

Social Justice Council Meeting
Discussion on Governance Task Force Proposal
Nov. 7, 2016

In attendance: Co-Chairs Jen Larimer and Stephanie Jones, Council members Edith Good, Kate Fraleigh, Margaret Gorman, and Task Force members, Donna Baker, Pam Philips, and Bev Thierwechter

Donna led the discussion, introducing the Governance Proposal, by saying that it represented a year's worth of work and that the Task Force was soliciting feedback from the SJ Council and other stakeholders, rather than presenting a final product. The Task Force is an outgrowth of recommendations in the Strategic Plan, along with observations that the Council structure was not functioning for some of the Councils. The Task Force looked at how the church should be, with a focus on a leaner organization, being transparent, looking at how to function with limited volunteers and provide volunteer opportunities that work for church membership.

Donna summarized the major points of the proposal: streamlining the Board (downsizing from twelve Board members to seven), establishing a Policy Review Team to expedite making or revising policies, changing the name of the Leadership Development Committee to Nominating, and changing the scope of that Committee to focus on nominations, while dropping the leadership development function from its portfolio. She noted that there is some interest in the Stewardship Committee on focusing on volunteerism and possibly on picking up the leadership development function.

Bev pointed out that the Councils would no longer be responsible for coordinating policy proposals, but encouraged Councils and committees to review and provide comments on policy proposals, as they arise – even voting on them, and then apprising the Policy Review Team of the results. However, the Board would be the group to approve any new or revised policies.

Jen Larimer stated that she likes the idea implicit in the proposal: “working smarter, not harder”, along with building flexibility into the Bylaws. She also praised the idea of an expedited policy review process and putting the onus on people who have comments/opinions to provide them within the 90-day deadline. She also supported the idea of not letting the leadership development function fall by the wayside.

Kate Fraleigh repeated her comments at the October cottage conversation: she supported the idea that the Bylaws would allow a President to serve more than one term in that capacity. She also felt that there was benefit in not having too many generic requirements for committees/groups and task forces and allowing subgroups to function with flexibility. Jen L. commented that there should continue to be an organized structure and policies for committees, because of their

needs for space, budgets and other resources, but that they should not be over-regulated.

Elizabeth Breeden had emailed Bev on her concern about whether the staff had sufficient support since Worship, RE and Administrative Councils are not functioning and the proposal is not recommending reinstating them. Bev mentioned the “Administrative Response Team” proposal that would provide the DAF with a small group to support her in resolving administrative issues. The DAF has supported that idea as a good solution. In addition, both Rev Wik and Leia are managing well without the benefit of the Worship and RE Councils, since they have the necessary assistance from the Worship Weavers and RE Committee.

Jen Caswell-Colbert had also emailed, wondering what literature the Task Force had researched in its work. Bev noted that the Task Force had worked with UUA consultant, Ken Hurto, who had provided some documents on UU governance and Church Boards, we had reviewed governance documents on the UUA website, researched a number of well-functioning UU churches of similar size (recommended by the UUA consultant), and scanned literature in Wik’s library, including a book on policy governance.

Jen Larimer mentioned that much of TJMC’s struggles with governance related to growing pains related to moving to a larger church size and making adjustments to that larger size. She noted that the Board is planning to have a speaker come to help the Board understand how to navigate the larger church size and drop some of the behaviors of a smaller church that can prevent the church from operating effectively.

The schedule for next steps was also explained – more meetings with stakeholder committees, a Jan 22nd cottage conversation, and a vote at the May congregational meeting. Council members were encouraged to provide written comments or have discussions with Task Force members before the Task Force disbands at the end of January 2017. After that, the Board will be responsible for moving the governance proposal forward in preparation for the May meeting and later comments should be directed to the Board.

Jen also thank the Task Force members for attending the SJ Council meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Bev Thierwechter