

Rethinking the Governance of First-St. Andrew's United Church

July 2025

Introduction

Based on the need to make most effective use of the volunteer resources to lead and serve FSA, and recognizing that the size of the FSA Community of Faith has decreased considerably since the Council model was implemented three decades ago, steps have been taken by the current Leadership Council to discuss and propose a restructuring of the governance and leadership of FSA.

In the lead-up to the change from a Session-Board of Stewards-Official Board governing model to a Council model in 1992, the (then) Chair of the Official Board, John Eberhard wrote the following in his report entitled 'A History Project':

Any church government must necessarily reflect all the required functions and responsibilities outlined in the United Church Manual. Within these constraints, however, we have considerable latitude to choose structures and become more effective in meeting the particular needs of First-St. Andrew's.

The same holds true today. The adoption of the Council model of governance, some thirty-three years ago, has served us extremely well. This should both reassure and empower us in making another major change; one that aligns with the current and future capabilities and needs of FSA.

A couple of items to note at the outset:

- This proposed change in governance will not have a direct impact on staff nor on their current roles and responsibilities.
- The United Church of Canada mandates that every church have a Board of Trustees to manage church assets and also a Ministry and Personnel Committee to manage staff human resources – this will not change.
- The new governance model will be tested out on a temporary basis to allow for changes and adjustments to be made. This will occur over about 17 months beginning in September 2025 and lasting until the annual congregational meeting in January 2027.
- The new model will be fully communicated in advance and as it evolves will be explained to the congregation both in writing and at some combination of town-hall style and congregational meetings.
- The final structure, assuming the pilot or test period goes well, will require the approval of the congregation and the Antler River Watershed Regional Council.

The proposed new governance structure

The proposed change involves having a smaller (eight person) governing Council which will involve the four officers of the church (Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Minister of Worship and Congregational Life) together with the Past Chair and three members-at-large. The current Council is much larger and includes the Chairs of all standing committees of FSA. In the remainder of this document, the proposed smaller Council will be referred to as the "New Council" to avoid confusion with the existing Council model.

The intent behind proposing a change of this type is as follows:

- To “free up” the time of current leaders who carry responsibility for leading both committees and Council itself
- To allow those who will become members of the New Council to focus their time and attention on church-wide matters. New Council members will not represent a committee or group but the church as a whole.
- To allow the New Council to focus attention on two key areas: long-term strategic direction-setting and operational management from an FSA-wide perspective.
- To allow some of areas of responsibility which fall, intentionally or by default, to the Chair under the existing governance model, to be taken on by other members of the New Council.
- To allow greater flexibility in how portfolios/committees are organized and structured including promoting shared leadership, thereby making it easier and more attractive for people to take on leadership roles.

A comparison between the current Council and the proposed New Council

Current Structure – Board Size

The current council is made up of designated officers (Chair, Past Chair, Chair Elect, Secretary, Treasurer, Associate Chair); the Chairs (or Co-Chairs) of all standing committees (seven in total); the Co-Chairs of the Board of Trustees, the Chair of the UCW (United Church Women); a representative to the Regional Council (one of three representatives); and, the Minister of Worship and Congregational Life.

Proposed Structure – Council Size

The proposed New Council would include the Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, the Past Chair, three members-at-large, and the Minister of Worship and Congregational Life. The New Council would not include Chairs of Committees or the Board of Trustees, a Regional Council representative, nor the President of the UCW.

Current Structure – Standing Committees

The current standing committee structure is outlined in the current Statement of Policies and Procedures of FSA (see the FSA website for details) and includes the following seven committees plus the Board of Trustees:

Faith Development Committee

Finance Committee

Membership and Nurture Committee

Ministry and Personnel Committee

Music Committee

Outreach Committee

Property Committee

Proposed Structure –new flexibility

Rather than having standing committees as currently defined it is proposed that the seven areas of responsibility as listed above be redefined as portfolios, each of which would have a lead **Coordinator**¹ The intent is to introduce new flexibility in how the functions, important and necessary to the work and life and FSA, are carried out - rather than prescribe a specific committee structure, organization, and membership as is currently the case.

Each portfolio will involve all of the following: leadership, oversight, and responsibility for the functioning of a designated operational area of FSA on a regular and ongoing basis. The portfolio's short- and long-term plans will inform the overall planning for FSA as curated by the Council.

At the outset, the number and main focus of the portfolios will mirror that of the current standing committees – although this could change over time. It is intended that there could be flexibility in the number and mandate of portfolios/committees. Any changes would be made by the Council in consultation with existing portfolios, staff, and other affected parties. Current Regional Council representatives could also be considered as a portfolio for reporting purposes.

As noted above, a key difference is the flexibility in how the work would be undertaken. The Coordinators will have considerable discretion in the operational and administrative structure of their mandated area of responsibility. In other words, a portfolio and its leader(s) can elect to continue to function as a standing committee, or choose an entirely different structure within which to carry out its mandate, or adopt a hybrid approach. Whatever form the initially adopted structure takes can be changed at any time, in consultation with the New Council.

Shared Leadership

One of the issues associated with the current organizational structure is the workload that falls to committee Chairs. For some, this has translated their leadership role into being an operational burden rather than a gift to be shared.

On a go-forward basis, it is proposed that shared leadership be implemented whenever possible. In practical terms that means that all members of a portfolio could share aspects of the leadership role so that the Coordinators can do just that – coordinate – rather than be “saddled with the work”.

List of portfolios/committees and mandates anticipated at the outset of the new governance model

Beyond the UCC mandated Board of Trustees and M&P Committee, all other committees (current)/portfolios (proposed) are at the discretion of FSA. The set of discretionary bodies has changed over time and will almost certainly continue to evolve to meet changing internal and external environments.

¹ This could be a shared role if that is the most effective way of functioning.

The individual mandates provided below are summative. It is anticipated that each discretionary portfolio would develop their terms of reference by building upon the mandate and mission statement of its precursor committee.

Board of Trustees (required by UCC)

Mandate: to be responsible for the sustainability of the capital assets of FSA, including the property and buildings own by FSA; generating investment income; and, defining on-going and priority activities on an annual and multi-year basis.

Ministry and Personnel Committee (required by UCC)

Mandate: to provide effective human resources management services at FSA including staff oversight; to define on-going and priority activities on an annual and multi-year basis; and to develop and be guided by an annual, approved budget.

Faith Development Portfolio (at the discretion of FSA)

Mandate: to support all aspects of faith development at FSA including worship and children & youth programs; to define on-going and priority activities on an annual and multi-year basis; and to develop and be guided by an annual, approved budget.

Finance Portfolio (at the discretion of FSA)

Mandate: to provide financial oversight of FSA operational funds; develop the annual financial budget and identify the future financial needs of FSA; to define on-going and priority activities on an annual and multi-year basis; and to develop and be guided by an annual, approved budget.

Membership & Nurture Portfolio (at the discretion of FSA)

Mandate: to provide caring support to FSA members (including pastoral care); to support volunteer engagement in the work and life of FSA; to define on-going and priority activities on an annual and multi-year basis; and to develop and be guided by an annual, approved budget.

Music Portfolio (at the discretion of FSA)

Mandate: To provide leadership and support to FSA's many music programs; to define on-going and priority activities on an annual and multi-year basis; and to develop and be guided by an annual, approved budget.

Outreach Portfolio (at the discretion of FSA)

Mandate: to bring leadership and support to FSA outreach projects and activities; to define on-going and priority activities on an annual and multi-year basis; and to develop and be guided by an annual, approved budget.

Property Portfolio² (at the discretion of FSA)

Mandate: to provide for the on-going operational management of the FSA property and buildings with a view to future sustainability; to define on-going and priority activities on an annual and multi-year basis; and to develop and be guided by an annual, approved budget.

Reporting Relationships and Communications – current structure

At the current time the standing committees report to the Leadership Council through their Chairs or Co-Chairs on a regular basis through the meetings of Council, as well as written reports – to keep people informed. Responsibility for communications between or among committees rests with the committee Chairs or Co-Chairs.

Reporting Relationships and Communications – Proposed

The proposed Coordinators would be expected to provide quarterly reports to the New Council – these reports would provide an activity summary and progress toward self-defined goals and objectives. These reports would be made available to all Coordinators and posted to the FSA website. In addition, it is proposed that individual members of the New Council be assigned responsibility to liaise with specific portfolio Coordinators and the Board of Trustees, to keep channels of communication open at all times. As is currently the case, any cross-portfolio initiatives would be addressed collaboratively through the Coordinators. Issues and conflicts would be brought to the attention of the New Council as needed. This same reporting and communications relationship would apply to the Board of Trustees and the Ministry and Personnel Committee.

There are undoubtedly benefits to be had from in-person meetings among the Coordinators and the New Council, with the frequency of such gatherings reflecting a balance between the burden of ‘too many’ meetings and the isolation of too few. Such a balance might lie in semi-annual sessions wherein progress can be shared and joint short- and long-term planning undertaken. Regional Council representatives would also be invited to attend these meetings.

On an ad hoc basis, one can also foresee occasional meetings involving subsets of Coordinators and representative(s) from the New Council to discuss inter-portfolio plans and/or operational matters in areas that overlap two or more portfolios.

² In some congregations the Property Committee reports to the Broad of Trustees and this is an option

Closing Remarks

The new governance structure outlined above should be seen as an organizational framework; not as a definitive statement as to its functioning. Policies and procedures to support the structure will follow on an as needed basis.

It is anticipated that the proposed changes will result in more effective (and shared) leadership and engagement by the members of FSA.

Accepting and adapting to a proposed change is not easy; actually, making it work is a challenge. But with a recognition that there are important benefits to be gained – change is not only possible but can evolve to become the “new normal” that is both exciting and enriching.