



**The Western District
of The Alliance Canada**

Learning Guide for Board Essentials

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Link to watch videos: <https://vimeo.com/showcase/11466796>

Password to access video: WCD 2024

Module 1: Biblical Principles and Postures of Board Leadership

Summary

This module establishes the biblical foundation for church governance, underscoring the importance of anchoring leadership in scriptural principles rather than adopting corporate models without critical reflection. Governance, in this context, refers to the system by which the church is directed and controlled. While secular models focus on efficiency and profit, church leadership is driven by spiritual stewardship—ensuring that the resources and mission entrusted by God are handled wisely. The Bible provides clear guidance on the character and conduct expected of church leaders, with passages like Titus 1:5-9, 1 Timothy 3:1-13, and Ephesians 4:2-3, 11-13, Revelation 2-3.

The role of a church board extends beyond administrative duties; it involves stewarding the mission of God in the church. Leaders are called to be managers of God's household, meaning they are responsible for the well-being of the church both spiritually and organizationally. This includes directing the church's resources and protecting the congregation from risks, be they financial, reputational, or doctrinal.

Additionally, the module introduces key spiritual postures for board leadership:

- Allegiance to Christ
- Missional Steward
- Reliance on the Holy Spirit
- Honouring Others
- Servant
- Unity
- Prayer

A board leader must first and foremost be a servant of Christ, yielding their personal desires and agendas to God's greater mission. The postures also emphasize the importance of unity within the board and the practice of prayer, recognizing that leadership decisions must be made with a spirit of unity and dependence on God.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do the biblical traits of humility and servant leadership influence the way we should lead as a church board?
2. In what ways can our board model Christ's character in its decision-making processes?
3. How does the idea of being stewards of God's mission challenge or affirm our current board practices?
4. As we think about the various postures of board leadership outlined in this module, which postures would we say are areas of strength for our board? What areas would we like to develop?
5. How can we ensure that we maintain a posture of reliance on the Holy Spirit in every aspect of our leadership?
6. What steps can we take as a board to foster greater unity and make prayer a central part of our meetings?

Module 2: Understanding the Board's Role and Structure

Summary

This module clarifies the multiple accountabilities and responsibilities of a church board, including accountability to God, the congregation, the denomination, and civil authorities. It emphasizes that governance within the church context is not simply about fulfilling legal requirements but about stewarding the church's mission and ensuring its health and growth. The four core legal duties of board members—honesty, loyalty, care, and diligence—are explored in detail, outlining how these principles guide decision-making and protect the church from risks.

Boards in churches typically fall into one of two models: management/working boards or policy governance boards. Management boards are more hands-on, involved in both governance and day-to-day operations. This structure is common in smaller churches where the pastor and a few leaders manage most ministries. Policy governance boards, on the other hand, separate governance from operations. The lead pastor is given authority to manage operations within the boundaries set by the board, which focuses on setting vision, strategy, and policy.

The roles of specific board positions—such as the board chair, secretary, and treasurer—are also discussed. The board chair is primarily a facilitator of meetings, ensuring discussions are balanced and productive. The secretary ensures decisions are recorded in the minutes and that essential documents are preserved. The treasurer oversees the financial health of the church, ensuring transparency and accountability. This module stresses the importance of having clear role definitions to prevent misunderstandings and ensure smooth governance.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can we as a board balance our legal duties with the spiritual mission of the church?
2. Which board structure—management or policy governance—best suits the current needs of our church, and why?
3. How can we ensure that each board member fully understands their role and responsibilities?
4. What are the key differences between managing church operations and governing the church's mission? How can we strike a balance?
5. How can the board chair foster an environment of respectful, constructive discussion during meetings?
6. Discuss how well our church committees are functioning? What changes might we like to make?

Additional Resources:

Canada Revenue Agency

Policies and guidance for Canadian registered charities

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/taxes/charities.html>

Canadian Centre for Christian Charities

Articles, resources, sample policies, and training for churches and Christian ministries.

www.cccc.org/

Module 3: Essential Skills for the Board

Summary

In this module, seven essential skills for effective board leadership are outlined: directing, maintaining relationships with the pastor, protecting, monitoring and evaluation, discernment, financial literacy, and communication. These skills are foundational to the board's success in leading the church well.

Directing refers to the board's role in guiding the church toward its mission. This requires a future orientation—staying informed about trends in the community and anticipating future challenges and opportunities. It also involves developing a clear vision and mission for the church, in partnership with the pastor, and identifying the strategies needed to achieve that mission. Boards must balance the daily management tasks with long-term strategic thinking to ensure that the church remains focused on its mission.

The relationship between the board and the pastor is crucial. A healthy, collaborative relationship allows the pastor to lead with confidence, knowing the board provides both support and accountability. The board must recognize the pastor's particular gifts while holding them accountable to the mission of the church.

The board is also tasked with protecting the church from various risks, including:

- Abuse prevention for children, youth, and vulnerable people
- Church culture
- Mission drift
- Ministry risks – physical, spiritual, and emotional safety of participants
- Missed opportunities
- Talent acquisition and retention
- Health and safety
- Technology risks
- Political and cultural shifts
- Reputation risks
- Disruptions

Discernment is another key skill—seeking God's guidance in every decision. Boards must cultivate the ability to listen to God's direction, paying attention to the ways God is already working within the church and the wider community. Finally, boards need to develop strong financial literacy and communication skills to ensure that they can make informed decisions and foster an environment of transparency and unity.

Discussion Questions:

1. How well do we feel our board is doing at fulfilling its directing role? What strengths do we have? Where would we like to develop?
2. What are the key components of a healthy board-pastor relationship, and how can we foster this in our church? What are some meaningful ways we can show appreciation to our pastor?
3. What risks do we currently face as a church, and how can we minimize or eliminate these risks while still promoting effective ministry?
4. How can we improve our ability to discern God's direction in our board decisions?
5. What steps can we take to increase our financial literacy and ensure that our decisions are fiscally responsible?

Module 4: Essential Skills for the Board – Part 2

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Feedback

Summary

Monitoring and evaluation are vital processes in church leadership, yet they are often overlooked or not conducted well. This module encourages boards to regularly assess the church's progress in fulfilling its mission, provide constructive feedback to the pastor, and evaluate the board's own effectiveness. By establishing a culture of accountability, church boards can ensure that they remain focused on God's mission and make necessary adjustments to improve their leadership.

Biblical examples of evaluation are presented, including God's evaluation of His creation in Genesis, the evaluations made by prophets, and Jesus' assessment of His ministry. These examples emphasize the importance of reflection and feedback as a means of growth and course correction. The letters to the seven churches in Revelation provide a template for evaluating a church's health, focusing on encouragement, correction, and exhortation to remain faithful to Christ.

Practical steps for monitoring and evaluation are outlined, including developing key performance indicators that align with the church's mission, providing regular feedback to the pastor, and conducting an annual self-evaluation as a board. These processes not only help keep the church on track but also foster a spirit of transparency and collaboration.

Discussion Questions:

1. What lessons can we learn from the biblical examples of evaluation outlined in this module?
2. What are some indicators that would help us to evaluate our church's progress on its mission?
3. What are some creative ways that we can share mission progress with our congregation?
4. Discuss the five steps outlined in the module related to providing performance feedback for our pastor (Agree on the process; Agree on evaluation criteria or goals; Provide feedback; Debrief; Provide care for the pastor). What parts of this process are we doing well? In what areas would we like to improve?
5. What are some biblical and effective ways to provide feedback to our pastor in a way that fosters growth and encouragement?
6. What are some questions we should ask ourselves to consider how effectively we are fulfilling our role as board leaders? How can we develop a more intentional process for conducting board self-evaluations?
7. What are some of the principles of discernment that we can learn from Acts 15?
8. What are some ways that we can improve communication as a board?

Additional Resources:

Devotional Guide “If You Can Hear, Listen to What the Spirit is Saying”

fivesmoothstones.ca/resources

Pursuing God’s Will Together: A Discernment Practice for Leadership Groups, Ruth Haley Barton

Module 5: Essential Tools for the Job

Summary

This module introduces practical tools to help the board function more effectively. These tools include a board governance manual, agendas, board reports, minutes, annual budget, and board development.

A board governance manual provides a framework for the church's mission, the roles and responsibilities of board members, and the processes for evaluating the church's progress. Having this written document ensures that everyone on the board is aligned with the church's mission and that expectations are clear.

Agendas are essential for running effective meetings. A well-planned agenda ensures that time is used efficiently and that the most important issues are addressed. Supporting materials, such as board reports, provide the necessary background information for informed decision-making, while minutes serve as an official record of discussions and decisions.

Another key tool is the annual ministry plan, which aligns the church's budget and resources with its strategic goals. By focusing on mission and outcomes, the board can ensure that the church's financial resources are being used effectively. This module emphasizes the importance of good documentation and organization in helping the board stay focused on its mission.

Discussion Questions:

1. How can a board governance manual help clarify our roles and improve our effectiveness as a board?
2. What steps can we take to ensure our meeting agendas are mission-focused and efficient?
3. What are some ways we can incorporate board development and learning during our board meetings?
4. Why is it important to document board decisions through accurate minutes, and how can we ensure this is done effectively?
5. How can an annual ministry plan help us align our resources with our strategic goals for the coming year?

Additional Resources:

Sample Board Agenda

The following is a basic agenda outline for regular board meetings:

1. Opening Prayer and Devotional
2. Approval of Agenda and Declaration of Conflicts of Interest
3. Approval of Minutes from Previous Meeting
4. Reports
 - Pastor's report
 - Church programs report (Students, Kids, Men, Women, Outreach)
 - Financial report
 - Other reports (committees, technology, building, insurance, etc.)
5. Additional items depending on the time of year (see below)
6. Board Development – short sessions to build board expertise and learn about the external environment
7. Communication – Is there anything arising from the meeting that should be communicated to all or part of our church family?
8. Meeting Review
 - Confirm next meeting date and significant agenda items for the next meeting
 - Have a brief discussion on how the meeting went (e.g., Did we operate as we intend? Did we do our job as a board?)
9. Closing Prayer and Adjournment

Additional agenda items to be scheduled throughout the year:

- Approval of annual ministry plan and budget
- Annual feedback for Pastor
- Annual board self-evaluation
- Annual ministry evaluation
- Preparation for Annual General Meeting

Ministry Plan Outline

A ministry plan is a description of the initiatives and strategies that are proposed for the next year. Initiatives should contain rationale as to why they will be effective in contributing to the mission of the church. Below are key components of a ministry plan.

- a) **Ministry Plan Summary** – This first section provides a high-level overview of the key goals and initiatives of the ministry plan as well as their connection to the mission statement.
- b) **Ministry Context** – In this section, provide information about the internal programs of the church (e.g., church demographics, ministry program demographics, current ministry trends, legal concerns, missions, and areas where ministry in the church needs to be strengthened, or programs need to be discontinued.)
- c) **Community Context** – In this section, provide information about the external outreach programs and initiatives of the church. (e.g., community demographics and needs, health of partnerships with others, and an analysis of where outreach needs to be strengthened.
- d) **Goals and Initiatives** – In this section, outline the goals and initiatives you are planning to address, the issues raised in the ministry, and community context section. Outline the resources for each including building space, people resources, and program supplies. If you want to elevate your plan even further, describe the indicators you will use to determine how well the program or initiative is doing. Ministry plans are usually operational, so if you have a specific building project, developing a separate plan is suggested.
- e) **Facility and Property** – Keeping up your facility supports effective ministry. In this section, detail your maintenance priorities as well as any investments needed to support safety and security.
- f) **Leadership, Staffing, and Volunteers** – People are the heart and soul of ministry in a church. In this section, discuss any training and development for both pastors and volunteers as well as the rationale for additional paid and volunteer positions needed to carry out your plan.
- g) **Administration and Infrastructure** – What type of support services will be needed to carry out the goals and initiatives?
- h) **Financial** – Based on everything you would like to accomplish in the ministry plan, what are the financial resources needed? Essentially, this should be your annual budget. If you have a larger church, you might segment your ministry plan by area, such as student ministries, children and families, etc.

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