

**“All church conventions  
are anxious settings!”**

Peter Steinke



# **LINKING GOVERNANCE & EMOTIONAL SYSTEMS**

**with Rev. Stefan M. Jonasson**

**Director for Large Congregations  
Unitarian Universalist Association**

# UUA National Large Church Conference



**From Perspiration to Inspiration:**  
Spiritually Grounded Leadership  
for Large Congregations

**Rev. Susan Beaumont**

Senior Consultant, The Alban Institute

**Louisville, Kentucky**

**March 13-18, 2008**


# Large Congregations Reception



Thursday, June 21  
2:30 to 4:00 pm

**Doubletree Hotel  
Morrison Room**

Light Refreshments  
will be provided.



Unitarian Universalist  
congregations have been  
experimenting with new  
governance strategies for  
more than 25 years.

# ***Lay Leadership and Development***

(UUA Extension Office, 1984)

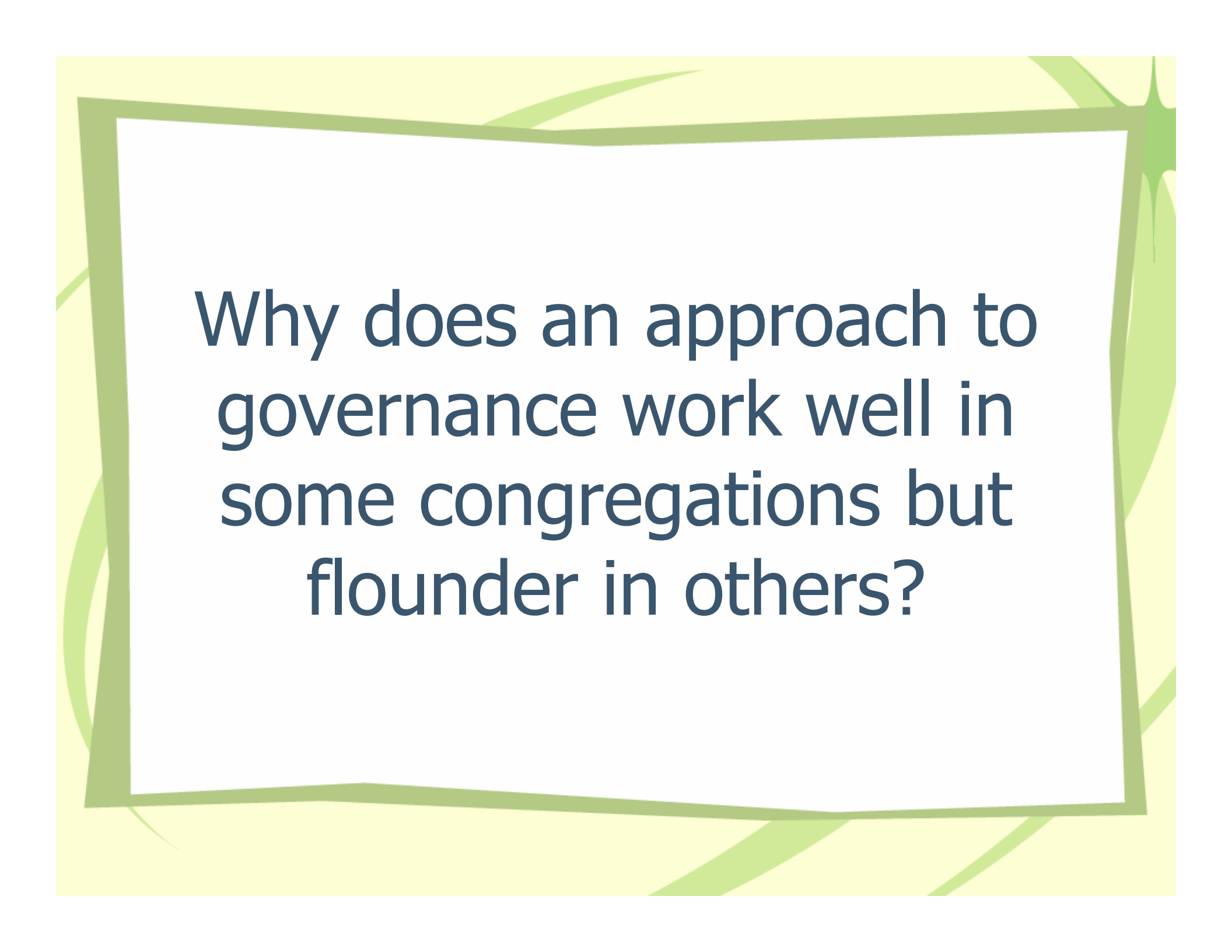
- Administrative Board Model
- Board-Council Model
- Policy-Making Board Model

*Radical Alternative Models:*

The “Goal-Based Model” and “Tribal Model”

# John Carver's Policy Governance®

- Policy Governance® is one well-defined and carefully developed model for governing with an emphasis on visioning and policy-making.
- This model is much more flexible than many people realize.
- Policy Governance® provides useful language for talking about governance, whether or not the model is implemented.



Why does an approach to  
governance work well in  
some congregations but  
flounder in others?

## **Tradition of Polity**

Denominations are differentiated as much (or more) by polity as by doctrine.

If a governance model is alien to a denomination's tradition of polity, it will prove to be problematic.

## Size Matters

Since size affects the dynamics of any organization, a congregation's size is an important variable in determining an appropriate model of organization – some would even say the *most important* variable.

**Member-Centered**



**Family Church**

average attendance is fewer than 50 people

**Program Church**

average attendance is between 150 and 350

**← Relationship**

**Organization →**

**Pastoral Church**

average attendance is between 50 and 150

**Campus Church**

average attendance is greater than 350



**Minister-Centered**

# **Growth and Decline Matter**

Few congregations remain static in size, even though some have elevated size stasis to an art form!

Governance needs change as congregations grow or decline in size.

**Member-Centered**



**Family Church**

average attendance is fewer than 50 people

**Program Church**

average attendance is between 150 and 350

**← Relationship**

**Organization →**

**Pastoral Church**

average attendance is between 50 and 150

**Campus Church**

average attendance is greater than 350



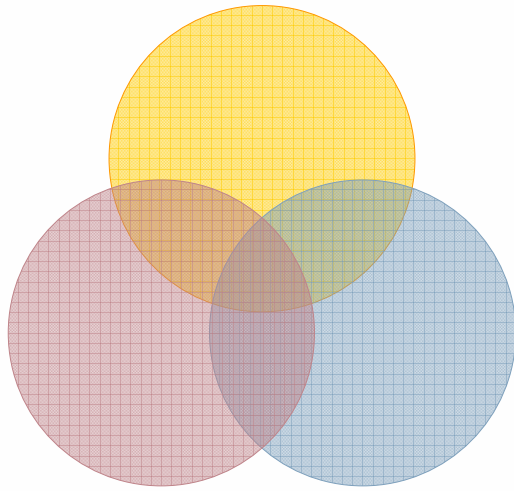
**Minister-Centered**

## **Competence Counts**

The leadership competence of individual office-holders affects the success or failure of governance.

Leadership competence also reflects a congregation's seriousness about itself and its mission.

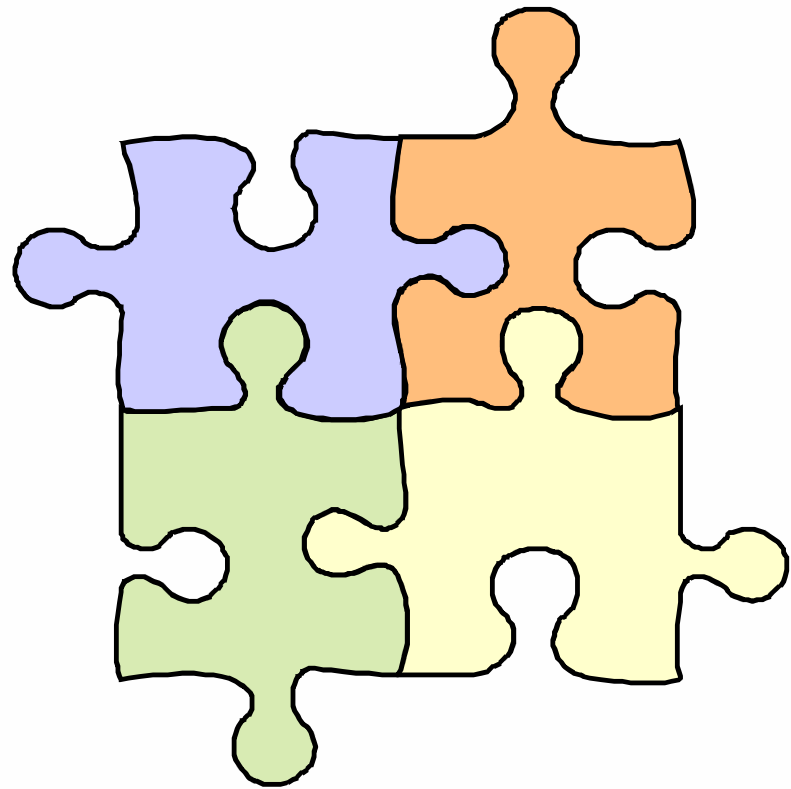
# Role Confusion Complicates Matters



In congregations, the “owners,” “staff” and “customers” are, by and large, the same persons.

# Boards Do More Than Govern

In most organizations – but especially congregations and cultural or community organizations – governance is only one part of the typical board’s work.



## Boards Have 6 Primary Functions:

- Visioning
- Policy-making
- Stewardship
- Sponsorship
- Advocacy
- Consultancy

# Visioning and policy-making



should be at the forefront of the board's work, in collaboration with the congregation's professional staff.

As stewards ...



the board holds the congregation's assets in trust, including moral and other intangible assets.

## As sponsors ...

the board should collectively be among the most generous supporters of the congregation with both time and money



As advocates ...



the board represents interests of the congregation as an institution both to its own members and, even more importantly, to the wider community.

## As consultants ...

board members are available to the staff – *at the staff's invitation* – to provide counsel and encouragement from their particular areas of expertise.



# **Emotional Systems are Crucial**

Congregations are not simply organizations ... they are organisms.

As social organisms, congregations are complex emotional systems.

## **Linking Governance with Systems Theory**

While governance systems do matter, governance models are not destiny. Emotionally mature people can make almost any organizational structure work, while the dysfunctional can paralyze even the best models. Ideally, we are looking for leadership approaches that promote healthy emotional systems.

## **Why New Governance Strategies Flounder**

New governance structures are often adopted to “fix problems” in congregations that are better understood as emotional systems issues.

The motives for adopting new governance structures have often been masked and conflicting.

“A systems approach to organizational problems does not deny that difficulties can be caused by individuals and/or by problems the organizational system needs to address, but it also observes the reactive patterns or nonconscious agreements or ‘understandings’ that people have about how they are supposed to act or get along.”

George Parsons & Speed B. Leas

# The “Agreements” in Systems

- **Formal agreements:** contracts which are *public* and *written*.
- **Informal agreements:** “an understanding in which the parties are aware that a bargain is being made,” which are *verbal* and may be either *public* or *private*.
- **Tacit agreements:** “habits or patterns people establish as they interact over time.”

## Examples of “Contracts” in Systems

Adapted from *Understanding Your Congregation As a System*  
by George Parsons and Speed Leas (The Alban Institute, 1993)

	FORMAL	INFORMAL	TACIT
<b>RULES</b>	By-laws Standard Operating Procedures	Special Cases Spoken Guidelines “Crying babies go to nursery”	Norms Dress Codes Not talking about politics
<b>ROLES</b>	Minister President Administrator Religious Educator	“I’m the devil’s advocate” “I’m a pinch hitter”	Conflict Smoother Gatekeeper Matriarch/Patriarch Flack-catcher
<b>RITUALS</b>	Sunday Worship Membership Ceremony	Going out for ice cream after winning the game	Greeting Rituals Shaking hands “How are you?”
<b>GOALS</b>	Vision and Mission Statements of Purpose Principles	“We need some new members around here”	“Let’s grow old together”

**Formal agreements** are those “contracts” we make with others that are public and usually written.

**Informal agreements** are understandings arrived at informally, which may be public or private and are usually verbal.

**Tacit agreements** have to do with the habits or patterns people establish as they interact over time.

# Limitations of Policy Governance

- PG assumes that boards should do little (or nothing) other than govern.
- PG sometimes seems “allergic” to relationships and politics, seeking to control the former and eliminate the latter.
- PG ignores emotional processes in human systems. In particular, the model disregards informal and tacit agreements.

# Limitations of Policy Governance

- Like Pharaoh in Cecil B. DeMille's movie *The Ten Commandments*, PG is over-reliant on the ability of the written word to manifest reality – “So it is written, so it shall be done!”
- As practiced in many congregations, PG substitutes micro-governance for micro-management.

## **Positive Characteristics of Policy Governance**

- Board members act as trustees on behalf of the ownership (including moral ownership).
- The board is proactive rather than reactive.
- Boards make decisions by determining the broadest values before progressing to narrower ones.
- The board “speaks with one voice.”
- The board decides what to evaluate, how to measure – and then does it!

## From Models to Modes

Richard Chait and his colleagues argue that we should shift emphasize **modes** over models in seeking to govern well.

Richard Chait, William Ryan and Barbara Taylor, *Governance As Leadership: Reframing the Work of Nonprofit Boards* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2005)

# **Type I: Fiduciary Governance**

- Prevent theft, waste or misuse of resources.
- Ensure that resources are deployed effectively.
- Promote lawful and ethical behavior.
- The board “speaks with one voice.”
- Safeguard the mission against unintentional drift and unauthorized shifts in purpose.

## **Type II: Strategic Governance**

- Oversees strategic planning process and articulates what matters most for the future.
- Aims to construct a consensus about what the congregation's strategy should be.
- Crafts forms and structures to mirror the congregations priorities and values.
- Builds authority, responsibility and accountability into the system.

## **Type III: Generative Governance**

- Defines what knowledge, information and data *mean*.
- Thinks retrospectively and constructs the congregation's "dominant narrative."
- Notices cues and clues.
- Chooses and uses new frames of reference.
- Engages others within (and beyond) the congregation in generative thinking.

# Qualities of Healthy Governance

- The board's attention is focused more clearly on "big picture" matters than minutia.
- The tendency of some board's to repeatedly micro-manage the staff's work is reduced.
- An "economy of governance" is achieved, freeing members for ministry.

Rev. Stefan M. Jonasson



(204) 889-4746 – [sjonasson@uua.org](mailto:sjonasson@uua.org)