
*GOVERNANCE AS
SPIRITUAL
PRACTICE*

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The Two Core Values

First, that faith formation is at the heart of all we do as Christian Community and that the practice of faith formation needs to be engaged by its core leadership group, informing their decisions and enlivening their encouragement of the life and ministry of the congregation. This is best done by having those who provide eldership present to and involved in the decision-making and regular governance of the congregation.

Second, that leadership needs to be encouraged in all areas of the congregation from the newly forming edges and the more established places. The way of offering leadership needs to be made easily accessible. One does not need to learn all the details of a committee structure to offer leadership. There is simplicity and fluidity. This encourages liveliness throughout the body.

The Shape

One of the first things to know is that **this way of governance ensures that all the responsibilities of governing bodies contained in The Manual of the United Church of Canada (2013) are fulfilled.** These responsibilities with the relevant sections are listed later in the document.

The Executive is the governing body of the congregation, equivalent in function, though not in its way of functioning, to a congregational Board or Council or Session/Stewards Governance Model. **While in the original form of this governance the name Executive was used for the reasons that follow, Trinity St. Stephen's calls its governing body Council and that is just fine.** When the original governance was developed the name Executive was chosen to reflect this body's close engagement with the whole congregation through **Ministry Areas** and **Circles of Service** facilitated by the **Elders**. It is in more proximate relationship to the whole congregation, whose size allows this relationship and discourages the effective functioning of governance based solely on committee structures. There is no need for a Nominating Committee since necessary positions are filled by the Executive's work with the congregation. Any one who volunteers or whose name is put forward as a member of the Executive has the name brought to a congregational meeting for ratification, as are names of Trustees, Ministry and Personnel and Presbytery Representative.

The Executive consists of a **Chair**, a **Treasurer**, a **Communicator** (akin to a Secretary, see Terms of Reference) and **Elders**. There are three Elders, but there can be as many as four. The Minister attends all Executive meetings. The Executive meets approximately twice monthly between September and June, once for grounding and growth in the narrative of scripture and of the congregation, and once to conduct business. By rule, no business is discussed at the **Grounding Gatherings**

Circles are important as we work with this governance shape. We imagine the congregation as a permeable circle of ministry in the world; tending those who move in and around it. The Executive encourages and supports the ministry of that congregational circle.

The originating congregation identified five areas of ministry within its congregational circle. The ministry areas are:

- Worship and Faith Formation
- Justice and Outreach
- Pastoral Care and Inreach
- Property and Finance
- Communication

The Executive is responsible for ensuring that work is carried out in the areas of ministry identified by the congregation. Your congregation might decide to change these designations in a way.

Within these Ministry Areas Circles of Service were invited by the Executive or initiated from within the congregation. Some areas were tended to by groups that were either pre-existed the new governance or bubbled up early in the year (for example, the Outreach Committee continued its work and other short-term outreach projects grew up around it). The Executive invited Circles of Service to form in other areas (for example, around Property and Maintenance). Some of these Circles of Service will necessarily be longer term, such as Property and Finance. They can however relieve themselves of all but the most crucial ongoing tasks by encouraging short-lived circles to tend various parts of their ministry. And they can be re-vitalized by the Executive inviting a Circle of Service to specifically work on Terms of Reference for the Property and Finance Group.

One of the tools at the disposal of the Executive (and the congregation) for inviting or encouraging ministry is the **Discernment Board**. The Discernment Board is a magnetic board in a very visible space. You may need to experiment to find that place that is just right. Forms for inviting Circles of Service are held in a folder to one side of the board. Each week an elder or elders check this folder for new invitations from individuals in the congregation. If an idea supports the ministry/mission of the congregation it can be posted immediately on the Board. If money is required to support the idea, Elders will consider it in consultation with the Executive. If Elders are unsure whether the idea supports the congregation's ministry/mission, they may bring it to the Executive for further discernment.

Once a new invitation is posted on the Discernment Board, the Elder (s) provide encouragement and support to the person who is inviting the Circle of Service. Support may include help with or suggestions for communication about the group, direction to the church office regarding available time on the church calendar for booking space and following up with the person as the group proceeds. The first sign of support may be to mention to the person inviting the Circle that it has been noticed on the Board.

The Executive also calls **Shared Ministry Gatherings** three or four times per year. This is a place for any who have engaged in Circles of Service, standing committees, or the life of the congregation generally,

to be present to one another for the sharing and celebration of ideas. The elders are present to support new ideas that arise, to notice Ministry Areas that are less active and to encourage celebration of the

various expressions of ministry within the congregation. These gatherings are a great opportunity for a shared meal or a dessert evening.

Terms of Reference for the Executive

All those on the Executive of the Congregation (EOC) attend the Grounding Gatherings, described elsewhere, ten times per year. These gatherings are in addition to the meetings that tend the ongoing work and administration of the congregation.

The responsibilities include all those contained in The Manual 2013 (UCC) and the relevant sections are listed.

The Chair (7.6.1)

- Call meetings
- Prepare the agenda
- Lead the Executive Governance meetings
- Be aware of and attend to (with the Executive) requirements for congregational life as per the Manual
- Act as spokesperson for the congregation
- Oversees the tracking of finances
- Reports regularly on finances
- Works in consultation with The Finance and Investment Group

The Communicator (This position contains and expands the responsibilities of a Secretary) (7.6.2)

- Records minutes
- Distributes approved minutes
- Keeps records (minutes) current and in order
- Receives and brings Correspondence to the meeting alerting Chair and Minister prior to the meeting
- Liaises with and supported by a core group within the Communications Ministry Area

The Elders

The Manual of the United Church of Canada in its definition of Elders gives us a place from which to begin. "People elected by the congregation or pastoral charge for their wisdom, caring, spiritual discernment and other gifts of the Spirit. They must be members of the congregation . . . unless the Presbytery makes an exception" (Manual 2013: 7.2).

In this governance model, we build on this definition. We make explicit the role of Elders to intentionally tend the connection between the ministry and mission of the congregation and the gifts of individuals

within the congregation. This connection is kept before, and informs, the decision-making process of Executive.

This model is shaped to include 3 – 4 Elders. Eldership is a responsibility shared among those who serve in this way.

Qualities

- Good listener
- An active participant in the life of the congregation
- Committed to individual and group/congregations faith formation
- Values and encourages shared leadership
- Approachable in a variety of ways
- Open to the emerging ministries to which we are being called

Responsibilities

- Attend meetings of the Executive of the Congregation (Executive), Executive Grounding Gatherings and Shared Ministry Area Gathering
- Facilitate the grounding gathering on a rotation basis of all members of the Executive
- Tend the Discernment Board: Check regularly and frequently for new ideas submitted and take appropriate action
- Bring new ideas needing Executive discussion to the soonest Executive meeting
- Be alert to the many gifts/talents/interests present in the congregation; practice a ministry of encouragement supporting the sharing of those gifts
- Nurture the shared ministry of Eldership: keep in touch with one another, support one another in the sharing of responsibilities

Time Commitment

- Meetings: average 3 hours total per month for all meetings
- Attention to the Discernment Board and to those who have posted there: a few minutes per week (this time is at the Elder's discretion)
- Consultation among Elders (a few minutes each week)
- Shared Ministry Gathering (3-4 times per year)

Other Responsibilities (7.4)

All responsibilities outlined in The Manual at 7.4 are covered by this Governance Mo

Grounding Gatherings (words to the original Executive after our first Grounding Gathering)

I want to comment briefly on this first Executive Grounding Gathering so that we all feel a sense of its movement. This will form a basic template for the gatherings. For those able to be present today some of this will be repetitive but it will perhaps serve as a refresher as time goes on. These gatherings will not be minuted.

We began with agreements on our participation.

- That unless we are ill or have an emergency or a commitment that cannot be moved we will be present.
- That because we will gather with a prayer, music or a reflective piece of some kind and perhaps a check in which we did more spontaneously today, we will arrive on time to participate in this centering moment.
- That we hold ourselves to the practice of meeting, not for planning or explicit problem solving or arriving at answers. We meet as a way of opening us to the narrative of Scripture and of the congregation in ways that will deepen our spiritual practice and our relationships and inform our direction and decisions at administrative/management meetings of the Executive.
- While we may speak outside the gathering about what arose in us or for us during the time together, what we learned or a new direction that emerged for us, we will share that without attaching names or identifiers or divulging private information that has been shared.

After this we will spend about 20 -25 minutes* in some kind of **conversation with Scripture**. Today the Scripture was Luke 9: 1-6; 10-17. Whoever is facilitating the gathering that day will choose a Scripture they'd like to work with and will bring it to the group in whatever way they are comfortable. Today I chose to engage the Scripture with Lectio Divina (I have the steps available if anyone would like to use that method). You might choose to bring a question that rises out of the text for you and to jump start a discussion with that. Or you might bring a piece of art relating to the text. Or you might invite us into Scripture some other way. The choice is yours.

Circles of Service

Some of the Circles initiated by those in the congregation using the **Discernment Board** appear as bubbles. Other Circles were 'invited' by the Executive when it was felt there was a need in a particular Ministry Area. Those don't appear here in circles but they included: a group to create terms of reference for a Finance Group, a Property Team, and a group that met for several weeks to discuss Eric Law's Book Holy Currencies (a way of considering Stewardship.)



Glossary

Chair: The leader of the congregational executive, who calls meetings, acts as a spokesperson, etc.

Communicator: An executive member with a job description that encompasses and expands on the role typically given to a Secretary.

Circles of Service: groups of individuals that form to carry out the work of the church.

Long Term: a circle that has an ongoing responsibility, such as Property and Building or a group for centering prayer that wants to continue as a constant presence.

Short Term: a group that has a time-limited task or activity, such as a book group, or putting in a flower bed, planning a fund-raiser, etc.

Discernment Board: a bulletin board that contains invitations to form Circles of services. The invitations can be issued by the Executive or by members of the congregation.

Elders: three to four members of the Executive who intentionally tend the connection between the ministry and mission of the congregation and the gifts of individuals within the congregation. Among other tasks, they facilitate the creation of Circles of Service.

Executive of the Congregation: the primary decision-making and oversight body, consisting of officers directly elected by the congregation.

Grounding Gathering: a monthly meeting of the Executive in which its members explore and grow in the narrative of scripture and of the congregation. No formal business is carried out at these meetings.

Ministry Areas: the categories of ministry/mission that the congregation has identified as important and that the Executive is charged with tending. Sackville United has identified the following: Worship and Faith Formation, Outreach/Justice, Pastoral Care/Inreach, Property and Finance, and Communication.

Shared Ministry Area Gatherings: quarterly gatherings of the congregation to provide an opportunity in which any who have engaged in Circles of Service, standing committees, or the life of the congregation generally, are present to one another for the sharing and celebration of ideas.

Standing Committees: committees as mandated by the Manual United Church of Canada such as a Board of Trustees or the Ministry and Personnel Committee on a one point pastoral charge (PC). If the congregation is one of two or more on a PC, each congregation nominates to the PC Ministry and Personnel Committee.

Treasurer: an executive member who, in consultation with a Finance and Investment Group, tracks and reports to the executive on congregational finances