

Frequently Asked Questions - The Elder Model

This is a time of transition for Unitarian Universalists in the Southern Region. If Unitarian Universalism is to be a vital and growing faith, it requires our active participation. We are reminded from the Cambridge Platform that ministry does not belong only to ordained clergy, but also to others who are servant leaders of the faith. According to our history from the Cambridge Platform, elders understand and uphold the deepest meaning of the faith and they may be teachers and preachers, and the deacon's role is the stewardship of resources. While the Cambridge Platform recognizes the independence of congregations, it also recognizes their interdependence. It is essential to congregation polity that congregations be in community, that they develop linkages to share resources, and that they participate in associational life.

This proposed Elder Model offers a means for building relationships between congregations, clusters, states, and throughout the region. Elders who emerge from congregations to serve at the region level will be those whose deep faith and commitment to Unitarian Universalism allows them to nurture others. Through the ministry of Elders, it is expected that congregants will deepen their understanding and talent for leadership so that more wise leaders will be available to offer more services to congregations and the world. The Council of Elders is a program body that will facilitate the development of Elders and will support opportunities to grow Elder teams and the faith throughout the South. Following are some frequently asked questions about the Elder Model and expectations for how it will be implemented.

1. What's the point of the Council of Elders?

The Council of Elders will be servant leaders practicing shared ministry in relationship with the Southern Region Congregational Life Staff (CLS). The Council of Elders will foster relationships and networks between congregations, clusters, states, and throughout the region and will create and support opportunities to grow leaders and the faith throughout the South.

2. What will the Council of Elders do?

This is a program body - working hand in hand with the Southern Region Congregational Life Staff (CLS) doing shared ministry.

The Council of Elders will serve in a variety of capacities. They will:

- Help to create and identify opportunities to grow networks, teams and the faith throughout the South.
- Help to foster relationships within and among congregations, clusters, states, and throughout the region. Elders will always look for ways to help congregations and leaders to network and help each other.
- Help congregations to develop ways to recognize and celebrate the elders they have and help to identify new elders.
- With the foundation of the Cambridge and Orlando Platforms, work towards our UUA ends.
- Represent the region at ceremonies of importance to the faith such as ministerial ordinations and installations, building dedication ceremonies, and celebrations of congregation anniversaries.

3. Is the Council of Elders replacing the Boards?

No. The Council has distinctly different functions from previous boards. Historically, boards focused on the business of our organizations including financial management, staff oversight and policy decisions. The Council of Elders will focus on strengthening congregational ties, developing leaders (therefore congregations) and bolstering faith development. The council will do this by building strong relationships throughout the faith. In short: whereas boards *govern* the faith, the council will *minister* to the faith.

4. How are Council Members chosen?

This process was refined in February, 2015, to preserve continuity across the four District Boards with different terms and to reduce the need for additional votes. The inaugural Council of Elders will consist of eight members:

- Two members of each of the existing District Boards will be chosen **by the respective Boards.**
- ~~Council members will be nominated at the Annual Assemblies in 2015 by the individual District Nominating Committees and voted upon by each body.~~
- ~~The Nominating Committee in each District will approach the Board members of that District to see if they are willing to serve on the Elderhood Council.~~
- Four nominees will be asked to serve a term of two years, and four nominees will be asked to serve a term of four years.
- *Each district will nominate two members of the current District Board to staff the inaugural Council of Elders and will be voted upon by each District body at their Annual Assembly in April 2015.*

[Click here to see a visual of the plan.](#)

5. What will the role of Staff be in relationship to this Council?

In covenant, the Council of Elders and Congregational Life Staff (CLS) will pursue our Association's Ends. Staff is ultimately responsible for program development. The Council of Elders will support CLS to develop structures and programs that are needed to grow vibrant congregations. Staff is ultimately responsible for program development.

The relationship between congregations, CLS, and Elders will help insure that excellent programs are developed and our faith is advanced.

6. What will Elders do? How will they serve the Southern Region?

Elders will serve in a variety of roles throughout the region, based on many factors. Elders on the Council will serve as organizers and relationship builders among Elders, congregations, and staff. Congregational Elders may do a variety of tasks depending upon their skill set, availability, and demand. Possible actions may include: mentoring other leaders, developing and facilitating training sessions, or community organizing. Elders can be wonderful resources to their home congregations, as well, as they have the opportunity to deeply engage in our UU faith within and beyond congregational walls.

While there are limited roles for Elders to play at the Regional level we are mindful that the need is infinite and the resources are finite. Elders can serve clusters and groups that form to address some particular initiative.

The Council of Elders is one role that Elders will play. Elder roles that exist today include the Smart Church Consultants, Leadership Experience Faculty and Regional Multi-track trainings and cluster development activities. As the system evolves more roles will be identified.

Our hope is that through regional opportunities leaders will be even better equipped to serve their home congregations and faith.

7. How will moving to the Elder Model affect me personally?

This is an opportunity for leaders and all congregants to have more resources so that they can go deeper into their own gifts and the service they can provide. Individuals will be offered many opportunities for development. This deeper training will feed leaders and allow them to serve in a deeper capacity - both in their congregation and in our larger faith. The Elder Model gives more people an opportunity to deepen their understanding and talent for leadership with the goal of having more wise leaders to offer more services to congregations and the world.

Congregations will have many more acknowledged partners in the good works they are doing. Silos will be broken down and we will come to know we are not alone in our work. The result will be a greater sense of community across the miles and a greater sense of interconnection with other UUs doing similar work.

8. How will congregations be served by moving to the Elder Model?

The Elder Model's emphasis on individual growth, maturity, and collaboration means that there will be more wise leaders to help manage and muster congregations.

The Elder Model gives congregations the opportunity to be more ministry-focused. This change will foster collaboration with other Unitarian Universalists and congregations to be more active in the community, to pull together like-minded interrelated ideas, resources and energy to better represent Unitarian Universalism in the world.

9. How will moving to the Elder Model serve our chosen faith?

Moving to the Elder Model provides a path to leadership and gives an opportunity for congregational Elders to connect with other Elders from across the region to serve our faith movement outside their own congregation or cluster.

Moving to the Elder Model will increase our incarnational growth. Those outside our faith will come to know what Unitarian Universalism stands for and does.

10. If I am interested in being an Elder, how does my name go forward for consideration?

You may request that your congregation recognize that you have been filling the role of an Elder, or your congregation, on its own volition, may come to you to ask if you would accept a nomination to be an elder.

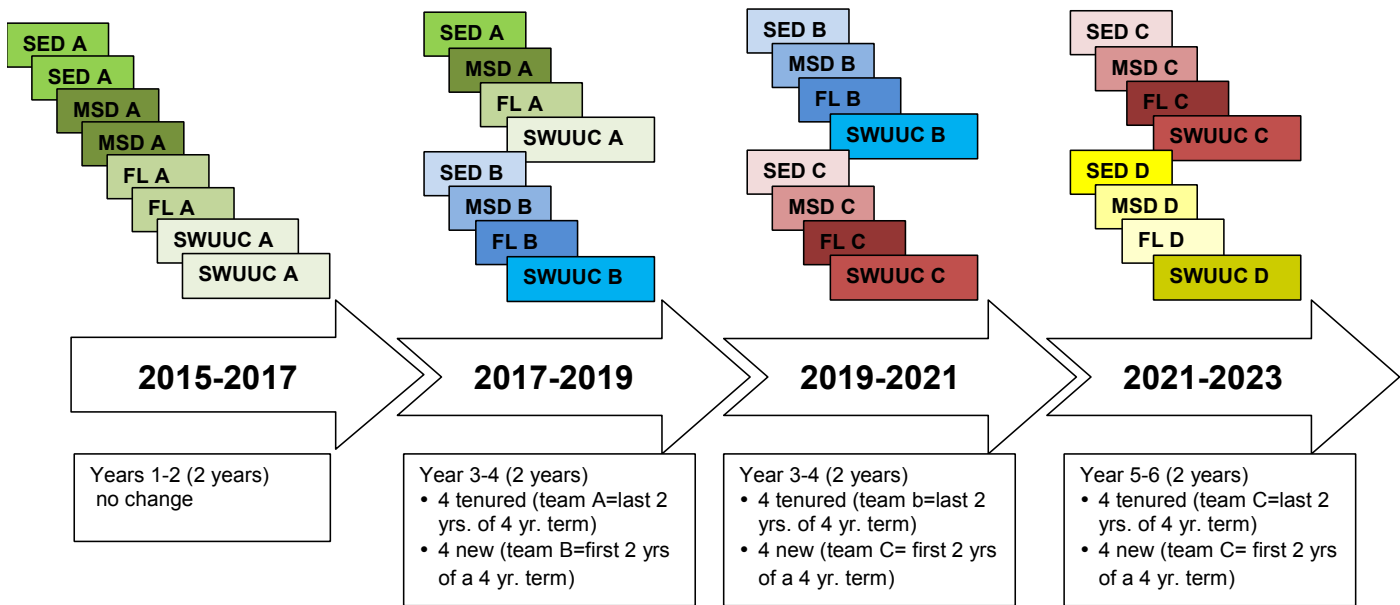
Elders may also be identified at events and trainings. Congregational Life Staff and the Council of Elders will always be in relationship with congregations about leaders who could be asked to serve on a regional body.

Congregations and/or covenanted communities, via their Boards, Faith Development Teams, Professional Staff, Nominating Committees, Leadership Development Teams or Committees on Ministry, will recognize and/or identify individuals who function as Elders in the congregation.

11. How long will someone be an Elder?

Elders are leaders in the community who hold in their hearts the deepest meaning of the faith. Elders are respected wise leaders regardless of the role they play or the position they hold. As long as one is serving to uphold the faith, one remains an Elder. A Unitarian Universalist Elder could be 15 or 105 years old.

Southern Region Council of Elders Rotation



- No mandated turnover of Council members for the first two years (2015–17 - Team A)
- June, 2017 - Four of the eight original Council members will be replaced by appointment. The Council of Elders and the Southern Region Staff will identify leaders throughout the Southern Region who would be capable and willing to serve on the Council, beginning in 2017 (Team B). Four of the original members will remain on the Council (Team A). This new Council will stay in place for two years
- June 2019 - Four council members that have been on the longest (Team A) will be replaced and new members appointed (Team C). From then on the Elderhood Council members will have three year terms. Four of the longest standing members will be replaced every other year. This leaves one year of no change, allowing for the team to mature and move out of teaching and into doing.
- June 2021 – Rinse and repeat.