

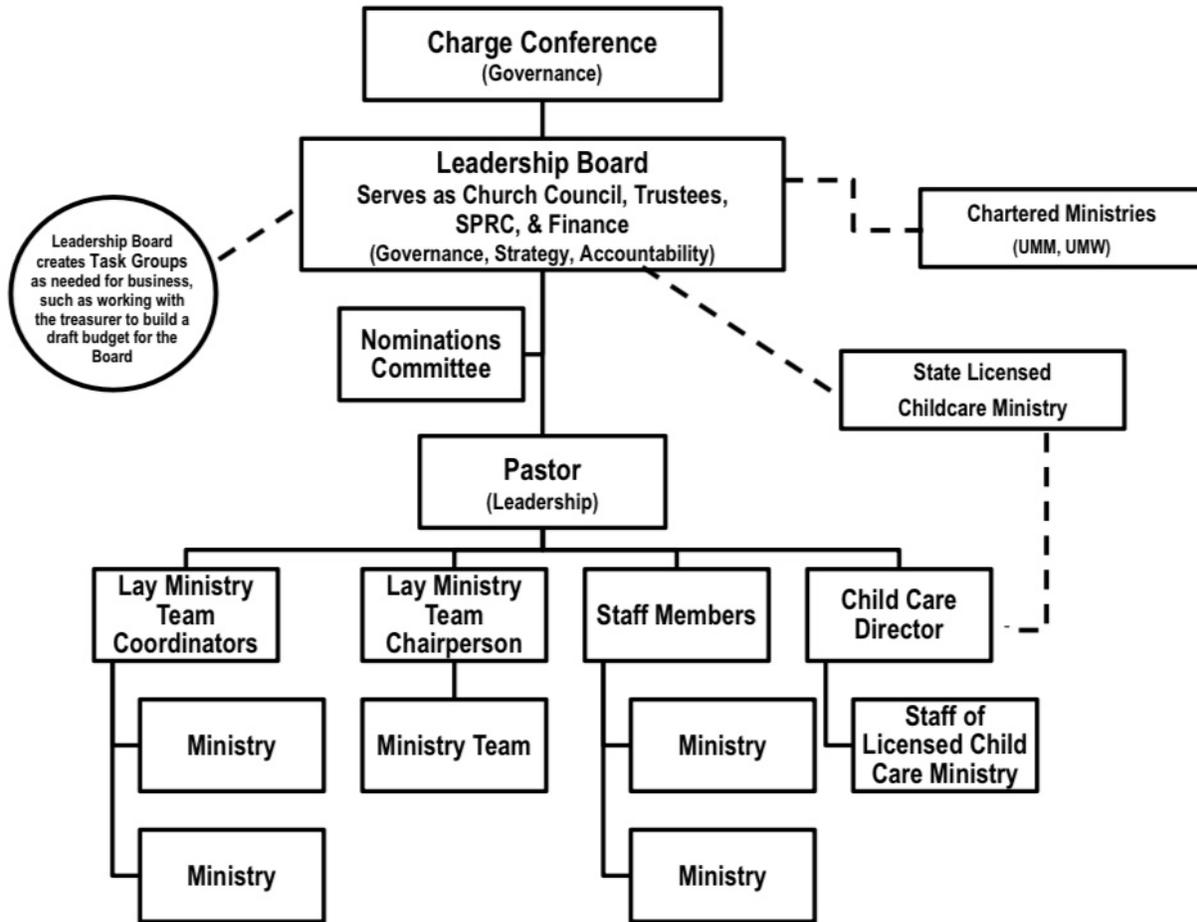
Exploring a Single Board Leadership Model

The following helps explain what is involved in moving from the UMC's formal leadership structure that includes an Administrative Council, Finance Committee, Board of Trustees, and SPRC, to a "Leadership Board" or "Single Board" alternative structure comprised of anywhere from 9-15 members. The 2016 Book of Discipline in paragraph 247.2 allows for a local church to adapt its structure:

"The charge conference, the district superintendent, and the pastor, when a pastor has been appointed (see ¶ 205.4), shall organize and administer the pastoral charge and churches according to the policies and plans herein set forth. When the membership size, program scope, mission resources, or other circumstances so require, the charge conference may, in consultation with and upon the approval of the district superintendent, modify the organizational plans, provided that the provisions of ¶ 243 are observed."

Basic Overview of Single Board Model

- The new Single Board would consist of 9 members who serve a three-year term. The Lay Leader and Lay Delegate are exempt from the three-year term. After being off the Board for a year, the person can roll back onto the Board if elected. SPRC and Trustees have limits on the number of members, so (depending on the Leadership Team's size and composition), all members of the Leadership Team may be barred as voting members of some of the constituent committees. For instance, there is a limit of 9 on Trustees. There is also a limit of 9 on SPRC, not counting Lay Leader and Lay Member of Annual Conference.
- A separate Nominations Committee, chaired by the Pastor, is required because the Board cannot self-nominate.
- At the first meeting at the beginning of each new year, the Board will elect a Trustee Chair to satisfy the corporate resolution requirement. It is recommended the Board Chair serve as the Trustee Chair. The Leadership Board, serving as the Trustees, is also the legal Board of Directors.
- Even though the re-structuring occurs, ministry teams are still needed and in place. Fewer people on the Board means more people are available to do ministry. Simplifying structure is the combining of the four administrative teams of the Council, Trustees, Finance and SPR Committees. The nurture, outreach, and witnessing ministries continue their disciple-making work.
- While the Leadership Board may designate specialists (such as finance specialists) from the membership of their Board, the whole Board serves as the Finance Committee, Trustees, etc., not just the designated specialists.
- The small number of governance officers on the Leadership Team requires trust and congregation-wide accountability. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the role of the Charge Conference ("all professing members and all clergy appointed or located at the charge") in voting to approve nominations to the Board.



Single Board Responsibilities

- Establish the church’s yearly budget
- Work with the Senior Pastor and Staff to cast vision and establish yearly goals for the church
- Work with the Senior Pastor to hire, supervise, and assess Church Staff
- Work in partnership with programs and ministries to ensure they fulfill the mission and vision
- Work with the District Superintendent with regards to pastoral appointments and accountability

Reasons for Exploring a Single Board Model

- Promotes a leadership style that combines accountability, responsibility and authority
- Reduces micro-management and establishes more clarity in decision making
- Synchronizes and aligns all the church’s ministries with the mission, vision, and goals
- Empowers laity to lead and cast overall vision and relieves burden off church staff to serve as the go-between among various church leadership committees
- Simplified governance with leadership accountability is one of the key factors of churches that grow in vitality and mission
- In many ways, it would be intentionally adapting to how we already informally function

Common Questions

How often would the Board meet?

The Board would need to meet quarterly at a minimum, but would most likely meet monthly and more often as needed to begin with.

Who needs to approve going to a Single Board model?

A church conference and the district superintendent must approve moving to a single board model of leadership.

What committees are impacted by moving to the Single Board model?

All of the Administrative Committees (i.e Trustees, Finance, SPRC, and Administrative Council all cease to exist once the single board model has gone into effect. The Lay Leadership/Nominations committee remains in place. Other ministry committees such as Children's Committee, Evangelism or other hands on committees do not go away.

How many people should be on the board?

Church leadership experts recommend a total of 9-15 people make up the new board.

Can other church staff be on the New Board?

Every church situation is unique, but a general rule is that other than the Senior Pastor, other paid church staff can have a voice, but no vote on the new board.

Are there still three-year terms and classes?

Yes. One third of the Board is required to roll off each year.

Is the Board self-nominating?

No. There is still a requirement that there be a separate Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development to nominate the Board Members to the Charge Conference each year.

If the church moves to the simplified structure, how does ministry happen?

Even though the re-structuring occurs, ministry teams are still needed and in place. Fewer people on the Board means more people are available to do ministry. Simplifying structure is the combining of the four administrative teams of the Council, Trustees, Finance and PPR Committees.

What are the rules for the new Single Board?

The new Board has the ability to create the operating rules for the church in the form of two different documents. The first set is called Organizing Documents (or "founding documents", i.e., by-laws) and can only be changed by the approval of a Church Conference. The second set of rules can be called whatever the church wants to call them, but they are "operating guidelines" (policy manual) for how the Board, the Pastor, the Church Staff and the Congregation will interact. The board will, with these operating guidelines, set the boundary rules for all of the entities that make up the church. These rules should not try to include rules for every conceivable situation, but should instead be rather broad in its writing. The operating guidelines can be changed by a majority vote of the new board.

Next Steps

1. Formal approval and vote of support by Administrative Council
2. Final Charge Conference vote regarding move to adopt a Single Board Structure and slate of leaders on December 15, 2020 at 7pm via Zoom.

Untangle Your Committees. Unlock Your United Methodist Church (Rev. Dalton Rushing)

What do you call a horse designed by committee? A **camel**.

What do you call a church run by committees? If you are not careful, you call it **United Methodist**.

One Size Fits All?

The United Methodist Church is structured to be **lay-driven**, and **this is a very good thing**. Unfortunately, in our zeal to include as many people as possible in church leadership and decision-making, **we often hold the church back**. Not only this, but the system we use for ordering our churches has, at times, actually prevented the laity from participating in our mission to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.

What if I told you that **there is another way**, and that it is actually already written into the Book of Discipline? There is, and it is. But let me first set the scene as to why exploring alternative governance is so important.

As clergy know, there's this interesting wrinkle in our polity as United Methodists that there are administrative committees, mandated by the Book of Discipline, with overlapping function. We try to make up for this fact with by including certain people on multiple committees, but frequently, rather than facilitating conversation, this structural principle means a certain number of people spend more nights than they should in the church parlor, sitting around a table, instead of caring for their families or making Disciples.

Let me share an example from the church I serve. During my first six months at North Decatur United Methodist Church, the church needed to undertake a major renovation project on our elevator. Basically, all the guts had to be replaced. Three groups in the church had oversight:

- **The trustees**, because this was a facility issue.
- **The finance committee**, because there was significant cost associated with the project.
- **The church council**, as the governing body of the church.

The money we planned to use to renovate the elevator was sitting in a bank account, *ready to be spent*, and yet because of the logistical reality of working through three groups with overlapping authority, we spend six months talking about a project that everyone agreed we needed to do and for which we had already set aside the money! This isn't to say that our lay leaders were doing anything wrong; it's to say that (as Andy Stanley says) our system was set up to produce exactly the results we were getting, which in this case were absolutely nothing.

It also isn't to say that the United Methodist committee system is irrevocably broken. I supposed it works for some churches. But I've rarely heard anybody *praise* our committee structure. **I've also never seen a disciple made in a committee meeting.**

The issue is this: not only is our structure built upon a premise of abundant meetings and overlapping responsibilities (a recipe for triangulation if there ever were one), but the structure simply was not built for a society that moves more quickly than ever. With instant communication, evolving demographics, and a rapidly changing culture, there comes a need to be able to make decisions quickly. As Jeff Brody says, "slow decision making means missed opportunities." We don't have to wait to gather in person in order to learn the results of a study or a bid. We can send it by email and everyone can instantly have all the data. The old way, while it does work for some churches, doesn't work for all of them. So why should we all have to be structured the exact same way?

The good news is that we don't.

The United Methodist Book of Discipline includes the following statement:

¶247.2: The charge conference, the district superintendent, and the pastor shall organize and administer the pastoral charge and churches according to the policies and plans herein set forth. When the membership size, program scope, mission resources, or other circumstances so require, the charge conference may, in consultation with and upon the approval of the district superintendent, modify the organizational plans, provided that the provisions of ¶ 243 are observed.

You will notice the broad scope of this paragraph. In consultation with and upon the approval of the district superintendent, a church can engage an alternative administrative structure for just about any reason, provided the provisions of ¶ 243 (which lays out the primary tasks of the church) are observed. Provided you have a district superintendent with imagination and guts (and, fortunately, I do), this may be the best path forward for you and the context you serve.

Paragraph 243, it should be noted, says nothing about *how* those tasks are to be carried out structurally. **The matter of governing structure is a matter between the local church, the pastor, and the district superintendent, in accordance with relevant provisions in the Book of Discipline.** There is wide latitude to convene a structure that:

- **has clear lines of authority**, so that everyone knows who is in charge of what
- **privileges decision-making** above simple reporting, so that God's people can move forward in ministry
- **empowers laity** to do the work of making disciples rather than sitting in incessant meetings, and
- **empowers the pastor** to attend to the work of Word, Order, Sacrament, and Service.

There are, of course, a number of ways that this alternative structure could function. Let me share how we do it at North Decatur UMC, and why we've found it to be helpful.

The Church Council at North Decatur UMC consists of 12 lay members, including the chair. The members serve three-year, staggered terms, and each member has responsibility to the council as a whole, in addition to any other responsibilities she or he may have coordinating a work area. The Council is structured as follows:

- 1 Council chair
- 1 member with SPRC/staffing coordination responsibility
- 1 member with Trustees/facilities coordination responsibility
- 1 member with Finance/budget coordination responsibility
- 3 with ministry area responsibilities
- 5 other members (including a recording secretary and those with positions required by the Discipline, namely the treasurer, lay leader, and annual conference delegate)

The ministry areas are structured as follows:

- Welcome and Worship
- Nurture
- Outreach

Each ministry of the church falls in one of these three ministry areas and has a designated leader within the congregation, so that responsibility filters up from the ministry leader through the chair of each area to the Council itself for purposes of coordination, budgeting, and calendaring. When needed, decisions related to ministries are made in the larger Church Council meeting, but usually the ministry teams are empowered to make those decisions themselves, in accordance with policies and procedures established by Church Council. Where coordination between teams is an issue, those matters can usually be worked out between the ministry chairs by email or phone.

Lay employees are accountable to the pastor (clear line of responsibility), and the pastor is accountable to the Council (another clear line). Hiring and firing decisions are made by the pastor, in consultation with the SPRC chair/coordinator; while the pastor consults with the whole council about staffing matters, the pastor is ultimately responsible for staffing, so that the staff understands lines of authority and so that the pastor may be properly evaluated on his or her entire portfolio, including management of the staff. This line of authority with lay staff, it should be noted, is in line with the Discipline's mandate that the pastor order the life of the church.

It is also important to note that while certain members of the council have coordination responsibilities, this model completely replaces the old SPRC / Trustees / Finance committee model. Rather than meeting in individual committees, Trustees matters are brought by the coordinator/chair and dealt with by the entire Council. SPRC matters are typically handled by the pastor (as head of staff) or in the Council as a whole. Major financial decisions are made not by a Finance committee, but by the Council as a whole. The purpose of the structure, after all, is to be clear about who has the authority to make decisions: it is the Council. When the budget is put together, the Finance chair works with the ministry chairs, the staff, and other council members as needed (typically the chair and the treasurer) to craft the proposed budget, which is then approved by the entire Council. Similarly, when a special Trustees project needs to be addressed, the Trustees coordinator/chair is free to put together

an ad hoc advisory or implementation group; even then, the entire Council retains decision-making power.

The only other administrative committee at the church is the Nominations/Lay Leadership committee, chaired by the pastor. We meet 2-3 times in the fall to prepare for charge conference and to propose new members for the Church Council. The new structure has made the job of the Nominations team *so, so* much easier. Rather than merely *filling spots*, we are able to focus on *developing leaders*, which is, of course, the charge of that committee. At the annual charge conference, we vote on the recommendation of the Nominations committee.

With so much work to do, one may be concerned that meetings would take hours. I have not discovered this to be the case. It is almost unheard of that meetings of the Church Council exceed two hours; most are completed within ninety minutes (and with more to show for the time spent than six traditional committee meetings!). What is more, these meetings are open to anyone who wants to come, until and unless there are SPRC/staffing issues to be discussed. If so, near the end of our time together, the meeting is closed, and non-members leave so that the Council may have the requisite confidential staffing conversations.

Streamlining leadership is not simply something that small churches should consider. I have taught this model to over a hundred churches, and the churches run the gamut in terms of dynamics and demographics: from large to smaller-than-small, white to multicultural to "racial-ethnic," liberal to conservative and everything in between. North Decatur UMC currently sees an average of 200+ worshipers on a Sunday, but the genesis for this model came from [Ginghamsburg Church](#), one of the largest UMCs in the world.

I believe in this model because **I have seen it work**. North Decatur UMC was a church ready to try something new, and because of that willingness, adopted this model. The model has allowed us to make swift decisions, freed up our evenings for ministry and family, and ultimately led us from an enormous budget deficit and dwindling attendance to a **large budget surplus** and a church that has **nearly quadrupled in size** in four years time. I cannot attribute all of these things to our structure--North Decatur UMC is a special place, for sure--but neither can I say that without this structure, we would be anywhere close to where we are. That said, **this model isn't for everyone**. It isn't for a church not yet ready for significant change, and it isn't for pastors who aren't ready to take on new and clear lines of authority.

Finally, let me stress that there is no compelling reason to structure your church exactly the way North Decatur UMC has. The purpose of this Disciplinary provision is to allow for contextual structure. **Do what works in your context**. The point here is to recognize that when you feel like you are spending all your time in committee meetings, **there are options**.