



UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION

Basics of Governance Presentation

All Souls Church, Unitarian

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What in the World is Governance?

- Governance is a fancy word for “How We Make Decisions Together”
- Every Unitarian Universalist Congregation designs their Governance differently
 - No two UU Congregations have the same Governance systems
- There are only minimal expectations of commonality about Governance amongst Unitarian Universalist congregations
 - Most Unitarian Universalists think there is far more governance in common between congregations
 - Often Unitarian Universalists believe that their first congregational experience of Governance is the “right” way
- Governance is **ALWAYS** an expression of the congregation’s culture, identity, vision, and mission.



My Assumptions and Biases as a Consultant

- I am “agnostic” when it comes to structures of Congregational Governance
 - Many different structures and organizations can be “good governance”
- The effectiveness of a Governance Structure depends on a few things
 - Clarity about the roles and responsibilities within the structure
 - How well people function within the structure
 - That the structure be an expression of the congregation’s culture, identity, vision, mission
- As Culture, Identity, Vision, and Mission change, so should a congregation’s Governance
- How we make decisions together is a clear expression of our faith
- The Purpose of Church is Spiritual Growth and Transformation
 - Governance should serve the congregation fulfilling that purpose



My Consultant Work with ASC

- 2016-17 Church year – Consultant support to the ASC Board of Trustees Governance Committee
- Fall 2017 -- Conducted a Bylaws Review for the ASC Board of Trustees
- February 2018 – Facilitated a Board Retreat for the ASC Board of Trustees
- This Presentation and Congregational Consultation
- Have agreed to a Governance Assessment and Governing Policies Review for the ASC Board of Trustees, to be completed by the end of June 2018

- Only indirectly involved in support related to the resignation of Rev. Dr. Susan Newman Moore
- I will be deploying as a military chaplain in September 2018



What is a “Governance Assessment”

- With the unique nature of each congregation’s Governance as an expression of the congregation’s Identity, Culture, Vision, and Mission, there is no “mass process” of Governance discernment that is effective
- A Governance Assessment is a process where we look at the structures, assumptions, and practice of governance in a congregation in light of the congregation’s assumptions, culture, and practice.
- The goal is to create an assessment that the congregational leadership (and others) can react to, in order to better understand their governance assumptions and system
- It also makes recommendations for possible adaptation of the system, and guidance for implementing such changes
- It also reviews and provides commentary on the documentary structure



There is no one right answer...

- Every Congregation designs their own governance
- No governance system lasts forever – Congregations experiment and change
- Good Governance means three things
 - Relationships and Responsibilities are Clear and Explicit
 - There is a place for the unexpected
 - There is appropriate accountability
- Major Governance Styles in UU Churches
 - Operational Board Structures
 - Liaison/Portfolio Board Structures
 - Strategic Board Structures
 - This includes but is not limited to the several forms of Policy Governance



Three Levels of Governance in UU Congregations

Level 1 – Congregational Polity

Level 2 -- Board / Executive
Relationship

Level 3 – Congregational Organization



Level 1 -- Congregational Polity

- This is the governance relationship formed between the members of the congregation and the elements they directly create
- This Level of Governance is created by the congregation's Constitution / Articles of Incorporation / Bylaws
- It includes the relationship between the Congregational Meeting and all of the Officers and Trustees
- Each member of the congregation is a part of this level of governance
- All other Levels of Governance are ultimately accountable to this Level of Governance
- Sometimes it includes a relationship with other elements such as Endowment Committees, Nominating Committees, etc.





Level 2 – Board / Executive Relationship

- This level of Governance is established by the Governing Board through Policy
- It defines the “Executive” within the congregation that is responsible for the operations and programming of the congregation
- It defines the relationship between the Board and the Executive
- It defines the authority and the limitations of the Executive
- Some of the more common models of this in Congregations:
 - Policy Governance
 - Governance and Ministry / Governance by Policy
 - Executive Council / Program Council structure
 - Professional / Lay Executive Team structures
 - Operational Board Structures





Level 3 – Congregational Organization

- This level is the structures of the congregation that are organized by and in some way accountable to the Executive
- This includes all the teams, committees, and programs of the congregation
- This is where the majority of the congregational life and ministry happens
- It happens within the structures created at Level 2
- Decisions that are made here are mostly focused on programming and operations
- Some elements are responsible to the Governing Board
 - Standing Committees and Task Forces
- Some elements are responsible to the Executive
 - Committees, teams, programs, etc.





What is “Policy Governance”?

- Policy Governance is a name for a “Level 2” system of Governance
- It comes to us through the Corporate and then Non-Profit world
- It is an attempt to define the relationship between the Governing Board and the Executive
- It has been adapted several times to several different variations to apply to congregational governance.
- It sets the Executive (however defined) as the authority for all operational concerns
- It limits the ways the Executive can exercise that authority
- It limits the ways the Board can exercise operational authority
- The Board sets Ends to guide Executive decisionmaking and accountability



Why Policy Governance?

- Policy Governance was adopted by many UU congregations, Large, Medium, and Small
- It works differently in different congregations, based on congregational Identity, Culture, Vision and Mission
- There are several different “flavors” based in different consultant formulations (i.e. Carver, Unity Consulting, Hotchkiss)
- There was a hope it would “solve” issues of authority, responsibility, and accountability in congregations
- Culture is Stronger than Structure however, and issues of authority, responsibility, and accountability continued even after implementation of Policy Governance



A Few of My Own Opinions

- I am not the “biggest fan” of Policy Governance in UU Congregations
 - Was not designed for religious communities
- How well it works depends upon the congregation’s culture
- It has some significant elements within it that are expressions of White Supremacy culture (once again, my opinion, not shared by all)
- It depends upon the ability of the Governing Board to terminate the employment of the Executive, something congregational boards cannot do if the Executive is a called minister
- It grants the Executive an inordinate amount of authority within a Congregational Polity system
- It sometimes creates an adversarial dynamic between the Governing Board and the Executive



Governance at ASC

- This is very preliminary, as I have just begun the Governance Assessment Process
- ASC clearly has the 3-Level system
- Authority and Responsibility is not clearly defined within the 3-Levels of the system
- Accountability structures between the levels are not robust, and trust has eroded because of this at all levels of the system
- The congregation may not be culturally appropriate to a strict or rigid understanding of Policy Governance
- The congregation has a more complex than usual system of Level 1 Governance



Governance at ASC

- There is significant “cross-level” confusion amongst congregants as a result of this lack of clear accountability structures and eroded trust
- The congregation has an all-staff “Executive team” at Level 2 that includes both Ordained/Called members and senior non ministerial staff, that causes some additional difficulties in accountability and responsibility
- The congregation has both elected Congregational Officers and a separate Board of Trustees that create other opportunities for confusion amongst leaders at Governance level 1
- Programs and leaders feel accountable to staff at Level 3, while also knowing that staff should be accountable to them at Levels 1 and 2
- Result is a system where responsibility and accountability are murky and difficult to manage at all levels of Governance



A Few Additional Notes

- The Larger a congregation gets, the greater the need for organization at Level 3
- The Larger a congregation gets, the greater the need for accountability at Level 2
- The Larger a congregation gets, the greater the need for good practices of disclosure at Level 1 (versus Transparency)
- While some ministers have experience or skill at being an executive, this is not something seminary teaches
- Nothing in Policy Governance requires the Executive of a congregation be ordained
- No governance structure will address challenges in a congregation's culture



AND NOW, A TIME FOR YOUR QUESTIONS