

Collaborative Governance at South Church

Frequently Asked Questions

“To collaborate means to work with another. The accent is on with rather than for or under. It is a cooperative activity that requires trust in others, humility concerning one’s own wisdom and competences and a desire to release the creativity and gifts of those with whom one works.”

-Jose Cristo Garcia Paredes

What do we mean by Collaborative Governance?

South Church governance has always relied on collaboration among ministerial and administrative staff, the Board of Trustees, associate groups and all of the other volunteers, groups and committees that help South Church live into its mission and vision.

However, expanded our collaborative governance to include shared ministerial leadership, a formal leadership model that emphasizes

- Sharing skills and responsibilities to ease the heavy workload of ministry
- Valuing the gifts and knowledge of all church staff and volunteers
- Clarity about roles and decision-making
- Transparency, accountability and oversight
- Continuity through transitions
- Flexibility to respond to future conditions and challenges

Collaborative governance also aligns with our UU faith more than our previous governance model, in which our minister(s) were considered Chief Executive Officers (CEOs). Collaborative governance reflects our congregation’s commitment to anti-oppression as a non-patriarchal leadership model that provides greater accountability throughout the system. Collaborative governance fosters mutual learning and shared experiences. We expect it to provide direction for institutional capacity building inside and outside of South Church that can lead to healthy social change and a more equitable community and society.

How does Collaborative Governance apply to ministerial leadership?

Under our new collaborative governance model, ministerial leadership involves **shared leadership** with tasks divided between members of an Executive Staff Team, rather than resting solely with a minister (or married co-ministry) as under our former CEO governance model. As well as emphasizing the values listed above, shared ministerial leadership allows members of the Executive Staff Team to allocate ministerial and administrative responsibilities based on their skills and talents, and it values the gifts and knowledge of religious professionals, whether or not ordained.

Members of the Executive Staff Team work in covenanted partnership with each other, as well as with staff and volunteer leaders. This type of partnership allows for a healthy division of leadership responsibilities in the large congregation that is South Church. Each partner has the benefit of the other person’s perspectives and insights as they each live into their call. Healthy

partnered leadership requires honesty, mutual respect, a sense of one's own strengths and weaknesses, and an interest in doing the day-to-day work of serving in relationship with others. Ideally, each member of the Executive Staff Team is able to center their ministry around areas for which they have particular skill and energy, while overlapping with their partner(s) to ensure that each has an overview of the whole ministry of the church. This model of shared leadership has allowed our staff to navigate unprecedented challenges, avoid burnout and lean on support when impacted by personal challenges.

How does shared ministerial leadership differ from our previous Chief Executive Officer (CEO) governance model?

In a CEO model of leadership, the ultimate responsibility and authority for all church work falls on the minister(s). The minister supervises all other staff and serves as the point of connection between the congregation and the staff. In other words, the minister serves the congregation and the staff works for the minister.

Our previous CEO governance model

- Held ministers responsible for almost all aspects of church leadership, which often resulted in failure to cover some tasks
- Provided little support for the heavy workload of ministry
- Lacked transparency and accountability
- Left the church with a large gap in leadership during transitions between ministers, which
 - Unrealistically delegated staff supervision to the Board of Trustees
 - Led to loss of important aspects of communication and oversight regarding matters held solely by the minister(s)
 - Required staff and volunteers to take on over-sized responsibilities for key matters, such as worship
 - Required staff to step into roles outside of their job descriptions and work longer hours

How does our current Executive Staff team operate?

We currently have a two-member Executive Staff Team composed of our **Newly Settled Minister, Rev. Ellen Quaadgras** who joined us in August 2022, and our **Director of Lifespan Ministry (DLM), Kirsten Hunter**. Both are credentialed religious professionals. Rev. Ellen is ordained. They share authority and responsibility for the work of ministerial leadership and have used a UUA resource titled [*Fulfilling the Call: A Model for Unitarian Universalist Ministry in the 21st Century*](#) to define and divide their basic tasks. These include leading worship, officiating at rites of passage, providing pastoral care and presence, encouraging spiritual development, providing witness to social justice in the public square, leading church administration, pursuing personal renewal and professional development, serving the larger Unitarian Universalist faith, and leading Unitarian Universalism into the future. The Executive Staff Team can be expanded if the congregation decides to include additional members in the future.

The members of the Executive Staff Team work together in a covenanted partnership. Each supervises specific staff members and holds other named administrative responsibilities. Their roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, as are areas where their portfolios overlap.

Currently, Rev. Ellen supervises the Finance Administrator, Music Director, and janitorial staff, and she meets and works with the Worship Associates, Social Justice Associates, and Pastoral Associates. DLM Kirsten supervises the Director of Religious Education, Office Administrator, and technical and nursery staff. She meets and works with the Fellowship Associates, Learning Associates, and the Community Action team. Rev. Ellen is largely responsible for leading worship, officiating at rites of passage and providing pastoral care and presence, with DLM Kirsten having some defined responsibilities for these matters. DLM Kirsten is largely responsible for encouraging spiritual development. Other tasks, for example serving the larger faith and witnessing to social justice, are shared equally. When matters outside of defined areas come up – for example, changing guidelines regarding Covid responses – Executive Staff Team members discuss how best to handle them. They also each work with a Committee on Ministry, which helps to guide them and provides an overview of church ministry in general.

The specifics of the current two portfolios held by our Executive Staff Team may continue to shift as we settle into this new ministry model, but any new configuration will work together and with the Committees on Ministry to clarify their respective roles. A new Executive Staff Team will covenant to work together with transparency and to foster trust and collegial well-being through their partnership.

How does Shared Ministerial Leadership increase transparency and accountability?

Shared Ministerial Leadership increases transparency and accountability in several ways. It increases communication between the members of the Executive Staff Team about the specifics of their work by the naming of responsibilities in their covenanted partnership. It is deepened by a new structure for the Committee on Ministry (COM), which now includes two groups within it, one to be with the Minister and one to be with the DLM. The new COMs also include members known as “boundary spanners” who attend and inform both COM groups. Also, each member of the Executive Staff Team reports separately to the Board of Trustees, creating an additional area of accountability.

How does shared leadership work with other aspects of church governance?

Our congregation is the collaborative foundation of South Church. Members pledge to support our congregation financially and by giving of their time and talents. Our membership comes together on an annual basis to learn about the year’s ministry; discuss direction; vote on a budget, use of resources, and management of property; and elect a Board of Trustees and other committee members. While collaborative governance authority is delegated to various groups and staff, it always loops back to reporting to our members.

The Board of Trustees works collaboratively with members of the Executive Staff Team, who serve as ex officio non-voting members of the board. The board has fiduciary responsibility for financial matters, and works collaboratively with a Financial Council that includes our Finance Administrator and members of related committees (Annual Budget Campaign, Endowment, etc.) to provide oversight. The board also appoints Task Forces to advise the board about important matters such as our Covid response and a Collaborative Governance Task Force.

South Church also has established other structures that exemplify collaborative governance. Shared Ministry recruits members for and oversees associate groups (Worship, Pastoral, Learning, Fellowship, and Social Justice Associates) that collaborate with our Executive Staff Team to assist with key elements of South Church ministry.

Shared Ministry, associate groups and the Board of Trustees also incorporate “boundary spanners” who through past and current experience with South Church governance create intentional connections within and between groups. For example, most members of Shared Ministry have served in associate groups, and the board usually includes a member of the Property Committee. This cross-pollination helps groups to reach out and address collective needs and goals of connected groups. These intentional connections and actions have helped to get work started or completed using a broad approach that has been effective in the context of a very challenging time brought on by a global pandemic.

Are other UU churches moving from a CEO model of governance to collaborative governance?

Yes, there are several UU congregations that have moved away from the traditional “Minister as CEO” framework. The Executive Staff Team and the Search Committee have consulted with other UU congregations who are leaning into a team approach and have adopted forms of collaborative governance. These models tend to arise from the structures of the individual churches adopting them and differ in various ways from the model we are building at South Church. We expect to continue to work with UUA staff and leaders in other congregations who are working on this change for the foreseeable future. We will be continuing to learn from them, and they will likely be learning from us as well.

What is the process for hiring ministers and Executive Staff Team members?

The bylaws specify that the congregation must call any new member to the Executive Staff Team. It is possible that persons already employed by South Church would be so called. When new staff is sought, the search process is not addressed in the bylaws and will be based on the responsibilities and qualifications of the position.

For hiring a new settled minister, we follow the UUA ministerial search process with some important modifications that allow for clear and bounded communication between our current Executive Staff Team members, candidates, and the Search Committee. How to conduct the search process is a question of policy, and we are still working on updating policies to meet the needs of this new leadership model.¹

¹ Updated February 2023