

CHURCH BOARD MEMBER

A MINISTRY DESCRIPTION FOR LOCAL CHURCH LEADERS

Introduction

Welcome to membership on the local Seventh-day Adventist church board. You have accepted an important responsibility. This board has been charged by the members of the local Seventh-day Adventist church with the operation of the church.

With such an important responsibility, persons selected must individually portray in their personal and corporate life qualities of spirituality, fairness and good judgment. You have been chosen because your church believes you exemplify these qualities.

Assumptions

As you begin functioning as a member of the church board, you should know that your church assumes:

1. That you are accepting this responsibility willingly. Only willing members can effectively perform the services that will be necessary.
2. That you are a loyal and faithful member of this Seventh-day Adventist congregation.
3. That you are faithful in your stewardship responsibilities in terms of time, talent, and financial means.
4. That you will seek the Lord for divine guidance and courage to make necessary decisions.
5. That you will be both ethical and professional in handling the information and decisions you will confront. You should be loyal to God, the pastor and elected leaders, and the members.
6. That you will put the interests of the church above any personal interest, for only thus can selfless service be rendered to the church and to Jesus, the Lord of the church.
7. That you will always remember the church's mission in making decisions.

Suggestions for Effectiveness

1. *Commitment:* A deep, genuine commitment to the Lord Jesus is the most important part of your work on this board. Board members' minds are the link through which God communicates His will to this church. Please spend time in earnest prayer before coming to each board meeting so your mind and spirit are in tune with the Divine.
2. *Participation:* In his book *Guidelines for Committee and Board Members* (Review & Herald, 1973), Dr. Robert Firth states: "No doubt there are places where silence is golden, but not on a committee. A committee member who sits through a meeting without saying something to aid the discussion is a useless committee member. The committee meeting is a place to exchange ideas, to create new ones, to hammer ideas into solutions, or to set a course of action" (page 48).

Dr. Firth balances things, however, by cautioning against going to the other extreme: "There are those who talk a great deal at committee meetings and say virtually nothing. They might call such talking participation, but few others would. Participation assumes the making of a worthwhile contribution to the discussion."

Don't be afraid to speak your conviction or disagree with others. This involves disagreeing with anyone, including the pastor. You are only as strong as your willingness to express opinions and convictions. All church board members are equal. Every voice carries equal weight. Every vote has equal weight. Some have a wider range of knowledge, but that should not stop you from expressing your own conviction.

Don't be afraid to reveal your ignorance. It is nothing to be ashamed of. Don't hold back an idea or motion because you are afraid you will be voted down. Realize now that you will win some and lose some on this board. That's democracy. Don't let a loss in support of your idea discourage you.

3. *Information:* Decisions are only as good as the information on which they are based.

Insist on adequate information before you vote. It is much better to postpone a decision than to rush into something with only partial, incomplete facts. Remember that confidential information must remain within the confines of the board in executive session.

4. *Respect and Trust*: It is necessary to have an attitude of mutual respect and trust. Each member of this church board was chosen because he or she has become known in your church for certain traits of leadership and areas of expertise. Unless we respect and trust one another, there will not be the free and open exchange that is necessary for good decision-making. If you have doubts and questions about the integrity or sincerity of any member of the board, including the pastor, express them to the appropriate individual and follow biblical principles. Ask questions. Clear the air. This will make the board's work a joy as friendships develop. Board members are not adversaries, but teammates trying to win for God.
5. *Honesty*: Please don't play games or seek to manipulate. Avoid hidden agendas. This can destroy trust. Be honest, straightforward, and direct.
6. *Decision Making*: Vote with your head, not your heart. Make decisions based on facts, needs, and careful thinking, rather than on emotional reactions or past experience. Avoid preconceived ideas or assumptions based on a bad experience or accumulated problems through the years. Above all, keep in mind the mission of the church in all your decisions.
7. *Cultural Sensitivity*: Filter all discussion and decisions through the viewpoint of diverse ethnic groups. Respect the historical background and special needs of others.
8. *Wounded Feelings*: Sometimes those who have never served on a board are surprised at the candor, openness, and willingness to disagree with a fellow board member. But that is one thing that makes boards effective. Effective members do not "wear their feelings on their sleeves." They present ideas they expect may be shot down rapidly. Each member tries not to become personally involved with his or her own ideas and opinions. They realize that the open discussion in the board meeting will expose weakness in arguments and ideas. This results in better decisions than those any member might develop alone. Another area of sensitivity comes from those who feel, "They never use my ideas." That isn't true! Your ideas will undoubtedly stimulate the ideas of others, and thrown into the mix of all the ideas, yours will be a part of the overall development even though your idea may not be the exact version of the finished product.
9. *Handling of Board Decisions*: When a decision is reached that involves members of the church, do not assume you are free to communicate that information. The pastor or other person assigned by the board has the responsibility of disseminating that information.

Example: Suppose the board votes to make a change in leadership of a ministry of the church. You tell a friend of yours, who tells a friend, who tells the person—and the pastor has not yet made contact. You can imagine how the person will feel, getting the information through an unofficial channel instead of the proper channel. Holding your tongue may be difficult sometimes. Yet Proverbs 21:23 reminds us that guarding our words keeps us from calamity.
10. *Confidentiality of Discussions*: No member of the board should be placed in the unenviable position of having a confidential statement he or she made in the board room come back to him or her on the telephone, street, office, or anywhere. The various viewpoints may be reported, but it is unethical to mention names. In fact, that person may have been persuaded by discussion, and ended up voting differently from ideas he or she expressed to the group earlier in the discussion.
11. *Ministry Representation*: Some people are members of the board because they represent a specific ministry of the church, such as music ministry or children's ministry. Such board members are expected to be fully informed about the ministry they represent and to make sure the board is fully informed of the way that ministry will be

affected by any action or decision the board is considering. However, the members of the church board are expected to represent the best interests of the entire church, without making every decision based on the priority of what would be best for the specific ministry or group with which they might be identified. Try to see the big picture and make decisions on what is best for the church as a whole, rather than voting only the little picture. This will produce a stronger church.

12. *Support of the Majority Vote:* Quoting again from Dr. Firth: "But once a committee has given its group judgment to a problem and decided on a solution by a democratic majority vote, the dissenting individuals no longer have the right of dissent. ...The person who cannot do that has no business serving on the committee and is lacking in ethical values."

Dr. Firth is quite firm, and some even say he is being too hard. However, consider the problem should a board member tell others: "I'm sorry the board decided the way they did. I certainly don't agree and didn't vote that way." Immediately the board member has set him or herself up against the board. Loyalty involves support even though it may not have been your first choice for the board to vote the way it did.

Attendance

Attendance is very important at all board meetings. At times there will be valid reasons why you cannot attend. If that is the case, please notify the secretary or board chairperson. Board members must realize the importance of attendance and try their best to be present at each meeting. If you are absent without notification for three consecutive meetings the board may vote to replace you.

Notice of Meetings

You will receive a notice of the next meeting one to four weeks in advance. At its first board meeting the board itself should establish a particular day of the month, such as the first Tuesday or second Thursday, when the board will meet—unless a different date is voted at one board meeting for the next board meeting.

Minutes

Minutes of each church board meeting will be sent to you by mail or email, or passed out at the next meeting. You should obtain a notebook or folder for the purpose of keeping your own minutes. At times the minutes will contain privileged information, so keep this book of minutes for your eyes only. The board also needs to ensure that official minutes of each meeting or sub-committee are kept in a secure location.

Budgets

A part of the work of the church board involves money. At each meeting the board usually goes through the financial statement, presented by the church treasurer. At first the statement may seem strange and unfriendly unless you have an accounting background. In time, the statement will begin to make sense and you will be able to plot the financial course of the church.

Conflict of Interest

Even though most board members are not employees of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, every board member must avoid any conflict of interest that would result in personal favor or gain. An example of a conflict of interest would be encouraging and voting for the church to purchase a product or service from which you would profit, or voting for the church to discard or sell something below market value that you might acquire and use to your advantage. Board members are held to a higher standard of conduct. After reading the North American Division Policy Statement on conflict of interest, each board member must complete and sign a conflict of interest statement.

Policies

The local Seventh-day Adventist church operates in harmony with the policies of the latest edition of the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*. Every church board member should have access to the manual and be familiar with its policies. Many of the recommendations of the Church Manual leave considerable room for local church application and interpretation, and occasionally the church board may vote to depart from a recommendation of the manual on minor matters. But when there is no clear consensus among board members that a variance is within the spirit of the manual, the Church Manual's recommendations will be followed. The local Seventh-day Adventist church is a part of the local conference of Seventh-day Adventists, and as such, operates in harmony with the policies of the conference. The local church's real property, the church building and all church equipment and furnishings, are held in the name of the local Association of Seventh-day Adventists. The conference and the Association are, in turn, governed by the local conference constituency, of which the members of the local Seventh-day Adventist church are members.

Program Evaluation

A major function of the church board is to evaluate the programs of the church. The board will review programs that are proving ineffective and seek solutions. Those that continue to be ineffective will be discarded, while those proving effective will be encouraged and expanded. It is also the responsibility of the church board to see areas of need and suggest and implement programs that will meet those needs.

Final Responsibility

In the final analysis, it is your responsibility as a board member to review all operations of the local Seventh-day Adventist church board and to act on behalf of all the members. Given such an important assignment, your dedication to the church and this position is extremely important. As you vote on issues that affect this church and its personnel and all of its outreach, please do so knowing that the Holy Spirit is beside you ready to guide you.

Resource Materials

The following resources are recommended for your ministry. You can purchase these by - calling AdventSource (800-328-0525), the Adventist Book Center (800-765-6955) or your local Christian bookstore.

Radical Disciples for Revolutionary Churches, by Russell Burrill. The author explores what it takes to produce church members who want to be participants, not spectators, and proposes a major change in how to "do evangelism."

Revolution in the Church, by Russell Burrill. Believing that both pastors and laity have strayed far from their biblically assigned roles, the author proposes a radical change in how Adventists "do church."

Revolutionized Church of the 21st Century, by Russell Burrill. Experience the explosive power of a church built on relationships.

Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual. All operating policies and procedures as voted by the General Conference.

The Power of Vision, by George Barna. Discover how developing a shared vision can ignite your board, pastors and church members.

Visit AdventSource On-Line at www.adventsource.org for a complete list of the latest resources available for local church leaders. You can place an order or request a catalog by calling 1-800-328-0525.

For information about additional resources and answers to your questions call the Adventist Plusline at 1-800-732-7587 or visit them on-line at www.plusline.org.