



UUCU

Reconsidering Consensus

**Decision Making Process
Recommendation**

(Version 2)

April 2010

BACKGROUND:

The founders of UUCC established a consensus decision making process to conduct the business of our church. This was a very carefully considered, intentional decision based on the belief that the congregation should speak with one voice and that every voice should have an opportunity to be heard. Our consensus decision making process has served us well and is a meaningful piece of the fabric of our community.

As our church has grown in size and welcomed new members, it has become less clear that consensus remains an effective way for us to make major decisions as a large group. In the cottage meetings conducted by the Ministerial Search Committee in 2008, questions were raised as to whether we should continue to employ consensus decision making, and it also became apparent that many of our members did not fully understand how consensus is supposed to work.

The Board of Stewards formed an ad hoc committee to guide the congregation through the process of considering whether to continue the use of the consensus decision making process. The members of the committee are Rita Beasley and Brian Stevens, representing the Board of Stewards, Michele Matthews and Colin Ferguson, representing the Transition Team, and Kathy Wimett, a founder of this church.

In order to ensure as many members of the congregation were able to include their voices in the process, Cottage meetings were held in February 2009 where folks were encouraged to bring questions and share concerns about consensus decision making. Following the Cottage meetings, the committee reviewed all the feedback from the congregation, conducted research and determined that a change to UUCC’s decision making process was warranted. They crafted a recommendation which was reviewed with the board and the congregation at a series of information meetings in October 2009. The final version of the committee’s recommendation is attached and will be brought before the congregation for approval in April 2010.

This document contains 4 sections

1 – UUCC Decision Making Committee Recommendation Overview	A summary of the recommended changes to the decision making process for UUSS.
2 – Language for Insertion into the UUCC Articles of Association	The text of the language to be inserted into the Articles of Association.

	There will be an additional step to update the Articles of Association after this change is approved.
3 - New Appendix to the Articles of Association - Rules for Congregational Meetings	Rules for Congregational Meetings to be added to the Appendix of the Articles of Association.
4 - New Appendix to the Articles of Association - Courtesy Guidelines	A set of guidelines for behavior at Congregational Meetings to be added to the Appendix of the Articles of Association

Section 1: UUCC Decision Making Committee Recommendation Overview

After gathering opinions of the members of Unitarian Universalist Community Church (UUCC), surveys of other UU congregations, and researching methods used by other religious organizations for decision making, the Decision-making Committee has created a proposal for how we at UUCC will make decisions.

Decision making is a spiritual practice. We value all voices.

- Our belief is in the value of all opinions and the value of blending points of view to create the best solution.
- Effective decision making calls upon each individual to speak their mind, to take the time to listen to others, to carefully form a judgment to create a resolution, and to support a decision once it has been made.

OVERVIEW OF RECOMMENDATIONS:

For committee meetings or those meetings that are not Congregational meetings, the consensus process should be used.

- In committee meetings or small informal groups, discussions should be held to decide future direction, solve problems, and reach decisions through consensus.
- This should be structured as normal conversations are structured. The Committee Chair or Leader will help all come to agreement on the issue at hand.

For large Congregational meetings, a thorough nonbinding discussion of an issue will be held. This will be followed by a vote. A substantial majority or Concordance will be required to approve a proposal.

- In a church that has grown as large as ours, consensus decision-making demands a lot of time in large congregational meetings. While decisions reached may be effective, the meetings required are not necessarily an efficient use of members' time and all members may not feel they have the opportunity to speak.
- While we strive for unanimous agreement, in order to make this process more efficient and inclusive, we recommend working for Concordance. Concordance is defined as a substantial majority vote of 80% in favor of a recommendation. The

process for coming to Concordance in a Congregational meeting, coupled with a nonbinding straw poll and voting, will be described below.

- Informational Meetings should be held before a Congregational Meeting. These meetings will help to ensure members are familiar with all sides of an issue and with the opinions of other members, allowing the larger group to more easily come to a decision. In addition, if Concordance is to be reached, education of members will be essential to ensuring that the “substantial majority” vote will occur.

When calling a Minister, voting should follow a nonbinding discussion to determine an exact count of those in favor of the decision to call the Minister.

- When voting for a minister, the Concordance should be 95% of those voting provided that the number of affirmative votes is equal to or greater than 95% of quorum.

Section 2: Language for Insertion into the UCC Articles of Association

The Rules for Congregational Meetings are to be used as the regular meeting method for UCC Congregational Meetings. The rules are subordinate to UCC Articles of Association and current State and Federal laws for nonprofit public or mutual benefit organizations. Following adoption of these Rules for Congregational Meetings, any changes as to the definition of the Quorum required for a congregational meeting or the percentage of affirmative votes required to confirm a decision at a congregational meeting must be approved by Concordance of the congregation at a duly called congregational meeting. Other procedures set forth in these Rules may be modified by action of the UCC Board of Stewards.

In Congregational Meetings, decisions are made through Concordance: approval by 80% of the members voting, provided that the number of affirmative votes is equal to or greater than 80% of quorum. Votes can be by show of hands or a written ballot. For hiring a minister, Concordance is defined as 95% of the members voting provided that the number of affirmative votes is equal to or greater than 95% of quorum.

The minutes of every congregational meeting shall be approved and the decisions reached at such meeting documented by the Board of Stewards at the next regularly scheduled Board meeting following such congregational meeting.

These Rules for Congregational Meetings are adapted from Roberta's Rules of Order by Alice Collier Cochran.

Section 3: New Appendix to Articles of Association – Rules for Congregational Meetings

RULES FOR CONGREGATIONAL MEETINGS

Meeting Roles

- The Moderator shall preside at the meeting and shall be the leader of the meeting. The Moderator is responsible for conducting a focused meeting and will make the final decision about the content and the agenda of the meeting after gathering input from others.
- The Egalitarian will be appointed by the Moderator to assist the Moderator and they will confer on matters of process. The Egalitarian will remain neutral and focus on the meeting process to help reinforce the group's agreed-upon meeting guidelines. The Egalitarian will help to ensure all who wish to speak have an opportunity to do so.
- The Time Keeper will be appointed by the Moderator and will act to ensure the meeting meets time goals. The Timekeeper can be called upon by the Egalitarian or the Moderator to give a speaker a one-minute warning.
- The Board Secretary shall be the note taker and will distribute meeting notes to the Board as required in the Articles of Association. The Secretary will record decisions made during the meeting and note the numeric results of any votes taken. The notes will be sent to the Board and can be reviewed by any member.

Preparing for the Congregational Meeting

- Informational Meetings should be held before a meeting to educate members on topics to be discussed and voted upon at the Congregational Meeting. Information about the topics should be gathered from many sources. Research findings and member opinions should be presented to all for discussion.
- The Moderator will draft an Agenda. It will include the church's mission and vision, the purpose of the meeting, and the meeting outcomes or intended results.
- The Agenda will state expected start and end times, topics in order of presentation, estimated time limits for each topic, and the name of the person leading the presentation on each topic.
- The Agenda, Courtesy Guidelines and other pertinent materials should be distributed to members no less than two weeks before the meeting.

Quorum

- A quorum is not needed to hold a meeting. However, no decision can be made that obligates the whole group without a quorum present. For UUCC, a quorum is defined as 25% of the membership as set forth in Article VIII, Section 4 of UUCC's Articles of Association.
- If the Moderator determines a quorum is present at the start of the meeting, the decision making can continue even if members leave and a quorum is no longer present, provided that no proposal can be approved without affirmative votes equal to at least 80% of quorum.

Conducting the Meeting

- The tone of the meeting will be informal and friendly. Chalice Lighting words should be read to reinforce the feeling of a spiritual community.
- At the beginning of the meeting, handouts will be distributed to each participant that contains a summary of how decisions are made and the *Courtesy Guidelines*. The *Courtesy Guidelines*, below, describe preferred behaviors at meetings.
- The first discussion will be about the meeting purpose, objectives, roles, expected behaviors (*Courtesy Guidelines*) and decision-making method for all appropriate items. The Moderator will ask all persons to uphold the meeting *Courtesy Guidelines*.
- In turn, items on the agenda will be discussed in an effort to come to agreement. Participants will strive to reach unanimous agreement for each proposal on the agenda and a vote can be called at the discretion of the Moderator. The decision will be made by a substantial majority vote of 80%, defined as Concordance. The discussion and vote should consume no more than 60 minutes per proposal.

Discussion of Issues

- When discussing a proposal, the Moderator and Egalitarian will structure the discussion to proceed from opening (proposal background) to narrowing (evaluating ideas) to closing (making decisions).
- The Moderator and Egalitarian will ensure that the discussion is balanced between pros and cons and that all points of view are encouraged.
- All members will be given an opportunity to speak on each proposal. Numbers can be passed out to identify who will speak next.
- Any member can suggest modifications to a proposal and the proposal can be changed by Concordance. If the modifications are not agreed upon, another member may present a different modification to be followed by further discussion.

Decision Making

- After a proposal has been presented and thoroughly discussed, the Moderator will ask if the group is in agreement with the proposal. No single individual or minority can block agreement.
- Following discussion, the Moderator may call for a simple nonbinding straw poll. A straw poll has value to clarify prevailing opinions. A straw poll shall be conducted by asking the members and friends present to show a green, yellow or red card. All those participating in the straw poll shall show their selected cards at the same time.
 - Showing a green card indicates that person is in agreement with the proposal.
 - Showing a yellow card indicates that person believes the proposal requires further discussion.
 - Showing a red card indicates that person is opposed to the proposal.
- The Moderator can gauge the amount of agreement with the proposal and request a vote to determine Concordance at any time. The Moderator can also choose to continue discussion and use straw polls as necessary to build Concordance.
- Decisions are made through Concordance: approval by a substantial majority of 80% of the members voting provided that the number of affirmative votes is equal to or greater than 80% of quorum.
- By way of illustration: if the total membership at the time of the meeting is 200 members, quorum would be defined as 25% of the members, or 50 members present at the beginning of the meeting – no proposal could be approved with fewer than 40 affirmative votes (80% of quorum) – if fewer than 50 members remain present at the time a vote is called, the proposal could still be approved, but would require at least 40 affirmative votes, regardless of how many votes were actually cast – if more than 50 members are present at the time a vote is called, approval would require affirmative votes equal to 80% of the total casting votes.
- For calling a minister, Concordance is defined as 95% of the members voting provided that the number of affirmative votes is equal to or greater than 95% of quorum.
- Although both members and friends of the congregation are encouraged to participate in the discussion and straw polls, only official members of UUCC can vote. Votes can be by show of hands or a written ballot, at the discretion of the Moderator. Following the vote, the Secretary of the Board of Stewards shall record

the numbers of votes cast in favor and opposed to the subject proposal, and the number of abstentions. The Moderator will announce the outcome of the vote.

Ending the Meeting

- The Moderator will end the meeting when the Agenda is complete or the time established for the end of the meeting is reached. The meeting or discussion of a particular proposal can continue after the established time limit only if there is Concordance to extend the meeting for a specified time period.
- There will be time on the agenda at the end of the meeting for the Moderator to summarize the progress made at the meeting in relation to the UUCC mission and vision and the goals of the meeting.
- The Egalitarian will confirm that a fair meeting has been conducted.
- The Secretary will summarize the agreements made and record the number of votes received on each proposal. The Secretary will send the summary and action plan to the Board within two weeks.
- The meeting will end with a Benediction or other spiritual reading.

Section 4: New Appendix to Articles of Association – Courtesy Guidelines

Courtesy Guidelines for Congregational Meetings

As a participant in this UCC congregational meeting, I pledge to:

Honor our congregational covenant, in which we promise (among other things) . . .

- to extend trust, patience, and goodwill to one another. We choose to act and communicate respectfully. When differences arise, we will allow opportunities for all to be heard and understood. We will work together, appreciating conflict as an opportunity to grow. We understand that not all concerns can be resolved to our personal satisfaction.

In keeping with this promise, I agree to:

- Come to the meeting informed.
- Introduce myself before I speak.
- Speak to and about others as I would want them to speak to or about me.
- Speak for myself, using “I” messages.
- Ensure that my opinions are communicated.
- Limit my speaking time so as not to dominate the discussion.

- Listen to understand.
- Assume the best about others’ intentions.
- Listen as an ally.
- Remain attentive, curious and open to the perspective of others.
- Avoid interrupting.
- Encourage others who have not yet spoken to share their thoughts and opinions.

Finally, I assume that all participants have acted with integrity according to their individual experience and spiritual beliefs, and regardless of the outcome, I agree to honor and respect the final decision.