

Staffing Structure

One of the more recent ministry discussions has been that of the preferred staffing structure. Whilst there are variations, the two basic approaches are that of the “Team Pastoring” or “Portfolio” approach; and that called the “Congregational” approach. This paper contains a brief argument for each. We are not advocating for either approach. They each have their pros and cons. Whichever approach is adopted, the point is to have clarity about which approach is pertinent to your context.

The Argument for a Team Pastoring Structure

First, we will outline the argument for the team pastoring approach. Under this approach, staff responsibilities are primarily defined according to portfolios across congregations. The so called “5M’s” model is one example, but there are others.

The primary advantage of the model is theological – giftedness. The Lord has gifted people in different ways (cf 1 Corinthians). One of the strengths of team pastoring is that respective team members (paid or lay) specialise in their area of gifting.

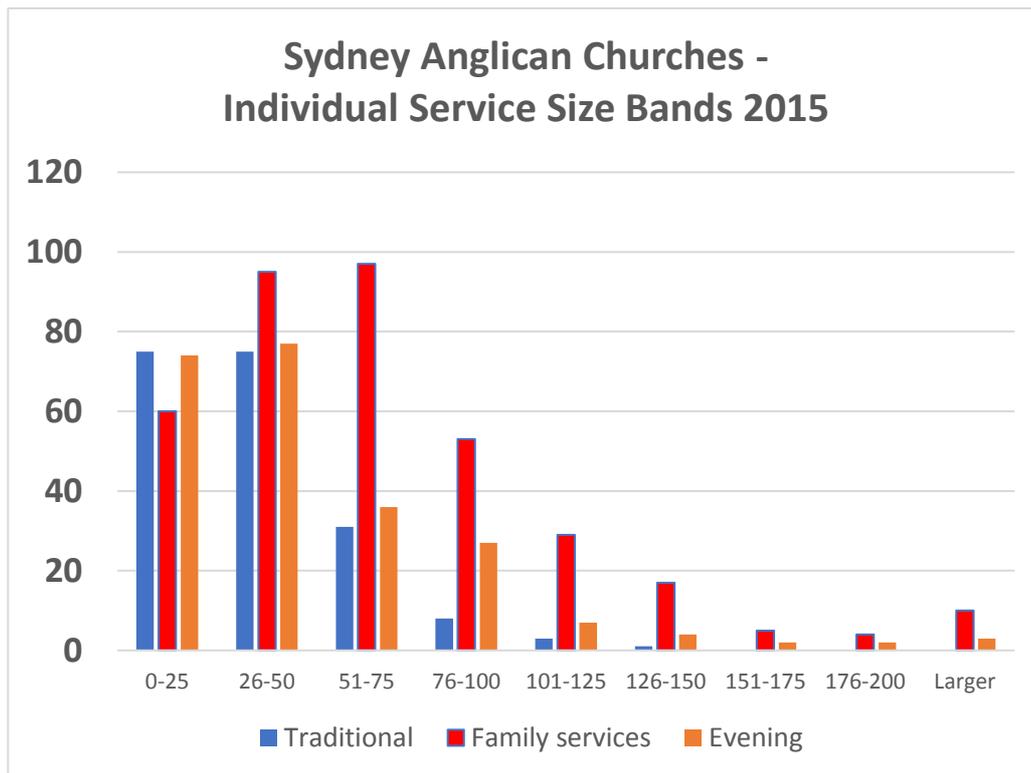
Therefore, as argued in 1 Corinthians, the whole body benefits. For example, the value of specialist youth or children’s ministers has long been recognised. They are wired and gifted to specialise in these areas, and the result is increased quality and therefore greater effectiveness for the glory of God. The same is true when it comes to other areas – music, evangelism, maturity, care, teaching ministries, etc.

Consequently, there is increased clarity to discipleship processes. It overtly seeks to do justice do all of the purposes God has for individuals in the church, and therefore the church. Breaking down the outcome promotes clearer thinking about how to biblically develop and disciple people. Sometimes this is called “moving people to the right.”

Furthermore, it is helpful to ask the question - what is a *pastor-teacher*, biblically speaking? It may be tempting to define a pastor-teacher as somewhat akin to a chaplain, with high degrees of personal contact with all aspects of an individual’s spiritual journey. However, the Apostle Paul often wrote to people that he had never met (e.g. Romans). But this did not mean that he didn’t care for the recipients’ spiritual well-being (c.f. 1 Thes. 2). It did not mean that he was ineffective in ministering to them. And, it does not mean that he was not qualified from doing so. Leading people spiritually does not necessarily hinge on tight personal relationships.

A further benefit in establishing a team pastoring structure is long term sustainability. As an example, the graph below indicates the sizes of individual services in Sydney Anglican churches (other Protestant denominations can have more difficulty centrally capturing such data).

Smaller congregations are more tightly connected relationally. If a congregation is to grow, under God, it must be less dependent, and less relationally connected, around any one person. That is, the model more easily enables scaling up.



All of this said, the difficulty in transitioning from a church with expectations of a congregational staffing approach toward a team pastoring approach must be acknowledged. Part of the difficulty is in the transitioning and the significant change management that is required for all concerned, particularly in an established church. New churches have seemed better able to begin with such a model from inception.

There are dangers of the model. It is possible for people to fall in between the cracks (though this is always a problem). People who desire strong connection with the pastor may (probably will) struggle. Team work becomes even more important, with its strengths and weaknesses, and this presses even more into the need for strong practices in staff leadership and management.

The Argument for a Congregational Pastoring Structure

The alternative staffing and church structure is often called the congregational pastoring structure. This is the structure where one pastor-teacher is responsible for a particular group of people. Rather than the locus being about any particular activity or priority, the locus of the responsibility is primarily about a congregation, for example.

The argument for such an approach starts off as **theological**. Of primary emphasis in the NT is the *relational* nature of church over and above the *functions* that it performs. Note the metaphors with which the Church is described: a flock (1 Peter 5:2); a body in which the parts all relate (1 Cor 12:12 ff); a household (1 Tim 3:15). The community nature of church is further affirmed by passages like Titus 2 where older women are to teach the younger women. All of these describe a community in relation to one another as each in turn is related to God, as opposed to a community defined by what it does and/or produces.

Second, church leaders are described in relation to these communities as a whole, rather than in terms of the functions they enable these communities to fulfill: “Be Shepherds of the flock” writes Peter (1 Peter 5:2); pastors are called to serve the body as it grows (Eph 4:12); the task of overseer is likened to that of head of the household, so much so that proven domestic capability is seen as a good indication of pastoral ability (1 Tim 3:5).

Third, leaders are called to teach, for it’s through teaching sound doctrine that the body is led to fulfil its purpose (Eph. 4:11-16).

Given this NT emphasis, it makes sense for church life and organization (including how we deploy leaders) to revolve around enhancing the community of faith, particularly through ministry of prayer and the word. The congregational staffing approach best fits this.

At an **experiential** level, the team pastoring approach is bound to allow some issues to fall in between the cracks. People always have issues that crop up that don’t fall neatly into a particular portfolio, and the (very real) risk is that no one has responsibility to assist. The congregational approach, on the other hand, prioritising the whole person means that such issues are less likely to be ignored. One observation from an older staff member was that there was a very high relational cost to a portfolio-based staffing model, and that the congregation in question was suffering on behalf of poor relationships due in large part to the staffing structure.

In addition, church members need to follow strong biblical leadership and therefore need to be sure of who the leader of their church is. This is more obvious in a congregational model of church.

Whilst it is clear that there are some functions of church that are important to do well and are worthwhile replicating across congregations it does not necessarily mean that we need to farewell a congregational model at the expense of prioritizing purpose over congregation.

Some issues to be aware of in the transition from Congregational to Team Pastoring

There has been a trend to try to transition from a congregational model to a purpose driven model and unfortunately more churches have failed than have succeeded. In our experience there are three main reasons:

1. Transitioning from one model to the other takes extraordinary change management skills and leadership. This change in structure requires a change in culture and approach to church. Most ministers do not have the capability and perseverance to achieve such a significant change and hence there are more failures than successes. NB it is much easier to adopt a new model in a church planting environment when there is the opportunity to create a new approach to church.
2. A purpose driven model requires significant leadership and implementation skills to coordinate a matrix approach to the organisational management of the church. We know that the average pastor in evangelical churches is not gifted in skills associated to implementation and operations and hence the shift to matrix management leads to failure more often than success.
3. In the case of small churches (the majority), it may be argued that it is very difficult to resource across multiple purposes from small congregations and for clergy to lead multiple purposes as well as take leadership in preaching duties. Hence it has been argued that the purpose driven model is more applicable to larger congregations.

Paper: Reflection Questions

Reflect on the material relating to the Team Pastoring Structure and the Congregational Staffing structure and then answer the below questions.

Given your ministry context, which model do you prefer?

Why do you prefer your chosen model?

What implications does it have for your selection of staff?