

Church Ministry Structure and Organization

Introduction

When believers in Christ join together as a congregation to do the work that Jesus commissioned the church to do: How can ministry be organized to best allow the church to function and fulfill its purpose?

This article is intended to present general principles that can be adapted to fit the unique character of a local church and also to give a fresh perspective on approaching ministry. These principles can be applied to the constitution and bylaws of a local church to help them stay focused on the purpose and mission of the church and help prevent them from falling into complacency and just "doing church." One of the most important concepts in architecture is that "form follows function." I believe that in a similar way the form or structure of ministry in a church should follow the function and purpose of the church. We will now look at some of these concepts by starting with the head leadership of the church and working our way down.

The Head Leadership of the Church

The first and most important part of the church's structure is the Head Shepherd who is Jesus Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23, 4:15-16; 1 Corinthians 12:12-13). He is the one who joins and holds every part of the church's body together. Without Jesus as the head of the church, it will not be able to function and accomplish its mission. Underneath the Head Shepherd, there are the under shepherds (overseers, elders or pastors) who are the spiritual leaders of the church. Their primary focus is to oversee the spiritual aspects of the church. We can see with the early church in Acts 6:1-4 that, in addition to spiritual matters, the twelve apostles also encountered other things that needed attention.

In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, 'It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word' (NIV®).

This passage shows that the twelve apostles saw their need to stay focused on the spiritual matters of ministry. So they created deacons (which means "servant") to support and serve the spiritual leadership and the church by taking care of the physical aspects of ministry which today would also include things such as finances, support staff, maintenance, and the church's property. This allows the spiritual leadership to not become consumed by the physical things that need to be taken care of in the church. It seems there is a natural tendency to get pulled into focusing on things in the physical world that we can touch and feel which often leads to neglecting the more important spiritual things.

The Church's Basic Functions

With the head spiritual leadership and supporting physical leadership established, we can now look at how we can structure specific areas of ministry under the head leadership. If we want to form the structure of ministry around how it functions, we need to discover the basic functions of the church. Looking at the Great Commission in Matthew 28:16-20 and at the early church in Acts 2:42-47 (and many other places in scripture), we can see four basic functions or areas of ministry. These four general areas are listed in the table below:

Evangelism, Outreach, Missions ... Matthew 28:19; 2 Corinthians 5:20; Mark 16:15	Fellowship, Encouraging, Accountability ... Hebrews 3:13, 10:24-25; 2 Timothy 4:2
Praise, Prayer, Worship ... Ephesians 5:19-20, 6:18; Psalms 33:1	Equipping, Education, Bible Study ... Matthew 28:20; 2 Timothy 3:14-17; John 14:26

These four areas can be represented by four relationships: between the church and those outside of it, the church and those within it, the church's relationship toward God, and God's relationship toward the church. These four relationships can be indicated by four directional words describing the direction of the relationship to the church. They are:

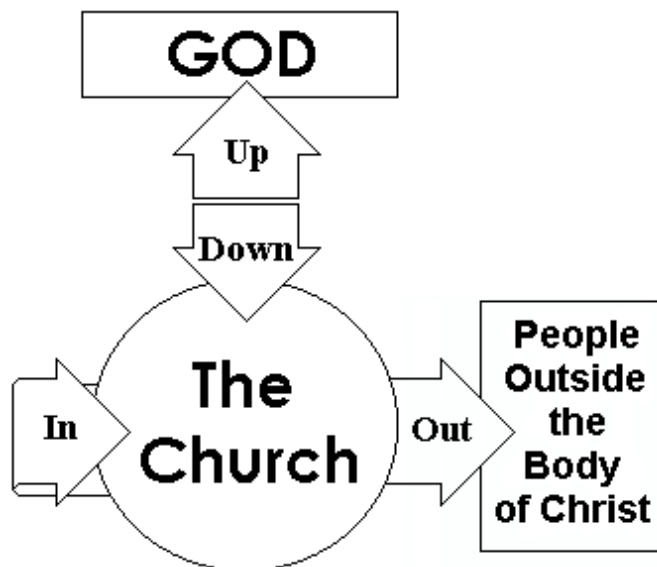
Out-Reach: The church reaching out to those outside the church. (Evangelism, Missions)

In-Reach: The church reaching in to those inside the church. (Encouragement, Fellowship)

Up-Reach: The church reaching up by communicating and giving to God. (Praising, Prayer, Worship)

Down-Reach: God reaching down by communicating and giving to the church. (Bible Study, Preaching, Teaching, the Holy Spirit)

All of these relationships work together in balance and are necessary for each other to function properly. These four areas are all part of the discipleship process, which is the church's Great Commission, and is overseen by the church leadership. People are brought into the body of Christ through evangelism and then through equipping, encouragement, and connecting with God they then go out and evangelize to others who are then brought into the discipleship process. With each of these four relationships, ministry teams can be established to help ensure that each one functions properly and that no area is neglected or out of balance. Sub-teams can also be established under each of these four core ministry teams to deal with more specific areas if necessary. Maybe even naming the ministry teams Up-Reach or In-Reach, for instance, would help the team to keep focused on their purpose. The following figure illustrates the In, Out, Up and Down-Reach relationships and how each are related to one another.



Group and Area Ministries

It is easy to see how many ministries in the church would fit under one of those four areas. But, consider, for instance, the youth ministry of a local church. At first you might think it would just belong under the Down-Reach or equipping function of the church. But, a youth group also reaches out to unsaved youth, encourages and keeps each other accountable, and worships and prays to God at a youth group meeting.

Group ministries include all four areas or functions of the church. There are two ways that ministries can be oriented: either toward ministering to a particular group of people or toward ministering to an area or function of the church.

Group ministries are concerned with ministering all areas of the church to a specific group of people. The groups are composed of people with a common characteristic or interest, many of which are based on age or gender. Some examples of groups could be Youth, Men, Women, Senior Citizens, Widows, Families and Marriages, Children, Singles, Foreign Language, College Students, or Single Parents. Each person in the church can be covered by more than one group, but each group can minister to others in each of the four areas a little differently. It is important with group ministries to make sure you do not create too many groups that are functioning by themselves. Try to keep groups that are similar together so that they will work better being with other teams that are related to it. For example, you could have a main Family ministry group with sub-teams for marriages, single parents, divorced, and for grieving lost loved ones.

Area ministries, on the other hand, are concerned with ministering in a specific area to all groups in the church. Compared to the group ministries, the area ministries are not as focused on ministering to a specific group of people, but rather are focused on ministering in one of the four ministry areas to the whole church. Each of these area ministries is primarily focused on its particular function (Up, Down, In and Out) that the team deals with, but they will also include a little from the other areas as well since no area can be completely separated from the others and work effectively. In addition to the area ministries working generally with the church body as a whole, they also work with each group ministry in helping them to minister to their people group in that area. For instance, an evangelism (or Out-Reach) team works with the church as a whole in evangelism efforts, as well as working with group ministries such as the Youth, Women, and Men in helping them evangelize their particular people group.

With some ministries it might be more difficult to determine whether it would be best to base the ministry under an area ministry or have it function as a group ministry. For example, if you have a ministry that is functioning primarily as a once a year outreach to a particular people group and it does not include a significant amount of the other areas, such as holding bible studies or accountability groups throughout the year, it may be best to base that ministry under the Out-Reach team. Even though the ministry deals with a specific people group, it is not focused on ministering in all areas to that group. However, if over time the ministry grows to include the other areas or functions about as significantly as outreach, then you could move it out from under the Out-Reach team and make it a group ministry. To help you consider which way would work best for a particular ministry, you might try thinking of a pie with four slices: one for each of the four areas or functions. If your "pie" for that ministry ends up having a single "slice" taking up almost all of the pie, it would probably work best being based under an area ministry. If your pie has all four "slices" being of about equal size, then that might be an indication that it would work best functioning as a group ministry.

Ministry Teams

Now that we have the group and area ministries established, we can look at how these ministries function internally. The leadership of each ministry can be composed of several different leadership structures depending on how large the ministry is or how much work is involved. Some ministries, particularly smaller ones, could be led by just a single leader. You could also include a co-leader to take on the responsibilities of the ministry when the leader is gone and to help share the work load. If a ministry is

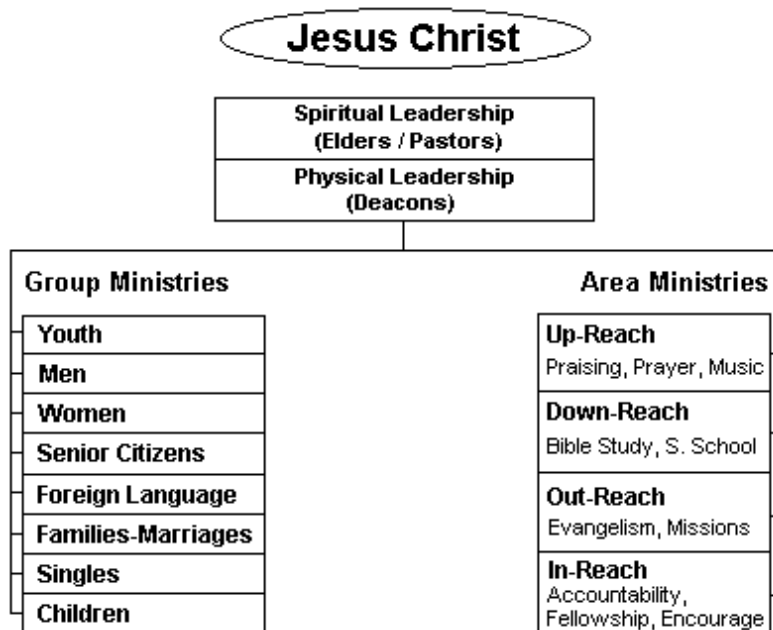
larger, and you have three or more leaders, you could make group decisions for the ministry. At the group leadership level the group can still designate a head group leader that can be given executive authority by the group to take care of certain decisions that need to be taken care of before the group is able to meet again (for example, if something breaks down and needs fixed right away). The group leader would only be able to make decisions that are within the limits of the authority that the group had previously granted. The group could also give authority in a similar manner to other group members at times to oversee details for a special project or responsibility. For some larger sized ministries, this group leader or single ministry leader could also be a staff member or pastor, such as in the case of a youth pastor or worship pastor. A ministry team leader could in some cases also act as a liaison or representative for that ministry by also being a member of the ministry team above them.

In addition to ministry teams working within their own areas and groups, there are many times when ministry teams work together on special events or ministry efforts. In these cases, one of those ministry teams can be designated as the primary overseer for that ministry effort or event (perhaps the ministry team that deals with the largest portion of the ministry or handles the primary focus of the event). This primary overseer handles how the overall ministry effort or event will look and fit together, in addition to handling their own specialized part in it. The other ministry teams involved would be responsible to the primary overseer regarding any details relating to that joint ministry effort. Sometimes a special ministry team made up of members of the various ministry teams involved could be established instead of designating one of the teams to be the primary overseer.

Another situation where ministry teams work together involves the support or service ministries in the church that are based as ministry teams under the head "physical" leadership (or deacons). These physical support ministries, if they would function by themselves, would not have any spiritual significance. But when they are joined together with supporting the other ministries in the church, they have a spiritual purpose. These ministries can be viewed as having a sort of client-business relationship with the other ministries in the church. For example, a technical ministry serves the technical needs of various different ministries in the church. It could be directly overseen by the head "physical" leadership of the church, and then all of the ministries it serves can be viewed as clients. The technical ministry serves and works under the leadership of each individual "client" ministry whenever dealing with that particular ministry, just like a business would work under the direction of their clients when they work with them. But, on the other hand, the other ministries cannot direct the technical ministry on what it does with its other clients, as only its boss, the head "physical" leadership, would oversee that. In some cases, these support ministries could just be based under a particular ministry if they primarily, or almost exclusively, deal with only that ministry. A technical ministry, for instance, could be overseen exclusively by a worship ministry if it does not deal with any other ministries in the church on a significant basis. The same model of the spiritual and physical focuses in the head leadership of the church is also evident in each ministry underneath them. The service aspects within each ministry can work as just a part of that ministry, or in cases where they are also part of many other ministries, can be based under the head "physical" leadership of the church.

Conclusion

Hopefully, some of these concepts will help give you ideas as to how ministry structure might be improved in your church to help you accomplish the mission and purpose God has given you. There are many other issues to consider in the ministry of a local church, but hopefully these concepts have helped you to look at ministry in a new perspective. The most important thing to remember is to seek God in prayer, spend time in His Word, and listen to the Holy Spirit. God will give clear direction to your congregation as to how He wants you to best structure ministry for your church.



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