

Changing Elders Into Shepherds Paper No. OCCG-009

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: A discussion of the customary organization of Churches of Christ and how it typically leads to an Elder/Manager dominated structure and then to decline; and how to potentially change the structure into a growth-oriented Shepherd/Mentor type structure instead.

KEY WORDS:

Elder
Shepherd

GLOSSARY:

Mentor: a trusted counselor or guide, a tutor or a coach.
Shepherdee: a person who is shepherded.

REPORT:

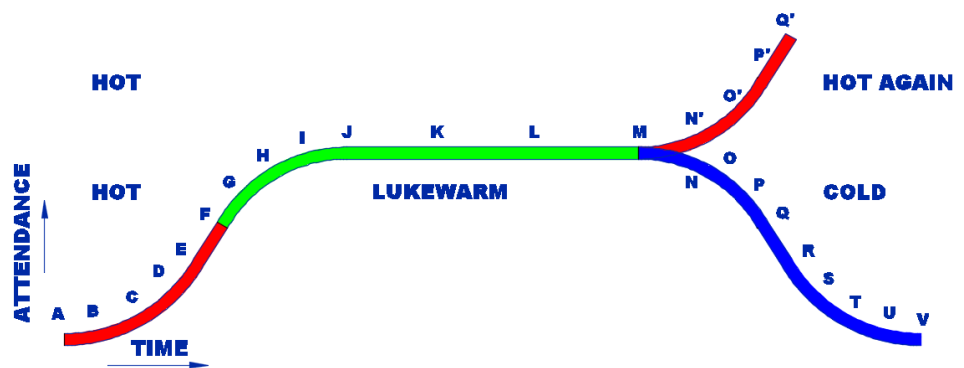
The scriptural plan for church organization is reasonably simple with Shepherds/Elders being in charge, Deacons being a supporting office, and everyone else being a member. The structure is fairly flexible to meet the requirements of many times and many situations.

The scriptural structure is combined with practices and customs which are developed to implement that structure. Some customs and practices can be good for one time and not another, both in the annals of time and in the life of a congregation.

However you look at it, the present implementation of the scriptural

requirements is not serving the church well. Probably at least 90% of our congregations are lukewarm or cold, and that does not bode well for Judgment Day.

We are going to look at the congregational situation in a couple of ways and then discuss possible ways to improve the situation.



A FIRST LOOK:

The graphic shown illustrates the OC Church Growth Think Tank’s conclusion as to what the characteristic life cycle of a Church of Christ is, with a “HOT AGAIN” addition to it. This “HOT AGAIN” portion is the dream and goal of every church growth plan.

At first glance most church members would think the transition from HOT to LUKEWARM happens someplace in the range of J to M on the curve. The Think Tank concluded the transition happened back around F, but the congregation continued to grow some due to general momentum.

This means that the changes which happened in the congregation leading the congregation to a lukewarm state happened around F.

The point to this is that when a congregation is somewhere between J and V on the life cycle curve, they will dream of going back to somewhere between G and J, the “good old days”. Numerically, this is when the congregation was likely the biggest and was growing the most. Probably a 2% growth rate at H was more new members/year than a 10% growth rate at C.

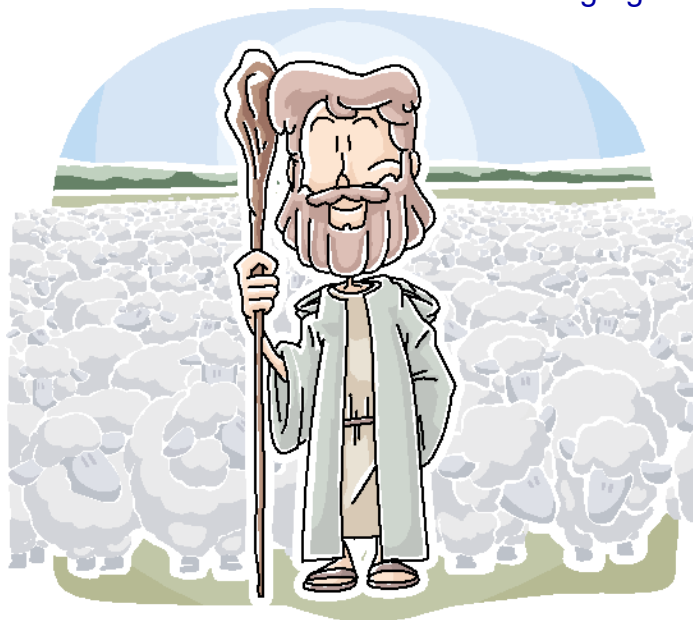
Going back to somewhere between G and J means going back to the methods and systems which were already driving the congregation to being LUKEWARM.

The object of this paper is to assist congregations in realizing this and what you might need to do to go back to somewhere between E and F, and to stay there which might be illustrated by the section on the curve from M to Q’.

For purpose of this discussion, although Elders and Shepherds are the same thing, we want to establish the general connotation that the word Elders would be understood as Elder/Managers and the word Shepherd would be understood as Shepherd/Mentors. Both the terms Elder/Managers and Shepherd/Mentors would be considered to be scriptural, at least in concept. In other words, you could act as either, and no one would say you are not acting scripturally. They are both scriptural methods, but those styles have different impacts on congregations at different times in the life cycle of a congregation.

However, in the customary way we apply these optional methods, the result is that most of our congregations are somewhere between lukewarm and dying. As a congregation ages, in addition to the oversight, the actual control of the congregation tends to be increasingly in the hands of Elders/Managers. There becomes a functional divide between the Elder/Managers and the rest of the congregation which only increases with time.

The unfortunate result of this is that Elder/Managers are not controlling what is going on in our congregations, but rather are in effect, controlling what is not going on in our congregations.



Elder/Managers are not controlling our Deacons, they are disenfranchising our Deacons such that the average Deacon does between little and nothing. This is not control, it is a failure in mentoring. The Elder/Managers are overworked and under-appreciated, and everyone else is mostly just there.

Image by I-Stock

The Elder/Managers are faithfully doing what they understand used to work. They are so overworked they have little time to ponder something which may be a better and still scriptural plan. The semi-annual slight tweaking of the system doesn’t seem to make much difference, the decline just continues. They cannot look to another congregation for an example, most congregations are in the same rut.

A SECOND LOOK:

A second way to look at this is to consider that leaderships are made up of different individuals of various dominant and less dominant characteristics.

The attached graphic shows a way one program defined 4 major groups of individuals with respect to their major characteristics. All people would have some of each, but one will usually be their dominant characteristic. Briefly they are:

RED: A task driven person who will want to get something done.

YELLOW: A more social person who will try to get things done by being involved with others, be relationship driven, seeking a consensus.

BLUE: More of a creative, thinking person. They tend to work behind the scenes one on one with people.

GREEN: One who values control and precision, wants to follow all the rules.

It is important to note here that if you want something to be done, you need a Red person to do it. If you want to talk about it, control it, or question it, you should get another color to lead the effort.

Presume you have a mix of these personality types in a leadership of several Elder/Shepherds in which we have our customary taking everything to the Elders for decisions. The Red guys want to make a decision and get on with it. The Green guys want to know what the rules and structures are which apply to the situation. The Blue guys probably want to consider several other ways to best do it and why. The Yellow guys want to talk (organize people) about it until they get a consensus.

First thing we do if someone wants to do something, it must be put on the Elder's meeting calendar to discuss it to get consensus. It may be 2 or 4 weeks delay

to get to a consensus discussion among the other elders. When it gets to the table more information may be needed, so it gets delayed to another meeting.

So what do our people do? The Green person doesn't care about the slow

Act Independent Be in charge Direct approach Task-driven	Adapt Interdependent Be Involved Responsive approach Relationship-driven
Analyze Autonomy Be in control Reserved approach Methods-driven	Assess Freedom Be informed Questioning approach Information-driven

consensus progress as long as it is in control. The Blue person is good as it gives more time to think up other alternatives. The Red guys give up and quits, and commits his energies to something which will make progress. The Yellow guys are happily going on toward their consensus.

With the Red guys gone the remaining members will likely be dominated by the Yellow outgoing guys and you would think they would have a yellow operating system.

What the congregations sees is that decisions to do anything are delayed by the Elders, which functionally control everything. The resulting impression will frequently be that the Elders operate in the Green mode because their inability to make ready decisions gives the congregation the impression of trying to control everything. The Deacons and members feel disengaged by the resulting remoteness of the leaders, the congregation becomes lukewarm and ultimately dies.

To the extent that this is true, it would teach that leaderships must strive to maintain a diversity if it is to survive as a Great Commission church.

Consider the color personality descriptions above and think of an army in which each quarter a General of a different color would take charge and push his personal agenda. One quarter you would attack the enemy (red, task oriented), one you would try to get consensus about what to do (yellow consensus oriented), one quarter you would think about the alternative ways to attack the enemy (blue, creative oriented), and the fourth quarter you would focus on regulating the supplies (green precision oriented). The soldiers would be in chaos or frustrated at best. Why do you think a church would be any different?

THE PURPOSE OF THIS PAPER

This paper suggests that there are some basic changes which can be made which will re-engage your congregation and give Shepherds the time they need to shepherd the flock, and the same steps will assist in maintaining a balance of personality types in the leadership.

Consider the following steps:

1. GOAL SETTING

1. Agree that the primary goal of the congregation will be to do your part of the Great Commission. That means convert prospects, train them, make them evangelists to convert prospects, and repeat.
2. Insist that other goals, committees, ministries, and activities of the congregation will be evaluated in light of that primary goal.

2. DELEGATION OF ROLES

1. Recognize that the Shepherds are in charge of everything, but that

does not mean they can/will do everything. The primary role of Shepherds is in shepherding, not Deacon type management.

2. Authority will be delegated by written job descriptions which are approved by the Shepherds.
3. All job descriptions will be reviewed and updated as required on an annual basis.
4. If the Shepherds do not have anyone they can trust to take on the needed responsibilities, it needs to be recognized as a failure in mentoring rather than a reason to do it themselves.
5. All Deacons will have a role and be held accountable for the roles.

3. BUSINESS MEETINGS

1. The business of the congregation will be handled in open business meetings generally following Roberts Rules of Order.
2. A congregational business meeting should be held at least quarterly.
3. Whereas business meetings should be administered on a rotating basis, everyone in any group (e.g. all Shepherds or all Deacons) should not run the meetings. Running meetings is a specific talent which many do not have. You would do better to hire or have someone objective from outside to run your meetings than have someone inside run them poorly.

4. BUDGETING

1. The annual budget will be fully subscribed. See OCCG-016 Guaranteed Budget Subscription at www.occg.institute, project papers tab for a suggestion on

how to do this.

2. The annual budget will be approved by the congregational business meetings. The Shepherds will have the same vote as any other attendee, but will have a veto vote as a group if the subject is unscriptural or exceeds the budget subscription. (In a capital program, the payments must be in budget, not the capital amount.)
3. The one portion of the budget not discussed in open meetings will be the salary of the staff. The staff deserve the same right to financial privacy as other members have. The Shepherds will administer staff salaries in closed meetings and put a lump sum in the budget.

Some of those steps may seem wildly radical to you at first. They are all scriptural and are methods open to you to revitalize your congregation.

They are not radical ideas, they are likely how your congregation operated when it was young and growing.

Think about it. Once upon a time weren't there regular business meetings? Wasn't everyone involved in the budget? Aren't these ideas like going all way back to when you were a hot congregation instead of part way back to an earlier time after you had already started operating on a lukewarm basis?

Unfortunately for most of us, we have never seen a Hot church to model after. When we say going back to when your congregation was hot, we do not even have a good idea what that was.

HOW DO OTHERS SOLVE THE ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEMS?

ARMIES: In a war, there is typically one

General in charge. In WWII with the allied governments favoring different people and different strategies, one had to be chosen. The British favored Montgomery, but Eisenhower was chosen as the Supreme Allied Commander.

CORPORATIONS: In a company bigger than a single person ownership, you do not let all the board members or stockholders tell the employees what to do. They delegate authority to a single President / Chief Executive Officer, who then delegates to others.

CATHOLIC CHURCH AND MOST DENOMINATIONS: There is a priest in charge of a local congregation who relies on a larger organization and a replacement from that organization. Most are in slow decline now, so not much of an example to look to.

BAPTIST CHURCH: Most Baptist churches simply do not have elders but rather refer to their head minister as a pastor and the Deacons generally report to him. Baptist pastors must be appointed so they have a special place of authority, and are typically a single point of authority in a local congregation. Note, there is variety among Baptist congregations.

WHAT ARE SCRIPTURAL OPTIONS?

1. Rotating leadership among Elders. O.K. as long as it works, and it appears to not be working now.
2. Funneling communication thru the Pulpit Minister, the one with the most exposure to the congregation. A consideration here is that most men are preachers because they are the "Yellow" type mentioned above, whereas management tasks tend to be a more Red/Green function. If you get a good preacher/manager, he is likely to be hired by a bigger congregation

and you start over again.

3. Hire a church manager reporting to the Elders. O.K. if you can find a good one and can afford him. If he is as good as you need him to be, he will be valuable (well paid) as a manager in the business world. If he is really good, he will be hired away by a bigger congregation and you start over again.
4. Use a church management database. The Elders delegate their operating decisions to a database in the form of instructions and job descriptions. This allows consistent communications over time, dampens the impact of the quarterly Elder in charge making sudden operational changes, and gives known directions for monitoring progress. A good database will even provide concise regular reporting on progress.

There will other alternatives, but of the 4 identified #1 is what is not working now, #2 and #3 are temporary fixes for an unknown period, and #4 you can control. However, if you are going to work it, you must commit to it and invest time in making it work for you.

OPERATING DATABASE

There are any number of databases adaptable to the Church of Christ operating style from the generic operating style they use for mass marketing, and at least one which is specifically designed for the it. Some of the things to look for are:

1. Member attendance at worship services and classes. Convenient attendance reports on members will help in Shepherding.
2. Integrated financial package. Will help in potentially reporting on declines in attendance and giving as an early indicator of a problem.

3. Member Involvement: Collect member preferences, collect member involvement, and compare the two.
4. Support easy regular reporting of committees and/or ministries, and summarized regular reporting of this information to leadership.
5. Job description management of staff and volunteers including the Great Commission church growth goal of the congregation, what is expected of the member, and a reporting method on what is expected. Reporting is likely to be part of your committee / ministry system.
6. Picture and text only directories. A picture directory should be printable such that it can easily be cut into flash cards for learning names in larger congregations.
7. Each Shepherd should be able to use the database to record confidential notes and history about his Shepherdees, and only he should have access to the information.

Just imagine the difference between verbal delegation with associated memory scope drift and getting roles done with written descriptions. Can you think of any other situation in which people on a rotating basis verbally organize a large group of people.

The best feature of a program like this is that it will be your tool for managing the congregation, and will allow you the time you need to become a Shepherd.

The second best feature of the program is that it is not a job you do, it is something the Elders delegate to Deacons and others to accomplish and simply oversee. Not only does your work become easier, but others become meaningfully involved in the congregation. That is a basic tenet of how congregations grow.

SUMMARY

We are not suggesting it will be easy to make change a from an Elder/Manager model to a Shepherd/Mentor model. However, what you are doing now is not easy either. We are suggesting it can help you to lead your congregation back to "Hot". It is our responsibility to be hot for the kingdom. Think of how much more

blessed you will be to report to Jesus on Judgment day about your Hot congregation than a lukewarm congregation.

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