

No Overlaps, No Gaps!

“BYLAWS BITS”— DECEMBER 2014

In the April *Bylaws Bits* we indicated that while we recognize and respect the expertise of those who have gone before us, we realize that our world has changed considerably in the 44 years since the last major revision of the First Church Bylaws. We further stated that as we



studied our Church’s current situation, we were asking a lot of questions: *Who? What? Where? When? How? and Why?*

The May and June 2014 *Bylaws Bits* articles explained that bylaws help to define an organization. They are a legal document describing an organization’s purpose and structure, as well as the purpose, roles, duties, authority, and accountability of its boards, committees and officers.

As we obtained information about our own and other churches, certain approaches and patterns began to emerge. We began to see that concepts described in May and June had their foundations in the simple questions identified in April and led us to consider a structure that we are expecting to use as we prepare to update our Bylaws. Bylaws should be concise and comprehensive, without overlaps or gaps.

Our goal will be to make each Article of the Bylaws as consistent as possible with every other Article having a similar function. This should be true whether it is describing a hired position such as Church Administrator, or an elected position like Board President. It should also be true when describing a standing committee or ministry, such as Outreach. Obviously,

not all Articles would deal with a position or committee or ministry description, and for those Articles, other formats would be necessary.

Having developed this foundational approach, we we share it with you and invite your comments, insight and questions. The

table below relates our plan for consistent Article content and the questions we expect each subsection of an Article to address.

As described in the June *Bylaws Bits* article, “A Book, or a Frame,” it is important to note that none of the article subsections addresses the question, “How is the work done?” Questions of this type are best outlined in separate external documents; for example, a Deacons’ Manual, a Policies and Procedures Manual, an Employee Handbook, an Investment Policy Statement, or a Committee Charter.

Documents external to the Bylaws should be used to define or describe “how work is done,” because they are subject to frequent change. Changes may occur for many reasons, including the availability of new tools and techniques, different laws, or adapting to the needs of the organization. Revisions to these external documents do not require a vote of the congregation to modify day-to-day work process. On the other hand, the Bylaws of an organization, which set boundaries for these external documents, are expected to be more stable, less subject to change, and require an affirmative vote of the congregation for any changes to be implemented.

Article Subsections	Questions Answered
Purpose	Why does this position or group exist?
Roles and Duties	What does this position or group have the responsibility to do?
Authority	What are the “Limits of Power” for the position or group?
Accountability	To whom does the position or group report?
Membership	Who is involved? How long can they serve? How do they gain the assignment?

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.