

Conference Governance Model Review

March 2008

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Governance Model Review Committee

The Rev. Dal McCrindle (Chair and Member of Conference Executive)

Dr. Marion Best

The Rev. Sandy Ferguson

The Reviewer

The Rev. Dr. Brian Thorpe

History and Background

In Esquimalt, the General Meeting of the BC Conference of the United Church of Canada (May 2006), mandated a review of the Policy Governance Model adopted by BC Conference by the following motion: *“that the 78th General Meeting of BC Conference conduct a multi-Court review of the effectiveness and faithfulness of the current governance model, gathering data broadly from each Presbytery, the Conference Executive, volunteers within the Conference structure and other affected parties, the report and recommendations of which will be distributed to each presbytery within BC Conference and Conference executive by December 31st 2007.”*

The November Meeting of the Conference Executive established the Terms of Reference for the review, approved a time line for conducting such a review (see Appendix I) and charged President Janice Young to name a Review Committee.

Those Terms of Reference stipulated that “the purpose of the Review of Governance Model review is to evaluate whether the Policy Governance model as practiced by the BC Conference Executive is effect and faithful.” Effective was defined to mean that the model can produce the desired outcomes of the Conference as defined by The Manual and especially in sections 400-470. Faithful is understood to mean that the model honours the powers, authorities and responsibilities of the church courts and officers as defined in The Manual.”

A Review Team of three people was to be named by the Conference President, one of whom would be a member of the Conference Executive and the two others members of BC Conference Presbyteries but not on the Conference Executive.

President Janice Young named Dal McCrindle, Marion Best and invited Kootenay Presbytery to name a third from a group of nominees from Kootenay Presbytery: Sandy Ferguson was so named. The naming of the Review Team was also vetted with the Presbyteries.

The first task of the team was to select a reviewer; ensure that the review was conducted according to the terms of reference, ensure that progress was made, and ensure that any questions regarding the review that arose during the course of the review were decided within the parameters of the terms of reference. It was expected that the members of the review Committee and the Reviewer would be familiar with both Policy Governance and the governance of the United Church.

There was to be wide consultation with the Presbyteries, the Conference Executive itself, a number of Conference Committees and volunteers, a number of congregational boards, councils or sessions and any other groups or individuals that might be directly affected by the Policy Governance Model. It was expected that most of the work of the Review Committee and Reviewer would be accomplished through written and telephone communication. The time line adopted would have seen the Review Committee selected by December 2006, a Reviewer by January 15th 2007, questionnaire and/or survey developed by February 15 2007, a consultation period from February to October with a report to the Executive and the Presbyteries by November 2007.

The Governance Model Review Committee was in place by December and held its first meeting on December 28, via Conference Call.

It had not been mandated that the Reviewer be outside the structure of the United Church but suggestions/nominations were sought from both within church circles and the private sector. Suggestions for a suitable Reviewer were received from a variety of persons knowing that a review was to be conducted. As well, the Review Committee drafted a list of candidates to be approached. Three formal proposals were received including the costs. While the three proposals presented were extremely knowledgeable of Policy Governance Models, their familiarity with United Church polity and practice was not. In addition the costs of these professional reviews were in the neighbourhood of \$30,000.

The Review Committee sought the advice of the Conference President to extend the time line and seek a competent reviewer from within the church who would conduct the review under the guidance of the Review Committee with a more modest budget. The President sought the consent of the Conference executive which through a poll approved the changes. The Review Committee had a questionnaire developed based on its assumption that it was not to be an opinion poll as to whether the adopted model was liked or not but whether it actually worked and respected the Manual in doing so. The Rev. Dr. Brian Thorpe was approached and he agreed to be the Reviewer.

Questionnaires were circulated as follows,

- Ten to each Presbytery for the Presbyteries to determine who and how they would be completed.
- One to each chairperson of every Conference Committee and Council
- One to each Conference Staff person (confidentiality was assured)
- One to each person whom the Committee felt might have something significant to offer and might not be consulted in any other way:

former Conference Presidents, former Executive Secretary, former Conference Committee Chairs and other wise persons

- Ten Congregational Boards chosen by Marion Best as reflecting the diversity, size, geography of congregations within the Conference.

Following the receipt of questionnaires, Presbyteries were invited to request a face to face consultation with the Reviewer; two requests were received one from Vancouver Burrard and one from Kootenay Presbytery.

The questionnaires were tallied (Appendix II) and assessed by the Reviewer and the Review Committee. In November 2007, a preliminary report of the survey findings was made to the Executive of BC Conference.

After examining the findings of the questionnaire, the Reviewer and the review Committee consulted to develop recommendations to be included in the final report which was to be circulated to the Conference Executive and the Presbyteries at the latest by the beginning of March.

Review of Governance Model

Process: The Reviewer carefully read the surveys submitted to the Review Committee. The results were collated and are contained, along with representative comments, in Appendix One. One Presbytery Executive (Vancouver Burrard) and one Presbytery (Kootenay) requested a meeting with the Reviewer. A summary of those two meetings is found in Appendix Two.

Evaluation Criteria: All written and spoken comments were given serious consideration. In assessing the findings particular attention was paid to recurrent themes in the questionnaires and the conversations with the reviewer. All responses were evaluated in relation to the mandate given to the Review Committee and the Reviewer to test the effectiveness and the faithfulness of the current governance model as practiced by British Columbia Conference.

Findings:

1. With a very few exceptions, the responses to the survey related to the effectiveness and faithfulness of current governance model of British Columbia Conference were both thoughtful and respectful. The conversations which took place with the reviewer with Kootenay Presbytery and with Vancouver Burrard Presbytery Executive were characterized by the expression of deeply held concerns about the model in a way that was both gracious and framed in a concern for the well being of the church.
2. With regard to the return of questionnaires, 38 were received out of a potential return of approximately 150. Out of the Presbyteries surveyed a larger number of returns came from two Presbyteries—Vancouver-Burrard and Kootenay. Out of the congregations surveyed, the greatest number of returns came from congregations in Comox-Nanaimo Presbytery
3. In the conversations with Kootenay Presbytery and with the Executive of Vancouver-Burrard Presbytery participants were often very deliberate in their separation of criticism with regard to the governance model from any sense of critique with regard to individuals. In particular many participants wanted to express their confidence in and respect for the current Executive Secretary of the Conference.
4. In a general sense the returns reflected an almost evenly divided constituency with regard to having concern about issues of oversight and decision making in the Conference. When asked about this, thirteen respondents expressed significant worry around this issue. Thirteen expressed no or minimal worry with the rest of the respondents between these poles.

5. For those with concern about the governance model, when asked which part of the Conference was the focus of the concern a significant majority named the Conference Executive.
6. When asked to name times in which British Columbia Conference had neglected to fulfill its statutory duties a significant majority (20) did not name an instance. Of those who did (8) the majority cited a lack of consultation with other courts of the church before decisions were made.
7. Lack of communication with regard to the processes and decision making of Conference (in particular, the Conference Executive) was often named as a source of tension.
8. When asked to name specific issues in relation to the governance of the Conference, the largest number of participants focused on the Camp Futures Project and on concerns related to specific church camps. In Kootenay Presbytery there was also a focus on the issue of Conference resources particularly with regard to the future of the Mutual Ministry project.
9. Some of the issues named with regard to the current governance model reflected on an ongoing concern which had preceded the advent of the current governance model. For example, one letter related to the issue of a particular camp focused on what was perceived to be neglect and obstruction on the part of the Conference in the 1990s. There were also issues which were assumed to derive from the model when, in fact, they preceded the advent of the model. For example, the supervisory role of the Executive Secretary in relation to the rest of the Conference Staff was taken to be an effect of the new governance model rather than, as is the case, the long standing staffing model of the General Council.
10. Two letters received (instead of a completed questionnaire) and several extensive written commentaries within the questionnaire focused on the issue of the relationship between the current governance model of the Conference and the conciliar ethos of The United Church of Canada. These comments reflected serious reservations about the governance model, not necessarily because of its effectiveness, but, rather, because it seems to run contrary to the praxis of decision making in The United Church of Canada.
11. There was concern expressed in both the questionnaires and in the conversations with the two Presbyteries with regard to the language employed in the model. Terms such as “ends” and “owners” seemed to some to be alien and not reflective of the language of the Christian community.
12. Several respondents expressed the need for the General Meeting of the Conference to be seen as the body which sets the direction for the mission and ministry of the Conference.

In a general sense we can conclude that the responses to the questionnaires and the conversations in the Presbyteries revealed that there are a number of people within our church who are uncomfortable with the current governance model of British Columbia Conference because it seems to run counter to the polity and ethos of The United Church of Canada. There are also a number of people in deep disagreement with recent decisions taken by the Conference, particularly with regard to the future of church camps.

Recommendations:

1. That the Conference Executive be intentional with regard to encouraging communication from the Presbyteries and the Councils (Native Ministries, Finance, Ministry Personnel, Ethnic, Youth and Young Adults) regarding their vision for the Conference and their particular needs.
2. That the language used in the current governance model be examined with a view to make greater connections with the language and ethos of the church.
3. That the Conference Executive be encouraged to explore ways in which the members of the Executive named by the Presbyteries might be enabled to communicate both the process and the decisions undertaken by the Conference Executive to the Presbyteries and the congregations (in addition to the ongoing role of the Executive Secretary in this regard) and that the minutes of the Conference Executive (in addition to the summary) be posted on the Conference web site and sent to Presbytery Secretaries.
4. That a statement be drafted which clarifies the role of the Executive Secretary to the Conference Executive and the Conference Staff in the current polity of the General Council of the United Church and the way in which this role relates to the governance model of the United Church.

Conclusion

While it is clear from the survey and from the consultation undertaken there are some in the Conference who are not comfortable with the current governance model of the Conference the Reviewer and the Review Committee did not find that the Conference or its Executive had been unfaithful or ineffective under the current governance model. While it is clear from the survey and the consultation that decisions and processes undertaken by the Conference and its Executive, particularly in the area of the Camp Futures Project, have created controversy it is our conviction that an alternate governance model would not have altered the need to make difficult decisions related to church camps and would not have lessened the ensuing controversy.

APPENDIX I (Terms of Reference)

Review of Governance Model
BC Conference Executive
November 2006

Terms of Reference:

Purpose

The purpose of the “Review of Governance Model” review is to evaluate whether the Policy Governance model as practiced by the BC Conference Executive is both effective and faithful.

Values

“Effective” is understood to mean that the model can produce the desired outcomes expected of the Conference as defined in *The Manual*, and especially in sections 400 – 470.

“Faithful” is understood to mean that the model honours the powers, authorities and responsibilities of the church courts and officers as defined in *The Manual*.

Review Committee and Reviewer

The review shall be overseen by a Review Committee composed of three persons: one shall be a member of the Conference Executive; two shall be members of BC Conference Presbyteries (but not the Conference Executive).

The Review Committee is to:

- select a Reviewer;
- ensure that the review is conducted according to the Terms of Reference;
- ensure that progress is made on the review;
- ensure that questions regarding the review that arise during the course of the review are decided within the parameters of the Terms of Reference.

The Review Committee shall be selected by the Conference President after consultation with the Presbyteries.

The work of the review shall be undertaken by one person (the “Reviewer”) within a budget established for this work. The Reviewer shall be accountable to the Review Committee for the accomplishment of the task and to the Executive Secretary for budgetary actions.

It is expected that the members of the Review Committee and the Reviewer are familiar with the Policy Governance model and with the governance of the United Church.

It is expected that most of the work of the Review Committee and Reviewer will be accomplished through written and telephone communication.

Consultation

The Reviewer will widely consult with:

- all of the Presbyteries (10)
- the Conference Executive as a group
- a representative number of Conference committees (4-6) and volunteers (10-15)
- a representative number of congregational boards, councils or sessions (8-12).
- the Review Committee shall determine what other groups or individuals might be directly affected by the Policy Governance model; the Reviewer shall consult with a representative number (5-10).

Reporting

The Reviewer(s) shall produce a written report for the Conference Executive containing at least the following:

- an explanation of the process followed by the Reviewer
- a list of all groups and individuals consulted
- a summary and analysis of the comments heard during the review
- a clear statement on the evaluation criteria used in the review
- a “finding” on the question posed by the Purpose of this review
- recommendations, if any, for the Conference Executive on issues raised during the course of the review.

The report shall be made available to the ten Presbyteries within BC Conference at the same time as it is distributed to the Conference Executive.

Timeline

Adoption of Terms of Reference	November 30, 2006
Selection of Review Committee	December 15, 2006
Selection of Reviewer	January 15, 2007
Development and finalization of questionnaires	February 15, 2007
Consultation period	February – October 2007
Report to Conference Executive and Presbyteries	November 2007 Executive

APPENDIX II (Survey Summary)

Review of Governance Model

Constituency Survey

1. IDENTIFICATION

Name	Phone	Email

1.1 Which of the following categories best describes the “hat” you are wearing in responding to this survey? (choose one)

- Member of a Congregational Board, Council or Session
- Member or Officer of _____ Presbytery
- Member of a Conference Committee or other Conference Volunteer _____
- Member of the Conference Executive
- Other (please specify) _____

1.2 How long have you been involved in one way or another in the life and work of BC Conference?

2 years or less 7 2 to 6 years 23 6 years or more

1.3 How would you rate your level of familiarity with the Policy Governance model in general? (1 = little or no familiarity; 6 = very familiar)

1 1 4 2 3 3 10 4 8 5 4 6

1.4 How would you rate your level of familiarity with the actual policies and framework by which the Conference Executive carries out its work? (1 = little or no familiarity; 6 = very familiar)

2 1 9 2 3 3 7 4 6 5 3 6

1.5 In light of your primary role (see 1.1), to what extent do you think you SHOULD be familiar with the policies and work of the Conference Executive? (1 = not necessary; 6 = very important)

2.4 How would you rank the following in terms of what you see as the priorities for the role of Conference in the life and work of the United Church in BC?

(please rank all by number; 1 = top priority; 6 = lowest priority)

- 106 To discuss and act collectively on key social issues
- 59 To ordain and settle, and attend to other statutory responsibilities
- 92 To provide inspiration and a sense of identity
- 81 To ensure proper management of property and other resources
- 81 To offer program and institutional support to the congregations

Other (please specify) to facilitate unity, support for children’s ministry, to support presbyteries General Meeting inspiration

2.5 When you think of BC Conference, what do you wish there was ...

More of?	Less of?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • consultation • accountability • communication • support for congregations • support for Presbyteries • leadership in global/societal ministries • focus on rural issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wasting time • Making decisions without consultation • Pretending to consult when decisions are already made

3. FAITHFULNESS

The Policy Governance model is a method for organizing the oversight, decision-making and accountability of the work of the Conference. Its “faithfulness” is understood to mean the degree to which the model honours the powers, authorities and responsibilities of the church courts and officers as defined in *The Manual* of the United Church.

The United Church has a “conciliar” form of organization, meaning that it seeks to be rooted in “the spirit of fellowship” and that authority and

responsibility is distributed among a number of inter-related and mutually respectful Courts – from the local Congregation and Presbytery through to Conference and the General Council. For the United Church, “conciliar” refers to both a structure and a set of core values.

The general duties of Conference are both specific and general, and are set out in Article 420 of *The Manual*. They are: a. to receive and dispose of appeals and proposals; b. to deal with matters referred to it by the General Council; c. to receive and consider reports from committees and other church bodies; and d. to have oversight of the religious life of the United Church within its jurisdiction, and to adopt such measures as may be deemed necessary for its promotion.

3.1 Are you aware of any specific ways in which BC Conference has neglected or failed to fulfil its statutory duties as described above – regardless of the governance model used – during the past five years?

8 Yes

20 No

... if “yes”, please provide detail:

- Lack of consultation re Camp Futures Report
- Deciding to sell camps before adequate consultation had taken place
- Conference staff accountability – Executive Secretary or Conference
- Lack of Presbytery oversight

3.2 Are you aware of any specific ways in which BC Conference has overstepped its statutory duties as described above or usurped the authority of another Court – regardless of the governance model used – during the past five years?

5 Yes

24 No

... if “yes”, please provide detail:

- Selling property without Presbytery consent
- Decision to create regional camps driven by small group
- Paternalistic controls over the need to spend Lower Mainland Funds with a budget year

3.3 Are you aware of any particular ways in which the use of the Policy Governance model by the Conference has a direct effect on or requires adjustments by other Courts in order to maintain appropriate and effective working relations?

15 Yes

11 No

... if “yes”, please provide detail:

- Accessibility of Conference Executive minutes
- No communication or cooperation with Presbyteries and congregations
- Statements on priorities too vague and lacking in definition
- Inadequate consultation regarding Mutual Ministry in Kootenay Presbytery
- Need for a process whereby decisions of the executive Secretary can be appealed to the Conference Executive without triggering a non-confidence motion

3.4 In the Policy Governance model, an organization carries out its work by creating policies and monitoring their actual achievement of them. Two policies adopted by the Conference Executive that may be said to directly relate to the question of “faithfulness” are those on “Priorities” and “Governing Style” (see Attachments B and C). Recognizing that these are only two of the policies used by the Conference Executive to guide its work, do you consider these policies to meaningfully reflect the duties and values of the Conference? What do you appreciate about these policies, and what do you find missing from them?

General Comments re Duties & Values ...

I appreciate ...

- Focus on vision and leadership
- Grounding in scripture, tradition and worship
- Briefness and clarity

I find missing ...

- Church relevant language (as opposed to “beneficiaries” and “ownership”)
- Representational links between Presbyteries and Conference
- Diversity of view points

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “ends’ in relation to church hard to measure
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3.5 From your experience in the Conference during the past five years, can you identify any ways in which the use of Policy Governance model may have enhanced or undermined the “faithfulness” of Conference in fulfilling its duties or expressing its core values?

- Undermined by Conference Executive decisions related to Camp Fircom
- Separation of “ends” and “means”
- Inordinate amount o time spent in formulation policies
- Forcing people to learn a foreign language [i.e. the language of Carver model] in order to participate

4. EFFECTIVENESS

The Policy Governance model is a method for organizing the oversight, decision-making and accountability of the work of the Conference. Its “effectiveness” is understood to mean the degree to which the model can produce the desired outcomes expected of the Conference as defined in *The Manual* of the United Church, especially in Articles 400-470.

4.1 To what extent do you feel satisfied that the information available from Conference (Executive Reports, Financial Statements, etc) is sufficient or adequate to enable you to assess whether it is performing effectively in relation to its goals and duties? (1 = little or no satisfaction; 6 = very satisfied)

4 1 7 2 7 3 3 4 4 5 2 6

4.2 As a member of the Conference constituency or community, what information would you expect to receive or to be available and would increase your level of satisfaction in being able to assess effectiveness?

- Executive minutes
- We want to meet with the Conference Executive
- Genuine consultation
- Better communication

4.3 Can you give examples of effective decision-making and of ineffective decision-making by Conference or the Conference Executive during the past five years? In each case, what made the decision or the process involved in making it or implementing it effective or ineffective?

<p>Example of Good Decision-Making:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Camping issues • Hiring Camp Futures Manager • Apology re residential schools (1997) 	<p>Example of Bad Decision-Making:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not having an annual meeting • Hiring someone to sell camps • Allowing people from Camp Fircom to address Conference Executive when there was no intention of changing decision • Refusing to receive correspondence from Kootenay Presbytery (because it had not been received 14 days prior to the meeting) while receiving delegation from Camp Fircom with only 3 days notice.
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4.4 In the Policy Governance model, an organization carries out its work by creating policies and monitoring their actual achievement of them. Two policies adopted by the Conference Executive that may be said to directly relate to the question of “effectiveness” are those setting out the “Conference Executive Job Description” and the “General Restraint” limiting the authority of the Executive Secretary (see Attachments D and E). Recognizing that these are only two of the policies used by the Conference Executive to guide its work or constrain the staff; do you consider these policies to provide a meaningful basis for measuring “effectiveness” in BC Conference? What do you appreciate about these policies, and what do you find missing from them?

<p>General Comments re Measures of Effectiveness ...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear and concise • Mechanism for performance evaluation not mentioned in job description for Conference Executive Secretary • Imbalance between Executive and Executive Secretary re checks and balances leads to conservatism on part of Executive Secretary • Difficult to appreciate policies in “shalt not” language • The Carver model is “permission giving” in that the Executive Secretary can choose any reasonable means. I would like to see a constraint that requires the executive Secretary to use a “permission giving” style of leadership when dealing with conference committees and councils

5. OTHER

5.1 Are there any other comments or observations you would like to offer for the Review Team to consider?

- **Concern over the lack of external reviewer**
- **Evaluation shaped by the Carver model**

APPENDIX III (Presbytery Visits)

1. Visit to Vancouver Burrard Presbytery Executive: The meeting with Vancouver Burrard Presbytery focused on particular issues involving the relationship between the Conference and the Presbytery. There was a recognition that there were some in the Presbytery who were upset by the decision of the Mission Through Finance Committee not to sell a portion of the Camp Fircom property in order to finance immediate improvements at the camp. There was also a frustration that the representation made to the Conference Executive did not effect any change in the decision. Some of the members of the Executive stressed that there were varying opinions within the Presbytery with regard to this particular Conference decision. There were also concerns expressed about some policies related to the Conference financial resources available to the lower mainland Presbyteries. Finally there was a sense that the communication of Conference processes and decisions to the Presbytery was inadequate.

2. Visit to Kootenay Presbytery: There was a good attendance of Presbyters at this afternoon meeting which took place prior to the regular meeting of the Presbytery. Several Presbyters expressed their conviction that the governance model of the Conference was in conflict with the conciliar ethos of the United Church. One Presbyter talked about her experience with the Carver model in a community organization. She found that in a smaller organization with a clear mandate it was an effective model but that the diversity and complexity of the United Church in British Columbia mitigated against it being as effective as is the case in a smaller organization. Several Presbyters expressed frustration over what was perceived to be a lack of consultation with regard to church camps and with regard to the future of the Mutual Ministry project. There was also a sense that the Conference Executive was too dominated by the lower mainland and that the concerns from Presbyteries distant from the lower mainland were neglected. Communications and the sense that the role of the General Meeting had been diminished were other issues which emerged in the conversation.