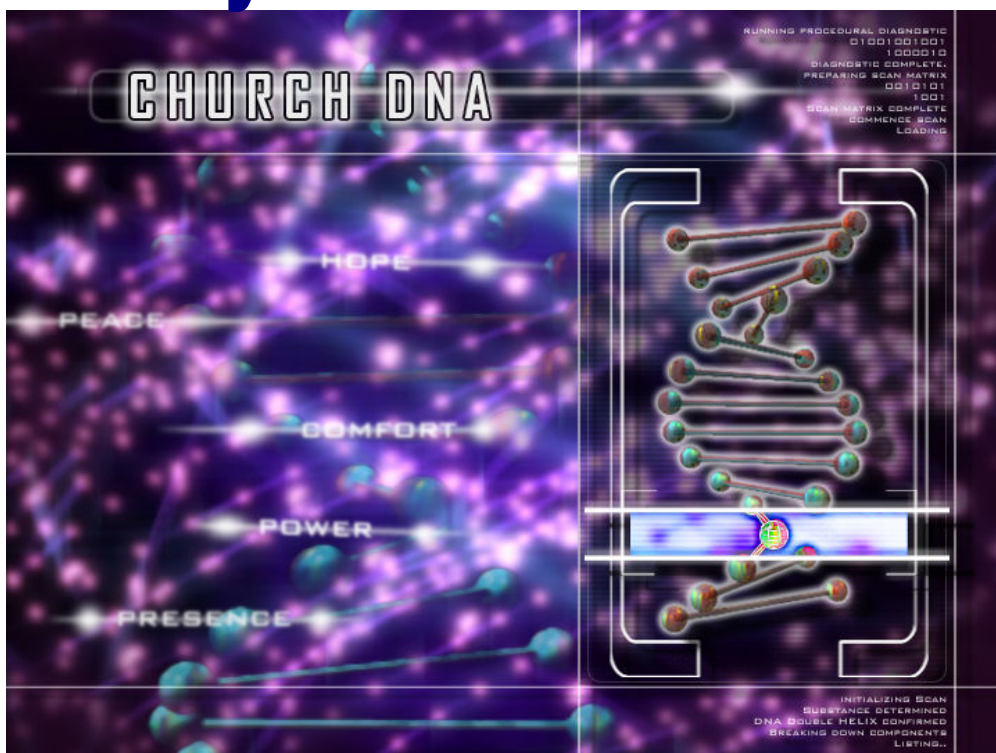


# Church Government Principles

by Kent R. Hunter



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This section is a group of ten principles concerning the general concept of church government. These principles reflect the tenor of the 21st Century Church as it wrestles with a desire to be effective, to impact a culture for Jesus Christ.

1. Move from committees to teams. The whole concept of partnership and servant leadership is demonstrated best by teams. These teams are purpose driven. They are not part of an institutional bureaucracy that simply meet because they are organized to meet. They meet because there is a need to get a job accomplished. They have an action bias rather than a decision-making bias.

It is highly unlikely, particularly among postmodern, young adults, that they will participate in bureaucratic and institutional forms of organized religion. They are more likely to be involved in cause-related issues. Think of a sports team, which is highly dedicated to the goal of winning the game. Likewise, task-oriented ministry teams are devoted to accomplishing certain goals within the Body of Christ and beyond.

2. Move from annual, elected, bureaucratic committees and boards to ad hoc ministries. The focus is on ministries, which implies action rather than boards and committees (which are characterized by meetings, talk, debate, majority votes, and decision-making policy). Focus should be on ministries that need to be accomplished. Freedom should be established to allow anyone to start a ministry as long as they have the resources, it is cleared by the leadership (not formally, but through contact with someone on the leadership team), and they have a God-given passion and gift mix to accomplish that activity. When the activity is finished, the ad hoc ministry disbands. There is no sense in meeting just to meet.
3. Move from position-defined to task-driven. This simply means people are drawn to and motivated by ministry objectives rather than to politically-recognized positions. Positions are not important. Relational activities in which people are impacted

are more attractive to people today.

4. Move from elections to choosing people by spiritual gifts. This presupposes a ministry of spiritual gifts discovery in the assimilation process. This allows people to discover, develop, and use their spiritual gifts. It also relates directly to the issue of helping each member of the congregation determine and define their God-given calling to ministry that belongs to all believers (refer to the Church Doctor CD *Activating Members for Ministry* and the Church Doctor reflective tool *Spiritual Gifts Discovery Survey and Scoring Sheet*).

The emphasis in this approach is not on the institution and its maintenance. You don't hear pastor saying, "We need more people to help with Vacation Bible School." This basically communicates, "The institution, to survive and maintain itself, wants to use you as a person." Instead, it is the church's responsibility (the leaders' responsibility) to help people discover their passions and interests and direct them according to their spiritual gifts to ministries that fall within their profile as a divinely created person. If a ministry does not exist, it is the church's responsibility to create such a ministry. If that is not possible, it is the leaders' responsibility to help that person find another church where his or her vision for ministry, given by God, can be accomplished.

5. Move from cognitive or popularity criteria to discipleship leadership. This means that learning a particular body of information does not qualify someone as a leader, nor does election by popular vote. Rather, every ministry leader has, as part of the "job description," the responsibility to equip and mentor another person. In other words, every usher would train a junior usher, every Elder would mentor an assistant Elder, every greeter would equip someone they are training, every person on the worship team would be discipling someone, all while "doing" their ministries. This is a discipleship lifestyle that permeates a congregation. It must begin with the leadership, including the pastoral staff.



6. Move from control (permission denying) to empowering/releasing (permission giving). Frequently, committees and boards tend to be permission-denying mechanisms within the church. They roadblock more ministry than they empower. However, the trend is toward the biblical notion of empowering and equipping people, as the direction is given in Ephesians 4. God has given apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers to the church for the purpose of equipping God's people for the work of ministry. To whatever extent possible, Christians should be encouraged to start any ministry God has called them to start. Issues such as financial resources must be understood and coordinated within the total overview of the congregation, but there should be freedom to begin ministries. Those ministries should be supervised by leadership, but they are certainly not denied simply because they are the creation of a "non-leader."
  
7. Move from neat to messy. Mission churches are messy. Pastors and church leaders, particularly in the West, often think ministry done "decently and in order" is spiritual, to the *exclusion* of cutting-edge mission work—which is often messy. If your congregation is reaching new Christians, ministry can be messy. Young Christians don't know how to act. There are many "gray areas." Everything is not neat and in a box. But cutting-edge ministry that is effective for reaching pre-Christians for Jesus Christ is ministry that is often messy. This is the missionary's lifestyle!
  
8. Move from hierarchical to flat organizations. This means the employer/employee concept, the leader/follower paradigm, or the clergy/laity distinction significantly dissolves. There remains an appropriate respect for authority—those in leadership positions, who have the gift of leadership. However, the flat organization perpetuates ownership and partnership at all levels. People are not followers or committee members, they are partners—equal players on the team.

9. Define ministry as impacting people, not meeting for discussion or debate. Resist the concept that because someone has filled a position on a board or committee they have somehow "done ministry." Ministry is all about impacting people and changing lives. Very little ministry happens in meetings, although it occurs occasionally through fellowship, the establishment of relationships, etc. However, the priority is the impact on lives.
10. Leaders lead. The New Testament includes the gift of leadership. This is God's gift to the church, as are all spiritual gifts. Leaders have that gift and it is appropriate for them to lead. Churches that grow tend to have large numbers of people who are involved in ministry and small numbers of people who are involved in leadership. This is unlike the congregational form of government, which has large numbers of people who lead (make decisions) and small numbers of people who do ministry (staff). In this sense, the New Testament Church is like a republic form of government. It is also a training base to release people for the work of ministry.

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