



The Flame

First Unitarian Church of Omaha

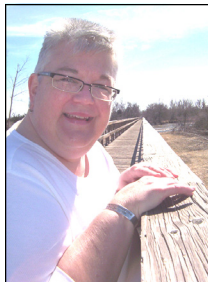
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Special Edition

The Zen of Leadership by Cheryl Wallace Director of Religious Education



When I think of inspiring leadership and the changes in the governance structure that our church is working on, a few things come to mind:

In order to be able to give, one needs a filled well from which to draw. If the inner life of a person is likened to a well of water -- clean, sustaining, life-giving water, and the act of leadership is the giving out of that water, then it stands to reason that one cannot give what one does not have.

One thing that can challenge us when it comes to the level of the water in our wells is working within a system that forces us to use a lot of energy to get to the place where the fun of our work can actually begin. I applaud our church leaders for recognizing that the system in our church that supports volunteers and their endeavors is unnecessarily cumbersome. Simplifying the structure will help us all to expend less of our precious time and energy just trying to find the right path that will lead us to what really excites us -- our real work within the church.

Another method to conserve the water in our wells and avoid burn-out is to follow the old adage that many hands make light work. We need to get as many people involved in doing the work -- the ministry -- of the church as possible because the community will be stronger if more people are

involved in bringing their gifts and talents to the table.

Good leaders also know how to refill their wells when they get low. They understand the importance of getting others to help share the load so that we have time to do the things that feed our spirits. It is up to each person to figure out what his or her particular kind of spirit-filling activities are, but they might include walking, golfing, running, reading, writing, spending time with those you enjoy being around, painting, counting the number of cardinals that visit your yard today, praying....the list is potentially endless.

My last observation is that leaders don't tell people what to do -- they create a safe space for people's ideas to blossom. If you are going to enjoy a beautiful garden, first you clear the land and create a safe environment, as free as possible from predators and weeds that are unwelcoming to new growth. Next you plant the seeds, water them and wait for the beauty.

Effective leaders create an environment for lots of ideas to flow -- little seeds of possibility. Every seed will not grow into a flowering plant and every idea will not become a new program or a way to effectively address the budget, but you won't know that until you plant the idea and tend it for a while.

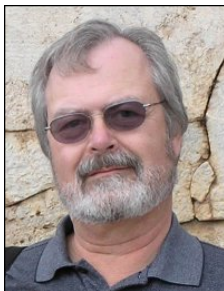
I believe that for every question in the church that needs addressing, there are many ideas that might work and some ideas that will work wonderfully.

*Please Read This Special
Governance Change Edition Carefully*

**Mark these important Congregational Meetings on your calendar:
May 2nd - Special Congregational Meeting on Governance
May 16th - Annual Congregational Meeting**

Look for Meeting Notices on Page 11

Governance Change Overview by Bill Ross, Chair, GTF



This special issue of *The Flame* is devoted to pulling together for you what we have learned about our governance processes over the last couple of years. We (the Board, the Governance Task Force, and the Senior Staff) have recommendations to present to you at forums to be held after each church service on April 18. After those discussions there will be a Special Congregational Meeting on May 2. We look forward to asking for your vote of confidence to move forward with policy-based governance and for your approval to reduce the size of our Board of Trustees. This overview is your “executive summary”. You will find more complete information elsewhere on these pages.

Background

The nine years since our last By-Law change in 2001 have provided plenty of opportunity for us to experience the complexity of our current system of governance and to consider its strengths and weaknesses. As a result, our church’s Boards of Trustees have been studying different governance models off and on since 2006. The 2008-2009 Board pursued governance change in earnest and decided to move forward with a change model set forth in Dan Hotchkiss’ book, *Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership*. The Board formed a Governance Task Force and charged it with guiding the congregation through the process. The Board also engaged Dan as a consultant to provide guidance. The GTF, the Board, Rev. Kate, Cheryll and other staff members, and many other church leaders have been working hard on this project for over 18 months.

How it Works

The process we are adopting is “policy-based governance”. In a nutshell, this means that the Board retains important planning, goal setting, and evaluation tasks for itself. The responsibilities retained by our Board are:

- Discerning and articulating the Congregation’s mission and vision of ministry,
- Setting goals and making strategic choices,
- Executing financial oversight to meet its fiduciary responsibility to the Congregation,
- Creating written policies to guide the Congregation’s ministry, and
- Monitoring and evaluating the Congregation’s leadership, including itself.

To focus on these tasks, the Board delegates the day-to-day implementation of the church’s activities and services to the “Ministry Team”. The Ministry Team includes the entire staff and all existing committee members. It is where the rubber meets the road and the church’s vision and goals are brought to life. Although they will be guided by the Board’s policies and goals, the Ministry Team will have significantly more freedom to make their own decisions. Periodically, the Ministry Team’s results will be evaluated by the Board.

Trial Run

If you approve the motions that we will present at the May 2 Special Congregational Meeting, we will embark on our “official” trial run on June 1. Unofficially we have been incorporating what we have learned about policy-based governance into our daily work for some time now.

The trial run gives us an opportunity to learn from doing. Over the year we will experiment with our policies and processes before we submit the final By-Law changes to you next year at about this time.

Board Size

The one By-Law change that we recommend formally implementing at this time is reducing the size of our Board of Trustees. We believe that the Board will be more effective with eight lay members and be able to work more closely together than is currently possible with sixteen members. You will find the details of the proposed By-Law change nearby in this issue. The Nominating Committee is fully informed on this proposed change and has developed a strategy to adjust as needed.

History & Rationale for Change

By Marie Sedlacek, Past President

Changing the governance structure of First Unitarian Church of Omaha has been a deliberate undertaking by the Church Leadership in order to improve the daily functioning of the church organization and to provide a dynamic vehicle for this congregation to use as it grows into the future.



I joined the Board of Trustees in May 2007 as President-elect with Dave Richardson as President. I had served on the Board twice before and had found the experience frustrating. While I was enticed by the opportunity to help realize the opportunities of an exciting neighborhood rising around us and serve with a new minister, it soon became clear that our governance structure was confusing, complex and an impediment to progress. Before we could reach out we had to look inward to revise the way we worked together. Here is a snapshot of our governance at that time:

- A great deal of power was vested in the President and the Board of Trustees, with most decisions made at that level. The Board had historically been the appellate body for the church. Committee requests for decisions, guidance and permission came directly to the Board. Over the years the Board weighed in on the minutiae of church life, yet seemed to have little control over the business brought before it and was unable to set limits on its areas of responsibility. The Board had become management-oriented.
- As past ministerial leadership waned, the need to provide day-to-day guidance fell to the President and the Board. This placed a heavy burden on the position of President and made it difficult for a new Minister to find a place in the structure of the church. Decision-making boundaries between Minister and Board/President were not clear.
- The Program Council existed in a nominal way with some duties in conflict with those of the Board. The decision-making function and role for this council of committee chairs was unclear.

- Decision-making was difficult within the Board as well due to its size. The Board had come to include appointed chairs of certain key managerial committees -Finance, Religious Education and House & Grounds. With 17 members (3 presidents, 9 elected members, 3 appointed committee chairs, the Treasurer and the Minister and a Partridge in a Pear Tree) meaningful discussion was difficult.
- The Board was committee-centered. The Liaison system of communicating with committees—where each Board member is assigned the role of advocate and monitor for a church committee -- reinforced committee-focused and detail-oriented Board activity.

In the fall of 2007 Rev. Kate suggested that the Board bring in a consultant to review our governance system. After much discussion, Dan Hotchkiss, a senior consultant with the Alban Institute, came for the weekend of May 30, 2008 to lead a workshop with Committee Chairs and the Board. He introduced both groups to several models of church governance. More importantly, he explained the relationship between governance models and the size of a congregation. His research, and that of others in the field of church governance, indicated that our organizational structure was hindering our ability to flourish as a church.

The Board began to seriously examine governance change, as reflected in the overview below:

- August 2008: Following in-depth discussions in June and July, the Board approved the formation of the Governance Task Force (GTF), appointed 5 church members, and drafted a Charge to guide their work. The Charge listed goals and tasks for the GTF and also approved funding for a governance consultant.
- August 2008 Retreat: The #1 annual Board goal was to *“Evaluate and modify our church governance structure. The Board will support the Governance Task Force process, which is a multi-year process.”*
- December 2008: The Board approved a contract with Dan Hotchkiss for consulting services to guide the work of the GTF.

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- January 2009: The GTF brought the first of many policies to the Board for affirmation. The first policy considered the areas of responsibility the Board intended to retain for itself.

The Leadership of the church took the courageous step of entrusting revision of our governance system to a dedicated group of church members, the Governance Task Force. The diligence and persistence of the Task Force, under the guidance of Dan Hotchkiss have brought us to this point. By approving the Trial Year, this Congregation can look to the future and know it will have the tools to shape it.

Mission: The church's mission is the good that the congregation means to do, whom it hopes to benefit and how, and what it claims as its central principles or values. Articulating mission is a central role of governance. The book argues that the mission is the actual "owner" of the church.

Vision: A vision is a star to guide by. It is an imagined future state of the church as it becomes a better vehicle to serve our mission. Strategies, goals, and objectives describe the plan for crossing the gap between our current state and the vision over time. The Board expresses its strategy to move toward the vision in its Annual Vision of Ministry.

Board of Trustees Working Mission Statement, Adopted Fall 2008, Reaffirmed June 2009

First Unitarian Church of Omaha strives to be a diverse, liberal religious community with a tradition of open-mindedness and tolerance. We promote spiritual growth, social justice, and service to those in need in order to effect positive change in our society and in ourselves.

Board Charge

to the Governance Task Force

The Board votes to create a **Governance Task Force (GTF)** to which it will appoint four church members and the minister.

The Goals of the Task Force will be to revamp our operating system so that we will have:

A **staff** that is free to create effective programs with the support of a structure that shares authority and requires accountability.

A **board** that is free to represent the membership by articulating vision, evaluating programs, and ensuring responsible stewardship of resources.

A **membership** that is free to share its myriad talents and interests in an atmosphere of trust and creativity where structure, goals, and purposes are clear.

Tasks of the GTF must include, but are not limited to: **Reflect** on the goals to be achieved through a change of governance.

Review the existing governance structure and other pertinent materials and consult with church staff, Board, lay leadership and members to assess the strengths and weaknesses of our current governance system.

Create a detailed proposal for implementing changes in our governance structure to meet our present and future goals.

The proposal should include the **rationale and goals** of the proposed changes, an **action plan** for implementing changes, a **timeline** for the process, and a **communication plan** for sharing this process with church staff, leadership and members.

Create a skeleton set of Board policies to implement the proposal in close consultation first with the Board, and enlarging the circle of consultation to church leadership and members as the proposal matures.

Guide church staff, leadership and members through a trial period (ideally a full year), in which the new structure is tested with as little change to current By-Laws as possible.

Evaluate the trial period and make adjustments to the new process as needed.

Present any necessary amendments of the By-Laws to the Board for their approval and ultimate referral to the congregation. The congregation will adopt any necessary amendments to the By-Laws at a congregational meeting called for that purpose.



The Governance Task Force By Beth Conover, GTF

In August of 2008 the Board of Trustees voted to create a

Governance Task Force (GTF) and appointed to it four church members

and the Minister. Beth Conover, Bill

Ross, John Wagner and Ben Wallace were selected to be Church members of the GTF, each chosen for a particular area of expertise or to represent particular portions of the church membership and ministry. Early in the process, Bill Ross was persuaded to chair the GTF, due to his knowledge and commitment to the project. Because of the complexity of the project, the Board also agreed to fund the hiring of Dan Hotchkiss from the Alban Institute as a consultant, using a portion of the funds from the Holland donation for special projects. Dan is the author of *Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership*.

The Governance Task Force began by learning more about the topic...reading Dan Hotchkiss' book, reviewing governance changes made by other churches, and discussing what might be needed at First Unitarian. Then a series of listening sessions were scheduled to determine how staff, church members, and committee chairs and other leaders viewed the strengths and weaknesses of the current governance structure of the church. Suggestions for change were elicited. The GTF then began the laborious task of revising the governance structure, carefully providing the church Board of Trustees with proposed changes during each step of the way. The process thus became a joint effort, with the Board revising and adding input to the structure and policies suggested by the GTF.

Early in the process, we learned that the language of governance can be confusing and we invested time to develop a glossary to help with communication. We also developed a web page and provided monthly reports in *The Flame*.

The most difficult decision occurred early in the process, where it was determined that the Board would shift to a broader and more visionary role, and the job of running the



church on a day-to-day basis would become the responsibility of the Ministry Team. While the Board would retain its essential power, including financial oversight, the authority to make many decisions was delegated to ministry. This would free the Board to do long-term planning and focus on broader issues. Reflecting its new role, the GTF recommended that the Board be reduced in size to president, president elect, and six members (one of whom will be secretary). Most committees would now report to the ministry team, rather than to the Board. All of this should clarify lines of communication and responsibility -- areas which most church members felt needed improvement.

Now half way through its second year, the GTF continues to meet two-four times a month to work on policies. Once the new structure was determined, many other changes needed to be made, but most are more procedural than conceptual. The GTF has been joined in its efforts by the Transition Team, comprised of Bill Ross, Kate Rohde, and Board President Donna Neff and President-Elect Shelton Hendricks.

The GTF has hosted two Soul-Full Thursday sessions to continue the process of informing church members and leadership of proposed changes in governance, and to solicit input as well. A third Soul-Full Thursday session has just started which is focused on the Ministry Team.

The GTF looks forward to the third year of the project and the implementation of the new procedures and structure on a trial basis. The role of the GTF will continue to focus on policy drafting and training. Our goal is to equip the Board's Governance Committee to assume our remaining duties by the end of the trial run.

Policy: A policy is an authoritative written statement designed to control many individual decisions over time. Developing effective policies is the responsibility of the Board. Policies provide the framework for on-going decision making. Ministry Team management decisions are made within the context of the appropriate policies. The book recommends policies covering discernment, strategy, management, and oversight.

A Board in Transition

By Donna Neff, President



It is not just “talk” about governance change or guesses about how such changes might work out. Board members have been living this change increasingly through this past year. We think differently now—easily categorizing our work as issues that will remain appropriate for a Board focused on strategic planning, monitoring, and evaluative functions—versus management and implementation issues better suited to a ministry team under the new structure. For past Boards and officers, the challenge has been to shoehorn in important “big picture” work along with all of the other matters constantly arising in the church. Much of this management and ministry-related work is much better suited to skilled, full-time and part-time church staff and volunteers, guided by policy, strategic plans, and each year’s “vision of ministry” from the Board.

This past year, the Board’s work already has transitioned towards the new structure, with at least four new elements directly reflecting these changes:

- **A Board retreat** was held at the start of this church year (not late summer or fall), with frank and open discussion about challenges facing the church, desires for the church’s future, and decisions about how to structure a ministry team under a new governance structure. Dan Hotchkiss, our governance consultant, lead the workshop with Board members, Governance Task Force (GTF) members, Rev. Kate, and Cheryll Wallace, Director of Religious Education. The outcome was to adopt a model with a ministry team headed by Rev. Kate as chief of staff.
- **A Board covenant** was created last fall, in which Board members explicitly discussed and agreed on expectations for Board members. We worked on a similar covenant guiding interactions between the Board and the Minister, which fostered important discussions.
- **A Board process of careful review, revision, and affirmation of all new policies generated by the GTF.**

Annual Vision of Ministry: The annual Vision of Ministry is the Board’s short list of priorities to be accomplished in the forthcoming one to three years. It is the short-term product of the Board’s strategic planning process. The Ministry Team then translates the board’s vision of ministry into goals and objectives for the coming year.

2010-2011 Annual Vision of Ministry First Unitarian Church, Omaha NE

Adopted 1/12/10, Board of Trustees

In 2010-11, implementing the new governance structure, First Unitarian church will:

- Cultivate deeper and broader involvement of current and new members in the ministries of our church, with emphasis on small-group ministry.
- Increase awareness of our church and Unitarian Universalist values in our community.
- Live our Unitarian Universalist values through opportunities for social justice and outreach to others.

Given a vote of confidence, these policies will go into effect June 1 of the trial year. It was a rare month that the Board did not have a significant amount of policy review on the agenda. Making and revising policies will continue to be an important part of the work of the Board.

- **A Board “annual vision of ministry”**—short-term goals for this NEXT church year—was completed with collaborative input from Rev. Kate and Cheryll. In place by early January, it marked a significant change from past Board practices in that we moved beyond setting goals for this current year to look farther into the future. With time, the window of strategic planning will expand to a longer time frame. Our 2010-11 Annual Vision of Ministry is featured elsewhere in this issue, and marks the start of more intentional strategic planning by the Board. It provides guidance for where the ministry team is to invest their

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time, energy and talents, and a benchmark for monitoring and evaluating the ministry teams' work. Creating an Annual Vision of Ministry is part of how the Board will better focus on the church's mission and future.

So - are we ready for a trial year? Yes. At a recent Board meeting, Board members were asked what they wished conveyed to the congregation before the May 2 vote of confidence on the trial run and a request for By-Law change to reduce Board size. Here are their thoughts:

- The Board has worked hard and taken this issue of governance change very seriously this past year.
- The Board feels the Governance Task (GTF) has done *outstanding* work preparing sufficient policies to launch the trial year and that Dan Hotchkiss has been a first-rate consultant throughout this process to the GTF, the ministry team, and the Board.
- The Board “gets it”—we have learned new concepts of how Boards can function and which duties stay with a Board and which move on to others in the congregation.
- The Board has learned the important role of trust and generosity of spirit needed for successful delegation and distribution of the work of the church, and for Board and

ministry teams to work together toward clearly defined goals.

The Board strongly supports this path forward for the church's governance structure. We are confident that the initial groundwork is laid for this continuing journey. We expect it will be a bumpy road at times, but that the journey will be worth it. We ask for your vote of confidence to move forward into a trial year with a much smaller, focused Board, a dynamic ministry team, and our exciting vision of ministry.

As we move forward, the main change that current committee chairs will likely notice is that their work falls under the direction of the Senior Staff Team on the ministry side—not the Board. No more Board liaisons, no more routine reports to the Board for monthly meetings, no more Program Councils chaired by Board officers, no more requests to the Board for sponsorship of individual events, etc. Instead, a new ministry team structure is forming that we hope will provide clearer (and faster) paths to get things done, clearer guidelines on what activities are important and why, and easier opportunities for “teams” to form, disband, or join forces to collaborate on projects of common interest. “Governance” sounds boring, but these are exciting times. Check it out.



The board, left to right: Gary Emenitove, Carolyn McNamara, Tom Foster, Marie Sedlacek, Roger duRand, Donna Neff, Shelton Hendricks, Ellen Shurson, Dave Olson, Walt Jesteadt, Tony Host, Linda Parker, Alex Nather, Rev. Kate Rohde. Not pictured: Dean Christensen. (Photo by Bill Ross)

Board (of Trustees): The Board is elected by the congregation to govern the church. The central tenet of the book is that strong Boards do not manage; they govern. The Board is responsible for understanding and articulating the church's mission, planning for the church's future, developing strategies and goals to achieve its vision, and evaluating the degree to which past efforts achieved the desired results. To focus on these key responsibilities, the book encourages the Board to delegate the day to day management of the church to the Ministry Team.



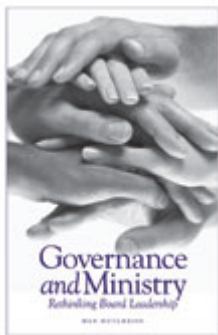
Ready ... Set ... Try! By Dan Hotchkiss

Over 140 years or so, a church develops habits. Changing established habits is not easy, but this church means to try. As you'll read elsewhere in this issue, First Unitarian has good reasons, a firm resolve, and a clear roadmap for change. Through the hard work of the Governance Task Force, the officers and board and staff, First Unitarian is ready to begin to make decisions and take action in a new way.

Now for the interesting part!

If a church were a computer, you'd be almost finished. Your minister and Ministry Team are ready to take charge of most of what, in the past, has been "committee work." The Board is ready to adopt policies to guide, limit, and monitor, and oversee that work and to evaluate results.

Your Board is ready to start looking to the future. Freed from the drudgery of operational decision-making, the Board has already written an initial "Vision of Ministry" to guide the Ministry Team and is beginning to define "Open Questions" to guide its own reflections and its conversations with church members. All is clearly spelled out and adequately understood. If the church were a computer, it would be ready to reboot with its newly installed program.



But First Unitarian is not a machine; most of its moving parts are human beings. Despite the clearly written "operating system," we can expect the old, habitual behavior to pop up for some time to come. It takes about three years, I find, from the adoption of a change of governance before the new behavior becomes second nature.

That's why, instead of being near the finish line, you're at the starting blocks for a Trial Run. The coming year will be for testing out the new approach seriously and fully, watching closely for two kinds of things:



Things that need to be corrected because they are ineffective, inefficient, or even wrong from the point of view of your shared Unitarian Universalist values, and

Things that need further work because the old way of doing things keeps re-emerging. How can you change persistent habits? The same way you get to Opera Omaha: practice, practice, practice.

During the Trial Run, you'll be evaluating—formally and informally—and making adjustments as you go. When you decide about bylaw amendments and other more lasting changes, you'll know what you're voting on because you will have lived it for a year.

You're ready. Now it's time to practice.

Dan Hotchkiss is a Senior Consultant, Author, and Seminar Leader with The Alban Institute. He is the author of *Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership*.

Governance: In Dan's book, the terms governance and ministry are used to differentiate between two spheres of leadership in congregations. *Governance* means "owning" the congregation, exercising ultimate control of its human and material resources and ensuring that it serves its mission. Governance is holding the whole institution and its work in trust, voicing its intentions, making its biggest decisions, and taking responsibility for its performance. Governance produces minutes, policies, mission statements, goals, and strategic-planning documents. Governance is the job of the Board

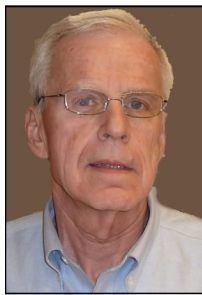
Ministry: Ministry doesn't mean just giving sermons or making pastoral visits. Rather, ministry is used in the broader sense meaning all of the work that is done by the congregation to serve the church's mission and make it an important aspect in the lives of both the congregation and the community. When the GTF uses the word "ministry" we include the work that you, your fellow congregants, and all staff members do...not just the work that Rev. Kate does. Ministry means making daily choices about money, time, and space. Ministry brings into being worship services, study groups, mission trips, service projects, mowed lawns, happy children, and renewed hope.



The Board of the Future

By Shelton Hendricks

President Elect



According to Dan Hotchkiss, “Strong boards do not manage; they govern.” Until now, particularly in recent years when our church was without a called minister, the Board of Trustees of First Unitarian has out of habit and necessity focused on management. The proposal that will be before the congregation on May 2 envisions a significant movement of the Board’s function away from management and towards governance. Throughout this past year the Board, the Governance Task Force (GTF), and the senior staff of the church have been attempting to understand what exactly that will mean for the business the Board conducts at its meetings, and how its members interact with the congregation at large and with the Ministry Team. So, how do we see this new Board?

It is clear the Board will establish policies that govern the functions of the Ministry Team and all other church related activities. With the hard work of the GTF, this process is underway and we will be ready to begin our first year under the new governance process with many excellent policies in place. As much as possible, these will be enduring policies and management decisions delegated to the Ministry Team and others who are doing the work of the church under the guidance of these policies. A major activity of the Board will be oversight, essentially assuring itself and in turn the congregation that its policies are being followed and when deemed appropriate it will consider adoption of additional policies or modifications of those that already exist.

Under our new governance processes the Board will be future oriented. Two major aspects of this orientation to the future should be *discernment* and *strategy*. The first asks what do we desire? The second asks how do we get what we desire?

The process of discernment according to Hotchkiss “includes all that the congregation does to discover and articulate its mission.” Clearly the Board cannot do this effec-

tively in isolation and without a nuanced sense of our collective values and hopes. I see the development of meaningful processes of discernment to be a major challenge for the Board during the initial years of this new governance process. I believe we can meet this challenge and that the process will not only lead to more effective governance but to a renewed sense of and confidence in our mission.

Strategy, to my mind, is simply planning. In the long run, I trust evolution over intelligent design. However, in the day-to-day world we need to anticipate problems and their solutions and envision and take advantage of opportunities. To some extent, we can design our future and this will be an area in which the Board will focus much of its attention and energy. How do we assure that the religious experiences we love or desire continue or are developed? How do we effectively express our core values in the wider world? How do we insure the integrity and adequacy of our physical facilities for now and for the future? The Board intends to spend much of its efforts on these issues with the goal of assuring we are a vibrant and meaningful church for another 140 years and beyond.

Discernment: Discernment and strategy comprise one of the four leadership roles described in the book. Discernment aims to discover the congregation’s mission (what good the congregation truly exists to do) and its vision (what the future will look like if we make good progress). The process of discernment and strategy is a shared responsibility of the Board and Ministry Team.

Strategy: Discernment and strategy comprise one of the four leadership roles described in the book. Strategy is the process of setting goals and making high level decisions to move the organization from its current state toward its desired vision. At least annually, the Board will describe its strategy in its Annual Vision of Ministry. The Ministry Team will then develop the action plans to implement the strategy.



The Ministry Team

By Rev. Kate Rohde, Minister

As you have read earlier in this special edition of *The Flame*, the GTF has been working with the Board to help it define its role. The Board plans to focus on the big questions and the future of our church and delegate much of what it has historically been doing to the rest of us...**the Ministry Team**. What this means is that if you are not on the Board you will be on (we hope!) the Ministry Team.



When Dan Hotchkiss and others who talk about congregations these days use the word “ministry”, they are not referring to the work traditionally done by the clergy, but about all of the good things that the church does, both within and beyond its walls. Our Ministry Team is comprised of the staff and all the volunteers who plan, organize, and do the day-to-day, week-to-week, and month-to-month work that keeps our church going and makes those good things happen. Folks who currently serve on committees, run programs, teach, sing, make coffee, and all the other important task will be “**on the team**”.

The job of the Ministry Team is to work together to do the work of the church that has been defined by the Mission and the Board’s Annual Vision of Ministry (see page 6). The Board has also been developing a set of policies that set out parameters within which we work. We will have the task of developing our own practices for working well together as a team.

The Ministry Team will be led by the senior staff team which consists of me, Cheryl Wallace, (our Director of Religious Education), and Catharine Dixon, (our Office Administrator). Most of our current “committees” will become “teams”: the Garden Team, the Religious Services Team, the Green Sanctuary Team, the Office Team, and so on. One of the most important tasks for The Ministry Team this year is to clarify what each team does and to develop a plan on how best to work together on the Board’s goals for the church for the year ahead.

We are beginning work with various committee chairs (soon to be called “team leaders”) to talk about how we might best work together under the new system. Some of the things to discuss are:

- What is their part in helping the church achieve the Board’s Vision of Ministry for the year?
- How does their work fit together with the work of others?
- Which current committees may need to be re-organized or to reallocate some of its work so that no one has too much to do?
- Which teams may need to have a volunteer administrator to help coordinate their work?
- What responsibilities and authority does each team leader have?
- Who will be their team’s primary contact on the staff team?

Just like the Program Council that it replaces, the Ministry Team leaders will meet together two or three times a year. Team leaders will not only be focused on the discreet tasks of their team, but also on how the work their team is doing fits into the mission and goals of the whole congregation.

Perhaps the most important tool we can bring to our Ministry Team efforts will be a sense of humor! We’ll be doing something new for our church and for all of us. We’ll all make mistakes. When that happens, just think of it as good material for the skit at next year’s all church party!

The upside of doing a good job of working as a team is that there will be less duplication of efforts, more clarity about who has the authority and responsibility for various decisions, and a greater likelihood of moving forward on the goals the board delegates to us. We will set priorities with those goals in mind. Once a new system is in place, there will be a quick vetting process for new ideas and projects.

You may not always get a green light, but at least you won’t get tired out by the process of looking for an answer.

Continued on next page



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It will be easier to shift course. If we do a good job, there will be a lot of interesting and fun opportunities for participating in the ministry of our church.

The part that some of us may not like is that with clear responsibility comes accountability. Also, with a clearer direction, some good ideas that don't fit well with our mission or that are not priorities given our current goals will need to be deferred or even rejected. No one likes tamping down enthusiasm, but we may say "no" to a good idea (such as creating a hockey rink in our parking lot), however worthy a project it might be, if it is in conflict with other priorities. Still, our congregation will be better off when we are putting our efforts toward an integrated vision.



Senior Staff Team: Cheryl Wallace, Director of Religious Education; Catharine Dixon, office administrator; Rev. Kate Rohde, minister. (Photo by Bill Ross)

As Dan says, it takes some years to learn a new system of working together. Members of other congregations who have gone through this change have found it time consuming but ultimately worth the trouble. I am confident that the talent and good will of our staff, members, and friends will give us what we need to have success in forming a strong team for the future works of our congregation.

Congregational Meeting Notices

Congregational meetings are called and conducted based on the provisions of the church bylaws. The bylaws and our other governing documents are available on the church web site at <http://www.firstuomaha.org/governance.html> or by contacting the church office.

Special Congregational Meeting on Governance – May 2, 2010

To avoid overloading the agenda for the Annual Congregational Meeting, the Board of Trustees has called a Special Congregational Meeting on governance. This special meeting will convene following the regular Sunday worship service on May 2, 2010 at 12:45 p.m. A light lunch and childcare will be provided.

The business to be conducted includes:

1. A motion to amend the church By-Laws to reduce the size of the Board of Trustees from sixteen (16) lay members to eight (8) lay members (*see proposed By-Law changes nearby*).
2. A vote of confidence motion to support the Board of Trustees in its efforts to convert to policy-based governance and to engage in the one-year trial period recommended by the Hotchkiss process beginning June 1, 2010 (*see proposed motion nearby*).

Annual Congregational Meeting May 16, 2010

The 2010 Annual Meeting of the First Unitarian Church of Omaha will convene following the regular Sunday worship service on May 16, 2010 at 12:45 p.m. A light lunch and childcare will be provided.

The business to be conducted includes the approval of the budget for the 2010-2011 church year, the election of members to serve as President Elect, on the Board of Trustees, the Nominating Committee, and the Capital Trust, and presentations of annual reports. A highlight of this meeting is the presentation of the Unitarian of the Year award.



Vote of Confidence

For Special Congregational Meeting on Governance - May 2, 2010

As set forth in our By-Laws, the Board of Trustees is the governing body of this church. Beginning in June 2008, the Board began an investigation of policy-based governance. Since then, the Board has created a Governance Task Force, engaged a consultant, and invested significant time and money in this effort.

The Board has concluded that a policy-based governance system will help the church achieve its mission more effectively and has begun the process of converting to the process set forth in *Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership*, by Dan Hotchkiss (who also served as our consultant).

One tenet of the Hotchkiss process is a one-year trial period. To begin the trial period, the Board must have defined the structure and basic policies that the church needs to operate. During the trial year, the church will learn by doing, adjusting its structures and policies as needed. At the end of the trial year, the Board expects that it will have developed a more complete body of policies to guide our future and also will present to the congregation any changes in the By-Laws that might be needed to finalize our conversion to policy-based governance.

The Board is strongly in favor of converting to policy-based governance and has the authority to change its own policies to institute it. However, the Board is also very interested in making sure that the congregation is fully informed and supportive of the effort. Therefore, before setting forth on the trial year, the Board asks the congregation for a vote of confidence as follows:

Resolved: The congregation supports the Board in its efforts to convert to policy-based governance and to engage in the one-year trial period recommended by the Hotchkiss process beginning June 1, 2010.

Affirmation (of a policy by the Board): The Governance Task Force develops policies for the Board to consider. At each step, the GTF reports back to the Board and senior staff and asks for affirmation (not adoption) of its work to date. Affirmation is a yellow light, permission to share the partial proposal with a wider group of leaders, then with all interested congregation members. At each iteration, the GTF makes changes in the policy drafts in response to widely held concerns and shares a revised draft with the Board.

Trial Run: Once enough policies have been developed by the GTF and affirmed by the Board to provide a reasonable safety net, the GTF asks the Board (and the Board plans to ask the congregation) to approve a year's trial run of the new structure. The Board's goal is to start our trial run on June 1, 2010.

Who May Vote at Church Membership Meetings?

The Church's Articles of Incorporation define who may become a member of our church and other qualifications for voting at a membership

Any person at least sixteen years of age may become a member of this church by signing a membership book which shall be headed by a copy of these articles, together with such Bond of Union as shall be provided for in the By-Laws. Those members who have been members of this church for three months immediately preceding any meeting and in whose name a contribution has been made during a period of a year closing thirty days prior to the meeting, shall be voting members at that meeting.



PROPOSED BY-LAW REVISIONS

Special Congregational Meeting on Governance - May 2, 2010

Explanation

First Unitarian Church of Omaha has a very large Board of Trustees compared to other churches and compared to the ideal. According to Dan Hotchkiss:

From the point of view of group process, the ideal board has seven members. A group that size finds it relatively easy to retain control of its agenda and to keep each member feeling responsible for the board's work. From the point of view of democracy, a seven-member board has some surprising advantages. Unlike a larger board, it can be under no illusion that its members fully "represent" the congregation. Small boards know that if they want congregational support (and they need it, whether they want it or not!), they have to engage constituents in continual two-way communication through committees, surveys, town meetings, and informal one-to-one exchange.

The proposed By-Law change below will reduce the number of lay members on our Board from sixteen (President, President-Elect, Past President, nine elected members, and four appointed members) to eight (President, President-Elect, and six elected members). Related changes in the Executive Committee and certain duties are also addressed.

Proposed New By-Law Wording

The new wording is shown below. The exact changes from the existing wording are shown on the following page.

III. BOARD OF TRUSTEES

A. The governing body of this church shall be a Board of Trustees consisting of (a) the President and the President-Elect, and (b) six other persons elected by the church membership (such six other persons being referred to herein as the "elected Trustees"). The minister shall be a member of the Board of Trustees but shall have no vote and shall not be counted for purposes of establishing the presence of a quorum.

C. An elected trustee shall serve a three-year term. The term of office begins at the first meeting of the Board of Trustees following the Annual Meeting at which the Trustee was elected and ends at the beginning of the first meeting of the Board of Trustees following the last Annual Meeting in the term to which the Trustee was elected. Trustees elected to three-year terms may not serve two consecutive terms. A President-Elect of the Board of Trustees shall be elected by the membership at each Annual Meeting and shall serve on the Board of Trustees as President-Elect under the current President and the following year as President; the year thereafter such person shall serve as convener of the Nominating Committee under the subsequent President. At each Annual Meeting of the Church membership, one third of the elected Trustees shall be elected to serve a three-year term.

IV. OFFICERS.

B. The President, President-Elect and a trustee selected by the Board of Trustees shall comprise the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees, with the minister as a non-voting ex officio member. Any two voting members shall constitute a quorum. The Executive Committee shall have power to act between meetings of the Board, to make recommendations to the Board, and to carry out those responsibilities and duties as may, from time to time, be prescribed by the Policies/Guidelines. Authority for acts of the Board of Trustees remains with the Board, and interim actions of the Executive Committee must be ratified by the Board at its next meeting.



Documentation Showing How the Proposed Change Affects the Current By-Law Wording

(underscore = addition, strikeover = ~~deletion~~)

III. BOARD OF TRUSTEES

- A. The governing body of this church shall be a Board of Trustees consisting of (a) the President, and the President-Elect, and ~~the immediate Past President/Advisor pursuant to paragraph C of this Article III,~~ (b) ninesix other persons elected by the church membership (~~the President, President-Elect and immediate Past President and such~~ ninesix other persons being referred to herein as the “elected Trustees”), ~~(e) the Chairperson of the Finance Committee, the Chairperson of the House and the Grounds Committee and the Treasurer, all appointed by the President of the Board with the approval of a majority of the elected Trustees, and (d) the Chairperson of the council on Religious Education (the Chairpersons set forth in (c) and (d) all being referred to herein as the “appointed Trustees”).~~ The minister shall be a member of the Board of Trustees but shall have no vote and shall not be counted for purposes of establishing the presence of a quorum.
- C. An elected trustee shall serve a three-year term. The term of office begins at the first meeting of the Board of Trustees following the Annual Meeting at which the Trustee was elected and ends at the beginning of the first meeting of the Board of Trustees following the last Annual Meeting in the term to which the Trustee was elected. Trustees elected to three-year terms may not serve two consecutive terms. A President-Elect of the Board of Trustees shall be elected by the membership at each Annual Meeting and shall serve on the Board of Trustees as President-Elect under the current President, ~~—~~ and the following year as President, ~~and as immediate Past President/Advisor and;~~ the year thereafter such person shall serve as convener of the Nominating Committee under the subsequent President. At each Annual Meeting of the Church membership, one third of the elected Trustees, shall be elected to serve a three-year term. ~~Appointed trustees shall serve a term not to exceed one year. The term of office begins with the Board Meeting at which the appointment is approved by the trustees and ends at the beginning of the first meeting of the Board of Trustees after the next Annual Meeting of the membership. Appointed Trustees may serve any number of consecutive terms.~~

IV. OFFICERS.

- B. The President, President-Elect, and a trustee selected by the immediate Past President, ~~the Secretary, and the Chairperson~~ Board of ~~the Finance Committee~~ trustees shall comprise the Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees, with the minister as a non-voting ex officio member. Any ~~three officers~~ two voting members shall constitute a quorum. The Executive Committee shall have power to act between meetings of the Board, to make recommendations to the Board, and to carry out those responsibilities and duties as may, from time to time, be prescribed by the Policies/Guidelines. Authority for acts of the Board of Trustees remains with the Board, and interim actions of the Executive Committee must be ratified by the Board at its next meeting.



DanSpeak is the Language of Governance

Definitions are Shown Below and Throughout this Special Edition

Committee: The book thinks of a committee as a group to which a deliberative body has referred, or “committed,” a piece of business. A committee gathers information, drafts a policy, or prepares in some other way to report back to the body that appointed it. The book uses the term committee to describe groups that report to the Board. In practice, there is no hierarchy associated with work group terminology and the terms “committee” and “team” are simply ways to conveniently identify whether a given group does its work primarily for the Board or primarily for the Ministry Team.

Management: Management is one of the leadership roles described in the book and is primarily the responsibility of the staff Ministry Team. The Board delegates its management responsibility to the Ministry Team by adopting written policies. These policies will authorize the Ministry Team to make the necessary day to day decisions to implement the goals and objectives articulated periodically by the Board. These policies will also set forth any limitations or other requirements.

Ministry Team: The Ministry Team is the entire staff group (both paid and volunteer) that will manage the church on a day to day basis. The team will include the vast majority of the members of current committees and all paid staff. The minister is the leader of the Ministry Team.

Open Questions: Open questions are questions that are significant to the Church’s strategic planning but do not, as yet, have answers. Open questions call for a wider, longer conversation than an annual goal-setting process can accommodate and invite congregational conversation before a decision is made.

Oversight: Oversight is one of the leadership roles described in the book and is primarily the responsibility of the Board. Oversight refers to the Board’s responsibility to ensure that the church’s human and material resources are used for the benefit of its mission. Oversight policies set standards for the church’s life and work to assure that that

its resources are safeguarded, its leaders are accountable, and the congregation learns from its experience.

Staff: Staff includes everyone who is part of the chain of practical activities that constitute a congregation’s work. For the purpose of the GTF’s work, we do not distinguish between ordained and lay, paid and unpaid, or “program” and “administrative” staff. All of the staff members constitute the Ministry Team.

Team: Teams are action oriented and produce practical results. Some teams directly fulfill pieces of the congregation’s mission, producing the primary results the mission calls for. Worship teams, educational ministries; outreach, service, and social-action teams; hospitality and caring teams; and choirs—depending how the congregation sees its mission—fall into the primary-results category. Other teams produce supportive, secondary results: a clean building, a fund-drive mailing, a readable newsletter, an attractive garden. The book uses the term team to describe the groups that report to the Ministry Team leadership. In practice, there is no hierarchy associated with work group terminology and the terms

“committee” and “team” are simply ways to conveniently identify whether a given group does its work primarily for the Board or primarily for the Ministry Team.

The Flame

This Special Edition of The Flame was prepared by the Governance Task Force which is responsible for any errors or omissions.

Layout

Catharine Dixon, Office Administrator

Mailing Team

Howard Bolton

Dale Freyer

Audrey Freyer

Jeanette Ryan

Evelyn Whitehill

The Flame is published monthly by, for and about members and friends of First Unitarian Church of Omaha.

Contact us at:

The Flame

First Unitarian Church of Omaha

3114 Harney Street

Omaha, NE 68131



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3114 Harney Street
Omaha, NE 68131



ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

Come to Remaining Soul-Full Thursdays - April 15, 22, and 29

On the Team: Conversations about how we will work as a team next year - facilitated by Rev. Kate Rohde with Cheryl Wallace

You have heard a lot about the GTF (Governance Task Force and how the Board will become a group that plans, develops policies, and evaluates. All the rest of us, staff and volunteers, will be a part of the "ministry team". Committee chairs will become team leaders. Day to day decisions will be in the hands of the "ministry team."

How is this going to work? How will it change what each of us does? How do we balance "getting it done" with "accountability?" "How do I implement my great idea?" Come for an open discussion of the changes and how we can be effective and inclusive.

Congregation: Our current congregation received the church from its predecessors and holds it in trust for future generations. Congregation members wear many hats and serve in all of the roles (both governance and ministry) described in the book. Congregation members make the church's most important decisions directly (e.g. calling a minister or electing the Board of Trustees and church officers). Although the votes of congregation members control the church, the book argues that the church is actually "owned" by its mission.

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