

3RD DIMENSION: HEIGHT (STRUCTURE & ORDER)

Love Brings Order

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EFFECTIVE CHURCH STRUCTURES

Building structures that serve the vision, strengthen ministry, and release people

Structure is a blessing when it serves the mission. It becomes a problem when the structure itself becomes the boss. As long as it remains a servant structure is good!

The purpose of this teaching is to help church leaders build effective structures that fit their context, whether they are serving alone in a rural congregation, pastoring part-time while working another job, leading a growing church in an urban area, or working with a team of staff and specialists.

1. Structure is a blessing, not a burden

Think about the human body. You need a skeleton to give your body shape, stability and support. Without it, your body could not function as it was designed to. But the skeleton is not the purpose of the body. It exists to support the life and movement of the body.

The same is true of the church. We need structure to help us organise people, coordinate ministry, steward resources and fulfil our calling. But structure must always remain the servant of the mission, never its master. Structure should support life, not replace it. Organisation should serve people, not make people serve the organisation.

The biblical foundation

1. **1 Corinthians 12:12–27:** Paul describes the church as one body with many members. Every member has a place and a function. Healthy church life requires different members to work together, recognising both their diversity and their interdependence.
2. **Romans 12:4–8:** We have different gifts according to the grace given to us. Paul mentions serving, teaching, encouraging, giving, leading and showing mercy. These gifts help us understand that God equips different people to make different contributions to the life of the church.
3. **Ephesians 4:11–16:** Christ gives leaders to equip His people for ministry, so that the whole body can grow and build itself up in love. The purpose of leadership is not to do everything, but to equip the body to function.
4. **Acts 6:1–7:** When the practical distribution of food became a challenge, the apostles helped establish a structure that ensured people were cared for while protecting their own priorities of prayer and the ministry of the Word. Appropriate organisation enabled the church to address a real need and continue growing.
5. **Exodus 18:17–23:** Jethro advised Moses to share responsibility with capable people rather than carry the entire burden alone. This is a powerful picture of delegation, shared responsibility and sustainable leadership.

Romans 12 is particularly helpful because it reminds us that leadership, service and other gifts are all part of God's provision for the church. For the specific gift of administration, **1 Corinthians 12:28** explicitly mentions those who have gifts of administration, while **Romans 12:8** speaks of leading with diligence.

The biblical principle is clear: God gives different gifts to His people, and wise leaders create structures in which those gifts can serve the whole body.

The question is not whether your church needs structure. The question is what structure will best serve the life and mission of your church.

2. Understand the three functions of a healthy church

Every church, regardless of its size, needs to pay attention to three essential functions: Leadership, Ministry and Management.

These are three different functions, not necessarily three different departments or three separate groups of people. Every church must be effective and bring excellence to all three. The important thing is to recognise that each function requires a different kind of conversation.

a. Leadership — Where are we going?

Leadership establishes spiritual direction, vision, priorities and the overall calling of the church.

Typical questions include:

- What is God calling us to do in this season?
- What are our most important spiritual priorities?
- What must we focus on, and what must we stop doing?
- How will we know whether we are fulfilling our calling?

b. Ministry — How are we discipling people?

Ministry is about helping people encounter Jesus, grow spiritually, experience community, become whole and serve others.

It includes:

1. Discipleship, pastoral care and counselling.
2. Small groups and community life.
3. Worship, prayer and spiritual formation.
4. Children's, youth, men's and women's ministries.
5. Evangelism, outreach and equipping believers for service.

The central question is: How are we helping people grow into mature followers of Jesus who can also serve others?

c. Management — How will we make it happen?

Management creates the practical environment in which leadership and ministry can function effectively.

It includes:

- Communication, calendars and meeting coordination.
- Administration, records and databases.
- Finances, payments, budgeting processes and reporting.
- Buildings, equipment, sound, technology and facilities.
- Legal compliance, governance and organisational policies.
- Event coordination, logistics and practical support.

The central question is: What systems, resources and practical arrangements will enable us to fulfil our priorities well?

These three functions must work together. Leadership without ministry can become a collection of ideas. A ministry without leadership can become a collection of disconnected activities. Both without management can become frustrating because people lack the communication, resources and practical support they need.

Likewise, management without spiritual direction can become bureaucracy. We can run an organisation efficiently without necessarily advancing the mission God has given us.

I want to encourage every pastor to establish a regular rhythm of conversations around these three functions. These do not necessarily need to be three long meetings every week. In a small church, some conversations may be combined or handled briefly. In a larger church, they may require distinct teams and more formal rhythms.

Ask yourself three questions:

1. Who needs to sit with me at the leadership table?
2. Who needs to sit with me at the ministry table?
3. Who needs to sit with me at the management table?

Do not invite everyone to every meeting. Bring the right people into the right conversations so that each meeting has a clear purpose.

3. Regular meetings

When I was the only pastor in a church of approximately 250 people, I learned that we could not build a healthy church life by expecting one person to carry everything. I established two important rhythms.

A weekly prayer and ministry gathering

Every Monday from 6:00 to 7:00 p.m., I brought together the people who were actively ministering to others. This included small-group leaders, people involved in pastoral care, counselling and other forms of ministry. The purpose was to carry the burden of ministry together, pray for people, strengthen one another and ensure that we were moving in the same direction.

We structured our hour into four equal parts:

- 15 minutes Fellowship - Coffee, connection and building relationships.
- 15 minutes Impartation - Biblical encouragement, teaching and equipping.
- 15 minutes Worship and prayer - Engaging God together and praying for the people we serve.
- 15 minutes Practical communication - Sharing essential information, ministry updates and upcoming priorities.

A monthly management meeting

I also held a two-hour monthly meeting with the people responsible for coordinating the practical operation of the church. This included event coordinators, sound and technical teams and people handling

administrative responsibilities. Here we could focus on the calendar, upcoming events, equipment, communication, logistics and the practical arrangements required to support the ministry.

The distinction was important: the weekly gathering helped us carry the spiritual burden of ministry together, while the monthly meeting helped us coordinate the practical work of the church.

Your context may require a different rhythm. If you are a part-time pastor in a rural congregation, a monthly gathering with your key volunteers and a short weekly check-in may be more realistic. If you lead a larger church with staff, you may need more frequent and specialised meetings.

With a full-time team we now have those meetings every week.

4. Staff your weaknesses and delegate your responsibilities

One of the most important transitions in leadership is moving from asking, "How can I do everything?" to asking, "Who has the gifts to help us do what needs to be done?"

A pastor's calling is not to become the best administrator, accountant, sound technician, event organiser and communicator in the congregation. Your calling is to lead people, equip them for ministry and ensure that the church fulfils its mission.

This is true whether you have a paid staff team or depend entirely on volunteers.

Ask three questions about your responsibilities

- What am I gifted to do that genuinely requires my leadership?
- What must be done, but does not necessarily need to be done by me?
- Who around me has the gifts, skills or experience to carry some of these responsibilities?

Sometimes you delegate because something is not your strength. At other times, you delegate because the task is important but does not require your personal involvement. You may even enjoy a particular administrative task, but continuing to do it could prevent you from investing in a more important leadership responsibility.

Delegation is not avoiding responsibility. It is placing responsibility in the right hands while retaining appropriate accountability.

Use the expertise already present in your church

You may have an accountant, bookkeeper, lawyer, project manager, teacher, communications specialist or experienced administrator sitting in your congregation.

Invite these people to contribute their expertise to the mission of the church.

For example, a qualified person could help manage the financial administration of the church for a few hours each month. The leadership team would still determine the budget, spiritual priorities and financial commitments. The person responsible for administration would ensure that approved payments are processed, records are maintained, reports are prepared and financial procedures are followed.

The distinction is important:

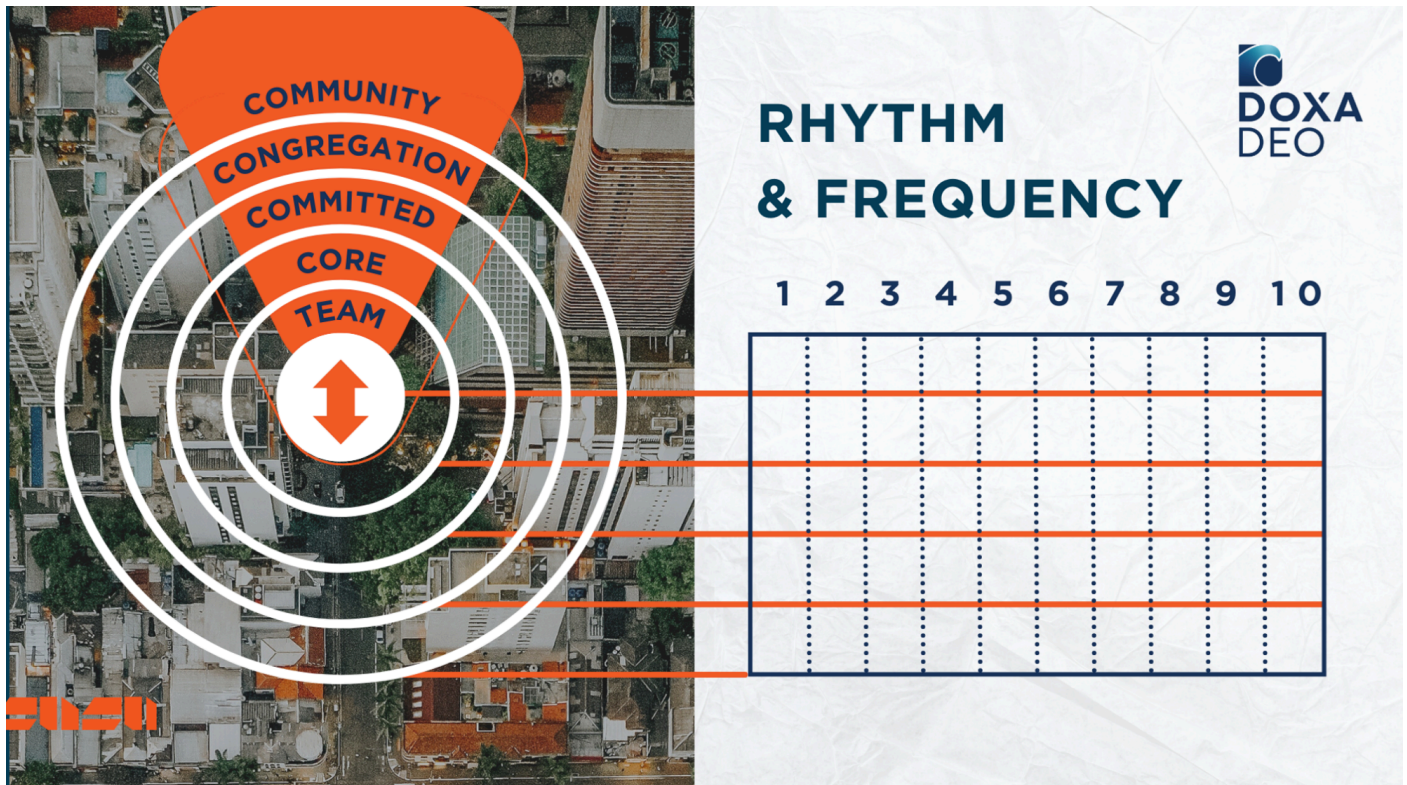
- Leadership determines priorities and makes decisions within its authority.

- Management implements approved decisions and ensures that the practical work is done properly.

Financial controls, appropriate approvals and accountability must remain in place, regardless of who performs the work.

5. Structure ministry from these circles.

One of the most useful ways to understand church structure is to picture the church as a series of circles, each with a different relationship to the life and mission of the church.



- Circle 1 — Leadership core - Those who carry the vision and lead the church.
- Circle 2 — Church leaders - Those responsible for leading teams and ministries.
- Circle 3 — Committed people - Members and participants actively involved in groups, worship and service.
- Circle 4 — The whole church - Everyone who gathers as part of the congregation, including people still finding their place.
- Circle 5 — The community - Families, neighbours, workplaces, schools and the wider city or rural community.

Work from the inside out

When you communicate vision, establish priorities and prepare for ministry, work from the inside out. The leadership core first clarifies the priorities. The leaders then understand and communicate those priorities to their teams. The committed people put them into practice through their groups, worship teams and other ministries. The whole congregation is informed, equipped and invited to participate.

This creates alignment. People understand not only what the church is doing, but why it is doing it.

If you communicate everything directly to everyone without first aligning your leaders, you can create confusion, duplication and unnecessary work. Healthy structures help people receive the right information at the right time.

Grow from the outside in

Although we work from the inside out to create alignment, we grow from the outside in by inviting people into the life of the church and helping them take their next step.

Ask yourself: What are we deliberately doing to help people in our community encounter Jesus and become part of the church?

For example:

- When a family dedicates a child, invite their extended family and friends to participate.
- When someone is baptised, encourage them to invite people who have been part of their journey.
- When the church hosts an outreach, encourage members to bring friends, neighbours and colleagues.
- When new people attend a Sunday service, ensure that someone welcomes them and helps them discover their next step.

Growth is not simply getting more people into a Sunday service. It is helping people move from attending to belonging, from belonging to participating, and from participating to serving and leading.

6. Grow leaders through four deliberate steps: Identify, Include, Develop, Deploy

One of the most important responsibilities of every church leader is to develop the next generation of leaders.

If everything depends on you, your leadership has become a bottleneck. Healthy leadership creates opportunities for others to discover their gifts, grow in maturity and take responsibility.

I use four simple words to describe this process.

a. Identify

- Who has potential?
- Look for people who demonstrate faithfulness, character, initiative, a willingness to learn and a heart to serve. Do not look only at those who are already prominent or naturally confident. Some of your most promising leaders may be serving quietly.
- Ask every ministry leader: Who are the one or two people you see who could grow into greater responsibility?

b. Include

- Who are you bringing alongside you?
- Invite emerging leaders into conversations, planning meetings, ministry opportunities and appropriate decision-making processes. Let them observe how leadership works. Give them opportunities to contribute before expecting them to carry full responsibility.
- People grow into leadership when they are given access, relationships and opportunities to participate.

c. Develop

- How are you helping them grow?
- Invest in their spiritual maturity, character, biblical understanding, practical skills and leadership capacity. Coach them, explain your decisions, give feedback and allow them to learn from mistakes within appropriate boundaries.
- Jesus did not merely give His disciples instructions. He invited them to be with Him, taught them, involved them in ministry and prepared them for greater responsibility.

d. Deploy

- What responsibility are you entrusting to them?
- Give emerging leaders real opportunities to lead a group, coordinate a ministry, organise an event, care for people or take responsibility for a project. Clarify expectations, provide support and review progress.
- The goal of leadership development is not simply to produce well-trained people. It is to release equipped people into meaningful responsibility.
- Paul describes this principle in 2 Timothy 2:2: entrust what you have received to faithful people who will be able to teach others also.
- Notice the multiplication: Paul, Timothy, faithful people and others who will be taught. The aim is reproduction, not dependence on one leader.
- Every leader should continually ask: Who am I identifying, including, developing and deploying?
- If you cannot name anyone you are intentionally preparing to take greater responsibility, make this a priority for the coming quarter.

7. Establish a quarterly planning rhythm

- Effective church life rarely happens by accident. While we must remain sensitive to the Holy Spirit and responsive to unexpected needs, we also need a dependable planning rhythm.
- I strongly encourage every church to plan quarterly, working from the leadership core outward towards the whole congregation.
- My preferred approach is to begin planning approximately six weeks before the end of the current quarter. This gives leaders enough time to pray, discuss priorities, coordinate activities and communicate clearly before the next season begins.

What should you discuss during quarterly planning?

- Spiritual focus: What is God placing on our hearts for the next three months? What do we want to see happen in the spiritual lives of our people?
- Preaching and teaching: What will we preach and teach? How will the messages reinforce our spiritual priorities and equip people to live out their faith?
- Ministry and events: Which gatherings, outreach opportunities, training sessions and ministry activities will support our priorities? Which activities should we stop or simplify?
- People and leadership: Who will take responsibility for each initiative? Who needs support, and which emerging leaders can be included and developed?
- Resources and management: What budget, equipment, communication, facilities and practical arrangements will be required?
- Outcomes and review: What do we hope to see change? How will we review progress without reducing spiritual growth to numbers alone?

Quarterly planning also prevents the church calendar from becoming a collection of unrelated activities. Every event, programme and initiative should have a clear reason for existing and should contribute to the broader mission of the church.

A simple question can be very powerful: Does this activity help us fulfil our priorities, or are we doing it simply because we have always done it?

8. Make communication visible through a simple administrative system

One of the biggest challenges in church leadership is not necessarily a lack of vision or commitment. It is the failure to communicate clearly what needs to happen, who is responsible and when it must be completed. A conversation takes place, but nobody records the decision. An event is planned, but the technical team does not receive the information. Someone assumes that another person has made the arrangements. A deadline passes, and everyone is surprised.

A simple administrative system can prevent much of this confusion.

Use one visible place to coordinate the work

Tools such as Trello, Microsoft Planner within Teams, or another shared task-management platform can help make church operations visible.

Trello

A visual board with cards, lists, responsibilities and deadlines. Useful for churches that want a straightforward starting point. [Explore Trello](#)

Microsoft Planner

Task planning that can work well for churches already using Microsoft 365 and Teams. [Explore Microsoft Planner](#)

The particular application is not the most important decision. The important thing is that your team has an agreed place where everyone can see what is happening.

For example, create a board for the coming quarter with cards for:

- Sunday services and worship.
- Preaching and teaching.
- Small groups and pastoral care.
- Children's and youth ministries.
- Outreach and community initiatives.
- Special events.
- Facilities, finances and administration.

The benefits are straightforward:

- Everyone can see what has been agreed on.
- Responsibilities and deadlines are clear.
- Changes are visible to the people affected.
- Leaders spend less time chasing information.
- Tasks are less likely to be forgotten.

- Progress can be reviewed without unnecessary meetings.

Do not make the system more complicated than your church needs. If your team has limited digital access, a shared spreadsheet, a printed calendar or a simple planning board may be sufficient.

The objective is not to introduce technology for its own sake. It is to make communication clear, responsibility visible and the work of the church easier to coordinate.

Conclusion: Build structures that release life

Let me finish with this thought.

The purpose of church structure is not to create a well-organised institution that keeps everyone busy. The purpose is to create an environment in which people encounter Jesus, grow in faith, experience love, discover their gifts, serve one another and bring the hope of the gospel into their communities.

Whether you lead a small rural congregation on your own or a large urban church with a team of professionals, the principles remain the same.

- Structure serves the mission.
- Leadership establishes direction.
- Ministry disciplines and cares for people.
- Management enables the work to happen.
- Delegation releases people into their gifts.
- Clear circles help people move towards meaningful participation.
- Leadership development multiplies responsibility.
- Quarterly planning creates focus.
- Visible communication turns decisions into action.

Ephesians 4:11–16 gives us the larger picture: Christ equips His people for works of service so that His body may grow and build itself up in love.

That is the goal. Not simply a church with good systems, but a church in which the whole body is functioning, every member is contributing, leaders are multiplying and the life of Christ is becoming visible in the community.

The best church structures are those that make it easier for people to fulfil God's calling together.