

## How the Proposed Leadership Structure Would Work in Practice

Over the past several weeks, the congregation has engaged thoughtfully and faithfully with the proposed lay leadership structure. We are grateful for the questions, comments, and conversations taking place across Sunday School classes, hallways, and kitchen tables. One theme has emerged clearly and consistently: many people are less concerned about *whether* change is needed and more interested in *how* the proposed structure would actually work once it is in place.

That is a fair and important question.

Much of our earlier communication focused on the values guiding this work—shared leadership, sustainability, clarity, and partnership between staff and lay leaders. In this article, we want to describe how those values take shape in lived practice: how priorities are set, how leadership work is prepared, where discernment happens, and how decisions move through the structure over the course of a year.



### Beginning With Priorities: How the Year Takes Shape

One of the most important—and least familiar—features of the proposed structure is *when* leadership work begins.

Rather than starting with fixed panels or predefined roles, each church year begins with a shared conversation about **priorities**.

At the May deacons meeting, the deacons as a whole begin discerning where focused attention is most needed in the coming year. In conversation with staff and Church Council, deacons listen for emerging needs, reflect on congregational feedback, and name a limited set of church-wide priorities that will guide leadership work for the year ahead.

This step comes first on purpose.

The goal is not to rank ministries or limit the life of the church, but to acknowledge an important reality: not every area of church life can receive the same level of leadership attention every year. By naming priorities together, leaders gain clarity about where energy, coordination, and resources are most needed *now*—and can organize leadership accordingly.

These priorities then shape how panels are formed, how leadership resources are allocated, and how decisions are evaluated throughout the year.

### **How Panel Alignment Flows From Shared Priorities**

Only after priorities are discerned are panels fully aligned for the year ahead.

Under the proposed structure, deacons serve in one of two broad ways: **Relational Action (RA)** or **Governance Action (GA)**. These are not hierarchies. They are two lanes of shared leadership, serving one church.

- **Relational Action** focuses on the relational and spiritual life of the congregation—care, hospitality, worship, formation, mission, and belonging.
- **Governance Action** focuses on stewardship that supports ministry—finances, facilities, personnel partnership, policies, and administration.

Panel assignments reflect both the gifts of individual deacons and the priorities discerned for the year. This alignment is intentionally **flexible**. It can change from year to year as leadership rotates, congregational needs shift, and priorities evolve.

Equally important, panels do not inherit a fixed number of teams or responsibilities by default. Instead, each panel asks a guiding question shaped by the year's priorities: *What leadership resources are needed to support this work well right now?*

That may mean continuing long-standing resource teams, forming a short-term task force with a clear purpose, or recruiting leaders outside the diaconate whose gifts best fit a particular need. The structure is designed to serve the work—not to preserve arrangements simply because they have existed in the past.

### **How Leadership Work Is Prepared**

A key part of the proposed model—and one that addresses concerns about either overload or centralization—is the emphasis on **preparation**.

Leadership work does not begin in large meetings. It begins with careful, faithful groundwork.

Teams of three deacons serve as the primary working units of the structure. Their role is not to make final decisions on behalf of others, but to prepare the church's shared discernment by:

- listening and gathering input,
- researching and clarifying options,

- consulting with staff, ministry leaders, or others as appropriate, and
- preparing recommendations for broader discussion.

This preparatory work ensures that when leaders do gather—in panels or the full Diaconate—conversations are grounded, focused, and informed, rather than rushed or reactive. It also protects leaders from burnout by distributing work thoughtfully instead of concentrating it in a single room.

### **Where Discernment Happens**

Once work has been prepared, discernment happens at the level appropriate to the scope and impact of the decision.

- **Routine ministry or operational decisions** are discerned by RA or GA teams, in partnership with staff and aligned volunteers.
- **Significant resource or policy decisions** are discerned within the appropriate RA or GA lane—or across both lanes when needed.
- **Major church-wide decisions** remain with the full Diaconate.
- **Time-sensitive matters** may be coordinated through Church Council, with relevant RAs and GAs consulted.

This flow is intentional. It does not push decisions automatically upward or downward. Instead, it places them where sufficient voices are present—without requiring every voice every time.

The goal is neither speed nor centralization, but clarity and trust.

### **What This Flow Is Designed to Prevent**

This approach guards against several familiar risks:

- unprepared or overcrowded meetings that dilute communal discernment,
- fragmented oversight that makes accountability unclear,
- burnout created when too many people are asked to carry too much work at once, and
- the opposite danger of concentrating decisions in a single small room without broader accountability.

By clarifying preparation, discernment, and responsibility, the structure seeks to honor both participation and sustainability.

## **The Role of Meetings—and the Role of Church Council**

Within this model, meetings are where discernment is affirmed and decisions are made—not where all the work happens.

Preparation before meetings and follow-through afterward are essential parts of faithful leadership. By reducing duplication and clarifying responsibility, meetings can become places of thoughtful discernment rather than information overload or repeated re-litigation of the same issues.

The Church Council exists to **coordinate, not control**. Its role is to align work across RA and GA lanes, support healthy staff–lay partnership, manage time-sensitive matters thoughtfully, and ensure that major decisions brought to the Diaconate are well prepared and clearly communicated.

Major decisions remain with the Diaconate. The Council’s purpose is to help that work happen better—not faster, and not alone.

### **Flexibility From Year to Year**

Because priorities are revisited annually, the structure itself remains adaptable.

Panels, assignments, and leadership focus can shift from year to year in response to the church’s life and calling. This malleability is not a weakness; it is a recognition that faithful leadership requires ongoing discernment rather than rigid design.

### **Bringing It Back to the Bigger Picture**

At its heart, this proposal is not about doing less or narrowing participation. It is about **shared discernment, sustained focus, and faithful care for both people and mission**.

The proposed structure begins with priorities, prepares leadership work thoughtfully, places discernment at appropriate levels, and returns again and again to the questions the church has named as most important in a given season.