

## **Update on Council Governance for 2018 Annual Report of Atonement Lutheran Church**

For the past year, much of the Congregation Council's work has centered on transitioning to a new style of governance. Making this change was a condition of Pastor Hersch's call, but Council has embraced the new structure for its potential to strengthen our organization and help Council lead more effectively. I've championed and led the transition, and in this report, I will describe the governing model and how we envision our work in the coming year and beyond.

When organizations grow, their leadership bodies often discover the importance of moving away from actively managing the organization and toward governing with a focus on concerns like vision, mission, and long-term strategy. Churches are no different in this respect (although, of course, they are unique in others). To keep abreast of the opportunities and challenges facing Atonement, to discern the paths that God has planned for our church, to steer the church in those directions—that is, to lead the organization—Council needs to devote more time on high-level questions and decisions and less on day-to-day decision making.

Although we believe this way of Council functioning is new for ELCA churches in the Northeastern PA synod, it's not a novel idea. The model that has guided our transition, the Policy Governance® model created by John Carver, was developed in the 1970s and used by many nonprofit organizations, including churches in the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and the Unitarian Universalist Association and, closer to home, Caron.

In the Policy Governance® model, the leadership body (our Council) determines and then clearly delineates—through written policies—the “Ends” of an organization (what God is calling Atonement to do) and its means (how to best accomplish the Ends). You could say that the means policies represent a vehicle for conveying the organization to its Ends, its directions and destinations.

We invested much Council time in 2018 in developing these means policies. The policies transparently delegate authority to the senior pastor to operate the church and work toward the Ends using his/her wisdom and experience and creativity, but to do so within clear boundaries defined by Council. Furthermore, the policies describe how Council will systematically monitor operations and progress toward the Ends. The means policies therefore let Council safely withdraw from executive minutiae and decisions better left to staff and dedicate most of our attention instead to the higher-level concerns.

Our full set of Council policies, along with links to some articles on governance, are available in the Atonement Business page in the Resources section of the church website.

What does Council look like going forward? In the future, Council members might not have intimate knowledge of all aspects of the church's operations—not because we're uninterested in such details, but because more of Council's time will be spent looking at the big picture. We want to avoid micromanaging the pastors and staff. But we will hold the staff accountable by monitoring our policies. We'll also adjust policies as necessary.

And we will turn most of our energy to continuing to define the Ends for Atonement. Our Ends policies already recognize our responsibility to raise the next generation of Christians by

increasing participation from young families, and the church has been making good progress in that area. Our pastors soon will be working to enrich, spread, and deepen the discipleship culture at Atonement; we hope to draw from our elders in this effort. Finally, Council will look to strengthen its connection with the congregation and discern the principles through which God is guiding Atonement and the additional paths God is asking us to follow.

Respectfully submitted,

Bryan Wang, Vice-President