

# CHRIST CHURCH CONGREGATION SAS UPDATE

MAY 23, 2026

## Brief overview of SAS

The simplified accountable structure (SAS) is a streamlined approach to church governance that combines the four administrative committees (SPRC, Covenant Council, Finance, Trustees) into one Leadership Board. The Leadership Board takes on all administrative committee functions and holds the mission and vision of the church as their primary focus that guides all decisions. SAS does not change how we do ministry together. All ministries and missions continue just as they have and remain accountable to the pastor. Guiding Principles are a set of policies and procedures, created by the Leadership Board, that empower the pastor, staff, and ministry teams with the authority and responsibility to get specific work done within healthy boundaries.

The resolution we will vote on at our special church conference on May 31 proposes that CCUM convert to the SAS plan for reasons of streamlined church governance, efficiency in carrying out CCUM's mission and vision, greater accountability, and to increase opportunities for members of the congregation to utilize their talents, passions, and time in carrying out the church's mission. The resolution is posted on the church website.

**Please read the resolution, POSTED ON THE WEBSITE prior to coming to the church conference AFTER SERVICES 5/31.**

If you have questions about the resolution, please reach out to someone on the SAS discernment team. We will be happy to answer any further questions. Those on the SAS team are Paula Jameson, Suzanne Shipley, Tobin Sidles, Marie Zoellner, and Kara Ford.

## Questions and Answers from SAS presentations at Christ Church

1.) **What churches in our region have shifted to SAS?** Paradise Valley UMC, North Scottsdale UMC, Chandler UMC, Trinity Flagstaff, Catalina UMC, UMC of Green Valley. There are several others in our conference running versions of SAS. We don't have a comprehensive list.

2.) **What happens if we try SAS and fail?** Our SAS coach thinks that churches might stumble a bit, but never truly "fail." Here is what he offered: Churches that "fail" at SAS can be summed up by a failure to implement what makes SAS so effective: clarity of roles and expectations, focus on mission and vision, governance that handles the numbers but doesn't mistake the numbers for vision.

3.) **What about individual liability if someone on a team or the leadership board makes a mistake?** The guiding principles document severely limits individual liability. The authority for

individual choices is limited, as when the Building Maintenance Team is given a cap on any money spent and is provided with detailed guidance for collecting project bids. Financial liability is limited to the dollar amounts the leadership board approves as stated in the guiding principles.

**Follow-up question: Please say more about the accountability on the teams in regard to liability.** The ministry teams are still accountable to the pastor as they have been in the past. All ministry teams, staff, pastor, and Leadership Board are expected to follow the guiding principles that pertain to their ministry or work within the church. The guiding principles provide healthy boundaries for people to do specific work while ensuring the well-being of the church. This limits the possibility for undesirable outcomes. Because CCUM is incorporated as a nonprofit, the leadership board and staff cannot be sued personally in their fiduciary role.

4.) **What does accountability look like overall?** All ministries and teams are accountable to the pastor, the pastor is accountable to the leadership board, the leadership board is accountable to both the Church/Charge conference.

5.) **How do we maintain diversity on the Leadership Board?** An interest form for leadership board membership will be distributed at the special church conference. The requirement for membership on the board is membership in the church and mature discipleship, i.e. members who are committed to Christ Church through their prayers, their presence and their service.

6.) **Can we go back to the old format if we wish?** With an approving vote at a church conference, we can.

7.) **How many teams will we have?** We can create as many teams as we need, but most will be short-termed and focused, like stewardship in the time leading up to the annual campaign. A few, like the Building Maintenance Team will be ongoing. All the current ministry teams will exist as they do now.

8.) **How long are the terms and how is the chair determined and the length of that term?** The chair is elected at the first meeting of the leadership board every year. Each member serves a maximum term of three years. According to the Book of Discipline the chair will also be called Chair of Trustees. The first board's terms will be a mix of one, two, and three years as members revolve off and are replaced. The cycle will continue at three years after that.

9.) **What kind of commitment will be made to give this time to work out?** Based on a positive vote by the church conference on May 31 the leadership board will begin January 1, 2027. It's hard to say how long we will need to fully transition into the SAS Plan and feel comfortable in this new model of church governance. Our SAS coach will ensure the Leadership Board is properly trained prior to January 1 and will continue to be a resource for us as we transition.

10.) **What happens if a team can't reach a decision?** They will work with the pastor to come to a resolution.

11.) **What is the greatest challenge we face if we implement SAS?** COMMUNICATION! It's been said that we must communicate seven times better than we do now, that regular updates must be made to the congregation in person and via newsletters. Since the leadership board meetings are public, any member can attend to listen, but only presenters listed on the

agenda may engage the board in discussion or ask questions regarding their agenda topic. For personnel issues, the board will go into executive session.

12.) **How often will the board meet?** Generally, once per month.

13.) **Are we planning to revisit this leadership approach in a year to see if it is working?** The goal of the communication process that occurs in various formats, monthly and quarterly, is to collect feedback on what is working and what isn't. The results will be summarized and shared, but the process will need more than one year to establish itself—more likely three to five years.

**Follow-up comments: How will we know in a year if this is working?** Though it will likely take longer than a single year, we will have had four quarterly town halls to provide impressions of the progress, its fit, and any gaps. I like the idea of periodic meetings with the congregation. In addition, information after every Leadership Board meeting will be relayed to the congregation, either through formal minutes, which must be kept by the Board secretary, or through summaries that could go, for instance, into a monthly newsletter.

15.) **It says that staff and unpaid staff should not serve on the Board, define unpaid staff?** Unpaid staff are ministry leaders not on payroll, and like the salaried employees are exempt from Leadership Board service.

16.) **Did we hire a consultant or pay a company for this SAS model?** No, the district supplies the support; our trained SAS coach is unpaid and counsels churches who are going through the process.

17.) **Are there other churches in Tucson who have adapted this model?** Yes, Catalina recently transitioned to SAS, as did Green Valley. Nearby churches could help us reimagine ways to communicate effectively and avoid the missteps they may have made, though we will still make our own and need to rethink and respond with agility.

18.) **Is there a way to hear from the churches who have made the transition in this week before the vote?** Any member who knows a member of the other churches can reach out; Catalina already has notes from its Leadership Board meetings in its newsletter. The exploration team chose to view video examples of Leadership Board meetings and practices instead. It is likely the new Board will meet with nearby churches' Board members as part of their preparation for leadership.

19.) **Does SPRC function with liaisons change? Staff and church members value the access to a sounding board and referee for difficulties and disagreements.** The current recommendation and best practice is not to use liaisons in order to urge disgruntled parties to air their issues one on one. This is the recommendation regardless of which model of church governance a church operates. The decision about liaisons would rest with the Pastor, who maintains oversight of staff.

20) **How does communication take place? How does a team form?** Much as it does currently: when a need is identified, the word goes out to the congregation. The Pastor may make a general call for volunteers and/or tap members whose interests and abilities match the need, or the Leadership Board may create a short term team.

**Follow-up comments:** This will make the process more efficient. And all fiduciary responsibilities remain with the Leadership Board.

21.) **Does SAS establish guidelines to evaluate itself?** The Leadership Board members would go through training in the fall before onboarding. Options for self-evaluation and review by the congregation can be part of that training.

22.) **And it's three year terms?** Yes, but the first Board will have 3 people with a one year term, 3 people with a two year term and 3 people with a three year term. Three people rotate off the Board each year and are replaced.

**Follow-up comment:** So, really, you're saying that our current four administrative committees will be collapsed into one Leadership Board, that church administration will be streamlined.

23.) **Won't it be hard to get members for the work teams, based on the trouble we have now to fill committees?** It will hopefully be easier to create and fill teams, since the terms are brief and based on individual interest. Agreeing to a three-year committee term is more onerous than a short-term work team taking a deep dive into a specific project like stewardship or new service options or addressing a particular need for the food bank or clothing boutique.

24.) **Why was this process so rushed? It feels like we've gotten limited information and now have only one week to consider our vote on a big decision.** The SAS exploratory team was very aware of the importance of this information for the congregation and aimed to create ample opportunities for learning and discussion. In order to offer the most information we could, we prepared our informational materials carefully and in consultation with our SAS coach, all with the approval of the District Superintendent.

The 2020/2024 Book of Discipline, paragraph 246.8, requires "Notice of time and place of a regular or special session of the charge conference (church conference in our case) shall be given ten days in advance by two or more of the following: from the pulpit of the church, in its weekly bulletin, in a local church publication, or by mail." Our first communication about the SAS process, after the vote to pursue it further at the last Church Conference, went out via email and mailed newsletters on April 25<sup>th</sup>, a month prior to the conference date. Because we knew how important this information would be to the congregation, we began making announcements in church about education sessions and the special church conference on May 3, May 10, May 17, and May 24. Finally, we emphasized at every education session that members should reach out to the SAS team with additional questions and concerns at any time. Thus far we have received two such requests and welcome any others.