

## **Board-Pastor Relationship**

Within the practice and engagement of leadership in local church ministry, there is little debate that leadership is relationship. Effective leadership is engaged within the web of relationships. Leadership builds or breaks down relationships, advances or hinders relationships. Without relationships, leaders have no followers and followers wander aimlessly.

Accepting this presupposition, it is also recognized that one of the most complex and somewhat confusing relationships that exists in any organizational structure is that of the board/pastor relationship. This is a relationship that reflects spiritual convictions, theological assumptions, organizational presuppositions and cultural dispositions. This is a relationship that is not easily defined, yet it is pregnant with potential, both good and bad. Given this lack of clarity and potential volatility it is necessary to reflect briefly on the dynamics of this pivotal relationship. Indeed it is pivotal, because the tone, tenor, attitude and experience of this relationship will unmistakably define the form and function of local church governance.

In far too many cases, this relationship that has been poorly defined, badly managed and improperly engaged has been the source of considerable frustration, dysfunction and conflict. In far too many cases this relationship has led to a polarization of the board and Congregation, and ultimately to the premature resignation of pastors. Not only is this unnecessary, it is a poor testimony and example of life and ministry in the church.

With this in mind, it is necessary to clarify the role of the board and that of the pastor in this relationship.

### **Fundamental Presuppositions**

#### ➤ Team

Fundamentally, the leadership team of the church is made up of the pastor and those who have been elected or appointed to serve on the board. The Congregation is confused and the ministry is polarized in those situations where leadership along the lines of the vocational and non-vocational leaders. Here roles are convoluted, competition and conflict emerges and progress is seriously diminished. However when the pastor and board function as a unit there is increased clarity regarding roles and responsibilities, decreases competition and a greater sense of cooperation.

A good illustration of this type of team is King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. At the table all are equal; there is equal distance between team members, equal voice, equal input and contribution, equal responsibility. Moving away from the table it is clear what the various roles are and who the leader is.

Using this model to illustrate the board-pastor relationship, the team comes together in a context of synergy and cooperation, discussing and debating, deciding and choosing. At the table the pastor and board demonstrate dependence, commitment, synergy, inclusion collaboration and agreement. It is in the context of team that values are affirmed, mission is clarified, vision is developed, ministry is evaluated, plans are designed and assignments are made. Leaving the table the pastor and individual board members enter their various roles, each one committed to the team and to the direction and decisions made. The pastor once again steps into his or her role as the leader of the church with the responsibility to operationalize the decisions of the board and mobilize the pastoral staff to move the ministry in the direction defined by the board. The board chair coordinates the work of the board in cooperation with and support of the pastor.

Although team and team ministry is illustrated throughout Scripture, and while theoretically most churches and church leaders would acknowledge the need for effective team work in the church, this approach is not always successful. Effective team-work between the pastor and the board is often hindered by: Lone Ranger attitudes, self-importance, role confusion and the absence of commitment to the team and the team paradigm. Further problems emerge if individual board members or the chair of the board believe it is their responsibility to control or dictate the ministry of the pastor. Team is also hindered by a pastor who refuses to cooperate with the board or views the board as adversaries.

The board-pastor relationship is fundamental to the direction, dynamics and health of the church. This relationship will set the pattern for the church. Where there is harmony and effective team-work here there is greater potential for the same throughout the ministry of the church.

➤ Trust

Within the relationship between the pastor and board, trust is a non-negotiable. The relationship must begin with an affirmation of absolute trust and it must continue with a repeated expression of unwavering trust. Where the pastor does not trust the board or where the board does not trust the pastor there can be no effectiveness. In his book, *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, Patrick Lencioni indicates that when there is an absence of trust, those who work together...

- ...conceal their weaknesses and mistakes from one another.
- ...hesitate to ask for help or provide constructive feedback.
- ...hesitate to offer help outside their area of responsibility.
- ...jump to conclusions about the intentions and attitudes of others without seeking clarification.
- ...fail to recognize and tap into the skills and experiences of others.
- ...waste time and energy managing their behaviors for effect.
- ...hold grudges.
- ...dread meetings and find reasons to avoid spending time together.
- ...question the motives and intentions of team members and team leaders

On the other hand, he goes on to suggest that where there is trust those who work together...

- ...admit weaknesses and mistakes.
- ...ask for help.
- ...accept questions and input about their area of responsibility.
- ...give one another the benefit of the doubt before jumping to negative conclusions.
- ...take risks in offering feedback and assistance.
- ...appreciate and tap into one another's skills and experience.
- ...focus time and energy on important issues and policies.
- ...offer and accept apologies without hesitation.
- ...look forward to meetings and other opportunities to work together.
- ...assume appropriate motives and intentions of team members and team leaders.

(Patrick Lencioni. *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 2002)

Trust is both the beginning and continuing commitment that must exist between the pastor and board if health and effectiveness is to be experienced and advanced within the church.

➤ Unity

As with trust, unity is both a beginning and continuing commitment of a healthy board-pastor relationship. Here the commitment is that neither the pastor nor the board, individually or as a group, will let nothing divide the team. No wedge will be driven between members of the leadership team; they will stand together, protect one another and affirm one another both privately and publically.

Once again Scripture expresses this expectation repeatedly regarding the Body, and the application of that expectation must be applied within the context of the leadership team. Members of the Congregation will watch carefully to see if their leaders demonstrate the teaching of Scripture. The lack of unity on this level will spread throughout the church, but the unwavering demonstrating of unity here will be an equally compelling testimony to the Congregation.

Having expressed the fundamentals of the board-pastor relationship, the question that remains is: How is this type of relationship accomplished? What do the pastor and board bring to the relationship that will engender a sense of team, trust and unity?

Without elaboration, the following are expressed as expectations. This is what both the pastor and board must invest in the relationship

### **Role of the Board in Relation to the Pastor**

- Prayer
- Support
- Cooperation
- Harmony
- Counsel
- Represent
- Follow
- Monitor

### **Role of the Pastor in Relation to the Board**

- Prayer
- Support
- Cooperation
- Harmony
- Represent
- Lead
- Protect
- Train