

## ***Is It Governance Or Is It Ministry?***

As we have previously discussed, the move to a policy-based governance system, a move you as a Board have approved and re-approved, take several years. The in-between time can be messy and confusing, as you are finding out. You don't want to be a management board anymore, but you are not sure you have all the structures and limitations in place that would allow you to truly entrust the staff and volunteers to practice ministry. You want to practice good governance, but you don't have a comprehensive policy book, and you don't have the track record yet to feel sure that you are making the right decisions regarding what the Board should and should not take time with.

The solution? Fake it till you make it! Yes, I am advising you to act as though all those structures are in place. Sort of. I present to you a simple decision making tree that will allow you to evaluate each decision and determine whether you should take it on yourselves or delegate it. But I adding in some secondary questions or follow up possibilities which will make it easier for you to let go of some of the things that you are tempted to hold on to.

First to review:

***Governance is concerned with the big picture of the congregation and with protecting and sustaining assets. Governance is about the 'what' – the fiduciary and strategic questions.***

***Ministry is about the 'how' – pretty much with everything else that goes on.***

***Governance is about oversight and definition and accountability.***

***Ministry is about implementation.***

***Governance produces minutes, policies, mission statements, goals, strategic documents.***

***Ministry produces programs.***

***Governance is providing direction and oversight.***

***Ministry is action.***

Here is a step by step decision making tree for you to use during this time of transition.

### ***Is It Governance or Is it Ministry?***

Whenever an issue comes to the Board, and you need to decide if it is appropriate for Board consideration. You must first ask, “Is it governance or is it ministry?” The best learning you all will do together as you evolve to a policy-based governance Board will be in the answering of this question. Even if you have to have the conversation over and over again.

#### ***Governance***

Step 1: If it is a governance question, do you have a policy in place that addresses the question? (Remember that for the most part, a Board never wants to make one-off decisions; you want to create policies that cover all such decisions.)

#### ***Can It Wait?***

Step 2: If there is a relevant policy in place, the issue can be easily dealt with. If not, you need to ask yourselves, “Does this issue need to be dealt with now, or can it wait until a relevant policy is in place?”

Step 3: If you feel that there is a need for immediate action, do so in such a way that you are laying the groundwork for creating a policy rather than making a one-off decision. If the issue itself can wait, make a formal request to your Policy Task Force to include the needed policy in the Comprehensive Policy Book they are in the process of creating.

#### ***Ministry***

Step 1: If this is a ministry question, do you have a policy in place that clarifies who in the ministry structure you can refer this to? Does that policy provide sufficient clarity as to the limitations of the authority of that person or committee? Does the policy include a feed-back/accountability loop? (Remember that for the most part, the Board never wants to get into management of staff or programs; you want policies that clearly delegate that to your staff and ministry teams.)

Step 2: If you can comfortably delegate based on current policy, then make sure you know who is going to communicate that the issue has come to you and been delegated to it doesn't get lost between Board and staff/ministry teams.

### ***Can It Wait?***

Step 3: If there is no clear policy in place, you need to ask yourselves, does this need to be dealt with immediately or can it wait until our Comprehensive Policy Book is completed? If there is a need for immediate action, delegate not only the action, but the first steps towards the creation of a policy that will cover such questions in the future.