

Governance and Mission

FRAMING GOVERNANCE AS A TOOL FOR THE CHURCH TO BE ABOUT GOD'S MISSION

As we move into new governance structures of the denomination, it is important to remember and frame our conversations about organization decisions, mindful of the deeper questions of mission and purpose. As the United Church moved through the discussions about Remit 1 on the structures of the Church, the underlying focus was the empowerment of local communities of faith to be vibrant, strong, and healthy as they lived God's mission in their context and in the world.

Governance is understood as a tool through which the organizational (institutional) Church empowers mission. The structures of the Church should not exist for their own sake, but rather, to support and inspire the mission of local communities of faith. As we set in place the governance for the new Shining Waters Regional Council, we are conscious of the principles related to our new denominational model:

- 1. Governance should enable and empower the mission of local communities of faith;*
- 2. Governance should not compete for precious volunteer engagement by lay or ministry personnel leaders. The work of the church is not primarily to sustain its own systems but to equip leadership for doing mission;*
- 3. Governance needs to be nimble and flexible in order to respond to specific contexts and to adjust to ongoing change in resources and priorities;*
- 4. Governance should energize leadership for mission by providing opportunities for growing in leadership skills and an understanding of the call to be Christ's Church in changing times and context.*

The governance model being offered strives to minimize layered decision-making, giving authority through the use of Commissions, to attend to operational decisions and thereby freeing the Executive to attend to the conversations and work (ministry) of visioning and planning for faithful and effective resource allocation to the mission needs of our context. Commissions, committees, clusters and networks provide a place for persons with particular passions for areas of the Church's mission to shape and implement programming that gives life to those areas of ministry.

In the new governance, there are fewer requirements for volunteers to "staff" the needs of the structure. This is not intended or constructed in order to limit the number of people participating but rather to invite more of us to connect with the places where the Church is living its calling and to give our time, energy and passion to being disciples rather than curators of the institution. It does represent a "shift" in how many of us have thought about our volunteer time to the church. Many of us have responded to the need of the church to have the "work of the church", (meaning administrative work of the church) attended to by those willing and able to devote time, leadership, skills, and experience. While there will always be the "work of the church" and the need for volunteers called to that ministry activity, our new structures and the governance requirement for them are endeavouring to make space for us to think about "discipleship" rather than "churchmanship" [sic].

The encouragement of cluster and networks is not intended as an 'add-on' to the governance model, but rather, as a call to dedicated church people to re-think the power of collegial, supportive relationships that nurture creative approaches to living the Gospel as a faithful witness of discipleship. The hope is that we live into being a Regional Council community, where there will be desire, energy, and commitment to journeying together through building connections built on common areas of interest, outreach, longing for learning, justice seeking, and shared experience and challenges.

As we contemplate the best model of governance for our Regional Council, a balance has been sought between attending to duty of care, decision-making, and resource allocation, and support and resourcing the priority of mission by the local community of faith.