

Governance at Zumbro

November 2010

Background

When Pastor Vern arrived at Zumbro a year ago, he soon ran into people that had difficulty explaining the governance structure. They mentioned that the structure had recently been revised, but then added that the finished product had left people struggling to understand the changes.

What happened? The Governance Team of the Vision for Mission process in 2008 was certainly diligent in their work. However, just about the time they were ready to make their final recommendations, Pastor Gary made the decision to leave for Arizona. The shape of the council and the committees ended up being revised and re-revised. A number of last minute compromises were made. And consequently not everything fit together as well as the Governance Team had hoped. For example, the plan for a *leadership* council, with several “at-large” members, was set aside in favor of the existing *representative* council. Currently the majority of the council “represent” various aspects of congregational life.

As the Visioning Team began to meet this past year, one of the team’s charges was to continue the efforts of Vision for Mission. When the team got to the subject of governance, a number of people expressed their difficulty in understanding the new structure. They brought this issue before the Congregation Council. The council eventually made the recommendation to revisit Vision for Mission, including asking many from the original Governance Team to take up the mantle once again. Over the past six months, the team has revised many of their existing proposals and also considered some new possibilities. See the hand out, “Proposed Revisions to Zumbro’s Governance,” for a further explanation of this process.

Why are we doing this?

- 1) Many in the congregation, including the council itself, have expressed confusion with the revised structure. For example, members of the nominating committee have been hard pressed to explain the difference between permanent committees, lay ministries, and covenant teams. The problem is compounded by two council positions representing *areas* of ministry (mission and spiritual formation), with more than one group to which to relate.
- 2) We need to more clearly define the various roles in the governance structure. In a nutshell, we want the roles to look like this: the congregation *does the ministry*, the staff and the teams *manage the ministry*, and the council *governs the process*. As we seek to carry out our ministry, we strive to be guided by a clear and compelling mission/vision set by the congregation. See page three of the “Governance” handout for further clarification of these roles.

- 3) We want to simplify the ministry structure by having only two types of teams. The *Core Teams* are defined as essential for the life of the congregation. They are co-led by staff and a lay member. Their work is broader in scope. They are ongoing in nature (example: Stewardship Team). The *Servant Teams*, while important for life of the congregation, are not necessarily essential. They have a staff liaison, who may or may not attend their meetings. Their work is narrower in scope. People serve as needed or until the job gets done (example: Altar Guild).
- 4) We want to streamline our structure, putting a distinct emphasis on getting members involved in *doing* ministry, rather than in simply attending committee meetings. That is not to say that committee meetings are bad, only that people in the pews regularly express a hunger to be engaged in hands-on work. Because of the overwhelming success of the yellow Life at Zumbro form, we anticipate that the new governance structure, rather than reducing the number of persons involved, will actually lead to an increase. Again, the staff and core teams will manage the process, with the goal being getting people engaged in doing the ministry.
- 5) The current council structure requires council members to wear two hats—a leadership hat and a committee hat. Too many people do not have the time, nor the inclination, nor the gifts, to wear both hats. The proposed structure enables council members to wear only a leadership hat. Hopefully this will allow them to maximize their gift of leadership without stretching themselves too thin.
- 6) We want to affirm the smaller size of the council. We think this is critical for encouraging all members to participate. According to experts in small group theory, a good size for optimum participation is ten people.
- 7) We want a council that is primarily concerned with carrying out the congregation's mission, setting annual strategic initiatives, and tending to its financial health. "Representative" councils, by definition, tend to be more concerned with the day-to-day operations of the church. As such, it is too easy to *manage* and much harder to find the time to *lead*. While the council will receive the reports of staff and various teams—and so be informed of the ongoing ministry—their primary responsibility will be to tend to the bigger picture. In particular, we want the council to regularly ask: are we as a congregation doing what God is calling us to do?
- 8) Zumbro is a large congregation. The left hand does not always know what the right hand is doing. We expect staff to play a crucial role in the governance process. The staff's responsibility is to work closely with the core teams in carrying out the council's strategic initiatives. The staff is also responsible for making sure that the various teams communicate well with each other.