

General Council Affiliated Church Governance Minimums

The current generation of Assemblies of God leaders value flexibility and freedom to lead the local church in the power of the Spirit. How this looks in the twenty-first century may be different than it looked in the twentieth century. That is because no single biblically prescribed model of local church governance exists. In fact, a case could be made for a diverse number of biblically based models of church governance. Diversity or a form of the word is one of Paul's key descriptors about the Spirit's gifts in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6. This emphasis on diversity provides a key insight in Paul's conversation about doing things "decently and in order" within the local church. So, what are some guiding biblical principles that help us understand what twenty-first century church governance should look like? [GPM 08/2012]

We believe in balancing flexibility and freedom with accountability and sustainability. A win for us occurs when this happens in a way that supports and perpetuates missional effectiveness. That may look somewhat different from church to church. But in a healthy church, pastoral leadership thrives in an environment that cultivates creativity and vision, while providing a system of checks and balances to ensure things are done "decently and in order." This both protects the integrity of the pastor and guards the body of Christ from potential harm.

Historically, we have utilized hybrid models of governance that combined our pragmatic bent with the Spirit's empowerment to use what worked best for us at the time. Yet what worked well for a season or for a church of a certain size or community may not work so well as seasons and communities change. Certainly, we acknowledge that as a church grows and develops in a healthy way, agile governance is required to adapt to changing realities.

We also recognize that the laws of the land and biblical principles guide us toward a collaborative system of leadership and oversight where no single individual maintains control. Thus, we seek to foster a culture that encourages and cultivates creative leadership by creating an environment where that is possible. To accomplish this, we lean toward a pastor-led model and affirm the autonomy of the local church to select a system of governance that works best for them. With these principles in mind, we propose the following as minimal governance requirements for a General Council affiliated church:

1. As a not-for-profit entity, a General Council affiliated local church system of governance must comply with legal requirements of state and federal law to include, among other things, a dissolution clause.
2. A General Council affiliated church must accept the Assemblies of God tenets of faith and be amenable to applicable General Council and district council constitutions and bylaws to include the provision for a lead pastor who is credentialed with the Assemblies of God.

3. A General Council affiliated church must have a clearly defined board of directors specified in the articles of incorporation and/or constitution and/or bylaws (governance documents).
4. The local church governance documents must provide for a process to elect or appoint with ratification individual board directors, to include a process for removal with ratification when necessary, and to include a process for mediating conflicts between the pastor and directors.
5. The local church governance documents must provide for a process to elect or appoint a lead pastor, and to review and assess the pastor's performance, to include a process for removal when necessary.
6. The local church governance documents must provide for an accountability structure that limits conflicts of interest, prevents personal inurement, and specifies procedures for financial oversight and property ownership.
7. The local church governance documents must include specifications regarding membership, rights and responsibilities of members.