

Augustine United Church's Leadership Structure

Adaptation of Carver Model

In the past, the council and committee structure of church leadership served us well, but we began to struggle with a number of weaknesses with this structure. Over time, the number of potential leaders diminished, in part because of the onerous expectations on Committee Chairs. They were required to call regular committee meetings and then attend monthly council meetings which would consider recommendations from the committees. Often the recommendations were reworked and rewritten. The meetings focussed primarily on these committee recommendations, leaving little time for the overall visioning of the church. It required a significant time commitment from committee chairs and often repeated the work of the committees. Augustine began to look for a new leadership structure that would better honour the stewardship of people's time and gifts, and allow more time and attention for the discernment of God's overall guidance and direction for the congregation.

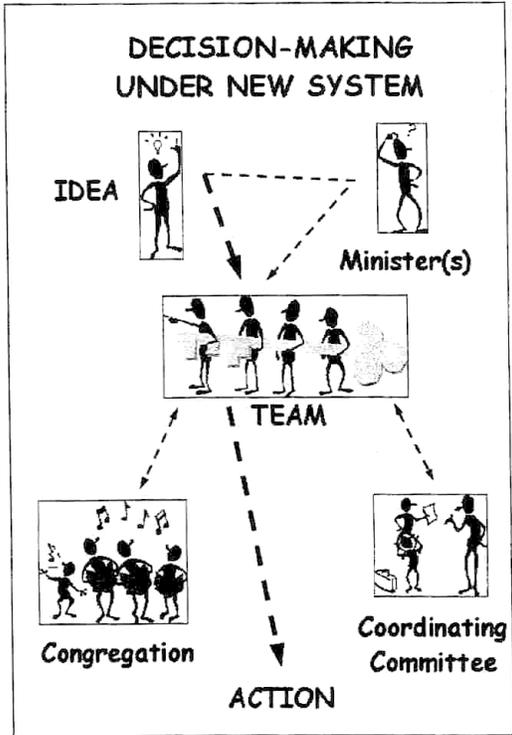
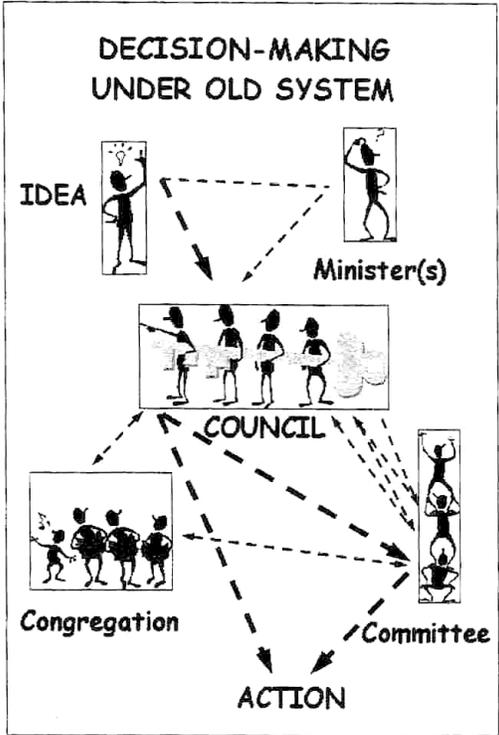
Bob Jackson, staff with Manitou Conference, developed a model of church leadership that addresses these concerns. In his DMin thesis, *An Effective and Efficient Model for Church Boards*, he adapted the Carver model for United Church congregations. This 46 page paper has been a helpful guide to congregations in Manitou Conference (northern Ontario) which have adopted this model. The Church Council carefully read this paper and decided that our new leadership structure could benefit from the guidance of Bob's adaptation of the Carver model. We were in email correspondence with Bob, who offered helpful suggestions as we began to flesh out our structure.

At two different congregational meetings, we presented and discussed the details of this new structure. With a recognition that traditional church councils spent most of their time reacting, reviewing, rehashing and redoing, the Carver model removes the micromanagement of the board and gives it time to focus upon visioning and overall guidance for the life and ministry of the congregation. The purpose of the Church Council is to:

1. discern God's vision for the church
2. establish mandates and parameters for the teams
3. monitor the teams according to their parameters and mandates
4. ensure good communication
5. develop the processes for the Church Council's work

This adaptation of the Carver model is based not upon centralizing power in a CEO (a common misconception), but in decentralizing power to the Teams. This model places day to day decision-making in the hands of the teams (see following diagram). They are given the freedom to design their own process of meeting and working (some meet regularly, others meet when necessary, yet others meet only through email). They are also given the freedom to implement their ideas without need of approval from another body, as long as their work falls within their mandate and parameters.

Winnipeg Presbytery approved Augustine's new leadership structure in 2007.



This decentralized model of decision making requires thorough communication amongst teams and committees. We have emphasized the use of sometimes redundant communication to ensure that everyone who needs to know particular pieces of information will receive them. Each team is asked to email their minutes to the other teams and Church Council to facilitate communication.

Based upon the Carver model, the Church Council developed mandates and parameters for each team. The United Church Manual requirements were carefully placed into the mandates of the appropriate bodies. The parameters were constructed in the negative tense so as to open up greater possibilities for their work. For example, if a team was given a parameter to work within the values of Augustine, a question of networking with other community organizations might arise. What if they did not espouse the same stated values as Augustine? Were they to be limited only to those organizations which upheld identically stated values? However, if stated in the negative (i.e. may not contravene congregational core values), anything that was not explicitly against a value was open for consideration. This would mean that networking with other communities which espoused different values was fine, as long as they didn't espouse values that contradicted Augustine values.

Implementation and Evaluation of New Model

The Team Mandates and Parameters were completed in the fall of 2004 and we have been operating with this model since that time. After one year, we found our leadership team reinvigorated with new energy and vision. Each team is able to make decisions and implement new projects fairly quickly. The Church Council has spent considerable time putting the details of this new structure into place, but is now beginning to spend time on broader visioning and long-term planning. The weakness of this new structure is communication. Because each Team Leader does not report to a council once a month, it is more difficult for them to stay informed of what each team is doing and to see their work within the broader ministry of Augustine as a whole. For this reason, Team Leaders send regular communiqués and minutes to each other. We continue to print a regular newsletter called AugustZine, which highlights different aspects of our ministries. We also have a meeting for all leadership three times a year to work together on common visions and goals.