

Improving the Way UUCF Operates

Frequently Asked Questions

In December 2003, UUCF's Board of Trustees asked the Review and Renewal (R&R) Committee to look for ways to improve the way UUCF operates—essentially how our board operates and how it interacts with the congregation and UUCF leadership—both salaried and lay.

The Review & Renewal Committee has been meeting regularly since January 2004. With the board's input, the group has been evaluating an organizational model known as "policy governance." The group is now exploring various structures and operating practices from the model, looking at how those might work at UUCF and determining what adaptations might be needed to fit our particular circumstances.

The following frequently asked questions (FAQs) have been included in a series of *UUCFWorks* inserts to the UUCF Newsletter since last September. These FAQs provide an explanation of why we need to make improvements to the way we operate, how a different structure might work, and possible challenges in implementing changes to our current structure. You may notice that some of the questions do not have definitive answers. The board and R&R committee are engaged in an ongoing exploration of many innovative ideas that will require additional study and consideration before we know how they will specifically affect our religious community at UUCF.

Q. With everything else that is going on, why are we looking at changing our leadership structure and operations now?

- A. UUCF is in a period of ministerial transition. We lost a full-time, senior minister and called an interim minister while we search for a new minister. This transition is an excellent time to review who we are as a congregation and how well we are accomplishing our mission. An important aspect of this self-reflection is looking at how we direct and control decisions about the activities we pursue.

Our interim minister, Rev. Richard Nugent, describes one of the developmental tasks of interim ministry as, "Clarifying the multiple dimensions of leadership, both ordained and lay, and aiding the congregation in navigating the shifts in leadership that accompany times of transition." Operating with an unclear and/or inadequate leadership structure contributed to many of our problems over the past few years. We need to clean up our structure so we don't face the same problems again. Also, since we will soon be calling a new minister, we need that minister to be well-informed about, and happy with, the leadership structure in which he/she will operate.

Q. Why do we want to change our operating and leadership structures at UUCF?

- A. As time has passed and our congregation has grown, our needs have changed. To ensure UUCF remains a vibrant and relevant congregation, we must evaluate our organizational and leadership structures to make sure they continue to support the changing needs of our members. Our current structure was set more than 20 years ago when the congregation and the communities we serve were very different.

The way UUCF operates has failed to keep pace with the changing needs of our congregation and the environment in which we function as a religious community. For example, last year the lack of definition and clarity around board, ministerial, and staff responsibilities contributed to our ministerial and leadership crisis. In addition, many in the congregation and our leadership believe that the board spends too much time deciding issues that could be resolved by others, distracting them from higher-level, strategic issues that will benefit our congregation over the long term. These are some of the motivations for the board and the Review & Renewal Committee to explore ways to improve UUCF's structure and operations.

The following is information on the lack of definition about the roles of the UUCF board, the ministers, and staff.

The Board's Role

Our current structure is a traditional hierarchical model with the UUCF Board of Trustees operating not only as a decision-making body, but also as the group responsible for carrying out day-to-day operations. In our history, there has not been clear definition about the board's role related to any of the following:

- Serving as the congregation's voice in UUCF operations
- Determining the mission of the institution
- Developing, instituting, and monitoring operational policies
- Formal relationship to ministerial and other staff, in terms of hiring, evaluating, or firing
- Formal relationship to lay leadership in terms of monitoring and oversight
- Reviewing staff

Because what the board does, how it does it, and how it relates to the congregation, staff, and lay leaders has never been formally defined, the board's role has been open to vastly different interpretations over the years. This has led to shifting roles for the board, often based on the style of any given minister and/or board. It has also sometimes caused congregational uncertainty about the board.

Ministers' and Staff's Roles

Just as the board's role is not well defined, neither are the roles and responsibilities of our ministers and staff. The following items illustrate this point:

- To date, the senior and associate ministers have not had job descriptions that clearly lay out their areas of authority and accountability
- Reporting relationships between the two ministers and between the ministers and the board and congregation are not clear.
- Clear job descriptions, including reporting relationships and areas of accountability, do not exist for staff
- Effective, consistent evaluations of ministers and staff have not been done in years

While the Ad Hoc Committee on Models of Ministry and the Ministerial Search Committee will address some of these issues through their work, the structure in which these individuals operate needs to be clarified and formalized.

Q. What kinds of organizational and operating changes are being considered?

A.. As an institution, we need to define and formalize the roles and responsibilities of the board, ministers, staff, and lay leadership. We must also clarify the relationships and linkages between these groups and individuals. Specifically, the board needs to move from being the day-to-day managers of UUCF to a group that:

- 1) Serves as the voice of the congregation;
- 2) Sets goals;
- 3) Delegates action; and
- 4) Monitors and evaluates performance.

Few operating models deal primarily with defining the board's role this clearly. However, a model called **Policy Governance®** was developed 15 years ago to address these issues in corporate and non-profit settings. The model lays out how boards in effective organizations should operate. It also describes how boards should interrelate with other entities in the organization. Corporations and non-profits have been successfully using this model for a decade. Large churches and congregations have begun adopting this model in recent years.

Q. What is Policy Governance®?

A. Policy Governance, an organizational model developed by renowned organizational experts John and Miriam Carver, is designed to make the leadership of an organization more efficient and responsive to its "owners." In the case of UUCF, owners would be members of the congregation.

Carver's model fundamentally redesigns the role of a board to be a conduit for translating members' needs and expectations into organizational action. It does this while delegating to organization leaders the specific means for accomplishing this result. Instead of simply being the overseer of management, the board becomes a proactive servant of the members and a creative force in directing the organization's activities.

Q. Can the Policy Governance® model apply to religious congregations like UUCF?

- A. Yes. Over the last five years, many large UU congregations have adopted policy governance, including congregations in Dallas, Oakland, San Francisco, St. Paul, Washington, D.C., and Wilmington, DE. In the Washington area, All Souls and Columbia have already implemented policy governance-based models, while Arlington and River Road are considering doing so. Although it is a relatively new concept for religious congregations, those that have adopted it report a positive experience to date.

Q. What is the role of the board in a religious institution under policy governance?

The role of the board of a religious congregation operating under policy governance would be to:

- 1) Serve as the voice of the congregation by proactively seeking members' input and listening to their needs;
- 2) Translate the members' needs into policies that guide the operations of the congregation in directions consistent with those needs;
- 3) Delegate responsibility for implementation of congregation policies and programs to a staff member in a top leadership position or to a management team made up of staff and lay leaders;
- 4) Monitor how well that individual or team actually performs those responsibilities and, accordingly, how well the congregation is being served; and
- 5) Evaluate the performance of those responsible for organizational results and use those evaluations to improve how needs are met in the future.

Q. How would things actually get done if UUCF used a policy governance structure?

- A. The board's role would be very different from its current role. Delegation plays a large role in policy governance. The board would set broad goals for UUCF, establish clear responsibilities for the ministers and senior staff, and regularly review performance. It would delegate responsibility for day-to-day operating decisions to others, most likely a team consisting of the ministers, a representative from the congregation (probably a former board member), and representation from the church staff, all of whom would be expected to work together collaboratively. Policy governance churches have various names for this kind of team, namely: management team, coordinating team, administrative team, and executive team. Though UUCF doesn't yet operate under policy governance, it does have a coordinating team coordinating many of its day-to-day operations.

Q. What's the role of our current coordinating team?

- A. Our Interim Sr. Minister Richard Nugent initially formed a coordinating team because he found a decision-making vacuum when he arrived at UUCF. He brought together the board (represented by its president), the staff (represented by the administrator), and the ministers to identify problems and recommend solutions to the board and others within the congregation (lay ministers, committee chairs, and activity coordinators). Its function thus far has been to coordinate activities, not manage or implement them.

Q. So what's wrong with our current Board/Coordinating Team structure?

- A. First, our congregation has never formalized any division of labor for UUCF's various day-to-day activities and decisions. Numerous policies and procedures (as well as traditions) have effectively ensured the performance of many of the various tasks in the past. But, with the growth of our congregation has come a significant growth in the numbers and kinds of services provided to the congregation. This has led to an increasing amount of confusion and conflict as well as tasks not being performed in a timely manner.

We lack a system of checks and balances that ensures the congregation as a whole remains in charge and in control of UUCF's vision and priorities.

Q. Why don't we simply formalize the coordinating team and give the board more authority to delegate day-to-day operations to that team instead of changing the structure?

- A. Policy governance offers a model for formalizing roles and responsibilities and setting limitations for how the board, ministers, staff, and lay leaders work with each other and the congregation. This may be particularly useful to us since those definitions are currently lacking. Policy governance offers a comprehensive governance model that focuses on changing the role of the board, rather than a piecemeal approach to change. Policy governance is an operating structure based on broad policies adopted by the board, taking into account the vision and mission of the congregation, with day-to-day authority to make decisions delegated to others.

Also, changing the name of the coordinating team to management team would be more reflective of the actual responsibilities of the group.

Q. What kinds of things would a board stop doing if it were functioning under policy governance?

Boards from local UU congregations with some policy governance experience have reported they have stopped doing the tasks listed below. Those boards now delegate those day-to-day operational tasks to a management team. This is not an all-inclusive list of activities, just an example of how the board's role might change. A board under policy governance does not:

- Recruit committee chairs/members (except for committees established by the board)
- Solve problems in day-to-day operations (scheduling conflicts, spaces for activities, personnel issues, interactions with vendors/contractors, etc.)
- Make general decisions about programs (requests for volunteers/money from charities, religious education issues, requests to change the locations of major events, etc.)
- Develop the budget (the board establishes budget priorities and approves the budget)
- Run the canvass
- Decide what to do with a complaint about the worship service format, coffee hour, etc. (except as part of a general monitoring program).

Again, a board does not need to do such things because it has arranged for the delegation of such tasks.

Q. If the board changes its role, won't it lose touch with the needs of the congregation?

- A. The congregation is likely to notice greater accessibility to board members, rather than less. In fact, under policy governance the board is charged with proactively seeking member input into decisions affecting the life of the congregation. You may have already seen some of these efforts, including focus groups, forums, and surveys. Policy governance should:
- Increase the time the board has for interacting with members, since board members will not be dealing with day-to-day issues.
 - Board-appointed committees will be formed that will report directly to the board, not to the ministers, so direct contact will continue.
 - Committees requiring staff support for their activities will work with the management team to get that support. If the committee does not need staff support, its members can directly execute their plans without getting "authorization" from either the management team or the board (assuming each committee is working within its charter and the bounds specified by UUCF policies).

Q. Under policy governance, what would the board delegate to the management team?

- A. The board would delegate responsibility for day-to-day operations to the management team. That team would complete the tasks that are within its scope of responsibilities. The management team would in turn delegate many tasks to the lay ministers or committees responsible for specific functions. The management team would also delegate day-to-day operational tasks to staff members. UUCF policies, developed by the board, would define the limitations placed on the actions of the management team and each of its members. Those policies would also define the limitations for many volunteer committees and lay ministries. Within the defined limitations, the management team would select its own way of doing things (means).

Q. Who will serve on the management team?

- A. Looking at models from other UU congregations that have implemented policy governance, we will likely have a five-person management team. Team members will include both ministers and the UUCF administrator. The other two members would come from the congregations' lay leadership. They would most likely have a significant level of tenure in both UUCF leadership and congregational activities. Since these roles would require a considerable weekday time commitment, the congregational representatives would have to be available to serve during those hours.

Q. In our current system, the senior minister has final authority for the coordinating team. Will the new lead minister for worship still have final authority in management team decisions?

- A. Generally, the management team will make decisions as a team. However, when the team cannot agree on a course of action, the lead minister for worship will cast the deciding vote.

Q. Won't policy governance require more time on the part of the lead minister.

- A. Under the old system, the senior minister was individually responsible for most operating decisions that were not already made by the board. Under the management team/policy governance model, the minister would work with a team to make decisions *when needed*. Each member of the team would have assigned responsibilities and would have authority to make decisions within their scope of work. Most activities would not require team decisions. So, not only would the work be spread across a team, but fewer decisions would need to be made.

Q. Will there be a liaison between the board of trustees and the management team?

- A. There would be no liaison between the board and the management team because the board would be responsible for evaluating the management team. It would be a conflict of interest for a board member to serve with the group he or she would be evaluating. Since the management team would be responsible for sending regular reports to the board, the board and management team would not need to have a liaison between them.

Q. What if something that's delegated doesn't get done? Who's responsible?

- A. Ultimately, the management team would be responsible and would report to the board if something that should have been done, didn't get done. How the management team ultimately monitors those doing the work will have to be decided by the management team. The board will evaluate the management team based on how well it has proceeded toward meeting the goals of the congregation.

Q. I now go to the board if I have a problem with a service provided by UUCF. Where would I go if we have a policy governance structure?

- A. Under the policy governance model, you will still be able to go directly to a board member if you have a question or concern. The board member will help you find the right group to help you with your problem. Under PG, the board will have an enhanced relationship with the congregation because the board will be charged with meeting the needs of the congregation and envisioning what those needs will be in the future. Only through frequent and direct communication with members can the board learn what it must know to plan for the future.

Q. How will minority viewpoints be heard and considered by UUCF leadership?

- A. This concern is appreciated and understood. Each member and friend is assumed to have the congregation's best interests in mind when forming and advancing a particular view on various issues. We are all individuals, with our own mix of experience, needs and expectations producing a prism through which we process information and form perspectives about any given issue. As responsible UUCF members and friends, we have several obligations concerning congregational issues:

- Taking the time to acquire, read, discuss and ponder information
- Participating in forums
- Expressing views while respecting the rights of others
- Supporting decisions reached through democratic processes

There are a number of ways by which views can be brought to the awareness of leadership and others:

- The initial period of regular Board meetings is reserved for anyone wishing to provide information or make an inquiry
- An open book of Joys & Concerns is always available in the Sanctuary Commons for personal expressions; this is periodically reviewed for matters requiring leadership attention
- Our leaders are also individual members to whom we have access at various church functions. Sometimes a private conversation is the best way to obtain information and express opinions.
- The petition route offers an opportunity to advance candidates for consideration, in addition to formal slates provided by the Nominating Committee.

Q. How does policy governance guide the way the board, staff, and lay leadership operate?

- A. The board will approve a set of management “limitations” that define what the board, management team, staff, and lay ministers cannot do. The board will convey the management team limitation to that team. The management team will convey limitations to the staff and lay ministers. The lay ministers will, in turn, express limits to their committees, adding other limitations as needed. The management team and staff can do anything to meet their goals that is not prohibited by the limitations. Likewise, the lay ministers and committees can pursue any activity not prohibited by the limitations or by their charters.

Q. How will policy governance be implemented?

- A. First, the board proposes to establish a management team. This is a necessary first step because the management team would be responsible for day-to-day operations. Over the last several months, the board has been developing the policies, limitations, ends, and means by which the new management team would operate. At a congregational meeting after the second service on January 23, the congregation will vote on resolutions to establish the management team and make the bylaws changes needed to implement this change.

If the congregation approves these changes, the board will move forward with developing additional policies, limitations, ends, and means that will guide overall congregational affairs. Full implementation is unlikely before the 2005-2006 congregational year.

Q. Do we plan to implement Policy Governance® in a prescriptive way?

- A. No. We will adapt the model to fit the needs of UUCF. For instance, several members of the congregation have recommended changes to the model that the board of trustees will consider before implementation. Also, as noted above, the board has recommended that the congregation implement a management team before the rest of the model is adopted.