

These frequently asked questions, or “FAQ,” will grow as members raise different issues. These are necessarily brief responses. More detailed information is available in other documents created by the Bylaws Task Force.

These documents include:

Full Task Force Report: We believe many questions are answered in our six-page Bylaws Task Force Report. It has a broad overview of what, how, and why we did what we did.

Explainers: We also have two two-page “explainers.” One is on the change in Council, the other is on the change of Boards to Standing Ministries.

Article-by-Article Detailed Description: This is a six-page document where the Task Force attempts to provide a detailed explanation of the revised Constitution and each of the eight articles in the new Bylaws.

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. **Won't reducing the size of the voting membership of Council from 17 to 10 make Council less representative of the membership?**
2. **How was it decided that 10 was the right size for Council?**
3. **Won't an even number of Council members lead to tie votes?**
4. **Why aren't Pastors voting members of Council?**
5. **Why are we merging Council and Stewardship?**
6. **Why are we changing the “Mission Spending Plan” to “budget?”**
7. **Why are so many details taken out of the Bylaws and put into Policy?**
8. **What are Resolutions? What are Memoranda of Understandings?**
9. **I can never find the Constitution/Bylaws/Policies, etc. Will this be made easier?**
10. **Why are we changing Boards to Standing Ministries?**
11. **What is the difference between a Standing Ministry and a Ministry Team?**

1. **Won't reducing the size of the voting membership of Council from 17 to 10 make Council less representative of the membership?**

We believe a smaller but more engaged Council with a lower annual turnover will not only be more effective than the current Council but also more representative. While this seems counterintuitive, representing any group requires both an understanding of the diversity of the group as well as the issues being discussed and voted on. While a larger size may provide a broader representation of the group, the same larger size makes active participation in the decision-making process by the many members harder and less likely. This reduces the number of voices actually represented.

2. **How was it decided that 10 was the right size for Council?**

Once we decided that we wanted a smaller group, we had to decide what the number would be. We started with the three moderators (current, past, elect). We then added in the current three at-large council members elected in a staggered one-a-year method. We decided to add an extra at-large member each year. This brought the total to nine (three moderators, six at-large). Further discussion decided it appropriate for the Treasurer to have a vote. That is where we reached 10.

3. Won't an even number of Council members lead to tie votes?

The vast majority of votes at Council are reached by consensus. However, if a decision can't receive six votes, it's probably not ready to move forward. A tie vote is a decision, it is a decision to reject the motion.

4. Why aren't Pastors voting members of Council?

This was an issue that was discussed at length. The Senior Pastor has been a voting member of Council for many decades. However, it was decided that it is better for both the membership and the pastors to have a clear delineation between our roles. Both will remain ex officio members without a vote.

This is another area reflecting how Plymouth has evolved from having few staff to an organization with a larger professional staff managed by the Senior Pastor.

Just like a city manager or a school superintendent, the chief executive in an organization often does not have a vote. It is somewhat similar to the split between the executive and the legislative bodies that we have in our government. In controversial decisions, it actually helps the pastors to not have to cast a vote. Even abstaining is a vote. This is particularly true in the odd situation in our current Bylaws where the Associate Pastor is a voting member of Council, but Council is the body that can terminate the Associate Pastor's employment.

5. Why are we merging Council and Stewardship?

This has a lot of thought and history behind it but the short version is that our current Constitution names Council members as the trustees with fiduciary responsibilities for our church but the Bylaws leave all of the fiduciary functions within Stewardship. While Council is nominally in control of the budget process, the work and the understanding of the revenue and expenses is almost entirely in Stewardship. We believe it is inappropriate for an organization to separate the responsibilities and the functions of its fiduciaries.

6. Why are we changing the "Mission Spending Plan" to "budget?"

Our budget was called a budget until sometime in the last 10 to 15 years. Changing it to Mission Spending Plan was to help people understand that our finances were a key foundation of our mission. However, Mission Spending Plan is not clear as to what it is for people new to the conversation. To make it even fuzzier, we frequently just call it "MSP" which no one knows what it is until they have been around it for a while. We believe calling the budget the budget is just simpler and clearer.

7. Why are so many details taken out of the Bylaws and put into Policy?

Bylaws are controlled by the membership; Policies are controlled by the Bylaws and Council. Bylaws should contain broad (but limited) authorizing language. Council is better placed to adapt details to changing circumstances, all still within the limits allowed by Bylaws. Everything is still subject to the will of the membership in a Called Congregational Meeting.

8. What are Resolutions? What are Memoranda of Understandings?

A big part of what we are trying to accomplish is more administrative than legislative. We have not done a very good job of collecting the documents we have passed either in Council or in Called Meetings.

They are in the minutes, but you need to know both that it was passed and when it was passed to find the language. We are creating a new Policy Book that will contain (codify) all policies. It will also be a document where we can collect resolutions we have passed such as the Open and Affirming Statement. Memoranda of Understandings are limited-time documents such the one that was adopted as our agreement on hosting a Winter Shelter a few years ago.

9. I can never find the Constitution/Bylaws/Policies, etc. Will this be made easier?

A part of our plan is using our website as an easily accessible depository of all our documents. This will include Council agendas and minutes as well as any governing documents.

10. Why are we changing Boards to Standing Ministries?

There is a two-page “Explainer” available on this issue. The short answer is that the name change is intended to reflect how the roles of the Boards have evolved over the years. Originally created as semi-independent entities that were run by members, most have evolved into a subset of Council following the lead of the staff person assigned to their Board. The change in name and structure will clarify lines of responsibilities.

11. What is the difference between a Standing Ministry and a Ministry Team?

There are currently seven Boards: Christian Education, Deacons, Fellowship, Membership, Mission & Service, Music & Fine Arts, and Stewardship. Stewardship will be blended with Council. The remaining six Boards will be changed to Standing Ministries. These are named in the accompanying Policy Book.

The Standing Ministries will continue unless Council decides at some point to make changes to reflect changes in the membership’s priorities. Each Standing Ministry will be headed by a staff person and have six members elected (two each year) by the Congregation at the Annual Meeting. They will continue doing the work they are currently done but the lines of responsibility are clearer. They will have more flexibility on when and how often they meet.

Ministry Teams will be “doing” teams that reflect the many different ways Plymouth members live their faith. They may be short-term groups for one-time events such as the winter shelter or on-going groups that have regular activities such as Family Promise.