STUDENT HANDOUT
Chapter 4
Organizing the Church

Lecture 4

Key Scriptures

1 Corinthians 12:4–7, 25, 27–30
Romans 12:4–5
Ephesians 4:11–13, 16

I. Biblical Foundations for Church Organization

The New Testament describes the church as a body composed of many members working together in unity. Each believer has been given spiritual gifts and responsibilities within the body of Christ.

Scripture teaches that:

• Every believer has a role in ministry.
• Responsibilities are distributed among believers.
• The church has defined ministry objectives.
• Leaders exist to equip believers for ministry.

Church leadership does not perform all ministry itself. Instead, leaders equip the body of believers so that the entire church participates in the work of ministry.

EXAM ANCHOR
The New Testament presents the church as a body in which every believer has a role and leaders equip the saints for ministry.

II. Types of Church Polity

Polity refers to the form of government used by a church or religious organization.

Four common forms of church polity exist.

Monarchial

Authority is centralized in a single leader who governs the church through a hierarchy of appointed leaders.

Example: Roman Catholic Church.

Episcopalian

A loose hierarchical system where denominational leaders guide the decisions and structure of local churches.

Example: United Methodist Church.

Presbyterian

Authority is vested in regional governing bodies composed of elders or presbyters who oversee church affairs.

Example: Presbyterian Church USA.

Congregational

Authority resides in the local church congregation. Leaders are elected or appointed by the congregation, and each church functions independently.

Example: Baptist churches.

Leaders must understand the polity structure in which they serve in order to lead effectively.

EXAM ANCHOR
Church polity refers to the structure of church government and includes monarchial, episcopalian, presbyterian, and congregational systems.

III. Developing an Organizational Structure for the Church

Church organization is guided by several foundational documents.

Mission and Purpose Statement
This statement explains why the church exists and how it views its ministry.

Constitution
The constitution describes the theological beliefs and governing principles of the church.

Bylaws
The bylaws describe how the church organizes itself to accomplish its mission.

These documents provide the framework for church activities including programs, policies, budgets, leadership selection, and evaluation.

EXAM ANCHOR
The constitution describes what a church believes, and the bylaws describe how the church carries out its work.

IV. Organizational Styles

Scripture emphasizes order in the church. 1 Corinthians 14:33 teaches that God is not the author of confusion but of peace.

Three organizational styles commonly appear in churches.

Centralized Organization

Authority is concentrated in one leader who directs most activities. This model can lead to burnout and limited participation from others.

Nonorganization

In this structure there is little clear authority. Each worker functions independently, which can lead to miscommunication and duplication of effort.

Line or Participative Organization

This structure distributes authority through multiple levels of leadership. Responsibility is delegated throughout the organization while maintaining clear authority and accountability.

This model resembles the structure suggested by Jethro to Moses in Exodus 18.

EXAM ANCHOR
The line or participative organization distributes leadership responsibility while maintaining clear authority and accountability.

V. Organizing the Church by Size

The size of a church influences how it organizes ministry.

Mission or Pioneer Churches

Small congregations of approximately thirty to fifty members often function effectively with a single primary leader and minimal formal structure.

Growing Churches

As membership increases, committees and ministry groups are often developed to assist leadership.

Larger Churches

When a church approaches approximately two hundred active members, additional staff members may become necessary.

Organizational development should follow the principle that structure supports ministry function.

EXAM ANCHOR
Church organizational structure should develop according to the size and ministry mission of the congregation.

VI. Organizing by Function

The New Testament church performs several key functions.

Gene Mims identifies five major church functions:

- Worship
- Discipleship
- Fellowship
- Evangelism
- Ministry

Many churches organize leadership into four functional divisions.

Pastoral ministries
Education and discipleship ministries
Music and worship ministries
Support ministries

This structure allows ministries to work together while maintaining clear lines of leadership responsibility.

EXAM ANCHOR
Church organization often divides ministry responsibilities into pastoral, education, music, and support functions.

VII. Developing a Church Staff Plan

Church staff organization develops gradually as the church grows.

Staff structures provide:

- Lines of authority and accountability
- Delegation of responsibilities
- Coordination of ministry efforts
- Shared decision making

Scripture teaches that church leaders equip believers to perform ministry rather than performing all ministry themselves.

A staff plan outlines the process by which personnel needs are evaluated, positions are developed, and leadership responsibilities are assigned.

EXAM ANCHOR
A staff plan establishes the philosophical foundation for organizing personnel to accomplish the church's mission.

VIII. Job Descriptions in Church Organization

Scripture provides qualifications for leadership roles such as overseers and deacons.

Examples include Exodus 18:21, Acts 6:3, 1 Timothy 3:2–3, and 1 Timothy 3:8–9.

Job descriptions are important because they:

- Outline responsibilities for a position
- Identify qualifications required for the role
- Establish supervisory relationships
- Provide a framework for performance evaluation

An effective job description answers several key questions including the title of the position, expectations, qualifications, supervisory relationships, and specific duties.

EXAM ANCHOR
Job descriptions clarify responsibilities, qualifications, and supervisory relationships within church leadership.

IX. Committees, Councils, and Ministry Teams

Acts 6:1–7 provides an example of the early church organizing ministry responsibilities.

Four administrative principles appear in this passage.

- The church is responsible for ministry.
- The church selects individuals for service.
- Individuals must meet qualifications for leadership.
- Leaders appoint and empower workers.

Three types of organizational groups are commonly used in churches.

Committees

Committees assist the church in planning programs and managing resources. Examples include finance, personnel, and property committees.

Councils

Councils function as advisory groups that assist church leaders in ministry areas such as education, recreation, or youth ministry.

Ministry Teams

Ministry teams carry out the practical work of the church and often include groups such as ushers, greeters, and benevolence ministries.

EXAM ANCHOR
Committees govern and plan, councils advise leaders, and ministry teams carry out ministry tasks.

X. Administration of Church Groups

Committees, councils, and ministry teams should operate under a charter.

A charter defines:

- The name of the group
- Its purpose and authority
- Membership structure
- Responsibilities
- Reporting procedures

Members of church leadership groups should demonstrate spiritual maturity, relational skills, leadership ability, communication skills, and technical expertise in their area of service.

EXAM ANCHOR
Church leadership groups should function under a charter that defines purpose, authority, and responsibilities.

XI. Conducting Effective Meetings

Acts 15 records the Jerusalem Council, which demonstrates an organized approach to church decision making.

The process included:

- Identifying a problem
- Calling a meeting
- Discussing the issue
- Reaching a decision
- Communicating the results

Effective meetings require clear purpose, preparation, appropriate participants, and structured discussion.

Robert’s Rules of Order often guide formal church meetings to ensure orderly and fair decision making.

EXAM ANCHOR

Effective meetings require preparation, clear agendas, proper participation, and structured decision making.