

Background for the Adoption of a New Governance Model for Manchester United Methodist Church

Introduction

Moses had to organize the children of Israel in order to lead them from slavery into a promised land. Jesus had to organize the disciples in order for them to share the good news of God's love. The church, from its beginning, has had to organize itself in such a way that the gospel can be proclaimed. So – excellent governance (administrative structure) must be joined to excellent ministry. Vital and vibrant ministry depends on effective governance and excellent leadership.

Boards are *at the very heart* of good governance and leadership for a congregation. They are needed to take care of *fiduciary matters*, they are needed *to strategize* so that the congregation moves toward its mission, and they are needed to ask the question about whether the mission and vision is the *right* mission and vision. In other words, Boards should ask *"Is the church doing what God is calling the church to do?"*.

The organizational structures of most of our large historic churches were designed for a different cultural context. In the context of the 20th century, change was more predictable and occurred at a slower pace. Today, we live in a culture of rapid and unpredictable change. When new threats appear on the horizon and when new opportunities present themselves, the church needs organizational structures that are flexible and adaptable. Long chains of decision making groups can get in the way when it is important to be flexible. Because large congregations are not generally nimble, they are not well equipped to handle the changes that are required in the 21st century.

Current Reality at Manchester United Methodist Church

Manchester UMC has a governing board (Church Council) made up of 40 members; a Ministry Council made up of 9 members; a Staff Parish Relations Committee made up of 11 members; Trustees made up of 9 members; Finance Committee made up of 20 members; and a Nominations Committee made up of 11 members. Other elected committees include Endowment, Stewardship, and Mission Funds. 100 + people who make decisions for the church!

On the one hand it sounds good to have a lot of people participating in the governance of the church. But is it?

In late 2011, the Church Council adopted a new Vision Document. In July, 2012, the question was raised in Ministry Council: **"Is our church structured in a way that is appropriate for our size, and does our system of governance support our vision and our mission?"**

The question was asked because:

1. We heard people talk about how many different administrative committee meetings they attend, and how the same conversations are repeated over and over again.
2. We heard moms and dads say that, with young children, their *time* was limited – that while they might like to teach Sunday School or work with the youth, they could not serve in those ministries and *also* serve on an administrative committees.
3. We talked about the reality that we have an excellent, experienced staff, but they also attend a lot of administrative meetings.
4. We remembered that we have adopted vision documents in the past, but often there wasn't the kind of follow through that led to growth in ministry and mission.
5. We realized that the larger the group, the less number of people who shared ideas or talked. Only a few talked, and many others remained silent.
6. We know that it takes a long time and a lot of meetings to make decisions.
7. We realized that it is rare for any of the administrative committees to have generative or “big picture” discussions. Most meetings consist of reporting and doing the tasks at hand. It is rare that the question “are we doing the right things to move toward the vision?” is asked. It is rare for us to hold any group (or persons) accountable for moving the church toward the vision.
8. Some of us know that the growing churches in the Missouri Conference of The United Methodist Church have moved to a single board model of governance.

The Ministry Council decided to form a Task Force to explore the question “Is our church structured in a way that is appropriate for our size, and does our system of governance support our vision and mission?”

The Task Force included Karen Everhart, Niki Winchester, Amy Folkins, Scott Walker, and Nancye Dunlap. The Senior Pastor was also included in the discussion and the meetings from the beginning.

Process of the Task Force on Church Governance

1. The Task Force met several times, and reviewed three different books relating to Church Governance. The books included:
 - Winning on Purpose, by John Edmund Kaiser
 - Inside the large Congregation, by Susan Beaumont (Alban Institute)
 - Church Governance (Rethinking Board Leadership), by Dan Hotchkiss (Alban Institute) (The Alban Institute is an ecumenical group formed in 1974 to help American churches face the challenges of a changing world. They do research, lead seminars, provide church consultants, and publish books to help churches be healthy and effective.)

Each of the books we reviewed recommended a smaller decision making group (particularly in large churches) for the following reasons:

- A smaller board works best for a church that is “outwardly focused”.
 - A smaller board brings greater accountability to the vision of the church.
 - A smaller board empowers the pastor to lead and the staff to manage the program ministry.
 - A smaller board allows more people to be in program ministry. It allows people who are especially gifted in administrative work and in vision work to serve in that capacity.
 - A smaller board allows for greater flexibility and nimbleness in decision making.
 - In addition, we learned that The Book of Discipline, 2012 gives permission to organize the local church in a single board model. (See Paragraph 247.2). Our Missouri Conference Charge Conference forms offer an alternative single board model for election of officers at Charge Conference.
2. Members of the Task Force talked informally with pastors of churches who have moved to a “single board” model, asked for their feedback, and asked how/why they moved to a single board. Those pastors included:
- Ron Watts LaCroix UMC in Cape Girardeau
 - Mike Schreiner Morning Star UMC in O’Fallon
 (The two churches above are the largest churches in the Missouri Conference,
 each with an average attendance of about 2000)
 - Matt Miofsky The Gathering UMC, in St. Louis
 - David Conley Centenary UMC in Cape Girardeau
 - Daniel Hilty First UMC, in Jefferson City

Each of the above churches use the single board model in a different way, but all said it worked better in making good decisions and in helping the church move toward its vision and goals. The first three churches named are new church starts in the past 20 years, 10 years, and 6 years respectively. The last two churches named are much older, traditional churches.

We also talked with:

- Kendall Waller Conference Treasurer
- Bart Hildreth District Superintendent, Ozarks Districts
- Kurt Schuermann District Superintendent, Gateway Central District

Kendall and Bart, along with Bob Farr, Director of Congregational Development, wrote the Missouri Conference “Alternative Structure” model for churches who want to move to a single board. All of these persons recommend the single board model of governance – particularly for large churches.

3. The Task Force went back to Ministry Council each month with our work. On September 23, 2012, the Ministry Council unanimously decided to support moving forward with investigating a new model for our church governance.
4. The Task Force met after Charge Conference (November 12, 2012) with the Chairs of our required Administration Committees. This group included Mike Clement (Church Council); Chuck Healy (Staff Parish); and Steve Varley (Finance). Bob Berry (Trustees) was out of town. The purpose was to introduce the work of the Task Force and the discussions from Ministry Council.
5. On December 2, 2012, the extended Task Force (including the chairs of the administrative committees) met again.
6. On January 28, the extended Task Force met to begin the more concrete discussion of what a single board model might actually look like at MUMC. Dave Divjak, new Trustee Chairperson, was also a part of this meeting. We also went back to some of the pastors we had talked with earlier to ask more questions.
7. On February 11, the extended Task Force met. We talked with Marsha Clark, a MUMC member who leads the Annual Leadership Retreat for The Gathering UMC. We wanted to ask her about her experience with that event. We heard from her that this event is a way The Gathering UMC evaluates their church governance, and evaluates how they are meeting their vision and goals. We also began to look at a possible model for MUMC. At this meeting the decision was made to take the conversation to the next step of discussing MUMC's church governance with our Church Council. We decided that meeting in small groups for this first discussion would be best for people to be able to listen, to ask questions, and to offer ideas.
8. On February 24, the Ministry Council looked at the draft for a possible single board model. After questions and discussion, they unanimously affirmed the process and the draft, and unanimously recommended it to Church Council.
9. Four small group meetings were convened for members of the Church Council. About 10 people attended each small group session. The background document and a "draft" model of possible Leadership Board were discussed. Questions from the group were also discussed.
10. On May 5, 2013 the Church Council approved the plan to move forward into a Leadership Board model of church governance.
11. On June 30, 2013 a called Charge Conference affirmed the plan, and accepted the Nominations Committee's slate of candidates to serve on the first Leadership Board.
12. Church Council, Ministry Council, and each of the four administrative committees of MUMC will continue to meet during 2013. They will hear about progress of the Leadership Board, and they will make suggestions, if needed, about the structure, guidelines, and plans.
13. The Leadership Board will meet each month for the remainder of 2013 for the purpose of learning what it means to be a Board, for learning about the vision and goals which have been adopted by both Ministry Council and Church Council, and for setting guidelines for their work together.
14. The Leadership Board will replace the Church Council and Ministry Council on January 1, 2014. The Leadership Board will continue to be in conversation about the need for, and the role of separate administrative committees in this new structure of church governance.

