

7 Reasons that Proactive Churches Get Legal Advice

I recently got to know David Middlebrook of the [Church Law Group](#). My eyes were reopened to the scope of legal implications for the church. Because I like to focus my energies on vision, I frankly don't think very much about the legal ramifications of church leadership. What struck me however is this: **Legal negligence as a church leader leaves your vision susceptible.**

Here are my seven take-aways:

#1 Don't ignore governance. Sometime a gap grows between the way you practically get things done and the ways things are legally outlined to get done. Your church has a by-laws and some kind of "birth certificate" as a legal entity. When is the last time you visited these documents and aligned them to current reality or made them more functional?

#2 Guard your church's real "vault"—your children. Almost 80% of churches that get taken to trial do so around the safety of children. Many churches do background checks on your children's workers? That's a good first step but there is a lot more you can do. Things like designing interview protocols and ongoing regular training to name a few. In the end, your church's reputation, financial resources and mission are all at risk if you leave your vault unprotected.

#3 Rethink sources of liability in everyday ministry. I was shocked when David shared stories of how churches can be liable from policies on pastoral counseling to physical injuries on your church's campus. Do you know where your liabilities might be in these areas?

#4 Stay on top of employment law. Most churches not only have employees but different kinds. And these are subject to the state and federal employment laws. The key reminder is simply this: If you have a problem down the road with how you have misapplied employment law, ignorance is not a defense.

#5 Structure well to serve the community. It's not uncommon for churches to start or be connected with business or non-profit entities from bookstores to food pantries. Two weeks ago I visited a church that built a water park for the community. When missional initiatives are born or spun off from the church, make sure you have done the due diligence on creating the right strategy, legally.

#6 Be creative with integrity. Every sermon, or original music composition or homemade children's curriculum is content that is technically regulated by law. Many churches have not considered the full implications of this reality. How will these content sources be distributed, regulated or protected? What is your vision for the content you create?

#7 Keep the peace with biblical authority. Churches have opportunities to adopt faith-based conflict resolutions that can significantly prevent or deter more difficult litigation situations. Have these mediation alternatives been totally explored and integrated into your church?

How can you best address these kinds of questions? Perhaps you should invite attorney's in your church to refresh or reevaluate on one or more of the topics listed above. Or you can have lawyers in your church vet the value of working with a church-focused group like David Middlebrook's team.

Don't leave your vision susceptible!

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