

Process and Rationale for Proposed Board Restructure
and other Bylaw Revisions
January 2019

The current structure of nine Board members with six council directors has been in place about 20 years. Early in the life of that structure, council directors supervised staff. About ten years ago, the minister became head of staff responsible for supervision. Although change comes slowly, it's time to review the board structure and consider a different method of governance.

This past spring and summer discussions took place with congregation members to get input about restructuring the Board. At the end of August, a working group formed. The group gathered information from the governance section of the UUA web site, contacted other UU churches, read bylaws of other UU churches, consulted with St. John's members in leadership positions and consulted with our minister Rev. Mitra Jafarzadah. In November, the working group presented their proposal to the Board.

The proposed Board structure and other changes to bylaws will help St. John's with the lack of volunteers for elected positions. Currently, there are four open Board positions: Administrative Council Director, Community Council Director, Finance Council Director and Mission Council Director. Reducing the number of Board positions and the number of Fund Trustees will free active members to volunteer for other open positions.

St. John's inability to fill needed volunteer positions, indicates a need for Leadership Development. Many UU churches give that responsibility to Nominating Committee. The proposed bylaws change Nominating Committee's name to Leadership Committee indicating responsibility for Leadership Development. The Committee will continue to focus on recruiting elected leaders and running the elections at the annual meeting. Stating responsibility for Leadership Development will help ensure work is done in that area.

The proposed bylaws change terms for Board members from two years to three years. In the past many Board members served for more than one two-year term. For example, the Vice President position was commonly filled by a Council Director or a Council Director stayed on the Board for a total of four years. That hasn't been the pattern recently. Three-year terms provide more productive time on the Board given the time it takes to learn how to do the work of the Board. In addition, three-year terms help with institutional memory and reduce recruiting for the Leadership Committee.

Immediate Past President is a new Board position. The current president will stay on the Board to continue working on any projects started during his/her presidency. The Immediate Past President will be able to mentor the new President, provide institutional memory and assist with leadership development. Therefore, Vice President, President and Immediate Past President will serve on the Board for a total of three years, one year in each position.

Removing Council Directors from the Board, implies that committee chairs and team leaders will take on stronger roles. The Board and the congregation must trust that these leaders will serve the needs of St. John's without monitoring provided by Council Directors. Self-monitoring is empowering and motivating.

The new board position of Program Director gives committee/team leaders a line of communication with the Board. The Program Director will focus on communication with teams/committees which can be accomplished by reading monthly reports, reading meeting notes or periodically meeting with committee chairs/team leaders.

Member at Large, a new board position, is responsible for filling roles delegated by the President, leading short-term subcommittee assignments and acting as board liaison for groups not assigned to the Program Director. In addition, Member at Large may volunteer to lead projects that the Board deems valuable.

The number of elected Fund Trustees has been reduced from four to two. In the past Fund Trustees were required to manage funds. Currently most funds are managed according to guidelines from the UUA. The main task of Fund Trustees is ensuring that fund rules are followed. Although it might be helpful to have four sets of eyes, the job can be done by fewer volunteers.

Current bylaws limit Nominating Committee (proposed Leadership Committee) members to one two-year term. Proposed bylaws change the term limits to two two-year terms. Overall, the proposed bylaws will help the Committee by reducing the number of elected positions and increasing the number of years volunteers serve.

Current bylaws don't define the role of Committee on Ministry (CoM). The proposed bylaws contain a description of CoM based on information from the UUA web site. The description makes it clear that CoM is concerned with the spiritual health of the entire ministry of the congregation. CoM will help committees/teams see their strengths and challenges in serving the needs of the congregation. The description of CoM is in ARTICLE X: Special Committees Reporting to the Congregation.

The proposed bylaws give CoM more flexibility. Currently the number of committee members is six. Depending on the type of project CoM is working on, six members may not be required. Rather than stating that the committee has six members, the proposed bylaws state four to six members. In addition, language describing how CoM evaluates ministry should not appear in bylaws. CoM benefits from greater flexibility in evaluation methods.

For details and comparison, please read the document with proposed bylaws and current bylaws, found at the website and posted at church.

From the Reorganization Committee Working Group:

If this proposed board structure is approved by the congregation on March 10, 2019, it should be reviewed and evaluated in two to three years. Immediate Past President, Program Director and Member at Large are new positions. It's likely the duties for these positions will change over time. It's important to periodically review and change bylaws.

For newer UUs: A characteristic of UU churches is Congregational Polity. From the UUA, "Under congregational polity each congregation is self-governing, choosing its own leadership, handling its own finances...." This gives St. John's members freedom and responsibility other churches may not have.

Reorganization Committee Working Group:

Debbie Combs, former Board Secretary

John Kachuba, former Mission Council Director

Monica Pellman, current Board Secretary

Matthew Peterson, chair and former Board President