

# Sample Simplified Structure (BOD ¶274.2) Leadership Council Monthly Agenda



So, you have “downsized” your church administrative board and simplified your congregation’s leadership structure. More leaders are now moving from leading *meetings* to leading *ministries*. You might think that you are done and all the structural changes will automatically lead to fruitfulness. Now your simplified leadership council will be able to strategically and boldly guide your congregation into the mission field! However, changing structure will produce no new fruit unless your team’s *behavior* and *expectations* change.

Adaptive change means that the conversation at the leadership table must change.

- If the leadership council continues to *manage* instead of *lead*, the church will be unable to build a vital congregation.
- If the leadership council continues to be a *reporting entity*, the church will be unable to claim opportunities to transform lives, communities, and the world.
- If the leadership council does not pursue intentional and strategic conversations about reaching new disciples, the church will not be able to equip disciples for the mission of Jesus Christ.

**Adaptive change means that the conversation at the leadership table must change.**

Your Leadership Council must be the group that looks after the overall effectiveness and fruitfulness of the congregation. Membership on the Leadership Council comes not from representing a particular ministry or constituency, but instead is focused solely on the disciple-making mission and the congregation as it lives into God’s vision.

When planning meetings and creating the monthly agenda, please do not expect that all the agenda content be provided by your pastor. Each person at the table should take turns praying, bringing the spiritual development time and/or the leadership development time. This sharing of spiritual leadership is coordinated by the chair.

As disciple-leaders, we should be challenging ourselves rather than relying on the pastor to provide all of these elements for the agenda. Remember, as leaders of the congregation, we are modeling leadership for others. The time used in each meeting can roughly be divided into thirds using the L3 model:

### **1/3 LOVING ~ Development Work**

Equipping and/or spiritual development

### **1/3 LEARNING ~ Fiduciary Work**

Measurement of goals

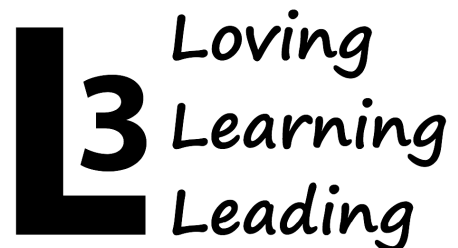
Connection Status of new people & how they are engaged

Financial reports

Leadership Packet Materials involving fiduciary work

### **1/3 LEADING ~ Generative Work**

Challenges, Issues, Dreams, Discernment Next Steps



# **L** Loving **3** Learning **L** Leading

## **L** Loving

- 1) Opening Prayer & Check-in
- 2) Spiritual Development and/or Leadership Development

## **L** Learning

- 3) Pastoral Review of Annual Church Goals
- 4) Review of Leadership Packet

## **L** Leading

- 5) Generative Work: Leadership Team Discussions
- 6) Communications Plan
- 7) Closing Prayer for the Mission Field

## **L** 3 Loving

### **1. Opening Prayer & Check-in**

Each person at the table should take turns praying and perhaps sharing a devotional (or leading the spiritual development section of the agenda). This is also a time to create sacred space for members of the council to check in with one another as fellow disciples of Jesus Christ who care for each other and pray for one another.

### **2. Spiritual Development (and/or)**

Spiritual development is a time to deepen the faith of our disciple-leaders. What does it mean to be a fully devoted follower of Christ? What does it mean to be a disciple? What does Jesus Christ have to say about the characteristics of a Christian leader? What responsibilities does leadership carry in your church? What is different about being a leader in today's church than in the church of yesterday, last year, and a decade ago? How does our Christian leadership allow us to show up differently in the world? As leaders, are we comfortable sharing our faith story? What are our "Glory Sightings"? Where have we have seen God at work in our lives since the last time the team gathered?

### **Leadership Development**

Leadership development is a time to be studying, discussing, and challenging ourselves about effective church leadership and the changing landscapes of our culture as it relates to the church. As the culture continues to shift more and more away from being church-centric, how is the church responding with the message of Jesus Christ? What must the church be doing differently in order to be culturally relevant and reach new people? How are we leading conversations with our congregation that help bring them along with the challenges and required shifts to address them. How are we leading our congregation to understand we must be outwardly focused with the primary focus on the unchurched first and those of us already at the church second?

## **L** 3 Learning

### **3. Pastoral Review of Annual Church Goals**

The leadership council (board/team/table) is accountable to Christ for the church living out its mission of making disciples. In turn, the leadership council holds the pastor accountable for leading the church into its vision – the unique way the church makes disciples, and fulfills God's vision for the congregation.

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Annual Church Goals are usually created in the Fall and included in the Charge Conference Materials. These goals should be determined annually during a longer day-long or multi-day leadership council retreat that also includes periods of listening to the larger congregation and possibly congregational surveys. In smaller churches, this review should include an update of new people who have related to the congregation, and a study of how these new individuals have connected into the ministry and fellowship of the congregation (larger churches may include a data sheet (see next section).

Accountable leadership is the marriage of responsibility, authority, and accountability. Accountability is not the proverbial “club over the head” mentality, nor is it about blaming. Accountability is asking critical questions. It is being supportive. It is about asking about progress. It is asking what might be getting in the way of progress. Accountable leadership is identifying missing tools in the pastor’s tool box and helping acquire those needed tools. It is helping the pastor (as head of staff) hold the rest of the staff accountable. It is about encouragement. It is about celebrating progress and success along the way. Accountability is having crucial conversations about forward movement for the sake of the mission.

**Accountable leadership is the marriage of responsibility, authority, and accountability.**

When the accountable leadership process is implemented at all levels, there is a deeper sense of purpose and direction. No one is lacking the understanding of what is expected of them and how their part ties into the bigger picture. With accountable leadership in place, there is a sense that we are all one big team pulling in the same direction – all pulling for the church to reach new people – all pulling for effectiveness, efficiency, and competency in its mission of making disciples.

When accountable leadership is in place, the pastor’s review is much easier. Without goals tied to mission and vision, the review is more subjective. Without goals established and measurable benchmarks along the way, there is really nothing to measure performance against. Without these benchmarks, we tend to base the pastor’s review on our own personal opinions and relationship with the pastor. For example, without clear expectations and goals, a team conducting the pastor’s annual review may base it on the pastoral care received or not by a particular team member. The expectations of that care may vary from team member to team member because no benchmarks or expectations were ever established. On the other hand, if there are clearly identified congregational goals that the pastor is responsible for, the expectation is set and the review is based on those – not the personal expectations of the team or a particular member of the team.

There are times during the year that this agenda item might need to move into executive (confidential) session so that the simplified structure leadership council may act as the congregation’s Staff/Pastor Parish Relations Committee (S/PPRC). Confidentiality in S/PPRC matters is a disciplinary requirement. A church using a simplified structure model that includes the functions of S/PPRC in its leadership council should take care to follow all of the requirements, restrictions, and protections found in the United Methodist Discipline sections dedicated to the work of the S/PPRC.

### 4. Consent Calendar and Review of Leadership Packet

At least a week prior to the leadership council meeting, an electronic packet will be emailed to each team member for review prior to the meeting. This prepares the leaders for the consent calendar section of the agenda. Sending the packet out ahead of time keeps the team from having to take time from the

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meeting to read reports or listen to long (and often unprepared) oral reports. This also allows plenty of time to fully review the information and be prepared with questions, comments, or concerns as well as the ability to fully participate in conversations and decisions.

The usual method of working through most of the leadership packet is a Consent Calendar:

- A Consent Calendar methodology should include all the agenda items that a board needs receive for historical reasons or to vote on for legal purposes.
- The leader will ask if there are any corrections to the consent calendar agenda, or if anything needs to be removed from what is presented in the packet, for corrections or further discussion under *Agenda Item #5: Generative Work*. If not, a covering motion for approval will be called for and seconded for all items that remain on the consent calendar. A vote to approve will then be taken. This is more a formality than anything. Yet, it is important to have an accurate historical document of the governing decisions of the leadership council.
- The minutes of the last meeting are an example of a consent calendar items. Other items could include the signing of a contract that has already been approved, shifting funds between accounts,
- Members of the leadership council should have read the packet and come prepared to either vote approval for the items or to move the items toward the discussion phase of the agenda.
- For some items, especially financial matters and statistical data, a short oral description may prove very helpful. This also addresses the complexity of learning and processing styles among council members. The focus of any oral report should be to frame a fruitful and effective discussion.

The leadership packet should include reports, information and statistics that allow the leadership council to have a full picture of the vitality of the church. While numbers aren't everything, numbers are indicators. When we are watching the numbers, we can more easily and quickly identify trends. The sooner trends are identified, the faster we are able to address them and course correct. Depending on the size of the church or staff availability, the packet is most often assembled by the church secretary or office/business manager. In smaller churches, the leadership council chair may take responsibility for preparing and distributing the packet.

### Financial Reports

- The balance sheet should include ALL assets and liabilities of the church.
- The spending report should show the annual budget amounts and how much (dollar and/or percentage) of the budget in each ministry area has been spent year to date. The report does not need to show each individual entry. The leadership council is looking at ministry category spending only
- When it comes to review of the packet, the council leader will ask if there are any questions or comments about the financial report. For example, if the church is substantially behind in giving, this may need to be a point of discussion. The treasurer/bookkeeper may put a note on the report sent out in the packet with any notes of explanation. For example, a note may be placed on the financial report indicating that while we are halfway through the year, the giving in not half of the budgeted amount. Historically, the church has received 40% of its budgeted income by July 1, so the church would historically be on track.

**Church's Vital Signs** *They may also be called signs of fruitfulness.*

- These signs are numbers that help us, as leaders, understand the healthiness of our church.

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These important statistics are average worship attendance, professions of faith, number of people participating in service, number of people involved in small groups, and generosity.

- As leaders, don't only look at the numbers for the past month. Pay attention to *trends*. This means you will want to have the packet prepared with historical information from the past three or five years. By including this historical information, it will be easier to identify trends. When trends are identified, the team needs to be talking about those trends and identifying any needed course correction.

### Connecting New People Report

- It is important for the leadership council to know the number of new guests each week.
- In addition, it is important for the leadership council to know the number of returning guests each week, and the level of connection (small groups, mission activities, etc)
- Again we are looking for trends. If we are not seeing new people, we know we have an evangelism issue. If we are seeing first time guests, but not returning guests, we know we most likely have issues with hospitality and/or connection (or maybe even worship).

### Minutes Of The Previous Meeting

- These will be approved (or approved as corrected) as part of the Consent Calendar Agenda

### Special Reports & Ministry Team Reports

- If you have a group in your church that just feels the strong desire to report, you can offer to insert a report into the leadership council packet.
- Please do not give way to returning to a reporting entity. Another reason for special reports might be a huge project going on that falls under the leadership council's responsibility. Examples of this might be a major church remodel, building project, capital campaign, stewardship campaign, etc. Is something like this is going on in the life of the congregation, it is appropriate and vital to have the person leading these special projects to submit a report for the packet. If it is just a progress report and things are going according to plan, there may not be a need for team discussion. However, if the project is not going according to plan or the project is stuck in some fashion, team discussion is probably needed and warranted.
- One suggestion is to have a standard report form (or even online form using ARUMC's free Google Apps system) that clearly asks at the beginning if the special report is an update or if Leadership council action is required.
- Most Committee or Team reports can simply be approved under the Consent Calendar Items. Need for discussion of an item may require that it be moved from the consent calendar for discussion under *Agenda Item #5: Generative Work*

# 3 Leading

## 5) Generative Work: Leadership Council Assistance/Questions/Discussion

While the last section involved accountability to goals and understanding the church's health and missional fruitfulness, this agenda time may be used to reflect on the value of the goals themselves. What goals may need to be added, adapted or changed to meet the changing ministry landscape and the needs of the mission field?

This is also the time where individuals team members may have questions, comments, concerns that need to be addressed for the overall good of the congregation as it pertains to church governance. Reports or items pulled from the Consent Calendar may need to be discussed. This is also a time for leadership council members to ask for help from other team members if they are stuck in individual assignments from the team. This could be an issue that brings about the need to establish a new guiding principle\* to allow ministry to happen without the leadership council's approval or intervention. This portion of the agenda deals with any places the leadership is stuck and needs to work through.

*\*What is a Guiding Principle? When the church moves into the simplified structure with the accountable leadership process, it will be helpful for the leadership council to identify some Guiding Principles. Guiding Principles is a document that gives permission for ministry to happen within healthy boundaries. Guiding Principles allows ministry to occur without constantly asking for permission. The principles give authority and responsibility to appropriate people while having a process of accountability in place. Most often leadership council develop these principles over time. It is a living document that is regularly visited, revamped and added to. Over time, as decisions are brought to the leadership council for approval, continuously ask yourself (when appropriate) how permission within healthy boundaries could be given in the Guiding Principles that would have allowed this decision not to have to come before the leadership council. How can this church create a culture of permission-giving with healthy boundaries in the framework of the mission and vision? A Guiding Principles document could include spending maximums, boundaries for Finance or Facilities Specialist authority, hiring/firing rules, and rules about Leadership council communication and transparency.*

## 6) Communications Plan

What needs to be shared from this meeting? How can the board support the ministry of the pastors, staff and ministry teams by keeping the congregation abreast of the board's strategic priorities and work toward the church's mission? Clarity about what should be communicated keeps the board on task, places the work of the board during the meeting in context and connects the board to the larger congregation.

## Closing Prayer

Prayer for the Mission Field, the Congregation, and our discernment of God's unfolding plan.

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## **Don't Forget:**

### **Communication Matters**

Particularly two-way communication! Simplified structure can make many members feel left out of the loop. Efforts to share and to listen must increase dramatically.

### **Leadership Matters**

Members of the leadership council should sign a published leadership covenant that lists expectations about the mission of the church, membership vows, presence and preparedness, behaviors, responsibility to the team, and accountable discipleship.

### **Clarity of Authority Matters**

When the meeting is over, finance, staffing, and building specialists put on their respective "hats" and have authority to make decisions within the boundaries of the UM Discipline and the congregation's Guiding Principles. Authority is granted while holding the persons responsible and accountable.