

Simplified Accountable Structure Design Basics

Resource curated by Rev. LuAnn Rourke, Michigan Conference of The UMC

- 1) Nine members, elected by Charge Conference, rotating three-year terms (max of nine to align with BOD limitations/membership requirements for Trustees and S/PPRC).
- 2) All nine members (plus the pastor) are simultaneously serving as S/PPRC, Trustees, Finance, and Church Council.
- 3) Required identified positions among lay members of the board (These three roles can be combined and filled by one person):
 - Board Chair
 - Lay Member to Annual Conference
 - Lay Leader
- 4) A separate nominating committee is required.
- 5) Trustees must be 18 years or older (a younger member of the board must not vote on Trustee matters). A Trustee chair must be identified by vote during the first meeting in January.
- 6) The pastor serves as executive leader and is an ex officio member of the board. The pastor is not a trustee and may not vote on Trustee matters. The pastor is not a voting member of S/PPRC and should not vote when the board is acting in its capacity as S/PPRC.

When functioning as S/PPRC:

- 1) The board must move into executive session at appropriate times and excuse all staff and guests. Note taking should be appropriately altered to honor confidentiality guidelines required by the Book of Discipline. Confidentiality is a vital part of the role of the board. Spiritual and emotional maturity should be considered when electing board members.
- 2) Resist the urge to utilize staff liaisons. This develops quickly into triangled relationships. (Briefly - when A needs to talk to B, they go instead to C and ask C to talk to A on their behalf). Instead of resolving the issue, it muddies communication, increases anxiety, and creates unhelpful alliances.

NOTE: In cases of misconduct or certain interpersonal issues, it may be helpful to have a trusted person serve as an intermediary.

3) The Board must clearly define who has responsibility for evaluation, and authority to hire discipline, and terminate staff. There are options, but the policy must be clearly defined, and the board must hold one another accountable to the policy.

A. The pastor supervises, evaluates, and disciplines staff. The board holds the pastor accountable for doing so faithfully, legally, and within the bounds of the church's mission, policies, and procedures. The board stays focused on the mission, strategy, and accountability, and the pastor leads the staff and day to day operations.

B. The board retains authority over hiring and termination, while delegating supervision, evaluation, and daily management to the pastor (or pastor's designee). The board approves positions, recommends job descriptions and compensation. The pastor supervises performance and manages teams. Written policies and procedures are non-negotiable in this model. The board must resist the urge to drift into day-to-day staff management or informal supervision.

C. Some hybrid version of these two options may be effective. However, specific written practices and procedures must be in place. They must be followed diligently and reviewed regularly. Ambiguity creates anxiety.

“The Leadership Board must resist the temptation to manage staff work under the guise of care or concern. Governance is neither pastoral nor managerial. Oversight is not supervision. Simplified accountable structure works best when everyone stays in their lane. When Leadership Boards govern, pastors supervise, and staff coordinate ministry, the system becomes not only simpler, but healthier.” – Blake Bradford

Reference: *Mission Possible 4th Edition 2026-2028*. Kay Kotan and Blake Bradford. Pages 129-133