

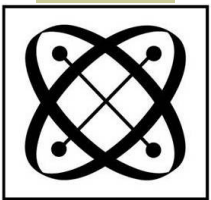
# Congregation & Governance

## Growth and Governance

Several years ago the Board of Trustees responded to growth and change at Eliot by implementing a governance model adopted by many other medium to large UU congregations. This model tasks the Board primarily with setting long-term vision of the Chapel and with setting limitations on the means by which that vision is achieved. The Board delegates programmatic and administrative decisions to the Lead Minister and staff, within the limitations. The lead minister has complete discretion in approving or canceling programs, hiring staff, and other daily operations issues, but is accountable to the Board to show that Eliot is meeting the goals set in the Board's vision. Our governance system enables operational decisions to be made efficiently without a Board or congregational vote.

Perhaps some feel this is autocratic or wonder what role the congregation plays in this model. Although the role of the congregation looks different than in the past, there are at least four ways in which the congregation plays an absolutely critical role in Eliot decision making:

1. Although the Board is tasked with developing vision, this vision must be discerned from the congregation. The congregation had deep discussions with the Board several years ago (called *Appreciative Inquiry*). Out of these conversations arose our five End statements, expressions of Eliot's collective vision. The Ends were updated last year after additional conversations with the congregation. Look for continued opportunities to continue this conversation.
2. Our governance model is fundamentally permission-granting. Any congregant with an idea for a new program or a suggestion regarding Chapel operation should bring this idea to the lead minister or appropriate staff member. As long as a program idea fits within the Chapel's mission and vision, and doesn't conflict too much with other priorities (including budget), the lead minister will have every reason to say "Go for it!" You can find examples in recent newsletters and orders of service. However, the lead minister is also in the unique position to judge priorities, potential conflict or overlap with other programs, and demands on staff time. Sometimes, compromises may need to be reached, resulting in scaling back or redirecting an idea or program. *We stress that this key role for creative congregants working collaboratively with the lead minister (shared ministry) is what propels Eliot's ability to transform lives.* There is no way a lead minister can directly run all the programs to serve Eliot's needs.



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Comments? Questions? Email [eliotboard@eliotchapel.org](mailto:eliotboard@eliotchapel.org)

3. The congregation has a key role in determining whether current programs are meeting the vision expressed in the Ends. Look for the rollout of Eliot's first annual congregational survey on this topic in May. This is a primary instrument that the Board will use in assessing accountability. It will be important for us to obtain a high survey return rate to know your thoughts on Eliot's direction and where to place priorities.
4. The congregation makes the most momentous decisions of the congregation, including property purchases or sales, calling ministers, changing bylaws, etc. These are handled at Eliot's yearly congregational meeting in May or by special meetings held according to Eliot's bylaws.

When we consider our roles as Eliot congregants (and Board members) in the present era, we realize that we can offer a passionate opinion, working under our Congregational Covenant, at each of the four levels above. However, we also understand that our priorities have to be balanced against 549 (current Eliot membership) other opinions and priorities. Letting go of control after arguing a position passionately can be an act of faith, but we take comfort in knowing that there are many routes to fulfilling our vision as a community. On April 13, the Board hosted an opportunity to discuss the ideas presented in this article. On that same date, OurEliot was launched as a congregant/lead minister-initiated program (see #2 above), to foster Eliot's communication with the lead minister and the Board.

## The Eliot Board of Trustees

Lea Ann Baker, Louise Bradshaw, Sheryl Foster, Gary Gray,  
Pamela Hermann, William Lemon, Steve Mennerick, Jordi Prats

