**CRC CHURCHES INTERNATIONAL**

**CHURCH GOVERNANCE**

**INTRODUCTION**

In this document we aim to discuss our Biblical understanding of

1. The Local Church
2. Church Governance
3. Church Governance Through Church History
4. The Governance of a local church within a Nation
5. The Governance of a National Movement
6. End Notes

There is also supplied a sample Local Church Constitution and a National Constitution.

1. **BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE LOCAL CHURCH**

Jesus only referred to the church twice. Firstly, he said in Matthew 16:18 “I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” The word translated as ‘church’ in English is taken from a secular Greek Word ‘Ecclesia’, meaning called out or gathered together. Thus, we understand that Jesus meant that out of the general population (demos) He would call out and gather the ‘Ecclesia’ – the church.

The second reference is in Matthew 18:15-17. Jesus is addressing the issue of dealing with sin in the church, particularly relating to forgiveness.

In the book of Acts and the Epistles we learn a lot more of the church, from the growth and establishment of the early church.

* 1. What is the Church?

Scripture uses several illustrations for the church. The main ones are:

* Spiritual temple, building – Ephesians 2:19-22
* Body – Colossians 1:18 & 1 Corinthians 12:27
* Bride – Revelation 19:7
* His Flock, Sheep – 1 Peter 5:2; John 10:14,15
  1. The Purpose of the Church
* A dwelling place of God through the Holy Spirit – Ephesians 2:22
* To be built into a spiritual house – 1 Peter 2:5
* To be a holy priesthood – 1 Peter 2:5
* To offer spiritual sacrifices – 1 Peter 2:5
* To go and make disciples – Matthew 28:18-20
  1. The Foundation of the Church and the head of the Church is Christ – Ephesians 2:20-21; 1 Corinthians 3:11, Ephesians 1:19-23
  2. The Operation of the Church
     1. In one place of one accord [unity] – Acts 2:1
     2. Spirit filled people – Acts 2:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:5
     3. Preaching the Gospel – Acts 2:22-24, 38-41, 43.

Passionate to share the Gospel of Christ by Word as well as by example, with signs following. Bold declaration – Romans 1:16

* + 1. Believers devoted themselves to:
* Bible Teaching – Acts 2:42

The new believers devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles. At the centre of the church’s life was the Word of God.

* Fellowship – Acts 2:42

Koinonia – Greek word used in various situations.

Means togetherness, common sharing of responsibility and privilege e.g. Marriage commitment, business partnership etc.

When we talk of Koinonia in the church we talk of a body of people who are totally committed to one another for better or for worse, who share what they are and what they have for the good of others, and who accept the disciplines and submit freely to the authority of the leadership in the church.

What is the basis for fellowship?

1John 1:

Vs 3a The Word – not personalities, common ideas, interests, age groups etc.

Vs 3b Our Relationship with God

Horizontal will not flow without the vertical

Vs 6,7 Our walk in the light

Open fellowship with one another.

* Breaking of Bread

Acts 2:42,46

Large group gatherings (Celebration Services) and Small Groups (home groups) – both essential.

Shared meals together

Shared in Communion together

* Prayer

Acts 2:42

Not saying nice prayers

They prayed! – Acts 4:24-31

Dependent on God

Confident in the power of God to work

* 1. The Church Inclusive and Exclusive

Inclusive – Ephesians 2:17-19; 3:4-6

Exclusive – 1 John 5:11-13; Acts 4:10

* 1. God’s Equipping for the Church

Ephesians 4:11-13 NLT

Ministry gifts to equip or prepare God’s people

* For works of service
* So that the body of Christ may be built up
* Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.
* To become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fulness of Christ.

What is mature?

Word of God changing us – mind and then behavior

Titus 2:1-10

1. **BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CHURCH GOVERNANCE**
   1. Under the Leadership of Christ

Ephesians 5:23 – Christ is the head of the Church

Colossians 2:10 – Christ the head over every power and authority.

* 1. Plurality of Eldership

The New Testament teaches that there is a plurality of leadership in each local church.

We see a picture of Ministry Gifts and Elderships working together in loving unity to advance the cause of Christ through the local churches.

*Ministry Gifts*: Ephesians 5:4:11-16

*Elderships*: Acts11:29-30; Acts 15:2,4,6,22-23; Acts 20:28-35; Acts 21:17-19; Philippians 1:1; 1Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-20; Titus 1:5-9; 1Peter 5:1-4; Hebrews 13:17; James 5:4.

We understand a differentiation between people who are specially gifted to operate a specific ministry role in the church; with others whose character qualification seems to be the predominant issue if they are to be on the government Eldership body of a church. (1Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Some people like Peter and John operate as ministry gifts (i.e. apostles) and can also be Elders in a governmental/leadership sense within a local church (1Peter 5:1-3; 3John 1:1).

THE ROLE OF ELDERS

The New Testament is clear that the church is to be led by a plurality of godly leaders under the oversight and watch care of Elders. The Elders are given ultimate responsibility and authority to see:

* that the church remains on a true course biblically,
* that its members are being appropriately shepherded,
* that the body is being fed through insightful and accurate biblical teaching,
* and that the life of the church is being well managed with the assistance of other competent and godly leaders.
* They are to care about the spiritual and physical well-being of members, regularly praying for the sick.
* They are to guard the body against harmful influences, confronting those who are contradicting biblical truth or who are continuing in patterns of sinful behavior.
* In doing so, they are to keep closing potential entrances for Satan so that the truth of Christ will remain credible to both the congregation and the community.
* Scripture indicates that the ultimate decision-making authority in the church rests with the Elders. (1Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:28-31; Titus 1:9; James 5:14)

In response to the biblical pattern of leadership, members of the body are taught in Scripture to lovingly support their leaders and submit to their leadership. (Hebrews 13:7,17,24; 1Thessalonians 5:12-13; Acts 15:2,4,6,22-33; Acts 21:17-19)

It is clear that Ministry Gifts like Paul, Barnabas and Titus appointed Elders and we can assume that they also had spiritual authority to terminate those appointments. (Acts 14:21-23; Titus 1:5)

2.3 Leader and the Team

“Every team needs a leader, and every leader needs a team”.

The Senior Minister must lead the other ministry gifts (Pastors) and Elders in the church.

2.3.1 The Senior Minister

Leaders should be able to grow as big as God has called and gifted them to become. Those whom the risen Christ calls into leadership of his church (Ephesians 4:11-12) must be allowed to flow and flourish and be as fruitful as possible for God’s glory.

They should be fully released to outwork at least the following four key tasks:

* To cast the long-term strategic vision of the church.
* To set the short-term spiritual directions and goals for the church.
* To personify the core values and the ministry style of the church.
* To be the main teacher/preacher of the Word.

Consistent with the New Testament concept of spiritual gifts, the Senior minister, like any member of the body, is uniquely gifted and should seek to minister primarily within his gift area.

In addition to his pastoring role as an elder, the Senior Minister is primarily responsible to be a teacher of the Word of God and to provide strategic leadership and vision to the body. His goal is to help mature believers through insightful and accurate presentations of biblical truth, equipping them to be the true ‘ministers’ in the body. He must strive to teach and lead by word and example, and he must stress both the understanding and the application of God’s truth.

* + 1. The Team

The team must allow the leader to fully express his/her leadership gifts and to become as big as God wants him/her to be.

Every team must have a leader and therefore team members need to:

* Sublimate their own personal leadership ambitions
* Work under leaders and assist and support them in their leadership role.
* Cover the leader’s lacks and weaknesses and never expose their nakedness.

Teams only work well, however, when they sincerely and wholeheartedly submit to good leaders and respect the God-given call upon the Senior Minister’s life.

If a team member cannot operate like this, they need to step aside at the most appropriate time, to ensure that unity and love prevail, and the church is protected.

Submission does not mean that team members should have an unhealthy and slavish unthinking devotion to a leader’s every opinion and whim. Loyalty to a leader can operate within an environment where rigorous discussion, debate and even disagreements can take place before a decision is made. It is more than permissible for team members to agree to disagree agreeably from time to time.

* + 1. Leaders and Eldership Boards must be fully Accountable to each other and to our CRC Denominational Family.

The Senior Minister

The CRC reaffirms the ministerial credentials of all its ministers on a yearly basis, as we believe that the New Testament teaches that all ministry positions (Senior Minister, Associate Minister, Assistant Minister and Elder) can continue only on the basis of a functioning and fruitful ministry. This means there are no lifetime appointments.

This is the only way a local church can operate with real spiritual effectiveness and genuine integrity.

The Team (Eldership, Oversight)

Teams should only over-rule the leader or terminate their leadership of the church if they willfully violate clearly defined standards in the five crucial areas that our entire denominational family has agreed upon:

* Morality – willfully violating our accepted sexual purity standards
* Money – willfully violating our accepted financial purity standards
* Ministry – willfully violating our accepted relational purity standards
* Doctrine – willfully violating our accepted Biblical purity standards
* The Law – willfully violating our accepted civic/legal purity standards
  + 1. Leaders Must Work Responsibly Through Their Teams

Leaders must learn to express their leadership through a team and avoid being a “one person” show.

Therefore, the leader must also allow the team members to grow as big as God wants them to grow in their personal ministry and leadership role within the church. Leaders should do all in their power to facilitate the full development of their team’s talents and gifts and coordinate their individual ministries into a purposeful and united team.

Plurality of leadership is the way of our CRC Churches and every leader needs a team as much as every team needs a leader.

It is imperative that all spiritual leaders (and particularly Senior Ministers and their Eldership Boards) be constant learners. This involves really learning the lessons that come from experience; and even more importantly, learning the lessons that come from other people’s experiences.

Therefore, great books, timely in-service seminars and leadership courses with a practical orientation are priceless.

All Senior Ministers and Elders need to be personally growing in their leadership capacity and skills by inculcating new learning from excellent leaders/authors. It’s also good practice for Eldership and Ministry Staff to work through some key books that will really be helpful in their important team roles.

**3. GOVERNANCE THROUGH CHURCH HISTORY**

Various positions of understanding developed over time

CRC

Congregational Plural Leader Hierarchical

Government Equal Accountable Authority

Eldership to a team one man leading

E.g. Baptist E.g. Presbyterian E.g. Bishop/ Brethren Archbishop

E.g. Roman

Catholic

1. **THE GOVERNANCE OF A LOCAL CHURCH WITHIN A NATION**

Every local church in time should establish their own local constitution. The timing of this will vary considerably between different countries.

Every CRC Church in a nation must accept and endorse:

* The CRC National Constitution of that nation
* The International Charter
  1. Name of the Local Church

Varied local names may be used but it must be clearly displayed that the church is a member church of the CRC Churches International, or whatever the name of the movement is in that nation.

* 1. Leadership of the Local Church

The first Senior Minister will be recognised by virtue of his/her ministry gift that has enabled him/her to pioneer the church. Future Senior Ministers will be appointed by the agreement of the Elders in the local church and approval of the National Executive of that nation. Endorsement should also be given by the Field Supporter.

Other leaders in the church are to be appointed by the Eldership Team after careful prayer and recognition of the fruitfulness of the person concerned.

All leaders must be members of the local church and clearly committed to the leader and the church.

* 1. Members of the Local Church

The members of the local church are those people from the general community who have met the requirements of membership and officially joined that local church. The church must always be open to anybody in the community to come, but the members are those who have met the membership requirements and been approved by the Eldership.

Normal membership requirements are:

* Born Again
* Baptised in water
* Ideally baptised in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues.
* Contribute by giving Tithes and Offerings
* Accept the leadership functioning in the church
  1. Voting in the Local Church

General operation is decided by the leadership team.

The members must vote on any changes to the church Constitution and confirm acceptance of the annual finance reports.

* 1. Managing Finance.

All finance must be handled by 2 unrelated people who have a good reputation of being honest, managing their own finances well and paying all their bills on time.

* 1. Leadership Structure/Roles

See attached Local Church Constitution

* 1. Dispute Settlement

See attached Local Church Constitution

* 1. Essentials for the Church to Function
* Integrity
* No self-seeking
* Humility
* Loyalty
* Forgiveness
* Unity

1. **GOVERNANCE OF A NATIONAL MOVEMENT**

Each Nation that is recognized as a CRC member nation must have its own National Constitution that ensures sound Governance in the context of that nation.

The National Constitution is to include a statement that they accept and endorse the International Charter of CRC Churches International.

This is the only document that holds us together by uniting us around a common vision and concept, as well as basic ministerial ethics

* 1. Name of the National Movement

The preferred name is CRC Churches International ---x “Country”

However, it is recognized that for various reasons it may not always be feasible to use the name “CRC Churches International” in such cases a name as close as possible to it would be appropriate.

* 1. National Leadership

The initial National Leader will be recognised by virtue of their gifting that enabled them to raise up the movement in their nation. This is not a lifetime appointment, but it is anticipated that the appointed person will continue to lead while the gift is clearly functioning.

Subsequent appointments of National Leader will be made by a majority vote of the officially credentialed pastors in the nation. If there is a change of National Leader before the church becomes a Full Member church, and part of a Full Member Nation of the CRC Churches International, the Field Supporter must also endorse the appointment of the new National Leader.

A National team will also be appointed from the experienced credentialed pastors to assist in leading the movement.

The Constitution must define the frequency of meetings of the National Team. The minimum is annually.

* 1. National Membership.

The members of CRC Church International in a country are the officially recognized credentialed pastors in that nation.

* 1. Accountability

Pastors are accountable to the National Leadership Team via their credential, but also are accountable to their local Eldership.

* 1. Leadership Structure/Roles – see sample National Constitution
  2. Dispute Settlement – see sample National Constitution
  3. Minister Credentials and the required competencies – see “Minister, Country X Competencies”.
  4. Raising and managing Finance – see sample National Constitution

1. **End Notes** 
   1. Field Supporter

Each Field should have a Field Supporter from the home country of those who helped pioneer the new nation. (See CRC Missions Policy 2.0)

The Field Supporters are available at any time to assist and support in any matter.

* 1. National Specific Requirements

It is recognised that each country has its own specific legal requirements for Constitutions, often involving finance reporting, child protection and safety and licensing to conduct weddings.

The specific requirements of each nation must be included.

However recommended Constitutions from Government bodies are often based on congregational government model. We need to clearly set forth our form of government in a responsible manner.

* 1. Further Reading

Lead Ministers and Eldership Boards – Operational Guidelines by Pastor Bill Vasilakis

Biblical Stability – Pastor Bill Vasilakis

Available on the CRC Churches International Website.

1. **SAMPLE CONSTITUTIONS**

* Sample Local Church Constitution
* Sample National Constitution