

### “Para-Church” Organizations

(Cont. from pg. 3) - deacon or preacher can tell you the functioning of a local congregation can be a complicated business. There are feelings that can be hurt. There are maturity levels that must be taken into consideration. There are individual abilities, preferences, and desires that must be respected for the overall good of the congregation. In those matters that are a necessary part of the work of the church there are enough of these kind of complications that a church should deal with without adding any other matters that are unnecessary. How many elders and deacons in churches which support these para-church organizations find their meetings

dominated by concerns over the management, regulation and functioning of these organizations rather than the true work of the church? How many quarrels and divisions have arisen over preferences about how such organizations should operate? How will we explain to the Lord on the Day of Judgment why we became alienated from a brother or sister for whom Christ died over the workings of some institution of our own creation?

\* The names of organizations used in this article are purely my own creation. If they, by chance, bear any similarity to actual organizations it is purely coincidental. At the same time these names reflect the kind of names that are often adopted by such organizations and are intended to illustrate the manner in which they are used.



**7845 Cottonwood  
Lenexa, Kansas 66216  
(913) 631-6519**

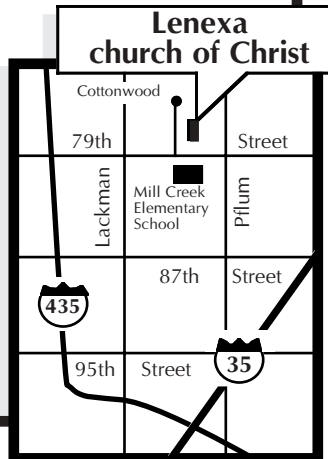
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**Elders:**  
Jim Stauffer  
Jim Tapp

**Deacons:**  
Grant Crawford  
Kurt McLoud  
Kyle Pope

**Evangelist:**  
Kyle Pope

**MEETING TIMES**  
Sunday – Bible Classes 9:30 AM  
Worship Services 10:20 AM & 6:00  
Wednesday – Bible Classes 7:00 PM



**The Lenexa  
EDIFIER**

...Let us pursue the things which make for peace and the things by which one may edify another. – Romans 14:19

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## “Para-Church” Organizations

by Kyle Pope

On more than one occasion I have had it happen in talking with people from a denominational background, when they learn that I am a preacher they begin to ask me about various human organizations. “Are you involved with Global Mission Outreach?”\* they might ask. Or, “Does your church have a Young Lions program?” When they learn, not only that the congregation I work with is not involved with such things, but that I may not even be familiar with such organizations, they are usually shocked and puzzled that I am a preacher and don’t know about these things. Even among some brethren, who have allowed human organizations to solicit and receive support from the church, if you don’t know about “Loaves and Fishes missions,” or “Christ in the Home outreach,” you are viewed as out of touch. Sadly, brethren who all once valued using “Bible names for Bible things,” barely speak the same language anymore.

Sometimes organizations of this type are referred to as “Para-Church” organizations. This name acknowledges that they are not “churches,” but they are viewed as extensions of the church. They carry out either works of the church (under the oversight of the organization rather than the church) or simply good works which are not the responsibility of the church (under its support). With respect to the latter, many human organizations exist which carry out good works. There are schools, hospitals, publishing houses and publications which carry out important functions and exist independent of any local congregation. Such organizations have the right to exist and operate and need neither the sanction nor oversight of any local church to do so. It is only when the church involves itself in the support, oversight or maintenance of these institutions that those who respect the authority of Scripture must stand up in opposition.

(Cont. on pg. 2)

**“Para-Church” Organizations**

(Cont. from pg. 1) - With respect to organizations which carry out works of the church but function independent of its oversight a number of questions arise. Is the church unable to do its own work? Did the Lord not know how to organize the church so that it could fulfill its own work? Do we think that we have the right to “extend” the organization of the church in ways that the Lord has not?

An examination of Scripture reveals a New Testament church whose organization and purpose was distinguished by its simplicity. The simple organization of elders, deacons and saints (Philippians 1:1), working under the headship of Jesus (Ephesians 1:22) carrying out their work of teaching the gospel and edifying the saints (Ephesians 4:12) had no need of “para” organizations to fulfill its purpose. Paul is never identified as the “President and CEO of International Christ to the Gentiles Crusade.” John is not “Executive Director of Agape Outreach.” Peter is not the founder of “Solid Rock Ministries.” Why is it that if the New Testament church functioned without these things we feel like we need them?

**What Difference Does It Make?**

To many people even raising such issues seems “legalistic” or like “straining out a gnat” and disputing over words. “As long as good is being done,” some say,

“what difference does it make?” Church history has shown us that human efforts to expand upon what God set up have led to the very chaos of denominationalism that exists today. People saw what they believed to be good works that needed to be done and failed to realize that if they created human organization in order to accomplish them they would ultimately contribute to disunity. Para-Church organizations lead to a number of significant problems:

**I. They Diminish the Role & Work of the Church.**

If a parent were to surrender to a nanny, a childcare center or even a grandparent all of their time spent with the child and their responsibility to raise the child it would be evident that in spite of the DNA and physical attributes that establish their parenthood, they would not be acting as a parent to the child. When the church either branches out into unscriptural works through the extension of “para-church” organizations or abandons Scriptural works to human organizations, in the same way they are not acting as the church. Jesus came to establish His church (Matthew 16:18). He died to purchase the church (Acts 20:28). It is an important institution which acts as the “pillar and ground of the truth” (I Timothy 3:15).



How can we think so little of something for which Jesus shed His blood? How can we appease our conscience into imagining that the Lord will not call us to account if we surrender to organizations of our own choosing the responsibilities the Lord has given to the church?

**II. They Change the Role & Work of the Church.**

Some might argue, “if the organization in question fulfills a work of the church – say evangelism, or some type of benevolence – isn’t that the same thing as the church carrying out the work?” Imagine a business executive who was too busy on his anniversary to take his wife out to dinner. If he sent his assistant to go to dinner with his wife instead, would she feel as if her husband was still “carrying out the work?” Do we communicate the same thing to the Lord? Are we too busy with unscriptural things that we must surrender to human institutions our own responsibilities? Do we care so little about our duties that we can give them over to others so readily? What if the organization teaches error? What if they misuse or steal funds? Will the elders of the church assume the liability for such abuse? If not then how can they claim that dismissing their responsibility to another organization is the same as the church “carrying out the work?”

Sadly, in many cases churches that have so readily given themselves to such things become little more than clearing houses for various human institutions. Sunday after

Sunday organization after organization vies for the support of the church. The focus of the eldership shifts away from the spiritual feeding of the flock to the evaluation of which institution is worthy of support. When they choose an assortment of “worthy causes,” these budgetary administrators fold their hands feeling that they have accomplished their work, when in truth the church may have done nothing.

**III. They Represent a Move Away from Respect for Biblical Authority.**

Churches of Christ have taken a unique position in the religious world. We have tried to assert that the Bible alone can be a sufficient guide for doctrine and organization. Just as we have called upon denominations to abandon sprinkling as a substitution for Scriptural baptism (i.e. immersion), we call upon denominations to give up their popes, cardinals, synods, conventions and any other organizations without Biblical authority. If we abandon this position and begin to create human organizations which we view as an extensions of the church how can we legitimately call upon the denominations to abandon their own creations? Are our creations better than theirs? Is it acceptable for us to act without Divine authority but they must not? Or, have we “matured” to the point that we don’t get “caught up” in such “trivialities”?

**IV. They Add Unnecessary Complications.**

As any elder, - (Cont. on pg. 4)