James Bay United Church

Governance Model

Draft 4 — September 21, 2026

Our Revised Covenant (read in unison at the start of every board meeting)

We covenant together … to listen and speak with respect … to express our views … to be aware of each other and ourselves … to be mindful of time, making room for each person to contribute … to ask for help as needed … to pause for discernment when we are uncertain … to remember that our work here is part of a larger church and a larger calling … to ask whether this is truly the work of the Board … to trust those doing the work … to meet our commitments … to speak with one voice once a decision is made.

Our Identity as a Board

Our governance structure exists to free people to live out their commitment to God and to each other. We are not alone — our work as a Board is part of a larger church and a larger calling.

The Board's primary work is to discern direction, not to manage operations. A small Board with clear focus serves the congregation better than a large Board with many representative voices.

How We Make Decisions

Decision-making belongs to the Board as a whole, not to any one member. Individual Board members have no authority to direct staff or volunteers outside of decisions made by the Board as a whole.

Once the Board has made a decision, members speak with one voice — even when they personally disagreed in the room. When in doubt, the Board stops to discern before moving forward.

Board members have freedom to ask mid-meeting: "Is this the work of the Board?" Most of our meeting time is spent on strategic and generative discussion, not routine business.

The Board's Scope of Work

The Board defines vision, policy, and budget allocations. Ministries work within those parameters. Operational decisions — logistics, project management, and day-to-day coordination — belong with those doing the work, not with the Board.

The Board supports staff and volunteer leaders. Primary evaluation of staff rests with the Ministry and Personnel Committee; the Board may become involved in evaluating volunteer leaders if and when necessary.

Our Relationship with Ministries

Much of what gets done in the church happens without Board discussion or direction, and that is as it should be. Ministries do not need a seat at the Board table for their concerns to be heard.

The Board relates to the congregation's ministries and programs through Ministry Stewards — a distinct role, separate from the Board, that holds a cluster of related ministries and programs with relational care. Ministry Stewards are not Board members; their work is the connective tissue between congregational ministries and the Board's discernment.

Ministry Stewards stay connected to the ministry leads in their cluster, help them think through challenges, and bring a matter to the Board only when it needs the Board's assistance or authorization — most things get worked out within the ministry itself. They carry the Board's decisions and direction back to those leads, submit a brief written update to the Board quarterly, and report anything urgent right away rather than waiting for that update.

Some matters can't wait for a quarterly update. Anything involving safety, personnel, finances, property damage, abuse, or significant conflict is reported immediately — to the Chair, not held for the next report. This expectation applies equally to Ministry Stewards and to ministry leads.

The Board receives what Ministry Stewards bring, discerns whether and how to act, and trusts Ministry Stewards to carry that response back. Trust between the Board, minister, and Ministry Stewards is built through regular sharing, not surveillance.

Information and Accountability

Reports to the Board focus on three questions: What is bringing energy? What is getting in the way? and Is there anything you want the board to know?

The Board receives sufficient financial information to make sound decisions without reviewing every expenditure. The same principle applies to property matters — enough information to decide well, without significant meeting time on maintenance details.

Note: This document is intended to complement what is outlined in section B.2.1 of The Manual 2026 of The United Church of Canada, not replace it.