

The Gist of It

Notes from the Governance Task Force

Seasons greetings to you! The Governance Task Force (GTF) has turned its attention to defining the governance and ministry structure we envision for the Storrs Congregational Church.

Previous issues of *The Gist of It* have focused on a conceptual understanding of governance and ministry. The first issue presented and interpreted our Philosophy of Governance. The second issue explored governance versus ministry and presented our view of the powers and authority the congregation would retain in the new structure.

In this issue we present our developing vision of what the new governance and ministry structures would actually look like. Three components are presented:

- first, the composition and responsibilities of the Governing Board;
- second, the nomination and election process for the Governing Board; and,
- third, the beginnings of an envisioned structure for our ministries.

Each of these is still a work-in-progress, and we would welcome your comments.

It is very important that the GTF hear your comments and concerns about these proposals. To that end we are planning a series of “easel talks” during fellowship hours in January. And we are looking forward to participating in a new format for the Annual Meeting on January 25, 2015. See the tentative schedule on the next page, and keep an eye out for announcements in the Carillon and Sunday bulletin.



Upcoming GTF Engagements

Look out for these upcoming opportunities to engage GTF members in conversation, dialogue, thinking-together, dreaming, and more...

- **January 4**
“Easel Talk” on Governing Board Composition and Responsibilities
- **January 11**
“Easel Talk” on Nominations and Election Process
- **January 18**
“Easel Talk” on the emerging vision for ministry teams structure
- **January 25**
SCC Annual Meeting with Potluck and GTF Workshop.

Being in touch with *Your* Governance Task Force...

We continue to be *eager* for your questions and quandaries, comments and concerns, fears and feedback, kudos and keep-up-the-good-works.... Please be in touch with any or all of us at any time—we’d also be happy to meet with you for face-to-face conversation and collaborative thinking!

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Governing Board: Composition & Organization

As a brief refresher, remember that in our proposed model the Governing Board has authority over all activities of the church other than those retained by the congregation (for a draft list of these, please see the second issue of *The Gist of It*.) The Governing Board focuses on the governance aspects of the life of the church, and delegates to the ministry staff the authority, power, and resources to carry out the ongoing operations of the church. The Governing Board is elected by and directly accountable to the congregation. These are all aspects of our overall philosophy of governance for our congregation moving forward.

We on the GTF have now further developed the proposal for what the Governing Board actually looks like. In our current vision, the Governing Board consists of eleven (11) voting members, along with the called ministers as voice-without-vote. These eleven board members would be as follows, all being members or associate members of the church:

- Nine (9) members elected for three-year terms in classes of three each year, not eligible for re-election until one year has elapsed.
- One (1) University of Connecticut student member, either undergraduate or graduate, elected for a one-year term that may be extended up to a total of three continuous years.
- One (1) high school or college student member, elected for a one-year term that may be extended up to a total of three continuous years.

The Governing Board would have three officers: the Chair, Vice-chair, and Clerk, chosen by the Governing Board from among its members each year. The Chair, Vice-chair, and Clerk would also serve as Moderator, Vice-Moderator, and Clerk, respectively, for congregational meetings. The board officers would typically be chosen as follows:

- The Clerk can be of any year of service and may serve from one to three years in the clerk role
- The Vice-chair will generally be in the second year of her or his term; The Chair will generally be in the third year of his or her term
- The Vice-chair will generally become the Board Chair in the next year.

The Governing Board may at its discretion appoint sub-committees to assist in its work; anticipated sub-committees would include Finance, Properties, and Personnel. The Treasurer will advise the Governing Board on financial matters.

Governing Board: Nominating & Election Process... the *Leadership Discernment* Committee

The Leadership Discernment Committee is responsible for presenting candidates for the Governing Board, Leadership Discernment Committee, and other elected officers to the congregation for election. They are also responsible for recommending candidates to fill vacancies. The Leadership Discernment Committee will be composed of five members. All committee members as listed below must be members or associate members of the church:

- Three (3) members elected for three-year terms in classes of one each year, not eligible for re-election until one year has elapsed.
- The immediate past Chair of the Governing Board who will serve as Chair
- The current Vice-Chair of the Governing Board.

The process to be followed by the Leadership Discernment Committee to generate nominations would work in much the same way that recent pastoral search committee slates were developed, as follows:

- The Leadership Discernment Committee will seek nominations from the congregation to fill the available positions.
- The Leadership Discernment Committee will discuss current Board needs with the Governing Board.
- The Leadership Discernment Committee will prayerfully choose candidates for open positions taking into account interest, nominations, and Governing Board needs, while seeking an overall Board make-up that represents the diversity of the congregation.
- The Leadership Discernment Committee will present a slate of candidates to the congregation for approval.
- Members of the congregation may nominate additional candidates for these positions from the floor (any candidates so nominated must indicate that they are willing to serve).
- The congregation then votes on the slate, using written ballot if nominations from the floor result in more nominees than positions available.

Governing Board: Its Function and Role

In many ways, the role and function of the Governing Board is like that of the Board of Directors or Board of Trustees in other non-profit, charitable, or educational organizations. Its purpose is to act as the chief stewards and overseers of the mission, life, and operations of the congregation. The Board acts on the congregation's behalf and in service of the congregation's mission in all matters that the congregation hasn't reserved for itself. The Board's work centers in four broad areas: discernment, strategy, management, and oversight.

Discernment has to do with all that a congregation does to discover and articulate its overarching mission. Discernment involves the work of clarifying and stating our sense of core purpose and reason-for-being, casting vision for who we are as a congregation and where we're heading, and giving expression to our core values.

Strategy covers the big-picture, "macro" decisions that guide the way toward fulfilling the mission and vision discernments. Strategic decisions and policies include things like developing longer-range strategic plans, expressing annual goals, determining major resources that will be available through

development of the operating budget and the making of major decisions about staffing, developing ongoing "open questions" that continue feeding the discernment and strategy work of the congregation, and so forth.

Management is the ordinary day-to-day running of the church as an organization. Ultimately as the sole chief governing body under the congregation, the Board is responsible for seeing to the management of the church. However, in order to provide room for the Board's other areas of responsibility, most of the Board's 'work' in management consists of delegating authority and power to others (the staff and ministry structure). Delegating involves more than simply assigning the task to someone, but also includes clearly articulating the larger results the Board wants, identifying the extent and limits of powers and authorities that the Board is



prepared to delegate, and creating plans for evaluation and accountability.

Oversight is the duty that the Board has to ensure that the congregation's resources—human, material, and financial—are used for the benefit of the congregation's mission. The Board will identify standards for the congregation's life and work and seek to monitor and evaluate that work so that staff and volunteer leaders are accountable and the congregation continues to learn and grow.



But *how* does the Governing Board do discernment, strategy, management, and oversight? The main way that the Governing Board engages these four areas of responsibility is through the development and adoption of written policies, which guide decisions over time. Because policies look to the big picture, establishing standards and resources for types and categories of situations, they provide the framework and freedom for individual decisions to be made away from the board table.

As an example, one policy that we already have in our current system is a facilities use policy. This policy gives guidance and standards as to what sort of groups can use our facilities, what sort of activities are permitted, and what sort of



arrangements need to be made. With this policy in place, the majority of facility use decisions can be made by the Office Administrator and/or the Senior Minister without needing to take up the time and attention of the Church Council or some other body.

By having in place a clear body of policies in the Board's four areas, and especially in the management and oversight arenas, the Board entrusts others—staff and volunteers—to go ahead and act, while freeing the Board to focus on the bigger questions of discernment and strategy. As Hotchkiss puts it, "Effective boards don't try [to use all of the power over congregational life that they have]. Instead they choose a few critical areas where the board's contribution is essential and unique—and delegate the rest. ... It remains *responsible* for everything under its authority, but controls some things directly, shares control of others, and delegates yet others fully." (pg. 91)

Governing Board: What does it do?

Once an overall framework of basic policy is in place—some of which we on the GTF are putting together, and some of which will remain for the new Governing Board to work on itself—we envision an ongoing annual routine for the Governing Board that would include recurring events like annual goal setting, evaluation, and the creation of a budget. Along the way, the Governing Board will engage in—and engage the congregation with—deep discussion of major points of our mission, programmatic and strategic choices, and even changes in our community and environment. What would agenda items in this vein look like? Perhaps they'd include items like these:

- In an August meeting, there might be an item that reads: “What are our ministry priorities for the upcoming two-year period? We will have a first discussion about our priorities, with final approval expected next month, in time to guide the making of a budget.”
- At another meeting, an item might read: “How well are we fulfilling our mission with regard to youth? As part of our ongoing process of discernment about the youth, the Board will

hold a one-hour workshop meeting with the youth ministry team leaders. Youth representatives will participate. No board action is anticipated at this meeting.”

- At yet another, one might be: “How do we best use our facilities for rental purposes? The Board will discuss a proposed board policy on rentals; a subcommittee will have modified the proposed policy based on last month’s preliminary conversation. We anticipate a final vote tonight.”

The sorts of big-picture matters that are appropriate to the Governing Board—and not simply day-to-day management that could be delegated with the appropriate policies in place—typically stay around for a long time. Main focal points for the Board agendas could even be planned months in advance... a regular cycle of check-ins with different ministry areas, for example, or an annual routine of goal-setting and resource development.



Governing Board: What does it *not* do?

The Governing Board has responsibility for—and oversight and authority over—the overall life and mission of the congregation, but it does not actually *do* everything that needs to be done. That's what we mean when we talk about *delegation*. The Governing Board ultimately has *responsibility* for, say, the maintaining of worship life in the church, but as a body the Governing Board doesn't actually *carry out* what's needed to make that happen. Rather, the Governing Board establishes the congregation's official policies related to worship, then delegates the actual *work* to the ministry staff, ensuring they have the resources they need and keeping them accountable to the policies that have been set. Beyond whatever policies have been set by the Governing Board, the ministry staff has freedom and latitude to carry out the work within those bounds.

There's another important thing to remember about what the Governing Board does *not* do. By and large, the Governing Board does not deal with individual operational decisions or 'cases'. The Governing Board focuses its work on setting policies, identifying strategic priorities and paths, engaging in bigger-picture

discernment, and attending to oversight... all so that the ministry leadership (paid staff and volunteer 'staff') have the guidance they need to make the myriad of day-to-day operational decisions themselves without having to go to the Board. As Dan Hotchkiss says in *Governance and Ministry*, "Most practical decisions can safely be made away from the board table, provided that the board adopts clear and limited delegation policies, gives the decision maker guidance as to the larger goals to be achieved, and establishes effective ways to monitor progress and evaluate results" (pg. 97).

Also, the Board doesn't function as an appellate court deciding individual cases when someone doesn't like the decision that a ministry leader makes, but rather always brings something back to the question of whether there is a policy question at hand. An agenda item that would decide only a one-time event or issue *should* prompt the Board to ask: 'Do we need a policy we don't have, or a change to one we do?' If so, *then* there might be an appropriate agenda item for the Board. And if that's not in fact the case, then, as Hotchkiss puts it, "the board will do itself a favor by allowing the decisions of its staff to stand" (pg. 93).

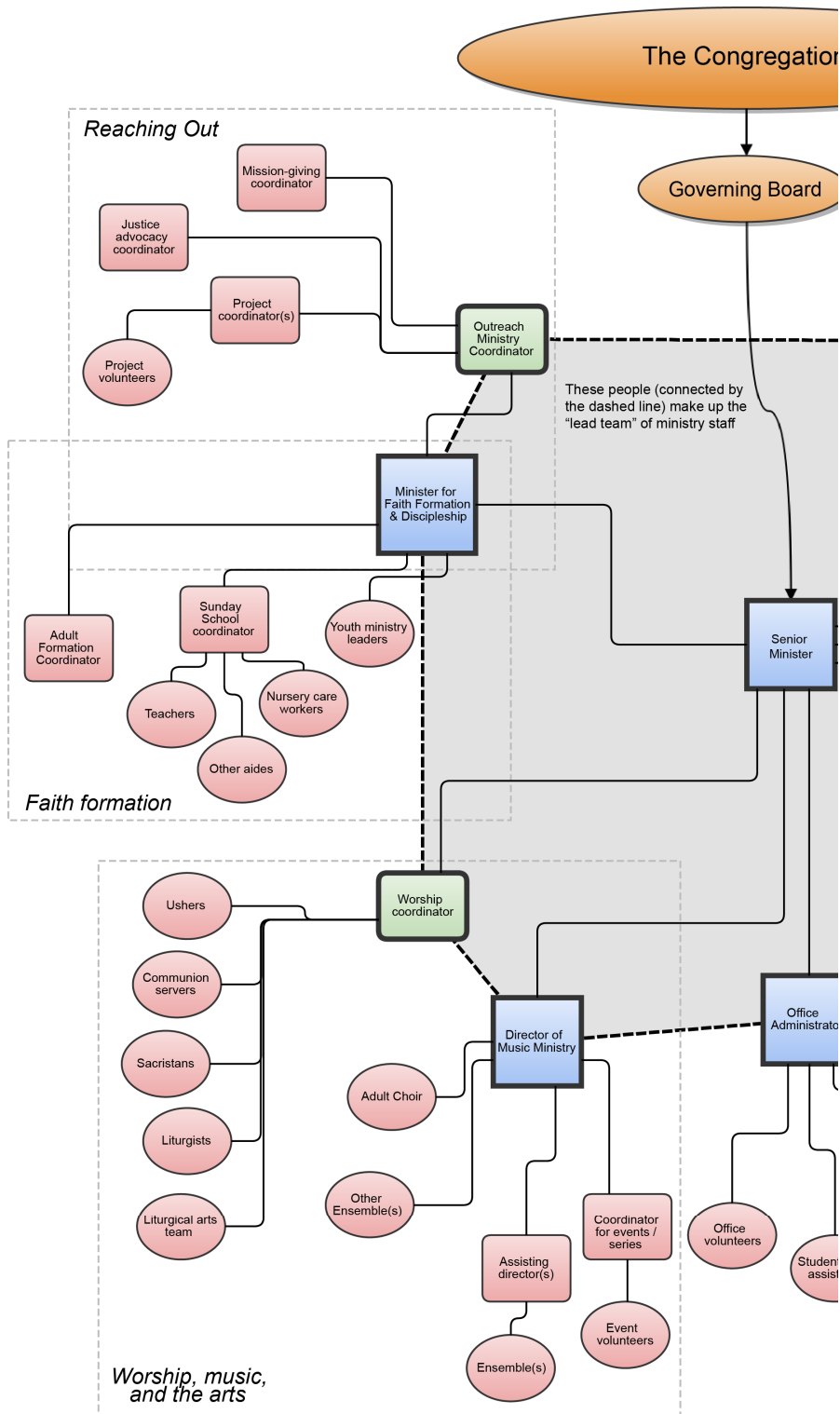
Ministry Teams and Structure

As described in the second issue of *The Gist of It*, “Ministry is the active, ‘doing’ aspect of the congregation”. As also shown in the second issue, we at SCC are currently “doing” a lot of ministries. In the model we’re working on, the Governing Board—as the representatives of the congregation and chief stewards of its mission and ministry—delegates the responsibility and associated resources for carrying out the ministries through the senior minister to a ministry structure.

The ministry structure will be very different from the governance structure. Ministries will be built around ministry teams composed of people who are interested in and/or passionate about that ministry task. A ministry team might be a group of people (think, for example, ushers or Sunday School teachers) or it could be a single individual (perhaps, a music special events coordinator, as an example). The membership of a team could be self-discerning, worked out among interested persons and whatever team leaders or ministry area coordinators oversee a particular ministry responsibility. There would be no requirement for election, membership, or length-of-term.

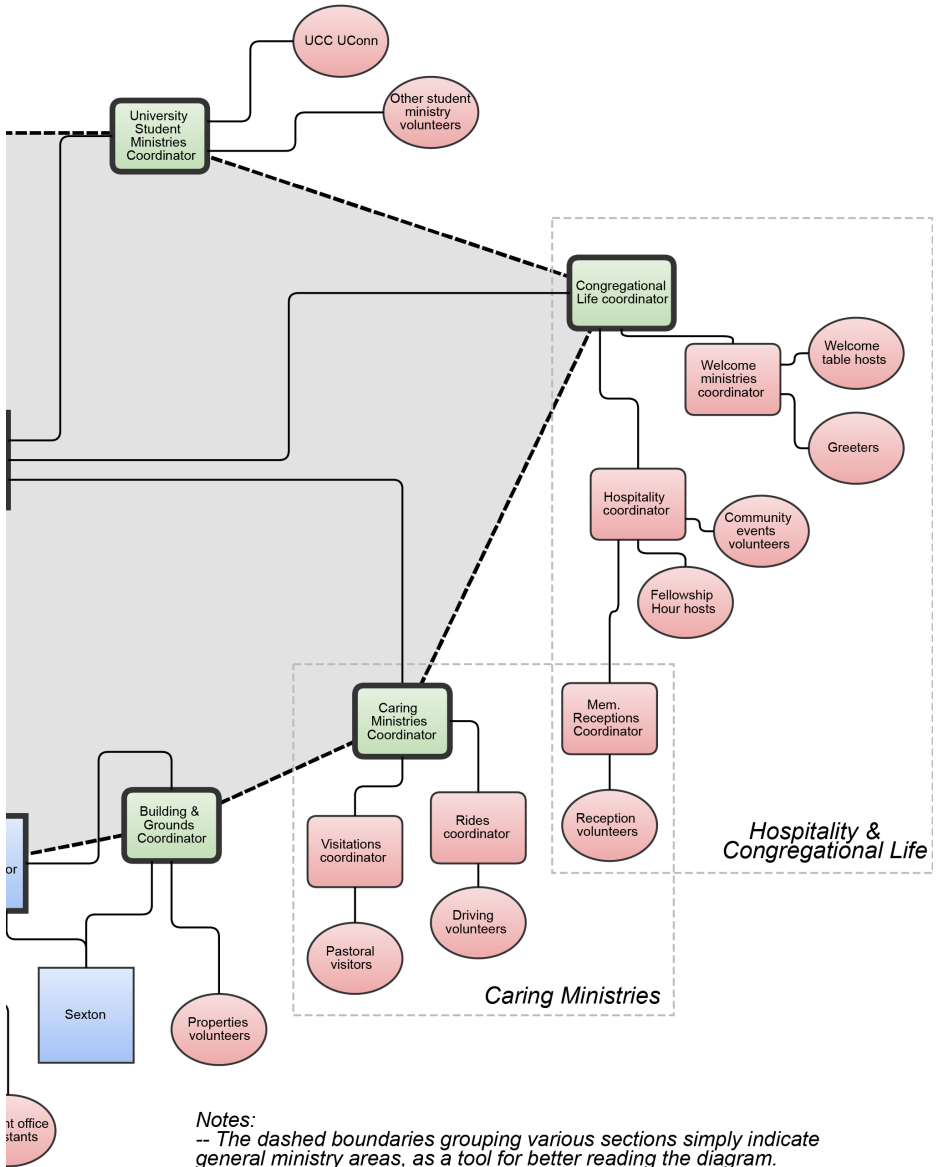
The overall ministry structure could be organized around the following six service areas: Reaching out; Faith formation; Worship, music, and the arts; Caring ministries; Hospitality and congregational life; and Administration. Each area would have a lead coordinator and/or staff member. The lead coordinators, staff members and the senior minister would comprise a “lead team”. The lead team would occasionally meet together for coordination, planning, cross-ministry work, creating ministry cohesion, and so forth. Within each area, ministry teams and their team leaders would work independently and coordinate their activities through their lead coordinator. Resources and direction would flow from the congregation and Governing Board through the senior minister to the lead coordinators and their team leaders. Accountability would flow in the reverse direction.

The diagram on the following pages depicts this structure and identifies many of the possible ministry teams. This diagram is intended to suggest a structure, not define it. Note that the shaded area reflects the roles of the lead team members and senior minister. Also note the boxed-in areas grouping the service areas.



Ministry “structure”: a *possible* organization

(Dec 2014 draft)



Notes:

- The dashed boundaries grouping various sections simply indicate general ministry areas, as a tool for better reading the diagram. They do not necessarily represent official bodies or committees, nor are they perfect or impermeable boundaries.
- The called clergy (Senior Minister and Minister for Faith Formation and Discipleship) are assumed to occupy places within all of the general ministry areas depicted (the dashed boundaries).

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