



M I C H I G A N
M I N I S T R Y
N E T W O R K

HEALTHY PASTOR/BOARD RELATIONSHIPS PLAYBOOK

Leading a church is a divine calling, honor, and privilege. It is also a very large responsibility both spiritually and practically. God has designed His church to function as a body with each member doing their part to keep the church healthy and growing.

God also provides oversight for His local churches in pastors and official boards. Together, they bear the load of leading the church. They are to steward finances and resources well. They make hard decisions, implement vision, and create healthy culture.

Most church conflict is a result of somebody being upset with a change or decision they don't like because they feel like they "own" the church. But when the pastor and board, together, lead in unity, led by the Holy Spirit, and with the understanding the church belongs to God, great things can happen.

This playbook is not focused on the practical responsibilities of the pastor and board or how to operate a church. The emphasis is on healthy pastor/board relationships and for each to understand their role in leading the church.

When the relationships between the pastor and board are healthy and thriving, the church is likely to be healthy and thrive.

As you go through this playbook, pray that God would speak to your heart and help you thrive in the role and assignment He has you in.

SECTION 1 - GENERAL PRINCIPLES

1. The Church Is Not Just a Corporation

The church is a family, a body, a flock, and a temple.

It is never described in Scripture as a corporation. Good governance matters, but relationships matter more.

There are four relationships that matter most -

- **Pastor and Christ:** The pastor must follow Jesus first.
- **Board and Christ:** Board members must seek God's will before personal preferences.
- **Pastor and Board:** Trust must be intentionally cultivated.
- **Church and Mission:** Everyone must remain focused on reaching people and making disciples.

Imagine a rowboat. If the pastor rows one direction and the board rows another, the boat simply spins in circles. If the board refuses to row, the boat drifts. If the pastor refuses counsel, the boat may hit rocks.

But when the pastor and board pull together under the Lordship of Christ, the church moves forward toward its God-given mission.

2. Remember Whose Church It Is

This may seem obvious, but it is easy for pastors, board members, and congregants to forget.

The church belongs to Christ: "I will build my church..." (Matthew 16:18)

The Church **does not** belong to the pastor, the board, the founding families, or the largest donors.

That's why every leadership decision should begin with:

"What would most honor Christ and advance His mission?"

When leaders remember they are stewards rather than owners, humility increases.

3. The Church Is a Spiritual Organism Before It Is an Organization

Good policies matter. Good bylaws matter. Good finances matter. But none of those replace prayer, faith, and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Some boards spend more time discussing copier leases than lost souls.

Healthy churches keep ministry and mission at the center of every discussion.

A good question for every board meeting:
"How does this help us make disciples?"

4. Unity Does Not Mean Uniformity

Healthy leadership teams do not always agree: The goal is not identical opinions. The goal is a shared commitment to Christ and His mission.

If handled appropriately, disagreement often improves decisions. The early church leaders disagreed strongly at times yet remained united around the Gospel.

A mature board understands: We can disagree without becoming disagreeable.

5. The Pastor Is Not Called to Do Everything

Many pastors burn out because they confuse responsibility with ownership. The pastor is responsible for leadership. The pastor is not responsible to personally perform every ministry function.

In Exodus 18, Moses was trying to carry everything himself. Jethro essentially said: "What you are doing is not good."

Pastors today need the same reminder.
Healthy pastors delegate, develop leaders, trust others, release ministry

6. Board Members Should Be Spiritual Leaders First

Some churches select board members based upon business success, longevity, and even financial giving.

While those qualities may help, the primary qualification should be spiritual maturity. The best board member is not necessarily the most successful businessperson.

The best board member is a person who walks with God, loves people, protects unity, and values scripture.

Character always outweighs competence.

7. The Pastor's Family Is Part of the Ministry Equation

This is one of the most overlooked leadership principles. A church may love its pastor and unintentionally neglect the pastor's family.

Board members should periodically ask:

"How is your spouse doing?" "How are your children doing?"

A healthy pastor at home is more likely to be a healthy pastor in ministry.

8. Protect the Church's Culture

Culture often determines success more than programs.

Healthy church culture includes prayer, evangelism, generosity, honor, service, and unity.

Every decision either strengthens or weakens culture. Pastors and boards are culture guardians.

9. Don't Mistake Activity for Fruitfulness

Busy churches are not always healthy churches.

Healthy churches evaluate things like life change, discipleship, spiritual growth, leadership development, and evangelism.

The question is not: "How much are we doing?"

The question is: "Are lives being transformed?"

10. Learn the Difference Between Principles and Preferences

This alone would solve most church conflicts. Church conflicts are often preference issues disguised as spiritual concerns.

Principles never change. Biblical truth. Moral standards. Doctrine.

Preferences may change. Music style. Service format. Ministry methods. Decorations.

Wise leaders fight for principles and hold preferences loosely.

11. The Most Important Item on the Agenda Is Prayer

Acts 13 records leaders worshipping and praying before major decisions.

Too often prayer becomes a formality. Healthy boards spend meaningful time seeking God. Prayer changes the atmosphere of leadership.

A church led only by human wisdom will eventually reach human limits.

12. The Church Must Be More Concerned About the Next Generation Than Its Own Comfort

The church exists for the lost, the next generation, and future disciples.

Churches that focus exclusively on keeping current members comfortable often decline.

Every healthy church eventually asks:

"What must we do to reach those who are not here yet?"

13. Succession Begins Long Before Retirement

Every pastor should be developing leaders. Every board should be identifying future leaders. Healthy churches prepare for the future. Leadership development should never stop.

Ask the question, "If our key leaders are gone tomorrow, who is being prepared to step in?"

14. Trust Is Built Slowly and Lost Quickly

Many churches spend years building trust and lose it in a single event.

Trust grows through: Consistency, transparency, integrity, and communication.

Trust erodes through: Secrets, surprises, broken promises, and defensiveness.

Most leadership problems are communication problems before they become conflict problems. Communicate earlier than feels necessary.

15. Leave a Legacy, Not Just a Building

At the end of ministry, few people remember things like budgets, carpet colors, and committee reports.

People do remember things like salvations, baptisms, discipleship, restored marriages, missionaries sent, and lives transformed.

The legacy of a church is not what it accumulated but what it accomplished for the Kingdom of God.

SECTION 2 – FOR THE PASTOR

1. The Pastor's Primary Responsibilities

Vision The pastor is the primary vision caster. Without vision people drift. Without leadership ministries become disconnected.

Teaching A church can only grow as far as its biblical understanding grows.

Pastors must continually teach doctrine, values, mission, and spiritual maturity.

Equipping Ephesians 4 teaches that pastors are not called to do all the ministry.

They are called to prepare others for ministry.

A successful pastor is not measured by how much they accomplish personally but by how many people they equip successfully.

2. Leading With Authority but Without Control

"Lead the church with conviction, but never as its owner."

"Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care... not lording it over those entrusted to you but being examples to the flock." - 1 Peter 5:2-3

Notice that Peter says the flock is entrusted to the pastor, not owned by the pastor.

Understand the Difference Between Authority and Control

Authority is Granted by God Biblical authority comes from God's calling and God's gifting.

Authority can be cultivated through relationships.

People follow because they trust your leadership, not merely because they recognize your title.

Control comes from fear. Whether it's fear of failure, fear of criticism, or fear of losing influence, when pastors become fearful, they often tighten their grip rather than deepen their trust in God.

A shepherd uses a staff. A cowboy drives cattle with force.

Scripture consistently portrays pastors as shepherds, not cattle drivers.

3. Lead Like Jesus

Jesus was both the Lion and the Lamb. He cleansed the temple and He washed feet.

The greatest leader in history described Himself as a servant. But strength and humility are not opposites. They are partners.

The more a pastor becomes like Christ, the less they need to control people.

a. Lead Through Influence Influence Lasts Longer Than Authority

Titles open doors. Character keeps them open. People may initially follow your position. Eventually they follow your character.

Influence Is Built through Consistency, Integrity, Competence, and Compassion

b. Build Trust Before You Need It

Trust Functions Like a Bank Account Every honest conversation makes a deposit. Every broken promise makes a withdrawal.

Trust Is Built Through transparency, consistency, humility, and honesty.

During difficult seasons or decisions, people are more comfortable following leaders they trust.

c. Strong Leaders Are Secure Leaders

Secure leaders listen well. They understand that not every question is a challenge and not every disagreement is rebellion. They know that sometimes questions produce better decisions.

Secure Leaders Share Credit. Insecure leaders need recognition, but secure leaders celebrate team victories.

Barnabas consistently elevated others. He encouraged Paul. He defended John Mark. His security strengthened the church.

d. The Longer a Pastor Serves, the More Important Humility Becomes

Long-tenured pastors face unique temptations. They know the history, the people and the systems. Over time they may begin believing they are indispensable. But no leader is indispensable.

That's why it's important that healthy long-term pastors continually listen, learn, adapt, and develop successors.

4. Relationship with the board

a. Never Surprise Your Board: Few things damage trust more than learning vital information after the congregation already knows.

b. Invite Wisdom: The board exists partly because no pastor sees everything. God often speaks through collective wisdom.

Moses nearly burned out until Jethro provided counsel. Strong leaders seek wisdom before crisis arrives.

c. Remember You Lead Volunteers: volunteers cannot be managed like employees

Employees work for compensation. Volunteers work because they believe in the mission. The stronger the relationship, the stronger the commitment.

Understand that volunteers need appreciation, purpose, clarity, and encouragement. People will do more for a vision they believe in than for a command they resent.

Jesus recruited disciples through invitation. "Follow me." He did not coerce them.

5. Understand Board Dynamics

Every board has encouragers, processors, visionaries, detail people, cautious members, and faith-filled dreamers.

The pastor/chairman learns how each member contributes. He values those differences rather than trying to make everyone think alike. Diversity, guided by shared mission and mutual respect, strengthens decision-making.

6. Major Decisions Require Major Communication

Larger decisions require greater communication.

Some examples of larger decisions are building projects, staffing changes, financial campaigns, or constitutional revisions.

People can often accept tough decisions if they are informed and can understand the reason behind them. People resist what they do not understand.

When you start to feel like you have over communicated, it's probably close to being just the right amount of communication.

SECTION 3 – FOR THE BOARD

1. Understand Your Role

- a. Board Members Are Stewards** Board members do not own the church. They serve as caretakers of what belongs to Christ.
- b. Support Without Control** "Protect the church without possessing the church."

A trustee protects the assets of another. Likewise, board members protect Christ's church.

Instead of asking: "How can I get my preference adopted?"
Ask: "What is best for God's church?"

- c. The Board Is Not Management** Governance Is Different Than Administration

Governance focuses on direction, accountability, and stewardship.

Administration focuses on daily operations, scheduling and ministry execution.

A board decides whether the ship is on course. The captain determines how to navigate today's waters.

d. Support Your Pastor Pastors Carry Invisible Weight

Many board members see the visible ministry. What they may not see are church conflicts, family crises, financial concerns, spiritual burdens. Board members can provide practical support for their pastor by praying regularly, encouraging often, speaking positively, protecting their reputation, and blessing their family.

Aaron and Hur held up Moses' arms during battle. The board should do the same for pastoral leadership.

e. Spiritual Leadership Team The Board Must Be More Than a Business Committee

Many churches fail because meetings become financial and more focused on business matters rather than spiritual matters.

Boards should make it a practice to pray together, read Scripture together, and seek God's wisdom together.

The early church leaders first prayed and discerned God's direction before making decisions.

2. Create a Healthy Board Culture

a. Confidentiality Builds Trust Nothing undermines a board faster than leaked conversations.

b. Respect Builds Unity People can disagree respectfully.

c. Mission Keeps Focus Personal preferences must always yield to kingdom priorities.

Healthy boards ask: "What advances the mission?"
Instead of: "What do I personally prefer?"

d. Understand Vision God Usually Gives Vision to Leadership

Throughout Scripture God typically spoke to leaders who then shared vision with others. For example, Moses, Nehemiah, David, and Paul. Although the board's role is not to receive the vision, it is important that they assess, refine, support and resource the vision.

A sailboat needs both a rudder and sails. The pastor often functions as the rudder. The board helps provide the wind, stability, and support needed to move forward.

e. Unity is a must Unity Is more important than winning or getting your way.

Board members should freely discuss issues. Once a decision is made, unity should follow. Everybody understands that as a board "WE" decided. Acts 15 included vigorous discussion. But after a decision was reached, the church moved forward together.

Lobbying, side conversations, political alliances, and personal agendas all work to destroy unity.

f. Oversight Versus Control Oversight Protects, Control Directs

Oversight asks: Is it biblical? Is it ethical? Is it financially responsible?
Control asks: What color should the walls be? Who should teach this class?
Which song should be sung?

Oversight acts like a guardrail to keep a vehicle safe. It does not steer the vehicle. Boards help provide oversight that acts as guardrails while the pastor steers.

g. Ask Questions Without Becoming Adversarial Questions create clarity.

Healthy boards ask questions. Unhealthy boards assume motives.

Good Accountability Sounds Like "Help us understand."

Not: "Why did you do that?"

A doctor asks questions before making a diagnosis. Board members should do the same.

h. Not Every Criticism Requires Action Pastors and boards must learn this.

Every church has critics. Sometimes criticism holds wisdom. Sometimes it is simply personal preference.

A helpful question when processing criticism is, “Is this a mission issue, a biblical issue, or a preference issue?”

SECTION 4 – FINAL LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES

For pastors: Lead with courage, serve with humility, and trust God with the results.

For board members: Support with loyalty, oversee with wisdom, and protect unity.

For both: Keep Christ at the center, keep the mission in focus, and keep people at the heart of every decision. (Jesus Christ)

Pastors should lead strongly enough that the church has direction, but humbly enough that people willingly follow.

Board members should support faithfully enough that the pastor is strengthened, but wisely enough that accountability is still intact.

Together they serve Christ, who alone is the Head of the Church.

When pastors and boards understand these truths, churches are positioned not merely to survive, but to flourish spiritually for generations.

APPENDIX I

THE LEAD PASTOR AS A CHAIRMAN

A Practical Guide for the Lead Pastor as Chairman

The emphasis should not be "running meetings."
It should be **leading the ministry through healthy governance**.
The mindset is this:
The pastor is called to shepherd people.
The board exists to steward the ministry.
The chairman brings those two together.

Lesson 1: You Are More Than the Preacher

Many pastors see themselves as:

- preacher
- teacher
- counselor
- visionary

Those are true.

But they are also responsible for helping govern the church.

A pastor cannot simply say, "The board oversees all of that."

Nor should he say, "I make all the decisions."

Biblical leadership rejects both extremes.

Instead,

The pastor leads.

The board helps to govern.

Together they steward God's church.

Acts 6 illustrates this beautifully.

The apostles remained devoted to prayer and the ministry of the Word while also organizing qualified leaders to oversee practical matters. They did not ignore administration; they structured it so the mission could flourish.

Lesson 2: Learn to Think Like a Chairman

A chairman asks different questions than a preacher.

Instead of asking, "What should I preach Sunday?"

He also asks,

- Are we following our bylaws?
- Are we making decisions consistently?
- Have all voices been heard?
- Is the motion clear?
- Have we documented this properly?
- Is this financially sustainable?
- Is this decision advancing the mission?

Healthy governance protects healthy ministry.

Lesson 3: Understand Your Legal Responsibility

Many pastors never realize that the state recognizes the church as a nonprofit corporation.

The board has legal duties.

The chairman has legal responsibilities.

That means understanding:

- By laws
- Articles of Incorporation
- fiduciary duty
- conflicts of interest
- financial oversight
- risk management
- employment matters
- record keeping

You do not have to become an attorney. But you cannot remain ignorant.

A pastor who signs legal documents without understanding them places both himself and the church at unnecessary risk.

Lesson 4: Learn Financial Fluency

Pastors do not have to become CPAs.

But they should understand:

- balance sheet
- income statement
- cash flow
- designated funds
- restricted funds
- reserves
- debt
- insurance
- compensation philosophy

Financial ignorance is not a spiritual gift.

Good stewardship requires informed oversight.

Lesson 5: Lead Through Difficult Decisions

Eventually every pastor faces:

- staff reductions
- building repairs
- discipline
- conflict
- budget shortfalls
- legal questions

These moments reveal the value of healthy governance.

The chairman helps the board remain:

- calm
- prayerful
- informed
- unified
- mission-focused

Lesson 6: The Chairman Sets the Culture

The pastor establishes the tone of every meeting.

If the pastor:

- listens well,
- stays humble,
- honors people,
- remains prepared,
- follows the bylaws,
- seeks God's direction,

the board will usually reflect those same values.

Lesson 7: Meetings Are Ministry

Many pastors dread board meetings.

Instead, view them as one of your shepherding responsibilities.

A board meeting should:

- create unity
- build trust
- solve problems
- seek God's wisdom
- protect the church
- advance vision

Every meeting is another opportunity to disciple leaders.

Lesson 8: Prepare Before You Preside

The chairman should rarely walk into a meeting unprepared.

Preparation includes:

Spiritually

- Pray.
- Seek wisdom.
- Ask God for discernment.

Practically

- Review agenda.
- Read reports.

- Understand financial statements.
- Anticipate questions.
- Talk with committee leaders.

Good meetings begin days before anyone enters the room.

Lesson 9: Lead Discussion, Not Debate

A chairman is not there to dominate.

Nor merely to moderate.

He facilitates wise decisions.

That means:

- asking good questions
- inviting quieter members to contribute
- preventing one person from controlling discussion
- summarizing viewpoints accurately
- keeping discussion on mission rather than personalities

The goal is not simply efficiency.

The goal is collective discernment.

Lesson 10: Every Board Meeting Should Include Mission

Many boards unintentionally become maintenance committees.

Meetings become dominated by:

- Roofs
- Parking lots
- Budgets
- Repairs

Those things matter.

But every meeting should ask:

Who are we reaching?

Who is being discipled?

Who was baptized?

How are people growing spiritually?

If these questions disappear, the church slowly becomes an institution rather than a mission.

APPENDIX II

TOOLS FOR EFFECTIVE OFFICIAL BOARD MEETINGS

1. Annual Board Calendar

Every board should have a yearly calendar showing when major items will be discussed.

Sample Annual Planning Calendar

Month	Major Focus
January	Annual goals, budget review
February	Ministry review
March	Facility and property review
April	Easter ministry evaluation
May	Summer ministry planning
June	Mid-year financial review
July	Strategic planning
August	Fall ministry preparation
September	Budget preparation
October	Leadership development
November	Budget approval
December	Year-end review and celebration

Benefit - Board members know what is coming and are less likely to be surprised.

2. Board Member Covenant

Every board member should sign an annual covenant.

Sample Commitments

I will:

- Pray for my pastor.
- Attend meetings faithfully.
- Maintain confidentiality.
- Support board decisions once made.
- Speak directly to those involved rather than gossiping.

- Put the mission of the church above personal preference.
- Act in a spirit of unity and humility.

Benefit - Creates clear expectations before conflict occurs.

3. Consistent Board Meeting Rhythm

Here is a tool that can help keep a consistent meeting rhythm:

1. **Pray Together** – Begin by seeking God's wisdom and aligning hearts with the mission.
2. **Celebrate Ministry** – Share stories of lives changed, answered prayers, and ministry impact.
3. **Review Stewardship** – Consider financial reports, attendance, ministry metrics, and operational health.
4. **Address Governance** – Walk through the Agenda, Handle motions, policies, legal matters, and decisions in accordance with the bylaws.
5. **Look Ahead** – Focus on upcoming ministry opportunities, challenges, and strategic priorities.
6. **Care for One Another** – Pray for board members, staff, and church families before closing.

This rhythm reminds everyone that board meetings are not merely business sessions—they are ministry gatherings where spiritual leadership and responsible governance work together.

A foundational principle

A lead pastor who neglects governance can unintentionally weaken the ministry. A lead pastor who governs without shepherding can wound the people. But a pastor who prayerfully shepherds people while faithfully leading the board helps create a church that is spiritually vibrant, organizationally healthy, and positioned to fulfill its mission for generations.

Sample Official Board Meeting Agenda

Opening

Call to Order - Pastor or Chairperson

Prayer

Ask God for wisdom and unity.

Scripture Reading

5-10 minutes

Keep the meeting spiritual before it becomes practical.

Approval Items

Approve Previous Minutes

Motion and second.

Approve Financial Report

Review and Receive

- Income
- Expenses
- Budget performance
- Major financial trends

Pastor's Report

Include:

Celebrations

- Salvations
- Water baptisms
- Membership growth
- Ministry successes

Current Ministry Activities

- Outreach
- Discipleship
- Staff updates

Challenges

- Attendance concerns
- Facility concerns
- Staffing concerns

Committee or Ministry Reports

As needed.

Examples:

- Finance
- Property
- Missions
- Personnel

Old Business

Items previously discussed but not completed.

New Business

New recommendations or decisions.

Example

- Building improvements
- Ministry opportunities
- Personnel recommendations
- Major purchases

Strategic Discussion

At least one discussion item should focus on mission rather than maintenance.

Examples:

- How are we reaching new people?
- How are we developing leaders?
- How are we discipling believers?

Prayer Time

Pray for:

- Church
- Community
- Missionaries
- Pastor and family
- Church needs

Adjournment

4. Consent Agenda

Many churches waste considerable time on routine items. A consent agenda groups routine approvals together.

Examples

- Minutes
- Standard reports
- Routine expenditures
- Ministry updates

One motion approves all routine items.
Discussion is reserved for items needing attention.

Benefit - Creates more time for vision and ministry.

5. Decision-Making Matrix

This may be one of the most valuable tools you can provide.

Who Decides?

Item	Pastor	Board	Congregation
Sermon Series	✓		
Staff Scheduling	✓		
Budget Proposal		✓	
Bylaw Changes			✓
Major Property Sale		✓	Often ✓
Vision Direction	✓ Leads	✓ Confirms/Supports	
Personnel Matters	✓ Usually Shared	✓ Usually Shared	

Benefit - Eliminates confusion regarding authority.

6. Board Dashboard

One-page monthly ministry snapshot.

Attendance

- Weekly average
- Comparison to previous year

Giving

- Monthly giving
- Budget comparison

Membership

- New members
- Transfers

Discipleship

- Small groups
- Classes

Evangelism

- Salvations
- Water baptisms

Leadership Development

- New volunteers
- Leadership training

Benefit - Board members can quickly assess church health.

7. Financial Dashboard

Simple and visual.

Include:

Income

Current month

Year-to-date

Expenses

Current month

Year-to-date

Cash Position

Operating account

Reserve funds

Debt Position

Current balance

Reduction progress

Benefit - Keeps board members informed without overwhelming them.

8. Board Meeting Rules of Engagement

Listen First

Seek understanding before responding.

Speak Once Before Speaking Twice

Allow everyone an opportunity.

Attack Problems, Not People

Disagree respectfully.

No Side Conversations

One conversation at a time.

Confidentiality

Boardroom discussions stay in the boardroom.

9. Executive Session Guidelines

Used only for:

- Personnel issues
- Legal matters
- Sensitive discipline issues
- Confidential financial matters

Important Principle

Executive session should be the exception, not the norm.

10. Annual Pastor Evaluation Tool

Focus on:

Spiritual Leadership

Vision Leadership

Communication

Relationships

Character

Team Development

Personal Growth

Avoid turning evaluations into popularity contests.

11. Strategic Planning Worksheet

Ask annually:

What is God doing among us?

What must we preserve?

What must we improve?

What must we stop doing?

What new opportunities should we pursue?

What are our top three priorities for next year?

12. Church Board Self-Evaluation

Each year ask:

Are we focused on mission?

Are meetings productive?

Are we supporting our pastor?

Are we providing healthy accountability?

Are we operating in unity?

Are we praying together?

Are we leading spiritually?

13. The Board Meeting "80/20 Rule"

A healthy board generally spends:

20% of time on maintenance

- Minutes
- Reports
- Routine business

80% of time on ministry and mission

- Vision
- Strategy
- Leadership development
- Discipleship
- Evangelism

Too many boards reverse this and spend 80% on maintenance and 20% on mission.

A Simple Board Philosophy Statement

You may want to place this at the front of every board handbook:

The purpose of the church board is not to manage the daily operations of the church but to serve as spiritual leaders who support the pastor, provide accountability, steward church resources, protect the mission, and help discern God's direction along with the Pastor for the congregation.

The pastor leads the ministry of the church. The board provides wisdom, accountability, and support. Together they seek the mind of Christ and advance the mission of the church.

This philosophy alone can prevent many of the tensions that arise between pastors and boards. It clearly establishes leadership, accountability, and mutual respect without creating either pastoral domination or board control.