

CrossWalk

WHY we Govern Ourselves the Way we Do

When we set out to find the best way to administer the decision-making process at CrossWalk, we determined up front to be exhaustive. So, we contacted the top ten, fastest-growing churches in America at that time and asked them all for their set of bylaws. Once we had those in hand, we assembled a competent team of high-impact leaders to study those different sets of bylaws and make a list of all the common denominators. It was our conviction that healthy churches grow automatically; so we wanted to know what characteristics of ecclesiastical governance these healthy churches had in common. We wanted to follow the model of the best that was out there.

Once we gathered all the similarities, we crafted a draft of our own policies and procedures as an evolving, working document. Then our team compared what we discovered with Scripture. What a delight it was to know that these churches were perfectly aligned with the principles found in God's Word! It was quite educational! In a day and age when it seems that many churches would rather copy corporate America than ancient patterns of Bible times rooted in godly principles, it was encouraging to know that God's ways are still the best. God's principles are timeless; we won't ever become more sophisticated.

Now the true test came – would a biblically-governed church satisfy the State laws that regulate corporations? So, our team hired a well-respected corporate lawyer to pour over our bylaws very, very carefully. Every line was meticulously evaluated over a period of several months. Although there was some minor tweaking of some verbiage, our lawyer verified that not only did our bylaws satisfy all the laws of our State, but they were actually healthier than most bylaws that govern the big corporations today! Again, we were thrilled to have our conviction re-affirmed that God's ways are indeed the best ways.

So, we are very confident that the document we have published will not only serve our church well into the future, but it will also serve all the other churches who wish to follow its patterns. While the above comments give a historical explanation of how we arrived at our conclusions, below is a theological explanation of our governing structure.

A Theological basis of Church Government

Throughout history, the Church has tended to abandon a Biblical governing structure, and instead, embrace the popular civil government of its day. For instance, when Caesar ruled the world, a Pope was established as the ecclesiastical counterpart. And when parliamentary law characterized the decision-making of Western Europe, Presbyterian and Methodist models set the new standard for churches. In like fashion, 20th century American churches became more and more democratic and suspicious of authority, being run more like secular corporations rather than a spiritual body and family of believers under the influence of the Holy Spirit. They followed a congregational model. However, it should come as no surprise that churches throughout history have also struggled with challenges as a result of trading Biblical models for trendy, man-made models. So, we attempted to correct the some of the challenges that have plagued many 20th century churches by re-aligning ourselves from a corporate, American governing structure toward a New Testament, early church governance. The result has been a much greater measure of unity and effectiveness.

When CrossWalk was first planted, it was called a "home missions" church. Due to the fragile nature of a congregation during its early developmental stages, CrossWalk was covered by a team of pastors from the District office of its affiliated network of churches. However, as the church grew, we were encouraged to go "sovereign;" which simply meant to exchange the team of appointed pastors' pastors from outside the church for elected businessmen/women from within the church body, some of which may have never had much prior church leadership experience. But could it be possible that there is no difference between a home missions church and the New Testament model? And we wonder why congregational churches have so many church splits when we hardly ever hear of such irreconcilable divisions among Episcopalians and Catholics. Could it be that one has a more Biblical structure than the other?

Thus, CrossWalk set out to pattern its governance after the following principles found in the New Testament. Today, we enjoy a sovereign status, but our pastors are the ones who lead. We recognize their anointing, training, and experience to do so. They are also held strictly accountable by the leadership of our affiliate network of churches. They do not work for a committee of businessmen/women inside the church. As a result, we also enjoy a strong sense of unity within our body and family.

The New Testament Network of Churches was led by a Plurality of Apostles.

Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders (about Gentile alignment with Jewish rites)... The apostles and elders met to consider this question... As they (Paul and the other representatives) traveled from town to town, they delivered the decisions reached by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem for the people to obey. Acts 15:2b,6; 16:4

According to this verse and others, local churches were submitted to the authority of the leadership based in Jerusalem. In order for a correct local church government to work properly, it has to be in the context of an over-arching correct apostolic government at work. A common misconception today is that the office of an apostle *ceased* at the end of the early church era. But where is the chapter and verse to support such a notion? That's Cessationism, which contradicts the very foundations of the distinctives of our particular affiliated network of churches. On the contrary, we believe that the gifts given to believers in the Church are just as relevant today. So why then not the gift of an apostle? Imagine the lack of impetus the New Testament would suffer if every verse referencing an apostle was purged. Acts would be anemic. Perhaps that explains some of our present-day challenges.

Furthermore, Revelation 18:20 makes reference to apostles who will be functioning in the end times. So, if apostles existed in the early church, and if they will also exist in the end times, then why would they not exist in between? Why not during our era? Many cessationists reference abuses of the apostolic office during the 20th century. Admittedly, there were some problems; but we don't deal with abuse with disuse. We simply correct the abuse. Since when has abuse of a Biblical principle ever given license to abandon the principle?

Tragically, we have reduced our District authorities to administrators and robbed them of some of the key elements of their pastoral calling. However, in order for local churches to be healthy, we *must* recognize the office of the apostle. Otherwise, substituted man-made governing structures for the local church in the absence of an apostolic covering will create unnecessary challenges and ultimately limit the local church from accomplishing its mission to the fullest.

At CrossWalk, we proudly introduce our District officials as our authoritative covering. After all, the Presbytery holds the credentials of our pastors and keeps our pastors accountable. If one of our pastors ever demonstrates any moral, ethical, or theological deviance, then our people are instructed to confront the pastor in question first, and then inform the proper officials. Then the District officials, serving in their apostolic role, will perform a thorough investigation, and if necessary, exercise the appropriate discipline.

The New Testament Local Church was led by a Plurality of Elders.

For this reason, I left you in Crete (Paul and Titus acting in apostolic authority), that you should set in order the things that are lacking, and appoint (kathistemi [ordain]) elders (presbuteros) in every city as I commanded you. Titus 1:5 (cf Ac 14:23)

Paul's address to the Elders (*presbuteros* in v. 17) from Ephesus:

Take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (episkopos), to shepherd (poimaino [pastor]) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. Acts 20:28

Peter's address to the Elders (*presbuteros* in v. 1) scattered throughout the world:

Shepherd (poimaino [pastor]) the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers (episkopos), not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly. 1 Peter 5:2

Notice that while the word “pastor” is used only once in the New Testament (Ephesians 4:11), the office is actually referenced quite frequently in terms of “shepherding.” But in every case, those shepherd pastors were called *elders* and *overseers*, giving their fulltime attention to their office and ministry.

Whereas the New Testament rarely used the word “pastors” in reference to the ones in charge of the church, and used instead the word “elders,” today we have reversed the practice. We rarely used the word “elders” in reference to the ones in charge of the church and instead use the word “pastors.” Then, because of this practice, we tend to create a new office for elders that never existed in the New Testament church, electing businessmen/women to the highest levels of governance in the local church. But we must remember that pastors were, and are, the ones charged by God to lead the church; not businessmen/women appointed as elders in addition to pastors. Businessmen/women are anointed to lead businesses; pastors are anointed to lead churches. While businessmen/women are extremely valuable in giving advice about the business matters of the church, and thus have an important role to serve in the church, the pastors are the ones who generally have been to school to be trained and they have the most experience leading the church. (Those businessmen/women don’t usually invite a pastor to sit on their boards, either.)

A thorough study of the functions of a New Testament Elder (Pastor) emphasizes the fact that the elders were fulltime, vocational leaders of the church – anointed and called, trained, under apostolic appointment (ordained), and experienced (proven):

- i. **Protect the Flock**
(Acts 20:17, 28-31a; Titus 1:5, 6, 9; Acts 15:6; 1 Thes 5:12)
- ii. **Feed the Flock**
(Mt 28:20; John 21:17; Acts 2:42; 11:25-26; 1 Tim 3:2; 4:13; 5:17-18; Titus 1:9)
- iii. **Govern the Flock**
(2 Sam 5:2; Ps 78:71-72; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2; 1 Tim 5:17a; Titus 1:7)
- iv. **Care for the Flock**
(James 5:14; Acts 20:35; 2 Sam 12:3; Ps 23; 2 Cor 2:4)

Given the interpretation of the Biblical principles found in the New Testament, CrossWalk has arrived at the following conclusions:

- The local church in the New Testament was modeled after a body and a family. Both have only one single head, held accountable by laws, not subordinates. The NT local church was elder-led.
- But the elders were vocational pastors under apostolic appointment, not lay businessmen/women elected by the people. Businessmen/women may advise, and alleviate business matters, but they should be non-legislative.
- The words “elder” and “pastor/shepherd” were used interchangeably.
- Churches today should be led by a pastoral staff that have the training, experience, and calling to protect, feed, govern, and care for the people in the church. Churches should not be led by a board who has been elected by the people. There should not be separate pastoral and elder bodies; otherwise, the possibilities of conflicts and impasses rise significantly.
- But if the local church is elder-led (pastor-led), then the function of accountability must come from the District officials serving as pastors’ pastors (apostles).
- For the governance of a local church to function properly according to Scripture, the office of the apostle must be brought back to the Church and recognized.

The 20th century, congregational model of church governance tends to keep a local church small! No wonder most congregational churches are under 200 people. Almost without exception, large, healthy churches are not encumbered by such an unbiblical model. So, we must be determined to use to what works – what is truly biblical. While we were a home missions church, the lack of absolute autonomy never impeded our mission. We have also experienced that we can be a sovereign church with a home missions structure.