

Questions and Answers on the Proposed Interim Structure

Overview:

Q: What is the purpose of this proposal?

A: The overall goal of the interim structure is to provide the congregation with an environment that will allow it to create a new permanent governance structure that best serves the mission of Community United Church. The interim structure must also serve the current needs of the congregation and provide for the essential tasks of the Church such as worship, education, fellowship and mission.

Q: Aren't we rushing into this?

A: On the contrary, for at least the last six years members of Community United Church have been discussing possible changes to the Church's committee structure. These discussions have taken place in Church Council, congregational meetings, various committee meetings, and numerous informal conversations. Action was taken by the congregation in the 2002 annual meeting to appoint a special committee to investigate alternative structures and make a recommendation to the congregation. The committee completed their work in the fall of 2003 with a church forum focused on their findings but with no concrete recommendations for changes to the current structure. Three congregational forums were held as a follow up to the 2003 research report. The question of church structure was taken up again at a Church Council retreat in May 2004. Over the two days of this retreat the Council discussed the current structure and looked at what changes might be recommended. Following this meeting, Council requested that a group (7 people) meet to refine the thinking from the retreat and return with a concrete proposal. In August, Council voted to move forward with the proposal. Since then, Council representatives and participants in the polity-planning group met with various Church Committees, talked with church staff members, held two additional congregational forums and created written information to share with congregational members.

Q: Why are two extra congregational meetings proposed for both years of the interim period?

A: The extra Spring and Fall congregational meetings will allow the congregation to make decisions that affect the Church and will also allow communication between the Task Leaders, Church Officers, and the congregation

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Q. Why are we voting on an Interim plan?

A. While some of the problems with the current structure were clear to the retreat participants, Church Council and the polity planning group, it became very difficult to determine what roles were essential and what kind of structure would best serve the congregation going forward. The decision was made to propose to the congregation a two-year interim structure that would reduce the administration of the Church to a workable minimum and allow the essential tasks to become more apparent. It was thought that by removing the current structure and experiencing something different, a new direction that better serves the missions of Community United Church might be discerned. This proposal is the result of that decision.

Q: What's wrong with the current Church Structure? Why change?

A: Some complaints with the current structure are:

- Hard to determine where decisions should be made
- Difficult to involve new people in a meaningful way
- Unclear how to proceed with a new idea
- Burns people out by giving multiple extra duties to committee chairs
- Does not allow participation tailored to current lifestyles
- Has become less and less democratic

Q. What is our current polity?

A. Our current polity is now a mixture of two components. We have a constitutional structure of committees to do the work of the church. This structure sometimes works and sometimes doesn't. We have committees that are supposed to have a minimum number of people and it is hard to fill the slots. We have some committees with a full slate of people but the committee is not able to pull itself together on a regular basis to implement the work completely.

Because we have been operational for so long, we also have a very strong informal polity that is based on common memory and individuals. This works at both the Church Council level and the Committee level. This people know (or don't know) who to check with to remove a plant from the ground or a plaque from the wall, who to check with about setting up Communion, who to check with to engage in a particular task, who closes up the building after church, etc. These may be poor examples but the experience/frustration of both old church members and new ones is very real.

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Q. Why can't we just fix what isn't working and implement what it says in the constitution?

A. Over time, the fundamental way people engage in organizations undergone a change; our church has participated in this change. It is increasingly difficult to fill the committee slots designated by our constitution. People are reluctant to commit to and attend regular meetings. And, even if they do sign up with good intention, they often have to be absent for work, vacation, family, health or other reasons. People are more inclined to take on specific tasks with clear responsibilities/boundaries and then just get the work done.

Q: Why is the proposed new structure in effect for only 2 years. Why not propose a new permanent structure?

A: The Church Council felt that it did not have enough clarity about what a new structure should look like and that a 2 year interim period would allow us to gather information and come to a more clear common understanding about how to create a new Church structure.

Q: What happens at the end of the two year interim period?

A: The proposed interim amendment will expire at the January 2007 annual meeting. If a new permanent structure is not voted in at that point, then the current structure will go back in to effect.

Q: What does this proposal really do?

A: The proposal is for a 2 year interim structure that eliminates the standing committees that are currently referenced in the constitution and replaces them with 2 committees and a set of task leaders. Each task leader has a defined responsibility, the authority to carry it out and a budget if needed. It increases the responsibility of the congregation to monitor how we are doing during this interim time by adding two additional congregational meetings per year for review.

Q: What are the two standing committees in the proposed interim structure?

A: The two committees are the Administrative Committee and the Personnel Committee. The Personnel Committee is responsible for support and accountability of the paid Church staff. The Administrative Committee is responsible for overseeing Church finances, dealing with issues of Church policy, and for the creation and support of Church Task Groups.

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Definitions

Q: What is a Task Leader?

A: A Task Leader is the individual who has the lead responsibility for a task. It is up to the Task Leader whether the task can be done by him or her alone or will require a number of people formed in to a Task Group.

Q: What is a Task Group?

A: A Task Group is a group of Church members responsible for a particular job done as part of the life of the Church. Task Groups will perform the functions that carried out by the current standing committees.

Q: What is the meaning of the word 'polity' that appears in the proposed amendment?

A: Polity refers to the way we order and process community life.

Administrative Committee

Q: Do Task Leaders serve on the Administrative Committee or attend its meetings to report?

A: The Task Leaders are not required to attend Administrative Committee meetings or get approval for decisions that are defined in their task descriptions.

Q: Are Administrative Committee meeting open to members of the congregation?

A: Yes. Any and all are welcome to attend.

Personnel Committee

Q: Why don't the task leaders for worship, religious education and music serve on the personnel committee?

A: One of the principles of the interim structure is to allow the task leaders to focus on their tasks, and not require their attendance at other committee meetings. The Personnel committee should get whatever information and feedback they need from the appropriate task leaders and others in the congregation in order to complete its mission.

Q: Are Personnel Committee meetings open to members of the congregation?

A: No. The Personnel Committee sometimes deals with sensitive staff issues and must be able to keep confidential information private.

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Task Leaders

Q: How are Task Leaders selected?

A: They can either be elected by the congregation or appointed by the Administrative Committee.

Q: How do task leaders know what authority and responsibility they have?

A: A form that describes the task and details its responsibilities will be given to the Task Leader and will also be on file in the Church office.

Q: How does a Task Leader recruit others to become part of a Task Group?

A: The Task Leader can either contact other members directly or they can go to the Administrative Committee for help with recruitment.

Q: Can two people share the job of Task Leader?

A: Not really. Only a single individual is name the Task Leader for a job. But they may choose to divide the responsibilities of the task and effectively share the job.

Q: These Task Groups look a lot like committees. Why not call them committees?

A: We tried to use new names for all the roles and groups in the interim structure in order to avoid carrying over the implied meanings from the current structure.

Q: Can paid staff be Task Leaders?

A: No. The paid staff of the Church have job descriptions that specify their roles and responsibilities. There will be task groups and task leaders to assist the paid staff in their duties.

Q: How does this work for something like worship?

A: Pastor Mulberry has the responsibility for presenting an effective worship service as part of his job description. There would also be a Worship Administrative Task Leader to work with the Pastor on the nuts and bolts details of worship such as getting ushers, making sure the sound system is functional, etc. This is a situation where a Task Group of a number of people would be needed to carry out this task.

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Q: What if there is conflict between a Task Leader and staff or between the Task Leader and members of the Task Group?

A: Conflicts that can't be worked out within the Task Group should be taken to the Moderator and the Administrative Committee for resolution.

Q: If the Task Leaders don't go to the Administrative Committee meetings, how do others get information on their progress?

A: Communication with the congregation is an important responsibility of a Task Leader. The Task Leaders should be available to answer questions at the 3 congregational meetings. They should also publish information in the Communigram when appropriate as well as making information available to the Internal Communications Officer.