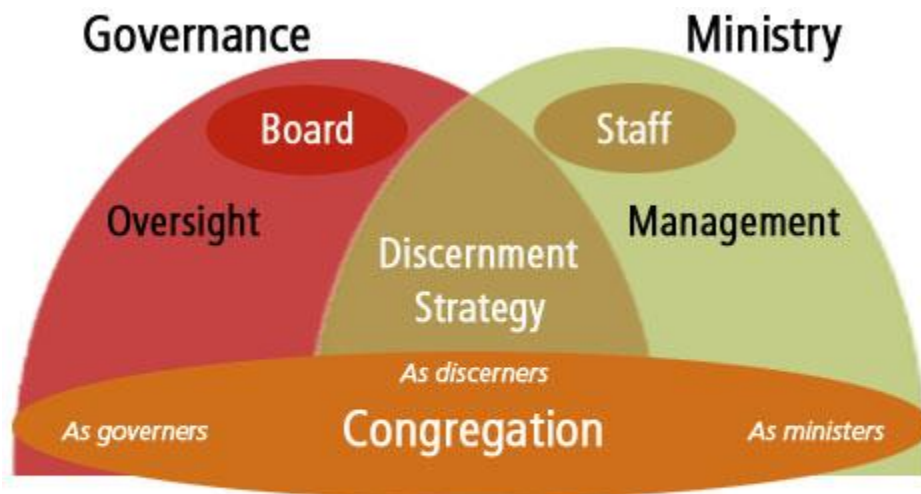


A Map for Thinking about Governance

Rather than considering any specific model of congregational governance, let's instead think about governance and ministry using a conceptual map (see figure below). On this map, Governance and Ministry are two zones of leadership that overlap. Governance includes the top-level tasks of articulating the congregation's mission, selecting a strategy for getting there, making sure it happens, ensuring that people and property are protected against harm, and seeing to it that the congregation lives in harmony with its own values. Ministry is the active "doing" aspect of the congregation, the daily practical work that brings into being worship services, study groups, visitation schedules, service projects, and programs.



A Map for Thinking About Congregations
Dan Hotchkiss, author of *Governance and Ministry*

In congregations, people wear many different hats, so it's not uncommon for a board member to also play a role in ministry. The hat metaphor can be a useful reminder about the separation of duties, depending on one's role in the moment.

At the top of each curve is its most frequent decision maker—typically the board for governance and the staff for ministry. The overlap of these two zones of power and control creates a third zone of shared decision making on issues that need input from both governance and ministry before traveling upward to the right or left for a decision. Clear decision-making authority at the top and clear understanding about the boundaries between governance and ministry actually makes it easier to share information, power, and influence throughout the organization.

Oversight belongs to the board, which maintains a certain separation from the staff in order to maintain sufficient objectivity to serve as an effective check and balance. The board connects with ministry leaders by adopting policies to guide their work. These policies include mission and vision statements, annual goals and budgets, and rules about finance, personnel, real estate, and so on. Through policies the board delegates authority to ministry leaders and

gives them guidance about how that authority should be used. It also holds staff accountable. Responsible boards match delegated power with accountability—neither writing a blank check to ministry leaders nor holding them responsible for a result without first giving adequate authority to accomplish it.

Management is the staff's sphere. Here, too, some separation and clear boundaries need to be in place. The staff accepts responsibility for managing its own internal relationships and for using the authority it has been delegated.

Discernment involves articulating mission and vision.

Strategy involves making the big choices about capital investments, staffing, program philosophy, and outreach goals. No matter who plays the final decision-making role in these two areas, the process leading up to a decision needs to be a shared one.

The congregation is at the bottom of the picture not because it is less important but because its members serve in all three zones. The congregation plays three distinct roles. As *governors*, members of the congregation play a formal, corporate decision-making role. This can take a variety of forms, and the role may be shared with the larger denominational family. As the main volunteer labor pool, members of the congregation play a role as *ministers*. Members of the congregation also play a role as *discerners*. Discernment aims to discover what good the congregation truly exists to do—what part of God's will is ours to accomplish? Members play other non-organizational roles as well—worshippers, students, evangelists—usually without thinking much about it.

Governance and ministry in the best sense is a partnership, one that depends on both clear boundaries and a relationship of mutual support.

This material is adapted from Chapter 4 of [Governance and Ministry: Rethinking Board Leadership](#), by the Rev. Dan Hotchkiss, and represents less than 1/20th of the content of that chapter.