

The Role of the Board of Trustees in the Life of First Unitarian Church of Des Moines And Expectations of Individual Board Members

The members of the Board of Trustees are the voice of moral ownership of First Unitarian Church of Des Moines. The moral ownership is defined as the past, present, and future members and friends of First Unitarian Church of Des Moines, and the principles of Unitarian Universalism.

The board speaks authoritatively when it passes an official motion at a properly constituted meeting. Statements by individual board members have no authority. The board speaks with one voice or not at all. The one-voice principle makes it possible to know what the board has or has not said. This principle does not require a unanimous vote, but it does require that all board members respect decisions made. Board decisions can be changed by the board as a whole, but never by individual board members.

Governance Style and Job Contributions

The board of trustees will approach its task with a style that

- emphasizes strategic leadership rather than administrative detail
- communicates a clear distinction between board and staff roles
- Is focused on the future rather than the past
- Is pro-active as opposed to reactive

In this spirit, the board will:

1. Focus chiefly on intended long term impacts or ends, not on the administrative or programmatic means of attaining those effects.
2. Direct, control, and inspire the organization through the establishment of broad organizational values and policies. Writing governing policies that at the broadest levels address:
 - a. Ends: Organizational products, impacts, benefits, outcomes (what good for whom at what cost).
 - b. Executive Limitations: Constraints on executive authority that establish the prudence and ethics boundaries within which lies the acceptable arena of executive activity, decisions, and organizational circumstances.
 - c. Governance process: Specifications of how the board conceives, carries out, and monitors its own tasks
 - d. Board-Executive Relationship: How power is delegated and its proper use monitored.

3. Assure senior minister's performance through monitoring and evaluation in accord with policies 2.a., 2.b., and 2.d. above.
4. Link First Unitarian Church of Des Moines with its stakeholders.
5. Enforce upon itself whatever discipline is needed to govern with excellence.
 - a. Discipline will apply to policy-making principles, respect for defined roles, and attendance.
 - b. After subjects have been discussed and voted upon, both majority and minority will support the action taken and speak with one voice.
6. Be accountable to the congregation and other stakeholders for competent, conscientious, and effective accomplishment of its obligations as a body. It will allow no officer, individual, or committee of the board to usurp this role or hinder this discipline.
7. Monitor and regularly discuss the board's own process and performance.
8. Ensure the continuity of board improvements through systematic treatment of its own institutional memory.
9. Be an initiator of policy, not merely a reactor to staff initiatives. The board, not the staff, will be responsible for board performance.

Responsibilities of Individual Board Members:

- Develop an understanding of current church by-laws, ends statements, policies, processes, programs, services, strengths, and needs of the church, and enter into creative interchange with others to achieve a collaborative understanding.
- Understand the principles of policy governance and make decisions and take actions based on those principles. As stewards of the Ends Statements making sure that we are meeting them today and being visionaries for the future.
- Serve in leadership positions and undertake special assignments willingly and with accountability.
- Avoid prejudiced judgments on the basis of information received from individuals. Urge those with grievances to follow established policies and procedures to create linkage with those who can assist in solving the issue. (All matters of potential significance should be called to the attention of the minister and the board's elected leader as appropriate.)
- Make a commitment to be true to the covenants made with others in the church and to integrate skills to one's best ability to speak truth with love.
- Encourage members of the congregation to apply to serve on the Board of Trustees and the Endowment Committee.
- Participate in creating linkage with the congregation and staff so that a mutual understanding of the policies, procedures, defined roles and responsibilities of committees, staff, Board of Trustees, and lay congregation is most effectively working together.

Approved by the Board of Trustees on 1/12/12 – reviewed 4/12/18

Reviewed, amended and approved by the BofT 2/20/20 – “Executive Team” was changed to “Executive” (2 instances).