MINISTRY BEFORE STRUCTURES

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Christian organisations should be continually asking whether there is still a need for the work that they do or whether the work could be accomplished better by another structure - perhaps a partnership, a merger or a different organisation altogether.
Category: Observations

Human beings are communal animals and we get very attached to the structures and associations that we belong to. In the Christian context, these structures can be our church family or congregations, a particular group within the church or it could be a different group such as a mission agency.

These structures are important. They give us a setting in which we can meet people, be encouraged and grow together. However, I'd like to suggest that the ministry that the structures exist to perform is more important than any particular, individual structure.

Let me explain. If (for whatever reasons) the congregation of a local church falls to the point where it can no longer sustain its ministries of worship and mission, then we need to ask the question as to whether that particular church should continue. It may be advisable to merge with another local congregation, or perhaps the best option would be simply close the doors and have the members go on to attend elsewhere. Then again, it may be possible with the help of another church to revive that particular structure - but things will be very different. What we shouldn't do is put all our efforts into maintaining structures simply because we are attached to them.

The thing with the church is that its ministry of worship, disciple making and mission will continue this side of eternity. We will always need local churches doing what local churches do. However, the same cannot be said about other Christian organisations, who by their nature have more specialised ministries. The need for a particular social ministry or a strategic evangelistic effort may change or fade over time and we shouldn't seek to maintain our organisations when the need for them changes.

Christian organisations should be continually asking whether there is still a need for the work that they do or whether the work could be accomplished better by another structure - perhaps a partnership, a merger or a different organisation altogether.

The aim of our organisations is to accomplish their ministry. However, we become so attached to the organisations themselves that we shape our ministry in order to maintain the structures. That is getting the cart before the horse!