

## **Church Governance at Church of the Apostles**

### **What do Anglicans know about governing churches?**

What do Anglicans know about governing churches? In many churches with long- standing Anglican roots this question never gets asked. However, Church of the Apostles, as a fairly recent church plant, is made up of people from a variety of theological and denominational backgrounds. Some have come from churches with congregational forms of government where the church body votes on every major decision. Others are familiar with elected boards. Still others have enjoyed the strengths of the elder and deacon board models. For many, the Anglican model of government is a new experience. This paper will attempt to explain the structure of the Anglican model, the biblical roots of that model, common questions and concerns, and the strengths of Anglican Church Governance.

### **The Structure**

In the Anglican model the senior pastor (often called “rector”) is charged with “final authority in the administration of all matters pertaining to the public worship and Christian Education within the congregation.”<sup>1</sup> This includes the authority to call and/or dismiss staff, and lay leadership. The Senior Pastor is under the direct authority of the regional bishop and is accountable to him for the faithful discharge of his duties.

The senior pastor presides as chair of the Leadership Council (often called a “vestry”) which is charged with oversight of all “temporal”<sup>2</sup> matters of the church. In other words, the Leadership Council has authority over the church budget, accounting, and calling of a new senior pastor should the position be vacant. In our setting they also serve as an advisory board on the big picture affairs of the church. As such, one of their main tasks is prayerful discernment and support for the vision, strategies and ministries of the church.

So, unlike congregational churches, or churches with a board of elders, the authority for church direction, strategy and vision lies solely on the senior pastor. As you can imagine, the potential

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<sup>1</sup> Anglican Mission in the Americas Charter -article 7, section IIIb, December 2008

<sup>2</sup> Article VII, *Section 2* A Canonical Charter for Ministry of the Anglican Mission in the Americas:  
Vestries and Boards: In every congregation of the Anglican Mission there shall be a duly constituted Vestry or Board having charge of the temporalities of the congregation, and it shall be their duty to oversee staff hired to assist with these temporal matters (sexton, bookkeepers, auditing firms, maintenance personnel, etc). This body shall be presided over by the Rector or Senior Pastor, if there be one, and shall be the official representative of the congregation. It shall be its duty to:

- a. aid the Rector or Senior Pastor in all agencies and efforts for the advancement of the congregation;
- b. develop and oversee the annual budget, and provide for all salaries and expenses of the congregation;
- c. keep a proper account of all funds, and insure that all accounts are audited annually;
- d. notify both the Network Leader and the Network Bishop when a parish is vacant or without a Rector or Senior Pastor;
- e. elect and invite a Rector or Senior Pastor, with due regard to the ascertained wishes of the congregation and the approval of the Network Bishop.

for abuse of such a singular authority would cause many to wonder if this is a wise, beneficial and even biblical form of church governance.

### **Historical Roots**

Where did the current form of Anglican governance come from? You may be surprised to find that the form is almost as old as Christianity itself. As the Gospel spread to key cities and towns in the Mediterranean and Asia Minor churches were established. These small congregations grew and planted other churches in their region. The first elder (pastor) was responsible for training up and calling out additional elders to serve these local congregations. As the number of congregations grew the demands for that first elder's oversight caused him to relinquish leadership of his own congregation to attend to the needs of the leaders of all the congregations. These founding elders were then recognized as "Episcopos" which we now call bishops. By A.D. 177 we can clearly see an example of the structure of Bishop, priest and deacon in the historical records of Lyons where Ireneaus served as Bishop.<sup>3</sup> The bishop delegated much of his authority to the local elders (pastors). The historical nature of the structure is hard to dispute but it is valid to ask "is it biblical?"

### **Biblical Roots**

As mentioned, in many Anglican churches the senior pastor is given the title "rector" which derives from a Latin term with a double meaning: "Teacher/Ruler". The title does not necessarily get the Anglican view off to a good start. In the Gospel of Mark, Jesus warned his disciples about the tendency of the human heart to abuse authority:

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant..."

Mark 10:42-43

Given that Jesus calls leaders to be servants and not rulers, and also because the word "rector" is unfamiliar to many and somewhat archaic, we have chosen to use the term "Senior Pastor" at Church of the Apostles.

However, this is no reason to abandon the authority he was willing to confer on individuals for the purpose of spiritual leadership. A clear understanding of the teachings of our Lord always leads us away from hard and fast rules to his greater concern: the heart. Jesus had no problem with authority or official positions of authority. The first chapters of the Gospel of Mark clearly teach us that Jesus is a man under the authority of his Father and that he is man of authority over all humanity, nature and the spiritual realm. He also made it plain that he gave authority to his disciples (Matthew 10:1) and his church (Matthew 16:17-19, 28:18-20, Acts 1:8). Jesus was not against authority but he condemned the abuse and misuse of authority.

In John 21:15-19 Jesus commissions Peter to exercise his authority as an Apostle by following Jesus in serving, caring for and feeding his church. The authority Jesus had with his disciples

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<sup>3</sup> See [Our Anglican Heritage](#), by John Howe for a complete treatment of this subject.

proved to be a model for the authority the Apostles would have with the church. As the church formed after the day of Pentecost, it began to take shape organically and institutionally. As the gospel spread throughout the Mediterranean world, Paul gave instructions to Timothy and Titus about the qualifications of those in servant authority over the church (1 Timothy 3:1-10, Titus 1:6-9). The early church was using the titles of “overseer,” “elder” and “deacon” as terms for the leading servants in the churches. While the qualifications of these positions are clearly laid out, the exact roles, functions and governing structures are not. (This is why I will gladly agree that churches based on elder and deacon boards can with great integrity point to biblical roots for their models. I do not think the congregational church model has any biblical warrant but I am certainly open to hearing the argument.) So, if different models can work why do Anglicans choose this model? It comes down to three words: calling, training, and trust.

First, the elder(s) (this is the title that most biblical scholars agree is linked to *local* church oversight) must have a clear sense of calling. They must be affirmed by the church and the local bishop (overseer). The Bible repeatedly establishes the fact that those who are to lead God’s people must be called by God. We see this dramatically played out in the calls of Moses, Jeremiah, David and Jesus. In 1 Timothy 3:1 Paul writes: “if anyone sets his heart on being an overseer he desires a noble task.” But Paul insists that deacons (and by association, all clergy) “first must be tested” (1 Timothy 3:10).

Being tested for leadership also involves training. The pastor, elder, overseer or deacon is set apart for the task of overseeing/serving the local congregation by intensive preparation. There is good biblical support for this. Jesus’ disciples, while unschooled in the Jewish rabbinic tradition, spent three years in the best school of all, sitting at their master’s feet. Moses spent 40 years in the wilderness tending sheep. Samuel was raised under the tutelage of Eli. While there were no established seminaries in the days of the Apostles we can see that a level of experience and study was required and expected for church leadership. (See 1 Timothy 3:1-10; 4:12-16, Titus 1:9) In whatever system a church chooses to employ, those who would fulfill the role of elder need a thorough and disciplined preparation process. Anglicanism has typically fulfilled this function by placing great emphasis on the calling and formal theological training of pastors to accomplish the roles of elders and overseers in the church.

Finally, employing this Anglican structure of leadership involves trust. No church governance can work apart from trust. It takes great trust to believe that God would set apart a man to lead a given congregation. It takes a different kind of trust to believe that the Lord might lead a congregation through the consensus of a small group of leaders. Either way, the system breaks down if the people do not trust the leaders and the leaders do not trust the people. In arguing for his authority as an apostle to the Corinthians, Paul claimed this word as the essential word for the health of the church.

“So then, men ought to regard us as servants of Christ and as those entrusted with the secret things of God. <sup>2</sup>Now it is required that those who have been given a trust must prove faithful.” 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

In the Anglican system, a pastor is called by the church and entrusted with the spiritual authority to lead that church. In the elder board model (often seen in Presbyterian and Baptist churches),

ruling elders call the pastor and then share the spiritual authority with him. The two models are different and both have a great history of successes and failures in the modern church. This leads us to the final issue in this paper.

### **Common questions, concerns and strengths of the Anglican Model**

The first question that comes to the mind of many is the question of checks and balances. “Doesn’t the idea of granting a senior pastor such broad authorities run the danger of going unchecked?” This is a healthy concern and Anglican congregations do well to give it serious consideration. Several checks do exist in the system and can be enhanced for greater effect.

The first check is the power of the vestry or leadership council to authorize a search committee to thoroughly interview and examine potential candidates for the senior pastor role. It is crucial that this process be accomplished in a prayerful, thoughtful and diligent manner. Once the senior pastor is chosen, the authority of the leadership council to set the budget and salary serves as the primary means of approval or disapproval of the senior pastor’s vision and direction for the church. In other words, if the pastor wants to take a church in a direction the council perceives as unwise, the council has the right to refuse to fund it. The senior pastor’s annual review is another means of check and balance, and this review is tied to any salary increases he may expect. The final check is the ability of the council to appeal to the regional bishop for intervention or removal of the pastor. The bishop is the direct supervisor and authority over the local pastor. All of these serve as powerful checks and balances and a wise pastor will understand this.

Another concern is that under the Anglican system a senior pastor could function autonomously with very little input from the council. While this is true, again, wisdom calls for a much more cooperative approach. The council functions as an advisory board and provides the pastor with valuable insight, guidance and prayerful support in discerning how the Lord might lead the congregation. Ignoring the godly wisdom and input of this leadership council would be detrimental to him and the entire congregation.

One last concern often voiced in this system is the anxiety that the church will become “professionalized” and lose the organic nature of the body of Christ and the rich understanding of the priesthood of all believers. (1 Corinthians 12; 1 Peter 2:4) This anxiety is common not just to this system but to all churches experiencing numerical growth. The Rev. Tim Keller of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in New York City addresses this anxiety:

“On the one hand, the larger the church the more decision-making falls to the staff rather than to the membership or even to the lay leaders. The bigger the church the more items have to be given to the staff to determine or execute on their own. The elders or board must increasingly deal with only top level, big-picture issues. So the larger the church, the more decision-making is *pushed up* toward the staff and away from the congregation and lay leaders. Needless to say, many lay people feel extremely uncomfortable about this.

On the other hand, the larger the church the more the basic pastoral ministry (hospital visits, discipleship, oversight of Christian growth, counseling) is done by lay leaders rather than by professional ministers. So the larger the church, the more shepherding, teaching, and discipling

are *pushed down* toward the lay leaders and people and away from staff. Pastors must teach lay shepherds and teachers how to fulfill this role.

In summary, in small churches policy is decided by many, and ministry is done by a few. In large churches ministry is done by many, and policy is decided by a few.”<sup>4</sup>

So, rather than negating the priesthood of all believers, members of a growing church often have the opportunity to increase participation and ownership in the mission of the church. This is not a guarantee, but the wise leadership of pastor and staff and the godly counsel of the leadership council can help make this a reality.

The strengths of the Anglican model are many. The church enjoys the benefit of clear lines of authority and understanding of roles of staff, clergy and laity. When functioning well, day to day decisions are made by staff and lay leaders in a timely manner. As a result, the leadership council takes on more of a big picture advisory role and spends greater amounts of time in prayer and discernment.

## **Summary**

It is my prayer that the model we employ as an Anglican church will produce all of the joys of godly, prayerful, biblical leadership. One of Apostles’ great strengths is that at every level, there is ample evidence of this kind of servant leadership. Our prayer is that we endure in following Jesus in his humility. The goal is as always to be a church that seeks God’s will above all else as he leads us to “seek the lost, build up the found, and transform the city through Jesus Christ.”

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<sup>4</sup> LEADERSHIP AND CHURCH SIZE DYNAMICS, Tim Keller, Senior Pastor, Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Sept. 2006. Copyright Timothy Keller, 2006.