

CHURCH @ CHURCH

Session + Committee of Management

for family, pastor + program size churches

Who calls the Tunes

Who the boss in a Presbyterian Church? It sounds like a 'Colin' song, 'the minister is not the boss, uh uh', 'the x...'. But who does call the tune of the Session and the Committee of Management? I think these are enormously important questions and the answers that I'm going to suggest may surprise you but if you get a hold of them they will revolutionise how your church can operate.

Who is the boss of the Session?

The Session in a Presbyterian church is of course ultimately accountable to the Lord but functionally the Session should be accountable to the Mission, Vision, and Values of the congregation. The Session prays, plans oversees according to the direction and character stated in those documents. If there is outrage at some decision that has been made then perhaps the values of the congregation need to be clarified.

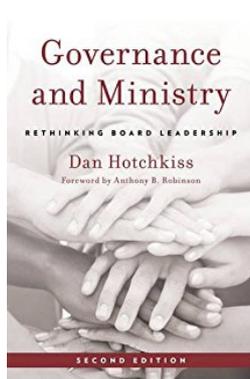
What about the Committee of Management? The Committee of Management's job is to implement the budget developed by a joint meeting of the Session and Committee of Management is adopted by a meeting of the Congregation and expresses the Mission, Vision, and Values of the congregation.

This ensures there is an alignment of direction and avoids personalities and power blocks.

In my preparation to become a minister of the Presbyterian Church of Australia we were required to do a subject called PPP – Presbyterian Practice and Polity; the title just about says it all. We were taught what a Session meeting was; what a Committee of Management meeting was; how they were different and the different rules and principles that governed them both.

The idea was that when we were responsible for our first parish, we would be the moderator of the Session and the Chairman of the Committee of Management and what was really important was knowing how to run a meeting well. In PPP, I learned about notices of motion, amendments, minutes, the role of the Annual General Meeting as well as the different powers of Assemblies, Presbyteries, Sessions, and Committee of Managements.

When you take your first Session meeting you not only want to look competent and efficient you want to be competent and efficient so that you not wasting people's precious time. There is one big problem with that last sentiment, being efficient doesn't mean you're not wasting people's time. Being efficient often means they don't notice that the waste of time is still happening. Efficiency is only a virtue if you're actually getting to a desirable destination. We learned to be managers in PPP, but not leaders; managers are efficient but leaders need to be effective. I'm not 'having a go' at good management, it can do and has done great things when applied in the right direction; but if you are facing a challenge and the challenge won't be solved by increased efficiency because what is needed is working out a new direction, then what is needed is leadership not efficiency. That was something I had to learn the hard way in the Sessions and Committees I managed at first and gradually learned to lead. This ministry Paper discusses how to lead and not just manage those organisations within a Presbyterian church; the Session and Committee of Management but it has application to other denominational structures.



Resources

Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership by Dan Hotchkiss

This is not a book on theology, which is just as well as Dan Hotchkiss is a Universalist Unitarian minister. Dan Hotchkiss has however had a great deal of experience as a senior consultant with the Alban Institute in America. Hotchkiss' book develops a vision for how the board (in a Presbyterian context- Session and

Committee of Management) works in relation to the congregation and the ministry 'staff'. His primary thesis is that when governance is done well, which includes generating writing operational policies and job descriptions according to the Mission, Vision, and Values of the congregations and holds the different ministries of the congregation accountable to those entities a church can operate in a transparent and healthy way.

Session

The role of the Session is to oversee the spiritual health of the congregation in all its ministries. The important word here is ‘oversight’; having elders representing different ministries of the Church runs counter to the purpose and culture of a Session. It is appropriate for an elder to be involved in a ministry and even lead a ministry but when it comes to the deliberation of Session they are not advocates for their particular ministry. What is required of a Session is to oversee the governing of the congregation so that the overall health of the church is in focus. Such a focus might sometimes mean the wrapping up of a ministry.

The Session and the Elder

The role of the session and of an elder are two very different things. An elder is to be a person of Christian maturity. This should not be limited to being able to affirm the Christian doctrine but rather they are to embody it as an elder’s primary role is not to make decisions but to be an example of Christian maturity. Even this needs to be qualified because this must mean more than having a consistent prayer and Bible reading regime, it is primarily the integration of Christian belief and behaviour in healthy relationships. It is this health that enables an elder to play a role in the spiritual oversight of the congregation as together with the minister they wrestle with leading the church to embody their Vision, Mission, and Values. Elders are to be model Christians. The Session is the place where elders work together under Christ to further his kingdom in a particular place and beyond.

Committee of Management (CoM)

The Committee of Management functions completely differently from the Session. Each member of the CoM should hold a portfolio for a different area of responsibility Com is given. There should be no one on the CoM who is free of a responsibility that they both report on and implement. Of course, there are the normal office bearers; Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer but in addition to these, there should also be someone who is responsible for buildings, grounds, technology, and software etc. There should be no one who is part of the decision making but does not bear a responsibility. The members of the CoM have the ability to enlist others with gifts in those areas but they are responsible for the portfolio.

Preparing a Budget

Each ministry and portfolio area is required, toward the end of the year, to submit a budget for their area of responsibility for the following year. The total proposed budget is prepared by the minister, and a representative of the session and CoM and submitted to a joint Session and CoM meeting. The agreed budget is then published and submitted to a congregational meeting in early December for approval. In addition to the approval, the Congregation also authorises the CoM to pay any bill that is in accordance with the budget.

The Job of Treasurer

It is rare these days, even in smaller churches, whose accounts are not complex, to have someone who can spend the time doing all the work that falls to the Treasurer. Increasingly churches are splitting the role of the treasurer into, overall responsibility- the Treasurer and employing a book-keeper who keep the accounts.

	SESSION	COMMITTEE OF MANAGEMENT
RESPONSIBILITIES	The overall spiritual health of the congregation.	Management of the finances and physical resources of the congregation.
PRIMARY MODE	Oversight	Management
MEMBERS	The minister and the elected and approved elders of the congregation.	The managers elected by the congregation at the annual General Meeting plus the minister as chairman.
WHO THEY REPRESENT	The Mission, Vision, and Values of the congregation.	The budget recommended by the CoM and Session and agreed by the Congregation in the previous year’s December budget meeting.
PORTFOLIOS FOR MEMBERS	None	Everyone must have a portfolio
MEANS	Prayer, mature example, policy formation, ministry job description approval, appointment and assessment all in line with the congregation’s Mission, Vision and Values statement	Portfolio reports and actions, management of accounts in line with the approved budget, preparation of annual report and audited accounts for the AGM.