

Tech Talk

by Randy Salo

For a computer to operate you need hardware (the physical machine) and software (the programs that interact with the hardware). There is a wide range of software. This article provides a high-level overview of common categories of software.

First there is the operating system (OS). Without the OS it is fairly safe to say you don't have a working computer. It is the OS that provides the overall interface the software employs to use the hardware. Examples of Operating System software are versions of Windows such as XP, Vista and, the latest, 7 along with Linux, Macintosh OS and UNIX. Each operating system has its own set of supported hardware. Applications running on a computer must also adhere to the interfaces provided by the operating system. Think of the OS as the "broker" between the hardware and the software.

Running along with the operating system are software components called device drivers. These programs are responsible for controlling specific pieces of hardware. For instance, the video card in a machine is controlled by a device driver. There are different device drivers for accessing the hard drive, controlling printers, network cards, etc. Because they need to access hardware, device drivers can operate in modes requiring higher degrees of "trust" by the operating system than other applications. The operating system maintains this "trust" by defining specific interfaces that device drivers must use.

Another type of software is application software. This category includes word processors, email management, contact management, spreadsheets, image editing, web browsers, etc. Each application has a specific intent. Additionally, each application interfaces with the computer through the operating system using a pre-defined set of messages. These common messages provide similar functionality for many applications to use reducing the effort required for each application to accomplish its own purpose.

How does this apply to the overall Church? We can think of the hardware as the Church itself. However, without the pastoral staff (operating system) we only have the physical building and group of people. The pastoral staff is responsible for the general leadership and oversight of the Church. They provide the overall structure by which the rest of the Church interacts.

The operating system relies on device drivers to interface with hardware. The pastoral staff also depends on trusted advisors to manage the details of the local body. These trusted advisors may be referred to as elders or deacons depending on the needs of the individual body of Believers.

Additionally the pastoral staff relies on many people in the church body to accomplish specific duties. For instance, there are people who teach Sunday School, use their abilities to lead worship and others to manage the finances and physical condition of the buildings. Each person is used by God under the leadership and direction of the pastoral staff.

A computer without device drivers cannot accomplish anything. A computer

also needs applications to provide functionality end users require. Similarly the pastoral staff cannot run a church alone; they need trusted advisors and helpers to perform specific duties in line with their talents and gifts. The pastoral staff is responsible for the overall spiritual health of the local body. They must ensure the framework in which the body operates is consistent with God's Word. The elders / deacons are responsible for managing the low-level spiritual matters of the church. The individual members of the church each have their own function and provide a certain "feature" of the church.

To function effectively each component closely interacts with the others. When all the software components of a computer operate within their own bounds great needs are met. However when one piece of software is unstable the entire machine suffers. This could result in applications crashing or the entire computer coming to a halt.

The local body of Believers also needs to work closely together. One part of the body cannot assume more power than they are due. An effective leader knows their role and their limits. They are willing to accept input from others and act on it. They also know they cannot do it all; responsibility is given to people with talents that can accomplish the task at hand. This requires willingness of people to perform the task, planning to know what needs to be done and delegation of the task itself.

The end result of components working together in a computer system is a machine allowing its user to complete a task efficiently and effectively. So it is with the church; it needs people operating together, within the framework managed by the pastoral staff, to accomplish God's work.