

Good Governance is Great - An Introduction to the Governance Resource Pack

Good governance is great! Yes, the very word causes some people to yawn and sends shivers down the spines of others, but such reactions are often the consequences of bad processes and inappropriate behaviour. Just as a grapevine needs a trellis to lift it up otherwise the fruit will lie on the ground and rot, so good governance will combat forces that damage church health. It will also support fruitfulness in life and mission.

Generally, church governance is the basis on which a church is organised and operates. A good framework will support a church's purpose, values, and vision. It will clarify how members appoint leaders, where various levels of authority lie, and accountabilities that apply.

Governance is a specific type of leadership – oversight - that enables others, especially the Senior Pastor/Pastor and leaders of church ministries to be more effective in their service of God. It is different from operational leadership, which concerns the day-to-day management of the church. A Governance Team ensures that a church is heading in the right direction and functioning correctly rather than managing the day-to-day operational details themselves.

A church needs both types of leadership. It must allow its Senior Pastor/Pastor to give a strong, confident lead but always within the bounds of oversight that is collaborative, supportive and ensures appropriate accountability.

Examples of poor governance are many and varied! One Governance Team treated its Pastor like an employee who was expected to do what they told him to. Rather than including him as a member of the team they required him to attend meetings for the purposes of reporting and then leave. They would make decisions without consulting him and strictly limited his authority to make any changes without permission. The Pastor soon accepted a call to another church.

Another Governance Team was so weak and the Pastor so domineering that he led with barely any reference to them. This was even the case when the Governance Team knew that the decisions he forced through were not well supported by the congregation. Eventually, the Pastor was asked to leave.

No two Pastors are the same, so each church must tailor its governance model according to the personality and gifts of the person they call to lead them. In some instances, the Senior Pastor/Pastor will lead the Governance Team, as a “first among equals”, while in other instances they will not be the best person to do so, and another member of the Governance Team will take the lead. However, the Senior Pastor/Pastor should always be a full member of the Governance Team. They must also be

empowered and supported by the Governance Team to lead the day-to-day details of church life.

While there are similarities between governance processes in Baptist churches, the autonomy of the local church allows each one to determine its own approach. This has produced mixed results, and a substantial number of church health related issues are traceable to inadequate processes.

The Baptist Association of NSW & ACT (BA) values good governance. Its operational values include reference to:

“Good Governance which:

- Reflects our core values
- Encourages empowerment and accountability of decision makers at appropriate levels
- Fosters a culture of transparency in its processes and reporting
- Minimises bureaucracy and permits decisions to be made in a timely manner”

Governance always involves people coming together to discuss, debate, and make decisions. Consequently, the BA’s operational values call for:

- “Godly conduct in meetings including a preference for:
- Decision making by consensus
- Personal conduct when speaking or delivering a report or statement characterised by respect and dignity, and
- Avoiding unnecessary repetition, unbecoming language, and any breach of agreed procedures”

These principles, and the way they influence practice have helped to create a culture that honours the Lord Jesus Christ, meets legal requirements, provides a safe environment for ministry and mission, and serves the Gen1K goal.

The Church Health Team trusts that the Governance Resource Pack will help churches to develop and implement processes that protect unity and support fruitfulness in life and mission.