

## **A Brief Primer on UUCP Governance**

### **Rev. Bill Neely and Peter Macholdt, President of the Board**

Understanding governance can seem like trying to learn a new language, particularly a governance system with as many unique terms as ours. Below you'll find brief descriptions of many terms used in our congregation's governance system. Some terms refer specifically to our style of governance (Policy Governance), while others are more general terms used in congregational organizing. We hope this information is helpful, and are always happy to answer any questions or talk more about how UUCP governance works.

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**Shared Ministry** is our form of ministry. It means that the ministries of the congregation, from financial planning to worship to pastoral care to social justice to ... everything, are shared and developed among the professional and lay leaders of the congregation. All ministry is shared ministry.

**Mission** is or what we're doing in our ministries at this point in time. Mission is about the here and now.

**Vision** is where we headed, or the goals of our ministry. Vision is about growth and change.

**Bylaws** are the guiding policies of a congregation; the central organizing principles. In UU congregations they are democratically-derived and amended. They belong to the congregation. No policies stand above the bylaws.

**Polity** relates to authority and is the system of governance in a church or other body; particularly with regard to the body's relationship with other bodies. Unitarian Universalist congregations (all of them) operate under Congregational Polity, which means that every congregation is ultimately its own authority. We voluntarily associate with other congregations, most notably in the creation and support of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (UUA), but each congregation is free to determine its own mission, vision, covenant, and programs. Another way to think of our polity is that it is very horizontal; there is no authority over the congregation; rather, we voluntarily associate with other congregations as equals. Congregations create and guide (and fund) the UUA, not the other way around.

“**Governance** [from the UUA] is the system by which the congregation exercises its authority.” There are innumerable forms of governance, all of which aim to organize the congregation's authority. UUCP's form is Policy Governance

**Policy Governance** is a non-profit form of governance created by John Carver that has become increasingly popular in our faith (in congregations, regional, and national bodies). It emphasizes the Board as the Body that sets Ends, or the desired results of the congregation's ministries, and monitors progress toward those Ends. The Board sets these Ends as policies, and the Ends guide the Executive Team's development and use of volunteers, staff, and resources (Means).

**The Board** in policy governance is the “informed voice” of the owners. It is chiefly responsible for clearly setting the objectives of the organization. To do this, the Board in policy stays focused on big questions like mission, vision, strategic planning, and long-view financial, plant, and location questions. The Board in policy is determinedly proactive and not reactive, and the Board in policy converses freely, but speaks, in policy, in one voice. The Board as a body has authority second only to the congregation. A Board member, absent the authority granted in Officer positions, does not have the authority of the entire Board.

**Links**, or linkage, is how the Board becomes an informed voice of the congregation. This is the often gradual process of the Board distilling the vision of the congregation into evolving Ends statements by engaging lay leaders. Or, in other words, linkage keeps the Board from working in a bubble.

**Monitoring** is how the Board confirms that Ends progress is being made and Executive Limitations are not being exceeded. This is done through Monitoring Reports prepared by the Executive Team.

**The Executive Team (ET)** is charged with organizing the congregation’s means around making progress toward our Ends. In pure Carver Policy, the ET functions as the CEO, meaning that all means are ultimately threaded through or developed by the ET. The Executive Team at UUCP was, for years, both ministers. Last year it was the minister, and now it is the Minister and the Congregational Administrator. This means that Rev. Neely and Sara Oderwald work as a team to lead the congregation toward making progress in achieving its Ends. They cover different areas, but work collaboratively and in the end, are accountable as a unit.

**Ends** are the goals, set by the Board, which are developed by listening to the “owners” or, in our context, the congregation. The “listening” is an example of linkage.

**Ends Progress** is monitored at UUCP once a year, in the summer, for the preceding year. This is the most substantial report that the Executive Team produces.

**Means** are the methods of meeting the Ends. The Board has very little to say about Means, and that which is said is said through policy, in this case usually through Executive Limitations.

**Executive Limitations** are part of the governing policies. They are sometimes disallowed means, or something that cannot be done to achieve our Ends (i.e., don’t break the law even if it means our message gets out, don’t let the cash reserve fall below a certain level even if doing so would allow staff development in an important area, etc.). At other times, EL’s describe the essential tone and qualities of our shared ministry, both staff-wise and volunteer-wise. And, again, all ministry is shared ministry.

**EL Monitoring** is offered monthly by the Executive Team according to a schedule created by the Board. Most EL’s are reported on once a year. Current financial activities is the exception; it is reported on quarterly. **EL Interpretations** are short statements made by the Executive Team that interpret the Limitations. They are included in each EL report. They are sometimes revised, but are more typically stable.