

CHURCH GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK



**CRC MISSIONS
INTERNATIONAL**

Contents

1	INTRODUCTION	3
2	BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE LOCAL CHURCH	3
2.1	What is the Church?	3
2.2	The Purpose of the Church	3
2.3	The Operation of the Church	3
2.4	Believers devoted themselves to:	4
2.5	The Church Inclusive and Exclusive	4
2.6	God's Equipping for the Church	4
3	BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CHURCH GOVERNANCE	5
3.1	Under the Leadership of Christ	5
3.2	Plurality of Eldership	5
3.3	Leader and the Team	6
3.3.1	The Senior Minister	6
3.3.2	The Team	6
3.3.3	Leaders and Eldership Boards	6
3.3.4	Leaders Must Work Responsibly Through Their Teams	7
4	GOVERNANCE THROUGH CHURCH HISTORY	7
4.1	National Leadership:	7
4.2	Global Accountability:	7
4.3	Collaborative Decision-Making:	7
4.4	Shared Vision and Ethics:	7
5	THE GOVERNANCE OF A LOCAL CHURCH WITHIN A NATION	8
5.1	Every CRC Church in a nation must accept and endorse:	8
5.2	Name of the Local Church	8
5.3	Leadership of the Local Church	8
5.4	Members of the Local Church	9
5.5	Voting in the Local Church	9
5.6	Managing Finance	9
5.7	Leadership Structure/Roles	9
5.8	Dispute Settlement	9
5.9	Essentials for the Church to Function	9
6	GOVERNANCE OF A NATIONAL MOVEMENT	10
6.1	Name of the National Movement	10
6.2	National Leadership	10
6.3	National Membership	10
6.4	Accountability	10
6.5	Leadership Structure/Roles	10
6.6	Dispute Settlement	10
6.7	Minister Credentials and Required Competencies	10
6.8	Raising and Managing Finances	10
7	END NOTES	11
7.1	Field Liaison	11
7.2	National Specific Requirements	11
7.3	Further Reading	11
8	ADJUNT DOCUMENTS	11

CRC MISSIONS INTERNATIONAL LOCAL CHURCH GOVERNANCE FRAMEWORK

1 INTRODUCTION

In this document we aim to discuss our Biblical understanding of

1. The Local Church
2. Church Governance
3. Church Governance Through Church History
4. The Governance of a local church within a Nation
5. The Governance of a National Movement
6. End Notes

Also attached is a sample Local Church Constitution and a National Constitution.

2 BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE LOCAL CHURCH

Jesus only referred to the church twice. Firstly, he said in Matthew 16:18 “I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” The word translated as ‘church’ in English is taken from a secular Greek Word ‘Ecclesia’, meaning called out or gathered together. Thus, we understand that Jesus meant that out of the general population “demos” He would call out and gather the ‘Ecclesia’ – the church.

The second reference is in Matthew 18:15-17. Jesus is addressing the issue of dealing with sin in the church, particularly relating to forgiveness.

In the book of Acts and the Epistles we learn a lot more about the church, as the early church is established.

2.1 What is the Church?

Scripture uses several illustrations for the church. The main ones are:

- Spiritual temple, building – Ephesians 2:19
- Body – Colossians 1:18 & 1 Corinthians 12:27
- Bride – Revelation 19:7
- His Flock, Sheep – 1 Peter 5:2; John 10:14,15
- Family/Household – Ephesians 2:20-22

2.2 The Purpose of the Church

- A dwelling place of God through the Holy Spirit – Ephesians 2:22
- To be built into a spiritual house – 1 Peter 2:5
- To be a holy priesthood – 1 Peter 2:5
- To offer spiritual sacrifices – 1 Peter 2:5
- To go and make disciples – Matthew 28:18-20
- Where each member has something to contribute – 1 Corinthians 12:12-18
- Christ is the foundation and head of the Church – Ephesians 2:20-21; 1 Corinthians 3:11, Ephesians 1:19-23

2.3 The Operation of the Church

- In one place of one accord [unity] – Acts 2:1
- Spirit-filled people – Acts 2:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:5
- Preaching the Gospel – Acts 2:22-24, 38-41, 43.
- Passionate to share the Gospel of Christ by Word as well as by example, with signs following. Bold declaration – Romans 1:16

2.4 Believers devoted themselves to:

- Bible Teaching – Acts 2:42
The early believers devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles. At the centre of the church's life was the Word of God.
- Fellowship – Acts 2:42
 - Koinonia – Greek word used in various situations.
Means togetherness, common sharing of responsibility and privilege e.g. Marriage commitment, business partnership etc.
 - When we talk of "Koinonia" in the church we talk of a body of people who are totally committed to one another for better or for worse, who share what they are and what they have for the good of others, and who accept the disciplines and submit freely to the authority of the leadership in the church.

What is the basis for fellowship?

1John 1:

Vs 3a The Word – not personalities, common ideas, interests, age groups etc.

Vs 3b Our Relationship with God

Horizontal will not flow without the vertical

Vs 6,7 Our walk in the light

Open fellowship with one another.

- Breaking of Bread
Acts 2:42,46
Large group gatherings (Celebration Services) and Small Groups (home groups) – both essential.
Shared meals together
Shared in Communion together
- Prayer
Acts 2:42
They prayed! – Acts 4:24-31
Dependent on God
Confident in the power of God to work

2.5 The Church Inclusive and Exclusive

Inclusive – Ephesians 2:17-19; 3:4-6

Exclusive – 1 John 5:11-13; Acts 4:10

2.6 God's Equipping for the Church

Ephesians 4:11-13 NLT

Ministry gifts to equip or prepare God's people

- For works of service
 - So that the body of Christ may be built up
 - Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.
 - To become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
- What is mature?

The Word of God transforms us, first in mind, then in behaviour Titus 2:1-10

3 BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF CHURCH GOVERNANCE

3.1 Under the Leadership of Christ

Ephesians 5:23 – Christ is the head of the Church

Colossians 2:10 – Christ the head over every power and authority.

3.2 Plurality of Eldership

The New Testament teaches that there is a plurality of leadership in each local church.

We see a picture of Ministry Gifts and Elderships working together in loving unity to advance the cause of Christ through the local churches.

Ministry Gifts: Ephesians 5:4:11-16

Elderships: Acts 11:29-30; Acts 15:2,4,6,22-23; Acts 20:28-35; Acts 21:17-19; Philippians 1:1; 1Thessalonians 5:12-13; 1Timothy 3:1-7; 5:17-20; Titus 1:5-9; 1Peter 5:1-4; Hebrews 13:17; James 5:4.

We understand a differentiation between people who are specially gifted to operate a specific ministry role in the church; with others whose character qualification seems to be the predominant issue if they are to be on the government Eldership body of a church. (1Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Some people like Peter and John operate as ministry gifts (i.e. apostles) and can also be Elders in a governmental/leadership sense within a local church (1Peter 5:1-3; 3John 1:1).

THE ROLE OF ELDERS

The New Testament is clear that the church is to be led by a plurality of godly leaders under the oversight and watchful of Elders. The Elders are given ultimate responsibility and authority to see:

- that the church remains on a true course biblically,
- that its members are being appropriately shepherded,
- that the body is being fed through insightful and accurate biblical teaching,
- and that the life of the church is being well managed with the assistance of other competent and godly leaders.
- They are to care about the spiritual and physical well-being of members, regularly praying for the sick.
- They are to guard the body against harmful influences, confronting those who are contradicting biblical truth or who are continuing in patterns of sinful behaviour.
- In doing so, they are to keep closing potential entrances for Satan so that the truth of Christ will remain credible to both the congregation and the community.
- Scripture indicates that the ultimate decision-making authority in the church rests with the Elders. (1Peter 5:1-4; Acts 20:28-31; Titus 1:9; James 5:14)

In response to the biblical pattern of leadership, members of the body are taught in Scripture to lovingly support their leaders and submit to their leadership. (Hebrews 13:7,17,24; 1Thessalonians 5:12-13; Acts 15:2,4,6,22-33; Acts 21:17-19)

It is clear that Ministry Gifts like Paul, Barnabas and Titus appointed Elders, and we can assume that they also had spiritual authority to terminate those appointments. (Acts 14:21-23; Titus 1:5)

3.3 Leader and the Team

“Every team needs a leader, and every leader needs a team”.

The Senior Minister must lead the other ministry gifts (Pastors) and Elders in the church.

3.3.1 The Senior Minister

Leaders should grow according to God's calling and gifting. Those whom the risen Christ calls into leadership of his church (Ephesians 4:11-12) must be allowed to flow and flourish and be as fruitful as possible for God's glory.

They should be fully released to outwork at least the following four key tasks:

- To cast the long-term strategic vision of the church.
- To set the short-term spiritual directions and goals for the church.
- To personify the core values and the ministry style of the church.
- To be the main teacher/preacher of the Word.

Consistent with the New Testament concept of spiritual gifts, the Senior minister, like any member of the body, is uniquely gifted and should seek to minister primarily within their gift area.

In addition to their pastoring role as an elder, the Senior Minister is primarily responsible to be a teacher of the Word of God and to provide strategic leadership and vision to the body. Their goal is to help mature believers through insightful and accurate presentations of biblical truth, equipping them to be the true 'ministers' in the body. They must strive to teach and lead by word and example, and they must stress both the understanding and the application of God's truth.

3.3.2 The Team

The team must allow the leader to fully express their leadership gifts and to become as big as God wants them to be.

Every team must have a leader and therefore team members need to:

- Sublimate their own personal leadership ambitions
- Work under leaders and assist and support them in their leadership role.
- Cover the leader's lacks and weaknesses and never expose their nakedness.

Teams only work well, however, when they sincerely and wholeheartedly submit to good leaders and respect the God-given call upon the Senior Minister's life.

If a team member cannot operate like this, they need to step aside at the most appropriate time, to ensure that unity and love prevail, and the church is protected.

Submission does not mean that team members should have an unhealthy and slavish unthinking devotion to a leader's every opinion and whim. Loyalty to a leader can operate within an environment where rigorous discussion, debate and even disagreements can take place before a decision is made. It is more than permissible for team members to agree to disagree agreeably from time to time.

3.3.3 Leaders and Eldership Boards.

The Senior Minister

The CRC reaffirms the ministerial credentials of all its ministers on a yearly basis, as we believe that the New Testament teaches that all ministry positions (Senior Minister, Associate Minister, Assistant Minister and Elder) can continue only on the basis of a functioning and fruitful ministry. This means there are no lifelong appointments.

This is the only way a local church can operate with real spiritual effectiveness and genuine integrity.

The Team (Eldership, Oversight)

Teams should only over-rule the leader or terminate their leadership of the church if they wilfully violate clearly defined standards in the five crucial areas that our entire denominational family has agreed upon:

- Morality – wilfully violating our accepted sexual purity standards
- Money – wilfully violating our accepted financial ethical standards
- Ministry – wilfully violating our accepted relational purity standards
- Doctrine – wilfully violating our accepted Biblical purity standards
- The Law – wilfully violating our accepted civic/legal purity standards

3.3.4 Leaders Must Work Responsibly Through Their Teams

Leaders must learn to express their leadership through a team and avoid being a “one person” show.

Therefore, the leader must also allow the team members to grow as big as God wants them to grow in their personal ministry and leadership role within the church. Leaders should do all in their power to facilitate the full development of their team’s talents and gifts and coordinate their individual ministries into a purposeful and united team.

Plurality of leadership is the way of our CRC Churches, and every leader needs a team as much as every team needs a leader.

It is imperative that all spiritual leaders (and particularly Senior Ministers and their Eldership Boards) be constant learners. This involves really learning the lessons that come from experience; and even more importantly, learning the lessons that come from other people’s experiences.

Therefore, great books, timely in-service seminars and leadership courses with a practical orientation are priceless.

All Senior Ministers and Elders need to be personally growing in their leadership capacity and skills by inculcating new learning from excellent leaders/authors. It’s also good practice for Eldership and Ministry Staff to work through some key books that will really be helpful in their important team roles.

4 GOVERNANCE THROUGH CHURCH HISTORY

Understanding the CRC Missions International governance structure in relationship to other church denominations. Key Characteristics of CRC Missions International Governance:

4.1 National Leadership:

Each nation is to have a legally recognized entity or NGO with its own National Constitution, ensuring governance is contextually relevant and accountable to local laws.

4.2 Global Accountability:

All Fields are accountable to the CRC International Charter with input from a Nation and Global Liaison. In the establishment phase, reporting to CRC Missions International, the Australian International Missions Team (AIMT).

4.3 Collaborative Decision-Making:

When the Mission Field becomes established by having its own legal entity (NGO). Major leadership appointments and policies require input and approval from credentialed pastors by its National Executive in the nation and collaboration with its Nation and Global Liaisons.

4.4 Shared Vision and Ethics:

The CRC Movement adheres to the CRC International Charter, which unites all CRC Pastors, and Spiritual Institutions in vision, values, and ethical standards.

The following chart helps to provide a clearer visual placement of CRC Missions International's and the CRC Movement governance relative to other denominational structures.

Governance Model	Denominations	Key Features	CRC Missions International
Episcopal (Hierarchical)	Anglican, Catholic, Orthodox	Centralized authority with bishops overseeing regions; clergy appointed by hierarchy.	Not applicable. CRC operates with decentralized, collaborative governance rather than a strict hierarchical model.
Presbyterian (Elder-Led)	Presbyterian, Reformed	Governance by a representative group of elders; regional and national synods for decision-making.	Similar. CRC governance aligns with this model in its National Leadership Team structure and collaboration across regions.
Congregational (Autonomous)	Baptist, United Church of Christ, Independent Churches	Each local church governs itself independently; decisions made by congregation.	Partially applicable. CRC churches are locally governed but accountable to CRC International Charter and the CRC Movement.
Connectional (Network-Based)	CRC Missions International, Assemblies of God, CRC Churches International	Collaborative networks with national and global leadership; shared vision and accountability.	CRC Missions International fits here. Combines local autonomy with input from National and Global Liaison structures.
Mixed Governance (Hybrid)	Methodist, Lutheran, Pentecostal	Elements of hierarchy and local autonomy; decisions shared between central authority and local churches.	Partially applicable. CRC uses a hybrid approach, balancing local leadership with adherence to the CRC International Charter.

5 THE GOVERNANCE OF A LOCAL CHURCH WITHIN A NATION

Every local church in time should establish their own legal entity (NGO), and local constitution, and Leadership Team, and Local Executive. The timing of this will vary considerably between different nations.

5.1 Every CRC Church in a nation must accept and endorse:

- The CRC National Constitution of that nation
- The International Charter of the CRC

5.2 Name of the Local Church

Varied local names may be used but it must be clearly displayed that the church is a member church of the CRC Churches, or whatever the name of the movement is within that nation.

5.3 Leadership of the Local Church

The first Senior Minister will be recognised by virtue of their ministry gift that has enabled there to pioneer the church. Future Senior Ministers will be appointed by the agreement of the Elders in the local church and approval of the National Executive of that nation. Endorsement should also be given by the Field Supporter.

Other leaders in the church are to be appointed by the Eldership Team after careful prayer and recognition of the fruitfulness of the person concerned.

All leaders must be members of the local church and clearly committed to the leader and the church.

5.4 Members of the Local Church

The members of the local church are those people from the general community who have met the requirements of membership and officially joined that local church. The church must always be open to anybody in the community to attend, but the members are those who have met the membership requirements and been approved by the Eldership.

Normal membership requirements are:

- Born Again
- Baptised in water
- Baptised in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues.
- Contribute by giving Tithes and Offerings
- Accept the leadership functioning in the church
- Received Duty of Care training
- Accept the CRC International Charter

5.5 Voting in the Local Church

General operation is decided by the leadership team.

- The members must confirm acceptance of the annual finance report.
- If there is any changes to the church Constitution the Field Liaison will be notified 6 week before the meeting where members must vote with 80% in favour for the change

5.6 Managing Finance.

All finance must be handled by two unrelated people who have a good reputation of being honest, managing their own finances well and paying all their bills on time.

5.7 Leadership Structure/Roles

See attached Local Church Constitution

5.8 Dispute Settlement

See attached Local Church Constitution

5.9 Essentials for the Church to Function

- Integrity
- No self-seeking
- Humility
- Loyalty
- Forgiveness
- Unity

6 GOVERNANCE OF A NATIONAL MOVEMENT

Each nation recognized as a CRC Member Field must establish its own legal entity (NGO) with a National Constitution to ensure sound governance in the context of that nation. This constitution must include a statement affirming acceptance and endorsement of the CRC International Charter, which unites us with a shared vision, ethical standards, and ministerial values.

6.1 Name of the National Movement

The preferred name is *CRC Churches International – [Country]*. However, in cases where this is not feasible, a name as close as possible to this designation is acceptable.

6.2 National Leadership

The initial National Leader is recognized by their gifting, demonstrated through their ability to establish and grow the movement in their nation. While this is not intended to be a lifelong appointment, it is anticipated the individual will continue to lead while their gifting remains evident.

Future appointments of a National Leader will be decided by a majority vote of officially credentialed pastors within the nation. If a leadership transition occurs before the church becomes a full CRC member nation, the Field Supporter must endorse the new appointment.

A National Team, comprising experienced credentialed pastors, will assist the National Leader. The National Constitution must specify the frequency of National Team meetings, with an annual minimum.

The National Leader is encouraged to maintain the partnership with the CRC church that initially supported their inclusion in the CRC Movement. They may also take on the role of Field Liaison to facilitate communication and reporting between the nation and the Global Liaison.

6.3 National Membership

Once the CRC entity (NGO) is legally operational, future members of the CRC Church within that nation will be officially recognized as credentialed pastors by the national entity (NGO).

6.4 Accountability

Pastors in the Missions field would then be accountable to the National Leadership Team through their credential. They are also accountable to their local church eldership and are expected to collaborate with the Global CRC Movement.

6.5 Leadership Structure/Roles

Refer to the sample National Model Constitution.

6.6 Dispute Settlement

Refer to the sample National Model Constitution.

6.7 Minister Credentials and Required Competencies

Refer to the *Minister, Country X Competencies*.

6.8 Raising and Managing Finances

Refer to the sample National Model Constitution.

7 END NOTES

7.1 Field Liaison

Each field should have a Field Liaison, typically the CRC Pastor who initially partnered to bring the Field nation into the CRC Movement. Once the nation is legally established, the National Leader often assumes this role.

The Field Liaison is responsible for facilitating communication between the nation and the Global Liaison, who in turn reports to the Australian International Missions Team (AIMT). Together, we fulfill the CRC mission to “reach every nation by 2045” as inspired by *Matthew 28:19-20*: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

7.2 National Specific Requirements

Each country has specific legal requirements for constitutions, often involving financial reporting, child protection and safety, and licensing for weddings etc. These requirements must be incorporated into the constitution as required by the nation.

While government-recommended constitutions often lean toward congregational governance models, CRC Churches must responsibly define their form of government to align with our biblical and operational principles.

7.3 Further Reading

For additional guidance, the following resources are available on the CRC Churches International website:

- *Lead Ministers and Eldership Boards – Operational Guidelines* by Pastor Bill Vasilakis
- *Biblical Stability* by Pastor Bill Vasilakis

8 ADJUNT DOCUMENTS

- Sample Local Church Constitution
- Sample National Constitution
- CRC Missions International Local & National Competencys.

As we adhere to these frameworks, we are reminded of the Apostle Paul’s words in *1 Corinthians 14:40*: “But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.” By maintaining sound governance and unified vision, we honour God’s call to advance His kingdom effectively and responsibly in every nation.

