

CuttingEdge

Monthly Board Meeting Agenda

Prayer

Treasurer's Report - Approval of last month's bills

Women's Report - Volunteers needed for Bake Sale

*Worship Report - Come to choir practice on Thursday
Delay piano tuning because of cost*

*Nurture Report - Names beginning with A-F bring salads,
G-Z bring desserts to fellowship dinner*

*Sunday School Report - \$2.30 last Sunday offering
Someone in Wanda's supply
cabinet; new locks*

*Property Report - Mabel's grandchildren running in
fellowship hall*

Old Business - Repair of front pew complete

*New Business - Consideration of \$10.00 expense for
window cleaner*

Minister's Report - Hours in office, hours making calls

*The Worship Committee will convene with
other Committee chairs after the meeting to
select hymns for next Sunday's service.*

'On board': Does the size and style and shape of your congregation's board help or hinder growth?

By Chuck Blaisdell

What do Disciples congregations that are growing have in common? Pastoral leadership that articulates a compelling vision? A clear sense of mission and identity that is prized and shared by virtually every member of the congregation? An attitude that *celebrates* new people in the congregation and encourages them to offer their gifts—even knowing that this will change “the way we’ve always done it?” A passion for hands-on mission and for reaching those who don’t know the gospel with its good and healing news?

Yes, yes, yes, and yes! And all of us could name other traits of congregations that are growing in spirit and wisdom and in numbers. Sometimes, though, congregations find themselves with an invisible roadblock to numerical growth—the size and style and “shape” of the church board.

Why does this make a difference? Why and how does the size and style and “shape” (that is, the tacit understanding of the purpose and function) of the congregation’s board affect growth? Because there is a common correlation between the often unspoken assumptions about the way a church board is “supposed” to function and how effective—or not!—it is at being an encouragement to a culture of growth within the congregation.

Consider the following: among congregations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), congregational boards tend in practice to

have one of three functions: informational, administrative, and policy-making. These functions also often correlate with church size and “style” as well.

The ‘informational’ function

Tacit Assumption: The purpose of the church board is to disseminate information quickly and efficiently to all members of the congregation.

It is important to note that this function presupposes that it is in fact possible to get information to everyone in this manner in a consistently satisfactory way. However, practically speaking, this means that either the church is relatively small—under about 60-75 in worship—and composed primarily of several “family cell groups,” or the church board is relatively large (theoretically composed of 20-40% of the average worship attendance—and covering, therefore, most of the family cell groups).

But this tacit assumption about the function of the board definitely affects the congregation’s ability to grow: 1) This sort of church board tends to reinforce the current size of the church (because when worship attendance is much larger than 75 this sort of church board won’t, in fact, communicate well to everyone—and the church will “plateau” in size); 2) This sort of board makes it more difficult to assimilate newcomers fully into the texture of church life and activities (if all communication flows through the board, new folks

quickly feel left out of the loop); 3) Some functional committees work, some don’t and most of the real decision-making often happens through certain “family cells” and “opinion-makers” in the church’s life—which can discourage serious effort by committees (why serve on a committee—as newcomers particularly ask—if the board is simply going to re-hash all the committee’s work anyway?); 4) Often in this situation, the pastor functions more as a chaplain to the current members, is not expected to have as a priority adding new members, and much of the leadership of the church is vested in the “informal decision-makers” (which gives the pastor little time for being the church’s front-line leader in offering a compelling vision for church growth).

The ‘administrative’ function

Tacit Assumption: The purpose of the church board is to implement particular ways and tactics for managing and deploying church programs and resources.

This sort of board function presupposes that the congregation is of such a size that its board can in fact do this kind of “hands-on administration,” always or often functioning as a “committee of the whole.” This kind of board works best when the church is at about 75 to 125 or so average worship attendance.

But again, there are definite implications for church growth when this function is tacitly understood as the board’s primary function:

1) If or as the congregation does in fact grow by adding new members, there is more “administration” to do and board leaders can get easily burned-out (and burned-out lay leaders cannot be effective

Sometimes, though, congregations find themselves with an invisible roadblock to numerical growth—the size and style and ‘shape’ of the church board.

“cheerleaders” for church growth and “non-anxious presences” in the midst of change!); 2) The minister may find him- or herself spending more and more time being a liaison between board members, spending more and more time un-snagging intra-board communications or preventing misunderstandings (which means, again, he or she is not giving primary emphasis to either a vision for evangelism or for equipping the members to do evangelism); 3) Committees (as in the first case) can often get to feeling dis-empowered when the board insists on revisiting many of the details of the work they’ve already done.

The ‘policy-making’ function

Tacit Assumption: The purpose of the church board is to give broad oversight to overall church policy, direction and mission, and to work closely with the minister—and the minister (or ministers) offers a vision for growth and implements that direction and mission.

This function presupposes that there is a high level of trust—between the members and the minister(s). It acknowledges that the nitty-gritty work of administering church life and program is in the hands of the committees as they work with the ministerial staff whom the church has called to give leadership. This sort of board—and church!—expects, hopes for, and is committed to numerical growth. This sort of board works best and most appropriately in congregations of 150+ in worship (or those committed to becoming this size!).

Some implications: 1) Committee members are freed and empowered to do the work and ministry that they are committed to without worrying about being second-guessed in detail (if folks—new or old—have a passion for a particular mission, they can quickly find a place to engage that passion); 2) Pastor and board can spend “quality time” reflecting on the overall mission and direction of the church (the pastor is no longer the one who is “doing the ministry” on behalf of the church, but is the one who is equipping the members

I believe that church growth and the presentation of the gospel to a needy and hurting world is enhanced when a congregation moves toward a ‘policy-making’ board.

for their ministry); 3) The pastor can be an informational and motivational resource for committees—rather than simply a communications liaison—because committees are truly empowered to do what they have been called to do (this encourages innovation and imagination—which is enticing to new folks!); 4) There is a recognition in a growing congregation that there must be a variety of venues of communication among all members—therefore new members are more easily assimilated in the church life. (You don’t have to be on the board or in the “right” family to be and feel a part of the church’s ministry.)

A couple of final points: Many church-growth and evangelism writers have noted that the hardest transition to make in a congregation is to grow past the 150-in-worship plateau. One of the ways that this will happen is when the pastor—backed by the key lay leaders!—gently but consistently reminds folks that in a growing, faithful church which is committed to doing mission and proclaiming the gospel, everyone will no longer know everyone! And that’s ok. But it’s not only just “ok,” it’s in fact a wonderful sign pointing to a congregation that is indeed alive and growing.

Secondly, many traditional Disciples congregational constitutions or bylaws construct the board based on “representation” from a variety of the congregation’s groups. (For example, some of—or sometimes all of!—the elders or deacons may be board members; or each committee chair and even vice-chair may have a “slot” on the board.) Over time, this tends to lead to boards that are far too big—but because they are big, more and more members think, “Oh, someone else will be there at the board meeting; I don’t need to attend this one.” This attitude, while under-

standable, plays havoc with continuity and the development of the board as an effective policy-making and visioning group. A too-large board always seems to be starting over and shies away from innovation—and people become frustrated.

I believe that church growth and the presentation of the gospel to a needy and hurting world is enhanced when a congregation moves toward a “policy-making” board. Even if your congregation is not 150+ in worship, you can begin to structure yourself as if you were—which can help make it a reality. Is your congregation’s board currently composed of 60 persons? Eighteen persons would be a much better size. Is it currently 30 persons, but has “representation” by the chairs (or others) of every fellowship group and committee? Consider, instead, moving to a 12-15 person board where each of the board members is a “liaison” with specific committees and fellowship groups—not to “keep watch over them” but to offer support and provide a means of informal communication with the board.

Use your imagination. Ask how your current structures and practices are serving the Great Commission. Be innovative. And “pray without ceasing” that all of our work will indeed glorify the God who has called us to proclaim and live out the gospel, doing everything we can to invite those in who need to know God—even when that changes us! For those opportunities, thanks be to God.



Chuck Blaisdell is the Regional Minister-President of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of Northern California-Nevada, and a member of First Christian Church, Concord, California.

Congregational survey results

Boards that work

By Ryan D. Hazen

Earlier this year, in an effort to understand congregational governance systems in strong, growing Disciples of Christ congregations, I sent a survey to the top 15 congregations in total membership additions in four size categories.*

The purpose of the survey was to provide preliminary observations to see what the 60 congregations in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) that received the most members (according to the 2002 *Year Book and Directory*—page 591) had in common concerning church governance. The smallest (0-50 members) and largest (over 1000 members) size category churches were not sent surveys because it was felt that governance in these congregations would be very different and, while perhaps informative, not the focus of this endeavor. Of the 60 two-page surveys sent, 31 were returned. The congregations that returned surveys represent 15 regions.

Board size

While the size of the primary governing bodies of these congregations ranged from 5 to 80, two congregations with large boards noted that their boards were in the process of

being downsized. The average size of the primary governing board was 29. They are called by a variety of names and, while a majority (17) meet monthly, four meet quarterly and five meet on other schedules.

Cabinet

Of the responding congregations, 22 of 31 have a smaller “cabinet.” Many cabinets dealt with program issues and the coordination of a common vision while the larger governing body dealt with policy and financial issues.

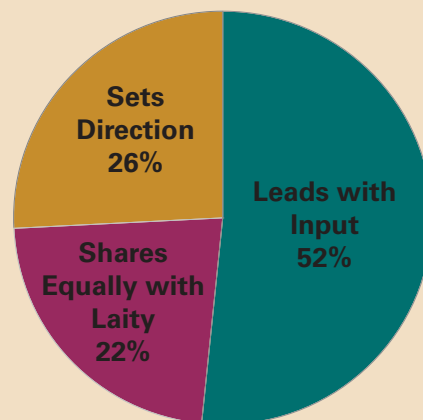
Selection of leadership

Almost every congregation (27 of 31) uses some version of a nominating committee to select a slate of leadership that is then approved by the board and/or congregation. Ten nominating committees work with the direct input of the Senior Minister. Three congregations noted that the pastor alone selects leadership.

Role of Senior Minister

None identified the Senior Minister as a follower of the lay leaders’ leading. Seven identified the Senior Minister as collaborating equally with lay leaders. Eight said the Senior Minister sets the direction for the

Expectations of the Senior Minister’s Role in Governance



congregation. The majority (52%) said that while the Senior Minister is the primary person in setting the direction, the process is informed with the input of laity.

Congregational approval

In general, only “major” items go before the full congregation for approval in these 31 congregations. These include land acquisition, changes in ordained staff, constitution and by-law changes, election of officers, acquisition of debt and operational budgets.

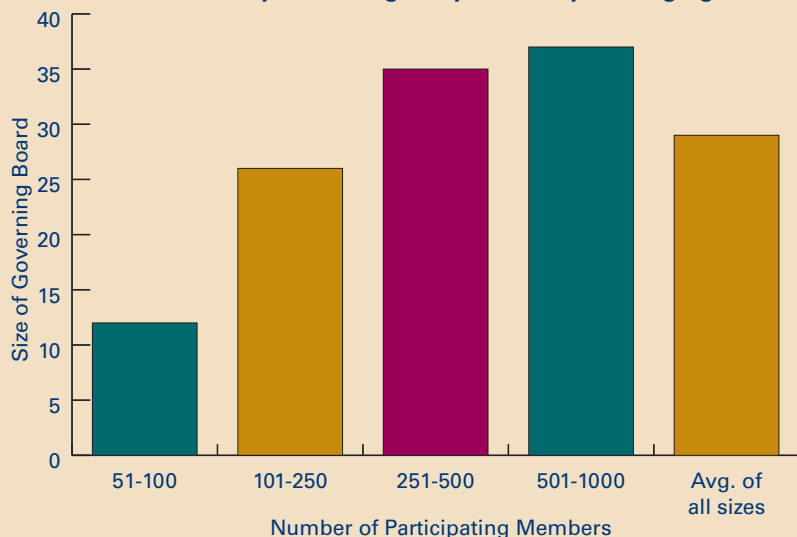
Growth factors

The last question in the survey gave respondents the opportunity to expound more fully on their growth. The question “what would you describe as the three most important factors leading to growth of your congregation?” solicited many, many answers including an underlying passionate excitement for a vibrant ministry. The common themes of the answers had to do with the spirituality of the congregation, openness to change and the strength of worship. Additional, but less mentioned, themes included the common understanding and excitement about the direction of the church and strong leadership for growth.

Ultimately, there are a variety of factors that come together to affect church growth, but the governance system that allows for the above factors to emerge is a foundational piece to effective ministry.

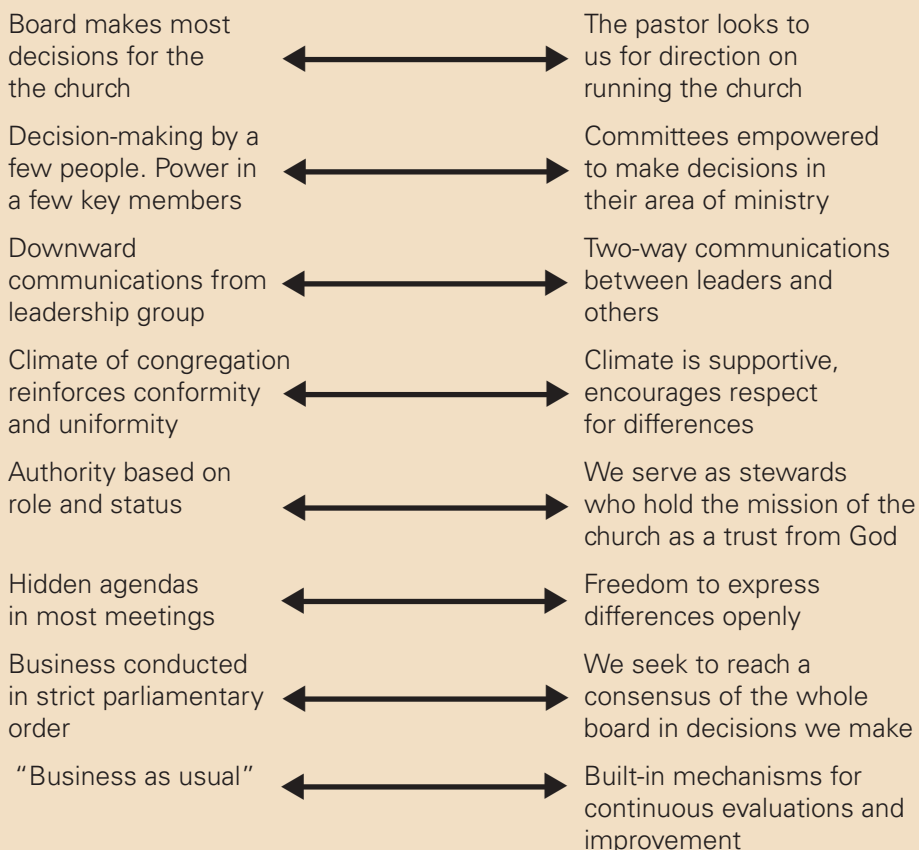
* Full survey results are available at www.churchextension.org

Size of Primary Governing Body of Surveyed Congregations



You CAN transform your church board!

Among the congregations of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), church boards tend to serve three functions: **informational**, **administrative** and **policy-making**. Mark an **X** on the continuum below to help you discern your board's "leadership style." Informational and administrative will be on the left end of the continuum, while policy-making traits are on the right.



(Developed from *Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders* [Charles M. Olsen, The Alban Institute, 1995], Chuck Blaisdell's article and the Christian Church in Nebraska.)



It's Catching!

Disciples Peace Intern and National Benevolent Association Leadership Scholar, Adam Von Boxel, had a good idea. At the end of the exhausting 72-hour orientation session for the Leadership Scholars, the tradition is to receive an offering for ministry in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Adam suggested the New Church Ministry Program because a number of the scholars knew about the exciting things happening in this area of our church's life.

An offering of \$611 was received from 10 Disciples college students and two adult coordinators of the NBA Leadership Scholars program. The funds will benefit the New Church Ministry Team as they provide a variety of services for new congregations, including leadership development and assessment, program grants and support to regional new church commissions.

General Assembly events

Mark your calendars now for two special events at this year's General Assembly in Charlotte:

- Join New Church Ministry in a noncompetitive 5k walk/run/roll at 2 p.m. Friday, Oct. 17. Encourage friends, family and members of your congregation to sponsor your participation in this Spirit Walk. Funds will be used to start new churches; a portion of the proceeds will also go to Week of Compassion. Contact New Church Ministry for more information: 1-800-274-1883; www.newchurchministry.org

- Exciting plans are underway for Church Extension's General Assembly Dinner, Oct. 17 at 5:15 p.m. A special presentation will highlight the ways Church Extension is living out the 2020 Vision of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Tickets are \$20 and must be purchased in advance; call 1-800-274-1883 or visit www.churchextension.org

CHURCHES ON THE CUTTING EDGE

Editor's Note: The Church Extension Board of Directors recently journeyed to the Central Rocky Mountain Region to see a sampling of ministry taking place there in a variety of settings and how Church Extension has been involved. In addition to seeing first-hand the facilities shown below, directors received an update on the five current new-church projects in the region from Regional Minister Ron Parker and Regional Moderator Sandra Hergenreder.



First Christian Church of Boulder is in the process of updating its facilities to attract younger families. If you've seen the movie "About Schmidt," you may recognize this church from its cameo appearance.



South Suburban Christian Church, Littleton, has grown by leaps and bounds in the past couple of years, currently averaging 800 in worship.



Heart of the Rockies Christian Church, Fort Collins, held its first worship service in March 1993. Church Extension has partnered with the congregation since the vision began for a new congregation in 1991.



Central Christian Church, Denver, is active in several outreach ministries, including preparing and serving meals at Senior Support Services and joining in the building of a Habitat for Humanity house.



South Broadway Christian Church, Denver, is busy seven days a week, providing a place for many community organizations to meet. The church, constructed of Castle Rock lava, was dedicated in 1892.

Ed Says—An on-going conversation between Ed Taylor, the Editor and You:

Ed says:

Maybe they are better named the Stream rather than the Board. For they are channels of life, rather than inanimate objects; fluid, not rigidly defined; moving, not stationary; entered thoughtfully, rather than burdened casually.

Ryan says:

The very structure and culture of the governing body of a congregation can be the roadblock to ministry or the channel that fuels enthusiasm and passion. I often see individuals with a pure excitement to be involved in a new program or ministry who do not act on their ambitions because of a governing body that too quickly would think of reasons not to proceed rather than asking how this fits with the mission. Indeed, boards rather than streams.

You say:

Share your insights.
Write to us at cuttingedge@churchextension.org.

Ed Taylor is the Executive Director of the Ecumenical Stewardship Center in Indianapolis. The mission of the Center is "to serve Christian denominations, institutions, organizations, and congregations in developing creative and vital stewardship ministries." For more information, visit www.stewardshipresources.org.



Property Committee Corner

By Michael Kizzie

Sure, you can use the parking lot!

Ending the monthly board meeting, the chairperson asks, "Is there any more business to address?" The director of the church's nursery school replies, "Oh, there's one more thing. Mrs. Jones, the mother of one of our students, handed me a bill for the repair of her car this morning. It appears that vandals damaged her vehicle while she was chaperoning students on last month's overnight field trip. She feels that the church should pay for it."

The church's regional agent who had also attended the board meeting states, "Before you make a decision, there is one thing you should know. Your insurance carrier will not reimburse you should you decide to pay for the damages to Mrs. Jones' vehicle."

The director recounts, "But we told her and all the other parents that they could leave their vehicles in our parking lot while they were chaperoning the students." All board members acknowledge they gave consent to use the parking lot.

"Let me have a few minutes to explain," says the agent. "It is agreed that the parents were advised that they could park their cars in the church's parking lot, but that does *not* make the church liable for the damage to their vehicles. With no legal liability, the insurance carrier will not respond positively to any request for payment for damage to vehicles the church does not own."

"But the damage did occur in our parking lot," says the director. "Someone broke the rear and side windows, right in our parking lot!"

The agent relays a similar story to help explain the situation. He poses a question to the board: "In whose parking lot do you park

your car when you go to the mall? The mall parking lot, of course, which is open and offered for use as 'free parking.' If Mrs. Jones had parked her car overnight at the mall and the same thing happened, would the mall pay for the damage? The answer is 'No,' because the mall is not legally liable for the damage to the vehicle and only legal liability can compel payment from the mall or the church's insurer. The church (like the mall) did not have possession of the vehicle, did not own or borrow or lease it, thus it cannot be held responsible for what happens to it, even on church property."

The proper party from whom to request payment is her own private automobile insurer. With the exception of the deductible, it should cover the damages. The church may feel compelled in the spirit of being a good neighbor to pay for the damage, but your insurer cannot reimburse you. The claim is not considered a covered claim.

While the church may offer the use of its parking facilities to any individual or group it chooses and may feel an obligation to pay for the damages, it is Mrs. Jones' primary personal carrier that should respond to her claim. These situations occur hundreds of times a year as churches open their facilities, both indoor and outdoor, to various groups and individuals. Unless there is legal liability for the damage on behalf of the church, there will be no payments remitted by the church's insurance carrier. Even Mrs. Jones' private insurance carrier knows this and that's why coverage is designed as it is. Mrs. Jones' carrier will pay for the damages to her car in excess of the deductible.

Michael Kizzie is Program Underwriter for the United Church of Christ Insurance Board.

Notes from the Editor



I hope the cover of this *Cutting Edge* issue struck you as somewhat funny. A few of us in the office had fun compiling actual

agenda items from meetings we have attended then added a bit of creative license. If this agenda looks too much like one from your congregation's board meeting, then you may find ideas in this issue.

The very mention of the words "church board meeting" sends chills down the spine of many pastors and has them reaching for the aspirin. It does not have to be the case. While the survey results contained in this issue are certainly unscientific, they do confirm some underlying assumptions on my part, namely, church

boards that are structured for setting policy are found in the healthiest and fastest growing churches. Those focused on day-to-day operation or as the primary communication tool are predominantly concerned with maintenance and survival.

My deep appreciation to Chuck Blaisdell for his succinct analysis of how church boards structure themselves to carry out the mission of the church. I know that my colleagues on regional staff are much more in tune with the variety of congregational boards that exist in our denomination, and Chuck's assessment certainly is backed by his experience. I hope you will find his comments and the survey results helpful as you see your own board fitting into one of the categories.

As always, I appreciate your ministry.

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