

## Governance Symposium at the UTS Alumni Conference

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As part of the 2015 UTS Alumni Conference at Unification Theological Seminary, alumni and panelists on church governance met for a session on “Governance for Not-for-Profit and Faith-Based Organizations” on May 25 at UTS in Barrytown, New York.

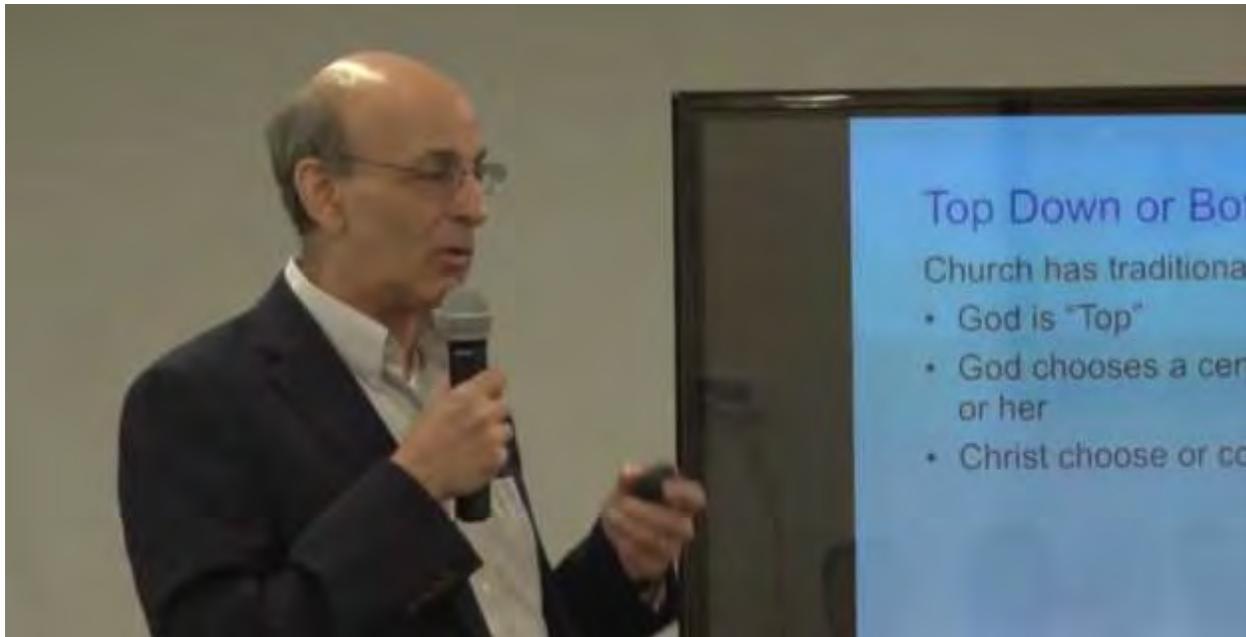
UTS President Dr. Hugh Spurgin greeted attendees and those watching remotely from around the world, and invited all to participate regardless of their connection to the Unification Movement. As moderator, I introduced the session by outlining some of the benefits of good governance for not-for-profit and faith-based organizations, the traditional main categories of church governance, and some of the challenges commonly faced by organizations in achieving good Rev. Dr. Mark Isaacs, assistant professor of ministry and management at UTS and a Lutheran pastor for 23 years, cited his experience as a veteran of church governance issues. As someone who shares Unification opposition to communist and totalitarian ideology (and cited the CAUSA Lecture Manual and Washington Times), he said today leftist ideology has not disappeared but gone underground, in a “cross-denominational conspiracy” among denominations such as the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, United Methodist Church, Presbyterian Church USA and American Baptist Church. Isaacs said they are well-financed, highly organized and currently rally around the issue of ordination of gay and lesbian pastors. While older church members like his parents, as lifelong Lutherans, will remain faithfully with the denomination, Isaacs said his congregation left the ELCA in 2000, and, with a group of about 12-13 other churches, practices congregation polity, where each congregation governs itself. “If somebody wants to call themselves ‘bishop’, run the other way — it’s a bad thing... pastor means servant,” he said.

But for some congregations, that means pure democracy, Isaacs said, where any change can be made by a simple majority vote, even for major doctrinal or core practice issues like gay marriage. That’s also a bad thing, he said, so his congregation relies on the Melancthon Rule — a form of representative rather than direct democracy, where a body of clergy and lay members make decisions based on a consensus rule: there must be 100% agreement among the representatives for any proposed change, or the policy doesn’t change. That conservative approach, Isaacs said, removes politics from many church controversies, since there’s no incentive to campaign or garner votes for controversial issues in an attempt to force change through a simple majority.

Isaacs concluded noting that concerns over church governance are “not a Unificationist problem alone... churches across America are burning to the ground... and most people don’t fight, they just get up and leave.” Still, he said, “When I see the Unificationist movement having problems, it rips my heart out — you are my friends and neighbors and your house is on fire and I wish I could come and do something to help you, but you have to do it, you have to get your house in order.” Isaacs noted the irony that “You’re supposed to be Unificationists and you can’t find agreement... If you want other people to join with you, you better get your act together. I’m pulling for you, I’m praying for you... it goes across the board, all religions are in a state of crisis right now.” But, he said, “a state of crisis means a state of opportunity... when things get reorganized and reordered, the people that have their act together can do the reorganizing, and so there is a home and place for this — pay attention to what these guys say, and get to work.”

Panelist and management consultant, Noah Ross, WestRock Council and FFWPU National Council Representative, District 2, said checks and balances are very important in maintaining the health of an organization. He said balance between top-down and bottom-up type organization is important for

churches, which have traditionally been top-down, starting with God calling a central figure like Christ to initiate His will. However, Ross said, as the sole management principle for an organization, “it doesn’t work well... you’re going to have problems.” When all decisions come from the top, he said, it creates a bottleneck, and a company, for example can’t make decisions, and can’t grow and develop. When employees have no ownership, and feel their contribution doesn’t matter, they become disconnected from the top and top management becomes disconnected from its employees and customers, he said.



Ross cited communism as another example of top-down governance failure: nobody has any ownership, and it doesn’t work very well. Unificationism, with its belief in human responsibility, fundamentally supports broader ownership and participation, Ross added. Bottom-up doesn’t necessarily work either, Ross said, especially in a religious context, where “God needs to be at the center.. there are some things that need to come from above; it isn’t a matter of public opinion or politics... God needs to be able to work — the body doesn’t need to control the mind — it needs to somehow have a balance and harmony, something in-between. In my mind, that has a lot to do with checks and balances.”

Ross spoke about his experience working on church government in WestRock Church and the National Charter and National Council. The idea is to give responsibility to elected bodies, to make real decisions that matter, he said, followed by a review from higher church authorities, to achieve some kind of balance, checks and balances, and shared ownership. On the local church level, Ross said WestRock Church uses a council system, where the pastor and council share responsibility. The pastor answers both to higher church authorities and God for direction, but also to the council for election to a three-year term. The council is also responsible for the church budget. “We found this works when there’s a good balance, and when the church leader and the council make a good relationship and work together well, “ Ross said. He said WestRock Church continues to experiment to find the right balance of authority between the pastor and the council, and hopes their work will be a helpful example to others and the larger church as constitutional issues are considered.

Dr. Michael Mickler, professor of church history at UTS, said an alternative approach to HSA-UWC governance is needed, that HSA-UWC should broaden its governance structure with a general assembly, at least annually, and that assembly should be congregationally-based. Currently, he said, an eight-member, self-perpetuating board oversees the organization, including all its assets. While spiritually the board answers to church leadership, legally the board is autonomous and responsible only to its own articles of incorporation, which it has the authority to change, he said. The first problem with this form of governance, Mickler said, is what in the corporate world would be called a hostile takeover: in 2009, Hyun Jin Moon made a concerted effort to take over the HSA board in the U.S. He failed, Mickler said, due to the direct intervention of Unification movement founder, Rev. Sun Myung Moon. The situation with the for-profit Unification Church International (UCI) was different, Mickler said, where, as board chair, Hyun Jin Moon succeeded by inducing two of the five board members to resign and replaced them with two of his associates, thereby giving him a majority. They then voted out two other board members, resulting in the movement losing control of half or more of its worldwide assets, including: the Atlantic Video building (i.e., Mediatech Plaza, 650 Massachusetts Ave., NW) in Washington, DC, which was sold for \$113 million; the 417-room Sheraton National Hotel in Arlington, Virginia; the J.W. Marriott Hotel and mall complex in Seoul, Korea, which sold for \$1 billion; and, the Yeouido Island land and \$2.3 billion Parc One tower project. The resulting litigation to try and stop or recover these losses cost millions of dollars as well, Mickler said.

In South America, UCI also attempted a hostile takeover of HSA Brazil in 2010, and placed three North American employees on the board, thereby gaining control, Mickler said, and then moved to remove the

current church president, who was resisting the change. They failed, in part again due to intervention of the founder, but more importantly, due to the Brazilian Church's General Assembly, the church's highest decision-making body, which consists of 10 founders, and past and current leaders. The General Assembly voted to retain the current president, and to remove the UCI-dominated board, thus keeping the land and assets in Brazil within the Unification Church, Mickler said.



The second problem with the board-dominated structure is demoralization of membership, Mickler said. The HSA-UWC charter actually makes no mention or provision for membership at all, he said, and only the board has authority to make decisions. An example would be the experience of Barrytown College at UTS, he said, where HSA made major financial commitments to launch the undergraduate program: \$7 million for start-up costs and \$8 million for the endowment, which were pledged in written commitments to the New York State Education Department, who, on that basis, approved the new undergraduate program in February 2013. Then, in October that year, within six weeks of the college opening, the HSA board directed that the college should be closed, resulting, Mickler said, in "a great deal of acrimony and demoralization."

Mickler proposed an alternative governance structure:

- HSA should convene a general assembly as the highest decision-making body

- The board and church administration should serve under the general assembly

- The general assembly should be genuinely representative of the membership

- The general assembly should approve the annual budget, establish policy, set priorities, protect assets and be a witness to Unification faith

The assembly should be congregationally-based, Mickler said, with any authorized and recognized congregation having representation at the general assembly, and with possible provision for district assemblies if needed. Mickler outlined five key benefits of restructuring church governance to a general assembly system:

- End arbitrary uses of power

- Empower membership

- Enhance the organization and leadership capacity of the church as a whole

- Effect a sea change in consciousness and maturity

- Establish a level of professionalism attractive to the church's next generation

The final panelist, Gregg Noll, President of Il Hwa North America, founding director of Camp Shehaqua and founder of Bluestone Farms Intentional Community, said he prefers to focus on governance issues on the local, community level. He said a community needs "community glue" to be successful: people spending time with each other, in social settings, eating, laughing, crying and working together. Communication is also critical to a vibrant community, Noll said, as well as good organization management.

Camp Shehaqua is a group of families that got together 20 years ago, a grassroots effort, he said, to take responsibility for education of the next generation. Until 2012, it was organized in a more traditional top-down system, Noll said, but that had limitations, and the community switched that year to a flatter, shared-responsibility governance called sociocracy. A council is the overall governing body, he said, and “circles” handle various areas, such a summer camp circle or a media circle, and people choose which to participate in based on their interests and talents.



“Dynamic governance” is another name for sociocracy, he said, and it allows the work load to be spread out more evenly, and planning to be done more in advance, rather than via crisis management and over-centralized responsibility.

Noll highlighted the basic principles to sociocracy:

Circle organization — people participate based on interests; circles carefully examine and vet proposals before submitting to the council

Consent versus consensus — “is this a proposal I can live with?” — rather than requiring agreement, proposals are viewed as experiments. If there’s a serious objection, the proposal goes back to the originating circle for re-evaluation.

Implementation involves taking an educated risk on a new proposal.

Evaluating what has worked and what hasn’t worked is critical, he said, and at Shehaqua, a lot of time is devoted to evaluation and review of programs.

Noll said the three key roles within a circle are facilitators, administrators and representatives. Also, each circle has a person who is a member of an operations team, which meets monthly to review how the circles are doing and the needs of various programs.

Blue Stone Farms, another project Noll is involved with, founded on 20 acres of the Upper Delaware, will also use the sociocracy model to create an intentional community. Six blessed families will live there.

To try and be successful on a large organizational level without first establishing good governance and community on the local level is the wrong order, Noll said.

The governance session included questions and answers (which can be viewed below), and after Dr. Spurgin thanked the panelists and those in attendance, UTS Alumni Association director, Robin Graham, suggested small group discussion, which the panelists then participated in, sharing their experiences of good, and dysfunctional, governance.