

A Guide for Chairs of Faith-Based Boards



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For further guidance, refer to IoD resources such as “*The Four Pillars of Governance Best Practice*” and seek advice from denominational authorities to tailor these practices to your specific context.

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Introduction

“Effective leadership from the chair can make the difference between a high or low functioning board. The chair frames and stimulates debate on issues while supervising the conduct of the meeting. Good chairs draw out the views of more reticent board members and manage the more zealous contributors. They help create a culture where directors can bring a robust, independent view to the table, and where appropriate dissent is valued.”

- The IoD's *Four Pillars of Governance Best Practice*

Chairing a faith-based board involves unique responsibilities and considerations that distinguish it from chairing other boards.

When chairing a faith-based board, there are several special considerations to keep in mind. The chair plays a crucial role in leading the board in seeking divine guidance through prayer and spiritual insight, ensuring that all decisions are in harmony with the organisation's mission. It can be important to integrate faith into meetings for example by beginning and ending with prayer and devotionals, while also encouraging board members to share faith-inspired insights that relate to the organisation's challenges and opportunities.

The chair should embody faith-based values through their leadership, demonstrating integrity, humility, and a commitment to servant leadership. This includes serving as a role model for ethical behavior and fostering a culture of trust and respect. In instances of conflict, the chair should guide the board in resolving disputes with a focus on reconciliation and forgiveness, adhering to faith-based principles.

Promoting participation and inclusion is also vital. The chair should ensure that all board members feel valued and heard, creating an inclusive environment where diverse perspectives are respected, aligning with the faith-based principle of valuing each individual. Additionally, stewardship and accountability should be emphasised, ensuring that the organisation's resources are managed responsibly and transparently. The chair must ensure regular reporting to stakeholders and maintain accountability for the board's decisions and actions.

Engagement with the broader faith community is another key responsibility. The chair should actively seek input, feedback, and foster relationships that support the organisation's mission. This involves regular communication with faith members, donors, volunteers, and other stakeholders. Finally, supporting the development of the board is crucial. The chair should provide opportunities for board members to grow in their understanding of governance and their faith, including governance training that incorporates faith-based principles and opportunities for spiritual development.

While many fundamental principles of effective board leadership apply universally, the integration of faith-based values and spiritual leadership adds distinctive dimensions to the role of a chair on a faith-based board.

Here are some special considerations for chairing a faith-based board:

1. Spiritual Leadership:

Regular Boards: The chair's role primarily involves facilitating meetings, ensuring effective governance, and providing strategic leadership.

Faith-based Boards: In addition to these responsibilities, the chair is expected to provide spiritual leadership, guiding the board in the integration of faith-based values into decision-making processes.

2. Mission Alignment:

Regular Boards: The chair focuses on aligning the board's activities with the organisation's strategic goals and objectives.

Faith-based Boards: The chair ensures that all board activities align with the organisation's faith-based mission and values and serving stakeholders in accordance with faith-based teachings.

3. Ethical and Moral Guidance:

Regular Boards: Ethical considerations are based on corporate governance standards and legal compliance.

Faith-based Boards: The chair must uphold and promote ethical and moral standards rooted in faith-based principles, such as integrity, compassion, stewardship, and humility.

4. Community and Fellowship:

Regular Boards: The chair fosters a collaborative and productive board environment.

Faith-based Boards: The chair also nurtures a sense of community and fellowship among board members, encouraging spiritual growth and mutual support through prayer and shared faith experiences.

Practical Tips for Chairing a Faith-based Board

1. Lead by Example:

Demonstrate faith-based values in all interactions and decisions. Show humility, integrity, and a commitment to serving others.

2. Facilitate Spiritual Growth:

Encourage board members to grow spiritually by incorporating prayer, scripture, and faith discussions into board activities. Consider organising retreats or spiritual development sessions.

3. Promote Ethical Decision-Making:

Ensure that all decisions are made with consideration of ethical and moral implications, in line with faith-based teachings. Encourage transparency and honesty in all board activities.

4. Build a Cohesive Team:

Foster a sense of unity and fellowship among board members. Create an environment where everyone feels valued and supported, and where diverse viewpoints are welcomed and respected.

5. Communicate Effectively:

Maintain open and transparent communication with board members and stakeholders. Ensure that everyone is informed about the organisation's activities, decisions, and strategic direction.

6. Encourage Servant Leadership:

Emphasise the concept of servant leadership, where the primary goal is to serve others. Encourage board members to lead with a mindset of service and humility.

7. Focus on Mission and Vision:

Keep the board focused on the organisation's mission and vision, ensuring that all activities and decisions align with its faith-based objectives. Regularly revisit the mission and vision to keep them at the forefront of board discussions.

8. Develop Succession Plans:

Ensure there is a clear succession plan for board leadership that includes identifying and mentoring future leaders who share the organisation's faith-based values and mission.

Conclusion

Chairing a faith-based board requires integrating faith-based values and principles into governance practices. The chair must provide spiritual leadership, ensure mission alignment, and promote ethical and moral behaviour. By fostering a sense of community, encouraging spiritual growth, and leading with humility and integrity, the chair can effectively guide the board in fulfilling its mission and serving its stakeholders in a manner that reflects faith-based teachings.



Institute of
DIRECTORS
NEW ZEALAND

iod.org.nz

Institute of Directors in New Zealand (Inc)
Mezzanine Floor, 50 Customhouse Quay
PO Box 25253, Wellington, 6146
New Zealand

Telephone +64 4 499 0076

Email mail@iod.org.nz