Board of Trustees

The board of trustees holds the church's buildings, land, and legal obligations — the roof, the boiler, the deed, the insurance, and the question of who may use the fellowship hall on a Tuesday. It is the committee most likely to be handed to someone because they own a construction business, and least likely to be told what the job actually is. Most of what trustees do is unglamorous and load-bearing in both senses. If you were just elected and nobody handed you anything, start here.

What the Discipline says

Who's on it. Between three and nine people, of legal age, with at least two-thirds being professing members of The United Methodist Church; the Discipline recommends at least a third laywomen and at least a third laymen (¶2525). The pastor is *not* a voting member unless separately elected as a trustee — a detail that surprises pastors and trustees about equally.

How you got here. Trustees are divided into three roughly equal classes serving staggered three-year terms, elected at charge conference on nomination by the committee on nominations and leadership development or from the floor (¶2526). Self-succession is explicitly permitted, so the "you've done nine years, you have to leave" rule some churches enforce is a local custom, not polity. A charge conference may also hand the election of trustees to a church conference (¶2526).

Organizing yourselves. Within thirty days of the year beginning, the board must convene to elect its own officers: chair, vice chair, secretary, and a treasurer if needed (¶2530.1–.2). Two constraints people miss: the chair and vice chair may not be from the same class, and the chair must be a professing member of the local church. Secretary and treasurer may be the same person.

Meeting. At least annually, at the call of the pastor or the chair, with notice to every trustee *and* the pastor (¶2532). A majority is a quorum. Annually is the floor, not the target — a board that genuinely meets once a year is a board that finds out about the roof from the ceiling.

What you actually control. Supervision, oversight, and care of all real property and equipment owned by the church — but explicitly *subject to the direction of the charge conference*, and hedged by three provisos worth knowing (¶2533.1):

1. You may not override rights the Discipline grants to other church bodies.
2. You may not prevent or interfere with the pastor's use of the property for worship or other proper purposes.
3. You may not permit outside use of the property without the pastor's consent — or, in the pastor's absence, the district superintendent's.

That third one is the source of most trustee-pastor friction over the building, and it runs in both directions: the pastor can't rent out the sanctuary either.

Three duties with dates attached. These are the ones that quietly become someone's emergency:

- **Insurance, annually.** Compare the church's coverage against the insurance schedule published by GCFA, and report the results *and any recommendations to come into compliance* to the charge conference (¶2533.2).
- **The parsonage, annually.** The trustees chair (or the parsonage committee chair, if there is one), the SPRC chair, and the pastor together review the parsonage to ensure proper maintenance (¶2533.4). Three people, one walkthrough, once a year. Put it on the calendar in the same month every year or it will not happen.
- **Outside use.** Permission for an outside organization to use the facilities may be granted only when the use is consistent with the Social Principles and ecumenical objectives (¶2533.3).

Bequests and trusts. Trustees receive and administer bequests and trust funds and invest them under applicable law — unless the charge conference has delegated that to a permanent endowment committee or a local church foundation, which it *must* do where a donor designated one (¶2533.5).

Leaving the board. A trustee who withdraws from or is excluded from UMC membership ceases to be a trustee automatically, from that date (¶2531.1). Vacancies are filled for the unexpired term in the same manner as elections; a vacancy arising mid-year may be filled by the church council until the next charge conference (¶2531.3).

First 90 days

1. **Get the deed.** Not a photocopy someone remembers seeing — the actual recorded instrument, and know where it physically lives. Churches lose decades to this.
2. **Get the insurance declarations page** and the current GCFA schedule, and put them side by side. You owe the charge conference this comparison anyway (¶2533.2); doing it in month one rather than month eleven is the whole difference.
3. **Walk the building with the person who actually maintains it** — the custodian, the trustee who's been on longest, the member who has fixed the boiler for fifteen years. Take notes. This person is your most valuable asset and is usually not on the board.
4. **Find out what's under warranty and what isn't.** Roof, HVAC, water heater, elevator. Ages and warranty status.
5. **Ask who holds keys** — and whether anyone knows. If your church uses Itineracy, this is the key log; if not, a spreadsheet beats memory.
6. **Read the last three years of trustee minutes.** You will find at least one unfinished decision everybody has silently agreed to forget.
7. **Schedule the parsonage review** with the SPRC chair and pastor (¶2533.4).
8. **Ask the treasurer what the building actually costs** — utilities, insurance, maintenance, as a share of the budget. Trustees who can't answer this can't argue for anything.

The annual rhythm

January — Organize: elect chair, vice chair, secretary, treasurer within thirty days of the year starting (¶2530.1). Confirm which class each trustee is in.

February — Review insurance renewal dates. If renewal is mid-year, start shopping ninety to a hundred and twenty days out; the market for church property insurance has tightened badly.

March — Spring inspection: roof, gutters, drainage, exterior. Freeze damage shows up now.

April — Parsonage review with SPRC chair and pastor (¶2533.4). Spring is better than fall for this: repairs can happen before a possible July 1 pastoral move.

May–June — Budget requests for the next year. Get capital needs in early; they lose to program requests when they arrive late. In an appointment-change year, finish parsonage work *before* moving day.

July–August — Slow months. Do the deferred paperwork: update the property inventory, confirm vendor contacts, check that the fire extinguishers were serviced.

September — Fall inspection: heating system before you need it, exterior before winter.

October — Prepare the charge conference report, including the insurance review and recommendations (¶2533.2). Get numbers from the treasurer now.

November–December — Charge conference. New trustees elected (¶2526); make sure they get more than a handshake — send them this page and the minutes.

A sample agenda

Board of Trustees — Tuesday, March 11, 7:00 p.m., church library

1. Opening prayer.
2. Minutes of the January meeting. *(Approve.)*
3. Financial report from the treasurer — building line items year to date.
4. **Insurance review** — declarations page against the GCFA schedule. Gaps? Recommendation to bring to charge conference in October? *(¶2533.2)*
5. **Spring inspection findings** — roof, drainage, parking lot. Three items; two are quotes, one is a decision.
6. **Parsonage review scheduling** — confirm date with SPRC chair and pastor. *(¶2533.4)*
7. **Facility use request** — the county 4-H club has asked for the fellowship hall on Thursday evenings. Pastor's consent obtained? Consistent with the Social Principles? Fee, insurance certificate, key handling. *(¶2533.1, .3)*
8. Old business: the elevator inspection from November.
9. Next meeting date. Closing prayer.

Ninety minutes. If it runs past two hours, the quotes should have been circulated by email beforehand.

Where this goes wrong

The board that meets once a year. The Discipline's floor is annual (¶2532), and some boards treat the floor as the plan. Quarterly is the realistic minimum for a church with a building; monthly during a capital project.

Nobody can find the deed. This is astonishingly common and becomes a genuine crisis exactly when the church is trying to sell, refinance, or resolve a boundary question. Fix: locate it, record where it lives, and tell the next chair.

The insurance review never happens, or happens as "we're covered." ¶2533.2 asks for a *comparison against the GCFA schedule* and a *recommendation*, not a reassurance. Fix: get the schedule, put it beside the declarations page, and write down the gaps even when the answer is "we accept this gap for now."

Trustees decide who uses the building without the pastor. ¶2533.1 makes the pastor's consent a condition for outside use. Fix: build consent into the request form, so it's a checkbox and not a confrontation.

Deferred maintenance is treated as savings. It isn't; it's borrowing at a bad rate, and insurers increasingly price it in. Fix: keep a written list of deferred items with an estimated cost and the year deferred. The list itself is the argument.

The chair does everything. Three to nine people were elected (¶2525); one person ends up mowing, calling vendors, and meeting the plumber. Fix: assign standing areas — grounds, building systems, insurance and risk, parsonage — by name, at the January organizing meeting.

Trusteeship quietly lapses. Someone moves their membership and stays on the board; under ¶2531.1 their trusteeship ended automatically the day they withdrew. Fix: confirm membership status at the January organizing meeting.

In a single-board church

Under a simplified structure — one board carrying the council, trustees, finance, and SPRC functions — the trustee *duties* do not go away. The charge conference may modify the organizational plan in consultation with and upon the approval of the district superintendent, provided the basic responsibilities of ¶243 are still met (¶247.2), and those responsibilities explicitly include providing for physical facilities and the legal obligations of the church (¶243).

So in a single-board church: the insurance comparison still happens annually and still gets reported, the parsonage still gets its annual review, and outside use still needs the pastor's consent. What changes is that these are agenda items in one meeting rather than a separate board's meeting. What does *not* change is that property decisions still ultimately answer to the charge conference (¶2533.1), and that the legal instruments still need properly authorized signatures. See the governance-model pages for how the whole structure fits together.

One pastor's take: the single-board form works well for property until the church faces something big — a capital campaign, a sale, a major insurance claim. At that point, name a property task group with a defined scope and end date rather than re-creating a standing board. You get the focus without undoing the simplification.

Elsewhere

- **Trustees Job Description — Discipleship Ministries** — the denomination's own role description for trustees and the trustee chair, including a short "getting started" list. The closest thing to an official job description, and free.
- **UMC Minimum Insurance Requirements — GCFA** — the landing page for the insurance schedule ¶2533.2 sends you to. The actual requirements are in a PDF linked from the page; download it before your review rather than during it.
- **United Methodist Insurance Program** — the denominational property and casualty program, rooted in ¶807.20 and run through an endorsed agent. Worth a quote comparison even if you stay with your current carrier.
- **12 Insights for Churches Challenged by Property Insurance — Discipleship Ministries** — practical and current on a genuinely hard market: shop 90–120 days out, don't file small claims, don't let coverage lapse.
- ***Guidelines: Trustees 2025–2028* — Cokesbury** — the official UMPH booklet for this committee, revised each quadrennium. A few dollars, and the companion this page is not trying to replace.
- **Your annual conference's property or trustees handbook** — many conferences publish one, and it may bind you beyond the Discipline. Ask your district office.

This is a starting point, not legal advice. Employment law varies by state, and your annual conference may have policies that go beyond the Discipline. Before you rely on anything here for a hiring, firing, or compensation decision, run it past your conference office or chancellor.

Paragraph references are to the 2020/2024 Book of Discipline. This document paraphrases; for the binding text, see the Discipline itself.