

Program Council

The Need

We are not adequately meeting the programming needs of the members and friends of our congregation. This results in loss of members and vitality. A Program Council could help meet unmet need.

Churches larger than 250 have difficulty meeting the needs of the members through the minister and occasional programs. They must rely on carefully created and nurtured programs: hence they are called “Program Churches.” The Board of Trustees can handle this extra responsibility in smaller program churches. However, in our church with over 450, there is too much urgent business for the Board to give adequate time to programming. Hence most churches create an alternate structure, such as a program council, to care for this area of church life.

UUSS has a wide variety of programs. However, they are created randomly and without careful evaluation of congregational needs or priorities. The proposed Council would not constrict or take control of any existing programs. People could still create new programs on their own. However, the Council would provide a richer level of support, coordination and development.

The Vision

The Program Council would be mostly elected by the congregation and operate roughly parallel to the Board of Trustees.

The Board would continue to be the “Mind and Body” of the congregation: it would give the *overall direction, care for fiscal, physical and administrative concerns and have the final legal authority.* It would be guided by the first and last line of our covenant: “We travel together would open minds, open hearts and helping hands. To this we pledge our times, talents and support.”

The Council would be the “Heart and Soul” of the congregation: it would *care for day-to-day and month-to-month congregational life.* It would be guided by the middle two lines of our covenant: “We value justice, compassion, integrity and acceptance. We seek spiritual growth, intellectual stimulation, caring and laughter.”

Structure

The Program Council would consist of nine members: seven elected at large from the congregation and two selected by the Board from Board members. Council members would serve two years staggered terms. People could serve consecutive terms if the congregation elects them. The Council would elect its own President and Secretary and could determine what other officers,

subcommittees or internal structures it needed. It would meet monthly. The Council would take over the functions of the current Council of Leaders and eliminate the need for that body. The Program Council would be expected to stay in close contact with the committees and groups in the church and might have several meetings a year in which committee representatives are encouraged to attend.

The Board and the Council would meet together once or twice a year for an extended meeting (such as a retreat) to consider the overall goals and directions of the church, to develop stronger working relationships and to clarify responsibilities.

The Board would retain final authority and responsibility for legal matters, long range planning, budget and physical needs. The Council would have final authority and responsibility for member program implementation within the bounds of the budget and the Long Range Plan.

Responsibilities

Legal, fiscal, physical and administrative issues remain the responsibility of the Board of Trustees. Member programming implementation is the responsibility of the Program Council. It has the following specific responsibilities:

1. Overseeing and coordinating all church based committees and activity groups which report to it (see the diagram)
2. Coordinating the calendar: Gather information from the Board of Trustees and committees to produce a three-year-span annual calendar, and resolve conflicts
3. Reviewing and approving or rejecting requests from outside co-sponsored groups (*Note: this responsibility might need to be shared with the Board or given to the Board entirely if it has budget or legal implications.*)
4. Developing programs: Nurture the development of new programs, identify needs, recruit chairs, help with charters, monitor and evaluate programs that fall within its province
5. Sanctioning new committees and dissolving ones that are not needed or inactive and fall within its province
6. Approving charters for committees that fall within its province
7. Maintaining accurate list of committee chairs and updating relevant brochures
8. Solving problems: Look into problems of overlapping committee functions and ineffective or inactive committees and conflict management for committees that fall within its province
9. Facilitating involvement of members
10. Determining how program budgets will be allocated among committees.
11. Maintaining church morale: this could include recognizing service, celebrations, community fairs, and so forth

12. Recommending policy to Board of Trustees
13. Training leaders and cultivating leadership

Next Steps

The Board of Trustees has approved this model of the Program Council as a two year experiment.

1. The Board will temporarily appoint a slate of candidates to meet and organize themselves. Hopefully this will happen by Spring.
2. At the May Congregational Meeting, the congregation will formally endorse the Program Council. (In subsequent years, as the congregation becomes familiar with the Program Council, the Nominating Committee will recommend a slate of candidates to be voted on at the May Congressional Meeting.)
3. The Council would be ready to go into full operation by the Fall of 2004.
4. The following year (or two), after the Council has some experience, a list of By-Law changes could be recommended and formally adopted by the congregation.

Frequently Asked Questions

Aren't we creating a two-head monster? What if the Board heads off in one direction and the Program Council in another? How will this dispute be resolved?

Rogue congregants and abuse of power cannot be stopped by any structure. But this structure creates no more problems than any other. If there were a disagreement between the Board and the Council, they would be expected to solve it collaboratively. If push came to shove and the contentious issue involved fiscal, physical, legal or church administrative concerns, the Board would have the final responsibility and authority. If the issue was primarily concerned with member program implementation, was within the budget and a reasonable interpretation of the Long Range Plan, the Council would have the ultimate authority and responsibility.

It looks like the Program Council is taking over the major functions of the church. What is left for the Board to do?

The Board would continue to do just about everything it has been doing over the last few years. In this model, the Program Council takes over only issues that currently are not being adequately addressed anywhere.

Why not have the Program Council report directly to the Board rather than work collaboratively with the Board?

Our tradition stresses congregational polity and horizontal distribution of power and individual responsibility. To say this differently, UUs tend to be hierarchy-phobic. The Board really does not have the time to oversee another large committee. This model requires the Council to take an active rather than passive role in collaborating with the Board. It also clearly empowers the Council to fulfill its responsibilities. And it makes sure that individual members and

committees are not too far removed from the Board: they are fewer layers to go through to get to “the top.”

Won't it be confusing for people to understand what issues to bring to the Board and what issues to bring to the Council?

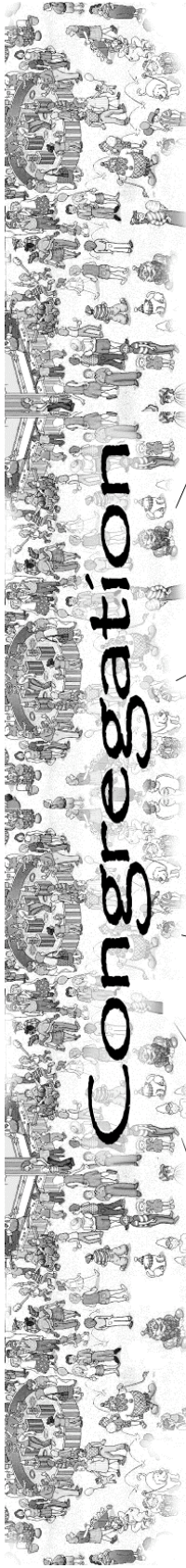
Perhaps. But currently, the issues that should be brought to the Council have nowhere to be brought at all. The Board is too busy with other matters to be concerned with program implementation. So issues like intergenerational programming, adult programming, social justice coordination across the congregation, committee recruitment fairs, etc. have no place to go for discussion. Perhaps we'll develop a mantra: “The Board: legal, administrative, fiscal, physical. The Council: program implementation.” That will answer 98% of the questions of where an issue should go.

What if the Council wants to hire a Member Coordinator and the Board disagrees?

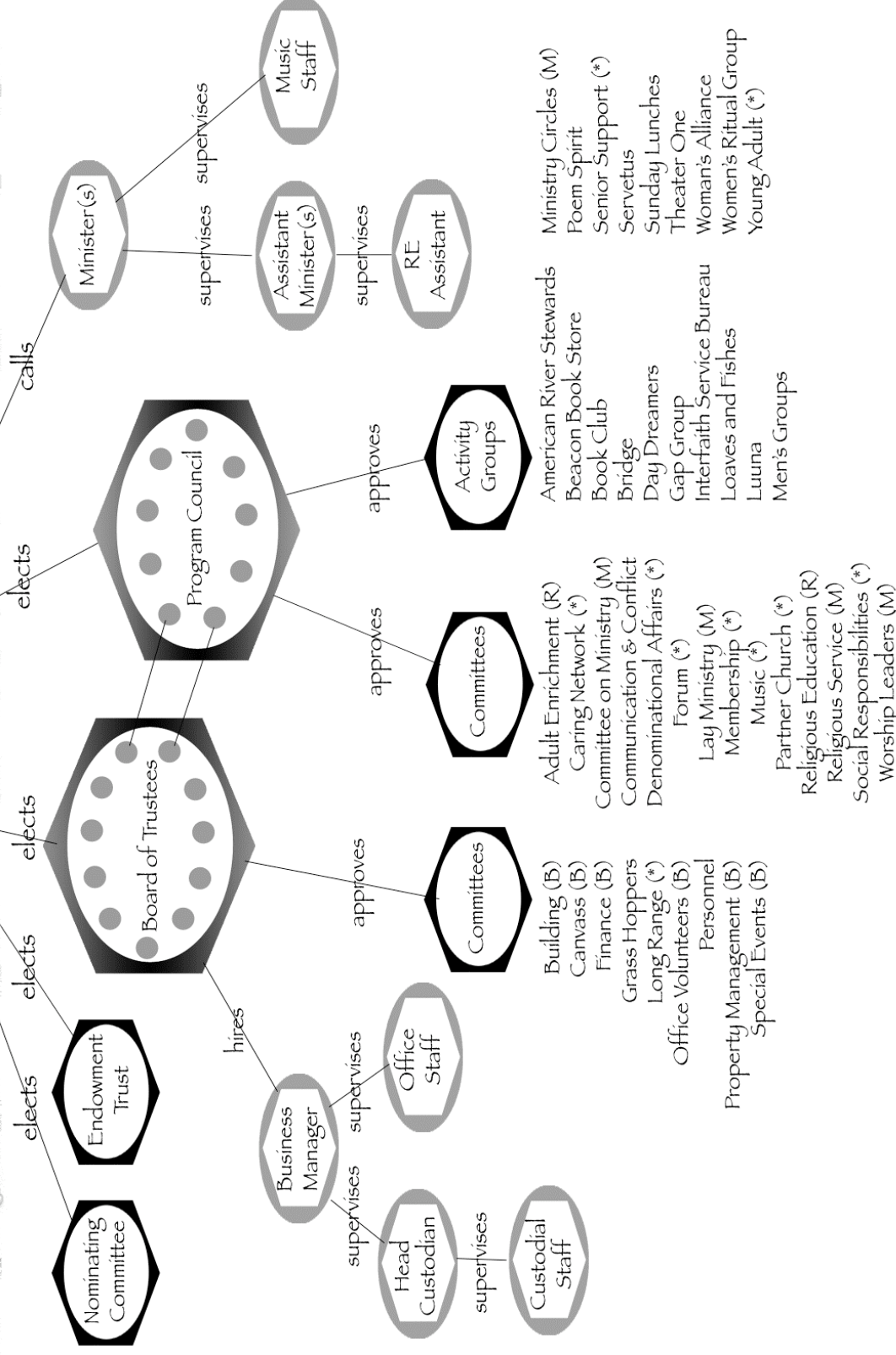
The Board wins. Hiring a new person has such overwhelming budget (fiscal) and personnel (administrative) concerns, that it clearly falls in their bailiwick. The Council can recommend such a position. But it is the Boards responsibility and authority to hire and fire such a person.

Organization Chart

The following chart shows the anticipated overall governance structure of UUSS. Not all the positions in the chart are filled or will be filled – it merely shows where various roles would fit. The chart also shows which committees and activity groups report to the Board and the Council based on whether their primary function is fiscal/physical/administrative (Board) or member programs and activities (Council). Parentheses after a committee or activity group indicate a special relationship to the Business Manager (B), Minister (M), Religious Education Professional (R) or future staff (*). Also note that two members of the Program Council are also members of the Board of Trustees.



Congregation



Note: Committees and activity groups with a special relation so a staff person are indicated by (B) for Business Manager, (R) for Religious Education Professional and (M) for Minister and (*) for those who need more and will get it with increase in staff.