

Frequently Asked Questions about **Co-Ministry**

What is our current ministerial leadership structure?

Currently, we have two ministers called by the congregation: Senior Minister Justin Schroeder and Executive Minister Jen Crow. Reverends Elaine Tenbrink and Ruth MacKenzie are hired associate ministers. Under our policy governance structure, the Senior Minister is essentially the chief executive of the church, responsible for and reporting to the Board of Trustees regarding our visionary goals and the supervision of the staff.

Why are we changing to a co-ministry model?

Justin and Jen approached the Board about one year ago with a request that the Board change the leadership structure from a hierarchical senior minister / executive minister relationship to a more equitable co-minister relationship. Justin and Jen realized as they worked closely together over several years that their ministries were both complementary and intertwined in ways that were functionally equitable but not formally so. Before approaching the Board, they spent time working with an outside coach to assist them in envisioning what a co-ministry might look like and how it would further enhance their individual ministries at our church.

The Board of Trustees enthusiastically supports the move to co-ministry. It is another example of how Justin and Jen provide visionary leadership for our church, seeking to practice equity themselves and model how equity can be lived out in the world. The Board believes that Jen and Justin have demonstrated, and will continue to demonstrate, the honesty, maturity, and compassion that is necessary to succeed as co-ministers.

What effect will this have on our congregation?

Because Justin and Jen have effectively been working as co-ministers for quite some time now, the congregation may not perceive a significant difference. Preaching responsibilities will be adjusted so that Justin and Jen preach an equal number of times through the church year but otherwise their portfolios of responsibility will not change. Justin and Jen will be jointly responsible for reporting to the Board regarding the execution of our visionary goals and the supervision of staff. The Board, in turn, will evaluate both Justin's and Jen's performance individually and as a co-ministry team.

What happens if Justin and Jen cannot agree on an issue?

Although we expect it will be exceedingly rare, based on the ministers' and the Board's experience over the past year, that Justin and Jen will reach an impasse on an issue entrusted to them, the Board of Trustees has considered this possibility. Justin and Jen intend to continue to allocate their professional development funds toward regular meetings with a coach, who could assist in resolving a dispute. Issues may also be brought to the Board of Trustees. Although the Board generally avoids becoming involved in staff or operations issues, either the Board President or the full Board could be consulted to help resolve a dispute.

What happens if Justin or Jen decides to leave our church?

The Board spent some time considering what might happen if either of our co-ministers was unable to continue to serve our church, whether because of a voluntary departure, illness, retirement, etc. Would the church seek to call a new minister to serve in a co-minister role with the continuing co-minister? Would the remaining co-minister become the senior minister? The Board came to the realization that it would be difficult, perhaps even impossible, to predict the circumstances in which one of our co-ministers might cease to serve our congregation, what the needs of the Church might be at that time, and what ministry structure would be appropriate. Hence, the Board is recommending that the congregation adopt the revised bylaws regarding executive leadership, which would make it clear that when transitions occur with called ministers, the Board would discern what steps were appropriate, determine what resources might be needed through the transition (including acting or interim ministers), and direct the Nominating Committee to recommend to the congregation a search committee to seek a new called-minister if necessary.

What is the role of the congregation in this transition?

Only the congregation can call a minister to serve and only the congregation can discharge a called minister. Under our Church's policy governance structure, the Board of Trustees is responsible for supervising the minister(s) who provide the executive leadership of the church. This includes monitoring the Church's compliance with Board policies, setting and modifying compensation, etc. As a technical matter, determining the appropriate responsibilities of the ministers providing executive leadership, their titles, and the manner in which the Board monitors their work is the responsibility of the Board of Trustees. Hence, deciding whether we should have two senior co-ministers is likely a Board function. However, it also seems counterintuitive that the congregation would not have an opportunity to weigh in on this type of a change. That is why the Board is presenting a resolution on co-ministry to the congregation at the Annual Meeting.