



Church Board Member

Introduction

Welcome to membership on the local Seventh-day Adventist church board. You have accepted an important responsibility. The church board provides a platform for pastoral staff and church members to come together and make decisions to further the mission of the Adventist church. Being a member of such a board is a weighty and honourable task.

With such an important responsibility, persons selected must individually portray in their personal and corporate life qualities of spirituality, fairness, tact, and good judgment. In addition, board members are trustees whom the constituency believes will operate in the church's best interest. You have been chosen because your church believes you exemplify these qualities.

Board Member Job Description

Together with other members of the board a member is legally and morally responsible for all activities of the congregation. It is responsible for nurturing and promoting the vision and mission of the congregation. The board is responsible for determining congregational policy, developing the annual budget, and determining the goals of the congregation.

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

1. Are accepting this responsibility willingly. Only willing members can effectively perform the services that will be necessary.
2. Are a loyal and faithful member of this Seventh-day Adventist congregation.
3. Are faithful in your stewardship responsibilities in terms of time, talent, and financial means.
4. Will seek the Lord for divine guidance and courage to make necessary decisions.
5. 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. 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. Will always remember the church's mission in making decisions.

Role of the Church Board Member

The keys for effectiveness as a church board member are respect for the process and the leader of the process – the chairperson – and respect for your fellow board members. Here are some suggestions that will enhance what you bring to the group process:



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- Participate freely in the discussion, but request recognition before speaking.
- Do not raise items that are not on the agenda.
- Speak your convictions during the meetings, not afterward.
- Carefully observe group dynamics.
- Defer to the chairperson to call for a motion before making one.
- Avoid calling “question” until discussion has matured sufficiently.
- Present reports from the front of the room or head table. Include printed format if it is a report that has been requested by the board or is a request for funding.
- Maintain a high ethical standard regarding confidentiality.
- Important decisions should be announced by the chairperson or pastor – not the members.

Suggestions to Enhance Your Contributions as a Board Member

The church board is committed to the success of your church. Your first task as a member is to review the list of every person on the board and identify their specific responsibility (i.e., why are they on the board). The next step is to cultivate relationships with your fellow members. Find ways to build relationships among board members so you can better understand the issues facing the board.

Your next responsibility is to learn about every aspect of board function. Read all available materials. Develop the reputation of being purposefully curious. As a board member, you owe it to yourself and your congregation to become familiar with all aspects of board stewardship. Review past board minutes and materials pertaining to your church board.

12 Keys to 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 to be 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



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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. Realise 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 board was chosen because you have 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 to good decision-making. If you have doubts and questions about the integrity or sincerity of any member of the board, including pastors, express it. Ask questions. Clear the air. This will make our 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 candour, 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 realise 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



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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 chairman. We hope you will realise the importance of attendance and try your very 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 Meeting

You will receive a notice of the next meeting one to four weeks in advance. At its first meeting, the board 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.

Agenda

The agenda is a very important document for the effective operation of a board. The agenda is usually developed by the pastor or pastoral team. Any member of the board should have the opportunity to include items on the agenda as long as they are appropriate to the work of the board. It is usually wise for the board meeting agenda to be circulated several days prior to the meeting so members can come prepared to speak to the substantive issues. Well-managed boards have a specific agenda and they stick to the items on the agenda.

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 subcommittee are kept in a secure location.

Budgets

Part of the work of the church board involves money. Each meeting normally includes a review of 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. Questions board members may ask include:

1. Are we meeting our budget? Ask for an explanation of significant variances.
2. Are we operating efficiently? As new systems have been added, have outmoded systems been rooted out?



3. Do we have sufficient reserves? What is the amount of working capital?
4. Are appropriate financial reports prepared and presented to the finance committee in a timely manner?
5. Do we have strong internal controls? Does the accounting system provide for the adequate separation of duties? Do the controls assure the accuracy of the financial reports?
6. Are there any tax or legal considerations of which we should be aware?
7. Are the organisation's investments managed in accordance with local conference and board-approved investment policies? How have our investments fared? What adjustments, if any, should be made in how investments are handled?

Remember legitimate questions by board members do not question the integrity of the church treasurer in their job performance.

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 favour 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.

Programme Evaluation

A major function of the church board is to evaluate the programmes of the church. The board will review all programmes and seek solutions. Programmes 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 recognise areas of need and suggest and implement programmes that will meet those needs.

Final Responsibility

In the final analysis, it is your responsibility as a board member to review all operations of your church and to act on behalf of all the members. The church board is ultimately responsible for the spiritual nurture of the church, including evangelism in all its phases. The board is also responsible for the maintenance of doctrinal purity and upholding Christian standards. Other critical functions of the board include recommending changes in church membership and managing the finances and properties of the church.

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.



Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS)

All Board Members at Newport Church are required to complete a Disclosure application form before assuming role.

Minimum Requirements of a Board Member

- A demonstrated interest in the congregation's well-being
- A desire to serve for at least one term
- Specific experience and/or knowledge in governance and structure
- Available time and willingness to attend all meetings
- Willingness to read and stay abreast of issues

What a Board as a whole brings to the Church

- Collective wisdom
- Continuity of policy
- Discerning questions
- Expertise
- Influence to attract resources
- Knowledge of the church and its mission

Disruptive Board Member meeting behaviour

- Interrupting
- Cross talk
- Not listening
- Side conversations
- Rambling
- Tardiness
- Poor preparation
- Early departure
- Noisy distractions