

Compilation of Reports Submitted by the Governance Task Force to the Congregation monthly in *The Flame*

January 2009 Governance Task Force Report

This is your first formal report from the GTF. You can look forward to hearing from us at least monthly in *The Flame*. We are a small band of volunteers (Beth Conover, Kate Rohde, Bill Ross, John Wagner, and Ben Wallace) who have been tasked by your Board of Trustees to look into the way we get things done in the church.

This process started because a number of people who volunteer in the church have complained that our governance process (our organization structure, governing documents, methods of making decisions, etc.) tend to hinder us rather than help us. As a result, the board has been spending time on this issue for the last couple of years and they have come to the conclusion that we can improve the way we do things.

As a first step, the Board brought in Dan Hotchkiss from the Alban Institute last spring to spend a little time with us. He met with many members of the board, staff, and others and conducted an open forum after the church service on June 1st. After reviewing the results of Dan's visit, your board voted to form the GTF and set our goal to be revamping our operating system so that the church will have:

- A **staff** that is free to create effective programs with the support of a structure that shares authority and requires accountability.
- A **board** that is free to represent the membership by articulating vision, evaluating programs, and ensuring responsible stewardship of resources.
- A **membership** that is free to share its myriad talents and interests in an atmosphere of trust and creativity where structure, goals, and purposes are clear.

As you might expect, this is not a short term assignment and the board has engaged Dan Hotchkiss to work with us over the next eighteen months. We are requesting both your input and your help along the way. Please share your thoughts with any of us and watch this space and other venues (especially the Board of Trustees page on the church website) for more information.

February 2009 Governance Task Force Report

Since we announced our existence in the January issue of *The Flame*, we have had the opportunity to participate in a Program Council meeting, a Board meeting, and to visit with some of our church staff members. One of the things that we have learned is that “governance” is not a word that one encounters very often in polite conversation and there remains some doubt about exactly what we exist to accomplish.

Our work is to examine the way that we go about making decisions in the church and also to consider the way that we organize ourselves to get those decisions implemented. The goal is to see if our current policies and structure still offer the best vehicles to achieve our vision or if there are improvements that might be more suited to our current opportunities.

As you might expect, we need your help. Now that we have introduced ourselves, we want to ask you questions and listen to what you have to say. You have experienced the way we do things now and we’d like to hear about it. What do you suggest we do to improve?

To get the conversation underway, we have scheduled gatherings immediately following each Sunday Service on both February 8th and February 15th. In total that’s four opportunities to help us learn how you feel about the way things are done today and for you to influence how they might be done in the future. These won’t be the only opportunities to participate but we’d appreciate your advice as soon as we can get it.

If you are interested in more information about the Governance Task Force, you will find it on the church web site. Or visit with any member of our group: Beth Conover, Kate Rohde, Bill Ross, John Wagner, or Ben Wallace. Our group email address is gtf@firstuomaha.org.

March 2009 Governance Task Force Update

Our work is to examine the way that we go about making decisions in the church and also to consider the way that we organize ourselves to get those decisions implemented. Many thanks to all of you who joined us after the services on February 8 and 15. Thanks also to your Board of Trustees who devoted time to visiting with us during their January and February meetings. With your help, we are learning.

The GTF project will be more of a marathon than a sprint and one of our highest priorities is keeping you up to date on our plans and progress so that you can comment and correct as needed. Because of space limitations in *The Flame*, we only have room to continue to remind you that we exist and to touch on the highlights. For those of you who wish for more information, we've set up a GTF web page that will grow as we proceed through the process.

During March, we will continue to visit with church members and staff. We are lucky to have the Alban Institute's Dan Hotchkiss working with us and keeping us on track. We are following the process set forth in Dan's soon to be published book *Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership*.

We are impressed with Dan's book...so much so that we are going to attempt the impossible and offer a guided tour of this excellent work at the upcoming Soul-Full Thursday session that begins April 9. The common wisdom is that it will be difficult to attract participants to this type of session but we have a good book and we're fun people so we're going to see if we can overcome that perception.

Beth Conover, Kate Rohde, Bill Ross, John Wagner, and Ben Wallace
(gtf@firstuomaha.org)

April 2009 Governance Task Force Update

According to Dan Hotchkiss' blueprint, church work can be grouped into two major categories: (1) governance and (2) ministry. These two terms have special meanings that we don't have room to fully discuss here, but "ministry" means most all of the work that each of us does to operate the church and provide its programs and services. When you hear us say "ministry", we include the work that you and your fellow congregants do...not just the work that Rev. Kate does. Ministry is where the rubber meets the road and you are part of the "Ministry Team".

On the other hand, "governance" is the process of deciding, in a very broad way, what work should be done, what results are expected, and what limits must be observed. Although we all provide input for the governance process, the responsibility is generally vested in a Board of Trustees like ours or some similar entity. For that reason, we've spent time at the last two Board meetings discussing the role that the Board might undertake in the future. After consideration, the Board has "affirmed" the following policy. "Affirmation" doesn't mean that the policy is officially approved...rather it means that the Board thinks it is sufficiently formulated to release publicly for discussion. It could turn out to be the final product, but affirmed policies are also likely to be amended by input from you and/or further work by the GTF and the Board.

Board Governance Policy

The board's focus shall be on the long-term mission and well-being of the congregation, not on administrative detail. It shall respect the distinction between board governance and ministry, and shall avoid when possible making decisions that address only a single situation. The board intends to govern primarily by

- Discerning and articulating the congregation's mission and vision of ministry,
- Setting goals and making strategic choices,
- Creating written policies, including fiduciary responsibilities, to guide the congregation's ministry, and
- Monitoring and evaluating the congregation's leadership, including itself.

If the Board is not going to focus on administration, individual decisions, and the relatively short term future, then who will? If we follow Dan Hotchkiss' recommendation, this will turn out to be the work of the staff and volunteers who make up the Ministry Team.

Would you like a deeper look into Dan's book? If so, please join us as we facilitate a discussion during the Soul-Full Thursday session that begins April 9. It is a good book and we think that we can make the discussions both fun and thought provoking.

You'll find much more information on the church web site or contact and GTF member: Beth Conover, Kate Rohde, Bill Ross, John Wagner, and Ben Wallace (gtf@firstuomaha.org)

Annual Report – 2008-2009 -- Governance Task Force

Members: Beth Conover, Kate Rohde, Bill Ross, John Wagner, and Ben Wallace

This ad hoc working group was initiated because a number of people who volunteer in the church have been concerned that our governance process (our organization structure, governing documents, methods of making decisions, etc.) tend to hinder us rather than help us, especially in light of our potential for growth in church membership. As a result, the Board of Trustees has been spending time on this issue for the last couple of years and they have come to the conclusion that the church can improve the way it is doing things.

As a first step, the board brought in Dan Hotchkiss, a consultant from the Alban Institute, to spend time with us. He met with many members of the board, staff, and others and conducted an open forum after the church service on June 1, 2008. After reviewing the results of Dan's visit, the board voted to form the GTF and tasked the group to study how to revamp our governance process so that the church will have:

- A **staff** that is free to create effective programs with the support of a structure that shares authority and requires accountability.
- A **board** that is free to represent the membership by articulating vision, evaluating programs, and ensuring responsible stewardship of resources.
- A **membership** that is free to share its myriad talents and interests in an atmosphere of trust and creativity where structure, goals, and purposes are clear.

This is not a short term assignment and the board has engaged Dan Hotchkiss to work with us for eighteen months beginning January 1, 2009. To date, we have:

1. Read (and are rereading) Dan Hotchkiss' book, *Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership*.
2. Conducted listening sessions with staff, volunteers, and other congregation members.
3. **Began providing potential policies for the board's consideration and affirmation.**
4. **Began considering a revised organization structure for the board and ministry team.**
5. **Communicated with the board and congregation to keep them up to date on the purpose and progress of the effort.**

During the 2009-2010 church year, our goals are:

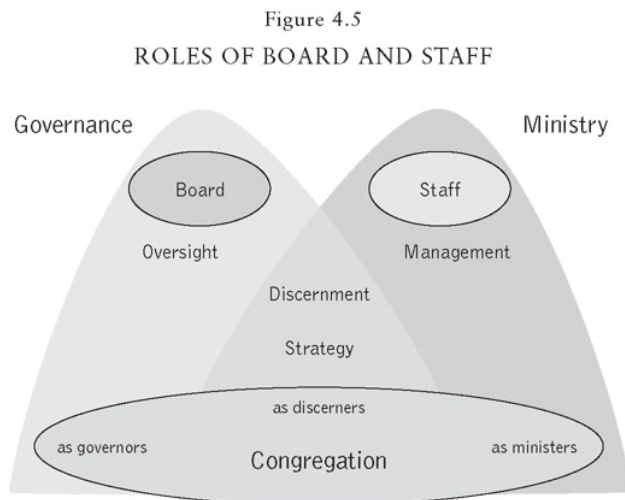
1. **Reach an agreement with the Board of Trustees on a new organization structure.**
2. **Develop a set of policies to support the new structure.**
3. **Obtain the congregation's approval for a test of the new structure and policies.**
4. **Help implement the test.**

In the 2010-2011 church year, our goals are to make any changes arising out of the test period, obtain the congregation's approval and then assist in the implementation of the new structure.

May 2009 Governance Task Force Update

As you know, the GTF was established by our Board of Trustees to examine how the church is organized and how we go about making our decisions. To be sure that we had some adult supervision, the board engaged Dan Hotchkiss to work with us as a consultant and we are using Dan's book as a template for our work. You will find much more information about this process along with copies of past reports on the church web site.

Through the March board meeting, we focused on discussions about the role of the board and the role of the "ministry team". At this point, it appears that we all are becoming fairly comfortable with a division of labor that charges the Board of Trustees with responsibilities that focus on the future. These are more clearly spelled out on the web site, but include setting goals, making strategic choices, discerning the church's mission (so that we all know where we are going), evaluating our progress, making sure we are solvent, and providing clear guidelines for the Ministry Team. The Ministry Team will be responsible for the daily work of the church. The relationship between the Board and the Ministry Team is illustrated below.



Our job now is to recommend policies that clarify the roles and responsibilities of the Board and the Ministry Team...and that leads to a bit of a "chicken and the egg" dilemma. Policies should be appropriate for the structure and the structure should be appropriate to do the work delegated in the policies. Which comes first, the structure or the policies? We've spent the last few weeks thinking about possibilities for leadership structure and visited with the Board on the topic at their April meeting. Nothing is decided, but the issues are starting to come into focus.

You will find much more information on the church web site and we encourage you to contact any GTF member (Beth Conover, Kate Rohde, Bill Ross, John Wagner, and Ben Wallace) or email the group at gtf@firstuomaha.org.

June 2009 Governance Task Force Update

Have you been thinking about good governance lately? Although you may not have seen much publicity about our work in April and May, these were busy months for GTF members. We spent much of this time considering the issues associated with the leadership of the “Ministry Team”. If Ministry Team still sounds strange to you, it’s because *Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership*, Dan Hotchkiss’ book that we are following to do our work, uses a little different terminology from what we have used historically (we are adding a glossary to our web page to help with translation).

The Ministry Team includes all of us, staff and volunteers alike, who will be responsible for the daily work of the church, including many of the responsibilities currently held by the Board of Trustees. It’s not the GTF’s job to decide the structure of the Ministry Team but we can define some of the issues to help the Board arrive at a recommendation.

In addition to discussions among ourselves and the board, we did a significant review of Dan’s book during the April/May Soul-Full Thursday session. Over the six Thursdays we had lively and interesting conversations about church leadership. Participants included GTF members, board members, and committee chairs. For one session, Dan Hotchkiss was even able to join us through the magic of video conferencing.

The month of June will be busy as well since Dan Hotchkiss will be visiting us and GTF members will be participating in the planning retreat that will be held mid-month.

You will find much more information on the church web site and we encourage you to contact any GTF member (Beth Conover, Kate Rohde, Bill Ross, John Wagner, and Ben Wallace) or to email the group at gtf@firstuomaha.org.

July 2009 Governance Task Force Update

The Board of Trustees held their annual planning retreat in mid-June. GTF members also attended and Dan Hotchkiss joined us to facilitate the meeting. Dan is the consulting minister from Alban Institute who is helping us with our governance review.

From the GTF perspective, the center piece of the meeting was the time spent considering the leadership of the “ministry team”. Dan’s book, *Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership*, recommends that the major work of the church be shared between two entities:

1. The Board that concentrates on oversight, planning, strategy, goal setting, and evaluation, and
2. The Ministry Team that does most of the work of the church. They take the goals that the Board establishes and turns them into action. The Ministry Team includes all of us, staff and volunteers alike, who will be responsible for the daily work of the church, including many of the responsibilities currently held by the Board of Trustees.

Before starting to write the policies that will define how this work will be divided, we thought it made sense to spend time considering the leadership structure of the Ministry Team. According to Dan’s book the appropriate question to ask and most likely answer are:

Who should be the ministry decision maker? In most congregations with an active membership of more than two hundred children and adults, the most straightforward solution is to delegate day-to-day decision making to the senior minister or rabbi.

We devoted more than two months to considering our options and, at the retreat, the Board arrived at the same answer...the straight forward assignment of day-to-day decision making to Rev. Kate.

The GTF will now be devoting our time to producing the policies that the Board will need to consider affirming as we continue to define a revised governance structure. You will find more information about this process on our web site and we will also be holding additional gatherings in the future to talk it over with you. Once the structure has been sufficiently designed and discussed, the Board plans to recommend a one year trial run to the congregation for approval. We encourage you to contact any GTF member (Beth Conover, Kate Rohde, Bill Ross, John Wagner, and Ben Wallace) or to email the group at gtf@firstuomaha.org.

August 2009 Governance Task Force Update

We are starting to pick up speed. It has been a slower start than we had hoped for, but it feels like we now have some important foundation work behind us. Your Board of Trustees has been great to work with. They have been patient with our trip through the learning curve and have invested significant time delving into the major issues involved in a governance change.

While the basic “policy governance” concepts are fairly simple, we have learned that the terminology we need to illustrate our evolving governance model isn’t yet up to the job. We need a common vocabulary and we have agreed to use words according to the definitions found in Dan Hotchkiss’ book, *Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership*. To help with that process, we developed a list of definitions and tested them on the board members. It really seemed to help communication and understanding.

You will find these definitions on the GTF web page on the church web site. You will also find a list of other UU churches that have gone through the policy governance process and have posted their completed policies on the Internet. Most importantly, you will also find the policies that have been “affirmed” so far. We will post some of this information in the common room.

Now, we’d like to start engaging you in a series of discussions about the evolving governance model. You will want to stay informed about the process and we need your feedback. Once policies have been sufficiently developed, the Board plans to ask you to approve a one year trial run to see if the model works as well in practice as it does in theory. For more information or to share your ideas, we encourage you to contact any GTF member (Beth Conover, Kate Rohde, Bill Ross, John Wagner, and Ben Wallace) or to email the group at gtf@firstuomaha.org.

September 2009 Governance Task Force Update

Elsewhere in this issue of The Flame, you will find that one of your Board of Trustees' goals is to create a Vision of Ministry, by the end of December, for the church year that will begin May, 2010. Perhaps you thought: "What is a Vision of Ministry"?

Here's the short answer, from our glossary on the church web site:

Vision of Ministry: The annual Vision of Ministry is the Board's short list of priorities to be accomplished in the forthcoming one to three years. It is the short-term product of the Board's strategic planning process. The Ministry Team then translates the board's vision of ministry into goals and objectives for the coming year.

The VoM is an important cog in the church leadership machinery. It is where the board distills the long-term vision of the congregation into priorities. The ministry team then converts these priorities into goals and action plans. This is where the rubber meets the road.

You will know a good Vision of Ministry when you see it. According to our GTF consultant, Dan Hotchkiss, it will answer the question, **"In what new and different ways will we transform lives in the next one to three years?"**

For more information or to share your ideas, we encourage you to contact any GTF member (Beth Conover, Kate Rohde, Bill Ross, John Wagner, and Ben Wallace) or send an email to gtf@firstuomaha.org.

October 2009 Governance Task Force Update

How Many Unitarians Universalists Does It Take To ...

... serve on our Board of Trustees? That's a big question that your Governance Task Force has been pondering recently. If you have been following our monthly journal, you know that our Board will not only be focusing on "governance" responsibilities in the future, but also turning over most "ministry" responsibilities to the Ministry Team. Our current board is large (seventeen) so we expect that the church will want to downsize.

Here's what Dan Hotchkiss, our consulting governance guru, has to say on board size.

From the point of view of group process, the ideal board has seven members. A group that size finds it relatively easy to retain control of its agenda and to keep each member feeling responsible for the board's work. From the point of view of democracy, a seven-member board has some surprising advantages. Unlike a larger board, it can be under no illusion that its members fully "represent" the congregation. Small boards know that if they want congregational support (and they need it, whether they want it or not!), they have to engage constituents in continual two-way communication through committees, surveys, town meetings, and informal one-to-one exchange.

To get the discussion on board size underway, the GTF has proposed a board consisting of eight members. All eight members would be elected by the congregation as follows: president, president-elect, and six regular members (two elected each year for three year terms). We stress that this is just a starting point for discussion and the result may be very different. Your input is very welcome.

For more information or to share your ideas, we encourage you to contact any GTF member (Beth Conover, Kate Rohde, Bill Ross, John Wagner, and Ben Wallace) or send an email to gtf@firstuomaha.org.

November 2009 Governance Task Force Update

Our current goal is the **TRIAL RUN**. It is scheduled to begin June 1st and it is starting to loom **LARGE** in our future! This planned trial, which will last for one year, is a major difference between the Dan Hotchkiss method of governance change and the approach taken by other governance gurus.

The purpose of this trial year is to find out if this new governance model is going to work for us. We must have the major pieces of our new structure in place before we can start the trial year, but we don't have to dot every *i* or cross every *t*. We will learn a great deal during the trial year and our plans, policies, and practices will evolve and improve because of it.

Between today and the start of the trial year on June 1st, we must:

1. Make sure that everyone in the congregation knows what we are trying to accomplish and why.
2. Prepare enough policies to provide a good foundation for the trial.
3. Restructure our organization into its governance (Board of Trustees) and ministry (Ministry Team) components.
4. Prepare an interim Annual Vision of Ministry to guide us into the trial year.
5. Tune our collective senses of humor up to their maximum setting and adventure boldly forth into the future.

For more information or to share your ideas, we encourage you to contact any GTF member (Beth Conover, Kate Rohde, Bill Ross, John Wagner, and Ben Wallace) or send an email to gtf@firstuomaha.org. To find out more about our governance change process, go to our church web site and follow the link on the home page.

December 2009 Governance Task Force Update

Consider this statement, “The University of Nebraska Cornhusker football committee is regaining its national reputation for excellence.” Does this sound odd to you? Is it difficult to visualize the football “committee” driving down the field in the last two minutes to cross the goal line and achieve their objective?

Dan Hotchkiss, our governance consultant, recommends that we give some thought to the names that we give to working groups in our congregation. He suggests that we refer to the very few groups that will report to our Board of Trustees as “committees” and the many groups that will form our Ministry Team as “teams”. Dan’s rationale is that, “Committees write reports, make recommendations, and gather information. Teams, on the other hand, produce practical results.”

Similarly, Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith, writing in *The Wisdom of Teams*, defines a team as, “...a small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.” Most of our current committees fit this definition very well. For example, the Membership Team, the Religious Services Team, the Caring Team, and many other existing teams. Together they form our Ministry Team and produce those practical results that serve our mission and help us achieve our vision.

For more information or to share your ideas, we encourage you to contact any GTF member (Beth Conover, Kate Rohde, Bill Ross, John Wagner, and Ben Wallace) or send an email to gtf@firstuomaha.org. To find out more about our governance change process, go to our church web site and follow the link on the home page.

January 2010 Governance Task Force Update

We always want to report fully and accurately to you...so we have to admit that we didn't accomplish much in December. Partly it was due to holiday activities taking precedence in our lives and partly it was just running out of gas. Our governance change marathon is entering the second half and we coasted a little to regain energy for the last thirteen miles.

We won't quite make our self-imposed deadline to have substantial completion of the proposed policies by December, but we won't be too late. We have a good body of work in place and a fairly clear idea of what remains to be done. Much of it is "thou shalt not" provisions, which are necessary but not as much fun.

The next few months will be both busy and chaotic. The Board is preparing its first "Annual Vision of Ministry" which will be followed by our normal budgeting and stewardship efforts. The GTF and the Board will be finalizing our draft policies. Rev. Kate and our church officers will be reorganizing to implement the Ministry Team. And we will be communicating with you so that you have all the information you need to approve the Trial Run of our new policies that we are proposing to start June 1st.

One of our major concerns right now is how to best keep you fully in the loop. We've not received much feedback so we're not sure if you are following the transition progress with interest. If you would like to learn more, please consider signing up for our discussion group (*"Dan Speak" and Other Forays Into Effective Church Leadership*) during the Soul-Full Thursdays session that starts January 21st. It sounds dull but it is actually exciting and interesting.

For more information or to share your ideas, we encourage you to contact any GTF member (Beth Conover, Kate Rohde, Bill Ross, John Wagner, and Ben Wallace) or send an email to gtf@firstuomaha.org. To find out more about our governance change process, please go to our church web site and follow the link on the home page.

February 2010 Governance Task Force Update

Five Hundred Twenty Five Thousand Six Hundred Minutes

The hit song, *Seasons of Love*, from the musical *Rent*, describes the passage of time in terms of minutes per year. It provides a different perspective when you measure time in terms of the ticks of a clock rather than the lifespan of a calendar on a wall.

Time is on the mind of everyone working on our governance change process. It seems like just yesterday that we had 525,600 minutes to prepare for the trial run of our new policy governance approach to church leadership. We are now down to about 172,800 minutes before our trial run begins on June 1. We have invested our minutes fairly productively so far, but we have to scamper and use the next four months wisely.

The major steps remaining are:

1. The Governance Task Force must complete the remaining policies that we need to operate our trial run for a year. The Board needs to review, amend as necessary, and affirm these policies. Of course, policy development will continue during our trial run.
2. The Board will complete its plan for restructuring and assuming its new job description.
3. The Ministry Team will be developing its structure and practices. While its work may not change significantly, its authority to manage its own activities will be quite different.
4. You will be asked to approve this trial run and the changes in governance structure that will accompany it. During the remaining 172,800 minutes there will be many opportunities to learn more about the process. Please set aside time to participate so that you are fully informed about this important event in the life of our church.

For more information or to share your ideas, we encourage you to contact any GTF member (Beth Conover, Kate Rohde, Bill Ross, John Wagner, and Ben Wallace) or send an email to gtf@firstuomaha.org. To find out more about our governance change process, please go to our church web site and follow the link on the home page.