



Bylaws for a Unity Ministry FAQ's

Ministry bylaws are an important component of ministry governance. They constitute a binding agreement between the members of the ministry and the board of trustees. Effective bylaws provide clarity of purpose and explicit structures for managing the business of the organization. The ministry bylaws define the ministry's relationship with Unity Worldwide Ministries (UWM).

To assist our ministries, UWM has created a bylaw template for ministries to use in creating bylaws. It was created by our Bylaws Ministry Team which is made up of individuals with extensive knowledge and experience regarding bylaws. In addition, it has been reviewed by our UWM legal team and our UWM parliamentarian. This template contains their wisdom and expertise and constitutes a highly effective tool for our ministries to use in designing their bylaws. We encourage all ministries to make use of this valuable tool. The Member Support Team will review ministry bylaws and coach ministries in developing bylaws that support them in the spiritual business of ministry.

FAQS About Ministry Bylaws

If bylaws and the template are so important, why was the policy requiring ministries to utilize the template in developing bylaws rescinded in 2019?

Unity Worldwide Ministries is always evolving with the ebbs and flows of our culture and religious denominational best practices. At that time, our goal was to collaboratively explore who we are as a movement and what the standards are to which we want to hold one another accountable. Until we gained greater clarity on these two issues, making governance forms mandatory seems too restrictive.

What if we have already gone through the process of changing our bylaws to harmonize with the template?

That's wonderful! You have an excellent up-to-date set of bylaws to govern your ministry!

What if we have begun the process of changing our bylaws, and are not yet finished with this work?

We encourage you to finish this work and reach out to the Member Support team to support you in this process. They will assist you in fine-tuning the template to your ministry culture and help you understand the purposes and value of the different aspects of the template.

What is the purpose of including the ministry's relations with UWM in the bylaws? Which bylaws articles are used for this?

Including your relationship with UWM in your bylaws clearly establishes that you are a member ministry with many ministries voting to join the Association of Unity Churches, d.b.a. Unity Worldwide Ministries (UWM) many years ago and committed to sharing the Unity message and teachings. We are stronger together and establishing coherence and a unified approach to serving the Unity movement supports the whole. Outlining the relationship with UWM in your ministry bylaws also allows the ministry and its members to call upon UWM for conflict transformation support. The template defines this relationship in Article II: Purpose, in Article IV: Members (Section 6. Rights of Members), in Article V: Meetings (Section 1 -E Participation), in Article VI: Board of Trustees (Section 10—Duties and Responsibilities, H, I, U, CC, DD, EE, FF.), in Article VIII: Administration and Leadership (Section 2—Minister(s), Article IX: Dissolution, Article XI: Amendment of Bylaws, and the Attest or witness signature block).

What are "the universal principles of Truth as taught and demonstrated by Jesus Christ?"

(Currently stated as “the universal principles of Truth, as taught and demonstrated by Jesus Christ and other spiritual teachers and interpreted by the Association of Unity Churches., d/b/a Unity Worldwide Ministries,”...) **What are the teachings of Unity? Unity is pretty open-ended. Why do we have such statements in our bylaws?**

Unity does have an open-ended theology and does not adhere to creeds and dogma. We are blessed with the rich teachings of our founders as well as more recent Unity leaders. These teachings have transformed many lives and our ministries have been formed to share these teachings. Therefore, it is important to state this purpose in your bylaws. The language "the principles of Truth as taught and demonstrated by Jesus Christ" come from UWM's articles of incorporation.

Autonomy is important to us. We want to be connected to the Unity movement and are willing to abide by UWM's bylaws and policies as long as they are not in conflict with our autonomy.

Self-determination is important to all of us; it creates a sense of agency and empowerment. We also have needs for belonging and support. There is a natural tension between these two forces and none of us is completely isolated from one another. As members of UWM, we all know the value of the Unity message and want to support one another in sharing that

message. Being part of Unity Worldwide Ministries is about supporting the mission of sharing that message and transforming human consciousness. UWM's policies and bylaws are designed to support us in coming together as one to support this; they provide common standards to support us in working coherently together—and members of UWM have the opportunity to share their perspective and help define these standards. And these standards leave a great deal of room for member ministries to make their own decisions and act independently.

Why does our money need to go to UWM? Can't we give it to Silent Unity or a community organization?

Members of your ministry give to the proliferation of the Unity message and its spiritual communities, and it is appropriate that your dissolution clause ensure that the remaining assets be used to support UWM with that intention. We encourage member ministries to have these assets go to UWM because we are the primary source of support for our ministries. Funds from dissolved ministries are divided equally and go to our Ministry Planting Fund, the Endowment Fund, the UWM Operating Account, and other current UWM programs/funds/grants/initiatives designed to give immediate support or assistance to ministries. For example, these include the Help Unity Grow Fund (HUG) and LEAP Grant Program which supports Unity ministries in a variety of ways.

When a 501 (c)(3) organization dissolves, its remaining assets legally must go to another 501 (c)(3) organization. While that organization does not have to be UWM, we would encourage your ministry to support the work of the movement through UWM or UWH (Unity World Headquarters). It is also possible for your ministry board to make decisions before the ministry is dissolved to make donations to other organizations—whether Unity organizations or other charitable organizations.

It is important to understand that once the organization has dissolved, the board no longer exists and can no longer make decisions about dispersing assets.

Is it necessary to have a formal membership? We are inclusive. Can't we just define membership as the people who show up?

Membership is an essential ingredient for nonprofit organizations and needs to be clearly defined in your bylaws. Inclusivity and belonging are important values, and clearly defined standards for membership do not limit people's involvement in the ministry. Rather, choosing to become a member gives one a voice in the decision-making process, and not all individuals in your ministry will choose to be engaged in this way. Choosing membership is also a display of dedication to an individual's spiritual growth, the spiritual community, and its proliferation.

It is important to understand that failure to clearly define membership creates significant liabilities for the ministry. For example, UWM has and continues to deal with some conflicted situations in ministries in which membership was unclear and an important decision was being considered; these exacerbated tensions and allowed individuals no longer engaged in the ministry to influence the vote.

People travel a lot today and we have members who are seasonal attendees or snowbirds. Can we have absentee or proxy voting?

Neither absentee or proxy voting are recommended by Unity Worldwide Ministries or Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised, our parliamentary authority, because these types of voting do not allow a member to benefit from the collective discussion which can influence decision-making. Our template does allow for voting by "electronic means simultaneously with a minimum standard being oral communication." This could include connecting by telephone or online.

What is the responsibility of the ministry board of trustees regarding continued communication with the ministry members in such circumstances as federal or state emergency lockdowns?

It is the responsibility of the board to continue to communicate faithfully to the membership regarding the activities of the board and ministry during the emergency. (Article VII, Emergency Situations).

We are a small ministry and have had difficulty recruiting board members. Why can't significant others serve on the board together? What about someone who serves on a contract basis serving on the board? What about a licensed Unity teacher?

It is important to ensure that there is no potential for conflict of interest or undue influence on the board. All these individuals could pose challenges here.

Relatives, significant others, or household members of any board member, licensed Unity teacher, or licensed/ordained Unity minister of the ministry and Individuals receiving compensation from the ministry with the exception of the senior minister (or co-ministers). serving on the board simultaneously can create an imbalance of power that could influence decision-making toward their preferences rather than the good of the whole. Those who receive compensation from the ministry will tend to support decisions that favor them financially.

Licensed Unity teachers serve under the minister, and they have a commitment to UWM through their Unity credential. UWM does not support them in serving on the board because it

represents a conflict of interest. We make an exception to this if the licensed teacher signs an agreement that they will not be active as a licensed teacher in the ministry.

UWM strongly recommends that all ministries keep this paragraph as written in its entirety. (Article VI, Board of Trustees, Section 1. Composition.) This allows for the natural ebb and flow of the actual number of active voting members to dictate the size of the board. During the pandemic, many ministries shifted in size and this paragraph kept the ministry in compliance with its bylaws. This also eliminates the need for a special meeting due to this concern at any given time in the year.

ARTICLE VI – Board of Trustees

Section 1. Composition. The board of trustees shall be composed of the senior minister (or co-ministers) and at least six (6) other trustees. The trustees shall be elected from among the active voting members of (name of ministry) at the annual membership meeting. Churches with fifty (50) members or less may choose to have a board of trustees composed of the senior minister and at least three (3) other trustees.

We are a very small and tight-knit community. Surely it is not necessary to have an application and vetting process for potential board members. We know everyone.

We may believe that we know each of our members, however, it is not possible to know what a person may wish to conceal. It is the best practice to have a standard vetting process for potential board members, those counting ministry funds, and those who work with our children, youth, and teens.

We are a very loving and accepting community. Surely it is not necessary to have a bylaws clause pertaining to the removal of a board member or a member.

Sometimes individuals find their way onto ministry boards or into ministry membership and then exhibit some unhealthy behaviors that undermine the safety and integrity of the organization. A bylaw clause allowing for the removal of a board member or a ministry member are essential so that clear, objective action can be taken to protect the local ministry. We also encourage ministries to adopt the Disruptive Behavior Policy which provides a clear process for dealing with such behavior: <https://www.unityworldwideministries.org/disruptive-behavior-guidelines>. We also encourage ministries to reach out to Member Support for guidance and support in addressing this challenging situation.

What authority does the membership have if they believe the board is not acting in the best interests of the ministry?

The membership has rights as listed (Article IV, Section 6). The membership elects the board members, and it is important that ministry bylaws give members the power to overturn board decisions or remove board members (Article V Section 1 . G. 5 & 6). Often such decisions are

made at a special membership meeting called through a petition (Article V. Section 2, A). There is usually a fair amount of tension in the ministry when this occurs, and ministers are encouraged to contact Member Support for guidance and support. Member Support also encourages the use of a professional registered parliamentarian or mediator to conduct such meetings and can discuss the benefits of engaging professional support, possibly connecting the ministry with such an individual.

Do we have to use the current edition of Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised for conducting business?

Robert's Rules of Order Newly Revised [RONR] is the parliamentary authority for UWM, provides clear guidelines for managing meetings and conducting business, and is used extensively in many organizations, including UWM. There are other systems for this, and a member ministry may choose to use one of these systems. Whatever system is used needs to be clearly defined and understood, as it supports healthy functioning of the organization.

Some ministries are utilizing Roberta's Rules of Order, which is a simpler, friendlier, and still effective method for conducting meetings.

If you have other questions, want more information,
or need guidance regarding bylaws or other governance-based questions,
contact Member Support at MemberSupport@unity.org.

We are dedicated to serving and supporting you and your ministry.