

# Organization and Structure of Your Church

An organization's structure is based on its purpose and how it lives that out. Structure develops a way for a group to organize its activities to pursue its purpose. Your church's organization and structure should provide an effective and efficient way for your church to pursue its mission. Once the church's mission is determined, you can decide the best way to organize yourself to carry out that mission. Structure is the way people are gathered, transformed and sent out.

## Principles of Church Structure

Knowledge of principles of church structure can help you evaluate your structure, restructure or begin new structure. Some basic principles are:

- **Structure supports purpose.** It states why you exist based on what you need and want to do and in turn how you best organize to do it.
- **Structure needs to provide a way for people to belong.** One of the principal reasons why people join an organization is because of their need to belong and have meaningful personal relationships with other people. People want to belong to a group with people who share common values, similar interests and life perspectives, and who make them feel included and at ease. Your church's structure should provide a primary group setting where each member or prospective member can feel at home. This means that the church will attract people who are like the present members. The greater the similarity between your church's members and

the people who live around the church, the greater the possibility of attracting people from the community into the church. The greater the diversity of people in the community, the greater the need for the church to provide a variety of kinds of groups where people can feel they belong.

People are called to repentance and faith and into the community of the church by the working of the Holy Spirit. The way in which the Holy Spirit works in the life of a person can neither be predicted nor manipulated. But the church's experience confirms the importance of those settings in which people hear the gospel proclaimed and experience the love and support of a Christian community as settings in which the Holy Spirit breaks into people's hearts and minds. Structure, then, is a servant or vehicle for the Holy Spirit to call people to repentance, faith and service.

- **Structure needs to provide a way for people to change and grow.** People need to grow into the new life in Christ, act in new ways and live their salvation in the world. The church provides a place for the reflection and prayer, study and reasoning, contending and healing that are necessary for this to happen.
- **Structure needs to provide a way for participation in tasks.** Not only do people need to belong and to grow, they need a way to express their faith and their sense of calling. They need to be able to use their gifts in ministry with others. You'll need to pay particular attention to the way people can find a task that fits them. One

study has shown that people are looking for very specific kinds of participation. They want to win people for Christ or study the Bible or put the church to work in the community and world.

- **Structure needs to provide for diversity.** The more homogeneous the congregation, the less complex the structure has to be. However, the more ways a church provides for people to feel they belong and have a task to accomplish, the more likelihood there is for growth in numbers and in participation. A structure that provides a basic group experience for a variety of people will be more effective than one that expects everyone to fit into one category. People of different ages, men and women, families, singles, people with different worship traditions and tastes, different cultural backgrounds, different theological perspectives, different social and political orientations and different economic means need a place where they can find personal support, hear the gospel and offer themselves as disciples in carrying out tasks. The structure must also provide ways for these diverse groups to communicate with each other. Since the United Church of Christ has sought to intentionally become more multicultural and multiracial, there is abundant evidence that diversity can revitalize congregations, especially if structure and program accommodate it.
- **Structure needs to provide ways for all people to feel they belong to the whole congregation and participate**

**in its mission.** While people join groups and committees for a sense of belonging and to participate in the task, they need to identify with the whole congregation. In smaller churches where most people are alike, it is in the whole congregation that people can find their sense of belonging and emotional attachment. In larger churches, structure must accommodate coordination of diverse programs, building use, resource allocation and leadership so that groups can pursue their own objectives within the context and purposes of the whole church. The greater the differences among church groups, the more leaders need to manage them and the structure needs to accommodate them.

## Applying the Principles in Your Church

To find out how well your church's structure provides for belonging to a primary group, accomplishment of tasks, diversity and belonging to the church as a whole, try one of these activities.

### Idea A

1. List all the groups, organizations and committees in your church.
2. What kinds of people feel most comfortable in each group? You might think in categories such as age, gender, life situation, economic class, social class, occupation, education, political and social interest and theological viewpoint.
3. Discuss to what degree members of each of these groups feel an important

sense of belonging and personal acceptance within the group.

4. After you have considered each group, consider whether there are members of the church who do not fit into the categories of people who feel comfortable in at least one of the groups.
5. Compare the types of people who feel comfortable in groups in your church with the types of people who live in the church's neighborhood.
6. Discuss whether new groups need to be developed, what their tasks might be and who might be comfortable in them.

### Idea B

1. List all the ways communication takes place within your church.
2. Indicate which methods of communication are provided for in the structure and which have developed in informal ways.
3. Discuss how members in different groups and organizations are reminded of the church's mission and purpose and made to feel they participate in it.

### Idea C

1. Describe the ways people in the community learn about your church, become prospective members, find groups where a sense of belonging is developed, become members and find opportunities to offer their understanding and gifts of ministry.

2. Discuss ways the process could be improved.

### Idea D

1. Describe how programs and groups are coordinated. Are there settings in which representatives of different groups and committees sit down to share information, talk about their purposes and plans, affirm and appreciate different viewpoints and plan ways to preserve a sense of unity?
2. What new methods of coordination can you imagine?

## Evaluating and Building Structure

Usually when people discuss church structure they name the groups and organizations within the church. These generally are described in the constitution or bylaws and include boards, committees, task groups, nurture groups and councils. They also discuss the relationships between the groups and organizations. This includes what groups have authority over others, how tasks are shared and how they communicate with each other. These groups and their relationships are indicated on an organization chart. A sample of a portion of a typical organization chart is included on this card.

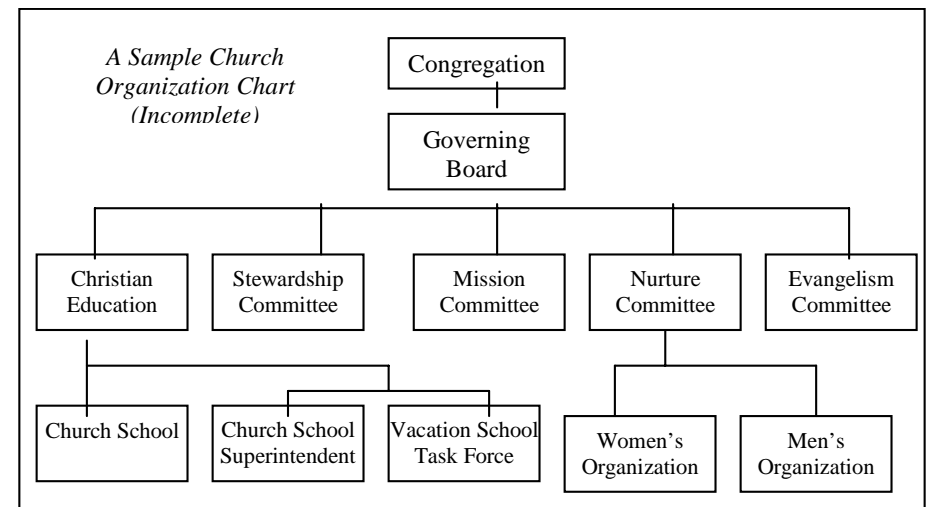
However, there are other important dynamics of structure that don't appear on an organization chart:

- Activities and events.
- Communication.
- Relationships between people.
- Relationships with the community.
- Relationships with the wider church.

**Activities** include worship service, annual meetings, bazaars, all-church dinners, trips by the youth group and all other special events of the church.

**Communication** is both formal and informal. It includes announcements on bulletins, the church newsletter, messages on the bulletin board, conversations during the coffee hour, telephone calls between members and other

ways that people communicate. **Relationships** between people are important. Even if the structure is confusing and hard to chart, things may function well because the people are working well with one another and understand what they are doing. It also may be perfectly clear how things are supposed to be working, but strained relationships between members cause a severe breakdown. The church isn't an isolated organization. It has relationships with the community and the denomination. Its members serve on conference committees and community outreach programs, visitors come to worship services, community groups use the church building and members contribute to Our Church's Wider Mission (OCWM).



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Another kind of organization chart is a circular chart. The sample below shows only a part of the church's structure. It shows a little more about the lines of communication than does the first example.

Taken all together, the groups within the church and their relationships, activities and events, formal and informal communication, relationships between people and relationships with the community and wider church make church structure very complex. Even the smallest church defies a simple understanding of its organization and structure.

## Your Church's Purpose and Structure

In order for your church to be clear about its purpose, it must have a way to relate to the community and understand needs and problems to be addressed by its mission. Your structure should provide a way for your church to stay in touch and translate what you learn about your community into its goals for mission. A church's purpose usually includes spreading the Word, offering service, providing worship and building a sense of welcome and community.

You can begin to understand your church's structure and its relationship to the purpose by using one of these activities.

### Idea A

1. Write a series of brief sentences that begins "A purpose of our church is ...." State as clearly as you can your church's primary purposes.
2. Next to each purpose statement write the name of the group or individual who has this as a primary responsibility. You will need to pay attention to those for which no one has primary responsibility. If more than one group has one of the purposes as a primary responsibility, examine the communication, coordination and cooperation between the groups.

### Idea B

1. List all the groups, organizations and offices that are part of your church's structure.
2. List the purpose of each group, organization and office.
3. Combine all the purpose statements into an overall statement of purpose.
4. Look at the overall purpose statement to see if there are any glaring omissions.
5. If more than one group, organization or office have similar purposes, examine the coordination, communication and cooperation between the groups.

### Idea C

1. List all the ways your church learns about its community.
2. Beside each, list a part of your mission program that was a response to information received from that source.
3. Examine sources that have no mission response and mission that seems to have no source.

### Idea D

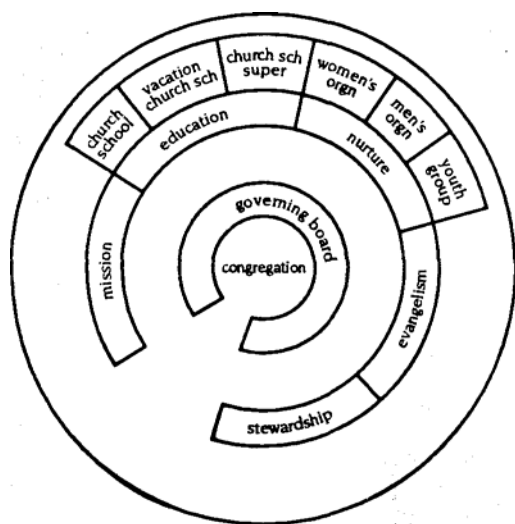
1. List all the ways your church learns about the needs of its members.
2. Beside each, list a part of your mission program that was a response to information about members' needs.
3. Examine needs that have no mission response and mission that seems to have no source.

### Idea E

1. List ways the church and church members carry out Christian service in your community.
2. Beside each, list the church programs that help enable them.
3. Examine kinds of service that are not enabled by the current program.

## Issues Facing the Church

- Sometimes so much attention is given to the structure that it gets in the way by taking time away from what needs to be done. On the other hand, if no attention is given to the structure, important things don't get done. How can you balance these?
- Churches are criticized for using ideas and techniques of secular groups and organizations. Is it appropriate for a church to use concepts and techniques such as planning and management by objectives? Why or why not? Is there a way for a church to give a unique expression to its Christian identity and mission through its organization and structure?



A Sample Church Organization Chart (Incomplete)