

# Ministry Teams in the Hybrid Model of Governance

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*This article describes what a ministry team is and how it functions in the hybrid form of church governance advocated by Ambassadors of Reconciliation.*



## What is a ministry team?

A ministry team is a group of people organized by a staff person or board to serve a specific ministry function. Their ministry purpose may be on-going (such as counting offerings each week or providing lawn care) or limited to a specific event (such as going on a mission trip or replacing a roof).

## How does a ministry team differ from a traditional congregational board?

A board is a group of officially elected people who have responsibility and authority for overseeing certain ministry functions. As part of their work, boards hold regular meetings for planning and making decisions. Boards document their work through minutes, resolutions, and establishing policy. Boards function best when they develop policy and avoid micromanaging professional staff. Their purpose is to focus on the big-picture issues for the organization, such as defining its mission. Boards also employ and/or supervise key staff. Board members may or may not actually participate in specific ministry endeavors.

A ministry team is a group of people who gather together under leadership of a staff person or board. Often volunteers, they may be informally appointed, but they are not elected. The team members do not have the overall responsibility and authority for making major decisions such as establishing long-term vision, determining budgets and approving expenditures, developing broad policies, and staff. Instead, they participate directly in delivery of ministry services.



Other differences:

### Boards

### Ministry Teams

Typically, board members are elected to serve formally established terms, usually one to three years.

Ministry team members volunteer to serve for a single event or specific purpose. Their length of service is not set by bylaws but by their availability.

Boards meet regularly and must maintain minutes to formally document meetings.

Ministry teams typically do not meet regularly but only for ministry functions. They need not maintain minutes.

Boards make decisions through formal resolutions, often taking time over several meetings. They formalize plans with budgets and develop policy.

Ministry teams make minor decisions collaboratively as they work together on their mission. Their leader (staff or board) makes major decisions including overall planning, budgets, and policies.

Boards designed for governance and management are authorized through bylaws and policies. They become a long-established form of the church's structure. They are created for the long-term governance of the church, not for meeting current ministry needs.

Ministry teams are not identified in bylaws or governing documents *so that* they can be more quickly organized and empowered for service to meet ministry needs. They are authorized by the staff person or board that mobilizes them. Even longer-term teams (e.g., Sunday school teachers, musician groups, etc.) can be modified more quickly than a formally created board.

Board members meet together on a regular basis as required in bylaws to set overall direction.

Ministry team members may meet together or work separately to deliver ministry services.

Board members may serve in one of three roles: governance, management, or advisory. Board members may or may not engage directly in ministry activities.

Ministry teams do not govern or manage, although they may serve as advisors. They assemble to participate directly in ministry activities.

## Can you give some examples of ministry teams?

Even in churches with multiple administrative boards, there are often ministry teams already at work. Some examples:

- Sunday school teachers and aides: Under the direction of a volunteer Sunday School Superintendent or staff Director of Children’s Ministry, Sunday school teachers function as ministry teams. The superintendent or director plan and order the curriculum, assign classrooms and equipment, maintain records, and coordinate the work of the teachers. Teachers agree to serve for a specific season, and they typically do not meet regularly as a formal board.
- Choir or worship teams: Under the direction of a music director or worship coordinator (staff or volunteer), the musicians meet together to practice and lead music in worship services. They are not elected by the congregation but volunteer to serve under the music director. The director (staff person) or a board determines the budget and approves expenditures, chooses music, and organizes practices. The musicians do not have responsibility or authority to make policies or spend money. They serve through the gift of music.
- Vacation Bible School teams: Often an annual ministry event, many volunteer to serve in teaching, providing refreshments, designing and creating crafts, leading music and devotions, and organizing games. The VBS Director or Director of Children’s Ministry serves as the staff person to plan the curriculum and budget, order the materials, set the date, and otherwise plan other details for VBS.



- Organized building repairs and maintenance teams: A Board of Trustees or Director of Operations may organize a special cleaning or repair day when anyone interested can come and participate in maintenance or repair projects. Those who show up don't take time to formally hold a meeting with minutes. They come with tools ready to work.
- Short-term mission trip teams: Organized by a staff person or board, those who participate in the mission trip often do not serve on the organizing board or as staff but volunteer for the mission. Mission trips may include both social ministry (building programs, repair and maintenance, medical, etc.) and gospel sharing (VBS, other teaching, evangelism calls, etc.).
- Fund-raising project teams: A school ministry often benefits from someone with a new vision for a special fund-raising project. Working under the general direction of a school administrator, the leader of the project pulls together a special team to organize the fund-raising project that encourages participation by students, parents, and others.
- Self-identified groups (single parents, young couples, seniors, home Bible studies, women's or men's groups, etc.): These groups informally organize under the church's general direction to provide support, encouragement, or care. They don't require a special church board, although they may serve under the general auspices of a particular board or staff member. Often, they are started by an individual who has a passion for a defined purpose.



## How are members selected for ministry team?

Unlike boards where people are typically elected, ministry team members volunteer and/or may be appointed by the organizer. The organizer may be a paid staff person, a volunteer staff person, or a board. Ministry team members serve for a specific purpose, usually for a defined project, time period, or season.

## To whom is a ministry team accountable?

The ministry team is accountable to the staff person (paid or volunteer) or board responsible for planning and achieving specific ministry outcomes.

Under the Ambassadors of Reconciliation hybrid model of governance, most ministry teams will be accountable to a staff person. Each governing board delegates the operations of ministry to one staff person responsible for carrying out daily functions of the ministry. In larger churches, the key staff person will have other staff serving under him or her. Thus, most ministry teams are not accountable to a governing board but to a particular staff member.

A ministry team may be accountable to a governing board for board responsibilities. For example, a Church Council may appoint a ministry team to conduct an annual audit. However, the Church Council delegates the functions of a church maintenance and repair team to the Administrator, who plans and oversees the maintenance ministry team.

## Why not just make a ministry team a board?



If every ministry initiative required a board, a congregation would end up with scores of boards. The result: A bureaucracy that would stifle initiative, creativity, and useful outcomes. Ministry teams require far less formalization and can be assembled and dismissed quickly as needed.

On the other hand, two or three governing boards are important. They are necessary to provide broad oversight to the church. Those who serve on governing boards need to be qualified spiritually and have gifts and/or experience in setting vision and establishing policy.

Due to people's personal schedules (work, school, family commitments, etc.), many are not available for regular board meetings. They resist committing to regular board meetings when they are uncertain what their availability might be. Furthermore, most people in a congregation prefer not to meet for board meetings, especially if they feel that the meetings fail to result in meaningful hands-on ministry. They would rather commit to a specific project rather than long-term planning and directing the work of a project.


## What are the benefits of creating ministry teams?

Benefits of ministry teams include:

- Easier to start new ministry initiatives – Under traditional governance with multiple boards, individuals with ideas for new ministry need approval at multiple levels. They first need approval at a board level, then an executive committee (or parish planning council), and finally by the congregation and/or key staff person.



Along the way, approval for the idea may be delayed, modified, or scrapped. It could take months, even over a year, to approve a new ministry initiative. In some cases, the ministry opportunity is lost. With a team ministry, a new initiative can be created quickly by working with the one staff person generally responsible for this ministry area.

- Quick response to ministry needs – An immediate call to action provides people with opportunities to serve. For example, if a household or even a community experiences a natural disaster, a ministry team can be assembled within hours to deliver needed relief.
  - Flexibility – Because ministry teams can be assembled or dismissed without waiting for a board or congregation to formalize an election, teams can be quickly formed or changed to meet the emerging ministry needs. In addition, the size of the team can be immediately altered to meet the need – larger or smaller. The team can be assembled with differing gifts for serving distinct purposes.
  - Finding volunteers is easier – Many more people are willing to work for a specific ministry purpose rather than pledge service on a board. They find it easier to commit to a limited term project than to a longer service with regular meetings. And, many would rather serve in a hands-on ministry than in a long-term planning process.
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- More opportunities to serve – Some complain that, with a governance model, there is less opportunity to serve in a church’s ministry. But when ministry teams are utilized, there actually is more opportunity to serve in ministry functions.

## Where do members from traditional boards fit in with the hybrid model of governance?

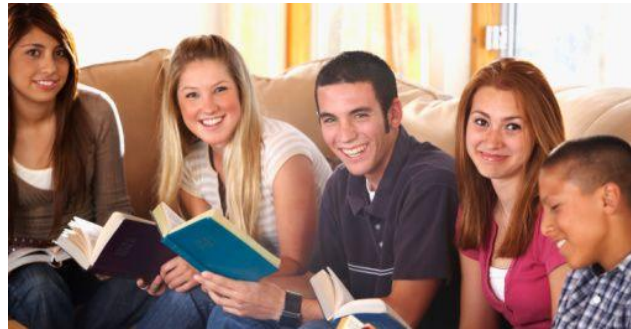
Congregations that adopt the hybrid model assign the responsibilities of traditional boards and positions to staff and/or the two to three governing boards. Similar to a project committee, a ministry team may be formed to carry out specific ministry functions. For several ministry activities, what was once a board that reported directly to the congregation will be a team that serves under a key staff member or governing board. Note that in smaller churches, a staff member may be a volunteer who reports to the Senior Pastor (e.g., Sunday School Superintendent, VBS Director, etc.).

Here are some examples where people from traditional boards will serve under the hybrid model (as a ministry team working under a staff person):

- Parish education board responsibilities fall under the Senior Pastor because it involves teaching, a spiritual function. He may delegate certain aspects to others who report to him. Staff will seek people for service on ministry teams:
  - Director of Christian Education (aka DCE), who will form ministry teams to lead home Bible studies and other teaching functions.

- Sunday School Superintendent or Director of Children’s Ministry, who will look for people to serve as Sunday school teachers.
  - Confirmation Instructor, who works with parents for helping with regular classes or special projects.
  - Vacation Bible School Director, who seeks people to serve in teaching, music, crafts, games, refreshments, etc.
- Traditional trustee board governance responsibilities become the responsibility of the Church Council. The specifics of implementing maintenance issues would be delegated to the Church Administrator, who may work with a ministry team (e.g., a maintenance team) that reports to him. Often, former members of the Board of Trustees appreciate having the Church Administrator schedule and organize work projects for them so that they can focus on hands-on projects.

- Youth board responsibilities become the overall responsibility of the Senior Pastor. He may delegate to a Director of Youth Ministry or ask parents or others to work with him as a ministry team, but these would all report to the Senior Pastor or to a Director of Youth Ministry who reports to the Senior Pastor.



- Stewardship board responsibilities are divided between two areas of governance.
  - The collection of funds, revenue and expense projections, and reporting of actual revenues fall under the Church Council policies. Daily operations are delegated to the Church Administrator. He may form ministry teams such as offering counting teams.
  - The spiritual life portion (which is primarily monitoring and educating responsibilities) falls under the general guidance of the Board of Elders and is delegated to the Senior Pastor. He may utilize ministry teams for these spiritual life responsibilities:
    - Monitoring attendance (worship, communion, Bible study) – observed as a function of individuals’ spiritual health.
    - Monitoring financial giving – reviewed as a function of individuals’ spiritual health (note that a major decrease in giving may be an indicator of a personal conflict, financial emergency, or other area requiring spiritual care).
    - Identifying and utilizing talents.

- Teaching stewardship – The team works with the Pastor in developing a stewardship focus incorporating preaching, teaching, and pledge campaign.
- Traditional evangelism board responsibilities fall under the general guidance of the Board of Elders and are delegated to the Senior Pastor. In a larger church, these responsibilities may be delegated to a Director of Outreach, who reports to the Senior Pastor. Either the Pastor or Director of Outreach may form one ministry team to assist in teaching how to witness and another ministry team to assist in making evangelism calls. Those who once served on the evangelism board can serve on either team, depending on their gifts and availability.
- Fellowship board duties fall under the general guidance of the Church Council and are delegated to the Church Administrator. He may assemble a ministry team for assisting in organizing all church fellowship activities or just for events as needed.
- Public relations board duties are assigned to the Church Administrator. He may utilize a PR ministry team to promote a special event or design a special promotion.

## What are the challenges for using ministry teams?

The biggest challenge is thinking differently about service in the church – for leaders and for members.

For leaders, especially key staff people, they need to think differently about how ministry can be delivered. They need to challenge members in the congregation to watch for opportunities for service. Leaders need to empower people through encouragement, general direction, and inspiration. They need to be open to delegating ministry functions to teams. In many cases, the leaders become vision setters who describe the overall objective and delegate the carrying out of the mission to the team. Guidance is provided through specific policies or, in some cases, specific goals. If the leaders fail to utilize ministry teams, the church will be limited in how it ministers to its own people and to the broader community. On the other hand, if the leaders grasp the immense potential of ministry teams, the church will find unlimited prospects for ministry endeavors and people willing to serve.



For members, they need to be shown how using ministry teams is a more effective and direct way that people can engage in the church's ministry. Some who have been accustomed to serving on boards may feel that they are now being shut out of the church's ministry. Just the opposite should be true with ministry teams. Those who desire to serve can be shown how they will have more opportunities to serve in a wider array of ministry



functions. Rather than serving on one board during a bylaw-defined term, they can serve on several unrelated ministry teams through the same period of time.

## Mission teams – it's all about washing feet

Like any human endeavor, ministry teams have their limitations. However, ministry teams can provide significantly more opportunity for members to serve directly in hands-on ministry. It's all about washing feet.



The apostle John recorded Jesus washing the feet of His disciples: “When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, ‘Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and

Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him” (John 13:12-16).

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## Leadership Training and Resources

Ambassadors of Reconciliation provides a wide array of training and resources to equip ministry leaders. For example:

- *Built on the Rock: The Healthy Congregation* by Ted Kober (Concordia Publishing House, 2017). Learn how you can strengthen the spiritual health of your church. This book provides guidance for leaders and leadership boards.  
<https://www.aorhope.org/product-page/built-on-the-rock-the-healthy-congregations>
- *Built on the Rock Leader's Pack* (AoR, 2018). 25 years in the making, this comprehensive resource includes 400 pages of consultation and teaching material. Church leaders will be equipped through teaching on spiritual leadership as well as governance. Additional features include:
  - Sample constitution and bylaws
  - Sample policy manuals for elders, church council, and school board
  - Flash drive with reproducible contents of teaching and sample documents<https://www.aorhope.org/botr-leaders-pack>
- *Leadership Training and Consultation*. Based on extensive experience working with leaders of churches, schools, and other ministries, AoR has developed training to equip lay leaders and professional ministry workers to be more effective and productive in their vocations. We offer standard and custom training and consultation in the following areas:
  - *Spiritual Lay Leadership Training and Consultation*:  
<https://www.aorhope.org/sllt>
  - *Structuring the Healthy Congregation Training and Consultation*:  
<https://www.aorhope.org/governance-seminar>
  - *Policy Governance for Boards of Directors Training and Consultation*:  
<https://www.aorhope.org/leadership-training>
- *NEW! On-line course Spiritual Leadership*  
<https://www.aorhope.org/spiritual-leadership>
- AoR also provides extensive resources and training to equip leaders in conflict coaching, mediation, and adjudication. <https://www.aorhope.org/practicums>

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