



POLICY GOVERNANCE

What is it?

Policy Governance is a “model of governance designed to empower boards of directors to fulfill their obligation of accountability for the organizations they govern” (The Policy Governance® Model, Dr. John Carver 2016). As applied at First Church, Policy Governance means the Board of Trustees exercises its governance responsibility through creating and monitoring a comprehensive set of policies to ensure that First Church achieves the outcomes (Ends) expected by those on whose behalf we govern, through the use of acceptable means. All aspects of operations (Means) are the responsibility of the Senior Minister. The Board of Trustees is responsible for the oversight and monitoring of our policies in conjunction with the achievement of our desired Ends.

Transition to Policy Governance

First Church has been moving towards the Policy Governance model for more than five years. Consideration of changes needed to respond to a growing membership and transition to a large size church began during Reverend Drew Kennedy’s tenure. This included recognition of the trend among larger Unitarian Universalist congregations to adopt the Policy Governance model. Laying the groundwork for Policy Governance continued during our Senior Minister Interim period and developed further during Reverend Jennifer Nordstrom’s tenure. The Board adopted its new policies in April 2019 and will begin to live into them in the 2019-20 church year, knowing that the policies and process will continue to evolve over time as we learn, grow, and change.

Key Benefits of this Model

- **Future Focus.** The Policy Governance model allows the Board to plan for the future and the difference First Church wants to make in the world, rather than being occupied with operational decisions that are better made by staff or volunteer leaders.
- **Empowering Staff and Lay Members.** At the same time, this model empowers staff and lay leaders and members to be flexible and creative in their responses to changing circumstances and new opportunities. The Senior Minister does not do all the work, but leads the collaborative team of staff and lay members.
- **Clarity - No Guessing Required.** This model provides the senior minister with clear authority and responsibility and a clear set of limitations. It also provides a comprehensive set of Board policies that apply in all circumstances. There is no having to guess what the Board will expect and whether a particular policy does or does not apply in a given circumstance.
- **Collaboration.** Clear roles support a collaborative atmosphere of trust and mutual respect between the Board and Senior Minister. Policies are designed to be in relationship.
- **Clear Accountability.** In this model, the Board establishes clear expectations through its policies and therefore can assess performance based on whether expectations are being met. This occurs through intentional monitoring of whether the Senior Minister is working within established boundaries and our Ends are being achieved.

Sources of Authority

Policy Governance requires clarity as to where the Board gets its authority to govern and on whose behalf it governs. As such, the Board has defined our Sources of Authority, which starts first and foremost with the current members and children and youth of our congregation. It is the Board’s duty to intentionally seek and listen to the voices of our sources and to be guided by their wishes and the best interest of the whole.

Board Governing Policy

Board governing policies ground us in our commitments and reflect our values. Board policies include Ends policies and Means policies.

Ends (Outcomes) Policies

Ends are the first set of policies the Board developed as part of our Policy Governance model.

It is through listening to our Sources of Authority that we developed our desired outcomes (our Ends). Our Ends express our vision of the future we are striving for and tell us what specific difference we want to make in people's lives.

- **Means Policies**

Anything that is not Ends is Means. There are three types of Means policies:

1. The Board delegates to the Senior Minister the means to achieve the Ends through operations and programs. The Board's sole official connection to the operation of the church and its Ends is through the Senior Minister. This is addressed in the Board-Senior Minister Relationship policies.
2. Another set of Means policies, the Senior Minister Limitation policies, provide the outside boundaries of the authority of the Senior Minister in carrying out the work of the church in achieving the Ends. These policies outline limitations on the methods, practices, and conduct that the Senior Minister must avoid, so as to prevent unwanted outcomes, such as staff being treated unfairly or the church finances put at risk, for example.
3. The final set of Means policies, Governance Process policies, keeps the Board on task with conducting its business in a way that ensures we are achieving the desired Ends on behalf of the Sources of Authority at appropriate cost and efficiency. These policies guide the Board in ensuring the integrity of governance.

Policies are defined to the level to which the Board is comfortable that any reasonable interpretation may apply. This format ensures that there is no area of operation about which the Board has been silent and that roles are clearly defined.

Monitoring of Policies

Board accountability begins with creating expectations via policy and fulfills its responsibility through monitoring. The Board works with the Senior Minister

to determine what kinds of evidence show that the Ends are being met and that Senior Minister Limitations are being adhered to. The Board then monitors the evidence at pre-determined intervals. Evidence can be of many kinds, including data and statistics, surveys, personal testimony, and more. Metrics serve as tools to reflect on our ministry and progress together.

Board Committees

Responsibility of the Senior Minister for operations means that certain committees that previously reported to the Board will become staff-led teams. The Personnel Committee will become the Personnel Team and will report to the Senior Minister. The Finance Committee will become the Finance Team and report to the Director of Administration. Their operational functions and areas of responsibility will remain the same. Similarly, Committees on Ministry serve operational functions and therefore are not considered to be Special Committees of the Board. The bylaws have been updated to reflect these changes to the Board committee structure. The Nominating Committee will remain a committee of the Board.

What Can You Expect with Policy Governance?

- **Voices Heard.** The Board will intentionally ask to hear your voice. The Board will listen to your voice. The Board will use what we hear.
- **Clarity.** Clarity about roles and responsibilities. Clarity about whom to ask about what. Clarity about what we at First Church are trying to achieve (our Ends) and whether we are making progress.
- **Accountability.** The Board will hold the Senior Minister accountable for progress on the Ends and compliance with policy expectations around limitations. The Senior Minister will in turn hold staff accountable. The Board will hold ourselves accountable for ensuring fulfillment of our Ends with an effective use of resources and within the boundaries of legal and ethical behavior.

Together, in this way, we are setting ourselves up for success in realizing the vision we have laid out about the difference we want to make in people's lives.