

Addressing concerns raised regarding Council and Standing Ministries

1. Removing Board Representatives from Council
2. Renaming Boards as Standing Ministries
3. Original proposal had “directed by staff”
4. Reducing the size of Standing Ministries

This is the Bylaws Task Force’s effort to address concerns raised by members regarding Council and Standing Ministries. A number of the concerns were at least partially the result of the membership not having access to the draft Policy Book that contains many of the details people were seeking. There are reasons why the draft Policy Book was delayed but no real excuse. It is now available.

1. Removing Board Representatives from Council

Our goal is to create a focused governing body combining fiduciary duties and responsibilities with reduced annual turnover.

The current structure is a legacy of when Council was created as a large “coordinating” group. It was originally (as the Prudential Board) created as a “coordinating” group. In 1968, “evaluating” was added. In 1988, “planning” was added.

It has slowly evolved toward being a “governing” body, yet its makeup remains largely as it was in the 1920s when the church membership, in regular called congregational “business” meetings, was the acting governing body. Our membership no longer has the time or interest in having frequent business meetings. Instead for decades, we have been delegating much of daily operations to staff and the evolving Council.

In 1988, the membership amended the Constitution to add, “The Church Council functions as trustees of the Church.” Previously the Board of Trustees had been the trustees of Plymouth. The church membership made the change in the Constitution and changed the name of the Board of Trustees to the Board of Stewardship. The “new” Stewardship was still charged with the same fiduciary duties that the Trustees had been doing.

We are attempting to reunite the fiduciary duties and responsibilities into one body. We are also attempting to clarify Council’s role as a “governing” body and not just a “coordinating” body.

Merging Stewardship and Council into one group requires Council members to have the time to develop an understanding of their role and to actively participate in decisions. All other current boards, including Stewardship, have members elected to three-year terms.

Council, in its design as a “coordinating” body has nearly half its members only serving one-year terms. They have these roles, not because they agree to run for Council but because two years earlier they had agreed to serve on a Board. They then found themselves as chair of that Board which meant they had a one-year term on Council. Council needs members who are as focused on overall governance as the current Boards have been on their specific area.

The “coordinating” function of Council needs to be addressed separately from Council’s governing function. For the “coordinating” function, we are proposing requiring Council to hold at least three coordinating sessions each year with all Standing Ministry chairs as well as other appropriate church groups.

2. Renaming Boards as Standing Ministries

The name change is to help clarify that the boards are not individual governing bodies but rather planning and coordinating bodies for their particular area. Members of the Standing Ministries will still be elected directly by the church membership. But the Standing Ministries will be created through policy controlled by Council instead of in the Bylaws that can only be changed through a Called Congregational Meeting.

We believe that the proposed changes will reflect how the remaining Standing Ministries largely already operate. The Standing Ministries will still make decisions regarding budgeted funds and restricted funds within their area. The difference would be that expenditures of more than a \$1,000 would be reviewed by Council unless they are a budgeted item.

3. Original proposal had “directed by staff”

Our interviews, surveys, and personal experience found that on most Boards, the Chair and the assigned staff would work closely together in developing agendas and plans. These would be discussed by the full Board membership with decisions usually being reached by consensus.

It was not our intention that “directed by staff” would mean “dictated” by staff. Rather it was intended that the assigned staff would act as more of a team leader. Even that is probably unnecessary as the current system of coordinating between the assigned staff and the chair works well. We have proposed changing Standing Ministries “shall be directed by staff” to “shall collaborate with staff.”

4. Reducing the size of Standing Ministries

Our proposal would reduce the size of the elected Standing Ministries from nine or twelve to six. The reason for this is the changing way new Plymouth members want to participate in the life of Plymouth. Fewer are interested in agreeing to three years of monthly meetings to discuss things. Many are looking for opportunities with a shorter timeline that are more focused on “doing” rather than “meeting.”

The reduction in membership of Standing Ministries is partially in recognition of changing volunteer habits and partially designed to encourage participation in the “work force” side of existing Boards. This is also an equity issue. We can get a more diverse group of members actively engaged if we are flexible.

To encourage the “work force,” we are proposing creating what we call Ministry Teams. These will handle many of the “doing” functions of the current Boards leaving the Standing Ministries to handle the coordinating and planning functions.

The current Boards have always been a mashup of planning and “work force.” The proposal recognizes the interest of many to be part of the “work force” for all things that Plymouth does in living our faith.

These Ministry Teams may be under the direction of a Standing Ministry or Council or staff. They are intentionally designed to be flexible and changeable. By taking the details out of Bylaws and putting them into Council-controlled Policies, changes can be made as the interests of the church change.

Even the number of six elected members is adjustable. If a Standing Ministry finds that it needs fewer or more elected members, Council can make that change.