

Meeting with Congregants
August 15, 2018
David Pyle - Report on Governance

Background of Board of Trustees' Consultation with David Pyle

All Souls Board of Trustees wanted to evaluate All Souls' current governing system (Policy Governance) and to consider alternatives that would clarify policy and administrative responsibilities and ensure monitoring.

September 2016: The Board asked Tracy Zorpette to lead a discussion on policy governance at the Board's retreat. Tracy reached out to Rev. David Pyle, Congregational Life Consultant and Governance Program Manager, Central East Region of the UUA, and an informal consulting relationship began. Several board members attended David's workshops for Trustees in 2016-2017 in the effort to assess the health of All Soul's governance, accountability, and staffing structures.

Spring 2017: The Trustees discussed a comprehensive governance review with David Pyle, received and reviewed a Memorandum of Understanding, but did not move forward at that time. The Board did approve a request from the Governance Committee for a bylaws review by David in July 2017.

June 2017: David Pyle led a trustee orientation organized by the Board's Governance Committee.

July 2017: The bylaws review commenced.

October 2017: The bylaws review was completed.

February 2018: The Board organized a Trustee retreat and work session led by David Pyle.

March 2018: The Board entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with David Pyle to prepare an assessment.

April 2018: The Board arranged for David to present to the congregation on the basics of church governance and All Souls' governance structure.

May/June 2018: David conducted two 3-hour sessions with the Board to explain his report and recommendations.

August 2018: The Board arranged for David to meet with All Souls congregants to explain his report and recommendations and to answer questions.

Meeting Summary

David introduced himself and began his presentation by defining governance as how we make decisions together. In his study he asked, “What is the story of how this congregation has approached its decision-making?” He emphasized: **No governance system can solve the problems of covenantal relationships.**

Q: What happens after the meeting?

DP: All Souls, you all, must decide how to go forward.

Q: When you say, “you all,” what do you mean?

DP: All Souls must decide – the Board, task force, congregants.

Initially, David began his study of All Souls’ governance by reviewing the by-laws with four parameters in mind. 1) Stress test – Are there ways in which the by-laws could be used that the church would not want them to be used? 2) How are the by-laws similar to other church by-laws? 3) What’s great about the by-laws? 4) Where can the by-laws be adapted? David’s by-laws review is available online for congregational perusal. The by-laws are **not** the focus of this report on governance. Congregants may review David’s bylaws report on the church’s website at [this link](#) under “Other BOT docs” on the right-hand sidebar.

Governance

In most congregations practicing Congregational Polity where the congregation itself is the primary governance authority, there are three levels of governance.

Governance Level #1: Congregational Meeting

The Congregational Meeting was created by the founding document that established who members are and how to vote. The congregation makes level 1 decisions, typically at an annual meeting, that include calling a minister, changing bylaws, approving a budget, and choosing trustees and officers and holding them accountable.

At Level #1, members of the congregation are the authority. There is no higher authority. It is not practical for the implementation and administration of goals because Congregational Meetings are not held often enough and all members cannot efficiently be involved in all decisions.

Governance Level #2: This level includes bodies elected by the Congregational Meeting such as the Board of Trustees and the Senior Minister who is called by the Congregational Meeting and is a member of the Board of Trustees.

The Board decides the governance system. At All Souls the Board has chosen Policy Governance. The Board decides how decisions are made between the Board and the elements, such as task forces and committees, that the Board creates. The Board decides the relationships, and so the decisions have to be made differently than in level #1.

The Board sets goals/ends.

The Board also sets limits saying what the Executive cannot do. This negative language makes it hard to measure the achievements, so the Board measures specific ends.

The Board directs the Executive to meet the goals. In the case of All Souls, the Executive has been a three-person team including the called Senior Minister Rev. Rob Hardies, called Associate Minister Rev. Susan Newman, and the Executive Director Katie Loughary.

Accountability is adversarial instead of a partnership. The Senior Minister reports to congregation as a called minister in level #1. However, the Senior Minister in level # 2 is an executive reporting to the Board.

At All Souls the Executive is a team and the Board has to hold a *team* accountable. Under stress or in times of conflict, the Carver system of Policy Governance tends to break down, especially if you have an Executive Team in which one person hires one other member of the team (i.e. the senior minister hires the executive director) and the congregation calls the other two members (i.e. the senior minister and the associate minister) and then the senior minister supervises the other two. It's a mess!

All Souls was a small congregation of 200 when the Senior Minister was called. Policy Governance was newly in place, but the search committee was not set up to find a minister with experience in Policy Governance. All Souls was one of the

first UUA churches to adopt this form of governance and few ministers were available with that experience.

In general, the hope of adopting Policy Governance had been two-fold: ministers thought it would solve the issue of challenge to ministerial authority by empowering the minister, and lay leaders thought it would solve the problem of not holding the ministers accountable. Policy Governance did not solve these problems.

After 9/11 the All Souls congregation grew rapidly and few congregants understood Policy Governance.

Governance Level #3: This is the implementation level of church government. Here the relationships are between those who have been given executive, program, administrative, and operational authority by the Board in level #2 and those in the congregation who are engaged in implementing those efforts. Board Committees are created and supervised by the Board at level 2; Operational Committees exist at level 3 and their effectiveness is the responsibility of the Executive Team that includes the Executive Director, the called Senior Minister and the called Associate Minister.

There is confusion with the Senior Minister's role at every level because it changes at every level. There is also confusion because congregants' roles and authority change at every level. This is what happens in a congregational system and that is not the same structure as a corporation or a non-profit. In those there is a clear distinction between those individuals in level #1 and level #3.

Q: What is a solution for this murkiness?

DP: Education and buy-in by congregants of the church's governance system are necessary with an understanding that it is tied to a spiritual community and it is an expression of our UUA values. There needs to be this buy-in of core beliefs because under stress a congregation goes to the most conservative understanding of its governance system.

Congregational Meetings cannot maintain management and oversight. In any congregation there are some congregants who are deeply involved in church culture issues. David referred to Ronald Heifetz's "creative zone of

disequilibrium.” Congregational participation and awareness of governance falls in three levels. When times are good, most congregants don’t care about such details. In times of major crisis, brains shut down and can’t function; Boards make decisions in the strictest understanding of governance. In between these two extremes is the opportunity for growth and change in church culture issues. They are cultivated in the “creative zone of disequilibrium.”

Q: How can more congregants be better informed?

DP: Quarterly Church Council meetings with committee chairs meeting and sharing with congregants is one possibility. Congregational town hall meetings in good times are sparsely attended and in stress times are difficult. A positive of such meetings is that issues possibly can be addressed before a crisis develops. Intentional communication and linkage are the keys, not structures.

Q: How can one be an informed voter at congregational meeting if some have confidential information, but others don’t. It is hard for congregants to know all information.

DP: When all is good, there is trust. When the system is not working, trust is not there. Transparency is the place to be until the stress is over. Transparency is passive, however, and puts the burden on all congregants to read and know. David recommends reading Healthy Disclosure.

A congregant commented that after 9/11 there was a period of great growth, a creative and imaginative period; this was the period of her greatest involvement, but then things hardened in the murkiness to an adversarial place and she stepped back from involvement. Now she is wanting to step back in.

David has observed a pattern over time between ministers and congregants. A congregation calls a charismatic minister and the board’s relationship with the senior minister is collaborative. Over time, the charismatic minister is not great at all things. Perhaps excelling in preaching and social justice and not great at administration. The board transitions to manage those areas where the minister may not be great – as no minister is perfect. There are no perfect ministers. As the board is elected over time, it moves toward an accountability mode to oversee the areas that don’t go so well. And with a murky system, things do not work well.

Q: Do ministers go through cycles?

DP: Yes, ministers have cycles. One reason the UUA offers a sabbatical every seven years is to provide an opportunity for the minister to rejuvenate. It also provides the congregation the opportunity to hear other ministers and to have a period of separation from the minister.

There are two ways rejuvenation can happen: 1) a sabbatical rejuvenates the minister; 2) a major event or new major initiative rejuvenates the minister/board partnership. As an example, A. Powell Davies' ministry went through two cycles like this—a period of creativity and partnership followed by a period of hardening into accountability, and then rejuvenation. The initiative to start many new UU churches in our area is one such rejuvenation.

Q: What makes policy governance more closed rather than a partnership?

DP: In Policy Governance implementers can restrict data and information sharing. By law personnel and HR information is restricted. In Policy Governance the Executive is responsible for implementation; the Board holds the Executive responsible; and the Congregation holds the Board responsible.

Q: How is it possible to hold a Senior Minister accountable when information is hampered by employment laws?

DP: The Board is making ethical decisions and makes them in trust. The Board must actively communicate as much as can be communicated. Contracts supersede a call to ministry. Correction is transparency. Transparency is to be done until trust is rebuilt.

Congregants comments:

1) The Executive Team is responsible for HR.

2) We are flipping back and forth when we say Executive between the Senior Minister and the Executive Team. We have no way to evaluate the Executive Team.

Q: How does Policy Governance manifest systemic white supremacy?

DP: Since Policy Governance was developed, there has been growing cultural awareness of systemic white supremacy. Sin of White Supremacy has highlighted the issues in the academic environment. The UUA has conducted its first rounds white supremacy teach-ins in many congregations. There is now recognition of

white supremacy imbedded in Roberts' Rules of Order and in Policy Governance. There is more work to do.

There is not a governance system that resolves relationships. It just tries to put them into predictable parts so they can be managed by covenantal relationships. Covenants work to move the community from the dream to the beloved community.

By definition a "Covenantal Relationship" is an agreement we make in light of some reality beyond us. In Hebrew scripture that greater reality is God. In UU culture that greater reality is *our dream of a world made whole and just*.

Recommendations

1. Adapt the congregation's Policy Governance model towards a Governance and Ministry modes, as expressed in the book Governance and Ministry by Dan Hotchkiss.

Hotchkiss wrote his first book twelve years ago and it was all theory. The second edition is 1/3 theory and 2/3 implementations. The later book takes into account the actual experiences of congregations and defines lines of accountabilities. David Pyle recommended reading both books.

Q: Are there any other governmental ideas rooted in the perspective of feminism and people of color and awareness of issues of white supremacy?

DP: Susan Beaumont is one resource and I will share additional sources. One suggestion is to have a team with this special lens participate in training on these issues.

2. Transition the Senior Minister fully into the role of a member of the ASCU Board of Trustees with the Senior Minister accountable to the board of Trustees for the effectiveness of the congregation's programming within the mission and vision of the congregation.

Take the Senior Minister out of the Executive role at Level #3, but fully functional at the Board level at Level #2. This would be a non-voting member and more of a shared voice in setting the mission and vision. The reason for the non-voting role

is that Trustees would never see the minister's hand up when the Trustees' hand is down.

Q: How is it possible to resolve the conflict of the Board's ability to evaluate the Senior Minister?

DP: The Board would have more useful evaluation information when working in partnership with the Minister.

3. Hire an Executive Director who is accountable to and hired by the Board, with direct responsibility for all congregational administration, finance, and operations, with the Senior Minister and Board President serving as the day-to-day accountability liaisons of the Board for the Executive Director.

There are two big places for tension: funding of programming and staff supervision.

Two senior professionals must manage the funding of programs.

Staff supervision should rely upon a system of evaluation developed and overseen by the Executive Director. The Senior Minister will use the system to evaluate all ordained ministerial staff. Other ordained ministers/staff will use the system to evaluate the staff that they supervise. The Board will hold the Executive Director accountable for managing the implementation and operation of the evaluation system.

4. Require the Executive Director to develop and implement a policy for an effective employee Performance Management system, including requiring the Senior Minister to conduct appropriate Performance Management Reviews of all ordained staff within that system.

5. Integrate the Congregational Officer Positions of Secretary and Treasurer into the Board of Trustees as voting ex-officio members of the Board of Trustees. Reduce the number of Trustees elected by the congregation directly to seven, two or three elected per year for a three-year term as appropriate. Maintain electing the President and Vice President from within the direct elected Trustees.

David has never seen another congregation in which officers were elected but were not members of the Board. A smaller Board makes for better communication and efficiency.

6. Maintain the Moderator as the only non-board Congregational Officer position and have the Board of Trustees appoint the Assistant Secretary and Assistant Treasurer positions from among the Membership. Board Appointed Officer's participation in the Board of Trustees should be limited to filling in the specific duties of the Treasurer and Secretary in the event of their absence.

7. Integrate into the Moderator's responsibilities the provision of Process Observation for the Board of Trustees.

The Moderator should serve the Congregational Meeting as their observer in the deliberations of the Board of Trustees. The Leadership Development and Nominating Committee could assume responsibility for the training of Moderator as Observer. The Moderator could run the Congregational Meetings, but not run the Church Council.

8. Transition the Membership Secretary position into a Membership Volunteer Staff position that reports to the Senior Minister.

This is a Level #3 responsibility, not Level #1. It has a program and outreach function with administrative and data components.

9. Develop with the Executive director an effective and regular monitoring regime and maintain that monitoring regime with minimal changes for a minimum of three years.

Monitoring is how the Executive reports to the Board. Regular reports make monitoring easier. The three-year minimum provides the Board with comparable data for evaluating well the Executive is doing.

10. Reclaim Strategic Planning and Congregational Assessment as a responsibility of the Board of Trustees from the Executive, and implement

a plan for effective accomplishment of both that may involve delegation to Standing committees of the Board. The Senior Minister will participate in these processes as a member of the Board of Trustees, and the Executive Director will support the processes by providing necessary data to the Board of Trustees.

Forward leadership and informed congregational involvement are the responsibilities of the Board.

11. Make appropriate changes to the ASCU Bylaws and the Board of Trustees Governing Policies to implement these changes, as well as to implement recommendations from the Bylaws and Governing Policies Review.

Establish a team to work on Bylaws, not the Board.

12. Integrate into the congregation's leadership development and new member programs an educational program on the congregation's governance structures, theory, and process, with a focus on developing awareness in members of different roles and responsibilities at different levels of congregational governance.

Membership orientation should include both a focus upon spiritual growth in a faith tradition without a creed and governance awareness.