

First Unitarian Society in Newton



Governance Committee Report

Overview

August 2008

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How to Read This Report

Level One: The Overview

We have divided our work into three levels. *Level I* is an overview. It is essential reading for all members of the board and other church leaders. We suggest that it be posted on the church website.

Since people have different reading styles, there is no correct sequence for reading this document. Nonetheless, we suggest you begin by scanning ***The Overview***. Then follow the sequence outlined below. This sequence mirrors the process we went through over the year and seems to be a good way of approaching the work.

Introduction

- How to Read the Report
- Charge, Scope, and Methods
- Governance Defined

Summary Findings

- The Focus Group Meetings: Summary and Analysis
- The Staff interviews: Summary and Analysis
- Church Interviews: Summary and Analysis of other UU congregations' practices

Summary Analyses

- The Key Issues
- The Three Governance Models

Remaining Work

- Work Remaining for the Board of Trustees

The identification of the ten Key Issues and the three governance models to consider in addressing these issues are the heart of the report. The Key Issues represent our summative findings. But the three ten-page *Summary Findings* documents are critical to understanding why we chose these issues to focus on. We see these Key Issues as flowing from our listening to the congregation and its leadership, listening to the staff, and listening to the leaders of healthy UU churches in the area who share our faith, our struggles, and our commitment to congregational governance.

Making meaning out of what we do, how we do it, and the ways it impacts our life together in community is what ***The Overview*** is all about. How we can best be a loving, a safe, a trusting and open community, as well as a dedicated, purposeful, and a spiritual one are the questions that inform our search for a governance structure that best meets our needs at FUSN.

Level Two: Supporting Documents

Level Two contains a variety of back-up materials. These include:

Information about the process of the Committee's research

- The Board's charter to the committee
- Documentation of our methodologies and strategies for gathering data
- Our timeline for the year's work
- The questions asked in focus groups, in staff interviews, in church interviews.

More educational materials

- Governance Basics
- Reader's Digest of Selected Educational materials
- An Elaboration of The Three Models presented in the Overview
- An excerpt on the impact of church size on governance
- A summary of Polarity management.

Other supportive materials

- A chart comparing the five interviewed churches
- A description of co-ministry
- A comment on the relationship between Congregational Polity and our search for new forms of governance.

The most important part of Level II is the educational piece, most particularly *Governance Basics*. *Governance Basics* defines a common language and framework of governance concepts that will bring clarity and efficiency to the Board's work. It focuses your thoughts on just what governance is and how it relates to other aspects of congregational life. We, ourselves, needed to do this before we could go about our work on this report.

The rest of Level II is not essential reading. It addresses very specific lines of inquiry that reader's of the Overview will be interested in, provides more educational background, and supplements issues and ideas touched upon in the Overview. Skim its contents and read what interests you.

Level Three: Transcripts and other Data Sources

Level Three contains all of the transcripts from interviews, focus groups, staff interviews, the interviews from other congregations, the listening circles, one on conversations with UUA officials, and background materials provided by the churches interviewed. These materials exist as single copies organized in a large notebook available to FUSN members. The transcripts amount to well over one hundred pages.

Since all parties involved in this process, congregants in focus groups, the staff, members of other congregations, understood that nothing said would be kept

confidential, reading these materials does not violate any expressed or implied confidentiality. It has been important to this committee that all parts of our work be transparent. We urge those interested, to scan the transcripts to catch the flavor of the responses the committee has summarized and analyzed in the body of the report.

Charter, Scope, and Methods

Charter

In the spring of 2007, a group – led by the presiding Senior Minister, The Reverend James Ford – drafted a charter to define the formation, scope, and work of a committee to study governance. On June 19, 2007, the First Unitarian Society in Newton (FUSN) Board of Trustees, after being presented with the charter for this committee, authorized the formation of the Ad Hoc Governance Committee (the Committee). The Board convened the Committee to study governance at FUSN because they recognized that the present form of governance lacks clarity.

The Committee was chaired by Bob Zeeb and other members were selected from the congregation by Bob during the summer of 2007. The other members were:

- Barbara Bates
- Adrian Bishop (also Board Trustee)
- Karen Burns (also Board Trustee)
- George Psathas (joined January 2008)

Additional work and consultation during the study was provided by:

- Jeff Baker
- Alice Nichols

The committee shall distribute its finished work (in writing) to the Board no later than July 31, 2008 meeting, and shall attend the Board's September 2008 retreat to present a summary and discuss the report. Presenting the report in July will give the Trustees time to read and digest the report over the summer in preparation for the retreat in September 2008.

After its September 2008 retreat, the Board will choose one of the alternatives presented by the Committee, commit to educating itself, modify the alternative as it deems necessary, and adopt it for its future use. The Board will communicate its choice and plans for implementation to the congregation as hard copy, in the newsletter, on the FUSN website, and in a public meeting, and in any other way the Board deems necessary.

The changes in governance made by the Board will inform the creation of a new vision, although the process of working on a new vision may be able to begin as early as October 2008 (after the Board's choice of alternatives and depending on the alternative chosen.)

The Board will monitor its own performance and the Society's performance over the following two fiscal years (until June 2011) in light of the changes it makes in governance.

Scope of Duties and Methodologies Used

As defined in the charter, the Board of Trustees asked this Committee to complete the following tasks:

- 1) Examine various styles of governance available to and used by Unitarian congregations:

Methodology: The Committee read articles and books on governance during the summer of 2007 as a first step in order to educate themselves on current thinking about governance. During the spring of 2008, the Committee interviewed other similarly-sized UU congregations about their governance and its strengths, successes, weaknesses, and failures.

- 2) Assess the present state of FUSN governance:

Methodology: The Committee conducted focus groups of FUSN members, asking for responses to specific questions about FUSN governance. The Committee also interviewed FUSN staff to understand their perceptions of governance at FUSN. Finally, the Committee incorporated feedback from the Listening Circles. The Listening Circles were a separate initiative led by the Board in response to congregants' desire to be heard after the resignations of the Sr. Minister and the Director of Religious Education.

- 3) Educate the Board on aspects of governance:

Methodology: The Committee conducted two educational sessions at Board meetings during the 2007-2008 church year. The Committee will also lead a session on governance at the September 2008 Board retreat. Finally, the Board has asked for and the Committee members have agreed to present additional material to the Board as requested in order to better facilitate the Board's decision-making process.

- 4) Present governance alternatives and their rationales to the Board:

Methodology: The Committee is presenting three governance alternatives and their rationales in this document. This document will be reviewed with the Board at the September 2008 retreat.

Governance Defined

What Is Governance

It is the Board of Trustees' (BOT) work to define governance on behalf of the congregation. This report seeks to provide the BOT with a common framework of language and concepts to make their work more efficient and effective.

Governance is often confused with government – but they are distinctly different. Governance is about “how government and other social organizations interact, how they relate to citizens, and how decisions are taken in a complex world.”¹

Our study of governance at FUSN focuses on processes, structures, and traditions/cultures in an effort to help the BOT clarify the following:

- How power is exercised (e.g. unilaterally, consensually, majority rule, in partnership, etc. and in service of what mission/vision).
- How stakeholders (e.g. members of the congregation, staff, etc.) have their say.
- How decisions are made (by whom and using what process).
- How decision-makers are held to account.

We believe the purpose of good governance is to see to it that the BOT does the will of the congregation and also leads the congregation – both, not either / or. By “leads” we mean doing what the congregation would want if the congregation knew everything that the BOT knows as it does its work.

What Governance Includes

As noted earlier, governance includes processes, structures, and traditions/cultures. By processes we mean things like:

- the ways that guiding policy is set,
- the ways operations are conducted (e.g. staff are hired, budgets made, etc.),
- the ways we covenant to treat each other (e.g. with respect, equity, compassion, etc.)

These processes are shaped by many factors in an interdependent web of forces (see “Governance Basics” in the **Supporting Documents** section of this report for more details.) One of the factors is structure – how we choose to organize our roles and responsibilities. Appropriate organizational structure maps out relatively clear spheres of responsibility for all the roles (e.g. BOT. minister,

¹ *Principles for Good Governance in the 21st Century*. Policy brief No. 15 – Institute on Governance, Ottawa, Canada. Page 1.

staff, councils, committees, volunteers, members, etc.) so that the important work (like worship and spiritual development, religious education, social justice, etc.) gets done in the congregation. At the same time appropriate structure maintains a certain degree of flexibility so that the work is meaningful and fresh, new work doesn't fall through the cracks, and special talents can be shared across boundaries.

These processes are also shaped by FUSN's traditions and culture (as well as UU history of congregational polity.) Tradition and culture are not always clear or even visible to people regardless of whether they are new or long-time members of FUSN. We lose awareness of our old habits and it takes new comers to ask us "Why do you do it that way?" or to challenge us by changing a beloved tradition like the chalice-lighting responsive reading or the style of music. We may hold unexamined cultural assumptions (e.g. that democracy means contentiousness; that ministers must have a certain facilitative leadership style; that everyone feels Sunday services are the most important program in the church; that UUs can do & believe anything they want). Not all traditions / cultural behaviors are relevant to governance choices. The BOT must discern what traditions and cultural assumptions exist, and which help and which hinder our work as a congregation before it can safely make changes in process and structure.

Four Governance Issues Congregations/Churches Face

Because FUSN is a UU congregation, a faith-based organization (regardless of our abhorrence of creeds), the BOT needs to be aware of four distinctions between governance in church/religious societies and secular governance. The BOT must guard against the belief that something that works well in academia (or in corporate, non-profit, legal, medical, etc. arenas) may be implemented wholesale in the church and be equally successful.

1) *The minister is not a CEO*

First, a minister is not like a CEO (Executive Director, managing partner, etc.). A minister is called by the entire congregation and ministers to the entire congregation; the two have entered into a covenantal relationship. The BOT may not hire and fire a minister even though the congregation may have charged the BOT with overseeing the minister's behavior on their behalf.

2) *Mission is not same* as in a secular organization

Second, the guiding purpose of a congregation, mission, is defined by the entire congregation with heavy doses of inspiration from the minister and lay leadership. In corporate parlance, this would be like having shareholders define the business mission instead of the management team (or alcoholics define the mission of a substance abuse rehabilitation facility instead of the non-profit board and health care professionals.)

3) *The Minister and Board Chair partnership*

Since the chair of the BOT is a volunteer (often with a day job), the chair will not always have as deep and broad knowledge and understanding of the entire

congregation. After all, the minister spends the whole week interacting with the congregation – week after week. Yet, the BOT must oversee the minister’s work as well as set its own agenda. To be effective, the chair must develop a strong partnership with the minister, striving to eliminate redundant efforts, and guarding against being either a “rubber stamp” for the minister, or a competitor struggling over “power” in the congregation. In the secular world, the CEO has all the power and rarely partners with the board chair.

4) Volunteers (not just paid staff) as leaders

FUSN does not raise sufficient money to be able to hire all the paid staff it would like to design and manage its programs. Volunteer lay leaders must shoulder a significant amount of the operational work. This puts them, like the BOT chair, in partnership with paid staff as leaders of the congregation, and they face the same effectiveness issues (see 3 above). Unlike workers in the secular sphere, volunteers don’t always have the same availability day to day; they may lack skills but have enormous commitment; and they do the work for reasons other than money. This makes supervision, evaluation and feedback complicated due to personal relationships, and the fact that one does not fire the volunteer from the congregation (one only removes them from their assignment.)

One other fact of life is that skilled volunteer resources are getting harder and harder to find since people’s lives are more complex, both parents work, and work has extended well beyond the 9 to 5 hours of yore. Even retirees are over-committed and have limited time to devote to a single volunteer organization. This means that operational areas in congregations the size of FUSN often ebb and flow (or suffer) from the lack of volunteers.

Please keep these governance issues in mind as you read the next sections of this report.

Focus Group Summary

Introduction

The focus group process on Governance at FUSN was extremely well received. People report feeling “heard” and suggest that such a mechanism be kept in place to be used periodically even when we are *not* going through a major change.

1. The Responsibilities for Membership at FUSN

Several distinct themes about what membership means were voiced in the focus groups. It is important to distinguish between *attending* FUSN and becoming a <member.> This question asked about <membership> and what it means to *be* a member. Focus group members stated clearly that if we do a better job at communicating a FUSN Mission, then people who are non-members would have a better sense of what it means to sign up as a member. The themes about what it means to be a member included:

- Financial commitment
- An understanding of the UU principals
- Participation
- Being part of the community
- Help in growth of the FUSN Community
- Support for education
- An open mind to explore spiritual growth

Financial commitment. At least one person, and in most cases more than one, in each focus group raised financial obligation as important to membership. While unlimited resources are a wish, all were clear that finances are central and that we could improve substantially in communicating the criticality of financial support and of garnering more financial commitment from members. Financial commitment has not always been communicated as a “given.” We have not sufficiently communicated that we take care of ourselves financially and that no one else is going to do it for us. While financial support was unmistakably raised as a responsibility of FUSN membership, there was also concern that we not discourage people who cannot commit financially.

Such discouragement might limit the social, economic, and ethnic diversity of the congregation. So a number of people felt strongly that financial contribution should be discretionary, as money can build community but can cloud other issues.

An understanding of the UU principles. Participants felt that a member should understand the mission of FUSN and, for many, the closest thing recognized as a mission or vision were the UU principles. Even with that, the UU principles were not at instant recall for most participants. This is not something

that we “push” as much as we could. There is an expressed need for members to better know what UU-ism IS.

Participation. Being a member at FUSN means getting involved, joining in, helping out. This can mean contributing time and skills, volunteering to be on committees, attending educational events. While some say there is no pressure to do so, others say that they consider participation a requirement of membership – being careful to add that there are myriad ways of doing so. In addition to being expected, it is seen as the way to get the most out of being a member of FUSN. Pitching in and helping out leads to community which is a vital part of being a member.

We do very well at getting volunteers but there are things we might do to improve. Certainly a small group of volunteers do the majority of the volunteering. We could communicate more effectively that you don’t have to “do a lot” to participate; there are many options for and levels of involvement. We can target and invite in our younger members. Participation is something that has peaks and valleys for individuals as parts of their lives ebb and flow – family, jobs, health. Listening circles have been a great way of involving people. It is amazing how well we do considering the busy lives of the people in the FUSN community.

Help in growth of the FUSN Community. Contributing to the growth of membership, although not as frequently expressed, is considered a part of membership. Our community must grow to thrive in the face of normal attrition. It is perceived that we are bringing in younger people and this is very good. We need their involvement and idea power by extending invitations to them for involvement in committees and other activities. Being a member means outreach and generally making space for others. “There are many new faces so we must be doing pretty well.” said one participant. Yet another, expressed concern about those who have come and left. Why? Exit interviews might help us learn more about why people have left.

Support for Education. There is an implicit educational component in membership at FUSN, particularly for youth. This is changing as we additionally focus on adult education. The RE program is strong and we do well in this regard.

An open mind to explore spiritual growth. Several participants identified not just tolerance, but an openness to consider things deeply as a key element to membership. Some feel that this means an obligation to speak out, but always with dignity and respect for others. Given that FUSN is a spiritual community, it is striking that this aspect of membership was not noted more often.

2. Responsibilities for Leaders and the Board

There are a couple of distinctions to make regarding this topic. One is the difference between the leadership of the Board, as compared to the leadership of the minister. The responsibility in these roles has shifted back and forth a good bit over the years, influenced by the individuals in these roles and particular challenges that FUSN has faced – for example, how to manage staff or how to ‘step up’ to difficult decisions. In addition to the distinction between the roles of the Minister and the Board, there is the distinction to be made about *strategic* versus *operational* leadership. These are addressed below as subtopics:

Ministerial Leadership. The sense of the vast majority is that the minister is responsible for the spiritual health of the congregation – the shepherd of the flock – having compassionate pastoral relationships. The minister should have firm convictions on life’s issues. The sense of most focus groups is that the minister must be the holder of the core communal values and that financial decisions should be made by the Board (not the Finance committee.) While the minister is expected to be an inspirational spiritual leader and to provide pastoral care, the Board should be our governing body.

Board Leadership. The role of the Board is considered by most to be both strategic and operational. The Board is considered responsible for financial viability and must ensure communication among the staff, minister and congregation. They must ensure the selection of strong, qualified leaders for committees. They must clarify and promote the FUSN mission/vision continually. Finally they must practice transparency and reach out to the congregation. Below are some specifically identified aspects of what focus groups identified as critical to the leadership of the Board:

Adherence to FUSN and UU Principles. Focus group members felt that the Board should be promoting the health of the society and making sure that we adhere to the mission/vision of FUSN (although there *was little* clarity what these are) and to the UU principles. The Board must keep fairness and equity in mind in terms of *determining* workload, setting expectations and *asking for* accountability. They must continually balance the polarities that will always exist in a society like FUSN – and that should exist *in any healthy congregation*. *To some*, promoting the health of the society means knowing how members are doing, without being intrusive, and not just when there is a crisis. The lay ministers were mentioned by a number of people as a strong tradition at FUSN that does this very well. Some feel that this is also the job of the minister. It is important to note that there is a broad range of feelings around this and that some people feel that it is NOT the job of the Board to know how members are personally doing.

Set policy and understand the structure, roles and operations of FUSN.

A critical role of the Board as leaders is to be a liaison and connection point for the silos of the FUSN committees, reinforcing that we are ONE society. The Board should oversee committees who are in charge of their own mission, content and focus. Committee chairs must be clear that they report to the Board. In some people's opinion, paid professionals (staff other than the minister) should report to the committees, not to the minister. This gets tricky when there is a personnel problem or if someone needs to be fired as this is hard for a 'committee' to do.

Strategic Outlook. The Board as leaders should be looking to financial growth and the viability of the congregation. They should also be looking to the future of the congregation racially, economically, and socially. It is critical that they carry and document an institutional memory, making sure that this memory is known and available through transitions in Board membership.

Financial Management. Although already mentioned, financial management deserves underscoring as it was raised as a critical role of the Board leadership. The board must look to the raising of money and must manage the budget – speaking and writing about what they are doing in a variety of forums including congregational meetings.

Communications. Also, already noted but important to repeat, is the role of the Board in fostering communications 1) between staff, the minister and the congregation 2) to the congregation about the state of the congregation on all matters 3) to the congregation around key transitions, such as the one the congregation is now engaged in.

Troubleshooters of problems as they arise. The Board must handle conflict in a manner that does not isolate, but that builds bridges among variant groups within the congregation.

The church council was mentioned by some as a body that makes operational decisions, yet it was not clear what operational decisions are the responsibility of the church council. Others see the church council as redundant.

The quality of board members and the process for recruiting members of the board is an important issue. Board membership should not be "honorific;" FUSN needs hardworking committed board members who have the skills to lead and have served FUSN in other capacities. However, while one person felt there are "some young people on the board who don't have enough experience." Another commented "I've been pleased to see young people commit, give their time and energy." It was noted that the board has written a

new definition of a board members responsibilities to be shared with all potential board members before they agree to serve. This is a step in the right direction.

The Board is viewed by the majority as doing an exceptional job. The individuals involved are responsible and working hard to keep the congregation informed. One or two people noted that they would like to know more of the 'inside story' around some of the recent resignations but these were isolated comments among a vast applause for the professional, transparent, active manner in which the Board has been doing its job.

2. Mission / Vision of FUSN

The focus groups show that there is a good deal of diversity in opinions about the issue of mission and vision.

There is general agreement that we do *not* have a clearly articulated vision and that we should do a better job at this. A few people report that they believe we have a mission but that they don't know what it is; there is no *super clarity* about why we exist or how we hold ourselves accountable. If we have a mission or vision it is clearly not articulated well. Others report that there is no sense of mission but that this is fine with them.

Bottom line – there is no sense of mission/vision – although many people offer their own opinion of what it is for them (and to some extent for the society.) People who offer a vision of their own readily agree that there is no consensus around it. Some examples offered include:

- < to provide a place to find religion on your own. >
- < the UU principles >
- < building a caring community>
- < to be focused on social action, community, spirituality, contemplation, meditation, community and being ethical.>
- < to increase membership>
- < to provide a spiritual community based on the UU principles. >

Again, these were offered as opinions of what the mission/vision is and what it perhaps could and should be – not what a mission for FUSN is accepted to be.

Some people yearn to be able to more succinctly tell others "what we are about." They would value a clearer mission. Others feel a loose sense of mission as "moving to action within the framework of the UU principles" *is* sufficient for them -- anything beyond that might be more confining than helpful – perhaps ringing of religion rather than spirituality. They are hesitant about the idea of a 'mission statement,' preferring to let everyone be happy and content with the broader UUA principles and values.

A number of individuals noted that they believed the mission should be created "bottom-up, not top-down" ***involve the board and other lay leaders, the whole congregation – everyone should own it.*** For others, the mission is considered to be within the purview of the minister working in concert with the congregation. Regarding accountability or adherence to a FUSN mission/vision – this is clearly not even on the radar screen. ***You cannot be accountable for something you do not have and/or cannot agree upon.***

Those who felt strongly about a mission statement, suggested it be revisited regularly, say every five years – that as the church changes, the mission should change.

3. Decision Making at FUSN

As has been true with most questions in this process, there is variety in the response to the question about what decisions get made at FUSN, by whom and how. One group of individuals might be described as espousing 'no idea' of how decisions get made – just that they get made somehow. A second group of individuals have a vague sense of how decisions are made. A third group describe decision making as clear and relatively transparent. While people in this third group view decision making as clear in specific areas (i.e. appointments to chair committees, staff evaluations) there are a much larger number of people who state that those very areas for decision making are confusing.

The types of decisions made at FUSN involve high-level decisions around policies to set, committees to launch, appointments of chairs to committees, large budgetary decisions, progress against plan, hiring and firing. These are made by the board. More routine decisions involve rentals, property maintenance and scheduling events. People refer to the "council" and staff rather interchangeably. Some decisions are very specific to committees such as Social Action or RE. Allocation of money is seen as a big area for decisions. This is seen as primarily handled at the Board and Committee levels.

While a number of people have no idea how decisions are made, they also report that when they have an issue they have little trouble finding someone to help them.

Four types of decisions were raised that are worth mentioning. The first is evaluations of staff. The process is unclear. A second is that of decision making generally between the minister and staff. A third area is that of conflicts and how they are dealt with – perhaps because ultimately in such situations there seem to be decisions that must be made to resolve conflicts. Some issues may remain for years because there is conflict-avoidance and no clear decision making about how to deal with such situations. Hiring and firing for example can be very sensitive issues. This will be addressed separately in an upcoming section. Fourth, and very importantly, there needs to be clarity for some as to

“who is the boss – the Board or the minister?” A decision tree that clarifies who makes decisions by role might clarify this:

- Board
- Minister
- Council
- Staff member(s)
- Committees (chairs)

According to many, there has been some breakdown about what to do with ‘petty’ conflicts that should not be raised to a Board level – but have not been handled so easily at a lower level – such as Women’s Alliance issues. Some people report a lack of meetings being held at the council level and that there has been some difficulty in getting routine decisions made (and keeping them made). Fran Clancy is lauded as someone who makes things happen and keeps routine decisions going.

4. Philosophy, Attitudes, Ethics that people want addressed in Governance

The following arose as themes in response to this question:

- Consensus building
- Clarity of responsibility
- Fairness, **an open** democratic process (although not every decision should rely on the whimsy of the majority. Some decisions should be protected. For example, the minister should be able to say what he or she wishes from the pulpit. One person describes it as ‘Democracy with an emphasis on responsibility.’)
- Small decisions need not be debated endlessly. As one participant noted, “Sometimes FUSN is so committed to openness that it can not get something done, can’t even make a decision.”
- Inclusiveness – **Neither** the Board nor small groups making decisions that affect all of us– **bring** in the larger community as this process is doing.
- Transparency, truthfulness (**yet** recognizing that this is not *always* appropriate)
- Consistency
- Communication AND Listening – including feedback mechanisms to make sure that the community is understanding and being understood
- Not just tolerance, but room for conflict and ways to process conflict
- Acknowledgement, thankfulness and gratitude
- Mutual respect

5. How we Evaluate Ourselves

Our self evaluation is described by some as an organic and mysterious process. For example, people chit-chat and the small groups or prominent people with the loudest voices get heard. When there has been some rigor, it has been good although some feel that follow-through and transparency could be better. One person suggested a grievance committee be started. Another suggested that a 'suggestions box' might be helpful. Others express wariness that we try to measure too much – that *measurement by feet* is what is best. Do people want to be here? Are our committees active? People generally are not fans of too much structure or measurement. Noted here are the types of evaluations people have seen in place:

- Attrition from the congregation – people leaving – keeping in mind that this may not always be a bad thing
- Attendance at services
- Survey questionnaires – although there seems a large time lag involved and surveys are seen as time consuming and hard
- Focus groups like this – this process was raised by many as a very good way to go, liked by many ***
- Conversation at coffee hour
- On pledge cards
- At annual meetings – an opportunity for people to catch up
- Committee reports and the subsequent annual report
- By how well we function when the minister is not here (and we do well on that)

A substantial number of people stated that the above are not adequate for us to evaluate ourselves. In fact the current board, in its focus group, responded in near unison that there **is** "no process" for our evaluating ourselves.

6. Conflict Resolution

Conflicts are viewed as good to have. While this is espoused, many describe the FUSN community as somewhat conflict avoidant. *Institutional disputes* are best handled through policies and procedures to depersonalize them. While we need to clarify this process, these types of conflicts are dealt with through the Board, the RE Council, etc. *Personal disputes* are noted as very different and can be destructive. These are conflicts that involve staff, personalities, and styles and are considered challenging.

Most conflicts tend to be dealt with by the appropriate committee and then a decision is made whether to bring it to the larger congregation. The list serve contributes as an accelerant to small issues becoming large rapidly.

Many issues do seem to have a beginning, a middle, and an end where the congregation has voice. Some issues may go on for a long time and seem drawn out. For example, the "crèche issue" is one where there was a great deal of discussion, a great deal of emotion – and some people left over this issue, however there WAS conversation and differences were discussed. Many felt that the process was healthy. The organist's **resignation** and **the selection of** a new Director of Music was painful. It was also pointed out that there **was** a followed process and that it worked. Some feel that the process and output were poorly communicated and more conversation would have helped people to understand.

There is room for improvement in **how** we resolve conflict. Some suggest that mediation or a committee of some sort should be in place to help with personal conflicts. Some suggest that we could do better at anticipating institutionalized conflicts, that clarifying policies and procedures could make it easier for us to face conflicts. One person suggested that we need a process to **heal** after conflicts.

7. Changes Wished For

****** Denotes that multiple people raised this issue.**

- A co-minister model – where we have one administrative and one pastoral minister. One minister just can't do it all. There are questions about whether the budget could support this. ****
- A detailed and publicized mediation process and/or grievance process (anonymous sometimes as an option) and more careful attention to institutional conflicts. ****
- More clarity in roles and responsibilities. ****
- More attention to evaluation of how we are doing – are we meeting our goals and purposes? Do we have adequate procedures and processes? Have we adequately defined our mission and our vision? ****
- Stronger membership outreach and coordination. People miss having someone in this role. ****

A sample of other suggestions that surfaced

- The Board of Trustees chair might be designated by the congregation, not be the Board itself.
- More transparency around who goes on the board – perhaps inviting the community to nominate people.

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- Board members more visible – perhaps with opening comments at services.
 - Turnover on the board is a real problem; we need more institutional memory and more continuity (Increase the length of a term on the board to 4 or 5 years?).
 - The board needs more staff development support. This requires money and time.
 - We need to work towards the right balance between trust on one hand and accountability on the other.
 - Better forums to discuss the minister issue and to give feedback.
 - More leadership involvement from a spiritual stand point.
 - The Church Council is structurally redundant (the cluster system makes it redundant). Also, the Council does not meet often enough to make operational decisions (its original purpose).
 - There are too many committees and that contributes to fragmentation. Reduce the number of committees and create more *ad hoc* committees.
 - Overcoming shyness to ask for money – getting over the sense of embarrassment that it takes money to have programs.
 - Get younger people more involved in leadership and committee.
 - Do a better job of reaching out to new members.
 - Think of openness as a marketing issue – the information on the survey, Board minutes, budget information. It is there if people want it. We are pretty good at getting the information out – it is just not marketed well.
 - Do exit interviews every year so we have more information about why people come, why people leave, and why people stay.
 - A guidebook (could be electronic) of sorts to address things like how to book a room, how to give feedback, how to get involved.
 - A theme of open mind and open heart for the next two years especially.
 - Find a method to increase diversity – perhaps a sister congregation.
 - Liaison with the mayor’s office.
 - Not hire FUSN members as staff.

Note: There were 13 focus groups, each with 5 – 9 participants. Overall there were 80 participants. They represent more than 20% of the members of FUSN –(nearly 40%) of FUSN households. The groups were rich in FUSN leaders – members and past members of the Board of Trustees, committee chairs, and other lay leaders. Forty (half the participants) have served at least one term on the Board of Trustees. And over 10% have served as board chairs.

Staff Interview Summary

Congregation Interview Summary

Introduction

We selected churches using a mix of criteria. First, church size – churches with populations ranging from 220 to 350, what are called *programmatically* churches in the church size literature. Second, churches struggling with similar issues. Third, churches that have practices and/or structures that might be helpful to FUSN. Fourth, churches that Mass Bay District President, Teresa Cooley, described as healthy churches.

We found that many of these churches have had significant changes within the last three years. One, like FUSN, will have an interim minister next fall. Two others have called new ministers within the past three years. All see themselves as either having made, in the midst of making, or about to make changes in governance.

This report is broken out into sections based on groups of interview questions, followed by insights on each set of responses.

Basic Demographics: staffing

See Church Interview and Analysis Chart (in [Supporting Documents](#)) for more extensive comments on church staffing. Staffing issues that emerged in the interviews included:

- By September 08 each church will have just a single full time minister position (Brookline has co-ministers filling that position), one full-time DRE, and one full-time Administrator.
- Two churches, North Andover and First Parish Lexington, are eliminating a half-time ministerial positions for financial reasons.
- Staff allocations for Music Directors run from 10 to 25 hours per week with the exception of Follen church which has a full time Music Director.
- Four will have a Membership Director, 10 hours per week, by September '08.
- Some churches have a bookkeeper (up to five hours per week).
- Many churches have a property manager (in addition to a custodian).
- Every church has had to make staffing choices that reflect their mission, for example, Follen has invested in a full time Music Director, because music is an essential part of their ministry, while North Andover chose to forgo a paid Youth Advisor to fund a half-time minister.

Insight

- There are no significant differences in staffing levels in this sample. These congregations seem to have similar needs and similar staffing patterns.
- Two of these churches have seen the need for adding a property manager (separate from a custodian) to relieve burdens on the Administrator and on the volunteer B & G manager. Leases, rentals, community uses of the building are common. They demand extra attention. FUSN might look to this model.

Introductory Questions: Questions 2 - 3

- 2. What makes your congregation successful /distinctive?*
- 3. Do you have a purpose or a mission? What is it?*

- Three churches mentioned the church history or a commitment to social action, or used words like “dynamic”, “vitality”, “filled with energy”.
- Two noted their music programs or an aspect of their population (“we are an older church” and “we are becoming an urban church”).
- One mentions the RE program, another the large and vital SGM program, still another the Women’s Alliance. Some other unique features included deacons, a communion service, and a Friday sundown service.
- Most respond with a variant of “Yes, but” or “We have one, but I don’t remember it” when asked about their mission.
- Regardless of whether they can parrot their mission, all welcome and value the question; all think a vital and memorable mission critical. They connect the creation of a mission statement with long-range planning, reflecting on governance, new by-laws, etc.
 - “we hope our new interim minister will help us redefine our mission”
 - “we created a mission five years ago when we went through a comprehensive planning process”
 - “ at this moment we are creating a new mission in connection with our work on governance, the by-laws, and strategic planning”
 - “we are just beginning a long term planning initiative and our focus will be on reevaluating our mission”

Insight

- We have company in our failure to remember and to articulate our mission; we are not alone in this respect.
- There is much in FUSN `s programs that is striking when compared with these other churches. Despite their many admirable qualities, FUSN stands out in the strength of several of our programs – lay ministry, RE

(especially our *Coming of Age Program*), social action, adult education, SGM.

- These churches find something special about their character, their identity and their mission by careful attention to their history and responses to changes in their populations, their communities, and the larger world they serve. FUSN should consider defining what makes FUSN distinctive.
- All are committed to creating a vibrant and living mission and see the creation of a mission as essential to their growth and well-being. FUSN has not demonstrated this kind of commitment. FUSN needs to revisit its mission.

Structures, Roles, Responsibilities

4. How do members learn their responsibilities?

There were a variety of responses to this question. Several churches have recently established new criteria for membership. In one, a member who has not given money or participated in church activities over a two-year period may have his/her membership revoked. Many have created ad hoc committees to address membership or growth; one (First Parish Lexington) used a half time ministerial position to oversee recruitment of more young members.

Insight

- FUSN has done much to create a welcoming atmosphere for new members – establishing a Member Services Coordinator, Community Breakfasts, a Membership Table at coffee hour, sermon talkbacks. We share the spirit of initiative of our fellow parishes.
- Nonetheless, many of the churches interviewed provide a model of clear expectations for membership, a directness and forthrightness about engagement in activities and financial contributions. FUSN does not have clear expectations for membership. We need to look at this.
- Many of these churches have deliberate structures for engaging new members in small group meetings and activities during their coffee hours, activities that put them in touch with each other and with lay leaders. We think FUSN could create more meaningful fellowship by adopting some of these practices.

Structure, Roles, Responsibilities: Questions 5 - 9

5. Describe your paid staff structure (list your paid staff, reporting relationships – who hires/fires/evaluates whom).

6. How is the leadership of your congregation organized (Board, council committees, programs, etc.) – describe the structure and relationships.

7. How would you describe the relationship between staff and Board?

8. What are the responsibilities of each?

9. What are the advantages and disadvantages of the choices you've made in this area of structure, roles, and responsibilities?

These churches have read about, struggled with governance questions, and are either in the process of or have recently adopted various changes. These changes have been influenced by arguments embedded in Policy Governance™ rationale (specifically, clarity of roles and the need to get day by day operational responsibilities off the Board's plate), but they are not wholesale adaptations of a strict or pure Policy Governance™ model. A snapshot of the current situation in each church we interviewed provides a richer and more integrated sense of where each is in terms of Structures, Roles, and Responsibilities.

Follen Church rewrote their by-laws last year. They

- restructured the church council as a much smaller elected Program Council (each member, other than the president and vice president, representing one of seven Action Teams.)
- wrote the description of this Program Council whose members are elected at the Annual Meeting. (The Council is responsible for all operational responsibilities including producing a yearly Plan, putting together the annual budget, supervising the Program Action Teams, and working with the Leadership Development Committee to provide lay and staff development.)
- redefined most committees as substructures of each of the seven Action Teams with their roles and responsibilities to be defined by each Action Team.
- rewrote the description of the Board to orient it in the direction of policy and removed operations from its responsibilities.
- created a four person Coordinating Team to sort out which issues should go to the Board and which to the Program Council.

This new system is seen as more democratic than pure Policy Governance™ because the Program Council leadership is elected, and although "a brand new policy governance structure," it does "not [include] the Chief Executive Officer part." The Program Council has responsibility for creating the annual plan and the budget (The Board approves the budget and makes certain the annual plan fits well within the context of the long-range plan.) The Financial and Human Resources Action Team supervises the minister.

Reading also recently rewrote their by-laws, created a Program Council charged with more operational responsibility (scheduling, leadership training, etc.). and created a cluster model to promote communication between committees. Yet the Program council struggles (it includes all committee chairs from each cluster-over twenty people). They reduced the Board to seven including church officers

and three at-large members who serve terms of two years each. The Board supervises the minister.

First Parish in Lexington is in the process of change. They disbanded the old Church Council, reduced the number of people on the new Council, and changed its role to include more responsibility for operations. They also created a system of seven clusters of committees to improve communication between committees, and decreased the number of committees. (At twenty, there are still too many according to the Board chair). The nine-member Board serves for three years, but the chair can sit (often does) for two years. The senior minister hires and supervises the staff (collaborating with the Board); the DRE hires and supervises the RE staff. The Board supervises the minister. They hope the new interim minister will help carry these changes forward.

First Parish in Brookline, with a co-ministry of an unrelated man and woman, has evolved a unique structure that complements this unusual ministry. The supervision model is organized around the skill sets of the two ministers. One minister, who has an MBA (and continues to work in capital investment), supervises all staff and works with the Finance Committee, the investment committee, and similar operational committees. The other minister (who was trained and worked as a therapist does most of the pastoral care) works with the conflict resolution team, membership, etc.

The Board and the ministers have established a Leadership Development Team (the old Nominating Committee), a conflict resolution process, and reduced the number of standing committees. They have established a traditional church council (composed of committee chairs who report and calendar four times a year as an experiment (two years old). It is not quite working yet and may not work at all. With so few meetings (4 per year) it is not realistic to expect them to manage operations (yet, "when they met monthly, attendance declined.") The Board supervises the two ministers.

In North Parish in North Andover, the parish minister has been asked to supervise the staff (previously the responsibility of committees who "did not do a good job" . . . "there really was no supervision at all"). Now, the minister is expected to use an evaluation structure created by the personnel committee, to consult with committees that work directly with the staff, (e.g. the music committee and the RE committee), and to share the evaluations with the Board.

The church continues to use a traditional church council model "which is definitely not as effective as it could be." However, all meetings now take place on Tuesday evenings (committees on the 1st Tuesday of the month, church council on the 2nd Tuesday, and the Board on the 3rd Tuesday). A crucial issue can get bumped from a committee to the council to the Board in just two weeks moving decisions along efficiently and improving communication. The Personnel

Committee (which is appointed by and reports to the Board) supervises the minister.

Insight

- These churches encourage the Board to focus on policy by strengthening the church council so it can be more effective in carrying out operational decisions. This division of labor appears to be more successful when the council is reduced in size and the number of committees also reduced. This reduction is usually accomplished by establishing a number of committee clusters responsible for coordinating efforts in one area. This model bears close watching.
- Churches interviewed have created structures to support better communication between church leaders. For example The Coordinating Team at Follen, the integrated meeting schedule at North Andover, the appointment of more church officers to the Board at Reading, the creation of committee clusters at Follen, First Parish Lexington, and Reading have all improved communication.
- Several churches have developed separate three member support teams for selected staff (minister, RE Director, ministerial intern etc.) This has replaced the old model of a Ministerial Relations Committee focused exclusively on the minister, and/or the new all-inclusive model of a Committee on the Ministry focused on all church ministries (e.g. education, SGM, social action, stewardship, music, etc.) The three member teams appear to address several needs:
 - provides more support for staff other than the minister
 - separates support from evaluation (Often the Committee on the Ministry is expected to both support and evaluate the minister)
 - reduces the overload on the Committee on the Ministry
 - decreases the possibility of conflict between the Committee on the Ministry and the Board.
- These churches use time-bound task forces created by the Board to address specific issues rather than standing committees. FUSN is moving in this direction.

[Note: These churches do not claim to have solved all governance problems. Rather, they are in the midst of implementing changes they expect they will need to reassess and, at the very least, fine tune.]

Quality: Questions 10 - 14

10. *Do you have a covenant? What is it and how was it created? How renewed? How do new people become committed to it?*
11. *How do you treat/relate to new people?*
12. *What is the atmosphere of the Sunday service?*

13. *How do you evaluate yourselves? Lay leadership? The Board? The minister/s, the Sunday services? The Programs?*
14. *How do you handle conflicts/disputes between laity? between staff? between staff and laity?*

Again, snapshots help address these questions for each of the churches.

Follen Church, the Board, the Program Council, and the seven Action Teams recovenant each year. Sunday services are “moving, participatory, a great time for bonding”, and “we have excellent music.” On the other hand, “We need to do a better job with evaluation: The minister is evaluated by a task force every five years but the by-laws say the Financial and Human Resources Action Team evaluates the minister every three years”. The Minister evaluates the DRE; the DRE supervises and evaluates the RE staff; the Program Council supervises and evaluates the Administrator. All use procedures developed by Human Resources. There is no policy for handling conflict, but the Board will, very likely, be creating a task force to research this issue.

The Governing Board at **Reading** has a covenant that is renewed every year: “We take it very seriously, read it aloud, light the chalice and sign it. We have a process observer at every meeting to help us honor this covenant.” The current Board Chair feels that they do an excellent job with new comers and that Sunday services are energetic. The Board supervises the minister and the minister supervises the other staff. The Board evaluates itself in terms of the goals it sets and uses these evaluations as the opening for its end of the year retreat.

“After our failed ministry, we created a variety of processes for self-evaluation, measuring progress against goals, and self-monitoring. The Committee on the Ministry handles any conflict with the minister. An appeals process allows unresolved conflicts to go directly to the Board. Our church has, historically, been very conflict avoidant. We have paid dearly for that in the past and we still have work to do in this area.”

At First Parish **Lexington**, there are multiple covenants - a Board covenant, a covenant between the minister and the minister-emeritus, and a whole church covenant (which is more like a statement of identity). “We have a special task force called *Spirit and Sparks* to attract more people under forty (We want forty more under forties in the next three years.) Our services are rich and varied. We really do not evaluate ourselves; at least we have no effective formal process. Our surveys have been ineffective - too time-consuming and out of date by the time we get them. We created an on-line forum for responses to our last budget. We do not accept any anonymous complaints.”

At First Parish **Brookline**, the co-ministers have a covenant with each other and a covenant with the Board. The Board will be developing a covenant for itself and would like the congregation to do the same. “We have been growing very fast the last three years (have submitted a Woburn grant for a Membership

Development position). People adore Sunday services; they appreciate the preaching and the music. No formal system of evaluation, but we expect to address this as a part of our strategic planning process. We use a variety of process models: dialogue circles, dream cafes, listening circles, and worship circles. We have a marvelous conflict management process: transparent, clear, and effective." The Ministerial Relations Committee functions as a conflict resolution team arbitrating disputes and grievances between all parties.

In **North Andover**, the staff has a covenant that works well. The Board has talked about creating a covenant. "We need to do a much better job with new members; we hope the new membership coordinator position will help. People love the services; some are electric, others peaceful. As I noted earlier, we have changed the staff evaluation process. (The Personnel Committee has created not only the formats and the protocols but also all the forms to be used by the minister.) Our new process observer should help the Board in evaluating itself. We have not found surveys helpful and hope strategic planning will help us develop other ways to assess our programs." "We had a separate committee that dealt with conflict, but that did not work well. We will return to that need." For now, The Personnel Committee helps with church conflict issues involving staff duties (congregation vs. staff) and the staff covenant helps with staff conflict.

Insight

- Each of these churches has at least one covenant and is in the process of creating others. They take them seriously, often renewing them yearly, and use them as a way to mitigate misunderstandings and disputes and promote an atmosphere of loving kindness. FUSN should consider the creation of covenants, most particularly staff and Board covenants.
- The leaders' self-reports of the quality of Sunday services in these churches are glowing, though self-reported judgments of this kind are not known for their reliability. In comparison, based on the feed back from congregants (see Listening Circles Summary), FUSN needs to improve its Sunday services.
- All churches seem to be struggling with self-evaluation. FUSN is no exception. However, several practices emerge here that are useful models for FUSN to consider:
 - substitute focused Listening Circles and other process models for surveys (note Brookline's practices)
 - establish goal driven evaluations (note Reading's yearly Board self-evaluation used every year at their spring retreat)
 - use a process observer at Board meetings (Reading, North Andover, Brookline)
 - enlarge the role of the Personnel Committee's in staff evaluations

(North Andover, Follen)

- Brookline has developed a very deliberate and sophisticated model for conflict resolution. But all of these churches are trying, in one way or another, to address conflict at all levels within the church. FUSN needs to look at best practices in developing models for addressing church conflict.

Support: Questions 15 - 17

15. How are people prepared for leadership?

16. Do you do leadership succession planning? Does the VP become President, etc.?

17. How do you prevent reinventing the wheel, maintain continuity in process and procedures (i.e. preserve institutional memory)?

At **Follen**, the main support system comes from a Leadership Development Team, a new group morphed from the now disbanded Nominating Committee. It is not a part of an Action Team, rather it works directly with and parallel to the Program Council, the Coordinating Team, and the Board itself. It provides leadership training for all church leaders including The Board, the staff, and the Action Teams. It also works on succession in all areas, including church officers and members of The Program Council. The six members of The Leadership Development Team are skilled members elected for three-year terms. Multiple committees of three function as support teams for staff members.

At the **Reading** church, service on the Church Council is supposed to prepare congregants for leadership, but currently it is not doing a very good job, despite changes in governance. (The Board is not clear about what they want from the Council.) In addition, the Council is a large committee that meets only every other month. The Committee on the Ministry works like the current UUA model; it has wide responsibilities to support and evaluate all church ministries.

Brookline also has a Leadership Development Team that provides leadership training to all committee chairs and other church leaders (and recruits nominees for elected office as the old Nominating Committee had done). They also use the MBD as a resource for leadership development - looking at various models, meeting other congregations and learning what these other churches are doing. The ministers take a very active role in promoting MBD learning events (perhaps too active according to the Board chair.)

Lexington has Board retreats twice a year. They invite new members to a Board meeting before the congregation officially nominates them. They have a second summer meeting so new members can hit the ground running. The chair is elected to a two-year term and may stay on for a third year. They are considering asking the outgoing chair to remain on the Board for one year to help with the transition. As in other models, the old Ministerial Relations Committee, now called the Committee on the Ministry, is constituted as three distinct three-person committees: one for the senior minister, one for the RE

Director, and one for the intern. All are support committees. The Board now includes in the Board minutes not only what is done, but why it was done.

In **North Andover**, there is much work to be done in the area of support. Co-leaders are encouraged for every committee to make succession easier, but for the most part there is only on the job training. The MBD has been very helpful. They hope a member of the congregation will be consulting with the Board next year. Again, three members of each *Committee on the Ministry* have replaced their old *Ministerial Relations Committee* as a form of support for the professional staff.

Insight

- The most promising practice is the formation of a Leadership Team (at Follen and Brookline) which provides leadership development for lay leaders and staff, supports Board Development, is responsible for succession, and does a skills inventory of all parishioners' interests and skills every year. As noted above, this is a promising practice that deserves scrutiny.
- First Parish Lexington's approach to training new Board members and transitioning new chairs of the Board are estimable practices. They might serve FUSN's need for more Board development and BOT Chair continuity.
- Reading, Brookline, and North Andover all mentioned the importance of support from the Mass Bay District. The FUSN Board's use of Teresa Cooley as a consultant and two experienced UUA trainers at two different retreats last year (followed by this year's Listening Circles and various UUA consultations related to our search for an interim minister) testify to the benefits of FUSN's renewed commitment to the use of MBD and UUA resources.

Planning: Question 18

At **Follen** the Program Council does an Annual Plan; the Board is responsible for a long-range plan, Strategic Planning is an essential part of their process and integral to the changes they have made in their governance. The Program Council Model is still in its first year, and Follen seems quite pleased with its results. They need some time to fiddle with it and evaluate its success.

Reading is committed to comprehensive planning. They set up a separate task force to work on their strategic plan. The task force brings its work to the Board, not just for approval, but also for discussion and education. Only after the Board has assimilated and rewritten the plan, does it go to the congregation. To quote the Board Chair, "We are committed to a long-term strategic planning process as well as a redefinition of our governance and by-laws. All this came out of the ashes of a three year long failed ministry followed by work with a consultant and an interim minister."

Brookline uses something similar to their conflict resolution process for planning - open discussions or listening circles "allowing us to sort through our priorities so the entire congregation can marshal and direct its energy to focus on a limited number of goals at a given moment in time." They are just beginning their short term planning process, "balancing the need for stability and continuity with a need for innovation and spontaneity."

Historically, **Lexington** has done no long-term planning. At present, they are creating a five-year plan for facilities. The Board chair would like to see a three-year budget plan that is revised every six or twelve months. Then they can move ahead with a strategic plan. "But we are not there yet."

In 2002, **North Andover** "had a Strategic Planning Committee that went well. It led to hiring an assistant minister, a decision to renovate the building, and the creation of co-chairs at the committee level. We agreed we would revisit long-term planning every five years." Recently they established a new long term planning committee, but it was abandoned because it was not done well, meaning "it was not representative and the church was not ready for it having just completed a major renovation". "We need a break, a year to breathe. In 2008-09, we must again address issues of growth, the elimination of the assistant minister position, and a shortfall in our budget. That is all we can handle at this moment."

Insight

- Clearly, each of these five churches is involved in, or committed to long-range planning, not only in terms of capital campaigns and building renovations, but as a way to address a myriad of other issues related to both policy and day by day operations. This kind of planning is usually considered part of a continuous process. In Reading, they are on their second comprehensive plan in a decade, in North Andover the Board voted to create a long-range plan every 5-7 years, at Follen it is essential that the yearly plan created by the Program Council fits with the long-range plan created by the Board.
- In all of the churches, long-range planning has been integrated with the reexamination or the creation of a mission statement. FUSN might consider this approach.
- Note that in most of these churches, initial attempts at long-range planning have followed a significant change, or even a crisis: in Reading letting go of a new minister and hiring another interim minister within three years, in Brookline the retirement of a long-time beloved minister and the creation of an experiment in co-ministry, at Follen following a contentious resignation of a key staff member, and in Lexington following a year-long illness and the retirement (just three months ago) of a respected minister. While this does not mean a crisis is essential for change to occur, it may mean that the resignation of four staff members

within the past two years is not necessarily a hindrance, but an opportunity for change at FUSN.

What Does This All Add up to?

First, our sister churches moved in different directions but are maintaining common threads here that catch our attention. These threads, noted in each of the sections above, contribute to our final statement of the Key Issues that impact FUSN.

Second, the ideas documented here are more than FUSN could do at any one point in time. Given all the other challenges that face it, the FUSN Board needs to conserve its energy, to focus, to set priorities, and to use its time wisely. Making changes in governance will be both a burden and an opportunity: a burden to take the time just now to address an issue to make it happen; but also an opportunity to create a governance structure that supports the Board in doing its work well over the long haul.

We suspect that what is needed at this moment in time is not to address all the issues, and most certainly not to do this work alone, rather to create a vision of governance that is supported by the congregation - a vision that will make it clear to our new DRE and to our new minister just who we are and how we work. This is the best of times for FUSN to undertake this task. And we have the resources and the will to do so.

Third, we have a new skilled interim minister to help us over the next two years. Interim ministers have special training in the problem areas we face, and with processes like Appreciative Inquiry and Listening Circles that can help. Our interim minister can be a critical partner in this work – walking the path with us, challenging us when we need it, partnering with our Board in leading us, and following when that is what we need. We are lucky to have a new interim experienced in this work.

Key Issues

Introduction

These are the key issues the committee has identified. Because we believe every decision FUSN makes needs to be filtered through the twin lenses of communication and accountability, we have not included them in the report as separate items. For us, both accountability and communication inform the quality of our relationships and of our community; they permeate everything. They are the assumed framework for, and are embedded in, all of the issues articulated below.

1. Mission

Even though people in the focus groups differed in their sense of what the word mission means, how important having a mission is, and whether FUSN could ever agree on a mission, even the least sanguine admitted that FUSN at present does not have a clear mission. Some of us may like being at sea, but all seem to agree that that is where we are.

By Mission we mean our purpose for existing as a congregation, and which, while we always striving for it, will never fully be accomplished or completed.

Lacking a mission or purpose we lack the ability to:

- Set priorities and mediate among competing interests
- Generate and focus our energies
- Assess progress towards realizing our mission.
- Make course corrections to our plans, and/or revise our mission as needed

2. Long-Range Planning

In listening to other churches talk about their engagement in long-range planning, we were profoundly struck by the lack of long-range planning initiatives at FUSN (with the exception of capital improvements and, quite recently, budget projections). But what about Worship? Education? Spiritual Development? Outreach? Social Action? Growth?

By engaging in conversation about those things that are most important to us we jointly determine where we will commit our resources and energy in service of our mission.

3. Clarification of Responsibilities

Clarity of roles, responsibilities, and decision-making methods needs to be addressed, and in a way that enables the entire congregation to understand who does what, how decisions are made, and by whom. This also needs to become part of the continuing education of all members, new and old.

The roles and responsibilities of the following must be addressed:

- Board
- Minister
- Paid Staff
- Volunteer Leaders
- Congregation

4. Policy and Operations

In order for a board of trustees to have the time and energy available to do the important and demanding work of policy making and long range planning it has to off load day to day operational decisions. Without a structural change the board will become overwhelmed, eventually burn itself out. No board can be expected to do what we are currently expecting our board to do.

As the board establishes a way to separate policy-making and long range planning from day to day operations, it nevertheless must remain alert to managing the boundaries between the two. The challenge for the board will be to set clear enough operational direction while finding an efficient method to monitor and hold accountable those responsible for operations without falling into micromanagement.

It is important to preserve the knowledge of past decisions, decision-making processes, authority, and precedents so as not to continually “reinvent the wheel.” Yet at the same time our governance structure must provide enough flexibility so that these decisions, precedents, and processes can be *appropriately* modified and amended.

5. Assessment

Two years ago FUSN experimented with a new form of assessment in its survey by placing it online. We need to continue this experimentation, but with more varied, more frequent, and more focused approaches. The committee encourages continuing a frequent, varied, and focused conversation which links the congregation with FUSN leadership such as the use of listening circles and other means. The enthusiastic reception of the Listening Circles speaks to this need.

6. Staff Evaluations

Currently, we have no FUSN-wide staff evaluation system in place. The richness of the church interviews in this area truly is a gift to us. We found a variety of means for bringing continuity, expertise, and collaboration into the evaluation process.

Lack of consistent, timely evaluations puts us at legal risk with our paid staff. Further, when both paid and volunteer staff receive uneven or no feedback, we risk creating feelings of lack of appreciation and diminished morale, commitment, and energy.

We need to create a system that is right and appropriate for FUSN.

7. Nurturing Lay Leadership

Congregations are utterly dependent upon high quality lay leaders. Most congregations do not have a way to identify leader candidates, develop and support them, or plan for leadership succession. Some congregations are transforming nominating committees into leadership development teams to do this work.

8. Membership

Often churches are not clear about the expectations of members, both new and old. At the same time churches are uneven in their ability to attract and hold new members. FUSN is no exception. We need to clarify our expectations for membership, and do a better job at welcoming and retaining members.

9. Covenants

Since they speak to issues of emotional and spiritual health, safety, and trust, covenants are important. They can be part of the spiritual life of our church. But they are also functional, vital ways of letting everyone know our shared expectations of behavior. Effective covenants, that is, covenants that are monitored and periodically renewed, prevent destructive conflict and nourish genuine fellowship.

Process observers are an important tool for monitoring and enhancing the application of covenants.

Together covenants and process observers help us deepen our genuine connection to each other, maintain right relationship, and cope with and heal conflict.

10. Handling Conflict

FUSN has made efforts to address some specific conflicts and not address others. We have no established process, shared values, nor skills in place for routinely addressing conflicts and grievances within our community. Churches we interviewed talked about conflict resolution processes freeing energy for purposive, disciplined, and creative lay leadership. The committee sees anticipating, airing, and accepting or resolving conflict as a critical part of church work, and another opportunity for our congregation to deepen its spirituality and establish more genuine fellowship.

Models of Governance

Designing Models of Governance

As the Governance Committee has emphasized, it is the Board of Trustees' (BOT's) work to design FUSN's governance systems in accordance with the congregation's wishes. However, volunteer lay leaders usually have many other demanding commitments that prevent them from devoting full time each day to such a design effort. Designing governance "from scratch" simply is not realistic.

The Governance Committee therefore offers 3 Models as a springboard for the BOT's work. These models expedite the BOT's efforts by

- Highlighting different structures
- Pointing out different ways of defining roles
- Focusing on different ways to handle accountability & evaluation
- Illustrating different uses of volunteer lay leaders

The Governance Committee wishes to make clear that ***no model is perfect.*** The BOT may pick one model, or merge key aspects of several models, or invent its own model. Regardless, it is the BOT's work to tailor its choice to FUSN's needs & capabilities.

It is likely that change (of any kind) will present challenges to the congregation, and it is also probable that many will find well-implemented changes energizing.

Leadership Development and Covenants

It is also important to emphasize, that the committee found, time and again, that churches with lousy governance models and leaders who do task, process, and relationship well enjoyed a healthy vibrant life; while churches with the best of governance systems and unresolved people problems did not. Skilled people and healthy culture provide a huge advantage. From this the committee learned that the success of each of the three models depends on the existence and use of good leadership development practices, and strong covenants of right relations. Few at FUSN would dispute that it helps if leaders are prepared for their work. The importance of covenants may not be as clear to folks at FUSN.




Covenants are "deep and abiding promises to partner with each other and that which is bigger than ourselves"² to work together in a way that lifts up and celebrates our values (what brings us together and holds us in community). Covenants spell out what behaviors we expect of ourselves (e.g. listening to understand, etc.) In a covenant we promise to practice these behaviors as a spiritual discipline, with the full knowledge that (as humans) we will fall out of covenant again and again and that we will call each other back into covenant with love and respect.

² *Creating Congregational Covenants*, UUA General Assembly Workshop By Eunice Milton Benton & Connie Goodbread (UUA district staff). 2008

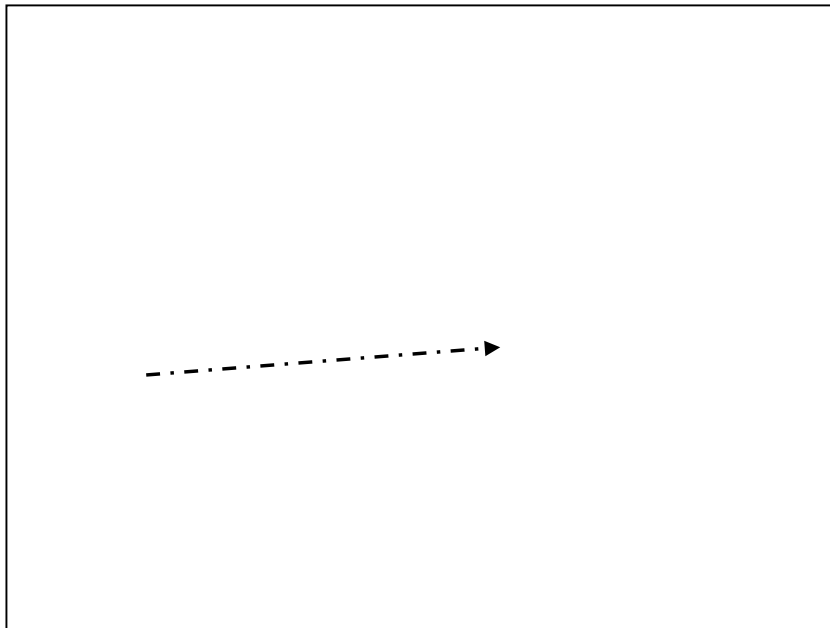
Three Models to Consider

The committee has named the three models it offers the BOT as springboards: Business as Usual, Board & Operations Council, and Carver-less Policy Governance™. Each of these models is presented as a schematic followed by Pros and Cons (benefits and risks, if you like.) In the schematics, we are trying to define relationships and accountabilities. We have used lines to show the primary conversations between the entities in the governance models (e.g. between the BOT and the minister, between the BOT and the congregation, etc.). The style of the line denotes the nature of the accountability between the two entities.

Here’s a “legend” to help make sense of the “Primary Conversation” lines:

- Hire/fire or appoint/dismiss (includes supervision/evaluation) 
- Supervision / Evaluation (only) 
- Partnership / coordination 

1. Business as Usual





Some of the benefits and risks for the Business as Usual Model (FUSN’s current way of operating) that the committee identified, follow.

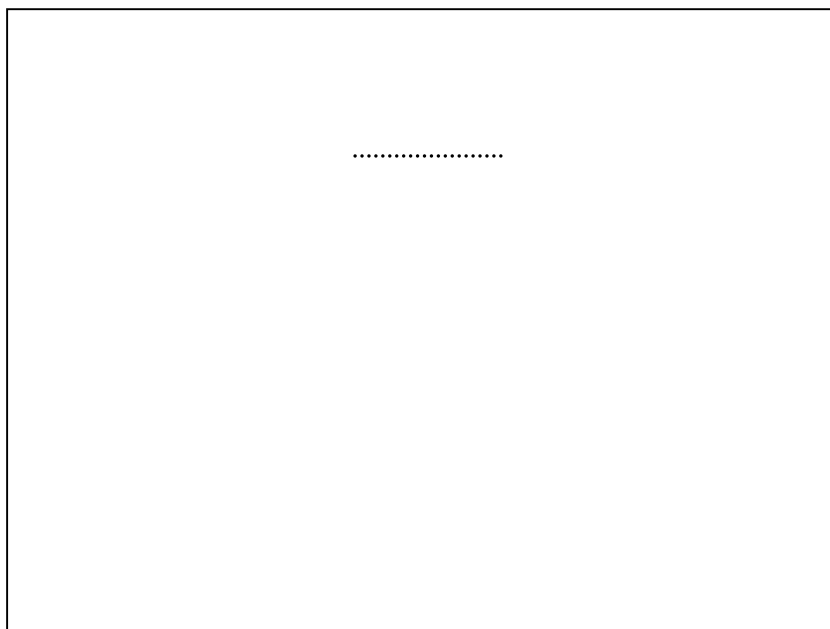
<i>Business as Usual PROs</i>	<i>Business as Usual CONS</i>
Involves many volunteers	Without a strong mission / vision to align people, differing priorities create needless conflict & overload
Involvement fosters commitment	BOT overloaded, focus on operations supplants long range planning
Commitment supports pledging	Council poorly attended, calendaring not always effective
We’re used to it & we have some excellent programming	Confusion over responsibilities allows things to fall between the cracks, creates needless conflict & tendency to not hold people accountable
No Bylaws changes needed	Hard to find enough qualified volunteers
No structural changes needed	Quality of program implementation depends on volunteers
	Without clear guiding policies that the BOT & everyone else use, people lack ways to resolve conflicts on what to do and how to behave appropriately
	Requires change to work better (e.g. Leadership Development, covenants, etc.)

2. Board and Operations Council



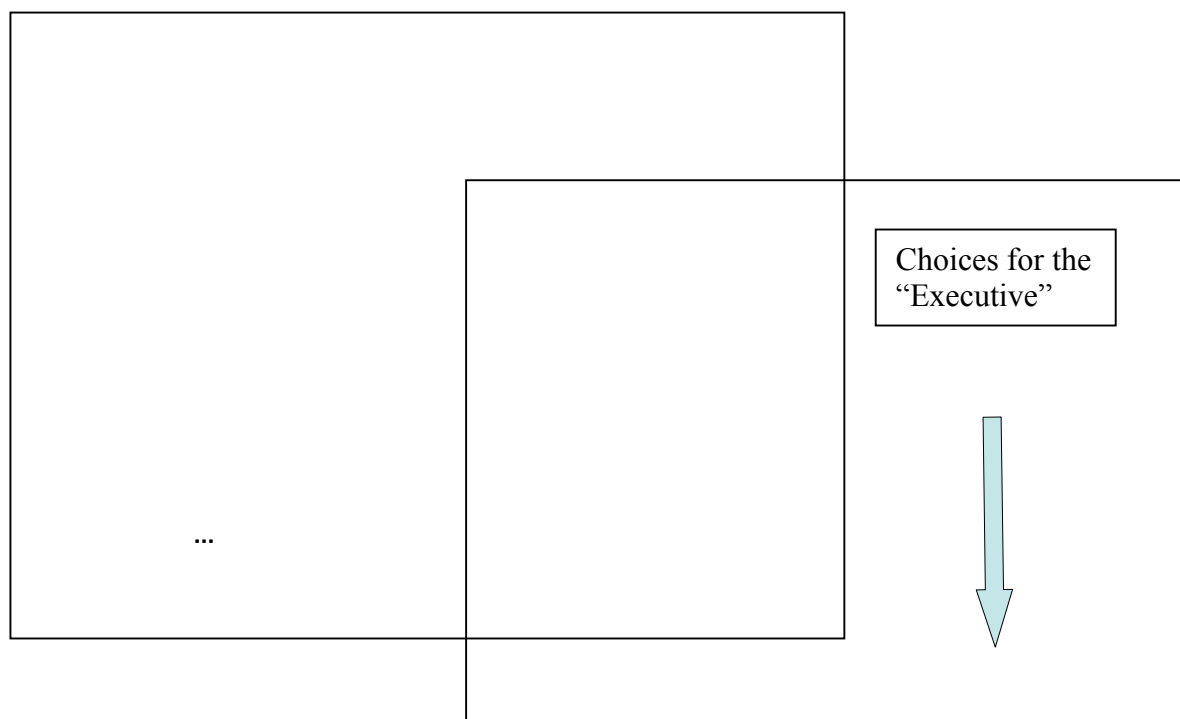
In the Board and Operations Council, policy making and planning have been split from operations. The BOT retains policy making, planning, and oversight, but delegates operations to a Program Council of elected lay leaders. These lay leaders are called Action Team Chairs, and they have the freedom to design the structures to suit the work they need to do. This means they can appoint a qualified individual to do the work, create ad hoc task forces, or create committees to do the work with which they are chartered. This usually results in fewer committees and more streamlined work.

A leadership Development Committee of elected lay leaders replaces the Nominating Committee and adds volunteer skill & interests identification and development to its duties of nominating FUSN's elected officials.



Board & Operations Council PROs	Board & Operations Council CONs
Clearer roles & responsibilities	Requires difficult behavioral changes for BOT members
Key parties collaborate in operations	Potential for Action Team Chairs over load
Focused leadership development	May be hard to find enough qualified volunteers
Appears more democratic than Carver-less Policy Governance™	Quality of program implementation depends on volunteers
Frees BOT for long range planning & sharpens focus on mission / vision / goals	Overly dependant on the quality of the "Program Council"
Smaller elected council is more effective & accountable	Without a strong mission / vision to align people, differing priorities create needless conflict & overload
Council has more meaningful work	If poorly implemented, can devolve to "Business as usual"
More flexible & improved use of volunteers, may be fewer used than in "Business as Usual"	
Volunteer involvement fosters commitment	
Commitment supports pledging	

3. Carver-less Policy Governance™



Pure Policy Governance™ the BOT's work is simple: to see to it that the congregation achieves what the congregation wants to achieve and avoids what the congregation wants to avoid. The BOT does only the highest level of strategic thinking/visioning (by setting Ends, super-ordinate goals), designs governance (by writing certain types of policies), and evaluates operations. The BOT does this out of continuous conversation with the congregation and continuous learning about the world surrounding the congregation. In the **Carver-less Policy Governance™ Model** long range planning and all other operations are delegated to an "executive/executive team" (sometimes containing an elected lay leader).

This executive/executive team may organize the operations in any way that is suitable for the work. The BOT evaluates it on its attainment of the Ends and its ability to stay within the Limitations policies written by the BOT. The Executive interprets the BOT's policies in writing to demonstrate to the BOT that it understands what the BOT is communicating to it. A focused and disciplined dialogue over policy replaces micromanagement, and congregation-wide disputes over responsibilities and who said what.

If the Executive does something the BOT does not like, the BOT's remedy is to look at the policies and ask, "Would a reasonable person interpret the executive's actions as failing to abide by the written limitation?" If the answer is

yes, the BOT may call for removing or disciplining the executive. If the BOT has simply not been clear in its Limitations policies, it acknowledges this and begins a dialogue with the Executive, explaining that the BOT is writing a new Limitation to address the actions, and that the Executive has a set amount of time from the date the new Limitation is written to comply with it.

The **Carver-less** Policy Governance™ Model is so called because it violates the cardinal rule of pure Policy Governance™ as formulated by John Carver (the trademark holder): the executive must be a single individual who may be held ultimately accountable by the BOT for all that happens on her/his watch (BOT has the remedy to fire the executive). A pure Carver model cannot be reconciled with UU congregational polity, because only the congregation as an entity may remove a minister (who is likely to be, at the very least, a part of the executive.)

Carver-less Policy Governance™ PROs	Carver-less Policy Governance™ CONs
Clear roles & responsibilities	Pure Carver model cannot be reconciled with congregational polity
Clear accountabilities	Requires difficult behavioral changes for BOT members
Efficient evaluation process, less likelihood of BOT micro-managing operations	Requires significant BOT development/ training since uses specialized language unique to Policy Governance™ to achieve clarity.
Dialogue replaces turf conflicts	May require Bylaws changes
Frees BOT for strategic thinking & learning. Sharpens focus on mission / vision & goals	If poorly implemented, can devolve to monarchy or anarchy
More flexible & improved use of volunteers, fewer than “Business as Usual” & more meaningful work	May be seen as less democratic
Potential better programming	Overly dependant on the quality of the “Executive”
Potential for high member engagement	Requires focus to maintain collaboration between BOT & “Executive/Exec. Team”
Pledging increases with strong mission & engagement	Loses all benefits if conflict among an Executive Team is not resolved by & within that team
Scales easily to much larger size congregation	

Governance Work Remaining for the FUSN Board of Trustees

The Governance Committee is a time-limited task force whose charter is to prepare educational material for the BOT. It is the Board of Trustees' (BOT) work to define governance on behalf of the congregation. It cannot delegate this work to some other committee, because the work is too central to the BOT's fiduciary responsibilities.

It is the Governance Committee's hope that BOT members will read and begin to digest the committee's report before their fall retreat. The Governance Committee will join the BOT for a part of that retreat. As agreed with the BOT last June, the BOT will spend considerable time at its September 2008 retreat (4 hours minimum) to engage in a substantive dialogue that deepens their shared understanding of the committee's findings and the scope of the work they face (with the Interim Minister's help) in the coming year. ***After the fall retreat, as defined in its charter, the Governance Committee ceases to exist since its work will be complete.***

Between September 2008 and September 2009, the BOT will need to synthesize a governance system out of the components of this report (such as the 3 Potential Models, the 10 Key Issues, the Focus Group Results, Church Interviews, etc.), informed by their understanding of the congregation's wishes.

Specifically, the BOT will need to:

- Create a BOT covenant, and a BOT-Minister covenant
- Articulate a FUSN mission / vision
- Document a model of governance (roles, relationships, structures)
- Complete governing policies that describe how "church" will be done.

During this time the BOT will need to maintain open communications with the congregation, perhaps using the Listening Circles format, which was so successful this past year, to gain input for mission/vision and to hear concerns about BOT choices. September 2009 is a critical date, because that is when the Search Committee for our settled minister will start its work. They need enough information about FUSN's mission/vision and choice of governance models to be able to paint an accurate picture of the congregation for a ministerial candidate.

The BOT will need to continue its education on governance to do this work effectively. And the nature of BOT meetings will need to change to allow a minimum of one hour of prime time per meeting to explore and resolve governance components. The BOT may choose to create sub-committees of the BOT to create agendas and straw proposals to focus their discussions, it may hold special week-end work retreats, and it may call upon members of the former Governance Committee to educate and/or support it as the work evolves.