

Explainer 1: Governance and the Structure of Council

The Congregation is, and will remain, the governing authority at Plymouth.

Council's current description in Bylaws: "The Council ... shall be the planning, evaluating and coordinating body of the Church."

The Constitution currently, and will continue to, state that the "governing authority" of the church is the membership. We are proposing adding language in the paragraph that follows governing authority to clarify that Council is the "governing body" subject to the will of the membership.

We are also proposing changing the Bylaws' description to: "Council is the governing, planning, evaluating, and coordinating body of Plymouth."

The difference between governing "authority" and "body" is the difference between the electorate and a city commission. However, at Plymouth, the members (the electorate) also retain the right of control in all affairs when meeting in a Called Congregational Meeting. All actions of Council are subject to the will of the membership. This does not change.

Other changes include the size and membership of Council and the role of the current Boards, particularly Stewardship.

A. The Evolution of Council

Council was known as the Prudential Board until 1961. It was always a large "coordinating" and "planning" body made up of members of the Deacons, Trustees, Church School, and other organizations. Decisions were made by the smaller boards and then coordinated in the larger body.

The Council was also named the "governing body" in 1961, but it and the boards retained their same functions. The "governing" language was dropped in 1968 revisions but the duties stayed the same.

Council members were named the trustees of the church in 1988. While not named the governing body, the actions of all boards were subject to approval by Council. Council retained the membership of a larger coordinating body. Most members view the Council as our governing body, except when the membership in a Called Congregational Meeting is acting as the governing body.

B. Council Size and Membership

Council currently has 17 to 18 voting members (the Moderator only votes in a tie). That number consists of the Moderator-Elect, Immediate Past Moderator, Treasurer, Clerk, three at-large members, Senior Pastor, Associate Pastor, seven board chairs, and the chair of Endowment. The chair of Personnel Committee and the Historian serve as Ex Officio members without vote.

We are proposing 10 voting members: the three moderators, six at-large members, and the Treasurer. The Senior Pastor and Associate Pastor would serve as Ex Officio members without vote. The Clerk would attend to record the minutes of the meeting.

Turnover in the members of Council each year is currently at least 50% with many members serving one year. The annual turnover in the proposed Council would be 33% at the most with all members serving at least three years. High turnover makes it difficult to establish the institutional knowledge necessary for a functioning governing body.

Explainer 1: Governance and the Structure of Council (cont.)

The ideal size of a board differs among organizations, but most city and county commissions and school boards are somewhere from three to seven. Legislatures are different creatures that work with an extensive executive branch. Many non-profits have larger boards, but these are often more vehicles for fundraising than governing bodies.

Boards that are too large often end up having a number of members who do not actively participate and who are not prepared for meetings. They know a smaller group will have already decided most things, and they view their role as secondary. This is particularly true when many members serve only one year and did not know they were going to be on Council when they agreed to serve on another board.

We believe having Council made up of people elected knowing they will serve on Council and with each serving at least three years will produce a more engaged and prepared governing body designed to oversee the implementation of church goals.

C. Blending Stewardship and Council

Our Constitution states “The Church Council functions as the trustees of the Church....” Being the “trustee” of an organization brings fiduciary responsibilities. Until 1988, the trustees were the Board of Trustees.

The Trustees were renamed Stewardship and retained all the functions and duties as when they were called the Trustees. But Council was now named the trustees. This had the effect of splitting the fiduciary responsibilities of the trustees from the functions of the trustees.

We are proposing blending the functions of Stewardship and Council into one true governing body combining the responsibilities and functions of true trustees. To set meaningful goals and oversee progress toward those goals, the governing body needs to have a meaningful understanding of the financial structure and situation of the church.

Council will be assisted in these fiduciary responsibilities by a new Finance Committee under Council chaired by the Treasurer and made up of a few people who are comfortable with financial statements.

D. Senior Pastor and Associate Pastor

Changing the pastors from voting to non-voting members was a decision based on the differing roles of staff and a governing body. Just as a city or county manager or a school superintendent are not voting members of the various elected bodies, we decided that our staff plays a very important role but not a governing one. Their influence will continue to be significant, but decisions will be made by the elected representatives of the Congregation. Council will establish goals and then oversee the strategies developed by staff to implement those goals.