



**BOOK REVIEW****THE BUSINESS OF THE CHURCH: THE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH THAT FAITHFUL MINISTRY REQUIRES EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT**

BY: JOHN W. WIMBERLY, JR.

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John Wimberly furthers a necessary and specific conversation in *The Business of the Church*. Drawing on four decades of pastoral and public ministry experience, executive MBA training, and popular management literature, he describes and promotes effective management for faithful congregational ministry.

Wimberly distinguishes between leaders and managers in order to further his argument that the business of the church is most efficiently navigated under managerial priorities. He notes that while leaders are concerned with outputs such as establishing visions through long-range strategic planning, managers attend more closely to the inputs that determine envisioned ends.

Chapter One identifies three elements needed for effective church management. The first, systems theory, derives from the theoretical framework of congregational systems, borrowed from Edwin Friedman's *Generation to Generation*, which attends to the relationships between the parts and the whole of organizations. These parts are a balance of inputs, including personnel, facilities, and finances that produce effective outputs such as proclamation, programs, pastoral care, and mission. The second managing element is a coherent strategic plan, which creates the clarity managers and congregational systems need to make decisions toward determined goals. The third element of effective management is the role of the pastor, the "head of staff" as Wimberly calls it, serving as the lead manager for the congregational system.

Wimberly argues that attention to these three elements will produce effective management of the congregation's culture and successful outcomes by reducing anxiety and offering clarity about congregational priorities and authority. The core anxieties of congregational life that need effective management include church finances, deferred facility maintenance, and personnel costs. Wimberly recognizes that the congregational system is also connected to societal anxieties, although he gives primary attention to economic concerns.

Chapters Two through Four further detail a systems framework for effectively managing personnel, facilities, and finances. Chapter Two addresses personnel management; here Wimberly calls for the clarification of roles and responsibilities, staff alignment toward church goals, and responsible personnel policies and practices. Chapter Three attends to the managing of property and technology. Wimberly points to the importance of having a lay board of trustees who help guide key staff managers. In addition to discussing the managing of funds and personnel for the tasks of facility management, he adds practical suggestions for managing facilities in tight fiscal times for small churches, wise and responsible attention to utilities and insurance that help maximize costs, and how to address legal matters. Chapter Four offers practical and wise suggestions for managing congregational finances. Here Wimberly describes how transactions relate to assets, liabilities, expenses and revenues, and encourages readers to consider important details regarding balance sheet accounts, income statements, cash journal, and cash reports.

Each chapter ends with a “manager’s checklist” including questions and guided exercises that summarize the preceding chapter and draw the reader into further engagement the topic. Three appendices, supporting the chapter on finances, offer concrete examples of a congregation’s balance sheet, an income statement, and accounting exercises.

This book would serve well as an interactive resource for pastors serving congregations as well as for seminary courses in congregational management. One has to wonder, however, if Wimberly's concept of management is too narrow for the complexities involved in a local church's engagement in this post-Christian twenty-first century world. Can an organizational business approach found in the marketplace transfer ad-hoc to organizing ecclesial identity without recognizing larger societal influences challenging ecclesial identity? That is, is the gospel reduced to a product "output" and people to its managing catalyst of the Spirit's work? The world, under this business model, can often be conceived as a target the church enacts on, rather than creating managing discernment conversations that attend to what God is already doing in the world. Mission, for Wimberly, is a Newtonian category, one output dimension among others. Recent ecclesial organization literature, however, suggest that a missional focus is equally concerned about how to manage ecclesial identity and not merely its functional purpose value. Is not the gospel itself equally an "input" the Spirit uses to manage the church's own trust in God for the life of the world? If this is so, how can congregations also find ways to manage or partner with the creative power of the Spirit? These questions are but a few that open up the discussion that Wimberly convenes, a necessary and specific conversation for the *Business of the Church*, but this business equally includes a managing conversation of God's Spirit and the place of the world.

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