

SECTION

4

**MOVING  
TO A NEW  
GOVERNANCE  
STRUCTURE**



## Moving To A New Governance Structure

ONCE YOUR EXISTING LEDERSHIP TEAM (governing board) has worked through Sections 1-3 of this manual and settled upon a recommendation to bring to the congregation for a new governance structure, it is important to formalize the process. Paying careful attention to observe your current by-laws and leadership format is crucial. Not only does this demonstrate the integrity and honesty necessary for healthy church leadership, it also legitimizes and strengthens the new structure by clearly and firmly anchoring it to the foundation of the history and memories of what preceded it. You are free to build high in your future because your design is deeply rooted in the ministry's past.

While the pathway to adopting a new structure will vary from church to church, there are certain crucial milestones to observe along the way in every setting. Communicate frequently and thoroughly. Explain what you are doing and why. Anticipate possible objections or concerns. Develop a set of answers for the “frequently asked questions” you are likely to face. A lack of information and understanding leads to fear, and fear leads to resistance. Many excellent proposals have been rejected because they are not well presented or sufficient opportunity for input invited from those making the final decision. In most cases more than a majority vote at a congregational meeting is needed to change church by-laws. Do not leave the congregation as a whole out of the loop or in the dark until the day of the meeting. Bring them on the journey with you from the beginning.

Organize the transition. It is unlikely that a new system can be put in place in its entirety overnight. You will need to think through and plan out a means of phasing out what was, while bringing what is to be on line. You may need to allow for a brief interim period where elements of both the new and the old systems overlap. In some cases, you will be shutting down organizations or ministries that are no longer required. In others you will be creating groups from scratch or recruiting brand-new leaders to give them life. This is a process calling for patience and perseverance. Expect to spend a year or more simply “learning as you go”. Understand that change, even good and necessary change, is always uncomfortable. It will take time until everyone feels at home in a “new normal” once again. Be positive and adaptable. Remember the vision that you are working for and keep promoting it.

Reflect as you are in transit. Take notes on what you learn along the way. You will need to make mid-course corrections. Give things time to settle down before making major modifications of something brand-new, but realize that there may be some surprises on the journey. The Lord saw them coming, even if you didn't. Be prepared to revisit and reassess them in due time. Remember not to hold too tightly to any structure. Governance is a tool, not an end product. Eventually the brand-new system you have labored to install will run its course, too. Having served God's purpose in “its generation”, it will need to be assessed and upgraded in its turn. You'll be all the better equipped to make that happen, having successfully traveled that road before.

The implementation phase can be complex and requires thoughtful preparation. A strategy for “closing down” the old format while bringing a new one “on line” must be developed.

Once again, the “pathway” that is created to build the bridge from what was to what is will need to be customized to your unique local situation. In some settings it may be possible and preferable to simply terminate the old structure and launch its fully functioning replacement all at once. In others it may be best to design a timetable for more gradually phasing one system out and another in, allowing for a certain period of overlap between the two. Examples of churches that have made a similar change may be borrowed from, but ultimately the template you create must be your own.

The following outline contains a series of suggested steps which are likely to be a part of any effective transition strategy. You may find that not every stage is applicable or in the best order for making your move to a new governance structure. For completeness, this sequence attempts to capture the entire process from start to finish, including the discussion and decisions covered in the previous chapters of this manual.

## Transition Sequence

1. **Pray!** Launch and surround the entire process of evaluation, design, selection of leaders, and implementation with prayer.
2. **Establish a governance study team.** This may be the existing leadership group or a special group appointed for the task.
3. **Communicate!** This applies to every stage of the process. Keep the congregation informed about the possibility of change. Seek their input. In some settings you may want to obtain congregational approval to undertake the process.
4. **Complete the governance study.** Work through Chapters 1 & 2 of the manual. Inform the District Field Director of your progress and consider inviting his participation as a facilitator as you review and/or develop the purpose, mission, vision, and values for your church.
5. **Select and design your governance structure.** Use Section 3 of the manual to shape your selection.
6. **Present your recommended new structure to the governing body of the church.** Be prepared to explain and answer questions. Receive their recommendation to move the proposal on to the full congregation.
7. **Present your recommended new structure to the congregation.** Be sure to consult your existing by-laws so that the decision is “beyond reproach”. Be prepared to explain and answer questions. Being well prepared at this stage will avoid unnecessary confusion and opposition later on. Consider requesting the establishment of a “trial period” of 6-18 months in which your current by-laws are suspended, and during which the new structure is set up and “tested” on a provisional basis, subject to final approval at a later date.
8. **Finalize and implement your plan to bring the new structure on line.** This may require identifying, recruiting, and training new leaders for the new structure as

well as reassigning or in some cases retiring former leaders whose roles may be changed or phased out. A means of selecting leaders must be developed. Training in how the new system works is essential.

9. **“Road test” the new structure, evaluate and make preliminary adjustments.** See the “trial period” mentioned in step 7 above.
10. **Prepare a comprehensive new set of by-laws establishing the new governance structure for approval by the congregation.** This formalizes and finalizes the change for now. Expect the need to experience a full annual cycle or two under the new structure until everyone begins to find it familiar and feels comfortable with it. You may feel “in between” for some time.
11. **Periodically evaluate your structure. The governance needs of a healthy growing church may change, and every structure can be improved.** Be prepared to work through this entire process again in the future, if and when your structure is hindering your ministry from being effectively missional.

