



**PLYMOUTH BYLAWS  
TASK FORCE REPORT  
TO COUNCIL  
FEBRUARY 2023**

Scott Morgan, Rich Bireta, Erika Dvorske, Doug Eason, Larissa Long,  
Elinor Schroeder, Valerie Miller-Coleman, Liz Smith

## SURE, BYLAWS ARE BORING BUT...

“And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?”

Moses

Deuteronomy 4:8 NIV

“In my experience, the sacred and the mundane are close companions.”

Valerie Miller-Coleman

Message to the Congregation regarding Covid, March 16, 2020

# WHY SHOULD I CARE ABOUT BYLAWS AND POLICY?

- Most sane people don't.
- No one attends Plymouth because of our Bylaws and Policies.
- But Plymouth can do the amazing things it does because it has clear and functioning Bylaws and Policies.
- They are like your home's foundation and plumbing.
- When they're not right, it's hard to focus on the things that bring you joy.
- It's been 35 years since we have had a deep review. It's time.

## BYLAWS TASK FORCE HISTORY & APPROACH

- Discussions to review the Bylaws go back at least six years.
- Task Force created by Council in December 2021.
- Members of the Task Force:  
Scott Morgan, Chair, Rich Bireta, Erika Dvorske, Doug Eason, Larissa Long, Elinor Schroeder, Valerie Miller-Coleman, Liz Smith
- First monthly meeting in March 2022.
- Guiding principle from the Constitution:  
“The governing authority of the Church is in its members, who exercise the right of control in all its affairs....” (Article III. Polity)
- Determined how Plymouth operates now, reviewed our history to see how we got here, draft focused on reflecting how Plymouth has already evolved.
- Some changes may at first seem radical. But we believe all reflect how we have already evolved as a Congregation.

Constitution vs Bylaws vs Policies vs  
Resolutions vs Memoranda Of Understandings  
Oh my...

**Constitution**: A body of fundamental principles, passed by a two-thirds majority of the Congregation.

**Bylaws**: Rules established for running operations, passed by a simple majority of the Congregation.

**Policies**: Detailed rules passed by Council for implementing the Bylaws.

**Resolutions**: Statements of belief (e.g., Open & Affirming) passed by the Congregation or Council.

**Memoranda of Understandings**: One time agreements passed by Council for specific operations such as the Winter Shelter.

## COUNCIL'S ROLE

Current Constitution states only that “the work of Plymouth shall be conducted in accordance with Bylaws appended to this Constitution.”

The Bylaws state, “These Bylaws may be amended by majority vote at a Congregational Meeting ....”

Nothing in the Bylaws require Council action for the Congregation to consider changing Bylaws.

However, the Task Force believes Council should first review the draft and make a recommendation to the Congregation for its consideration.

Council will at the same time review the draft Policy Book for its approval (no congregation approval needed).

## POSSIBLE TIMELINE

All dates are a guess. Reality will determine the time needed. Could roll into the early fall.

**February:** Council is introduced to the process.

### **March:**

- Council members read the reports and the drafts.
- You ask questions, express concerns, make suggestions to the Task Force.
- Task Force members meet with Boards.
- First congregational meeting between services held to explain and receive feedback.
- At March Council meeting (3/28), begin reviewing Bylaws article-by-article.
- Council also reviews relevant Policies along with the Bylaws.

## POSSIBLE TIMELINE (CONT.)

All dates are a guess. Reality will determine the time needed. Could roll into the early fall

### April:

- Second congregational meeting between services held to explain and receive feedback.
- At April Council meeting (4/25), MAYBE Council votes to move Constitution and Bylaws along to Congregation.

### May:

- Called Congregational Meeting to consider adopting Constitution and Bylaws.
- Council passes Policy Book.



## SO WHAT CHANGES? CONSTITUTION

- The Constitution has the benefit of being short.
- The one semi-significant change proposed is specifically naming Council as the “governing body.”
- The Congregation remains the “governing authority.”
- The rest of the changes have more to do with style.

## SO WHAT CHANGES? BYLAWS

- Shorter, from 8300 to 5600 words.
- Lots of reorganization, style changes (looks longer).
- Significant areas include: (The “why” is in our report)
  - ✓ Blending Council and Stewardship into one governing body.
  - ✓ Reducing the size of Council from current 17 or 18 to 10 voting members.
  - ✓ Restructuring remaining boards to smaller Standing Ministries directed by staff.
  - ✓ Creating new, flexible ministry teams to enable members to live their faith.
  - ✓ Moving many details from Bylaws to Council-controlled Policies.



## NEXT STEPS

- You will receive the draft Constitution and Bylaws tonight.
- You will also receive a large amount of other documentation to provide more insight.
- We ask that you take 15 minutes to read our report and another 30 minutes to actually read the Bylaws over the next few weeks.
- Ask questions, make comments, offer changes before next meeting.
- Please don't give up all hope.