

Policy on Committee Governance

First Universalist Church of Rochester, NY

Structure

The current bylaws for the church call for a structure with four standing committees—House, Finance, Membership, and Personnel—plus the Nominating Committee, which is separately specified. Additional ad hoc committees are to be established by the Board. By authority of this *Policy on Committee Governance*, these will include Worship, Religious Education, Music, Social Justice, and Communications.

The Board may create (or dissolve) additional ad hoc committees from time to time, each with its own mandate. Together, the standing and ad hoc committees are known as “formal committees.” At any given time, there are likely to be other informal committees that report to the formal ones. These are not the direct responsibility of the Board.

At its first meeting after the Annual Meeting each year, the Board will select, from its own members, a contact person for each formal committee. Contact duties are expected to be spread more or less evenly across the Board, with each Board member carrying his or her fair share. Each Board member is expected to remain in regular contact with his or her contact committees, to bring to the Board any issues from those committees that require Board attention, and to take back to the committees any tasks that have been delegated by the Board.

Chairs of formal committees are appointed by the Board, drawing on recommendations from the Nominating Committee. In making these recommendations, the Nominating Committee will in turn work closely with the relevant committees whenever possible.

Philosophy

Brief statements of responsibility for the standing committees appear in the Bylaws. Similar statements for the ad hoc committees appear below. Each formal committee has a mandate from the Board to enhance the life and welfare of the Society, to the best of its ability, in the areas of concern outlined by these statements. It is the policy of the Board to defer to committees as much as possible (consistent with the Board’s own responsibilities), and to empower those committees to pursue their mandates with passion and creativity.

When a new matter is brought before the Board, the first response must always be to ask whether the matter can reasonably be referred to one of the formal committees or to staff for resolution. It is understood that not all decisions will meet with the approval of all Board members, or indeed of all other congregants. Board members covenant to assume, absent compelling evidence to the contrary, that everyone is proceeding with the best of intentions and deserves to be treated with kindness and respect. The Board further recognizes that “second guessing” of committee decisions or staff decisions—by the Board or others—is harmful to the Society’s social fabric; the Board resolves to interfere in committee activities only when some larger good outweighs the potential harm.

Statements of Responsibility

- The WORSHIP Committee works with the Minister to ensure the highest possible quality of worship. Among other things, the committee coordinates ushers and chalice lighters, lay participation in services, and speakers for Sundays when the Minister is out of the pulpit.
- The RELIGIOUS EDUCATION Committee works with the Director of Religious Education to promote life-long learning within the congregation. In the event of a vacancy in the DRE position, the committee works with the Minister and the Personnel Committee to recommend a new Director to the Board, as outlined in other policy documents.
- The MUSIC Committee works with the Music Director and the Minister to enhance the life of the Society—both in worship and elsewhere—with diverse, accessible, and outstanding musical experience. In the event of a vacancy in the Music Director position, the committee works with the Minister and the Personnel Committee to recommend a new Director to the Board, as outlined in other policy documents.
- The SOCIAL JUSTICE Committee coordinates and promotes the Society’s volunteer action in the wider community. This includes both service activities and, within limits established by the Board, advocacy in the cause of social justice.
- The COMMUNICATIONS Committee works to improve both the Society’s internal communications and the effectiveness with which the Society presents itself to the larger world. Among other things, the committee manages the newsletter, bulletin boards, web site and other online forums; coordinates advertising and press releases; and organizes and archives congregational records.
- The Committee on MINISTRY works with the (settled) Minister to monitor and enhance our level of caring for one another. It seeks to identify and address unhealthy situations before they turn into problems, and to promote right relations in all aspects of church life.