

## ***SIMPLE STRUCTURE***

(The following is adapted from Rick Warren's early presentations on his Purpose Driven Conference lecture on "Simple Structure" i.e. how we work together in the church. Rick subtitled this lecture "How to Structure for Growth")

Inadequate structure causes:

1. Plateaued growth
2. Internal conflicts (when people fight over decisions, it means you've got the wrong structure)
3. Discouraged leadership ('a lot of pastors just get tired of fighting the bureaucracy—it's the number one ache of pastors: drains their vision, their energy).

### ***Structure doesn't cause growth, but it does control the rate and the size of growth***

The shoe must never tell the foot how large it can grow, i.e. God's dream for your church will outgrow any structure you put in place as long as that structure is adaptable and willing/able to reevaluate and readjust for effectiveness. All churches are to grow! It's the natural thing for living things to do. You get a new skeleton every seven years. Every 45% growth, you need a new structure. What works at 50 will not work at 200. You must be continually renewing structures (wine skins). A major problem is traditional structures that squeeze the life right out of churches—doesn't allow for more people to be absorbed into the life and leadership of the church.

The model for structure is the Bible, not business or government. Many times we use terms in the church and associate thoughts with these concepts that are unbiblical in origin:

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(The word 'vote' was foreign to the NT—deciding Judas's apostleship replacement was by straws [lots]. The first vote in the church was three steps: 1) understood the qualifications: qualifications were Scriptural and common sense thinking for God's work to be achieved, 2) after such understanding they reasoned and realized who met those qualifications, and 3) after putting forward names, they entrusted themselves to the Lord's decision for His leading and will by drawing straws.) Appendix: there is no clear-cut organizational pattern in the NT.

## **I. THE NATURE OF THE CHURCH DETERMINES ITS STRUCTURE**

### **1. The church is a FELLOWSHIP**

**Acts 2:42** "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

**1 Cor 5:2** "...man who has done such a thing should be expelled from your fellowship."

**1 John 1:7** "We have fellowship as we walk in the light."

"A good structure will promote unity and downplay differences"

see Jim Collin's *Good to Great* and John Wooden's *They Call Me Coach*

Eph 4:3 “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Some church structures actually build in self-destructive concepts. When you have two or more boards with equal authority--for the same jobs...you have set yourself up for problems. “Policies” are usually reactions to people who have gotten ‘out-of-line.’ Our challenge is that 95% of churches do not follow the principles & steps in Matt. 18.

## 2. The church is a FAMILY

**Galatians 6:10** “Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

If the church is a family (and it is), then the church is to operate on the basis of RELATIONSHIPS, NOT RULES. (THE GREATER THE RELATIONSHIPS, THE FEWER THE RULES.....THE GREATER THE LEVEL OF TRUST, THE EASIER TO MAKE CHANGES IN THE ORGANIZATION.) “We have no more rules in our house; we just always tell the truth because there’s a relationship of trust.”

**1 Timothy 5:1** “Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, **5:2** older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.”

The church is a family and family relationships are to be the model of the church.

**1 Tim. 3:4-5** If we just treat each other as family, we’ll have lots fewer problems.

**Paul** says 98 times in his writings “**Brother.**” It’s a great term.

(Rick chose three Godly men who were spiritually mature, loved God—the church, and asked them to “*tell me when he’s off-base.*”)

\*\* As a loving parent do you let your children do whatever they want?—Do you vote on everything in your family? For example, do you vote on what’s going to be the menu? (If there’s more children than parents, then it will probably be ice cream three meals a day.) You have to recognize there are different levels of maturity in a family and give responsibility accordingly. The same is true of the church. It’s stupid not to admit there are differing levels of maturity in the church. Someone who has been a Christian for one week cannot have the maturity equal to one who has been walking with God for thirty years. And to try to get a consensus when there is such a wide degree of spiritual maturity is just idealistic. Why don’t we admit this in our church family and allow the mature to lead? The Bible makes this clear: the spiritually mature are to lead the church. It’s not a one man, one vote situation. So how do you know whom the mature ones are? Simple, look at **1 Timothy 3**.....nineteen qualifications are delineated. Example: **1 Tim 3:4-5** If can’t manage his home, can’t manage the church. The church is a family, not a business. An unloved family will equal an unloved church. This verse also implies the church needs *managing*.

\*\* If you vote on everything in your church, your people's creativity lessens and you have fewer opportunities for fresh & relevant ministries to be started. A structure of control retards growth because everything is controlled by hierarchical approval.

### 3. The church is a BODY, i.e. **AN ORGANISM, NOT AN "ORGANIZATION."**

The church functions on the basis of spiritual gifts, not elected officers.

Romans 12:4-6 "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us."

When organization is stressed, **maintenance** becomes the focus. But where spiritual gifts and Biblical commands are recognized and prized, **ministry** becomes the focus. **The structure is to build unity, not destroy. We're a family—so relationships, not rules. We're a body—so gifts, not elections or popularity contests.**

#### **WHY WE NEVER VOTE ON MINISTERS FOR MINISTRIES:**

- 1) Eliminates those who want titles
- 2) Cream rises to the top: those who want to minister, minister
- 3) Avoids personality contests (most popular person mentality)
- 4) Increases assimilation: new members can get involved
- 5) Allows quicker response to Spirit's leading--some start right after a worship service
- 6) If someone fails, you don't have to "de-elect" them

#### **SO WE EQUATE MEMBERSHIP TO MINISTRY:**

"If you only plan to attend, you don't want to be a member here yet."

### 4. The church is a FLOCK (meaning it is to be led and cared for by shepherds)

**John 21:16-17** Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "DO you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

In the NT, the feeders were the leaders. **Acts 20:28** "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood."

#### The local church's simple structure:

Ephesians 4:11-12 "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up..."

## THE PEOPLE ARE THE MINISTERS THE PASTORS ARE THE ADMINISTRATORS

**The pastor must give up control of the ministry; the people must give up control of the leadership**  
The pastor must equip and let the members be successful in ministry (and gain just recognition for doing it—remember John Wooden’s remark “it’s amazing what can be accomplished when no one cares who receives the credit”) and the people must allow the pastor to cast the vision and point the ship (and if he is smart, the pastor will always listen and tweet the vision per his people’s input as is needed for the church to obey Christ’s commands as a team).

### II. THE ADVANTAGES OF A SIMPLE, GIFT-BASED STRUCTURE

- 1) It focuses the church on ministry, not maintenance. (The more complex an organization, the more maintenance it takes to operate it. Remember the grease company which made so much grease it thought it needed more parts and finally used up all the grease on themselves and had to close down the grease factory.....People get so tied up in flower committees they don’t know their neighbors and can’t witness. Members are so pre-occupied with maintaining themselves that they can’t minister. Most churches have too many meetings that do not amount to ministry to the unchurched.
- 2) It makes better use of talent: we take the brightest minds and turn them into bureaucrats.
- 3) It builds morale. Fulfillment comes from ministry, not maintenance. People busy rowing the boat, don’t rock the boat.
- 4) It allows for spontaneous growth. If you have a ministry idea, you can start it without a lot of red tape. “If God’s in it, it’ll work; if God’s not in it, don’t worry about it. He’ll lead you through the efforts invested to your place of ministry and gifting.
- 5) It promotes creativity. Freedom increases creativity. People will be as creative as the structure allows them to be. Unfortunately most structures won’t allow it to bubble up. Structure for growth—not control.
- 6) It allows more efficient and effective decision-making (not wasting time over trivia)
- 7) It is more stable---simple structures are stronger. When decision-making is diffused, no one person or group can control the church.

**In 1990**, Rick shared “We’ve created an atmosphere at SVCC so that we have not had one church split in ten years going from 0-10k. We don’t vote on things and we don’t pit people against each other. We base the whole structure at SVCC on one verse—Eph 4:11-12: ‘the people are the ministers; the pastors are the administrators’.”

Who does ministry? Who prepares the people? It's not my job to do the ministry [yes, the pastor is to minister—he's just not to do all the ministry alone or as a hired hand by the church to do so: he is to equip the members and help/support/coach them to be successful ministers and missionaries for Christ]. The pastor's responsibility is to see that the ministry gets done. Forty-eight times in the NT 'one another' is used, i.e. the mutual ministry of the body is what God intends. **EVERY MEMBER IS A MINISTER.** You can never add enough staff to care for the ministry of the body. Undershepherds feed and lead, and the sheep do the caring.

"Leadership should rest in the hands of a few and ministry should rest in the hands of many. The more in decision-making, the longer the process and the more delayed growth potential/possibility.

"Hebrews 13:17 should scare every pastor to death to self. And God will judge me for the leadership I gave this church. How can I be accountable for leadership if I'm not given authority—for decisions, if I'm not the decision-maker for direction, if I am not the direction setter, for vision if I'm not allowed to give vision. The fact is that the decision-making process must change as a church grows or it will bog down. And many pastors have to spend excessive time to get their board on board. The implementers are the decision-makers. The members need ownership of the ministry. Once they've bought into the purposes of the church and bought into the ministry, they could care less about deliberating decisions.

Rick's people told him, "We're managers. We don't go to stockholders each time we make a decision. We trust you. Let's just have one business meeting a year to vote on the budget." SVCC get budgets from each ministry team, goes to the budget leadership, then staff goes out and prays in retreat and sees where God wants them to go, then brings back to budget leadership and he goes over it and arranges it. Then all the leaders look at it and have one open meeting. Then vote it.

#### **FOUR KINDS OF RENEWAL**

1. **Personal renewal**
2. **Corporate renewal in worship: people begin to sense God's presence**
3. **Functional: church gets vision of what the church should and could be**
4. **Structural: OPENNESS and WILLINGNESS TO RESTRUCTURE**

"You lead a flock; you drive cattle." So the key to pastoral authority is pastoral vision. (Wayne Cordeiro *Doing Church as a Team* says authority comes from raising people up, i.e. believing in them, encouraging them). It's the ability to implement vision through practical steps. Not to be a 'pie-in-the-sky' dreamer—'but here are the nine, ten, eleven steps we are going to do.' **THAT IS A SKILL YOU CAN LEARN, IF YOU ARE WILLING TO BE TEACHABLE.**

Jim Collins identified this same characteristic in executives of great corporations. In his book *Good to Great* Collins researched and documented that companies who were able to transform from mediocrity to sustained great performance, did so through under-

standing what they could do best and what they could be passionate about. And they didn't have to expend a lot of energy on getting people "on board." Collins writes

I fully expected to find that getting everyone lined up—"creating alignment," to use the jargon—would be one of the top challenges faced by executives working to turn good into great. After all, nearly every executive who'd visited the laboratory had asked this question in one form or another. "How do we get the boat turned?" "How do we get people committed to the new vision?" "How do we motivate people to line up?" "How do we get people to embrace change?"

To my great surprise, we did not find the question of alignment to be a key challenge faced by the good-to-great leaders.

Clearly, the good-to-great companies did get incredible commitment and alignment—they artfully managed change—but they never really spent much time thinking about it. It was utterly transparent to them. We learned that under the right conditions, the problems of commitment, alignment, motivation, and change just melt away. They largely take care of themselves. (p. 176)

What Collins talks about a leader being "utterly transparent" was described as top leadership being totally selfless and team-oriented, with a wise and passionate focus on what could be done with excellence—and a consistency of effort and focus being practiced even when conditions and circumstances were very tempting to bail out for another program or product venture. Collins explains how those companies who failed to progress functioned:

We found a very different pattern at the comparison companies. Instead of a quiet, deliberate process of figuring out what needed to be done and then simply doing it, the comparison companies frequently launched new programs—often with great fanfare and hoopla aimed at "motivating the troops"—only to see the programs fail to produce sustained results. They sought the single defining action, the grand program, the one killer innovation, the miracle moment that would allow them to skip the arduous buildup stage and jump right to breakthrough. They would push the flywheel in one direction, then stop, change course, and throw it in a new direction—and then they would stop, change course, and throw it into yet another direction. After years of lurching back and forth, the comparison companies failed to build sustained momentum and fell instead into what we came to call the doom loop. (p. 178)

Interestingly, Collins and his team of researchers determining what comprised and created great companies, made the observation: **"Stop and think about it for a minute. What do the right people want more than almost anything else? They want to be part of a winning team"** (p.177).

To be a part of a winning team requires leadership who knows where they are going and realizes they cannot go there without the help of others.....others who will deserve as much and even more credit than the leader himself because they knew less than he about their futures, but were willing to believe anyhow. And we all know God is honored when people trust Him—in fact it "tickles" Him (study the Psalms.....and remember what Hebrews 11:6 states).



Rick explains Simple Structure means, as much as possible, give the lay ministry authority to make decisions over that area of the ministry. In the Nursery, you make decisions on which cribs should be bought, if Youth, you make decision on what youth need. Singles, then you make decisions what singles should do. As church gets larger, it's not possible for one single person to know all that's going on. You don't need to. So how do control? You don't! Just control the vision. (Rod's 'decentralization' studies at Univ of Texas documented this practice in healthy American businesses. These businesses helped all employees know why the business was there [for the customer and an honest product & service], but the company allowed those closest to the market to come up with products how best to meet local needs.) This is why as congregations grow, congregational decision-making doesn't work.....because no one group can make decisions for everyone when it's too big.

**Often, non-growing churches are into control—whereas churches into growth, worry about letting people go.**

In plateaued churches the big deal is to maintain status quo...and if it gets too big, maybe we can't control it. So everyone likes it to a point, until new-timers are more than old-timers. You must decide if you want control or growth. Lots of churches can't grow because the pastor won't let go; many won't because layman won't let go by letting things get beyond their control. *There needs to be a "loose-tight control": tight vision control and a loose decision-making control.* Ministry area leaders make decisions for their own areas; but they don't try to make decisions for other ministry areas. There is concerted congregational effort for all ministry decisions to be guided by the purposes of the church defined in Scripture.