

# A Book, or a Frame?

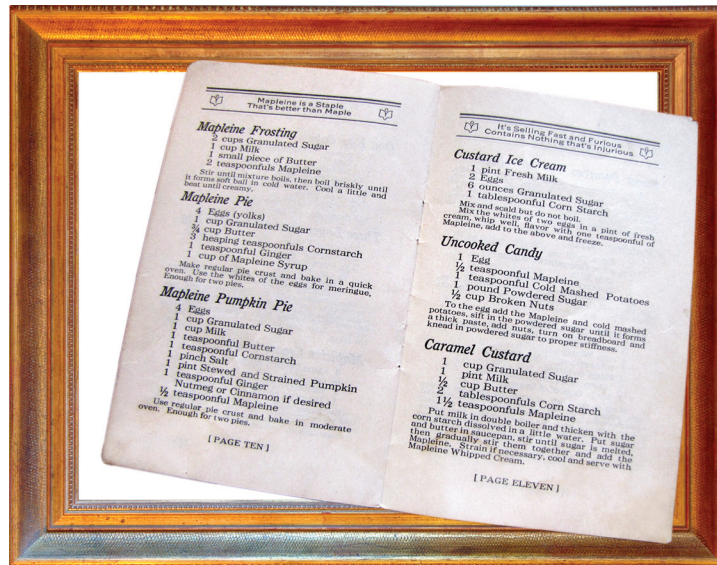
"BYLAWS BITS"—JUNE 2014

Bylaws are a document that helps define an organization. It is a legal document that describes structure, purpose, duties and power in conformity with requirements of local, state, and federal law.

Just as a picture frame definitively establishes the edges of a photograph or painting, the bylaws of an organization definitively establish behavior, structure and activities within that organization.

This does not mean that bylaws describe or define every behavior or activity of the organization, only that they prescribe the limits of authority, the organization's structural boundaries and the limits upon the responsibility that the organization delegates to its leadership.

Similarly, bylaws can be likened to the drawings in a children's coloring book, where the drawings define the edges of the delegated authority to the organization's elected volunteers and its paid professional and spiritual leaders. Within the space defined



by the drawings, a child is encouraged to exercise his or her imagination and artistry, while at the same time being urged to color within the lines.

So it is with bylaws; the organization delegates authority to its leadership to use its imagination and artistry in directing and managing the affairs of the organization up to the limits

established in the bylaws.

While bylaws resemble the constraints of a children's coloring book, they should not be expanded to resemble the instructions of a cookbook. Organizational recipes such as job descriptions, employee handbooks, investment strategies, or even covenants or mission statements should not be codified in the organization's bylaws. Each of these and other policies and procedures regarding the day-to-day activity of an organization often require revisions that have no impact on the organization's structure or on its delegation of authority and responsibility.

When instructions likely to be changed are included in the bylaws, the bylaws can quickly become out-of-date. Out-of-date bylaws require frequent revision with congregational meetings to approve them—otherwise they subject the organization to unnecessary risk.



The Committee—**Tina Balmer, Amber Bird, John Davis, Anton Hertle and Steve Soderberg**—encourages any First Church member to share his or her views regarding updating the bylaws. This can be done by mail, email, or notes to the Committee delivered to any Committee member, the Board chairperson, the chairperson of the Research and Long-Range Planning Committee (R&LRP), or the senior minister. Notes to the Committee may also be dropped off with the church receptionist, for the R&LRP mailbox. For your convenience, the current First Church Bylaws are posted on the Church website and are also available in the Church Library.