

Purpose: To connect with those who have an active relationship with Church Doctor Ministries as peers in ministry, clients, and partners in prayer and support.

The Church Doctor® Report provides a quick read of strategic and influential information.

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Your Church: Organism or Organization?

In mission school, they teach future missionaries the basic nature, function, and purpose of the local church according to Scripture. Why? Because clearly understanding God’s intention for the church impacts the effectiveness of His primary mission: to reach the world for Jesus Christ. Jesus changes everything. As a believer, you have experienced that, even though you might confess, with me, “I’m still a work in progress.”

With that confession, we want to learn all we can about *being* church. Healthy churches develop believers who carry out the mission of Jesus: that all people come to know Him. They become part of His movement to reach others for eternity. Then we will be one step further in our work in progress!

For now, if you’re breathing, you want to be the best version of “church” you can be. You know lost people matter to God. Jesus died for them. He has called us to live for them—to reach them. These are our marching orders, our most important mission. We join hands with the King of the universe—who, through the Holy Spirit, empowers us to point others to Jesus. Then, miracles occur: Lives are changed, the world is a better place, and the population of heaven grows.

For the past 30 years, Kent Hunter and Church Doctor Ministries have helped dozens of churches



remove the political shackles of church governance structures patterned after the corporate world. In this issue, Kent Hunter shares key elements from his upcoming book about the biblical approach that frees congregations — and denominations — from the political gridlock that cripples the movement that Jesus launched.

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A key element of God's salvation plan is that Christ-followers become "church" in the authentic way Scripture describes. Unfortunately, the world seeps into the lives of church people—even people like us. The enemy attends church as well, not to worship Jesus, but to corrupt God's plan. The enemy is there to get us off track.

Jesus promises: "I will build my church, and the powers of hell can't stop it" (Matthew 16:18). Yet, the battle is constant. The enemy is wise. He knows how to corrupt the church and disrupt God's plan. This is the tension with which Christ-followers like you and me live every day. We celebrate that Jesus won the victory, but the battles remain.

The Battle of Bureaucracy

The Scripture describes the church as a living organism. You and I are part of the body of Christ. We are the household, the family of God. We are sheep with an awesome Shepherd. We are branches of a divine vine. We are living stones, building blocks of a holy temple, with Jesus, the solid rock who holds it all together. We are a priesthood of believers, everyone a minister, everyone with spiritual, supernatural gifts—used by God for ministry that reaches beyond human limitations. To be a part of the church is to be used by God to help change the eternal destiny of others. It is nothing short of miraculous.

However, the battle continues. The enemy persists. One of his tools of corruption is the poison of bureaucracy. Of course, God wants order in the church. It's the way effective ministry is accomplished. Yet, when we get humanly organized, rules and regulations turn to laws and bylaws and suck the spiritual air out of the Christian movement.

In Scripture, all the metaphors that describe the spiritual entity of the church are living organisms. The bottom line? The church is alive. It is an *organism*—not an organization. We organize, but we are not under the rulership of structure.

Jesus has a unique strategy concerning the mobilization of His movement. It is human nature to go big, move fast, create programs, and perpetuate routines. Jesus' approach is different. He clarifies: "I will build my church..." (Matthew 16:18). With divine impact and power, Jesus mobilizes His movement. In Matthew 10:7, Jesus says, "Go and preach, 'The Kingdom of Heaven is near!'" In verses 19-20, He says, "...do not worry about what you are going to say or how you will say it; when the time comes you will be given what you will say. For the words you will speak will not be yours; they will come from the Spirit of your Father speaking through you." The mission of the church is a divine enterprise carried out by empowered believers, infused supernaturally.

It's so easy for this divine co-mission to become a bureaucratic organization—corrupted and impotent. In an upcoming book about church politics, I have reflected on how overorganized and political churches can become. Many congregations are weighted down by laws and bylaws, rules and regulations, votes and vetoes.

How did the early church operate? Look carefully at the book of Acts. The new Christ-followers were constantly attacked by the bureaucratic scribes and Pharisees. They were steeped in rules and regulations, "the way we've always done it." The establishment religious leaders voted. They gathered in meetings called "councils." It is surprising that today, many churches operate through governing mechanisms called "church councils." They vote. They operate by majority rule, just like the scribes and Pharisees. I mean no offense, but read on!

In the book of Acts, the Christians gathered to make decisions as well. However, their approach is described as “counsels.” They prayed. They sought wisdom from the Scripture, the teaching of Jesus, and the disciples. They sought *counsel* from God. There were no votes and majority rule. *They led by searching for the will of God.*

Jesus Launched a Movement

When you are tempted to drift into the political realm of an organization, it is helpful to clarify what it means to be part of a divine movement. *Organizational structures stall the growth of God’s Kingdom.*

There are many Christians, churches, and whole denominations that have replaced the spirit of the New Testament movement with a multilayered organizational bureaucracy. They have elevated human systems, like *Robert’s Rules of Order*, to a level that is treated as “sacred.” Majority votes do not guarantee God’s will. Anyone who has been a church member for more than a year knows that! Instead, such approaches to decision-making tend to draw bureaucrats to congregational and denominational leadership positions. Bureaucrats are rarely visionaries!

How should a church develop a spiritual approach to decision-making? Ephesians 4:11-12 says: “And his gifts were that some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, (what for?) to equip the saints (all followers of Jesus) for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Revised Standard Version, my notes in parentheses).

Here is the biblical formula for the mobilization of the organism called “church”:

1. Church leaders disciple church members.
2. Church members do ministry.

In the body of Christ, leaders have the primary purpose of equipping Christians to use their unique spiritual gifts for ministry. They train them by discipling—on-the-job equipping. In the world outside the church, this is called training as an “apprentice.” In the church it is called discipling. The world has learned this from Jesus. Some church leaders and several denominations have forgotten it—to their peril!

When we pray for revival—a renewal of the church—we are asking God to revolutionize our basic operational approach, including staff and all the church members. The result? Missionaries call it “revival.” Strategists call it multiplication. In your church, you might describe it as the rebirth of the Christian movement—at a whole new level. This is fundamentally different than most “church programs.” It includes the genius of discipling.

How Would Decisions Be Made if Jesus Was Your Pastor?

If you study the New Testament from the perspective of decision-making in the church, you might summarize the process as an *apostolic counsel*.

The word *counsel* describes the New Testament approach to decision-making. Instead of votes and constitutional rules and regulations, those in the decision-making group would be committed to prayer and searching the Scripture to seek God’s will on any subject that impacts the direction of your church. This approach influences *who* is chosen for the counsel. They would be mature Christians who reflect a lifestyle of regular Bible study. They would approach every issue from a scriptural lens. They would not vote, but would come to unanimous agreement—what Scripture refers to as “being of one mind.” Their commitment for every decision would be to seek God’s will.

They would never consider meeting without Bibles. They would literally “search the Scriptures,” as the Bible directs. When they cannot reach a consensus, they table the issue—no matter what the urgency. They stop the conversation. They pray. They look to Scripture. They seek guidance from the Holy Spirit. They table it until there is consensus.

Those on the apostolic counsel would be responsible Christians who would pray for, look for—until they find—another member of the church to disciple for the apostolic counsel position. The “disciples” attend the counsel gatherings, and they are mentored (discipled) by their disciplers. They may become future counsel members or may lead other ministries in the church. However they serve, they will make decisions and will lead using a biblical approach.

The role of leadership for the apostolic counsel is that of the (senior) pastor, who has a divine call and responsibility for the church, its health and direction. If there is an associate or assistant pastor on staff, the (senior) pastor would disciple that person to lead the counsel gatherings, if it should ever become necessary.

The pastor, as leader, is sensitive to identify when discussions seem “stalled” in search of a conclusion. The pastor would declare a time of prayer and/or Scripture search. If there is still no consensus, the issue is tabled, with the understanding: “Perhaps it is not God’s timing.”

The word *apostolic*, in the biblical concept of “apostolic counsel,” reflects the leadership style of the apostles. The New Testament apostles were not politicians. They were committed to seek God’s will, no matter what the cost. They were committed followers of Jesus. They were influenced by the teaching of Jesus and the Old Testament—today’s Scripture, which now includes the New Testament—as the key resource for direction. Their leadership style was relational, not political. They were not nominated or elected, but followed their calling, even in the face of persecution. They loved the church and were totally committed to the Great Commission, to make disciples of Jesus Christ and to equip them to

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- Hunter, Kent R., and Tracee J. Swank. *Politics in the Church: Pain-Free Decision-Making*. (Available in late 2022 or early 2023. To sign up to be notified when the book is available, email jasonatkinson@churchdoctor.org.)
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multiply disciples. They relationally influenced other Christians in the spirit of the Gospel, just as Jesus had led them. They were personal, not institutional. They were committed to God's Word. They were sold out to the mission, to make disciples of Jesus Christ. They were believers who raised up future leaders.

Are You Serious?

At this point, if you are still reading, you may have a twinge of doubt. It usually goes like this: "That would never work in this church!" You should know: Over the last two decades, Church Doctor Ministries has worked with numerous churches—from different denominations and independent churches—that have wanted to "leave the politics behind" and find a better, more effective, biblical approach to decision-making. It is an approach that unites rather than divides. In every case, in each of these churches, there were those who felt this approach would be impossible to achieve. Yet, in every case, the people worked through the process and felt liberated from politics. They discovered a much improved, healthier, more biblical atmosphere as a result. In truth? It is impossible to improve on the way the New Testament church operated!

Here's my prescription: Read the book of Acts. Reflect on your congregation's decision-making process. Pray. Ask God to give you biblical wisdom to rethink the way you make decisions. Ask this question: "What is God saying to me? And what am I going to do about it?" Don't settle for politics. There is a better, more spiritual approach!

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