Open His Gates

A fresh way to serve together: fewer slots to fill, more room for everyone's gifts.

Overview

Our committee structure from the 1960s served us well for decades, but it's showing its age. We're replacing it with a smaller Council of Ministry and member-led Connect Groups, so more of us can serve where our gifts and passions really are. What stays the same: our mission, our confession of faith, and the biblical roles of head and helper.

The result: fewer seats to fill, less time spent on reports, and more room for everyone, men and women alike, to jump in and serve.

THE QUICK VERSION

Church Council	→ Council of Ministry
Committees, boards, aid and volunteer groups	→ Connect Groups
Elders	→ Soul Care
Board presidents	→ Coordinators
Board of Christian Education	→ School Ministry Team
Quarterly voters' meetings	→ Open Forums + annual Business Meeting

Council of Ministry
LEADING

Servant leaders who guide our day-to-day ministry, look after our people and resources, and carry out what the congregation decides.

School Ministry Team
SUPPORTING

Helps the Principal care for Pre-K and the Grade School, from accreditation to policy.

Connect Groups
SERVING

Member-led groups, open to men and women to coordinate. Where the everyday ministry and fellowship happen.

The Council of Ministry

Think of the Council of Ministry as our leadership team. Along with the Pastor and Principal, it makes the everyday operational decisions that keep our mission moving. The big, binding decisions still belong to the voters: calling workers, electing the Council, adopting the ministry plan and budget, and major purchases.

President
Leads the big picture, chairs meetings, keeps an eye on finances

Vice-President
Steps in for the president; looks after the care of our called workers

Secretary
Keeps minutes and church records

Treasurer
Offerings and gifts in, bills out, regular reports and the annual audit

Buildings & Grounds
Property upkeep, maintenance Connect Groups and big facility projects

Soul Care
Spiritual care of members and non-members; Soul Care Connect Groups

Outreach
Guides the Connect Groups that run outreach events and church and school marketing

Member Engagement
Shepherds the whole Connect Group program; Time, Talents, Treasures

School Ministry
Oversees school ministry and sits on the School Ministry Team

TERMS

2 years, up to 3 in a row in the same office. About half the seats turn over each year.

ELECTIONS

Any voting member (male, 18+, in good standing) can serve. The slate goes out two Sundays before the annual Business Meeting.

ADVISORS

The Pastor(s) and Principal advise but don't vote (the Pastor does vote on church discipline).

School Ministry Team

Some ministries need a bit more structure, so the Council can hand decisions to a Ministry Team with its own charter. Our school is one of those, and that's where the School Ministry Team comes in. It takes over from the Board of Christian Education and helps the Principal with Pre-K and the Grade School.

Main goal

Helping the Principal carry out the school's mission, especially spiritual growth, school quality through accreditation, outreach and nurture, and school policy.

Who's on it

The Principal leads it, joined by the School Ministry Councilman and 4 members recommended by the Principal. They serve staggered 2-year terms with no term limit, and any communicant member 18+, man or woman (staff included), can serve.

What it decides

The Council has handed off student discipline and final expulsion decisions, school policies, and yearly reviews of the staff, school and athletics handbooks to this team.

Appeals

Parents or staff who disagree with a decision by the Principal can bring it to this team.

What else it does

Carries out the School Improvement Plan, reviews the school's mission objectives each year, makes teacher call recommendations to the voters and staffing recommendations to the Council, helps with school outreach events, and represents the school at congregational meetings, open forums and graduations.

Who it answers to

The Principal still answers to the Council of Ministry, not to this team.

Connect Groups

We want to do more than be a friendly church. We want to be a church of friends. Connect Groups take the place of our old committees, boards and volunteer groups, and they're where most of the ministry at First will happen.

They're run almost entirely by members. The Pastor offers a little training for leaders, but he doesn't plan or run the groups. This is your ministry.

Three kinds of groups

Spiritual Study

Conversational time in God's Word, more discussion than a Sunday morning class. No teacher needed: a facilitator keeps things moving, and the Pastor helps you find good materials.

IDEAS

Men's and women's Bible studies, small group studies, Coffee and Bible Bites

Active Service

Teams and short-term groups that get things done, for the church, for specific people, or for our wider community.

IDEAS

Ushers, AV, choir and handbells, buildings and grounds, VBS, homebound visits, Meals on Wheels, food pantry, yard work for elderly members, funeral team

Social Fellowship

Time to relax and enjoy each other's company. God rested from his work too, and we all need to recharge so we can serve with energy.

IDEAS

Book clubs, dartball, a monthly golf outing, card games, Games and Giggles, Moms of Might, coffee or dinner out

How they work

Coordinators
The only real qualification is passion. Any communicant member, man or woman, in good standing can coordinate. Never led a group? No problem, you'll get some brief training.

Who's looking out for them
The Member Engagement Councilman shepherds the whole program; Buildings & Grounds, Soul Care and Outreach guide the groups in their areas.

Everyone's welcome
Members and non-members alike. Invite friends, neighbors and family who don't have a church home.

Less red tape
Groups run with real freedom, no permission loops. If something needs a binding decision, it goes up to the Council of Ministry.

Church App
Browse groups, sign up instantly, message your group, RSVP and sync events to your calendar. Coordinators share schedules and updates there too.

What if nobody signs up?
It happens! Two or three people is still a group. A quiet round usually just means the timing or topic didn't click, so try again next time.

WANT TO START A GROUP?

Work through these, put your answers on the Connect Group Planning Form, and turn it in a month ahead (leading in August? turn it in by July).

How often?
Short-term or ongoing, plan at least three meetings. Monthly works, weekly is great. List every date.

When?
Any day or time. Keep it consistent, and give an end time so people know what they're signing up for.

Where?
Your home is best for building friendships. A coffee shop, a different spot each time, or the church work too.

Who?
Aim at a certain crowd if you like: seniors, singles, moms. Twelve or fewer is the sweet spot.

Any cost?
No surprises. List any materials or fees on the form.

What's it called?
Every group needs a name. The catchier, the better!

Teens: want to run a group? Go for it! You'll just need an adult sponsor.

Voice over votes

We're trading quarterly voters' meetings for relaxed Open Forums plus one annual Business Meeting. The goal is consensus: leaders share information ahead of time and gather input from everyone, men and women, through forums, questionnaires and polls.

Open Forums

WHEN

A few times a year (about 3x, usually before Business Meetings)

WHAT WE TALK ABOUT

Congregation updates, a financial health check, upcoming events, Connect Group highlights, and open discussion

DECISIONS

No formal votes, just conversation, with consensus gathered if needed

Business Meetings

WHEN

The annual meeting in July, plus call meetings and other special meetings when needed

WHAT WE TALK ABOUT

The budget and ministry plan and Council elections. Call meetings are for calling pastors and teachers; other special meetings cover major purchases and governance changes

DECISIONS

Talk it through to consensus first, then voters have the final say

Questions? Talk to Pastor or any Council of Ministry member.