



Session & Committee Of Management

By Dave Thurston

People from all different church backgrounds (or none!) can attend and be part of a Presbyterian Church of Queensland. This can mean that those in the church have different expectations and experiences of how leadership, organisation and decision-making within a church occurs.

This paper will provide a brief overview of both the Session and Committee of Management within a local charge (church).

SESSION

The role of the Session is to oversee the spiritual health of the congregation in all its ministries. The important word here is 'oversight'; having elders representing different ministries of the church run counter to the purpose and culture of a Session. It is appropriate for an elder to be involved in a ministry and even lead a ministry, but when it comes to the deliberation of Session, they are not advocates for their particular ministry. What is required of a Session is to oversee the governing of the congregation so that the overall health of the church is in focus. Such a focus might sometimes mean the wrapping up of a ministry.

Who Is The Boss Of the Session?

The Session in a Presbyterian church is, of course, ultimately accountable to the Lord, but functionally the Session should be accountable to the Mission, Vision and Values of the congregation. The Session prays, plans and oversees according to the direction and character stated in those documents. If there is disagreement at a decision that has been made, then perhaps the values of the congregation need to be clarified.

The Session And The Elder

The role of the Session and of an Elder are two very different things. An Elder is to be a man of Christian maturity. This should not be limited to being able to affirm the Christian doctrine, but rather that are to embody these beliefs. For an Elder's primary role is not to make decisions, but to be an example of Christian maturity. Even this needs to be qualified, because it must mean more than having a consistent prayer and Bible reading regime. It is primarily the integration of Christian belief and behaviour in healthy relationships. It is this health that enables an elder to play a role in the spiritual oversight of the congregation as, together with the minister, they wrestle with leading the church to embody the congregation's Vision, Mission and Values. Elders are to be model Christians as they follow Christ. The Session is the place where elders work together under Christ to further his kingdom in a particular place and beyond.

Committee Of Management (CoM)

The Committee of Management functions completed differently from the Session. Each member of the CoM should hold a portfolio for a different area of responsibility, that they both report on *and* implement. Of course, there are the normal office bearers; Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, but in addition to these, there should also be someone who is responsible for buildings, grounds, technology and software etc. There should be no one who is part of the decision making, but does not bear a responsibility. The members of the CoM have the ability to enlist others with gifts in those areas, but they are responsible for the portfolio.

Who Is The Boss Of Committee Of Management?

The Committee of Management's job is to implement the budget developed by a joint meeting of the Session and Committee of Management. This budget is adopted by a meeting of the Congregation and expresses the Mission, Vision and Values of the congregation.

Preparing A Budget

Each ministry and portfolio area is required, toward the end of the year, to submit a budget for their area of responsibility for the following year. The total proposed budget is prepared by the minister, and a representative of the Session and CoM, and submitted to a joint Session and CoM meeting. The agreed budget is then published and submitted to a congregational meeting in early December for approval. In addition to the approval, the Congregation also authorises the CoM to pay any bill that is in accordance with the budget.

The Job Of A Treasurer

It is rare these days, even in smaller churches, whose accounts are not complex, to have someone who can spend the time doing all the work that falls to the Treasurer. Increasingly, churches are splitting the role of the Treasurer, where overall responsibility remains with the Treasurer, while also employing a book-keeper who keeps the accounts.

| | Session | Committee Of Management |
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| RESPONSIBILITY | The overall spiritual health of the congregation. | Management of the finances and physical resources of the congregation. |
| PRIMARY MODE | Oversight | Management |
| MEMBERS | The Minister and the elected and approved Elders of the congregation. | The managers elected by the congregation at the Annual General Meeting, plus the Minister as the chairman. |
| WHO THEY REPRESENT | The Mission, Vision and Values of the congregation. | The budget recommended by the CoM and Session and agreed by the congregation, in the previous year's budget meeting. |
| PORTFOLIOS FOR MEMBERS | None | Everyone must have a portfolio. |
| MEANS | Prayer, mature example, policy formation, ministry job description approval, appointment and assessment all in line with the congregation's Mission, Vision and Values statement. | Portfolio reports and actions, management of accounts in line with the approved budget, preparation of annual report and audited accounts for the AGM. |