

Subject: Transition to Our New Organizational Model

Submitted by: Rev. John Pons (970) 224-1206

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Transition To Our New Organizational Model

By Rev. John M. Pons

ponsjm@aol.com

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The New System:

Three years ago, United Church announced a new organizational structure at the annual convention (now called the Gathering). I was so excited about what was presented, that upon returning home, I presented the information to our Board of Trustees. The excitement was contagious; we immediately began the process of transitioning from the old hierarchical base that we had been using to the circular organization that was being created at the national level.

By April of that year, we had already moved the mechanics of the church to the new style of governance. This was not an instant process. Rather, it happened in stages. The new model was presented at the convention in 2000. Although we began to run the church under the new structure the same year it was presented at convention, the actual transition was not completed until our annual meeting in January of 2002, two years later. I have prepared this paper to assist those of you who are contemplating the move but might not know how to begin.

Remember, this is merely an example of one approach. Although it worked well for us, it cannot just be blindly followed. Each church and its energy are different. However, I believe by utilizing a plan such as the one outlined below, the transition can be accomplished not only easily but also in a method that empowers the entire church community.

What are the benefits of moving to the new system?

There are two major areas of benefit that can be derived by a church after implementing the new system:

- **Mechanical Opportunity**
Imagine owning a certain make of car. The car is engineered by the company that manufactured and sold you the car. At some point in time, maintenance or repair work must be performed on it. You search for a service shop that works on your brand of car. Once you begin working with that service shop, you have the confidence that the work done on your car is completed correctly and using parts that are manufactured to the proper specs.

Now imagine taking your car to another manufacturer's repair facility and having brakes or a fuel injection system designed for a different car installed in your vehicle. Would you like to take that vehicle on a long road trip? Probably not.

By staying in the old structure, that is essentially what a church will experience. It will be trying to operate in a mechanical fashion that is not only inconsistent but one which produces dramatically different results.

Prior to moving into the ministry, I worked for both large and small corporations as a CPA in a management position. I have observed that a corporation cannot work effectively with a subsidiary that operates under a different organizational philosophy.

- Energetic Opportunity:
The new structure provides:
 - An opportunity for many more people to become involved in the structure. The more people involved, the more informed, educated and committed the congregation will be.
 - The infusion of the vision committee /committees provides the direct and latest intuition for church growth.
 - The flatter, circular structure eliminates power points. With more people involved in the decision-making, there is less of a tendency to look to any one individual (that means us as the ministers and boards) with challenges.
 - By utilizing the new structure, there is more of a system of checks and balances that supports the quality production of projects and programs. This avoids having individuals run amok with the creative process. When people feel empowered, there is increased risk of “Lone Ranger Syndrome”. However, with the increased level of responsibility on a congregational level, if this kind of challenge arises, the group—not the minister or the Core Chairperson—works together to correct the challenge.

It is true that it remains the duty and obligation of the minister to “hold the box of excellence” as Rev. Petra Weldes so eloquently put it in her workshop at the most recent Gathering. However, within the framework of the new system, more people take ownership of that “box of excellence” as they feel empowered to be a part of the decision-making process.

How can we make the transition?

The following describes what we did at Whole Life Church. While this is not a guaranteed blueprint for success in every community, it made sense to us as we went through the process. It is up to each individual community to create and implement a process that works for them. However, our story may spark some ideas within your community as you contemplate the transition process.

In the beginning...

Combining a desire to migrate to the new structure with a certain degree of self-preservation, our board decided that immediately moving into a new structure without working out the kinks could be considered foolhardy. So being practical folks, we figured out a way to do it without really *doing* it. Hmmm....

What we did was leave the old Board of Trustees in their positions. Our church’s Bylaws empowered the Board to establish committees as they saw fit. So we established committees...and named them “Core Council”, “Vision Core”, “Stewardship Core”, “Operational Manifestation Core”, and the “Ecclesiastical

Manifestation Core". (With all of those cores, we felt a bit like Adam in this process.)

We then populated the cores with the best qualified congregants for those specific cores. Most of the board was on the Core Council; however one individual was redirected to the Vision Core. The President of the old board interviewed each person to ensure that they were comfortable in their new positions. We then simply let the old board drift into the background and started working with the new "committees" with the insurance that if things went south, we could re-institute the old structure, which we knew how to work.

We went to the end of the year, moved tasks around a bit and went into the year-end annual meeting with the old board running the meeting. At this point, we began the process of tracking more along the lines of the national level. We named a transition team – it just happened to be the committee members who had run the church for the previous nine months. The congregants voted them in as transition members. The board was still functioning since we hadn't yet changed our by-laws.

Next, we went through the process of adopting the new bylaws. We had everything ready so that at the end of the year, home office had already accepted them. We were then able to present them at the annual meeting, thus avoiding having to have a special meeting to change the bylaws.

And that brings us up to January, 2002 when the congregation voted the new structure into being. We have operated under that structure since.

What has Whole Life Church gained as a result?

Change simply for the purpose of change is a futile exercise. The Whole Life Church reaped a number of significant benefits from this new structure.

- By providing the people with a greater voice, and by flattening out our structure, the community gradually took more of an interest in their church. It is no longer the Minster, Practitioners, and the Boards that have to pull the people along behind them.
- The Vision Core guided us to the purchase of a new Church Building.
- The Ecclesiastical Manifestation Core (EMC) provides value by enhancing the Sunday Service, assisting with ceremony, devising functions and their timing to meet the community's needs, and assisted in my sermon preparation (I particularly like that benefit).
- The Stewardship Core is empowered to take charge of the financial operations of the church.
- The Operations Manifestation Core, by its presence on the Core, is aware of what is happening at a significantly greater level, thus ensuring that all mechanical requirements are handled in a timely manner.

In summary, EVERYTHING works better.

I invite all who are thinking of making the transition to look at the benefits and take the first step. It might seem daunting, but you don't have to know exactly how it will unfold. Isn't that part of the mystery of life that we teach? I know that each of you desiring to make this move is divinely guided, and the process and result are empowering to all involved!

With Love and Peace, I respectfully submit these ideas,
Rev. John Pons