

# MODELS OF MINISTRY IN CHINESE CHURCHES

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## I. THE DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

**Stage 1:** a Chinese church is planted with Cantonese or Mandarin as the language/culture of the church

**Stage 2:** side by side translation of the sermon into English with some English ministries beginning

**Stage 3:** a separate English speaking worship service begins, usually overseen by an OBC

**Stage 4:** tension often grows because of different language, culture, leadership styles & structure

**Stage 5:** partnership of unity, vision, effectiveness & empowerment to fulfil the Great Commission

**Stage 6:** partnership within a dual church setting

## II. COMMON MODELS OF MINISTRY

### MODEL #1: The PARENTAL (Father/son) MODEL OF MINISTRY

- this is the predominate model of ministry in Chinese churches throughout North America
- the underlying reason is that most OBC leaders run the church in the same way they run their family

#### Stage 1

- the entire culture in the church is Chinese & the church's constitution & by-laws are formed
- line of authority & the way of doing things are established (from a Chinese cultural perspective)
- expectation of OBC upon CBC is to be good (submission & obedience)
- good parents preserve the Chinese language, culture & traditions

#### Stage 2

- translation of the Chinese sermon into English begins and some English ministries are started
- cultural expectation of OBCs upon CBCs are still the same as Stage 1
- CBCs are assimilated into the Canadian culture & develop more Canadian-ness than Chinese-ness
- common to most 2nd generation CBCs is the problem of an identity crisis (Who am I?)

### **PREDICTABLE RESULTS AT THE END OF STAGES 1 and/or 2**

- more than translation must be done to minister to the growing number of CBCs
- an estimated "drop out" rate of 95% (Dr. Gail Law, 1986, CCM)
- growing dissatisfaction of many college & career CBCs in Chinese churches
- "drop outs" are seldom followed up and very often go un-noticed

*Conflict begins to arise between the OBC & the CBC & the OBC leaders often opt to start a separate English speaking worship service & assign a bilingual elder/deacon to oversee it.*

*More progressive OBC leaders suggest aiming at a Parallel model of ministry and acknowledge that the English speaking have grown up and are no longer children.*

## **MODEL #2: THE PARALLEL MODEL OF MINISTRY**

- Chinese churches here tend to be more open, flexible & innovative
- this may be the most common model with 2nd generation CBCs and ABCs (American Born Chinese)
- progressive OBCs also opt for this model when they see their own children dropping out of church

### **Stage 3**

- English Service is run by the older OBC leadership & all decisions must be passed by the Board
- OBCs still expect CBCs to be good by being submissive, obedient & to attend all church functions
- cultural expectations are lessened but still expect conversational Chinese (just like their own children)
- English Service must respect all of the traditions of the church
- common feelings & questions among CBCs are:
  - Why do we have to do everything their way?
  - Why do we always have to get their permission to do ministry?
  - Why don't they let us to sing songs that are meaningful to us?
  - Why do they always make us sing their hymns?

### **Stage 4**

- CBCs are given more responsibilities & increased involvement in church leadership
- great desire to develop more unity between the groups
- suggestions are made to involve more CBCs on the church board

## **PREDICTABLE RESULTS AT THE END OF STAGES 3 and/or 4**

- tensions & conflict continues to develop and little ownership/belonging felt by CBCs
- high drop out rate, especially with college students who go off to another city
- CBCs demand more autonomy while OBCs feel threatened to relinquish decision making power
- the leaders opt for a Parallel Model of ministry as a mediating position rather than visionary progress
- if cultural distinctives go un-noticed, conflict will continue to reign

### **III. ANALYZING COMMON MODELS OF MINISTRY**

#### **THE PARENTAL (Father/son) MODEL OF MINISTRY**

##### **The Positives**

- excellent model for a mono cultural church in a mono cultural setting
- extremely successful in the Eastern world
- perhaps quite beneficial to a small family type church of all Chinese people set out to stay that way

##### **The Drawbacks**

- may not be very appropriate or effective in a multi-cultural, multi-racial setting
- especially difficult in a Western egalitarian & democratic society
- often fails to recognize the equality of fellow Christians of another ethnicity (Acts 15; Gal 3:28)
- hinders the cultivation of diversity in the body of Christ (Acts 6; 1 Cor 12)
- reflects an OT monarchical/patriarchal style of leadership (OBC leaders like Moses on Mt. Sinai)

#### **THE PARALLEL MODEL OF MINISTRY**

##### **The Positives**

- OBCs recognize the need to include CBCs in leadership & to glorify Christ together
- OBCs show genuine desire to foster unity rather than divisiveness
- OBCs demonstrate deep sacrifice to satisfy CBCs

##### **The Drawbacks**

- existing constitution, by-laws & Board structure designed without an English congregation in mind
- unity in an already developed structure may be too idealistic and conflict is likely to arise
- the Parallel structure does not take into consideration:
  - a. posts in the English ministries seldom parallel the existing Board structures
  - b. the number of qualified English leaders may be low due to its newness of ministry
  - c. the English ministry is usually at a different stage of growth than the Chinese counterpart
  - d. even in a parallel positions, what young CBC leader would challenge an OBC leader
  - e. structure means little if the leaders are culturally insensitive to one another

### **IV. PROPOSING THE PARTNERSHIP MODEL OF MINISTRY**

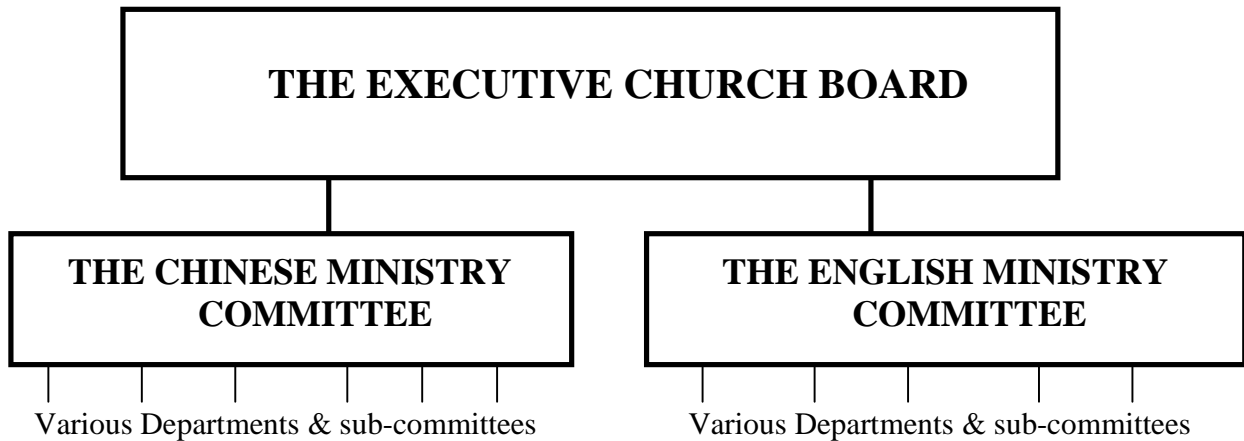
#### **NEW TESTAMENT SUPPORT**

- Ephesians 2:11-22 .. Jesus broke down the dividing wall between Jew & Gentile
- Galatians 3:28 ..... all stand equal before the Lord
- Acts 6:1-7 ..... Hebrew speaking Jews relinquished authority to Greek speaking Jews (partners)
- Acts 15:19-21 ..... the Christian Jews did not impose their cultural practices on the Christian Gentiles

#### **ACHIEVING Stage 5**

- attitudes & structures are modified & matured (contextualization occurs)
- new perspective and mutual empowerment as partners in the Gospel ministry (cultural sensitivity)
- diversity is encouraged with an intentional plan to foster unity of faith, mission, community, purpose, commitment and practice
- leaders become visionaries instead of reactionaries

**A. Structural Suggestions**



- 1) Role of the Church Board
  - to set the general direction of the church & to develop policies that affects the whole church
  - to deal with issues & make decisions that affects the whole church
  - to demonstrate a unified effort in the advancement of the Gospel
  - the Church Board should consist of leaders from each Ministry Committee proportional to their weekly adult worship attendance along with the pastors
  - communication & understanding are absolutely crucial at this level
- 2) Role of the Ministry Committees
  - each Ministry Committee is responsible for the smooth operation of their congregation
  - their various departments are based on the particular needs of their congregation
  - all department chairpersons sit on the Ministry Committee
  - the chairperson of each Ministry Committee represents their Committee on the Church Board along with other elected/assigned leaders according to the set proportion

**B. Pastoral Suggestions**

- seek a mutual understanding of cultural distinctives & develop vision as a united pastoral staff
- decide a yearly theme that each ministry can apply
- foster good communication and share each others plans
- learn to pray regularly and seek after quality staff meetings
- plan strategic events that will bring a greater understanding and unity in the church
- ensure that all joint services are sensitive to both ministries
- model a high level of unity before the leaders & the people

**C. Leadership Suggestions**

- develop a standard of leadership that is rooted in Scripture
- provide training and spiritual development helping the leaders to understand the cultural distinctives
- ensure that all joint leadership meetings are comprehensible to all parties attending
- solicit input from both ministries for joint worship services & provide bilingual leaders in the service
- clearly identify expectations and solicit commitments to attend unifying events

#### **D. The Limits of Stage 5 Partnership**

- There are limits to the achievement of the Stage 5 partnership of ministry
- The Senior pastor & pastoral staff may be very supportive of the described partnership model
- This support is rarely experienced at the Board level
- This support is rarely practiced at the congregational level within most Chinese congregations
- Stage 5 may work well until the building gets too crowded
- Crowded or over-crowded churches: most leaders make decisions with “themselves” in mind
- Though not intentional, the biggest and smallest congregation can become self-centred & self-serving
- Achieving effective stage 5 requires all leaders to be on the same page
- Stage 5 seems most workable when there is only 1 Chinese & 1 English congregation of similar size
- When 1 congregation becomes bigger than the other and even grows into multi-congregations, the pattern of decision-making often changes
- The input of the smaller congregation is usually diminished and can be over-run by the tremendous needs of the bigger congregation(s)

#### **Stage 6: The Dual/Multi Church Building Model / Strategy**

- If financially able and spiritually ready, the Dual/multi Church model can be a productive & purposeful strategy
- There are different buildings for each language group on the same property
- Can have shared parking, property management
- Each language group can plan & determine own building & sanctuary size

#### **Potential Benefits**

- Greater freedom to excel due to familiarity
- No need to interfere with other congregations
- Minimize normal patterns of conflict
- Most conflict in Chinese churches are related to facility and/or perceived “control” that leads to suffocation
- Lesser cultural clashes
- Free all congregations to develop more ministries
- Can determine own traditions relevant to own culture
- More effectiveness in evangelism & church growth
- Eliminate the “jook sing” syndrome
- No need to interfere with each other’s affairs
- Easier to bring & to win non-Chinese and/or non-Christian friends
- Curb the existing drop-out rate
- Create greater ownership among the youth
- Can determine own church theme & pulpit direction
- Greater potential for creating cross cultural respect
- Can bring Chinese-speaking parents/relatives/friends and coworkers to next building
- Can bring Eng-speaking children/relatives/friends/coworkers to next building
- Can hire own secretary dedicated for each language ministry
- Can advertise own culturally relevant name
- Can allow youth to spray paint youth room(s)

#### **Potential Drawbacks**

- financial responsibilities
- leadership/discipleship responsibilities
- staffing responsibilities
- evangelism responsibilities
- developing a workable childrens min
- may be difficult for traditionalists
- may be perceived as disunity