

CAMPUS MINISTRY BOARDS

“Having the right board members will, in the end, help your institution resonate with service and overflow with activities. The proper board sustains your mission and ensures your future.” Jerry Panas, FINDERS KEEPERS

A carefully selected, adequately oriented, fully empowered, duly appreciated board ⁽¹⁾ is one of the most important components of a dynamic campus ministry. Although those who serve on boards are often looked upon as heavenly gifts, who come from nowhere completely trained and committed to the mission at hand, the reality is that most board members enter the fray of our ministries with very human gifts. Yes, we hope that they have experience on other boards or local church councils. We expect that they have some grasp of our mission on campus. We anticipate that they will be able to contribute something in the areas of finance, personnel or facilities management. But when individuals become board members, they bring along their fears, failures, frustrations, former experiences and, usually, large information vacuums that have to be filled by careful training and sharing of the ministry’s vision.



WHAT IS A BOARD?

A Board of Directors is a legal entity created to operate an organization. It is legally responsible for the supervision and operation of this organization, in this case the agency for campus ministry. It functions as a unit, not as a collection of individual members; outside a board meeting, a member is the same as any other ministry constituent with no authority to speak or act on behalf of the governing entity—the board. A board is usually the incorporated agency established by the formation of a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit corporation. In most states an annual report is required to remain in good standing as a corporation. In the Articles of Incorporation the duties of board members are described in general terms. Bylaws offer more specific details for board operation, delineating times of meetings, number of members and the procedure for their election, duties of officers. etc.

A board is incorporated to limit liability. In case of mismanagement, only the corporation can be sued, not individual members or “sponsors” (as in the case of synods). Legally a board has responsibilities in three areas:⁽²⁾

1. The Duty of Obedience

The duty of obedience requires board members to be faithful to the organization’s mission. Although board members may exercise their own judgment concerning how the organization should best meet its mission, they are not permitted to act in a way that is inconsistent with the central goals of the ministry. The rationale for this rule is based in part on the fact that

1. The term “board” is used here generically. Many campus ministries will have a council, coordinating committee, directing council or planning council, but they will function for the most part in similar ways.

2. From *The Legal Obligations of Nonprofit Boards: A Guidebook for Board Members*, by Jacqueline Covey Leifer and Michael B. Glomb, © National Center for Nonprofit Boards, 1996.

nonprofits rely heavily on the public's trust when soliciting donations and grants, and the public has a right to rely on the representation that the money will be used for the purpose for which it was given. There is a general rule, for example, that only Lutherans serve as voting members on Lutheran campus ministry boards. Those with other affiliations or commitments may serve in an advisory capacity, because they are not bound by the duty of obedience.

2. The Duty of Care

The duty of care describes the level of competence that is expected of a board member. Although historically there has been considerable debate about whether the standard of care for a nonprofit organization should differ from that of a for-profit corporation, today it is fairly settled that the standard of care is the same. The most commonly expressed standard is that a board member owes the duty of "care that an ordinarily prudent person would exercise in a like position and under similar circumstances." From the beginning of their term, the board member must be actively involved in the management of the agency. Before votes are taken, the member must question, probe and analyze before making judgment. Regular minutes and financial reports must be kept and understood. While not attempting to micro-manage the ministry and the work of the staff persons, board members are expected to have a solid grasp of the large picture and be accountable for how the ministry functions and is funded.

3. The Duty of Loyalty

The duty of loyalty is a standard of faithfulness to the organization. The fundamental duty of loyalty owed by a board member is the duty to give undivided allegiance to the organization when making decisions affecting the organization. This means that there should not be any conflict of interest between the board member and the campus ministry staff person (where the member may be related to the staff person or a close personal friend, for example) or between the member and the ministry (where the member as a contractor enters a bid to remodel the ministry facility, for example).

WHAT ARE BOARD RESPONSIBILITIES?

Campus ministry boards generally function on behalf of synods and the ELCA nationally. In many areas local board members are nominated by the agency, but appointed formally by the synods and/or state agencies. In town-gown settings they may also represent the congregation, although they still have accountability to the wider church.

In general, board responsibilities include:

- Development and maintenance of the campus ministry, including the oversight of the agency's nonprofit status, issuance of annual reports, keeping of records and evaluations of the board's work and, perhaps most important, the creation of a vision for the ministry.

Board members are expected to contribute financially to the ministry, at whatever level they are able, above and beyond the time they commit. They should be the first to give in response to the special needs of the campus ministry. Board members are

expected to be good stewards of what God has given them and to invite others to share their gifts with the ministry as well.

- Election of professional staff, including the guidance, support and evaluation of staff in the exercise of their ministry. The board makes provision for adequate salary and other benefits and oversees continuing education. Along with the staff person, the board attends to the hiring of support services and the writing of job descriptions.
- Ownership, maintenance and improvement of facilities for ministry. Although staff may have day-to-day responsibility for building use and care, board members are responsible for long-term care and for providing adequate space for the ministry to function. If capital improvements need to be made, the board will work closely with the Deployed Director and NLCM, Inc. to see that funds are available or secured.
- Interpretation to congregations and other constituents. Board members are front-line interpreters of the ministry, in part because they know it well. Board members appointed by the synod have a responsibility to report to the synod on a regular basis in writing or in person.

HOW DO BOARDS BECOME EFFECTIVE?

As with most things, becoming an effective board member involves training, practice and continual evaluation. At the point of recruitment, care should be given to match the organizational needs of the ministry with the gifts of potential board members. What are the gaps to be filled? Does the board need someone with legal expertise, financial strengths, organizational skills, personnel abilities, or visioning capabilities? An expert in the nonprofit world offers these 10 suggestions:⁽³⁾

1. Rebalance the recruitment equation. Recruit from a sense of pride in the organization. Don't minimize the seriousness or the time commitment required. Let people know that they are wanted and that they are important.
2. Develop a board recruitment matrix. Along one axis include the skills, experience, gender, ethnicity/race, age, etc. that are appropriate for a well-rounded board. Along the other axis, chart the gifts and expertise of current board members. Then work on recruiting to fill the obvious needs.
3. Develop and implement a recruitment policy and process. People need to know how it is that they were invited to be on your board and why others may have been excluded.
4. Dissolve the Nominating Committee and replace it with a Board Development Committee. The latter has a larger mandate that makes it responsible for recruiting, cultivating, enlisting, monitoring, encouraging, orienting and (heaven forbid!) de-enlisting members. This committee develops the board handbook and sees to it that the board has an annual goal-setting and evaluation process in place.
5. Prepare and approve a board member job description.
6. Do prospecting for board members, using the board matrix.
7. In the recruitment and enlistment process, don't focus only on the expertise each person will bring. Focus, as well, on the mission and vision of the ministry and the passion that potential members will bring to it.

3. Kay Sprinkel Grace, author of *Beyond Fund Raising*.

8. A thriving board is one that is truly involved. Avoid rubber stamping important decisions. Trust the board with serious matters and take their opinions seriously. Give board members things to do and a reason to show up at meetings.
9. Board meetings must be relevant, interesting, marked by dialogue and discussion and should never be a waste of time. A board calendar and published agenda prior to the meeting are very helpful. Perhaps have a “mission message” at each meeting, asking someone to talk about why the mission of the organization is important to them. Have at least one “hot” item to work on at every meeting.
10. Celebrate the board and help them to feel personally connected to the organization and to each other. An annual retreat helps this process. Having a current member serve as a “friend” or “mentor” may ease the time when asking “dumb questions” or not knowing another soul seems stressful. Find ways to periodically say “thank you” to board members and acknowledge them when their term of service is ended.

AN INVITATION TO DANCE!



The interrelationship between board members, professional staff, congregations and synods, the national church, and all those who are involved in the ministry as students, faculty, parents and friends may sometimes seem like an unruly mob, milling about with no particular purpose or direction. The board is central to creating a vision for the ministry and helping others join in supporting that vision. It's not unlike an invitation to dance.

First, those who want to participate need to agree on the music. We need to feel its beat together, learn to sway to its rhythm, individually and collectively. Imagine trying to do a foxtrot or swing dance to a tango beat. Vision and a sense of common mission create this kind of musical beat for an organization. It gets everyone involved in the same kind of dance and surrounds us with a common sound.

But it's not enough to feel the beat, you have to know where to put your feet. The large vision is important, however those who dance together have to know where to step, how to plan strategically, how to set realizable, smaller goals, and how to move from point A to point B with careful planning and attentive implementation of those plans. Partners in ministry have to walk together, move together, work together to make the dance work. It involves coordination, awareness and style.

But that's not enough either. Along with feeling the beat together and knowing the steps, you have to know how to hold your partner. Essential human courtesies such as listening, compassion, forgiveness, care and encouragement will build up the relationships of board members and form them into partners and colleagues instead of competitors and isolated individuals. Board work in the church is being about the work of the body of Christ. It is a careful, serious, yet joyful, calling to move on together for the sake of the gospel. An invitation to serve as a board member is an invitation to dance, and in this dance we are servants of each other as Christ was the servant of all.