



Trinity United Presbyterian Church

Summarized Recommendations with no references and no personnel details

Rev. Nate Dreesmann, Executive Director of Ecclesiastical Support, ECO Synod

Rev. Scott Palmbush, Co-Founder Mirador Leaders, ECO Pastor

Site visit - December 2-4, 2025

Executive Session Meeting - Wednesday December 17, 2025

Recommendations Summary

HR Policies

1. Session (or its Committee) determine how to properly use a Board Governance Model.
2. Affirm, refine, and/or create clear pathways for when the HR committee reports HR issues to session and what should ordinarily be in the HR report to the session on a monthly basis.
 - a. Create clear pathways for the staff on when to report to the HR Committee and how the HR Committee interacts with staff in different situations.
 - b. Determine if the HR Committee representatives to each ministry area is effective or not and lay out responsibilities should this system remain in place.
 - c. Create a standing HR investigating team that has appropriate training to properly investigate ANY potential issue that is reported.
 - d. Determine how a staff member is relieved of their responsibilities with pay while an investigation is happening.
 - e. Set a policy on when Resignation Letters are sent to the congregation or a specific mission area.
 - f. Determine if any changes are needed in Trinity's "Non Frantization" policy
3. Create language for the staff employment manual regarding the limits of confidentiality when a pastor is serving as a supervisor.
4. Affirm, refine, and/or create improved policies for Trinity employees who hold a second job or operate a separate business. Include a rubric on how to determine approval based on the potential impact for staff and ministry at Trinity.
5. Affirm, refine, and/or create a policy for proper usage of the church credit card that includes an accountability and escalation process for cards to be removed/restored based on employee behavior.
6. Create regular management training that includes proper 1:1 meetings, developmental plans, and accountability. Include real life case studies for managers that walk through various scenarios churches have faced in the past. In a sense, develop a Trinity model of supervising, training, and equipping that is standard operating procedure for all managers.



7. Consider adding a policy in the handbook that substantiated misconduct may be shared publicly with the congregation and other places of employment could offer the church more options for appropriate disclosure in the future.
 - a. Example of potential wording: *When an Employee is dismissed for violating the Code of Conduct, or otherwise failing to adhere to church tenets, biblical standards and values, the church reserves the right to confirm with others including, the Membership, and other faith-based organizations that the offender is no longer in good standing with the Church due to nonconformance to employee policies and procedures along with beliefs and tenets held by the church. Depending on the seriousness of the offense, the Church may provide more details known to it to its stakeholders, concerning the employee's violation of the Code of Conduct, or failure to adhere to Church tenets, biblical standards, and values. At all times, the Church will endeavor to protect the innocent and respect the privacy of third parties when adhering to its rights and obligations under the ECO Constitution; Essential Tenets, Polity and Rules of Discipline, this handbook, the church by-laws, and any other applicable laws.*
8. Consider creating a policy or plan to address past and present harm to those who call Trinity their church home. The plan would acknowledge the harm, take responsibility as appropriate and work toward restoration of all involved. The goal is to create a path for those who are harmed, those responsible for harm, the congregation and staff heal. It also points to resources we have as Christians in the area of repentance, forgiveness, and amends and is a tangible way to demonstrate Christ's presence in the midst of a sinful world.
9. Ensure updates of policies by Session through a regular review process.
10. Implement a yearly review of the employee handbook by staff which should include a required staff sign-off every year.
11. Add accountability structures that invite 360 feedback for all managers.
12. Develop a robust onboarding process and training program for staff and volunteers focused on prevention of harm.
 - a. Implement best practices around reporting potential inappropriate behavior and situations.
 - b. Provide various ways for issues to be reported including a 3rd party hotline.
 - c. Hold regular "refreshers" for staff and volunteers
 - d. Potentially consult with an outside organization to develop a training program (<https://zeroabuseproject.org/>).

Pastoral Care

The pastoral care needs of the congregation will continue to be extensive and long-lasting. Many people have been touched by this issue and it has impacted a significant percentage of the congregation.

1. Create a comprehensive care plan that includes pastoral staff and elders operating as a team. Potential elements may include:

- a. Public acknowledgement in some form is essential. While communication may be limited by applicable laws and potential liability, saying as much as possible and taking responsibility as leaders is a key step to rebuilding trust with the congregation.
- b. Personal outreach should be attempted with any one who is connected with the student ministry especially parents, volunteers and staff.
- c. Listening prayer sessions should be offered to any in the congregation who wants to come. These are primarily about listening and processing feelings NOT defending the actions of leadership or smoothing over the emotions that present. Recommend an elder and staff member partnered together.
- d. The church should consider creating (or curating) some written and on-line resources for people who need support.
- e. Hold a special worship service focused on lament and grief.

Current Staff

The session must decide how it wants to resolve any issues with current employees. This is laid out in the report as submitted.

Leadership

We urge the church leadership - pastors and elders on session - to focus on leading with boldness, clarity and humility.

1. We recommend that current leadership (especially those involved in the current issue) offer a clear, authentic and heart-felt apology to the Trinity congregation, specifically to those who have been impacted throughout this process.
 - a. Obviously this will need to honor the appropriate boundaries required by the situation, but we urge some form of direct communication.
2. We encourage staff and Session leaders to actively move towards one and address any division and conflict between one another. Healing broken trust among the church leaders is a crucial step toward leading the congregation to health and wholeness.
3. We recommend implementing regular and consistent feedback loops for anyone serving in senior leadership.
4. We recommend improving Executive leadership and addressing supervision deficiencies. Some suggestions:
 - a. Org chart: We would recommend a review of the org chart and reporting relationships for effectiveness and vision alignment.
 - b. Leadership Circle Profile: We would recommend that the session move from the current review practice for the senior staff to the robust Leadership Circle Profile, which is a more effective tool for senior leaders. (*The Leadership Circle Profile is something that Rev. Dr. Dana Allin, Synod Executive can support*)
 - c. Address On-going Institutional Leadership challenges:
 - i. Implementing a clear vision to move Trinity forward
 - ii. Addressing work-life balance issues for the staff.

- d. Creation of a Go Team: We recommend a team be created which we call a “Go Team”. This Go Team consists of three people: the chair of the HR team, one elder chosen by the Senior Pastor, and one elder elected by the session. The Go Team has two primary functions:
 - i. Trusted advisors: The Senior Pastor will have a safe place to consult on any Executive Issues that arise.
 - ii. Escalation Point: This team is the designated group for escalating issues that have already been presented to the Senior Pastor.

Culture

1. Examine the culture around student and family ministry.
 - a. Determine how to help the culture balance excellence, sacrificial living, and personal and spiritual needs.
 - b. Look at the calendar of events and find ways to streamline. Consider the ROI including the impact on staff and volunteers in the long term.
2. Address the meta-narrative regarding perfection, failure, and sin.
 - a. One of the concerning messages that we heard echoed throughout different conversations pointed to a lack of transparency at Trinity. People wondered if Trinity was a place they could be real. Some of what we heard included questions such as: *“Is this a place where I can admit failure and not be ok?”*, *“Everything always seems so perfect, what about the hard things I am facing?”*, and *“Are we all just pretending that we have it all together and figured out?”* We heard stories of people who have walked through affairs and felt alone at the church.
 - b. Trinity has a long history of excellence in worship and ministry which is wonderful. Over time, this exerts a pressure to present an image of perfection to the congregation - to minimize any problems and to project the image of success. However, we all know this is not reality. Everyone is broken and in need of healing. Consider naming problems and embracing brokenness in prayers, sermons and worship experiences.
 - c. Publicly naming when things fail, demonstrating repentance when appropriate, and modeling restoration would be a gift to the congregation. It would also take some pressure off the staff and leadership who are working hard to maintain the image of perfection. In the end, it would more accurately reflect the Gospel: that we are all sinners in need of grace.
 - d. This narrative has taken time to develop and is not the fault of any one person. However, it will require a commitment of those in leadership and especially the messages from the pulpit to change it. Honest transparent communication is also crucial.
3. Expand and improve training for the elders on Session.
 - a. Many of those we spoke with believe that the Session needs to reassert greater authority in the church operations. We believe that the Session needs to embrace their appropriate role more fully. more training.

- b. To be effective the elders need to have more training on their role and authority. This should be done as part of the onboarding process for new elders and reviewed periodically for everyone on Session.
 - c. We further believe that the Session should consider the larger issues and challenges surrounding the church rather than reacting to specific issues one at a time. It will be more constructive to proactively consider the overall system with all of the recommendations offered along with creating a taskforce to deal with structural issues first. Then the smaller issues can be addressed.
 - d. I (Rev. Dreesmann) recommend that Trinity considers utilizing the services of Rev. Palmbush to continue this work with this team.
 - i. We would recommend that this would include reporting structures as mentioned above in all areas of the church and clear policies and procedures laid out to ensure proper governance and management.
 - ii. Also I (Rev. Dreesmann) am happy to continue to support this effort as needed.
 - e. We recommend a renewed commitment to confidentiality be part of the session's commitment to one another in their continued work.
4. Encourage deeper connection and support among the pastoral staff.
- a. We recommend that the pastoral staff connect on a regular basis for prayer, support and encouragement.
5. Do overall "culture audit" at Trinity
- a. A core part of Trinity's culture should be the phrase, "Doing out of being." This emphasizes that our engagement in ministry flows directly from our relationship (our being) with Christ.
 - b. We recommend that Trinity contract with Rev. Lisa Johnson, former Synod Executive of Leadership Formation for ECO.
 - i. Lisa lives in Southern California, understands the culture and complex leadership dynamics.
 - ii. The purpose of this would be to assess the overall culture of Trinity and to provide recommendations and to engage in practical changes to ensure a healthier staff, volunteer, and church culture.
 - iii. We would further recommend that the session grant her access to the HR report and the December report so she can understand the background of the situation, and that, once the Session accepts her recommendations (or agreed modifications), she be given the authority to provide accountability for any direct work she may do with Trinity staff.

Communication

The Session must weigh the dual risks of further congregational disclosure and potential legal action. While the legal advice provided to Trinity is robust under California law, the Session may decide that accepting a higher risk is necessary to mitigate the intense dissatisfaction felt by

some covenant partners and regular attendees. Should the Session choose to proceed with this elevated risk, we propose the following steps:

1. A letter from the Session to the congregation communicating more information without creating unnecessary legal risk.
 - a. This may include information that the investigation continues without giving any details.
 - b. Also include actions steps that are being taken in response to this report.
 - c. It is impossible to remove all risk, so this will be a judgement call weighing congregational trust and financial exposure.
2. A possible apology letter or announcement from staff involved in the issue.
 - a. It is important for the Session to know that this may be more or less helpful for any future legal action. It is also important to acknowledge changes and work which will be done in the future.
3. An update on any future staff shifts (in vague terms), once this is known.
4. Creation of talking points which the elders agree to and each member and pastor commit to using.
 - a. These are truthful statements in which the risk has been assessed by the Session and agreed to and stuck with. This may mean there will be information which is not shared due to CA law and/or because it falls outside the scope of what would be helpful.
5. A commitment to answering questions of congregation members at selected events.
 - a. We recommend that this is done with elders selected by the session along with a pastor or two and stick to the talking points. This is a high touch event which allows people to process their grief.
6. A follow-up letter, which should go out 45-60 days later if there is anything else to report to the congregation from further investigations. This should also include vision and what is coming next.

Closing Thoughts

1. We highly recommend that the session continues to dialogue with one another, filled with prayer, listening and discerning for the voice of the Holy Spirit.
2. We encourage the session to avoid immediate reactions, ask good and helpful questions, listen deeply before reacting, lean towards right doctrine and scripture, and give one another the benefit of the doubt.
3. We encourage the session to build towards consensus and to recommit to one another that the decision(s) you make as a session are supported by all of you.

Rev. Nate Dreesmann
Rev. Scott Palmbush

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Appendix C.1: ECO's Church Governance Flyer



CHURCH GOVERNANCE

The pressure on churches to adapt to the needs of their communities has been amplified to new highs. Between the pandemic, political polarization, and the age of technology, many churches find themselves as frequent start up organizations, even if they've existed in their locations for a century. Clarity and efficiency are needed for this day.

ECO wants to help pastors and sessions explore church leadership structure. We want to assist you in articulating and implementing your guiding principles, as well as your church's unique mission.

We hope to help pastors and sessions, amidst their difficulties, to create a shift in their current church governance structure. We want to equip you with the tools to become more nimble in dealing with adaptive change. We offer these resources to church leadership to view and discuss, in order to seek missional clarity and direction in this area of church structure.

This resource includes downloadable video presentations & corresponding powerpoints, book recommendations, conversations with ECO church consultants, as well as sample documents, and guiding principles to help churches consider adopting this model of church governance on a variety of levels.

THERE ARE 3 SECTIONS TO THE CHURCH GOVERNANCE RESOURCE:

SECTION 1 PRINCIPLES OF POLICY MODEL OF GOVERNANCE

- Explore information on church structure and principles of the Policy Model of Governance
- Define the role of the pastor and session
- Discover the reasons why you should apply it to your church

SECTION 2 ECO CHURCH SAMPLES OF GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Discover guidelines and boundaries for staff to work within at different churches (blueprint of operations in the policy model)
- Explore sample documents that you may want to consider as you move forward within the Policy Governance Model

SECTION 3 KAISER (POLICY) MODEL AND ECO POLITY

- Review Kaiser Model and ECO Polity documents that consist of various studies and responses to areas where the Policy Governance Model, particularly as described in "Winning on Purpose," might conflict with ECO Polity.

Duration

The Church Governance resource is available online and includes on-demand videos and corresponding materials that you can work through at your own pace. Most churches are able to complete the resource within 3 to 6 months. Some steps of implementation may take longer based on a church plan to move forward in adopting these principles. As a supplement to this process, if you are interested in learning more about ECO's Vision Framing Process, visit: eco-pres.org/vision-frame-process.

Cost

Free to all ECO Churches

*some coaching costs may apply with implementation

How to Get Started

To access the Church Governance course, please visit:

courses.eco-pres.org



Please reach out to us at office@eco-pres.org if you need more assistance

Appendix C.2: ECO's Leadership Circle Profile Flyer



The header features a collage of diverse people's faces. In the top left, there is an orange square with a white leaf icon containing a cross. In the top right, there is a QR code with the URL qr.co.de/bcf1go below it. The text "LEADERSHIP CIRCLE PROFILE" is prominently displayed in large white letters. Below it, the subtitle "Evaluate and Enhance Leadership Effectiveness" is written in a smaller white font. On the right side, a circular radar chart is partially visible, with labels like "CREA" at the top and "REAC" at the bottom.



Looking for a tool that can help in annual pastor performance reviews?

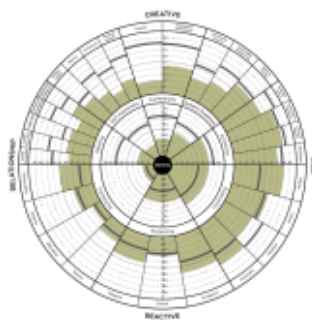


Wanting to pinpoint areas of needed development in your church leadership?



Seeking synergy around how your senior staff team functions?

The Leadership Circle Profile (LCP) is an assessment that is designed to accelerate leadership effectiveness beyond traditional personality or strengths based instruments. It is the only 360 degree competency assessment that simultaneously provides focused competency feedback while revealing the underlying assumptions that are causing a leader's pattern of strengths and limitations.



The assessment measures behaviors that are positively and negatively associated with leadership behavior and organizational performance on a percentile scale. It is also statistically validated, consisting over 100,000 people who have taken it. You can review the research and gain a deeper explanation in the book, "[Mastering Leadership](#)."

The Leadership Circle Profile tool will help you identify and change the behaviors that sabotage your leadership.

Watch this short video about the LCP measurements. →

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrNO3kWeSss>



WHY USE THE LEADERSHIP CIRCLE PROFILE

While most 360 degree assessments only share what is or is not contributing to a leader's effectiveness, the Leadership Circle Profile also gives you the "why" behind it. It gives the leader insight into what is happening beneath the surface and is quite different than any other leadership 360 on the market. The LCP helps leaders understand the relationship between how they habitually think, how they behave, and how all this impacts their current level of leadership effectiveness. Once this awareness is established, leadership development can proceed.

HOW IT WORKS

Pastors and/or church leaders will first take a self assessment and ask several other trusted people, both personal and professional contacts, who will then take the assessment on their behalf.

Once these 12-16 individuals answer questions on behalf of the leader, a report is generated.

The report measures leadership behaviors on a percentile basis using a graph compared to the hundreds of thousands of leaders who have taken the instrument as well as comparing self-assessment to the assessment of others. The assessment tool and report shows leaders capacity, capability and leadership indicators.



WAYS TO USE THE LCP

- The session can use it as part of an annual review of the pastor or other senior staff
- Leaders can identify strengths and areas of growth opportunity to strategize a plan to grow
- Senior staff or executive team can use it to understand and enhance their working relationships

COST

\$500 per LCP (Includes assessment report and 90 min debrief with the individual)



How to Get Started

For more information or to sign up, email: info@flourishmovement.org