



**Strategic Visioning
Governance Task Force Update to the Congregation
September 25, 2022**

Task Force Members: Catherine Spinella (chair), Karen Ermler, Peggy Hsiao, Sally Iracane, Todd Landis, Jon Thomsen (Executive Director), Katrina Forman (clergy), Don Hill (advisor)



In April, our congregation approved a Foundational vision and seven commitments:

Foundational Vision: We are called by God to be a thriving, imaginative community hub providing opportunities for deep reflective worship and spiritual growth; points of connection for fellowship, joy, and Christian education; and collective impact on social inequities through the intentional and comprehensive use of Union's resources and campus to enact our Statement of Purpose.

Our Task Force is responsible for fleshing out Key Commitment 5:

Adopt a more nimble and sustainable congregational governance model that allows members to devote their energy to mission and spiritual growth.

Our work to date:

- Researched within Union Cong:
 - Strategic Visioning “What” and “Why” conversation input and feedback
 - Nominating patterns
 - Current governance structure (Constitution & Bylaws and Policies & Practices Manual)
- Researched the UCC’s vision of governance & the roles / responsibilities of a congregation
- Considered volunteerism trends
- Reviewed writings on church governance best practices
- Interviewed 8 communities of faith re:
 - Governance structures
 - Impact of structure on mission, staffing, volunteerism, congregational energy & implementation of new ideas
- Reflected on our own experiences
- Processed all this information, individually and collectively, identified some patterns, lessons, and evolving learnings.



Goals for Today's Check-In

1. Share **highlights of the task force's evolving learnings** and some of our open questions
2. **Elicit your questions and comments** to inform the task force's future investigation and discernment process.

NO RECOMMENDATIONS are being made today.



A reflection:

Our Task Force's readings and discussions have taught me a lot. Prior to joining the Task Force, I was unthinking and undisturbed about our governance structure and procedure. I have learned that there could be more efficient, accountable, productive ways of carrying out the church's mission and ministries. We need more clarity about accountability, about the relationships between clergy, the Executive Director, staff, lay leaders, and the congregation, about the composition and role of the Leadership Council, and ways to cultivate fresh vision and to implement the various ministries of the church.... Now I am also beginning to think about how we are going to engage the rest of the congregation in this journey.

From our research and interviews, we learned of different models for governance structure, raised questions about where authority is vested and who is accountable to whom, how a congregation is empowered to do ministry, and who sets the vision for carrying out the mission of the church.

The roles and responsibilities of the different components of the church have become clearer, as task force members each tried to put their understanding in writing.

– Peggy Hsiao



What does the UCC say about governance?

David Greenhaw, former President of Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis and leading authority on the history and life of the United Church of Christ:

- **The local church is the “basic unit” of the Church – and key to Christian Identity**
- **“Christians are communal”**
- Members of the local congregation are the “controlling authority”
- How the church organizes itself varies according to history and situation
- **We are called to form and re-form the church.**

According to Article V (Local Churches) of the United Church of Christ Constitution:

- The Local Church has autonomy in the management of its own affairs, which include, but are not limited to:
 - **the right to retain or adopt its own methods of organization, worship and education;**
 - to retain or secure its own charter and name;
 - to adopt its own constitution and bylaws; ...
 - to call or dismiss its pastor or pastors by such procedure as it shall determine;
 - to acquire, own, manage and dispose of property and funds; to control its own benevolences....

Union has made major changes to its governance structure throughout its history.





We are called to form and re-form the church....

- Churches are unique, even among non-profits.
- God is still speaking.
- We are accountable to former members and traditions, current members,
AND to our future members and friends.
- We are accountable to our mission as a Christian community.
- In an ever-changing world, how do we leave space in our governance structure for the inspiration of the Spirit? For the divine to intervene?



God
is still
speaking,



Key participants in church governance:

- The Congregation
- The Governing Board (now known as the Leadership Council)
- The Clergy
- The Executive Director and other Staff
- Current Leadership Teams (Worship, Stewardship, Deacons, Welcoming, etc.)
- Current Committees (Finance, Pastoral Relations)
- Task Forces
- Small Groups
- Ministry Teams
- Standing Committees

What are appropriate roles & responsibilities for each of these entities?

What is the appropriate accountability structure?

How do these players work together to further our mission?

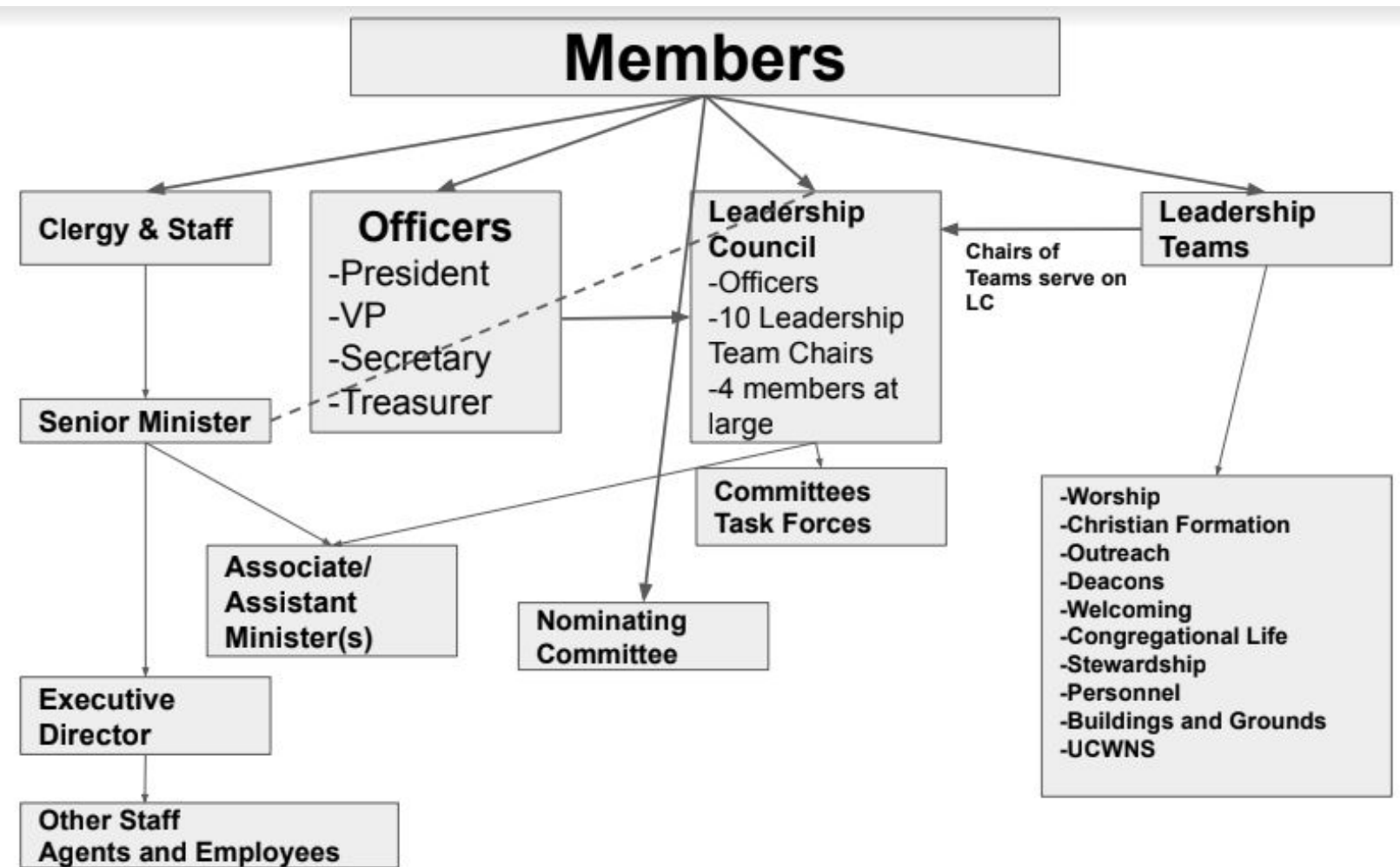


Let's pause for a momentTake 5 minutes to:

Draw a sketch of Union's CURRENT governance structure (Leadership Council, Leadership Teams, Committees, Clergy, Staff, Congregation).

Feel free to add solid and dotted lines to indicate accountability!





Virtually all active members & friends are involved with committee and leadership work.

A number of folks serve on more than one committee.

Union's structure is typical of post-WWII family & pastoral-sized congregations

- Board primarily comprised of practical program leaders
- Chairs have a program to run AND Board responsibilities
- Boards get larger as church and programs grow
 - Theory that important programs deserve representation
- Virtually every aspect of church life falls under a committee (Team).
- Stable but often resistant to change
- Can be draining

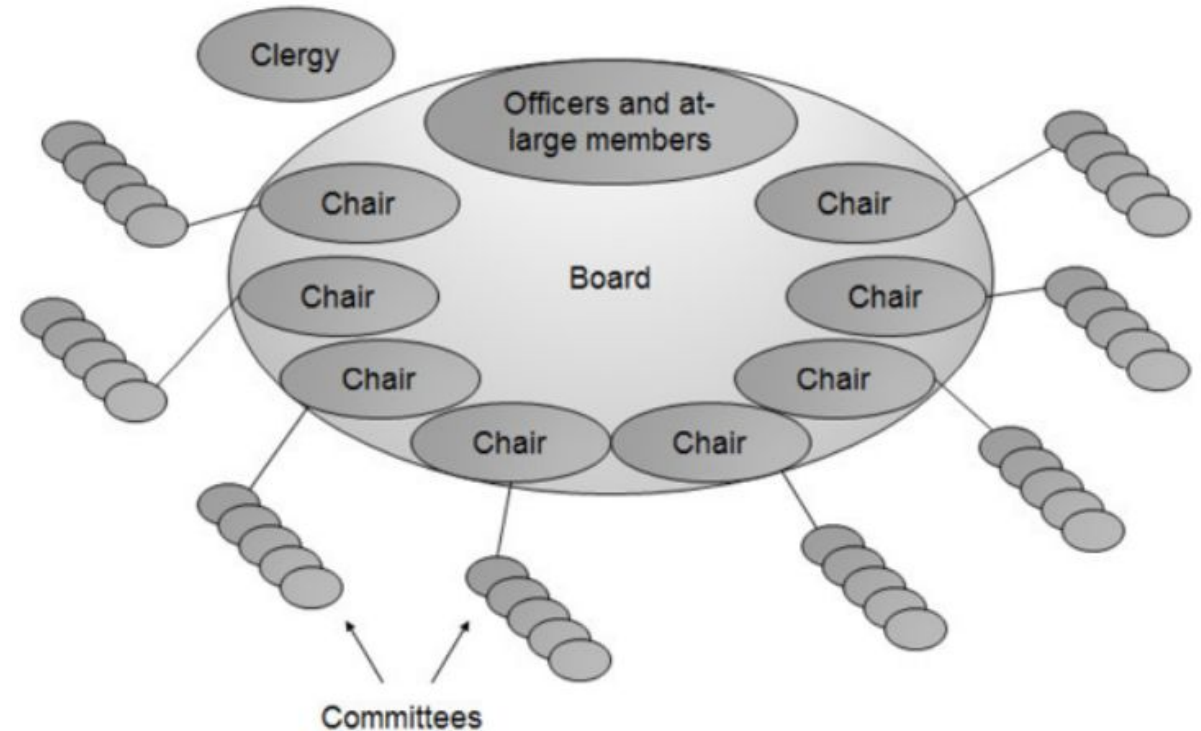
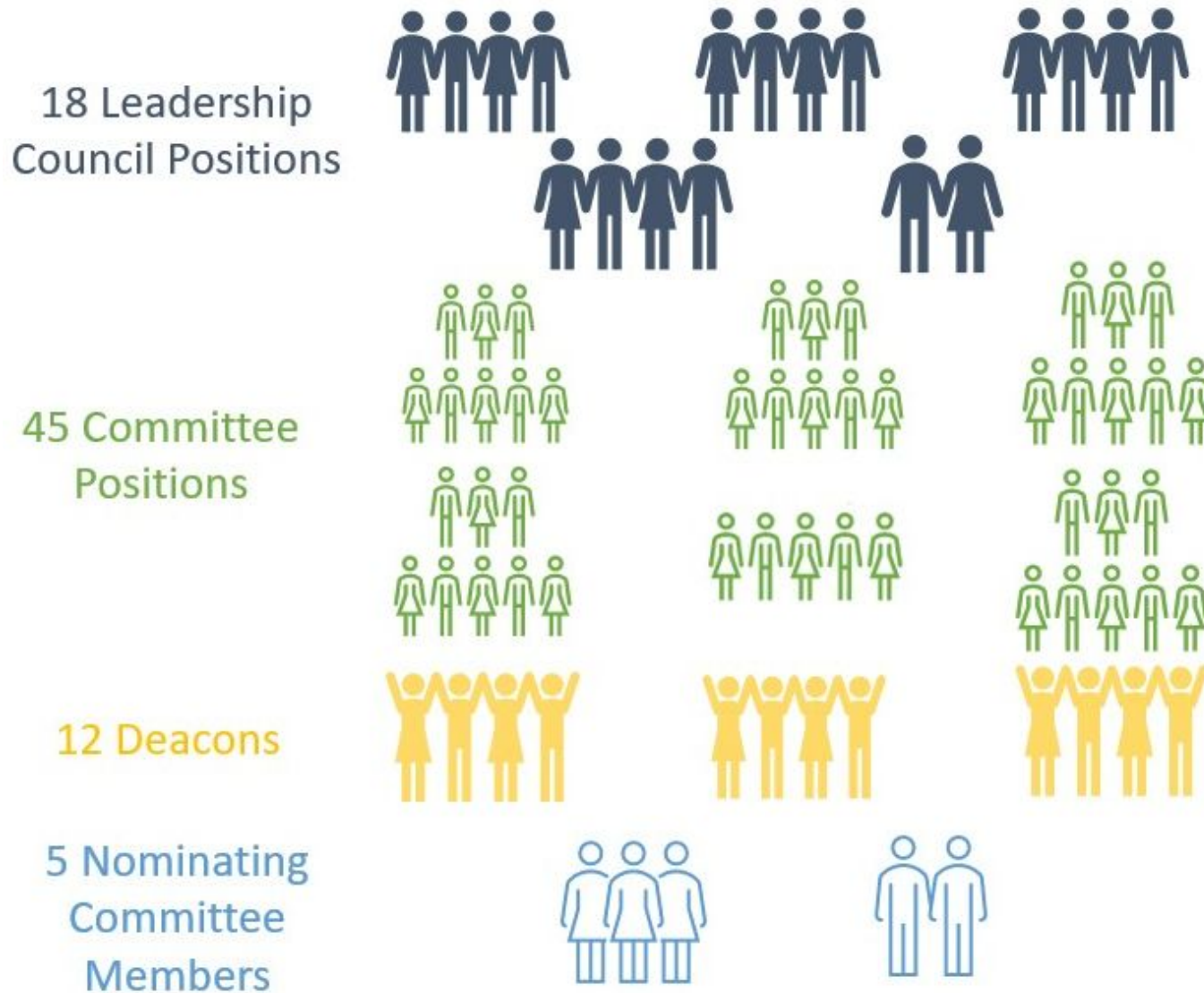


Figure 3.1. Board-centered.



Union is an active, engaged congregation!



Union in 2022:
83 Elected Team (Committee) Positions
31 Appointed Standing Committee and Task Force Positions

114 Total Positions (includes 24 members serving on more than 1 committee)

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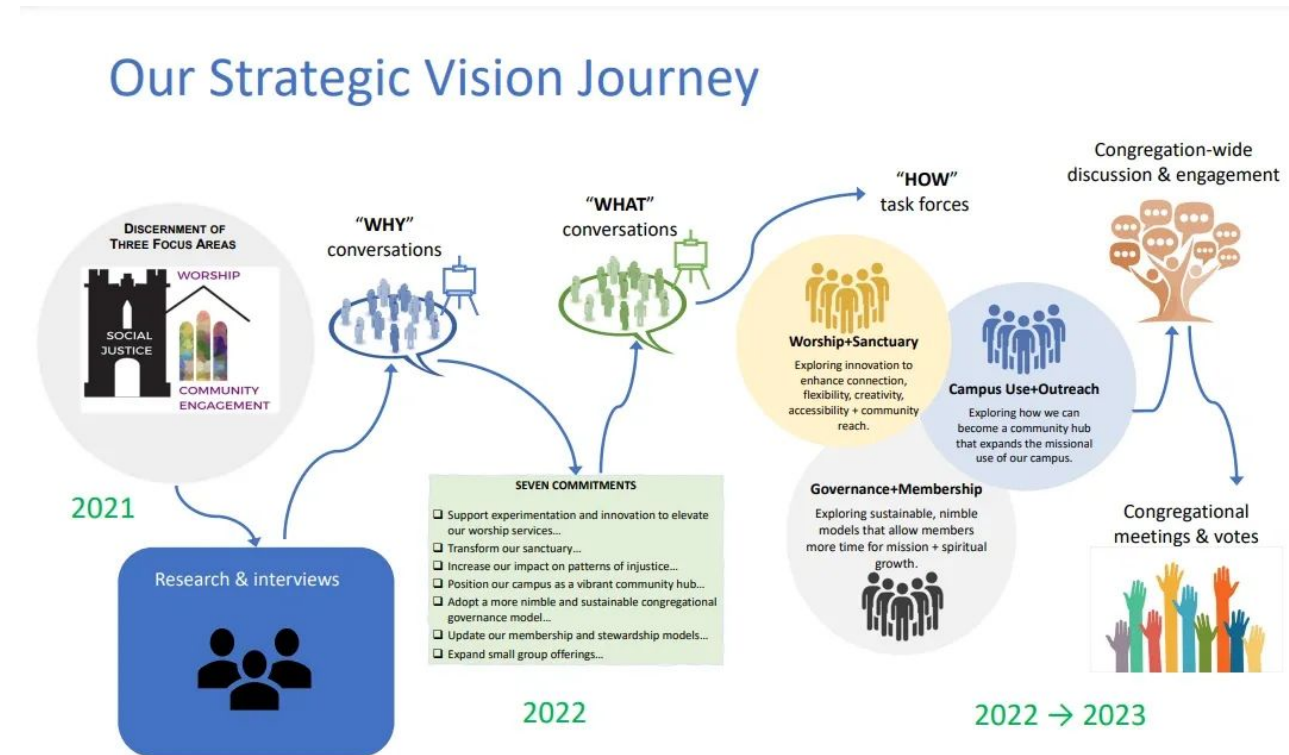
2,000+ Hours of Committee Meetings per year across **110 Active Members**



Perspectives / Learnings: MORE ministry, spirituality, mission - LESS bureaucracy

Community Conversations:

- Broad changes in family life and demands on working families have changed volunteerism.
- Our governance and committee structure can be confusing and bureaucratic.
- For some, current Leadership Council model “saps people’s energy.”
- Folks want more “ad hoc” volunteer involvement/opportunities and less time in committee work



Perspectives / Learnings: MORE ministry, spirituality, mission - LESS bureaucracy

“The mainline churches’ congregational governance structure was designed with multiple layers of checks and balances. Our inherited governance and leadership structure is a system built to maintain and preserve the ecclesiastical institution – to make sure that nothing too crazy (or reactive) happens. While this may have been fine in the American postwar era of church growth and engagement, the missional church of the twenty-first century must be creatively and structurally enabled to make changes in methods to fulfill its mission”.

Rapid cultural change is not going away.

The typical church structure is driving the mission rather than the mission driving the structure.

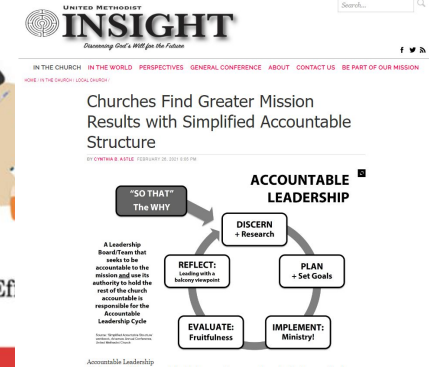
EXPANDED THIRD EDITION!

New Resources, Activities, and Checklists

MISSION: POSSIBLE



A Simple Structure for Missional Ef



Kay Kotan & Blake Bradford

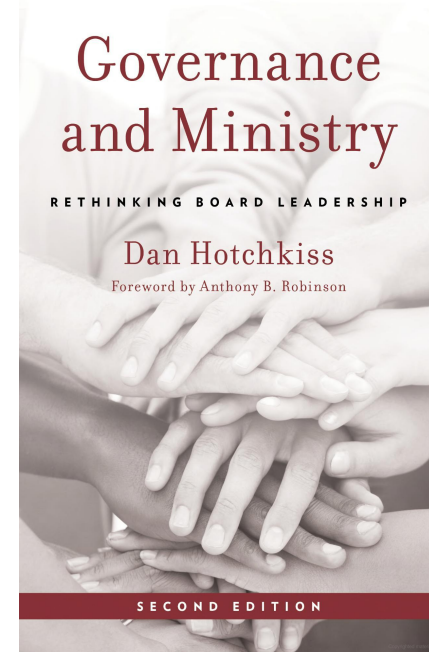


Perspectives / Learnings: MORE ministry, spirituality, mission - LESS bureaucracy

*A congregation that invites people to participate in organizational life appeals to only a few, but **a congregation that invites people directly into spiritual growth and service appeals to many.***

Outdated, overly complex, and inward-focused structures might be one cause of decline in congregations.

*Volunteers require that the **nature and scope of the work be defined honestly and clearly**, that the **benefits be significant and tangible**, and that the **work itself make good use of the talents of the volunteer.***



Next up:

Governing Board Models



Perspectives / Learnings: Interviews

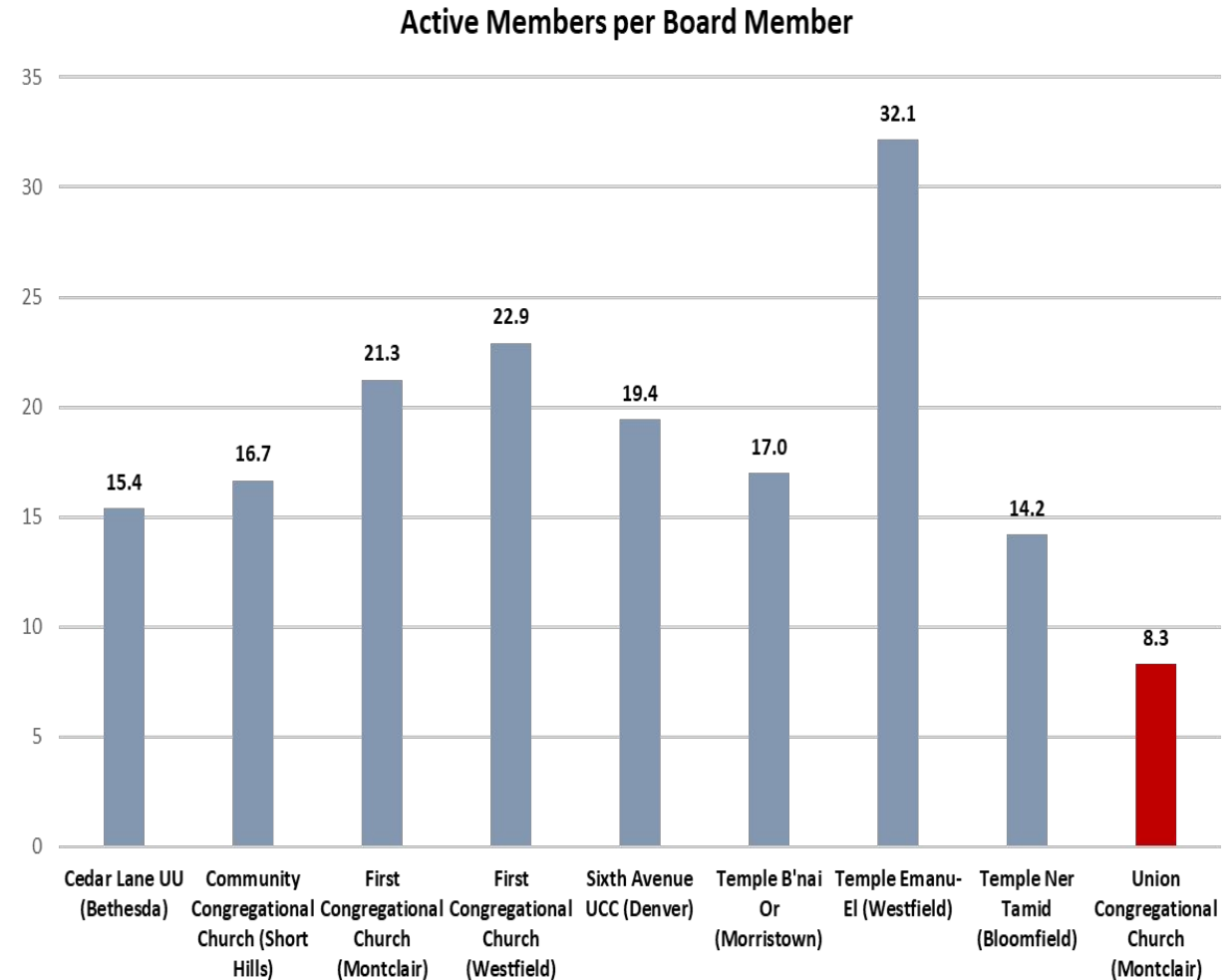
- Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church, Bethesda MD
 - Community Congregational Church, Short Hills
 - First Congregational Church, Montclair
 - First Congregational Church, Westfield
 - Sixth Avenue United Church of Christ, Denver CO
 - Temple B'nai Or, Morristown
 - Temple Emanu-El, Westfield
 - Temple Ner Tamid, Bloomfield
- **Congregation Sizes**
555 members; 217 members; 309 members; 600 members; 175 members; 420 families; 900 families; 540 families
 - **Principal Governing Board Sizes**
13, 9, 12, 12, 9, 25, 28, 38
 - **Have newly revised governance structures**
1 Unitarian, 2 synagogues, 1 UCC (and one exploring); 2 UCC relaxed during COVID
 - **Have Executive Director role**
4 (1 Unitarian, 3 synagogues)





Perspectives / Learnings - Interviews: Governing Boards

- Evolution from Boards comprised of committee chairs, officers, and a few at-large members to **Boards comprised primarily of at-large members**, with perhaps a few committee chairs.
- Boards handle **oversight** related to policies, finance, property, investments, buildings & personnel. Standing committees for these areas (where they exist) report to the Board.
- The UCC & UU churches have **smaller governing boards than Union**. The synagogue governing boards are larger, though 2 of the 3 reduced their Board size in recent years.
- New initiatives are typically vetted by clergy, with major initiatives approved by the Governing Board, and often by the congregation.



Perspectives / Learnings: Governing Boards

Thoughts From Hotchkiss:

- Hotchkiss favors a 7-member Board and notes it's very rare to find a Board of more than 9 working as an effective single team. Boards of 7-9 find it relatively easy to retain control of their agenda, hear from every member, and keep each member feeling 100% responsible for the Board's work.
- *“Even from the point of view of democracy, a smaller board has some surprising advantages. Unlike a larger board, it can be under no illusion that its members fully ‘represent’ the congregation. Small boards know that, if they want congregational support (and they do need it!) they have to engage constituents in continual two-way communication through committees, surveys, town meetings and informal one-to-one exchange.”*

Thoughts From Kotan and Bradford:

- Recommends a 9-member Board, with single 3-year terms. Argues that church structures must be lean, effective, and efficient to impact our non-church-centric world. A simplified, accountable governing structure makes it possible for churches to better focus on leader equipping, missional alignment, and next steps in ministry. Removing bureaucratic redundancies allows more members to spend their time in service rather than unproductive meetings.



Evolving Thinking on Governing Boards: Summary

- **Size: Smaller**
 - Supports greater Board engagement with key strategic issues.
 - Frees up more volunteers.
- **Role and Responsibilities:** Shifts from management to oversight of fiduciary responsibilities, missional long-term planning, and policy development.
 - Clarifies responsibilities.
 - Board responsible for planning and evaluation, not execution.
 - Standing committees to support fiduciary responsibilities.
- **Composition:** Not necessarily committee chairs
 - Situates all board members as representatives of the entire congregation.
 - Underscores need for more two-way communication.



Next up:

Ministry Teams



Perspectives / Learnings - Interviews: Ministry Teams

- Many have “ministries” rather than standing committees with monthly meetings
- Focus is on task-oriented, hands-on ministry teams
- Staff and clergy “facilitate” ministries
- Several congregations noted greater reliance on staff for continuity and follow through, and greater emphasis on ministry for members and friends.

“People want to join a movement, not a bureaucracy.”
“If we don’t focus on ministry teams, the church could fade and die out.”



Evolving Perspectives & Thinking: Ministry Teams



Figure 4.3. Committees and Teams.

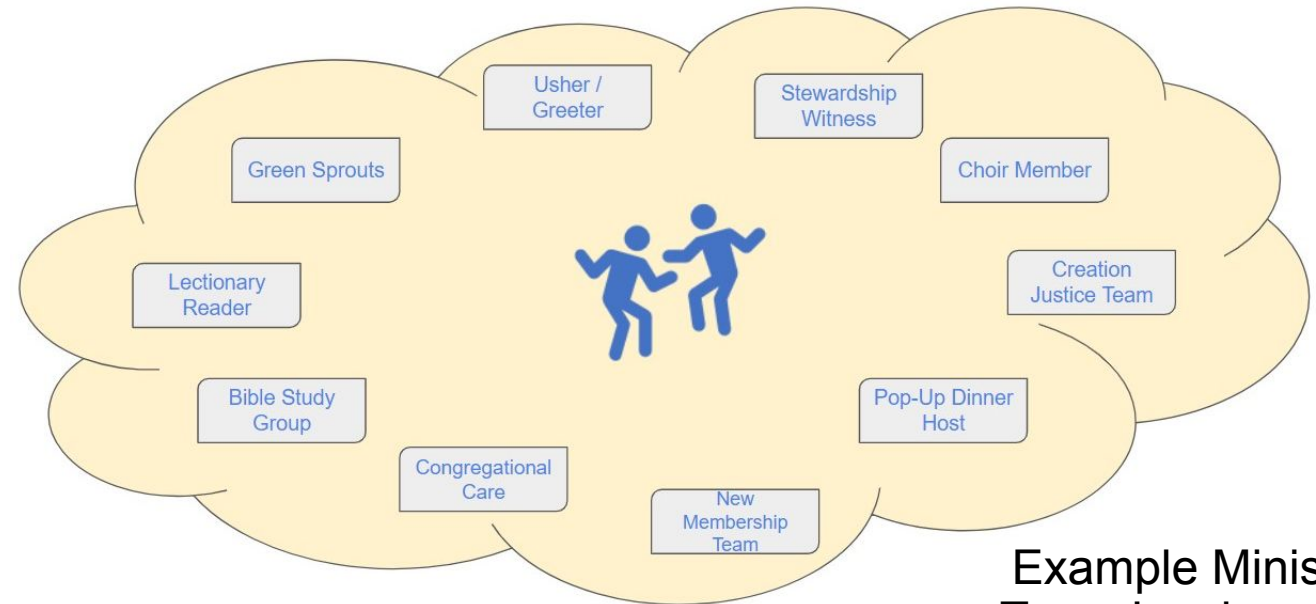
Ministry Teams are the power of the church, empowered to:

- DO the day-to-day ministry of the church
- Achieve practical results
- Communicate frequently with staff and clergy who have execution responsibility
- Create and implement ministry operational plans in consultation with clergy and staff



Responsibilities of current teams would need to be reviewed:

- A current Team might become multiple ministry teams.
- Functions that currently reside in different teams could be combined.
- Some functions could become the responsibility of the governing board or staff.



Example Ministry
Team Involvement

Summary:

- Fewer meetings and focused volunteer opportunities make better use of the congregation's time to further Union's strategic missions.
- Members and friends can volunteer where their interest/passion lies.



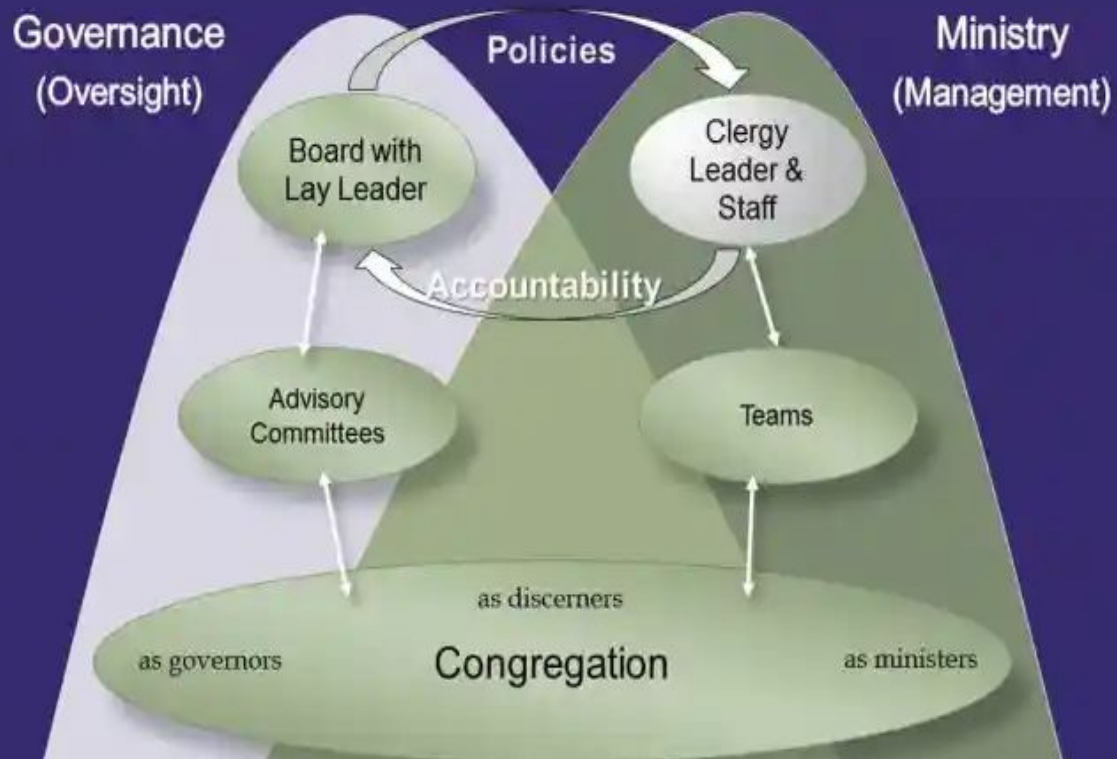
Next up:

Clarity on Roles



Evolving Perspectives & Thinking: Role of the Congregation

Collaborative Leadership



We are Governors:

- Vote at annual and special congregational meetings (budget, slate, missional priorities).

We are Planners:

- Participate in small-group sessions, congregational meetings and task forces on key issues, new ideas, missional priorities.

We are Ministers:

- Engage with clergy and staff to achieve results in various fields of practical work.



Evolving Perspectives & Thinking: Role of the Clergy

- Spiritual leader(s) of the people, providing worship and spiritual opportunities and pastoral care
- Lead the congregation in ministry to the wider community
- Work together with Executive Director and staff to carry out daily operations
- Oversee and provide guidance to ministries of the church.
- Lead the congregation through regular visioning and discernment to set priorities and ministry goals.



Perspectives / Learnings - Interviews: Executive Director and Staff Roles

- Clarity about the roles of clergy and Executive Director are key to visioning and execution.
- 4 churches / synagogues have Executive Directors responsible for:
 - Budget preparation & management
 - Member engagement
 - Communications
 - Building & facilities management
 - HR (hiring, onboarding, exits)
 - Staff supervision (not clergy)
 - Some have active role in fundraising

Evolving thinking from our Task Force - Our Executive Director's role includes:

- Freeing up clergy from HR tasks - it's not why they went to seminary!
- Taking ownership of facilities and staff responsibilities, working in collaboration with standing committees
- Facilitate Ministry Teams to support execution of Union Cong's mission



Topics we're still exploring:

- Optimal Board size?
- “Specialists” on the Board?
- Board representation for any committees?
- How would all current Team responsibilities be covered?
- Staff/clergy capacity?
- Timing for prospective changes to the governance structure?
- Accountability structure?
- Timing??



Key Takeaways



- ❖ Clarity around roles, responsibilities, and accountability is key to successful governance.
- ❖ Volunteerism has changed dramatically; the world has changed dramatically; there is no going back.
- ❖ We are called to form and reform the church; God is still speaking.
- ❖ Change is already happening at Union:
 - Ministry teams are already “sprouting” independent of committee work
 - Communication and feedback opportunities are increasing
 - With support from ED, clergy, and lay leaders are more able to focus on mission planning and ministry

Key Takeaways



- ❖ We have the opportunity to channel our congregation's energy into ministries that are more fulfilling and connected to our spirituality.
- ❖ A smaller governing board and ministry teams, which reflect a new approach to committee work, would enable us to have deeper and more impactful meetings that give greater focus and clarity with respect to the mission of the church.
- ❖ MORE ministry, spirituality, mission - LESS bureaucracy.
- ❖ We need your input and feedback!

Discussion and Reflection

- ❖ What governance ideas/reflections did you hear today that resonated with your own experiences with governance at Union, and why?
- ❖ What governance ideas/concepts did you hear today that sparked your interest and curiosity? For which ideas/concepts would you like more information and/or clarity?
- ❖ As a member or friend of Union, how can any future governance structure ensure that your voice is heard?
- ❖ General questions and comments?

