

Executive Summary Draft 2022-2023 Plymouth Bylaws Task Force Report

Our task force was charged by Council with reviewing Plymouth's Bylaws. We always kept in mind the language of the Constitution, "The governing authority of the Church is in its members, who exercise the right of control in all its affairs...." (Article III. Polity)

Our process was to explore where Plymouth governance currently is, both in structure and in practice. We would then review the history of Plymouth governance to look for clues as to how we got to where we are. We would then discuss issues and possible improvements.

To explore where we are, we surveyed almost every current Plymouth member who had been a Moderator, member of Council, or a chair of a board or committee in past 10 to 15 years. All of the task force members have been one of these things, but we needed more insight and were lucky with the quantity and quality of the responses we received.

We found that we have a vibrant church. But we also found issues that warranted consideration:

- Bylaws are not easily accessible so rarely consulted;
- Policy is neither defined nor collected;
- There is confusion on the roles of Council, boards, committees, and staff;
- There are a lot of meetings;
- There is a lack of goal setting;
- We are heavily dependent on a few individuals who have stepped up.

Our review of Plymouth's history showed:

- An evolution through the decades of moving from a church overseen, managed, and operated by members to one where gradually more and more staff were added to take over much of the management and some of the operations.
- Council had been – but no longer is – a large "planning and coordinating" body with the decisions made by Deacons, Trustees, and a Christian Education body.
- Beginning in 1976 an additional semi-independent board was added with more added through the 80s and 90s. These boards also evolved from running things to becoming more of an advisory group helping with implementation of staff efforts.
- The Trustees were renamed Stewardship in 1988 but retained the financial and facility areas.
- Council members were named the trustees in 1988 with final say over boards but not designated as the governing body. It remained designed as a large coordinating body without in-depth knowledge of church finances. Goal setting is infrequent. Annual turnover is high.

Based on these findings, the task force drafted bylaws and policies that:

1. Reduce Council from 17 or 18 voting members to 10 members. Reduce Council turnover each year from more than 50% to 33%.
2. Blend Council and Stewardship into one true governing body with the duties and fiduciary responsibilities of trustees, combining the oversight of the church program and the secular functions.
3. Provide a clearer goal setting and strategy process.
4. Transform remaining semi-independent boards into Standing Ministries that continue to provide advice, feedback, and energy.
5. Create new Ministry Teams to encourage members to find ways to live their faith. Fewer meetings and more doing.
6. Develop a policy process and move many details to flexible policy.