

## **Administration in the United Church**

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Within the United church, today, there are some weaknesses in administration that need to be overcome. The two main failings I see, especially in regard to our Melanesian context, are in planning, and in stewardship. These are great tasks, and the church will not achieve its potential for growth unless its leaders fully appreciate, understand, and implement the management process. Management is crucial to the health of the church, with its diverse needs and complexity.

The cause of these problems seems to be the lack of training in management among church leaders, who, therefore, find it hard to take control of such issues. Hence, they only try to keep the church continuing on in its established ways, maintaining things, much as they are. Ideally, of course, there should be progressive adjustments made to tune the church's administration to operate more effectively.

In the general understanding of planning and stewardship, life may not be reduced to a formula, but needs a strategy for living. This involves setting goals, establishing priorities, working out plans to reach those goals, and then measuring the situation against those goals. In this presentation, I will be focusing on weaknesses and failings in planning and stewardship (including the management of time), as I have observed in the United church.

## **Planning**

In church administration, planning is one of the important factors in leadership. In order to understand the present patterns of church leadership, one needs first to examine leadership in Melanesian social structures. Many Melanesian societies developed some degree of social and political ranking, which was transmitted through heredity. And this same pattern is a common practice for church leadership today, instead of choosing people with a modern understanding of management. This, inevitably, creates weakness in some of our church administration.

Planning is inseparable from purpose. We need to have clear-cut objectives, which must also be measurable. Achieving excellence is impossible when people are unsure about why they do things, or what they are trying to accomplish. To plan without purpose is futile. Since planning is related to purpose, a pastor, who initiates the management process, will spend a good deal of his time thinking about the future. Many pastors, in our church, find themselves so busy planning and coordinating at a lower level that they have no time to do creative planning. This is a danger signal. If the larger issues are not dealt with, and planned for, the church will probably not grow.

A minister needs to work towards freeing himself to plan creatively. He is not uninterested in, or isolated from, active ministry, but, if the church is to move towards fulfilling its objectives and purposes, he must give attention to matters that pertain to the whole church. If he does not, no one will, and the result will be stagnation.

The successful approach to overcoming this weakness in planning within the church should be based on training programmes to upgrade the standard of management, and to develop knowledge of how to plan for the future. Vision, of course, is the ability to see. We speak of being short-sighted, when we do not anticipate what will, or could, happen, based on what is already happening. Sometimes, we are so used to seeing things in a certain way, we cannot see what is really

there. Mounds of rocks and vegetation close in our minds. We have not opened ourselves to see the world in new ways, often because it is more comfortable and secure to maintain an old pattern. We know what to expect, and so, we resist change. But the world continues to change, despite our best efforts, and so we continually need to see life anew.

Teaching is not necessarily the act of imparting knowledge. Rather, it is changing lives. And, for this, it is better to teach people to find the truth for themselves. We have to recognise, and admit, that many of our present church-teaching programmes are not very effective, with the result that the weaknesses and failings continue. The church should understand the development of leadership skills as a never-ending process. It is a continuous activity, which flows like a swollen river. The person, who, seemingly, has achieved leadership, must realise that he never “arrives” simply through learning some basic skills. Other things also need to be learnt.

Training courses do not always bring the best results, unless participants recognise that basic changes are sometimes required. A leader may be faced with the fact that he will need to revise his attitudes, and change his ambitions. The development of skills for leadership is judged successfully by the overall performance. This lies not only in what a leader gets done, but also in the satisfaction rendered, the sustained enthusiasm, and effort, put forth by the followers, and the depth of loyalty manifested by the members.

### **Stewardship**

Stewardship is the other common failing, or weakness, in the United church. This is very important, especially in terms of finance, since the church’s resources come from its members’ pockets. If there is misappropriation, or poor stewardship, it will result in arguments, conflict, and backsliding. People will complain about giving, and the church will become weak.

But, along with questions of financial administration, we should consider, also, the use of time and physical resources.

Many ministers seem to misuse time, in doing their work. Often there is apparently no opportunity for important church activities, because most of their time has been spent on other unnecessary activities. But we can release pressure, if we schedule times to plan and to evaluate. For this, we need a chart to gauge what we must do to prepare for an event or activity, and to make sure all of the steps are placed on the calendar in advance. Each item must have a date beside it. This insures that the preliminary work will be done, and done on time. Without this, some of our ministers find that their workload overruns the available time, and is left undone.

Similarly, there often seems to be difficulties in stewardship of church property. It is the normal practice that anything belonging to the church is under the management of the pastor concerned: a vehicle, motor, dinghy, house, and so forth. This becomes a critical issue, if there is mismanagement of this property, and it has to be admitted that this is an area, where some pastors become dishonest and untrustworthy. Because they see themselves as the overall manager of the property, they may not use it in a way the church wants. And again, when there is dissatisfaction among members, there is often conflict with the pastor.

But it is stewardship of finance, which has become the most common, and major, problem in church administration today. Nearly all regions in the United church claim that this particular issue is a difficulty, which they are struggling very hard to solve. When money is given to the church, somehow it does not follow the proposed allocations, but is used somewhere else. This becomes the greatest obstacle for the flow of contributions to the church, and is, at times, the cause of loss of members.

To overcome these problems, once again, I say that it is a lack of training in such responsibilities. Training is an integral part of discipline. It is the process by which Christ-like behaviour and character become a way of life, through repeated, consistent application of God's truth. Training aims at developing the habitually-right response. It is an activity, which, by its nature, involves repetition and practice, repeating an exercise or technique, until the skills developed become second nature, and a way of life.

All the churches have positions that need people to fill them, but, for some reason, we cannot find the perfect people for the job. There are jobs in the church that need to be done, but we are not doing them, because there is no one suitably qualified. The church, which consistently has unmet training needs, probably has reached a growth plateau, and needs additional staff. Sometimes the problem is that we do not have a way to find the right people.

Specialists in various areas of ministry can take responsibility for training leaders. We may also be able to utilise other training resources outside the church, through the various seminars, institutes, and other training resources, to which people can be sent. Also, it can be very helpful to determine where a particular ministry is being done well, and to send the untrained person to that location, to observe, and learn, from people, who are already doing it. This may be the best way to develop leaders, and let them learn by doing.

## **Conclusion**

These are the common, and basic, weaknesses and failures that I observe in the United church today. In the long-range process of developing leadership, several factors have been suggested as helpful. Leadership develops, in the context of involvement. Some structure must exist for recruitment and involvement. Some way must be found to discern interests, gifts, and skills. A survey can be helpful, but preaching, or seminars about using spiritual gifts, through involvement in ministry, are crucial. If the church tries to develop its leaders in

these ways, it will have a significant effect upon her spiritual vitality. Today, the church needs to evaluate its work, and make changes, to be effective in its duties.