



Greater Sydney SDA Conference

Thinking About Functional Structures

When creating functional structures, it is not merely a matter of redesigning a board, congregational flow chart or implementing a new programme. While these aspects of church life are often indicators of a congregation's values and systems, they are only the outward workings of a more fundamental change. At a deeper level, there needs to be an understanding of the principles of structure and the nature of the "church".

What Healthy Adventist Churches Know About Structure

1 – The Church Is The _____ - God's Community On A Mission

The church is an interconnected body that exists to show the world what happens when Jesus is at the head. The church should never be so reliant on its forms and structures that it forgets its spiritual nature. Forms and systems used in the church need to be consistent with Christ's character. **Church leaders need to continually remember that the source of vitality in the church is not its structures or processes, but its connection with the Godhead. Spiritual vitality is central to effective structural renewal.**

It is not sufficient for the church to be defined as a building, or merely a place where a worship service happens. It needs to be viewed and explained in relational and experiential terms as God's new community.

2 - Each Church Is A _____ System

The church needs to be seen as an integrated, unique living system. Because each congregation shapes and responds to its own unique environment, each church will have different structures that allow it to be functional. These structures will need to adapt as various changes

in the context of ministry call for different responses to ensure continual effectiveness. Seeing the church as a system brings with it a more dynamic, fluid view of the church as it inter-reacts with its environment and mission.

3 – There Is An Important Difference Between _____ and _____

A concept of church must be established that allows members to identify the difference between what is a core purpose of the organic nature of the church and what are simply forms that allow the organic sphere to be effectively facilitated.

The role of organisational aspects of the church needs to be clearly seen as necessary in achieving the dynamic, spiritual aspects of the church. It is important to remember that designing functional structures is not the endpoint in itself. Structures should not be considered “sacred” in themselves, so that they cannot be changed. The goal of functional structures is to facilitate the mission of the organism.

4 - Ministry Needs To Be _____ Holistically

Structures must revolve around facilitating five biblical ministry concepts. These concepts are evangelism, worship, service, spiritual growth and community. This means that in designing structures, the church needs to be seen in holistic terms. To fill just one, or some, of the purposes misses the overall biblical design for the church.

Understanding the biblical purposes of church is important in developing a more flexible environment for expressing church structures. People in the church need to be able to differentiate between biblical principles and cultural forms. This education process is important so that they realise what practices can be changed but also identify what about the church is absolute and needs to be protected.

5 – Structure Needs To Be _____ Based As Opposed To _____ Driven

The way the ministry flow plan is designed, reinforces and shapes structural values. While there are countless ways to work through the

ministry flow plan, to be functional it needs to have a concept-base rather than be programme driven. The five concepts of church (worship, evangelism, spiritual growth, community and service) are underlying environments for ministry that are applicable at all times and in all situations and which must be facilitated in every ministry plan. Programmes are merely the forms that deliver the concepts. A valuable exercise for a church leadership team is to assess each purpose of the church and determine what the church does currently to facilitate it and what ideas could make it happen more effectively.

By structuring around concepts, the institutionalisation of programmes is less likely. Rather than having a programme represented at leadership level, that programme can be under the overall concept area. The leadership team is then more likely to work through ways of lifting a concept area rather than adjusting a confined programme. Most times this does not involve finding new leaders and alienating current leaders, but rather re-envisioning current leaders to a broader role. For example, the Sabbath School leader may be willing to become the spiritual growth leader for the whole church and someone else in the Sabbath School team takes on his/her role.

6 – Open _____ Is Vital

Effective communication allows the church to move away from systems of dependency and engenders a greater degree of belonging and involvement. A continual communication flow between the various areas of church life is essential in creating an environment that allows for structural fluidity while still retaining overall interrelationships and a common focus. Communication pathways must be intentionally outlined to ensure the flow of information from and back to leadership.

This communication system must include a tolerance of healthy conflict, with structures in place that allow for people to disagree and express their opinion so that together the underlying values can be addressed and structures shaped that facilitate effective mission.

7 – Church Structure Is A _____ Rather Than An _____

There are no quick solutions. The application process is a continual journey for the church, rather than a task to be completed. Because structural forms provide an organisation with predictability and security, changing them can be threatening. The process needs to be worked through with care and diligence.

Church leaders need to avoid the temptation of attempting to “fix” their structural deficiencies with a model that has worked in other environments. While it might offer immediate results, this kind of prescriptive approach often ignores the underlying issues of the church that created the initial dysfunction. The process of healthy structural renewal grows out of changes in values and mind-sets which takes time.

8 –Skilled Leadership Needs to be _____ and _____

Leadership is crucial in the structural renewal process. Lyle Schaller claims that “the reason more churches are not renewed is that 95% of today’s church leaders do not bring the gifts, skills, passion and persistence required for that most difficult assignment.”¹

The beginning point for the leader who wants to move the church toward structural renewal is self-assessment. The leader needs to be clear on the reasons and motives for embarking on this process. The leader must also be willing to lead in an environment that may involve risk, disharmony and a large time investment in learning new leadership skills.

Because each church is different, the role and expectations of the leader will also be unique in each environment. However, in most cases of successful structural renewal, the key leaders role was defined in terms of facilitating church health and leadership for change.

9 – A _____ Environment Creates Vitality

Having a team creates vitality through collaboration and participation. In many cases, this team will already exist as the leadership team. In smaller churches, it may even be the whole congregation. The goal of this team is to help articulate and communicate the vision along with identifying obstacles and assisting in embedding the new values into the church culture. The skill of the leader is in perceiving the rate of change that is possible at any given point without destroying the system. Resistance to a new idea can never be eliminated, but it certainly will be minimised through collaboration and involvement of a wider group.

While there needs to be defined systems of leadership and accountability, the environment for decision making should be a

¹ Lyle Schaller, in forward to Donald Morgan, *Share The Dream, Build The Team* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Books, 2001), 11.

supportive team as opposed to a hierarchy that communicates control. In the case studies of functional Adventist churches, a relationally based teams approach to ministry was found to be more conducive to creating functional structure than the formalised hierarchical structures that generally characterise a committee. Each leader talked in terms of teams and relational styles of meetings rather than more clinical systems of operation.

10 - A Clear Picture Of The Current State of the Church: Values and Mission Needs To Be Established

For the right changes to be made, an assessment of where the church currently is in relation to structural renewal is required. Often an objective assessment, like NCD, can help in this process. This stage will include identifying and working through the implications of where the church is at on the institutional life-cycle and its attitude toward structural renewal. Knowing how a church reached a given point helps in identifying the values that currently hold the system together and at what pace the structural renewal process can proceed.

Growing out of the church's analysis process, a set of values and a mission statement need to be clearly articulated. A mission statement provides a measuring point for all existing and new programs. The need for this process in Adventist churches was shown in the SRS responses where just under half the churches (49%) had not developed a mission statement. The mission and values need to be modelled and taught so that when changes are made people can see the basis for them. In addition, goals and objectives need to be shaped so that there is a clear picture of the direction the structural renewal process is taking. The results of NCLS and CLSNZ highlight that a large group of Adventists in Australia and New Zealand are not aware of the goals and future plans of the church.² If people are expected to change, they need to know where they are going. Keeping the vision continually before the congregation is also important in guarding against institutionalism.

11 – A Church _____ Process Is Essential

The church has to be clear about the New Testament principles of the church and what its purposes are. The pictures of “church” in the minds of each church member needs to be those that express

² Summary of NCLS and CLSNZ is above, p 155.

community. The importance of functionality also needs to be made clear to church members. This will include an explanation of the cost, in terms of mission, of not making changes. The values that underlie structural change, including the value of “lost” people, cultural relevance and a commitment to biblical purposes need to be established before significant changes begin to be made. The congregation should feel a sense of being part of the change process toward something better. This can happen in many ways including newsletters, courses, one-on-one conversations, small group curriculum and sermons.

It is important that the five ministry purposes are taught, modelled and kept before the church. This must be an ongoing process as these concepts require continual reinforcement. It is only when the church understands its biblical mandate that it will begin to see why structural renewal is necessary.

12 – Structures Must Be Shaped In Relationship To Size

The “one size fits all” method that has often characterised the Adventist approach to local church structure has made for congregations that are often trying to be something that they are not. When shaping structures, it is important to recognise the church’s internal size environment and what structural type works best as a function of size.

For smaller churches to be functional, it is vital that they make the shift to family size structures (0-60). A small church should not be expected to run the same structures as that of a larger church. The small church’s internal environment is better suited to structures of informality. The small church could take advantage of its size and achieve the five purposes of church through a small group meeting in place of a formal worship service. If the informality works the church will soon have more people. At that point the informality will be strained and the church will need to transition to a structural system that better suits its new size. In a similar way, larger Adventist churches need to restructure in view of the programme (200-350) or corporate (350-400) size dynamics. The structure of each local church should be shaped in response to its own internal environment.

It is important to think through and anticipate the structural transition points and begin preparing the congregation before the size transition is required. The church should be reminded that even though their current structures work well, with growth (or decline), they will necessarily become obsolete.

13 - Ministry Flows Out of _____

The way the ministry flow plan is designed, reinforces and shapes structural values. While there are countless ways to work through the ministry flow plan, to be functional it needs to have a concept-base rather than be programme driven. The five concepts of church (worship, evangelism, spiritual growth, community and service) are underlying environments for ministry that are applicable at all times and in all situations and which must be facilitated in every ministry plan. Programmes are merely the forms that deliver the concepts. A valuable exercise for a church leadership team is to assess each purpose of the church and determine what the church does currently to facilitate it and what ideas could make it happen more effectively.

By structuring around concepts, the institutionalisation of programmes is less likely. Rather than having a programme represented at leadership level, that programme can be under the overall concept area. The leadership team is then more likely to work through ways of lifting a concept area rather than adjusting a confined programme. Most times this does not involve finding new leaders and alienating current leaders, but rather re-envisioning current leaders to a broader role. For example, the Sabbath School leader may be willing to become the spiritual growth leader for the whole church and someone else in the Sabbath School team takes on his/her role.

14 – Structures Need To Be Shaped Around _____

How ministry leaders are selected is also an important process in the establishing of functional structures. Once again, this process will be very different in churches of different natures. The structures need to foster a person's individuality while placing him/her in an environment that encourages interdependence.

Ministry placement structures, while needing clear definition, require flexibility in the way people are shaped in to ministry areas. Opportunities for first time service need to be available along with systems of ongoing training.

15 - Systems of _____ Allow Ongoing Functionality

To change structures in an effective, ongoing manner an intentional evaluative environment needs to be developed. Evaluation builds a body of knowledge that can help leaders refine activities, select appropriate resources, describe impact and understand more fully the context that is being addressed. It allows current church needs to be determined against the backdrop of biblical principles, historical lessons and social implications. Forms and structures require continued evaluation to see if they are facilitating biblical principles and reaching New Testament goals and objectives.

Evaluation systems can be as simple as a debrief meeting after a programme or as complex as a system of ministry key performance indicators. The larger the church, the more formal its evaluation system will need to be. In large churches, no one person or team can know the overall situation of the church. It is only through combined evaluation that the larger picture emerges. Even in smaller congregations, it is useful to have at least some objective data, for example NCD, which reveals an overall picture that might be different from each person's separate opinions.

Authority, Responsibility & Accountability

Working through governance means getting systems of **authority**, **responsibility** and **accountability** sorted. To this point, these aspects of structure have been poorly defined in most Adventist congregations and as a result we have had a very low level of accountability. This leads to institutionalism, an unwillingness to address issues, evaluate and work through more effective forms of ministry.

Each leader needs to clearly know what objectives they are to be working toward, what boundaries they are working in, what authority they have in terms of decision making to achieve the objectives and then to who and how they are accountable.

The principle is:

-People given **authority** must also be given **responsibility** and then held **accountable**. This holds true at each level of church leadership. It follows that you cannot be held accountable for a team that you have not been given the responsibility to put together or do not have authority over.

-While we aim to work in a team environment, teams are not easy to hold accountable. Therefore it is team leaders who will be given the

authority and in turn be the ones held accountable for achieving the objectives.

-A positive environment for accountability is important. Accountability is not something to avoid but rather is to enhance ministry effectiveness and in so doing maximise the ministry impact of every person who is involved in the ministry of the church.

-The Senior Pastor is responsible for shaping the ministry directors group to achieve the elders set objectives. This means the Senior pastor will oversee the ministry directors team. Ministry directors will then take the objectives for the church and be given the authority and responsibility to shape their ministry teams to achieve the objectives. They will be accountable to the Senior Pastor who in turn is the one accountable to the Elders.

-The ministry directors will then work with their team leaders in terms of implementing ministry strategies to achieve the objectives. These teams will be accountable to the ministry director but will need clear lines of accountability and responsibility in terms of how they can achieve their objectives.

ENSURING THE STRUCTURE REMAINS EFFECTIVE

To put in place a particular structure and see it as the answer is to miss the point of functionality. Churches, along with the wider environments they work in, are continually changing. Consequently, the forms that facilitate the church achieving its mission at one point are unlikely to do so at another. Functionality, in terms of structure, calls for regular evaluation of the forms and systems that facilitate congregational life and its mission. This is an area needing emphasis in Adventist congregations where in 77% of churches there was no evaluation process in place to assess effectiveness.

Being Intentional

Effective evaluation of a ministry structure requires a defined expectation against which it can be measured. This should be expressed in terms of how a particular ministry contributes to the purposes of the church. The evaluation can then determine how well a particular form is achieving its function.

Leaders need to understand the concepts of structural functionality so well that when a particular form they are overseeing is deemed to be not functional it is changed and rather than being seen as a failure, is a

step on the way toward increased effectiveness. Leaders must continually be reminded of the fact that their programme is just a vehicle for facilitating a ministry concept. The vehicle will inherently become dysfunctional at some point and new ideas need to be tried. If leaders see ministry structures as flexible and adaptable, evaluation opens up the process of discovering alternative strategies for fulfilling the mission.

The reason that an evaluation process exists needs to be kept in mind, so that it in itself does not become organisational bureaucracy. Ministry evaluation forms or key performance indicator information should be used to shape ministry responses. The evaluation system itself requires regular evaluation in a process that is always adapting and moving the church toward increased functionality.

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