

Additional Study Materials

Brief Overview and History of Governance Work

Prepared for Delegates to the 2009 Synod
Cabinet of the Council of Conference Ministers – July 2009

(to be used in conjunction with attached Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ))

Governance: What is Being Proposed

The work of the Governance Follow-Up Teams (GFT I and II) grew out of feedback from the 2000 Restructure Evaluation Oversight Committee of the Executive Council; and the experience of the Collegium since 2000. The concept of Single Governance for the national setting would bring together one common board rather than five. Following study and reflection, proposals on how to do this with diverse representation, protections for historic endowments, and principles of good governance were brought forward to the Covenanted Ministry Boards and Executive Council by the Governance Follow-up Teams (GFT I and II).

At its core, the GFT (both teams) proposed:

- creating a single United Church Board accountable to the General Synod
- requiring that fifty percent or more of the Board shall be persons of color; and fifty percent or more ($\geq 50\%$) shall be women – adopted in support of the Justice & Witness Ministries Board composition standard
- retaining the Collegium model of leadership
- building on the earlier restructure that streamlined national setting governance

The resolutions now before General Synod 2009 came as a result of a vote by one of the Covenanted Ministry Boards in March 2009 not to move forward with an action to make a presentation to Synod to change the composition of its board; and it was not possible to move the single governance proposal and proposed constitutional changes forward without this affirmative vote. Thereafter, resolutions have come forward from conferences and associations about the issue of single governance.

Why have Single Governance?

Common governance would allow for discernment and strategic decision-making in a single body rather than five distinct boards which is the current reality. Moving from the current, multiple board model to a single governance model would allow the national setting to be more responsive to local churches and settings of the church in a changing world.

A Brief History of Governance Work

2000, the current structure of the national setting of the United Church of Christ took effect in July. Its adoption required that the new structure would be evaluated a few years into its life.

2003, the Restructure Evaluation Oversight Committee of the Executive Council conducted wide-ranging interviews and surveys throughout the church and drafted a report on the governance structure.

2004, the Report of the Restructure Evaluation Oversight Committee was presented to the Executive Council, fall meeting. **Three chief concerns were identified:** *a)* the difficulty of engaging in strategic planning across the Covenanted Ministries, *b)* ambiguity about relationships among – and lines of accountability between – the Executive Council and the Covenanted Ministry boards, and *c)* the need for clarity and strengthening of the distinctive role of the General Minister and President.

Spring 2006, during Joint Board meetings in Hartford, Connecticut, and at the Executive Council meeting following, the Collegium presented a report on the above concerns and others.

Executive Council charged the Collegium to develop recommendations for a significant streamlining and/or reshaping of management and governance structures for the national setting in order to enhance capacity for strategic decision making, improve effectiveness, and achieve cost savings.

Fall 2006, the Collegium gave a report addressed to the Executive Council and the Covenanted Ministry Boards recommending the United Church of Christ “bring the current responsibilities and authority of the Boards of the four Covenanted Ministries and the Executive Council into a single ‘Governing Body.’ ” It also recommended a smaller, streamlined management and program structure and the continuance of a collegial model of leadership with a smaller Collegium. The report suggested a timeline anticipating the need in January 2007 for a “meeting of a ‘conference committee’ of Executive Council and Board leadership to reconcile comments, concerns and recommendations” that would likely emerge from their separate fall 2006 meetings. The boards had a mixed reaction to the report; and the need for such a “conference committee” turned out to be even greater than anticipated in view of the divergent actions taken in October and November 2006 by the Executive Council and the four Covenanted Ministry Boards. Some opposed, some did not, which led to a meeting to try and reconcile differences.

Jan 2007, “Conversation on Structure” was held in Cleveland. Participants agreed that the governance work should be continued by a smaller group and entrusted its appointment to the Collegium, the chairs of the Boards and of the Executive Council, and a Conference Minister. Members of the Governance Follow-up Team (GFT I), once identified, were to be asked to make themselves available until the completion of the team’s work – possibly as late as 2008 or even 2009. The GFT I Composition was discerned: the Collegium of Officers, two representatives from each Covenanted Ministry Board, two representatives from the Executive Council, two representatives of the Council of Conference Ministers, one representative each from the Associated and Affiliated Ministries, and members as needed to ensure representation of Historically Underrepresented Groups. While these additional members came from the governing boards, the persons selected as additional persons to include voices of Historically Underrepresented Groups (HUGS) were persons serving on those Boards that were named by the HUGS. These were appointed by the Collegium to serve in an “at large” fashion. National Special Council Donald Clark was invited to attend as a resource person.

Feb 2007- Apr 2008, the GFT I met, engaged in reflection, created writing teams, and presented a proposal for single governance that valued and responded to each of the raised concerns of the Covenanted Ministry Boards and Executive Council. The April 2008 Joint Boards and Executive Council experienced an emerging consensus about the importance of a single board structure for the leadership

of the national setting, although not unanimity. There was, however, also significant unhappiness among some COREM bodies as they stated they did not name the persons serving on GFT I. Even though those persons were representatives of COREM bodies on the boards, some COREM bodies took exception as they had not directly appointed them to serve on GFT I. Questions also remained about the size and composition of the proposed new board, and the GFT II was authorized to engage in broad testing of the single governance model and conversations to respond to concerns. The COREM representatives on GFT II were specifically named by each COREM body following a special meeting of the Historically Underrepresented Groups (HUGS) later that summer.

Oct-Nov 2008, the GFT II brought a revised proposal for single governance to fall Board and Executive Council meetings. Each of the Covenanted Ministry Boards and the Executive Council affirmed not only the concept of single governance, but affirmed the GFT II proposal itself. Constitution and Bylaw changes were requested for review by the Executive Council at its Spring 2009 meeting.

Spring 2009, the Boards of Directors of Local Church (LCM), Wider Church (WCM) and Justice and Witness Ministries (JWM) considered an action to bring changes to their board structures before the General Synod for review in Grand Rapids, a requirement to move forward. The Executive Council and Office of General Ministries (OGM) acted in October 2008 to affirm the report. No additional vote was required by OGM. The additional action required of the Executive Council was to approve proposed changes to the constitution and bylaws and forward them to the General Synod. Before this could happen, however, the LCM, JWM, and WCM boards were required to pass an action authorizing a presentation to Synod to change the composition of their boards. LCM and WCM passed the required action, JWM did not. It was not possible to move the proposal and the proposed constitutional changes forward without this affirmative vote. Since the Spring Boards, a number of resolutions about the concept of single governance have been submitted.

Summer 2009, the General Synod affirms the concept of unified governance “Toward Unified Governance for the National Setting of the United Church of Christ.”

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Single Governance of the National Setting –Prepared for 2009 Synod Delegates – Cabinet of the Council of Conference Ministers

(to be used in conjunction with the brief overview and history of governance work)

Can you tell me briefly what is the current governance of the national setting?

Since the 17th century, our ecclesiastical structures and mission societies have evolved many times. Our current structure, adopted in 2000, includes four separately incorporated Covenanted Ministry Boards (LCM, JWM, WCM, OGM) and an Executive Council.

Why haven't I heard about this single governance proposal before?

Both United Church News and www.ucc.org have provided ongoing, detailed coverage of every stage of these conversations since our current structure took effect in 2000.

What was the diversity of the Governance Followup Team (GFT) as the recommending body? Were the COREM (Council of Racial Ethnic Ministries) and HUGS (Historically Underrepresented Groups) represented on the Governance Followup Team that developed the single governance proposal? The GFT included, among others, a representative from all the established racial ethnic groups (United Black Christians [UBC]; Ministers for Racial, Social, and Economic Justice [MRSEJ]; Pacific Islander and Asian American Ministries [PAAM]; Council for American Indian Ministry [CAIM]; and Council for Hispanic Ministries [CHM]) as well as a representative from the UCC Disabilities Ministries (UCCDM), the Council for Youth and Young Adult Ministries (CYAM) and the United Church of Christ Coalition for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Concerns (Coalition). In addition to these representatives, the GFT also included several additional people of color. See the brief history for more detail on GFT composition.

Were other governance models considered? Why the "single governance" model?

In May 2007 the GFT considered a total of seven (7) possible restructure models. From this broad discussion, the GFT identified what it considered to be the key elements of whatever new model would be proposed. In September 2007 the GFT reviewed and modified the proposal presented by its drafting group. A year later, the GFT II further modified the proposal before it was affirmed by all four Covenanted Ministry Boards in October-November 2008.

If we centralize power by adopting a single governance board, won't we lose the current "checks and balances" provided by our current four boards? The proposed single governance model will require that Board members whose passion is concentrated in one or another covenanted ministry work together with other Board members whose passion may lie elsewhere. By requiring each to have to convince the other as they work through alternative strategies to advance the mission of the UCC, they will both "check and balance" one another and communicate with one another. Also note that the various "settings" will provide continuing checks and balances. We retain a collegium of officers who are peers, the General Synod retains and perhaps even strengthens its role, Conferences retain their "funding" role, and Conference Ministers and leaders from other settings continue to be in regular and

covenantal dialogue offering advice and counsel over program initiatives. Finally, the General Synod would be directly related to the Board and would be a key place of accountability for the Board.

If this is all about saving money, don't we run the risk of putting money in front of mission?

While a single governance model would save some money (instead of 310 members of four boards and one council there would be 84-87 members of a single board) this proposal is actually all about mission. A single board would be fully conscious of the whole of the national setting as it generates strategic vision, oversees comprehensive policy, and stewards the historic and new financial resources of the church. A single governing board can deal more effectively with financial challenge by making thoughtful decisions about how to use dollars in a time of diminishing support. It can also cast a more compelling common vision and "case for support" for fund raising in a new and evolving philanthropic environment. Once our national church leaders are less burdened with multiple, cumbersome governing bodies, they will focus their considerable gifts on engaging emerging mission opportunities that will draw new disciples and resources to the UCC.

Will adopting a single governance model make it more likely that we might be careless about the bequests made over the past decades and expose ourselves to law suits?

Legal counsel for each of the four current Covenanted Ministry Boards were involved in drafting the proposed by law changes that would have come before Synod in 2009. They were satisfied that the intent of the donors of current funds would be honored with respect to both designated and undesignated funds.

I understand that concern about racial/ethnic representation was a major reason for the vote to stop the single governance proposal. What were the provisions for racial/ethnic representation in the single governance proposal?

The proposal stated that of the 68 persons elected through the General Synod nominating process, 50% shall be people of color, 50% shall be women, and 20% shall be under the age of 30. The proposal affirmed that each of the five racial ethnic ministries (as named above) shall nominate two persons as their representatives; which will leave 25 additional positions to be filled by persons of color from conferences and other groups. In addition, if the board was still not sufficiently representative of the full diversity of the church, the proposal allowed for the addition of up to three (3) at-large representatives to be added each biennium.

Did the proposal itself weaken the participation of the COREM (Council of Racial Ethnic Ministries) and HUGS (Historically Underrepresented Groups) groups in the governance of the church?

In the context of the total number of people involved in governance decreasing from 310 to 84-87, the representation of COREM and HUGS groups will also diminish in real numbers, as will the representation of persons named by conferences. However, the overall proportion of people of color will increase.

Would adopting a single governance model such as the GFT proposed violate our polity?

The process included two consultations with respected history, theology and polity teachers of the church, along with many other individuals with significant national leadership experience. These consultations supported the belief that a single governance model would be consistent with our polity.

Will important mission mandates and values be lost if we adopt a single governance proposal?

A single governance structure would, for the first time, assemble all the mission mandates and values – along with the enormous new mission opportunities – before a single, accountable group of church leaders who would be in a position to assure that the resources of the church are strategically aligned to advance the mission of the church in the most effective way. It would also allow, for the first time, the capacity to respond nimbly when a new opportunity like the Stillspeaking Ministry is proposed.

Won't a single governance model compromise the autonomy which is so valued in the UCC?

While the current governance structure upholds the autonomy of each of the four Covenanted Ministry Boards, it inhibits and impedes our capacity to quickly and eagerly claim new mission opportunities; it requires both staff and volunteers to expend an enormous amount of time in meetings instead of mission; it complicates rather than facilitates strategic visioning and planning. A single governance model creates a Board which can be held accountable for its strategic use of the resources of the national setting to further the mission of the church. Furthermore, just as the prophetic voice of a single synod is heard every two years, one could imagine the prophetic voice of a single Board speaking to (but not for) the churches with greater frequency.