



# Does Your Church Need to Change It's Organizational Structure?

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By Rick Warren, Pastor of Saddleback Church

Why is it that 95% of all churches in the world never grow past 300? I believe it's because their structure keeps them from growing beyond that point. Hebrews 8:13, in the Phillips paraphrase, says, "When a thing grows weak and out of date, it is obviously soon going to disappear." That's true of churches, too. If a church cannot change, it will eventually die.

**How do you know when you have an inadequate structure in your church? There are three symptoms of an inadequate organizational structure:**

## **Plateaued Growth**

You're not growing any more. You just stay the same year after year after year. You're going nowhere. That is a clear indication that you have the wrong structure in your church. Now understand, structure does not cause the growth in your church. But it does control two things: the rate of growth and the size of growth. Plateaued growth says something's wrong with the organization.

## **Internal Conflict**

Internal conflict in your church is almost always a symptom that you're fighting over decisions. And fighting over decisions means you've got the wrong kind of structure in your organization right now.

## **Discouraged Leadership or Low Morale**

I have talked with literally thousands and thousands of pastors and church leaders, and without a doubt, the number one heartache pastors have is fighting a structure that won't let them do what they know God has called them to do. Many pastors become very tired of fighting a bureaucracy and struggling with the power structure. Little cliques and little organizations and the wrong structure will drain your enthusiasm and kill your vision quicker than almost anything.



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**Real change begins with renewal. In order to change the structure, there must be renewal in your church. There are four kinds of renewal, and note, if they do not occur in this order, you may lose your job trying to bring renewal.**

## **Personal Renewal**

Personal renewal comes when your heart warms up to Jesus Christ, and you become more aware of the presence of Christ and the filling of the Holy Spirit in your life. It's called many things – the deeper life, the Spirit-filled life, consecration, and rededication. I don't care what you call it, but it always has to start in your heart – in the leader's heart - and then in the hearts of other leaders and then in the hearts of the people.

Personal renewal always has to happen first. If you try to change your church without personal renewal in the hearts of the people, it isn't going to last.

## **Corporate Renewal**

Corporate renewal comes after personal renewal. You see it when the body of Christ begins to warm up. People begin to love each other and to make things right with one another. Restitution is made, sin is confessed, and barriers are broken down. There's warm fellowship in a church that's been corporately renewed.

How do you know when your church is experiencing corporate renewal? It may seem funny, but there's a simple sign: the singing gets better! People sing better when their church is alive, when their church is on fire, when they sense the presence of God in a service.

## **Purpose Renewal**

The renewal of purpose (or mission) is when the church begins to realize that they are here for more than just to have a good time and feel good. We have a mission, an objective, a purpose. It's when people say, "We're not here to have a little Bless Me group. We're here on mission and for a reason."

The first two kinds of renewal – personal and corporate – occur quite often in many churches, but little comes from it because we don't get to the third and fourth level.



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I have seen many churches that grow to 200 or 250 and then bump back down. Then a few years later, they grow up to 200 or 250, and then they go back down again. If you study the history of many churches, you'll see that the church will go up so far, and then the pastor leaves and it goes back down. It looks like there's some kind of glass ceiling that keeps the congregation from growing above 300.

And I think the reason for that is they never get to this fourth level of renewal:

## **Structural Renewal**

When you have personal renewal and corporate renewal and purpose (mission) renewal, inevitably the church starts growing. But when it starts growing, you'll eventually need to make organizational changes because you can't put new wine into old wineskins. If you insist on keeping the old wineskin, it's going to stifle the growth.

This is what happens in literally thousands and thousands of churches. You must have this structural renewal because there is no lasting change without changing the organization.

Now, here's the catch: You can't start with the fourth kind of renewal. If you start trying to change your structure without having personal, corporate and purpose renewal, then you may get your head chopped off! People don't like to change unless their hearts have been warmed and prepared for change.



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## One Size Does Not Fit All

As I said, for your church to keep growing, your structure must keep growing, but there is no single structure that will work for your church for the rest of its life. I once asked Peter Drucker, the father of modern management, how often a growing organization must restructure. He said, approximately, every time it reaches 45% growth.

As an example, in the first ten years of Saddleback, we grew an average of 47% a year, which meant we had to restructure every year! We had to reorganize, regroup, and try it in different ways.

Jesus said you can't pour new wine in old wineskins (Luke 5:37). Nothing can expand without a flexible structure, and that means you must change and adapt your structure as you grow. Only then will you break through barriers and continue moving forward toward fulfilling God's vision.

Pastor Rick Warren founded Saddleback Church in Lake Forest, Calif., in 1980 with one family. Today, it is an evangelical congregation averaging 22,000 weekly attendees, a 120-acre campus, and has more than 300 community ministries to groups such as prisoners, CEOs, addicts, single parents, and those with HIV/AIDS. Recently, the church fed 42,000 homeless people – three meals a day – for 40 days.

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