



# WORKING WITHIN YOUR CHURCH

A good team knows how to work within the structures and processes of their church.

As a Champion, you have a deep passion to see families in the First Thousand Days (FTD) be supported, connected in loving relationships and be strengthened. You might have already grown a team of volunteers and key people to carry this vision and passion forward.

This document captures the learnings from churches that have champs and teams and how they best work within the existing structures and processes of their church. Your church will look different. It will have its own leaders, ministries, decision making groups, and meetings. As much as we have attempted to make this as generic as possible, it will need to be contextualized in your church.

## THE PLACE OF THE FIRST THOUSAND DAYS (FTD) TEAM:

An important thing to remember is that the FTD team serves its local church. It is accountable to the leadership of that church – and not Sikunye. Sikunye is here to support, encourage, share resources and empower you to serve. We do not want any church to experience their FTD team as being misaligned, or independent of the church leadership. If your pastor is not aware or is not passionate about FTD, have a look at (resource [how to get your pastor on board](#))

We have discovered, however, that some champs are so passionate about the opportunities and ministries within the FTD space, that they get frustrated with their church leaders for not being as excited as they are. Unfortunately, this can lead to FTD teams seeing pastors / church leaders as roadblocks / barriers / the 'problem' rather than seeing them as key allies. This breeds mistrust between the leaders and the FTD team, leading to relational breakdown and frustration.

Pastors hold the whole life of the church and want to see every area of church life grow. Your passion for families in the first thousand days is great, but there are other things in the church that require attention, pastoral care and leadership. Ensure you have empathy for other areas of church life that your pastors are carrying, and understand that you might not be able to get everything you want in the time you want. Be sure you ask your pastor what is on the heart of the leaders for the church at this time. Knowing that can help you position your ideas to be in line with other areas of church life.

It is best when you, as the champ, and your team, are working in a way that brings unity within the church.

## Understand your local church

To effectively serve within your local congregation, it is important to understand how the early life team fits within the decision-making people and groups. It is not always clear who decides on what and how the FTD team fits within broader teams and decisions. Factors like the size of your congregation, leadership team and style of decision making will affect how your team will operate. We encourage you to sit with your pastor / key leader and ask questions about how you and your team fits within the broader structures. If possible, explore having a key leader / pastor that you account to. This tends to speed up decision making.

## Map out who does what

To best serve within your church leadership structures, it is important to make clear who decides on what. Some pastors or key leaders that you report to want to know a great level of details. Others will be fine with the headlines.

As you look at the ideas and plans for your team in the church, put names to the following four areas:

- Who is actually doing this task to completion? (Responsible)
- Assisting – who is helping the person who is responsible? (Assisting)
- Consulting – who do you need to 'check in with' to keep moving (Consulted)
- Informed – who do you need to keep up to date about this task (Informed)

Sometimes these can be limited to a project – like making changes to an area for moms to breastfeed, or it can be ongoing tasks, like bringing FTD-related prayer items to prayer meetings, organizing meal rosters for families in the FTD.

We encourage you to meet with your pastor, or key leader to map out these kinds of details. Talk through what ideas you have planned and ask how they want to be part of the process of planning, decision making and delivery. Typically, earlier in on the project requires more conversations with leaders, to ensure everyone is aligned.

Bring clarity to what you can, and a plan to bring clarity to areas that are not yet clear. Decisions around who is in your team, areas of teaching/ theology, if/ how money can be spent and communications normally require much more detailed conversations.

Together, agree on how they want to be kept up to date with how things are moving forward. This will help ensure that there is alignment and awareness. Keep reporting back on progress or challenges so that your pastor is informed and able to lead in this area.

## “Front of church” announcements and communication

Depending on your church culture and context, making announcements in a Sunday meeting may require permission several days in advance. It might be an announcement of a pregnancy or birth, a call for volunteers in an FTD ministry, a new opportunity that exists etc. Explore the best way of bringing an announcement on a Sunday, so that it is in line with how things normally operate. How much does the pastor or key leader need to know about what you are announcing? In short, they should not be surprised by what you are saying. We encourage that you script what will be said and send it / talk it through with your leader so that they are fully aware of what will be said.

The same principles apply to using other media to communicate – Whatsapp groups, social media, noticeboards and newsletters. Seek permission first. Similarly, be sure you have the permission of the family, should you want to be sharing any details of pregnancy, birth or miscarriage.

### General tips:

When engaging with leaders and volunteers who are perhaps already serving families or young children, be sure to help them see the value and opportunity of the First Thousand Days, and the church's role in it. For folks who are not yet aware of this, they may be defensive that someone is wanting to bring new ideas into an area that may have been their responsibility. Engage in a way that helps them to not get defensive but help them see the value and opportunity of FTD-specific activities to existing ministries. We encourage you to win them over to the ideas and opportunities, rather than assuming they should know this already. See [resource 4.2](#) on how to win others over.

We encourage you to gain the above clarity before you grow your team too quickly. Whilst it might feel like 'red tape', for the FTD team to effectively serve the church, it must work within the structures, leadership and processes, otherwise there will be friction and challenges that can slow down good ideas. If you are directly approaching people to serve in the FTD team, be sure that they talk to leaders in other ministries in which they might be serving. You don't want other ministries to experience the FTD team as being the one that 'poaches' people from other ministries.

When sharing updates with your key leader / leadership team, be sure to share positive news. It can be easy to only focus on challenges. You want your leaders to be sufficiently informed so that they can lead well. You also want them to experience the value of the FTD team and the work that is being accomplished. Feeling like you only bring complaints and frustrations will strain the working relationship.

## Conclusion:

Be sensitive to how your church works behind the scenes. Working within those processes, teams and decision-making will help you in the short term and the long term. Remember, this is all about sustained ministry and change.

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