

FAQ SHEET

Frequently Asked Questions surrounding the proposed Bylaws – June 2019

1. Why do we need new Bylaws?

One of the needs that has been frequently rising to the surface among our ministry leaders is the need for clarity. Our Church Council and Elders often have questions about who needs to make which decisions. Many of our committees are unclear about which decisions they are free to make and which ones need to be approved by the Council or Elders. We've discovered that the lack of clarity decreases our efficiency and limits our effectiveness in ministry.

Two key concepts in the new bylaws are: accountability and empowerment. A clarified organizational structure means that leaders are accountable. It also means that leaders are empowered so that we can be more effective in accomplishing our mission. See the attached structural map for a visual picture.

The lack of clarity that we have been experiencing is a common challenge in many Church of God congregations. One of the best-practices that many congregations are working through is a bylaws revision that clearly defines roles and accountability. Consequently, we've been able to learn a great deal from these congregations.

It is not generally recommended that a senior pastor focus on new bylaws during the first year of his or her tenure with a church. Yet the Elders felt this was an appropriate time for us to revisit this topic, noting that similar discussions have been held periodically over the last few years. After extensive discussions between Pastor Erin, the Elders, and Church Council it was agreed that this was the right time.

2. What was the process for creating these Bylaws?

We began with a Saturday retreat day for the Elders and Church Council in early February. Pastor Bill Greiner (Eagle Ridge Church of God, Midland, MI) came and told us about the recent journey in his congregation of adopting a new set of bylaws. He shared that it's been a total game changing move for them. Additionally, Pastor Bob Moss (Hope Community Church, Niles MI) came to talk with us about his new book: *Lost in Logistics*, which provides a step by step process for governance revision. Pastor Moss (a.k.a. Pastor Erin's dad) has been a great help to us during this process.

The Church Council and Elders affirmed the decision to adopt a Governance/Accountability model of church leadership and appointed a Bylaws Committee. The committee includes: John Kemler, Kristina Eggenberger, Bill Hirschman, Garrett Whitmore, David Martin, and Erin Taylor. The Bylaws Committee worked diligently, investing more than 17 hours together over the course of 7 meetings to work on the bylaws line-by-line. In addition to utilizing the template suggested in the book *Lost in Logistics*, the committee also reviewed multiple examples of other bylaws as well as referenced the materials in the book *Winning on Purpose*, by John Kaiser. The Council and Elders then discussed and reviewed the drafts suggesting various changes until we were all agreed on the proposed copy.

3. What accountability is provided in the new governance model for the Senior Pastor?

The level of accountability is far superior to most church bylaws. These bylaws give much more specific instruction about the role of the Governing Board and how to hold the Senior Pastor accountable.

The intention of these bylaws is for the Senior Pastor and the Governing Board to collaborate together in establishing the ministry objectives for the church. The senior pastor is then accountable to the Board for forward progress in leading the organization in the fulfillment of these objectives.

4. What are the checks and balances for the Governing Board provided in this system?

The Board is not able to self-perpetuate for the following reasons:

- All Board members are subject to ratification by the congregation.
- Term limits for Board members are defined by the bylaws (see section 9.3).
- The Nominating Committee is ratified by the congregation and is also subject to term limits.

This ensures that our Governing Board has a balance of continuity and fresh perspective.

5. Does the congregation lose its voice under the new bylaws?

No. The congregation continues to have an important voice and ultimate authority over the business affairs of the church.

There are nine major decisions for which the congregation is responsible:

1. Call of a Senior Pastor.
2. Call of an Associate Pastor.
3. Purchase or sale of land or buildings.
4. Incurring of long-term debt with payments extending more than 5 years (60 months).
5. Incurring of long-term debt with annual payments (principal and interest) that exceeds 10% of the expenditures included in the approved budget, including amendments, in effect as of the date of the loan. For purposes of this section, "expenditures" shall be considered normal, operating expenditures and shall exclude any capital outlay item specifically identified in the approved budget.
6. Approval of the Annual General Operating Budget.
7. Purchases of fixed assets (assets that have a useful life of more than one year) in excess 10% of approved budget currently in effect as of the date of the purchase.
8. Individual Ratification of Governing Board and Nominating Committee.
9. Alteration, amendment, or repeal of the Bylaws.

6. What happens to existing staff when new bylaws are adopted?

Existing staff will remain in place. The proposed changes to the bylaws are not intended to provide a mechanism to bring about changes to the staff, but rather to provide clarification in the relationship between staff and the Governing Board and the Senior Pastor.

7. What will happen to existing boards and committees?

The existing ministries of the church are essential to the success of our ministry. Our committees will continue to lead their ministries and collaborate with other ministries. The most important transition provided by the new bylaws is by transitioning our mindset away from a legislative mindset with terms of office, voting, minutes, and parliamentary procedure, to a mindset of ministry. The desire is for our church to consist of many ministry teams and all members of the church are to be encouraged to find their place in a ministry team. See the attached structural map for a visual picture.

8. If the proposed bylaws pass, how soon would they become effective?

The beginning of our next fiscal year: Sept 1, 2019. A business meeting will be held in August to ratify the budget and leaders. The Church Council will act as the interim nominating committee in the transition.

9. Explain the difference between bylaws and policy.

This is a key distinction! Bylaws are written to provide the governing structure and provisions for regulating the affairs of the corporation. Bylaws describe the core structural function of how the church operates. Policies are the specific ways that we go about life and ministry within the church. This means that many important and specific ways that we do ministry together remain as policies. Policies can change and adapt as needed to help us achieve our mission.

10. Why do the bylaws describe our church as corporation rather than a congregation?

The term corporation describes us as a formal, organized, legal entity that is accountable to the laws of the state of Michigan. This, however, is not a description of our identity. We will continue to define and understand ourselves as a congregation.

Governance / Accountability Model

Alma First Church of God

