Bylaws for a Unity Ministry

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. It is also advisable for the ministry bylaws to define the ministry’s relationship to Unity Worldwide Ministries (UWM).

To serve our ministries, UWM has created a bylaws 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. 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 Services Team is available to 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and the template are so important, why was the policy requiring ministries to utilize the template in developing bylaws rescinded?
Unity Worldwide Ministries is in a liminal period, a period of deep change and transformation. It is a time 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 have 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 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 Member Services to support you in this process. They can assist you in fine-tuning the template to your ministry culture and mission and help you understand the purposes and value in 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 and committed to sharing the Unity message. 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 to call upon UWM for conflict transformation skills. 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, I), in Article VII: Administration and Leadership (Section 2—Minister(s), and Article VIII: Dissolution).

What are “the universal principles of Truth as taught and demonstrated by Jesus Christ?” What are the teachings of Unity? Unity is pretty open-ended. Why 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 Unity message, and it is appropriate that your dissolution clause ensure that remaining assets be used to support 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 go to our Help Unity Grow Fund (HUG) which supports Unity ministries in a variety of ways.

When a 501(c)(3) organization dissolves, their 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.

It is important to understand that failure to clearly defined membership creates significant liabilities for the ministry. For example: We have dealt with a number of conflicted situations in ministries in which membership was unclear and an important decision was being considered; this 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 snow birds. 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 collective discussion which can influence decision making. Our template does allow for voting by “electronic means simultaneously with a minimum standards being oral communication.” This could include connecting by telephone or online.

**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.
Significant others serving on the board simultaneously can create an imbalance of power that could influence decision-making towards 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 sponsorship of 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.

We are a very loving and accepting community. Surely it is not necessary to have a bylaws clause pertaining to 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 bylaws 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: UnityWorldwideMinistries.org/disruptive-behavior-guidelines. We also encourage ministries to reach out to Member Services 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 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 Services for guidance and support. Member Services also encourages the use of a professional registered parliamentarian to conduct such meetings and can connect 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.
If you have other questions, want more information, or need guidance regarding bylaws, please contact Member Services. We are dedicated to serving and supporting you.