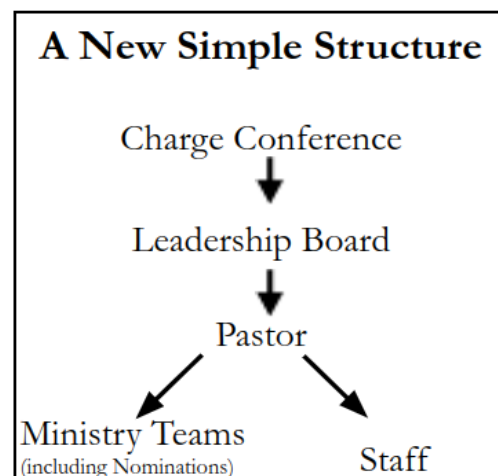


Beaumont FUMC Leadership Task Force - FAQ 1

The leadership task force is developing a proposal to streamline our church's administrative leadership. Following the guidance of *Mission Possible* by Kay Kotan, the group has been studying a model known as simplified accountability. The graphic below on the left is a typical example of the older structure (note: it's unclear where the pastor or staff fit in). On the right is the model being considered. By our Nov 19th town hall, a final proposal will be offered. Church members will vote on that proposal in early December and, if approved, the proposal will take effect January 1st, 2024.



1) Why should we make a switch? Is there any actual difference?

Streamlining enables us to have one consistent group of decision makers focused on the health and future of the whole church. In our current set up, each administrative committee is responsible for focusing on one particular area of church governance. That means, for instance, any significant change relies on multiple conversations across multiple committees, each focused on a different set of questions and priorities. Finance (based on available funds), SPRC (based on staff evaluations), and Trustees (based on plans for buildings use) may each come to a different decision when confronted by the same challenge. There is no simple or obvious way to resolve the conflicting decisions, which often results in a practical outcome for which no one is accountable or responsible.

The resolution being developed by the LTF will provide a pathway for the church to **refocus, realign, and reframe** all that we do around a clear mission and purpose. Having one administrative Leadership Board means having the same group of leaders with the same information asking the same questions. This set up makes it crystal clear who is responsible and accountable for the resulting decisions. It also challenges that group of leaders to make every decision in light of what is best for the overall church and in service of specific goals developed by the Board.

Reducing the number of standing committees and allowing most other positions to be filled or vacated throughout the year also creates more opportunities for church members to serve in roles that don't require long-term commitments or monthly meetings. Many of our members desire to serve, but would be far more comfortable committing to a month or even a semester's worth of work as opposed to the typical 3 year committee assignments we have now. There will also be a much greater emphasis on allowing people to sign up for specific tasks that are currently tied to committee membership, such as counting money after church (finance committee) or doing work around our buildings and grounds (trustees).

2) What recourse would the congregation have if the Leadership Board took action that the congregation did not support?

One of the benefits of the streamlined system is a much greater opportunity for transparency and accountability compared to our current system. Only Board members will have voice and vote in meetings, but all Board meetings will be open to the congregation (except when discussing staff and certain legal negotiations). Board members will be expected to make decisions with the health and future of our whole church in mind, and there will be no opportunity to pass the buck or deny responsibility for decisions that are made in full view of the congregation.

The primary recourse in response to unsupported decisions is an annual vote on Board membership at a Church Conference. Our nominations committee will submit a slate of nominees each year, but the ultimate composition of the Board is determined by a majority vote of the members present at the Church Conference. The Board will also have a mechanism in place to remove a Board member who does not meet their obligations and, in extreme circumstances, a special Church Conference could be called by our District Superintendent.

3) It sounds like complete chaos if there aren't centralized committees making decisions. Is it true that anyone can do what they want? Won't that cause more problems than it solves?

It is true that one of the goals of the “simplified accountability” structure laid out in [Mission Possible](#) is to empower more people in the church to do more without requiring specific approval of a centralized committee. That goal comes from approaching the task of committee leadership through “principles” more than “permission.” However, this approach does not by any means allow anyone to do anything they want. Most importantly, policies will still be in place for vital matters like 1) safe sanctuary, which ensures standard vetting and training procedures for anyone working with children; and 2) how finances are tracked and reported, which will still set standards for transparency and accountability and ultimately be overseen by the Leadership Board. Such vital policies won't immediately change at all; it will be up to future elected Board members to make any actual changes if they desire and vote to do so at one of the open Board meetings.

The clearest and simplest example of how principles function differently while still maintaining order is in relation to a “Fix it Team.” *Mission Possible* encourages a Leadership Board to name someone to lead a “Fix it Team,” which would have the authority to fix things around the property as needed. The group would have a set budget overall and a per ‘fix’ spending limit, but within those bounds be free to fix anything they find broken. The group would not have to attend a monthly meeting in order to fix a broken window or get approval to replace a broken light fixture. To do something major like add a room onto the fellowship hall or knock down a wall, they would need explicit permission.

The other effect of a principle focused Leadership Board is to invest more trust in the pastor and, by extension, the staff and other church leaders. The pastor would have a lot more flexibility to approve a request from a leader or ministry area without having to go back for specific permission from a monthly committee (assuming, of course, that the request falls within a previously set budget, doesn't directly alter another ministry area, furthers the church's mission, and complies with any other principles set forth by the Board). The Board can always reign in, reprimand, or even fire

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leaders who push too far. As much as possible, day to day decisions are entrusted to the day to day leaders of the church; monthly Board meetings stay focused on the big picture, church goals, and how to govern/oversee rather than do the work of the church.

4) What's wrong with our current system? It has served us well and I don't agree with the criticisms I've heard.

There is nothing inherently wrong or broken with our current system. The structure of leadership in our church is the same structure in our United Methodist Book of Discipline, which has remained mostly unchanged for at least the last 50+ years. During that time, the structure has benefited our church and denomination in a variety of ways. One of the greatest strengths of the system is to slow down change and decision making. Having multiple committees in charge of various aspects of decision making forces leaders to seek a broad base of support and ensure that complex decisions are understood and supported across various constituencies.

The primary challenge with our current system is that our church is not in the same position it was 50 years ago. In a time when the church was stable or even growing, slowing down ensured that the church didn't change too much too fast and, thereby, ultimately undercut its own success. Three main factors highlight the need for change now.

- a) Our budget challenges have been an open secret for a while, and require us to move swiftly toward greater stability. Thanks to your generosity and our endowment funds, we have been able to fund our annual budget and necessary repairs. However, what we are doing is not sustainable in the long run and we'll need to move quickly to raise income and/or find ways to cut expenses so that the funds we have can do more than help us keep the lights on. The simpler we can make the decision making process, the better we are positioned to make good and timely decisions.
- b) It is also no secret that our trends for the last decade or more are not good. We have seen significant declines in worship attendance, program attendance, and community outreach. We are in need of new programs and/or new ways of doing things if we are to stabilize and even reverse those trends. Streamlining leadership puts us in a much better position to think strategically about what choices, programs, or investments provide the best pathway toward growth.
- c) Between lasting demographic shifts in our area and the unpredictable changes brought about by Covid, it is evident that "the way things have always been done" isn't a viable pathway toward building on the legacy we've been given. We don't know the long term effects of these or any other trends and we aren't proposing specific programs or decisions in light of them. But it is clear that success in the long run will require responsiveness to the broader cultural and demographic changes happening nearby. Being more nimble and flexible is far more important in the coming season than it has been in the past.

5) Which people on current committees would become members of this proposed Leadership Board? Three from each committee? The current Chairs?

Our current nominations committee will submit a slate of nominations for a Church Conference vote. Should the Church Conference pass the resolution moving toward a streamlined structure, those nominations will be offered to fill the new structure. There would be 9 members of

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the Leadership Board and 6 members of the Gifts Team (aka nominations committee). These would be the only officially elected leaders of the church, with other defined tasks and types of leadership being available for anyone else who wishes to serve under the guidance of those leaders or the church staff.

The current nominations committee has full authority to nominate any church member to the new structure regardless of what, if any, previous position they held. That committee will work to solicit feedback and collect information between now and the church vote in order to make the best decision possible. The committee may factor in current leadership roles, but there will be no direct or guaranteed transition from the current structure to the streamlined structure.

6) It seems like the members of the congregation will have even less input on church decisions; is that true?

On one level, this is straightforwardly true. Elected members of the Leadership Board will have the authority and responsibility for making almost all administrative, policy, and oversight decisions on behalf of the whole congregation (per the Book of Discipline, there are a handful of major decisions that would require Charge or Church Conference approval - that would not change). With fewer committees, there would also be fewer people serving in a decision making capacity. Even if we take that fact at face value, the LTF still believes the benefits outweigh the loss.

However, at least three factors complicate the real picture. First; the Leadership Board will be focused on the level of governance and oversight rather than day to day or direct ministry decisions. The goal is to set policies, procedures, and goals in place that will free the whole church to do the hands on work of the church. The only kinds of authority and decision making held exclusively by the board are at that general, big picture level. Anyone wishing to start a bible study, run a mission event, reserve a room, help out with worship, set up a donation drive, or any other practical and concrete thing will have exactly the same ability to do so as they have now - it will only be the process of setting it up and/or the person/committee receiving the request that may change.

Second; big decisions in the current system are often complex and ambiguous. With multiple committees having input from multiple angles, it is not always clear what committee or leader is ultimately responsible for the outcome. When it isn't clear who ultimately decided or why, it is impossible for the congregation to fairly evaluate the decision after the fact or to advocate for a particular outcome ahead of time. Streamlining reduces the people with a vote, but open meetings and clear accountability means that members will know who to speak with if they desire input on an upcoming decision.

Third; it is very common in the current system that no one actually knows who should have voice and vote in a number of settings. There are contentious and major decisions in which this challenge plays a key role in most churches with the current structure. "Who rallied more people to come to a meeting" and "ambiguity in who has a vote" play a determinative role in outcomes. The possibility of those dynamics affecting decisions isn't inherently good or bad, but the dynamics reflect a more complicated picture of who actually has power and input in our current system. Again, clarity about who is actually making decisions provides better avenues for input, even if that input isn't an official vote.