

SLIDE 1. Series: Big Rocks

Teaching: *How Do Things Work @ SLC?*

Date: Feb. 5, 2023

Not so long ago – I tried to make a benefit claim with our health insurance provider.

I filled in their many prescribed online boxes. I attached the relevant documentation. And I waited... and waited... and waited.

When I hadn't heard from our provider – I contacted them via email for an update on my claim. And I waited... and waited... and waited.

Almost a month later – I called them during their office hours.

I waited online for more than an hour!

When I finally got through – I was told that someone would call me back about the status of my claim – because the person I was talking to couldn't answer my question.

I'll bet you'll never guess what didn't happen! That's right – no one called me back. So, I called them back.

I waited online for more than an hour!

To have someone tell me that the reason my claim had not been processed was because I had provided them the brand name of the medicine instead of the broad category under which it belonged.

Which I wasn't told when I inquired via email. Which I wasn't told on the phone in round one.

"Can we do that right now?" I asked on the phone.

"Sure!" came the cheerful answer.

Then I asked, "What could I do differently in the future to avoid this kind of slow down on my claim?"

I was encouraged to fill out the "contact" form online. Which I did.

I was encouraged to contact them by phone. Which I did.

"So," I concluded, "I did everything I could to process this decision as efficiently as possible?"

"Yes."

Then I was told that they are short staffed – and that they are in a hiring season. I was sympathetic and expressed my thanks.

If only there was an easy button!

If only there was an easy button to make decisions in the church!

The second BIG ROCK we're going to look at in this teaching series – THE BIG ROCKS - has to do with how things work at SLC and our trust of each other in those processes.

This is how you described it in a report titled – *Big Rock Town Hall Outcomes and Discussion* – as communicated by transitional pastors Brad Julihn and Ron Toews: "It has become unclear how things work around SLC."

And while this isn't a big deal to some – who reported, "It is what it is" – it is a big deal to others.

It's a big deal for those who want clarity in their role as a member of the congregation.

It's a big deal for those who are called to lead on Council as representatives of the congregation – to know what they are called to do and not do.

It's a big deal for those who are affirmed as staff – to know the authority they have to do the work they are responsible to do.

Otherwise – people get frustrated, and trust can break down.

No one wants that. So, what can we do?

Well – let's check the Bible to see what it has to say about church governance, then look at some practical models, and then talk about how we can continue to build trust as leaders and members who make decisions and work together.

SLIDE 2. What does the bible say about church governance?

1. Jesus is the head of the church (Eph. 1:22, 5:15; Col. 1:18).

2. The local church makes its own decisions (1 Pt. 5:1-3; Acts 14:23).

3. There are 2 leadership offices: elders and deacons (Num. 11:16; Acts 20:17; 1 Tim. 3:8-10).

First – Jesus Christ is the head of the church. This is why the church is regularly referred to as the "body of Christ."

As the bible says: *He (God) put all things under his (Jesus') feet and gave him as head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22) ... we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ (Eph. 4:15) ... And he (Jesus) is the head of the body, the church (Col 1:18).*

This is why it is so important to turn to our God through Christ – as guided by the Spirit of God – in prayer – for guidance and wisdom – to lead His church with Him leading us - as we did last Fall – as we will do through this teaching series – meeting in intentional circles of prayer for a season.

To seek Jesus first – in our decision-making.

This is why praying for each other, and the church is the first thing we do in our Council meetings. This is why praying for each other, and the church is the first thing we do in our Staff meetings.

Second – that the decisions made by a local church are theirs to make – autonomously – that under Jesus – the local church should be led by *its* leaders.

This seems to be the spirit of what Peter and Paul say in 1 Pt. 5:1-3, and Acts 14:23...

*"The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God **which is among you**, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock."*

*"So, when they had appointed **elders in every church**, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed."*

"Elders... in every church... shepherd the flock which is among you..."

So – a plurality of leaders for every church – as if every church is equal to the other.

Third – that church leadership has two main offices: elders and deacons.

There are many mentions of each role throughout the bible. Here is a quick sample....

*Then the Lord said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy men of **the elders of Israel**, whom you know to be **the elders of the people** and officers over them, and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you (Num. 11:16).*

*Now from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and **called the elders of the church** to come to him (Acts 20:17).*

***Deacons** likewise must be dignified (like elders), not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them also be tested first; then let them serve ... (1 Tim. 3:8-10).*

Nice nods to the roles – but – we should ask - what do they do? In short...

Elders are the primary spiritual leaders of a church. They teach, pray, guard, guide, rebuke, protect, and love the sheep. They oversee the spiritual life of a church - as a whole.

Deacons are the primary servant leaders of a church. They assist the church in whatever is needed – ministries like – building maintenance and administration and children's and youth ministry and outreach.

The difference between these roles is illustrated in Acts 6 vv. 1-6.

The church was growing. And some widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So, the apostles/elders gathered all the disciples together to discuss the situation. The disciples chose 7 men from among them to take care of the widows. Deacons. They were presented to the apostles, who prayed and laid hands on them for service.

BTW – this is why some people are a good fit for Council (our version of elders) and some aren't. Not good or bad – just different. Different callings and gifts.

So, in summary - so far – the bible teaches that Jesus is the head of the church, local churches are autonomous decision-makers, and that they are led by elders (who oversee the spiritual health of the church) and deacons (who serve the church as needed).

Now – let's look at some practical models.

SLIDE 3. Practical Models of Church Governance

- 1. Episcopal**
- 2. Congregational**
- 3. Presbyterian**

These are 3 representative models.

And here – is an oversimplified crash course on each:

Episcopal governance is hierarchal – from priests to bishops to an archbishop who has final authority. The lines of authority are clear, but accountability can be problematic.

Congregational governance is the opposite – everyone has a voice on all matters of the church – from budget to ministries to policy to personnel. They can be plagued by division and slowness to change – and then they are often small churches.

Presbyterian governance delegates responsibility and authority to a representative. These delegated leaders can be effective – but they can also become disconnected from the rest of the congregation.

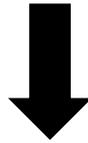
And then there is a hybrid of congregational and presbyterian... Congre-terian?!

Where the congregation's input is valued. Where the congregation is the final word in everything. Where the congregation elects and affirms members to represent them as leaders to act on their behalf. Where power is delegated and overlapping – like elders and deacons. Where there is accountability. Where there is shared visionary leadership between elders and staff.

It could look something like this...

SLIDE 4: A SIMPLE GOVERNANCE MODEL

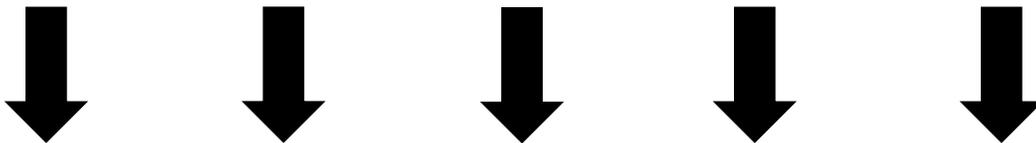
THE CONGREGATION: The congregation elects the Leadership Team as their representatives and delegates decision-making to the Team – apart from budget affirmation, the calling of a Lead Pastor, approvals of sale and purchase of property, or bylaw and constitutional changes.



THE LEADERSHIP TEAM: The Leadership Team oversees the Lead Pastor, and they work together to oversee the ministry initiatives, finances, and policies of the church, and guard the mission, vision, and values of the church. The Leadership Team then delegates the details and strategy of ministry to the pastoral staff as overseen by the Lead Pastor. The Lead Pastor is a member of this Team who is made up of dreamers, discerners, developers, detailers, disseminators, and doers*



PASTORAL STAFF: The Pastoral Staff is responsible for the day-to-day implementation of ministry as approved by the Leadership Team and as supervised by the Lead Pastor. Pastoral Staff members equip and deploy the congregation in ministries based on giftings and passion.



MINISTRY TEAMS: Ministry Teams are volunteers recruited, trained, resourced, guided, and empowered by the Pastoral Staff to lead their ministries in line with the Mission, Vision, and Values of the church and to operate within the parameters laid out by the Leadership Team.

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TEAM

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This is a model we are looking at as Council and Staff.

Please note the location and role of the congregation. It is at the top. It may not be the first word on everything – but it is the *final word* on everything – because it elects and affirms the leadership team AND it votes on crucial ministry pieces.

I point this out because I think SLC sees itself as a congregational church.

But I also think that this way of seeing yourselves has been a contributing factor to the lack of clarity as to how things work at SLC – because my sense is that “congregational” means one thing to some people, and another thing to other people.

My sense is that some of you think “congregational” means – everyone has a voice on all matters of the church. And therefore, everyone should know everything so that everyone can be informed so that everyone can decide.

But I think this falls apart. I think it can lead to breaches of confidentiality. I think it can lead to unchecked gossip. I think it can lead to mistrust – when people think they aren’t being informed (even when it is unlawful to disclose information). I think this can lead to criticalness of those affirmed to lead who necessarily have more information.

I think it can lead to division - when people gather people-support for their point of view. I think it can lead to resistance to change – because it can take too many people to make a decision – particularly if that decision needs to be unanimous.

And I think this understanding of what it means to be “congregational” really muddies the lines of authority.

Then – I have a sense that there are others who think of “congregational” like the hybrid I just spoke of – a combination of congregational and presbyterian governance models.

Quoting again from *The Big Rock Town Hall Outcomes and Discussion* report – “SLC’s congregational model isn’t what it once was. It is ever evolving, and (it) is shaped and reshaped by the experiences, understandings, and assumptions that individuals bring to it...”

...while decades ago, a general clarity seems to have existed regarding how things got done at SLC, the passage of time, a changing demographic, and the decline of functional committees, among other factors, have resulted in a diminished ability to define how SLC works.”

This happens. Things change.

Lots – if not most churches in Canada – are in a state of wondering how to move out of the BOOMERS-driven church of the 80s and 90s and early 2000s – into the next, historical iteration of church. And governance is among the things being talked about!

So – as you’ve wisely acknowledged in the report - we need to update our governance model to keep it consistent with biblical principles and to be effective in our specific situation – including role clarity for congregation, council, and staff, and functionality (ie. you should be able to draw how SLC works on the back of a SMALL napkin).

And that (pointing to the screen) is something I think might be easy enough for us to draw on the back of a small napkin.

Why is this so important? Because – it seems to me that governance – how things work in a church and how things are decided - either hinders ministry or it unleashes it.

And we want to unleash it!

We want to be as efficient and as effective as possible – to do, whatever we do, with all our hearts, as if working for the Lord – says the apostle Paul (Col. 3:17, 23-24)

In the meantime, while Council and Staff work away on a decision-making process that seems to make the most sense for us right now – maybe we can *continue* to build trust between us by:

SLIDE 5

- 1. Being transparent in our communication (Council).**
- 2. Expressing thanks to the Council for their work (Congregation).**
- 3. Being visible and accessible (Council).**
- 4. Praying for the Council (Congregation).**
- 5. Believing the best in others.**

We all want greater clarity on how things work at SLC.

We all want to be able to give and take feedback.

We all want to make decisions more efficiently and effectively.

We all want to unleash ministry.

There is no EASY BUTTON - though.

But we can “make every effort to KEEP the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).