

# Change your Bylaws and Do it NOW!

By Pastor Chris

There are lots of reasons to change your bylaws, many of which I will outline for your shortly, but I think the biggest and most compelling reason is that most of the structures our bylaws were built on the church of the 1950's and while many churches have revised the bylaws in recent years they have only admened and structure and way of thinking that is ill equipped to handle the complexity of ministry in the twenty-first century. The premises our structures were built around have shifted and changed and we need to adapt if we are going to survive.

I wish I could give the one model that will work for you, the one model that will transform your church from maintenance to ministry, but I can't. I can share with you some important questions and things to think about. I can tell you what has worked and what has failed. What works here may not work there, it's up to you to sort out.. **Additionally I make no legal claims about this work, I am not a lawyer nor can I give legal advice.**

Most churches begin to recognize the bylaws and structures aren't working because of simple math. The bylaws say they need 75 to 100 people to all the positions but the only have 65 active folks and less than that on a Sunday Morning. So rather than adapt we move into an unhealthy model of asking the smaller number to fill multiple rolls, to pick up a few extra hats. Or some churches go back and widdle down the number of people needed on each board and each committee, and while this seems to be wise, it fails to embrace the gift we are being presented with.

There number one resource we have as a church is our people. These are people who are hungry to learn how to be disciples and be engaged in the God is calling us to. Bylaws ought to empower us to do the work and mission of the church but more times than not our governance does not allow our active membership e time away from responsibilities, and does not allow them to be rested and at their most creative. It leads to poor attendance at meetings, a spiritual longing, and an unwillingness to volunteer for new endeavors, yet again winnowing down the number of people who are able to do the work of the church.

I believe the church of the 21st century needs leadership models that empower individuals, that allow for flexibility and adaptation. We need a model that allows us to quickly grab opportunities and chart new courses. We need a model that lets members quickly join the work of the church in meaningful and engaging ways. It is my belief from both study and experience that this is found in team approach. In the following pages I will outline a model that I believe begins to speak to our needs. A model that will help us to be better stewards of the time and talents of our members and help us become the church of the 21st century.

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## Why the Team Model? What are Teams?

*Being the Church is not something we witness, just like worship isn't something we sit through; being the church calls us into action. 1st Corinthians chapter 12 tells us that “ **Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.**” it is within the context of teams that ALL members of the community receive the opportunity to put these gifts into God's service. It is one way for the community to be the Body of Christ.*

## How to Teams work?

Ministry Teams are the backbone of the congregation. Our goal is to have each active member of our congregation involved in at least one team per year, remembering that some teams are long term projects and some are short term projects. Teams provide an opportunity for prayer and reflection and to do the work God is calling us to do. Ministry Teams recognize that they have no direct authority yet are empowered to do the work of the church, and as such must discern carefully and wisely which matter they should carry out on their own and which matter they should. Ministry Teams can be formed either by direct invitation of a Minister or Pastor, or can be formed around a common interest however all teams need to be in relationship with one of the Ministry Team Leaders. Ministry Teams do not need official minutes but need to use all the tools necessary to stay focused and on track.

- Ministry Teams will be formed and reformed on a regular basis.
- Ministry Teams that exist to complete a goal, and then dissolve upon completion
- Ministry Teams will bear responsibility for both long term and short term tasks.
- Ministry Teams can be made up of both Members and Nonmembers

## Ministry Team Meetings:

Teams are asked to meet for no more than 1 hour, they may choose the frequency of their meetings.

Ministry Team Meeting should begin with a check in Link and Downloads

774-318-6006

PC@PastorChris.Faith

Business cards available on the table and the sharing of any prayer requests followed by prayer. They should review the Bible Study or devotion provided by Pastor and /or The Minister of Faith Formation and /or team member. The Ministry team should review the goal and purpose for the meeting followed by discussion of obstacles and opportunities around previous actions items. New Actions items assigned to individuals with completion dates.

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**Sample Motion:**

I (**Your-Name**) move that we suspend for two years, the bylaws that define church organization except those needed for legal standing as a nonprofit organization. So that we might move into a team model of organization that reflects greater stewardship of the time and talents of our membership. I move that below mentioned Ministry Team Leaders be empowered and recognized with the legal authority as Trustees to do the work of Groveland Congregational Church.

For Clarity I suggest suspending; Article 9, Article 10, and Article 11, of the Congregational Church United Church of Christ bylaws adopted September 1960 for a period of two years.

Further, I move that we elect the following individuals to serve a 2 year term as our initial Ministry Team Leaders.

<b>Minister of Stewardship</b>	“ Name of Person ”
<b>Minister of Worship</b>	“ Name of Person ”
<b>Minister of Faith Formation</b>	“ Name of Person ”
<b>Minister of Outreach</b>	“ Name of Person ”
<b>Minister of Hospitality</b>	“ Name of Person ”

Further I move that this motion could be extended for a 1 year period if needed to finalize our new model of ministry into bylaws to be adopted at an duly called annual meeting of this congregation.

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## Who are our Ministers?

*"All members of the Body of Christ are called to ministry through their covenant of Baptism. God calls all of us to follow Jesus Christ and proclaim the Gospel in our lives. **We are all called by Baptism to minister, or serve, others in Christ's name.** In that sense, all members of the church are called to be ministers. The UCC Constitution affirms that "the United Church of Christ recognizes that God calls the whole Church and every member to participate in and extend the ministry of Jesus Christ by witnessing to the Gospel in church and society. The United Church of Christ seeks to undergird the ministry of its members by nurturing faith, calling forth gifts, and equipping members for Christian service." www.ucc.org*

(1) Each Minister will bear direct responsibility to the congregation and to individual teams that support the work and ministry of Groveland Congregational Church. Our Ministers will serve a two year term. One year is spent learning the role, the second is spent empowering and preparing the next Minister. Those first elected to the position will spend one year creating their roles, and the following year mentoring someone to replace them, but as they step down both a Minister and Shepherd will step into place so that going forward there is a consistent duality. Our Ministers and Shepherds will be authorized both by a vote at annual meeting and **Service of commissioning** during a service of worship. This will occur every two years or as needed.

(2) Our Ministers, Shepherds and the Pastor will meet at least monthly to direct the Ministries of the church and to discern God's call, spending little to no time reviewing the work of teams unless there is a reason to do so. **Teams are entrusted to do the work of the church and to ask for help when needed.** Our Ministry Team Leaders' meetings should follow the format of Ministry Team Meetings outlined below. Official meetings minutes should be taken and distributed openly, all meetings should be open to anyone in the community. There may be times when Closed Session are needed to deliberate in private before public action is taken.

(3) Our Ministers, Shepherds and our Pastor will take a **yearly visioning retreat for prayer, reflection, and listening to God.** During this time our Ministers will prayerfully consider whom God may be calling into church leadership. This will be a time of prayer and discernment.

(4) Minister will service legally as our trustees

(5) There will be at least 5 ministers, titles and numbers may vary depending upon the call of God.

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**Minister of Worship** will assume responsibility will be the Worship life of the congregation. Experiencing worship that is engaging, multigenerational, multisensory and transformative is an essential element of a thriving church. The Minister of Worship will connect with teams that support not only our Sunday worship but the worship life of the congregation.

**The Minister of Faith Formation** will bear responsibility will be helping community members grow in thier faith. No matter what our age or developmental level God is still speaking to us, the Minister of Faith Formation helps all to grow in their faith.

**The Minister of Outreach** will be primarily responsible for will be helping unchurched people into Christians community. The future of the church is not contained within our 4 walls, The Minister of Outreach will help us to share God's good news in a world of hurt and to help welcome new members into the fold.

**The Minister of Hospitality** will be primary responsible for ensuring all who visit GCC are welcome and safe and well fed. It is one thing to say all are welcome, but if it's not reflected in how we welcome others, our words lose their power.

**Minister of Stewardship** will be primary responsible for the care and nurture of the gifts God has given to both the community and to the individual members. Stewardship includes the times, talents, and treasures of the individuals and of the community as a whole.

**Minister of Social Justice?**

**Minister of Environmental Justice?**

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### **Challenges**

- We don't know who to ask?
- How do I get on a Team?
- Who is in charge?
- I don't know where to find information?
- I think we have a communication problem?

### **Consideration to this approach..**

Some people are like me and thrive in these creative modes that lack structure other people need things written down and spelled out in detail AND dealing with change is hard.

### **All at once? Or baby Steps?**

Do we have to do it all at once or can we do it here and there? Do we approve new bylaws first or start doing it first. Great questions

I think you need to jump, most churches I know don't have time to wait and we all know how long a church takes to change anyway. It's not going to be easy no matter how you do it and people are going to say your doing it wrong anyway. So do it now, you have nothing to lose?

So I suggest outlining a basic structure that you think will work in your setting, then suspending the bylaws trying it for AT LEAST 2 years, Refining it, and implementing it. This is at minimum a 3 year process.