

HOW OUR CHURCH WORKS

I. Theological Statement on Congregational Polity (Governance)

Adapted from *THE NEW UU: A Tapestry of Faith Program for Adults*, Workshop Five, by Jonalu Johnstone.

<http://www.uua.org/religiouseducation/curricula/tapestryfaith/thene.../index.shtml>

In the matter of governance, Unitarian Universalist congregations today are directly descended from the Puritan churches that were self-governing. Each congregation has title to its property. No official in a religious hierarchy may close a Unitarian Universalist congregation, or fire its minister. No authority outside the congregation can define membership or dictate the annual budget of the congregation. Only the members of the congregation can make such determinations. This structure of self-government is called congregational polity.

While members cannot be consulted on every decision, they do vote on the most important issues. One of the important decisions is the election of leaders, generally a governing board and the call of the minister(s). Implicit in our congregational covenants is a promise to trust leaders to make decisions within particular realms, and to ask when they need guidance. For example, ministers generally have responsibility for worship-related concerns, though some issues such as adding an extra worship service may require a congregational vote, or certainly, input. A religious educator or Religious Education Committee may create a Coming of Age program for youth, but the congregation will determine when a youth may become a member of the congregation.

Membership means that you are able to help make the important decisions. The members collectively own the congregation and are vested with the power of governance. Elected lay leaders and called ministers are accountable to the congregation.

Relationships between congregations are mutual relationships of equals, regardless of the congregations' size or influence. Unitarian Universalist congregations covenant to form the Unitarian Universalist Association of congregations, coming together for mutual benefit.

Unitarian Universalist congregations also participate in Districts, geographic groupings of congregations which work together to promote Unitarian Universalism and to support one another. Unitarian Universalist Community Church is part of the Northern New England District which includes Maine, New Hampshire and Vermont.