



# SOCIOCRACY AT NORTHWOODS

Town Hall – September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2024  
Sara DaSilva, Facilitator

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# WHAT IS SOCIOCRACY?

- Sociocracy is a way of governing by consent and sharing leadership
- Groups are organized into circles that link between each other when they are related, which improves cross-functional knowledge (less “silos”)
- Decisions are made by consent and each member of the group has a right to and is expected to voice any objection, after which the proposal should be improved – this happens in rounds

# Sociocracy

a peer governance system based on consent

## Circles = a trusted team of peers

Groups of 4-8 people work together with a defined purpose (aim) and with authority in their domain

## Linking = connectors

Links between circles help align circles, help information flow and balance circles with each other

## Decisions = consent

Circles set their agreements by consent - if a circle member has objection, the proposal needs to be improved

## Feedback

Build in feedback and increase information flow to make incremental improvements a habit.

share information

decentralize power

# WHY WOULD WE WANT IT AT NORTHWOODS?

The concept came up at a Board of Trustees retreat in 2023; it was proposed by Rev. Sarah as something that might work for us as we were looking at what does and doesn't work with our governance structure.

Some thoughts at the time as to what was NOT working with our governance:

1. Decision-making was slow and isolated, with poor sharing of outcomes
2. Foundational Trustee and Shared Ministry Trustee had too many things to track at an operational level, so issues didn't always get the attention they deserved (no one's fault)
3. The work needed to "keep things moving" at Northwoods was concentrated among a few people
4. Our bylaws were due for revision

# WHAT WOULD ACTUALLY CHANGE?

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We would have a Coordinating Circle, which would be one step removed from the Board of Trustees. This team would ensure the ministries are aware of what's going on in each ministry, work together collaboratively, and be a conduit between the Board and the rest of the circles as needed. This may remind some long-term NUUC'ers of past organizational structures.

# WHAT WOULD ACTUALLY CHANGE?

<b>Current</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
Board approves changes of committee leaders	Circles have agreed upon roles and who fills the roles can rotate
Committee information flow goes upward, e.g. to Foundational Ministry on BoT	Information is shared freely especially between circles that overlap
The Board is in charge of Northwoods	The Board sets a strategy and thinks longer-term; everyone in a circle owns Northwoods
Committee chairs feel like they can't leave their position if they need a break (or even ask for help)	Leadership is shared among multiple people in the circle, allowing flexibility and playing to individual strengths
Leaders can get "stuck" or "pigeonholed" in something they're good at, because there's no one else to take on the work	Individuals could participate in a greater number of circles and not be expected to lead them all; it's easier to step away when there is more support in a circle vs. one leader
Large expenses are approved by the board	Same – large expenses are approved by the board per bylaws
Board members are separated from committees	Two of the board positions are Coordinating Circle members, one of those being a static person from the Board and the other being a flexible member of the Coordinating Circle (whomever the Coordinating Circle chooses to be its delegate to the Board)

# HOW WOULD IT WORK?

1. We would agree upon a draft (good enough for now, safe enough to try) circle structure that can be modified, and mention of organizational structure in the Bylaws would point to this documentation
2. We'd decide what circles we must have, and how close we are today to the proposed structure with the people we have
3. Each circle would then determine its roles, covenant, goals, meeting cadence if any, and how it will document its discussion and decisions (recommend Google Drive)
4. The circles would continue meeting as the committees meet now, if agreed upon by the members of the circle, but now with more circle (committee) overlap and transparency

Benefits	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Alignment with UU values, in particular Pluralism and Equity, which speak to the importance of multiple voices being heard and respecting what each person brings to the table
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Shared ownership of the church itself and the tactical actions needed to serve our community
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Less decision-making pressure to be perfect
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	More alignment/collaboration between groups

Risks	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	May feel slower/too democratic/less efficient to some
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	May not initially see enough people stepping up
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Not the way we're used to doing things
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No "the buck stops here" leader

# SHOULD WE CHANGE?

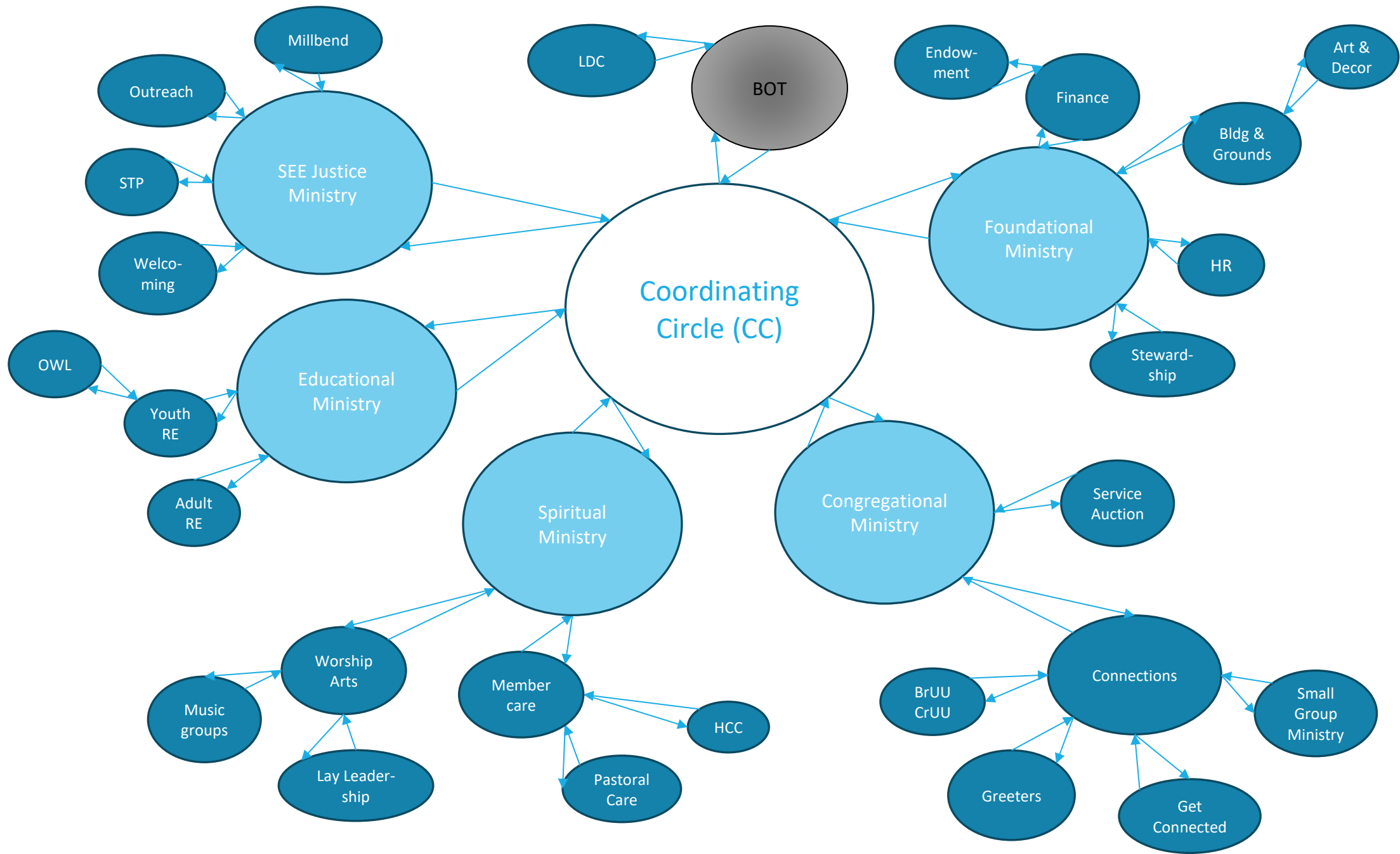


The proposed circle structure is NOT (and will not be):

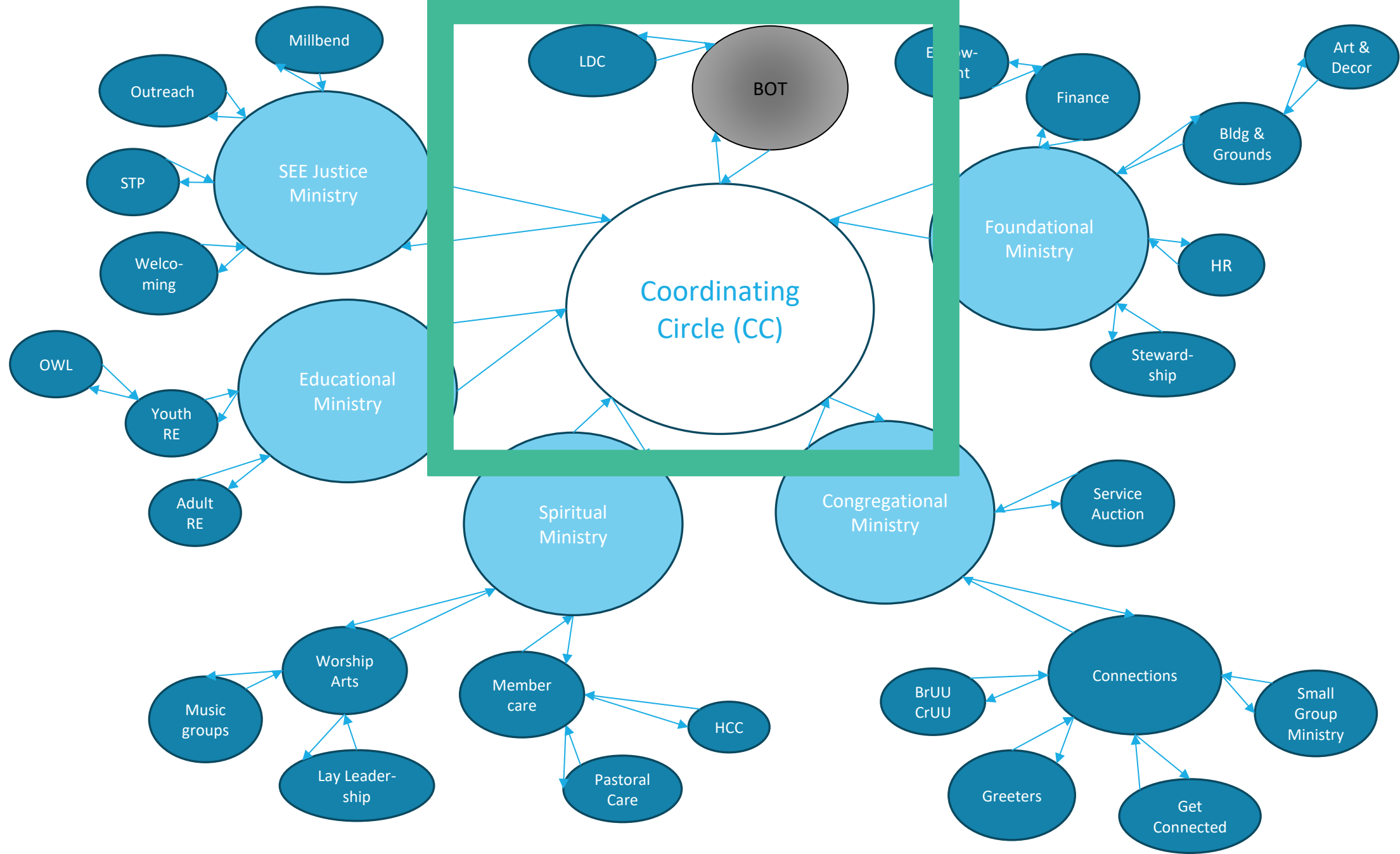
- Set in stone
- Decided by one person
- Intended to change a lot right away
- Perfect

The proposed circle structure IS:

- A proposal
- A DRAFT
- Intended to be flexible
- Reflective of the current state

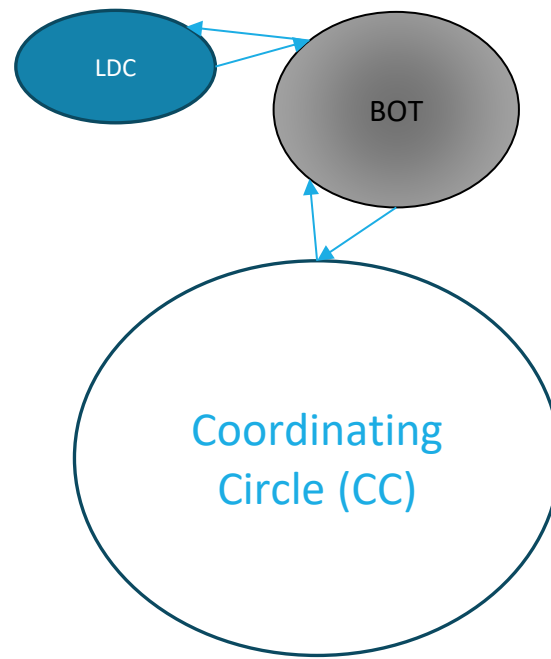


Circle Structure Reflecting Current Committees – DRAFT Option



Circle Structure Reflecting Current Committees – DRAFT Option

# Who's in the Circle?



## BOT (9)

President  
Past President  
President-Elect  
Treasurer  
Secretary  
Parliamentarian  
Delegate  
Leader  
Minister (non-voting)

## Coordinating Circle (11)

BOT Leader (1)  
SEE Justice Delegate + Leader (2)  
Educational Ministry Delegate + Leader (2)  
Congregational Ministry Delegate + Leader (2)  
Spiritual Ministry Delegate + Leader (2)  
Foundational Ministry Delegate + Leader (2)  
*(CC Delegate, Scribe, and Facilitator would come from these roles)*

Both the Delegate and Leader are in the Coordinating Circle

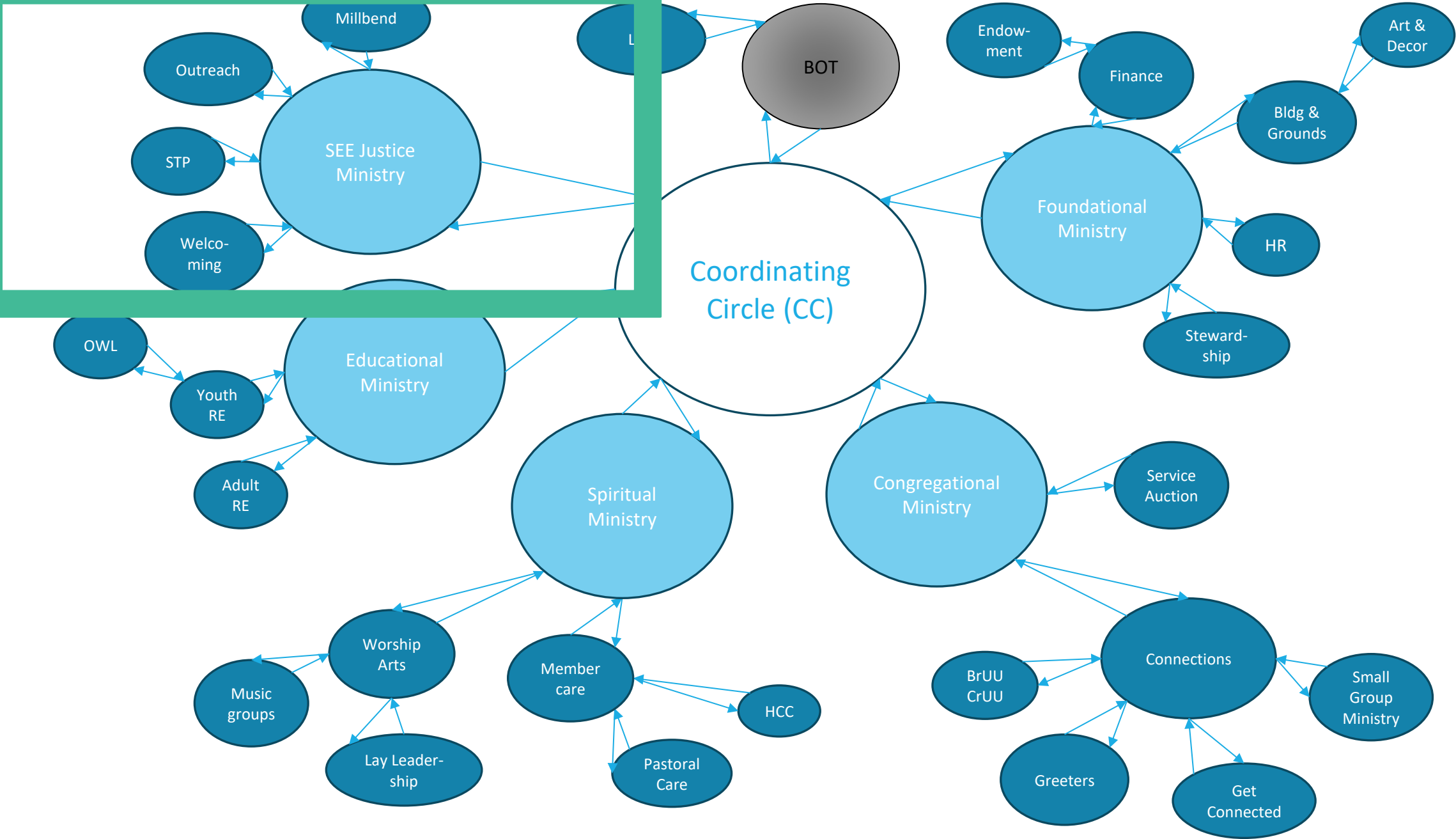
## LDC

Could continue to be independently elected & work with BOT

### Roles in Coordinating Circle

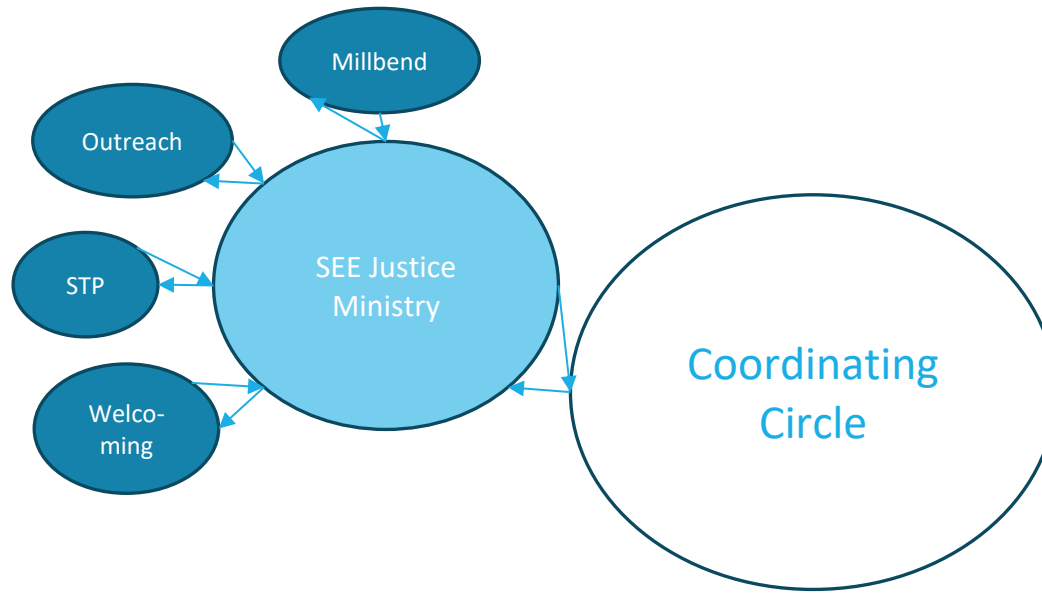
Leader from BOT: communicates info from BOT to CC  
Delegate from CC – is one of the other 11 members: communicates info from CC to BOT  
Scribe/Note Taker: captures & shares what is discussed & decided + action items  
Facilitator: organizes & facilitates meetings  
+ Any roles the circle collectively decides on

These roles can be filled by anyone, other than the Leader from BOT, who is elected as part of the BOT.



Circle Structure Reflecting Current Committees – DRAFT Option

# Who's in the Circle?



SEE Justice Ministry (10)  
CC Leader (1)  
SEE Justice Delegate (1)  
Millbend Delegate + Leader (2)  
Outreach Delegate + Leader (2)  
STP Delegate + Leader (2)  
Welcoming Delegate + Leader (2)  
*(Scribe and Facilitator would come from these roles)*

## Roles in SEE Justice Ministry

Leader from CC: communicates info from CC to SEEJ

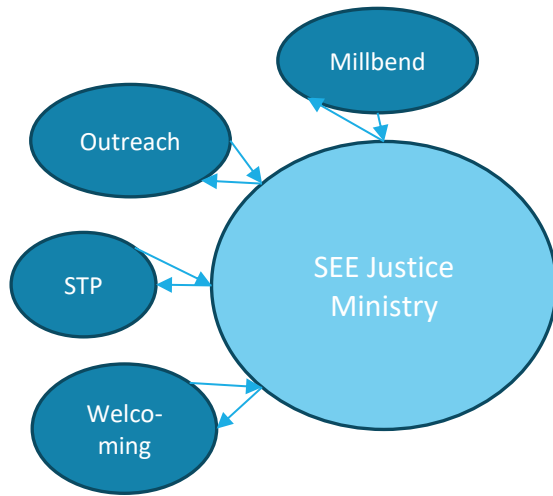
Delegate from SEEJ: communicates info from SEEJ to CC

Scribe/Note Taker: captures & shares what is discussed & decided + action items

Facilitator: organizes & facilitates meetings

+ Any roles the circle collectively decides on

# Who's in the Circle?



## Other potential circles

Reproductive Justice  
Environmental Justice  
Racial Justice  
LGBT Justice

Welcoming (2-4)  
SEEJ Leader (1)  
Welcoming Delegate (1)  
*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

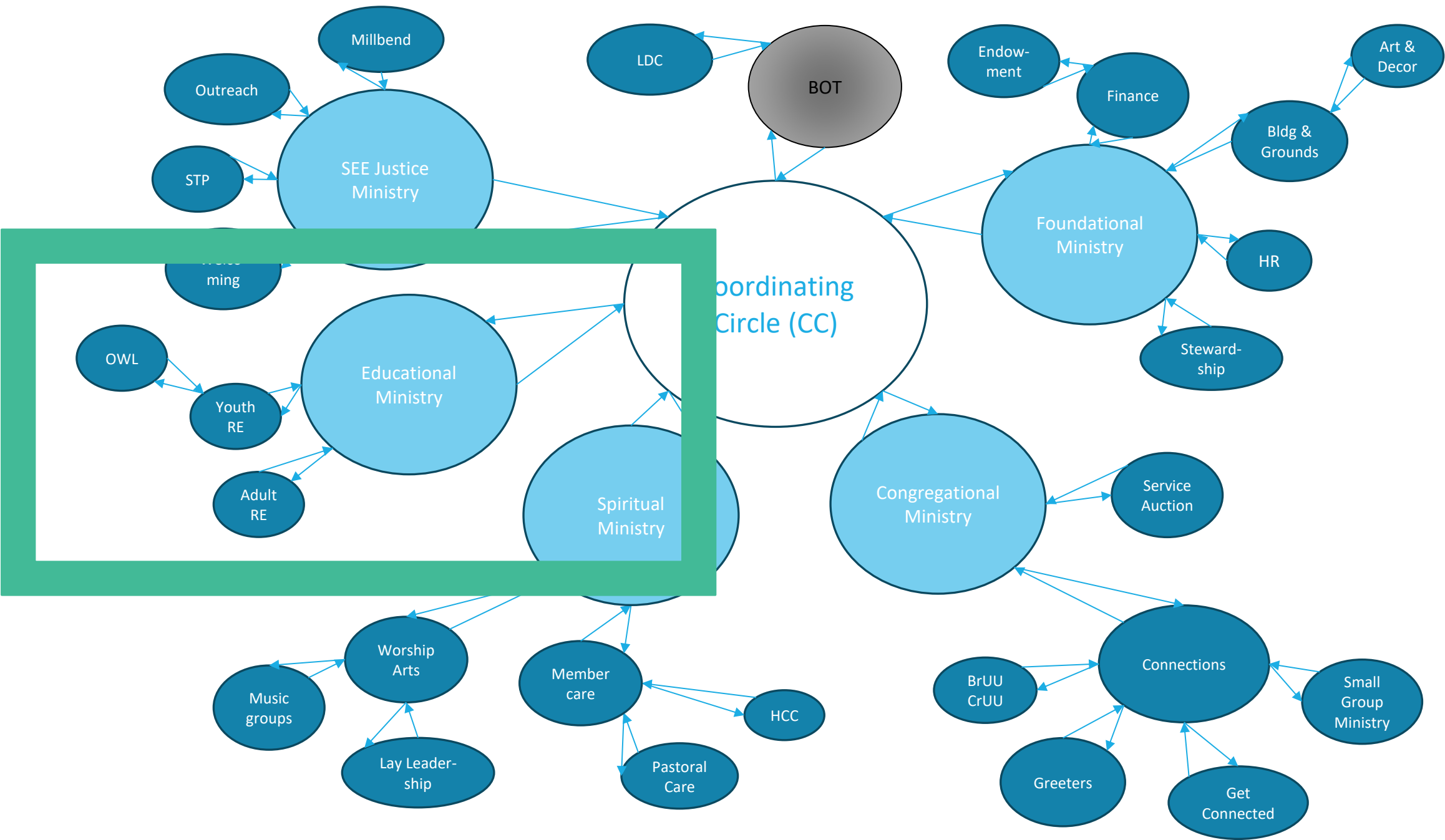
STP (2-4)  
SEEJ Leader (1)  
STP Delegate (1)  
*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

Millbend (2-4)  
SEEJ Leader (1)  
Millbend Delegate (1)  
*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

Outreach (2-4)  
SEEJ Leader (1)  
Outreach Delegate (1)  
*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## Roles in Outer Circles

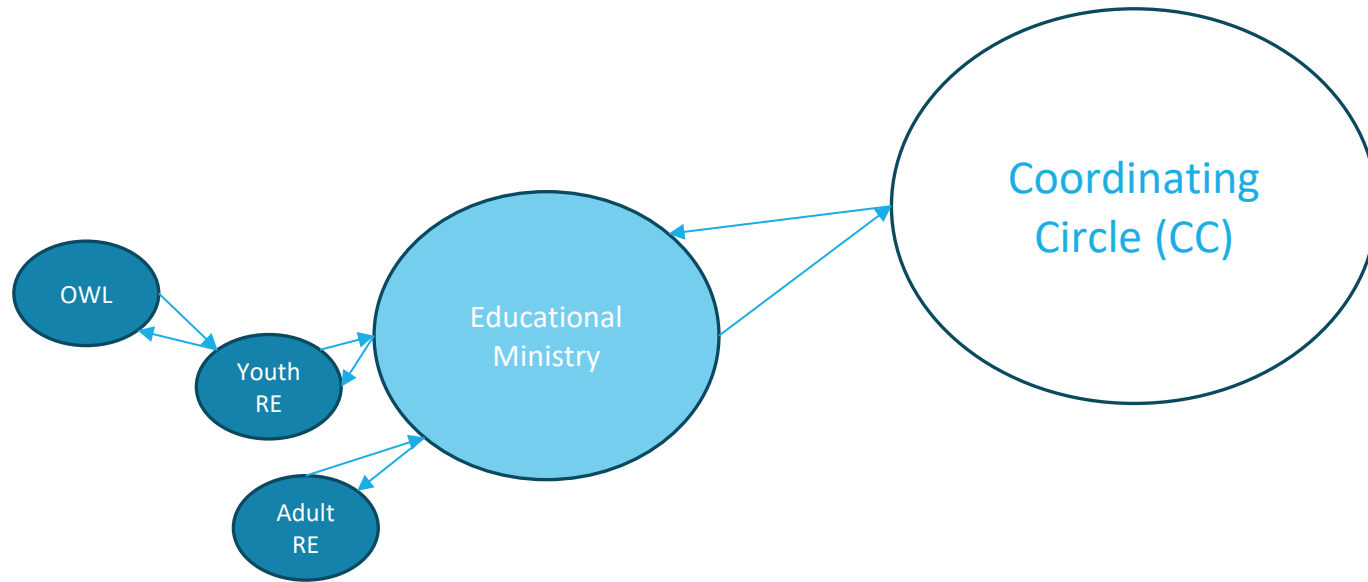
Leader from Ministry Circle: communicates info from Ministry Circle to Outer Circle  
Delegate from Outer Circle: communicates info from Outer Circle to Ministry Circle  
Scribe/Note Taker: captures & shares what is discussed & decided + action items  
Facilitator: organizes & facilitates meetings  
+ Any roles the circle collectively decides on



Circle Structure Reflecting Current Committees – DRAFT Option



# Who's in the Circle?

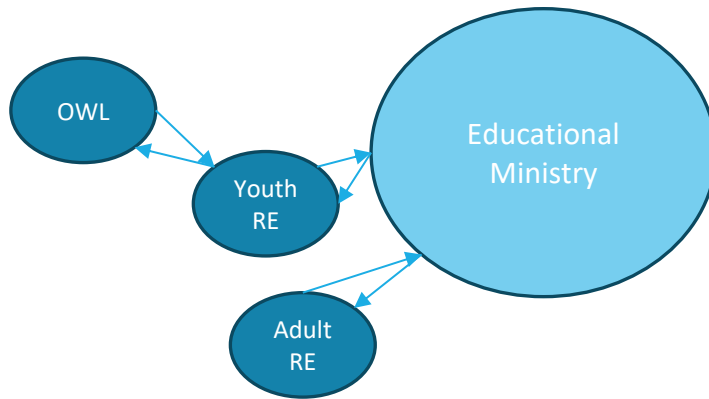


Educational Ministry (6)  
CC Leader (1)  
Educational Ministry Delegate (1)  
Youth RE Delegate + Leader (2)  
Adult RE Delegate + Leader (2)  
*(Scribe and Facilitator would come from these roles)*

## Roles in Educational Ministry

Leader from CC: communicates info from CC to Educational Ministry  
Delegate from Educational Ministry: communicates info from other circles (RE) to Ed. Min.  
Scribe/Note Taker: captures & shares what is discussed & decided + action items  
Facilitator: organizes & facilitates meetings  
+ Any roles the circle collectively decides on

# Who's in the Circle?



OWL (2-4)  
Youth RE Leader (1)  
OWL Delegate (1)  
*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

Youth RE (2-4)  
EM Leader (1)  
Youth RE Delegate (1)  
*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

Adult RE (2-4)  
EM Leader (1)  
Adult RE Delegate (1)  
*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## Roles in Outer Circles

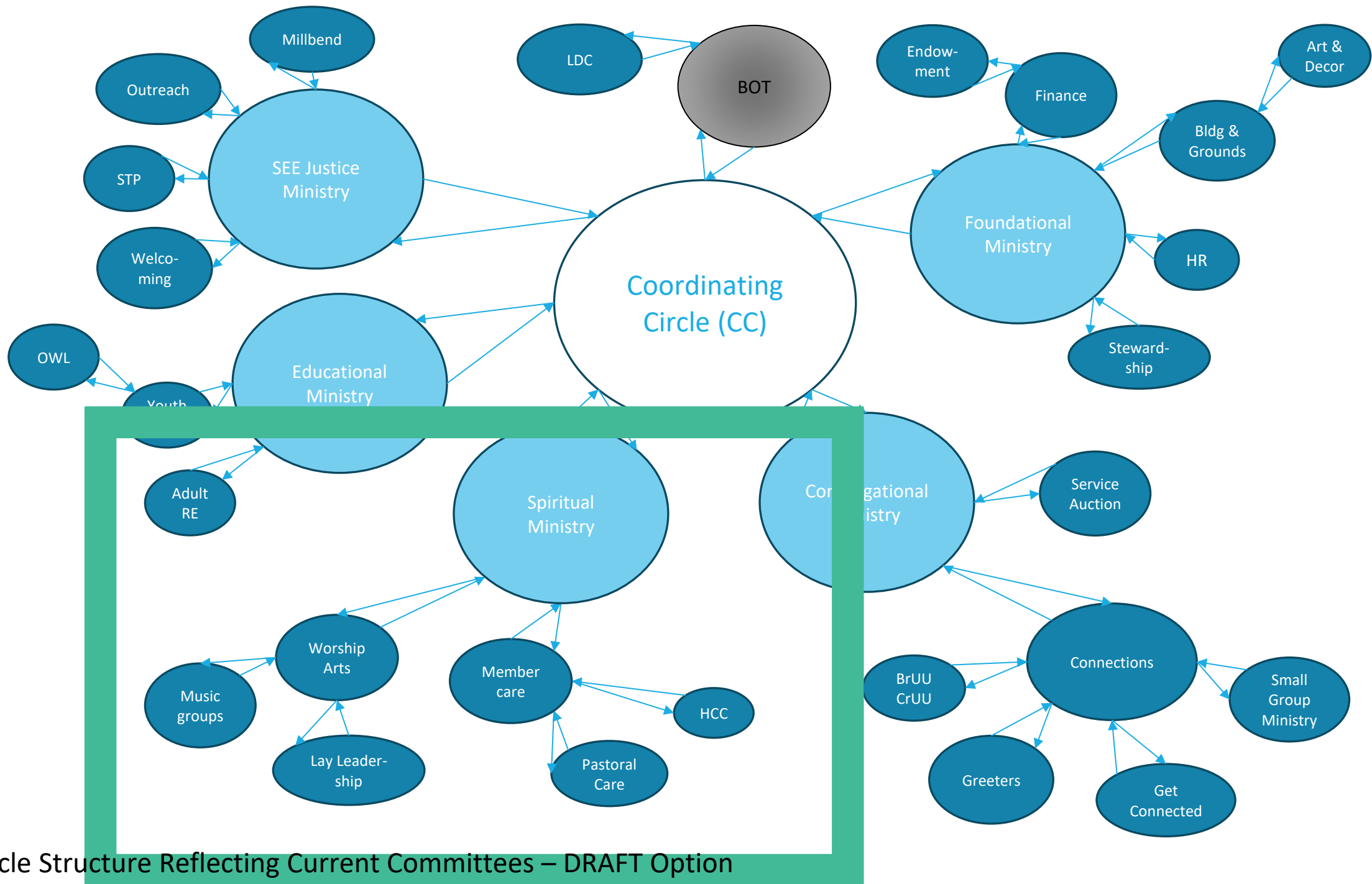
Leader from Ministry Circle: communicates info from Ministry Circle to Outer Circle

Delegate from Outer Circle: communicates info from Outer Circle to Ministry Circle

Scribe/Note Taker: captures & shares what is discussed & decided + action items

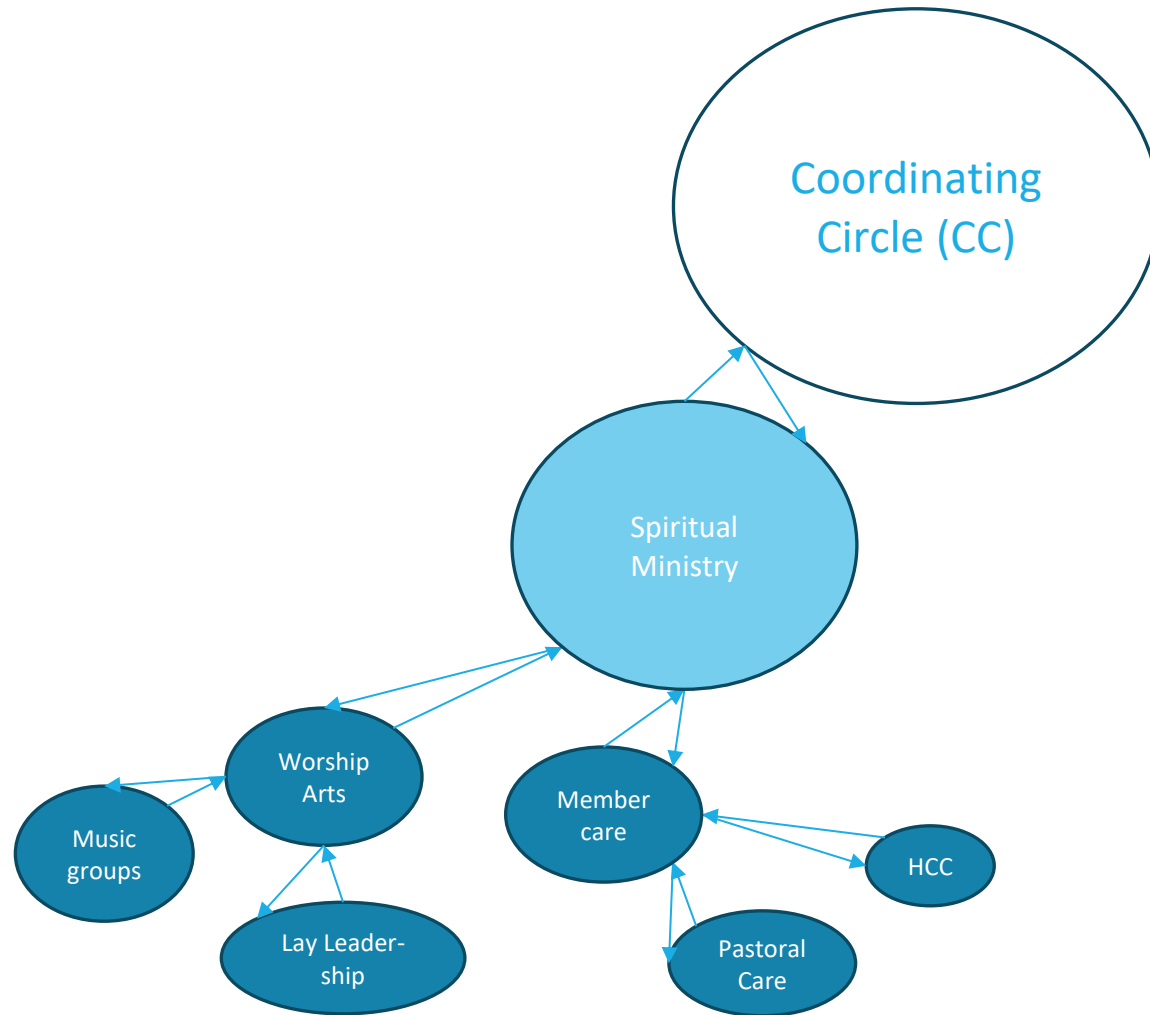
Facilitator: organizes & facilitates meetings

+ Any roles the circle collectively decides on



Circle Structure Reflecting Current Committees – DRAFT Option

# Who's in the Circle?



## Spiritual Ministry (6)

CC Leader (1)

Spiritual Ministry Delegate (1)

Member Care Delegate + Leader (2)

Worship Arts Delegate + Leader (2)

*(Scribe and Facilitator would come from these roles)*

## Roles in Spiritual Ministry

Leader from CC: communicates info from CC to Spiritual Ministry

Delegate from Spiritual Ministry: communicates info from Spiritual Min. to CC.

Scribe/Note Taker: captures & shares what is discussed & decided + action items

Facilitator: organizes & facilitates meetings + Any roles the circle collectively decides on

# Who's in the Circle?

## Worship Arts (4+)

- Spiritual Min. Leader (1)
- Worship Arts Delegate (1)
- Music Groups Delegate (1)
- Lay Leadership Delegate (1)

*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## Member Care (4+)

- Spiritual Min. Leader (1)
- Member Care Delegate (1)
- Pastoral Care Delegate (1)
- HCC Delegate (1)

*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## Pastoral Care (2-4)

- Member Care Leader (1)
- Pastoral Care Delegate (1)

*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## Lay Leadership (2-4)

- Worship Arts Leader (1)
- Lay Leadership Delegate (1)

*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## HCC (2-4)

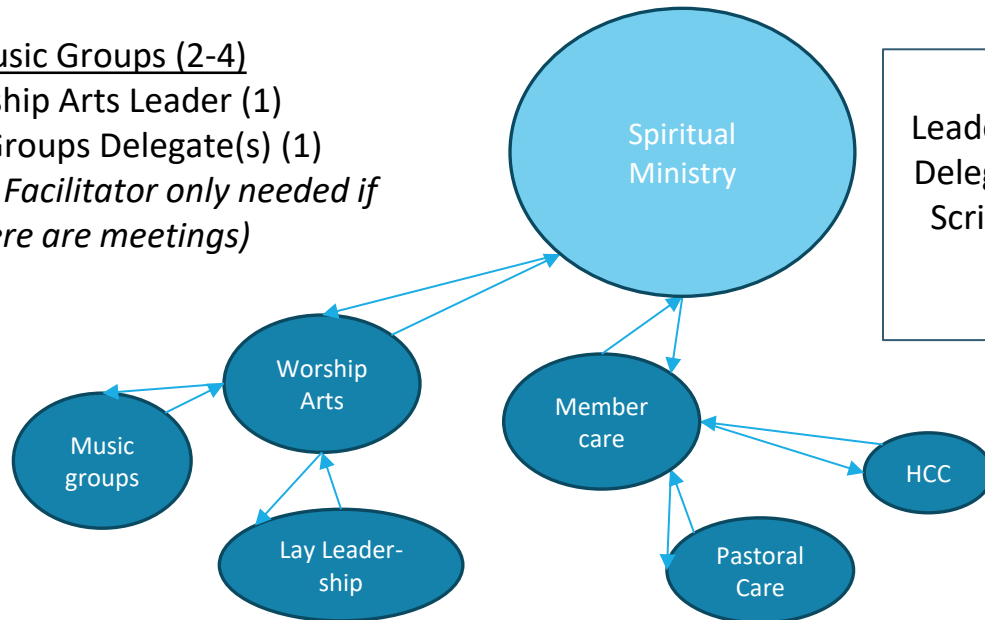
- Member Care Leader (1)
- HCC Delegate (1)

*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## Music Groups (2-4)

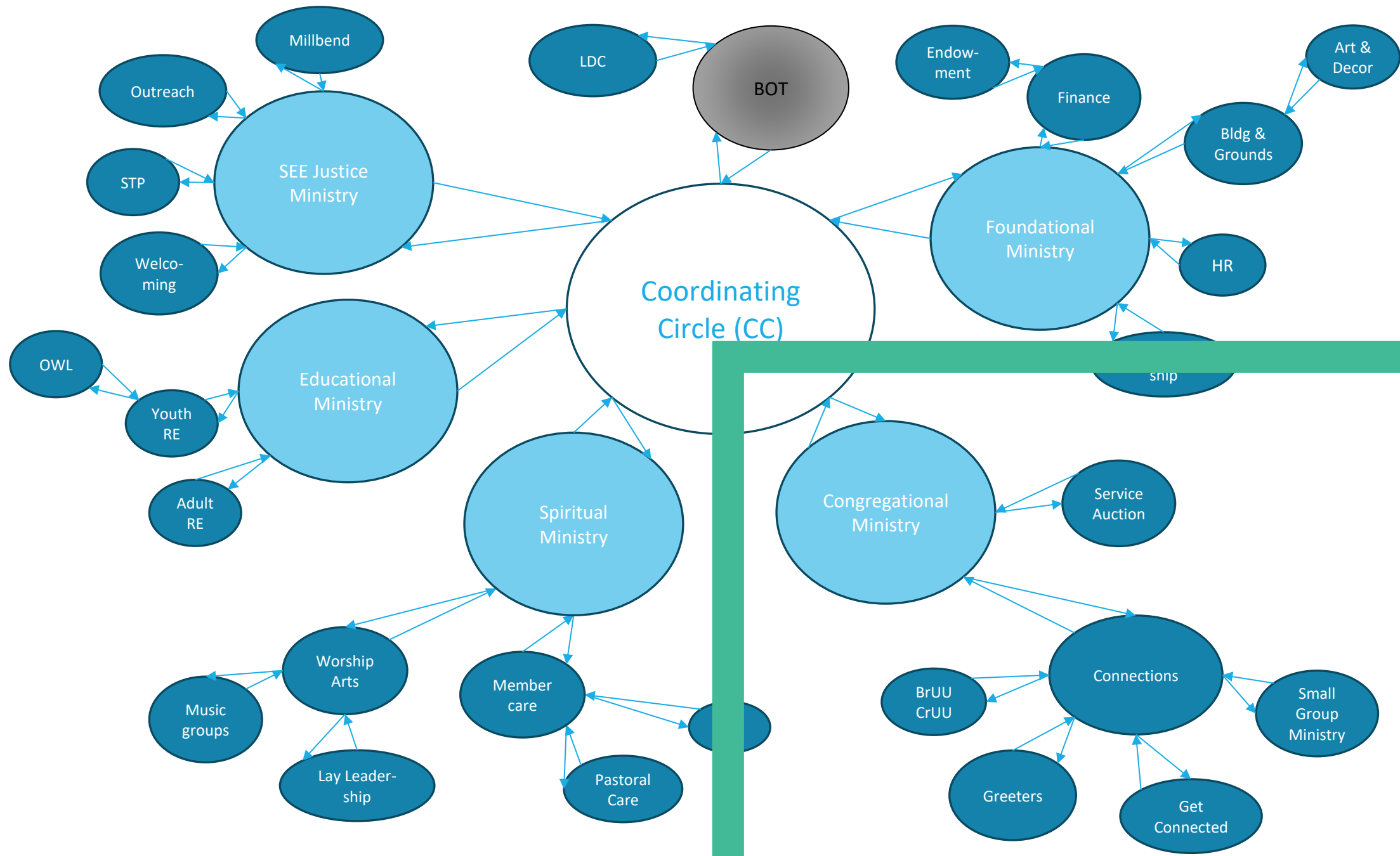
- Worship Arts Leader (1)
- Music Groups Delegate(s) (1)

*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*



## Roles in Outer Circles

Leader from Ministry Circle: communicates info from Ministry Circle to Outer Circle  
 Delegate from Outer Circle: communicates info from Outer Circle to Ministry Circle  
 Scribe/Note Taker: captures & shares what is discussed & decided + action items  
 Facilitator: organizes & facilitates meetings  
 + Any roles the circle collectively decides on



Circle Structure Reflecting Current Committees – DRAFT Option

# Who's in the Circle?

## Congregational Ministry (5)

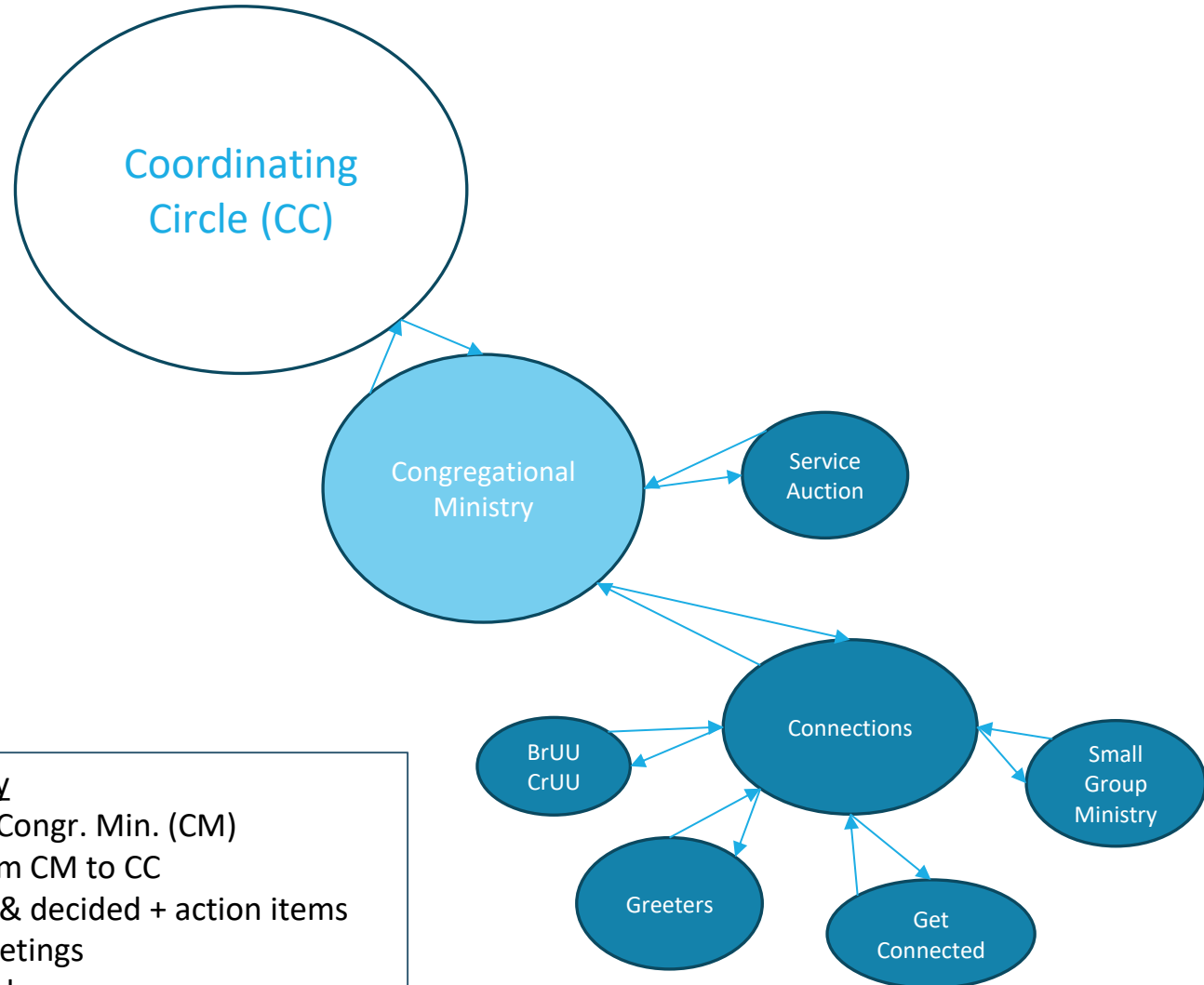
CC Leader (1)

Congregational Ministry Delegate (1)

Service Auction Delegate (1)

Connections Delegate + Leader (2)

*(Scribe and Facilitator would come from these roles)*



## Roles in Congregational Ministry

Leader from CC: communicates info from CC to Congr. Min. (CM)

Delegate from CM: communicates info from CM to CC

Scribe/Note Taker: captures & shares what is discussed & decided + action items

Facilitator: organizes & facilitates meetings

+ Any roles the circle collectively decides on

# Who's in the Circle?

## Service Auction (2-4)

Congregational Ministry Leader (1)  
SA Delegate (1)  
*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## Connections (5+)

Congregational Ministry Leader (1)  
Connections Delegate (1)  
Small Group Ministry Delegate (1)  
Greeters Delegate (1)  
Get Connected Delegate (1)  
BrUU CrUU Delegate (1)  
*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## BrUU CrUU (2+)

Connections Leader (1)  
BrUU CrUU Delegate (1)  
*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## Get Connected (2+)

Connections Leader (1)  
Get Connected Delegate (1)  
*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## Greeters (2+)

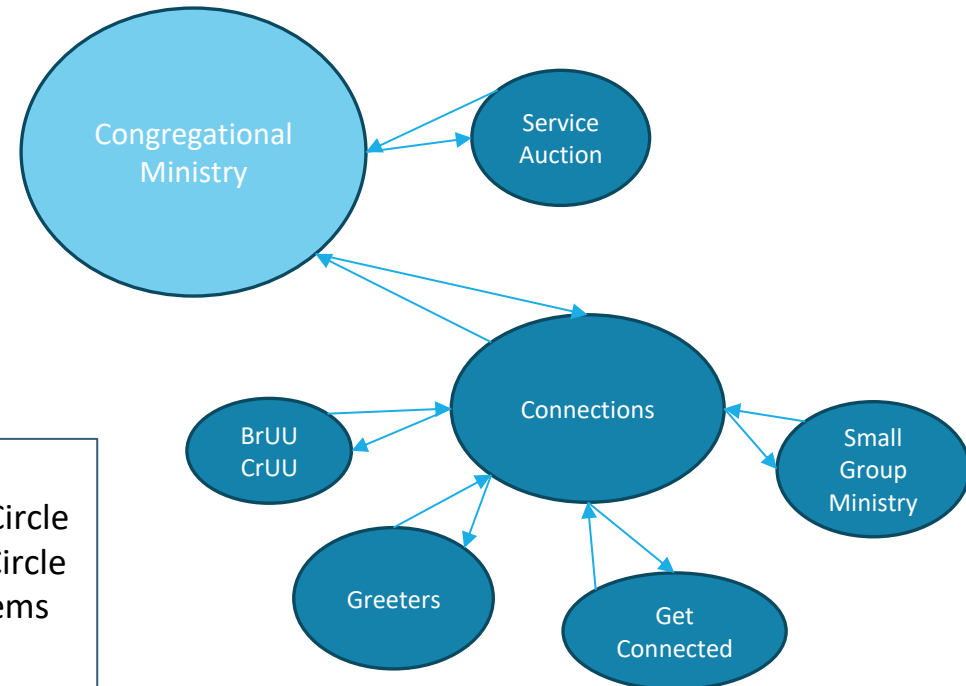
Connections Leader (1)  
Greeters Delegate (1)  
*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## Small Group Ministry (2+)

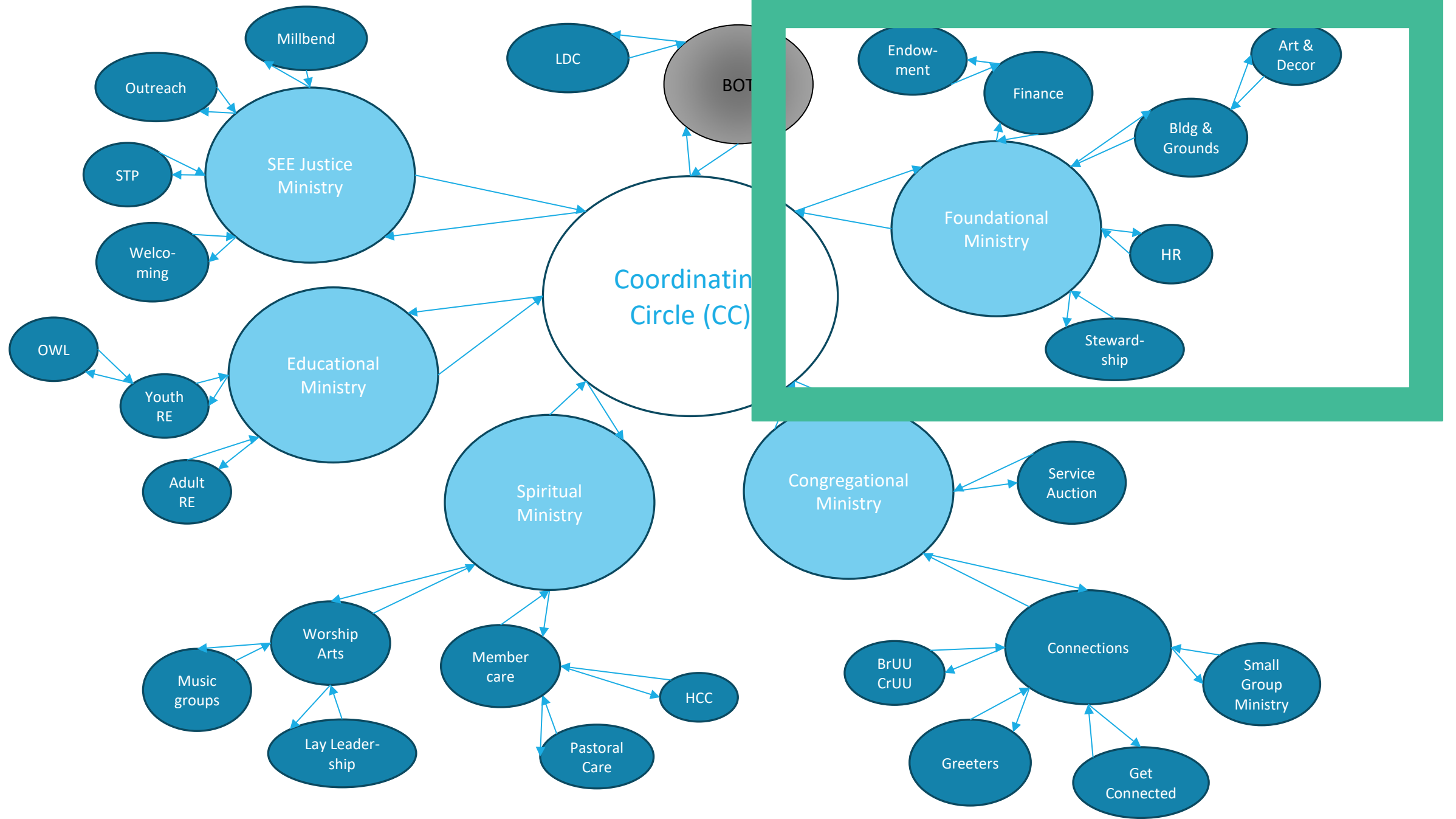
Connections Leader (1)  
Small Group Ministry Delegate(s) (1+)  
*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## Roles in Outer Circles

Leader from Ministry Circle: communicates info from Ministry Circle to Outer Circle  
Delegate from Outer Circle: communicates info from Outer Circle to Ministry Circle  
Scribe/Note Taker: captures & shares what is discussed & decided + action items  
Facilitator: organizes & facilitates meetings  
+ Any roles the circle collectively decides on







Circle Structure Reflecting Current Committees – DRAFT Option

# Who's in the Circle?

## Foundational Ministry (8)

CC Leader (1)

Foundational Ministry Delegate (1)

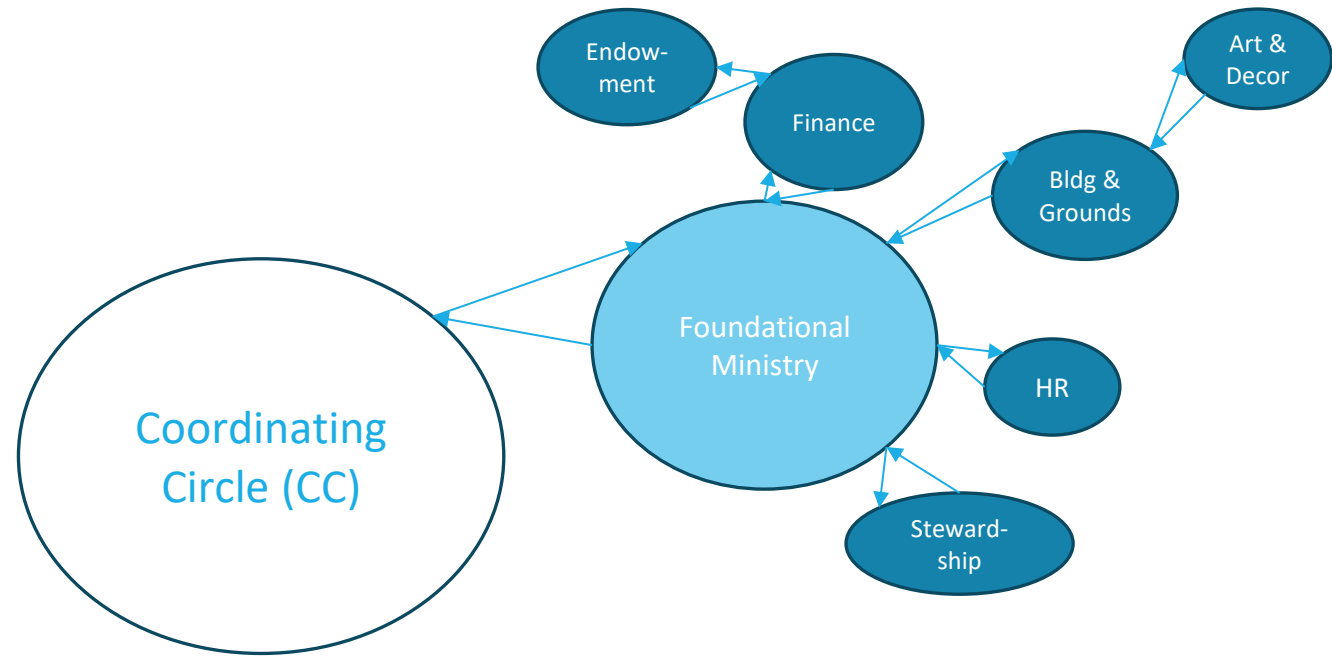
Finance Delegate + Leader (2)

HR Delegate (1)

Stewardship Delegate (1)

Building and Grounds Delegate + Leader (2)

*(Scribe and Facilitator would come from these roles)*



## Roles in Foundational Ministry

Leader from CC: communicates info from CC to Foundational Ministry (FM)

Delegate from FM: communicates info from FM to CC

Scribe/Note Taker: captures & shares what is discussed & decided + action items

Facilitator: organizes & facilitates meetings

+ Any roles the circle collectively decides on

# Who's in the Circle?

## Building and Grounds (4+)

Foundational Min. Leader (1)

B&G Delegate + Leader (2)

Art & Décor Delegate (1)

*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## Art & Décor (2+)

B&G Leader (1)

Art & Decor Delegate (1)

*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## Finance (4+)

Foundational Min. Leader (1)

Finance Delegate + Leader (2)

Endowment Delegate (1)

*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## HR (2+)

Foundational Min. Leader (1)

HR Delegate (1)

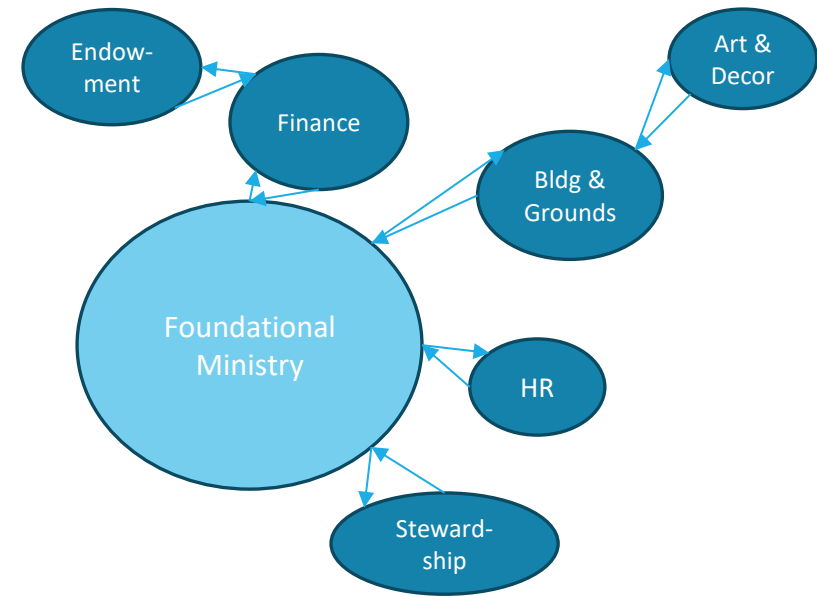
*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

## Endowment (2+)

Finance Leader (1)

Endowment Delegate (1)

*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*



## Stewardship (2+)

Foundational Min. Leader (1)

Stewardship Delegate (1)

*(Scribe and Facilitator only needed if there are meetings)*

### Roles in Outer Circles

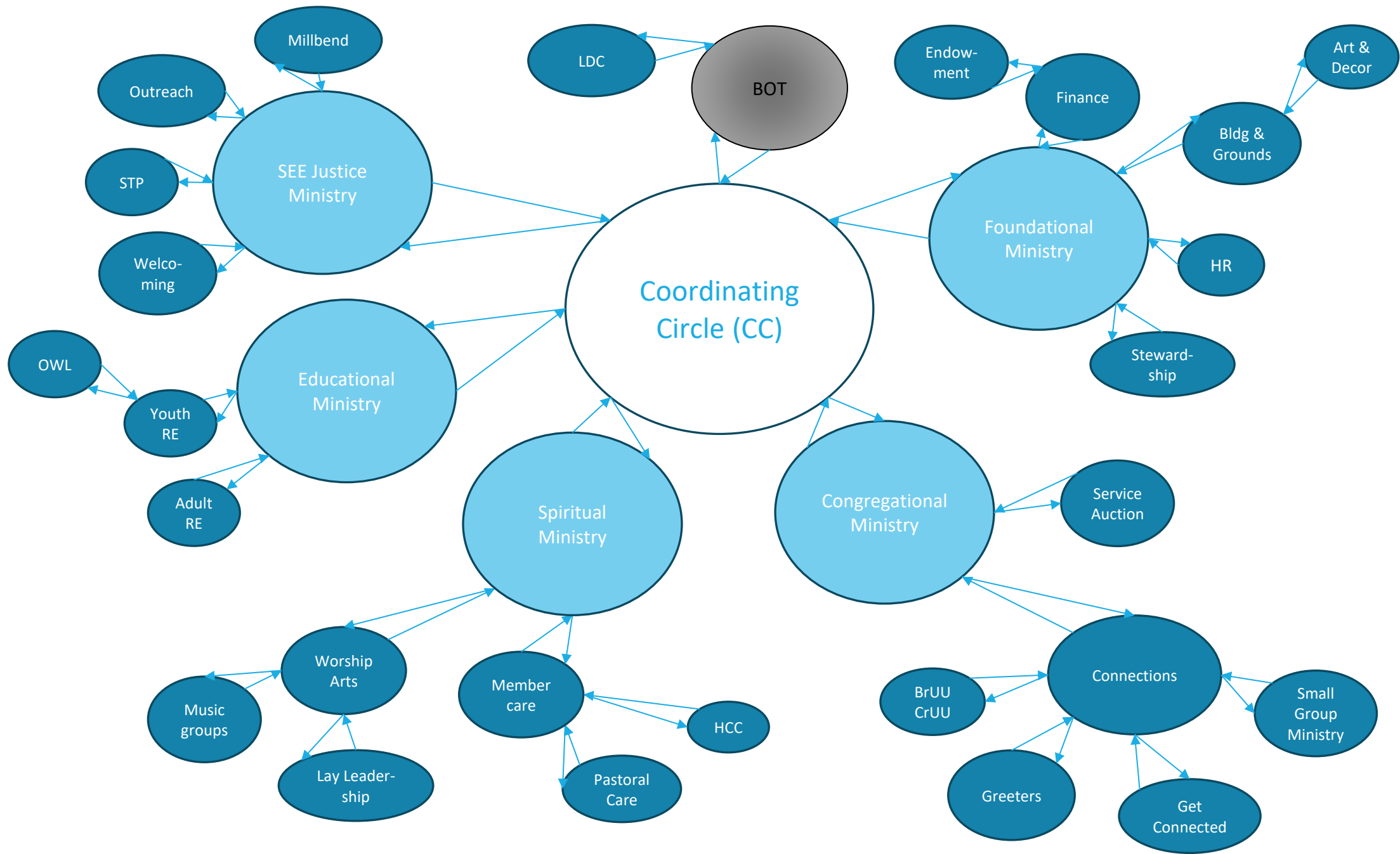
Leader from Ministry Circle: communicates info from Ministry Circle to Outer Circle

Delegate from Outer Circle: communicates info from Outer Circle to Ministry Circle

Scribe/Note Taker: captures & shares what is discussed & decided + action items

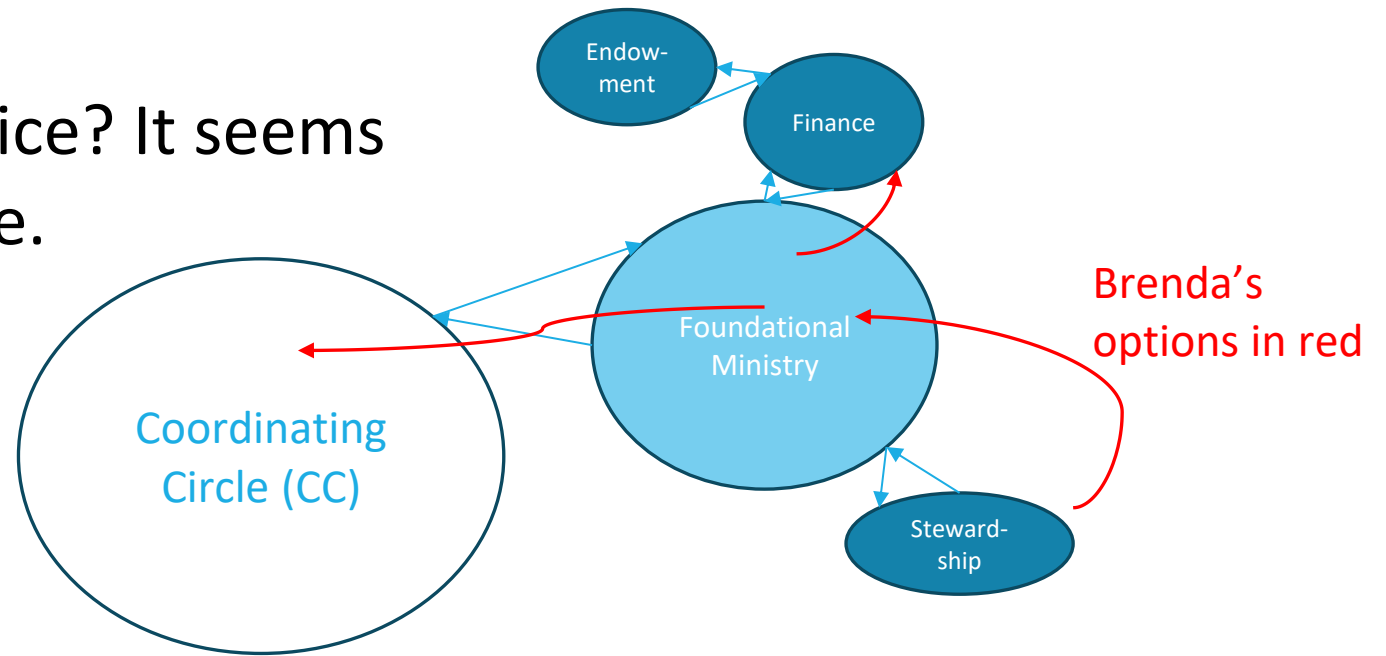
Facilitator: organizes & facilitates meetings

+ Any roles the circle collectively decides on



Circle Structure Reflecting Current Committees – DRAFT Option

How does this work in practice? It seems like we need so many people.



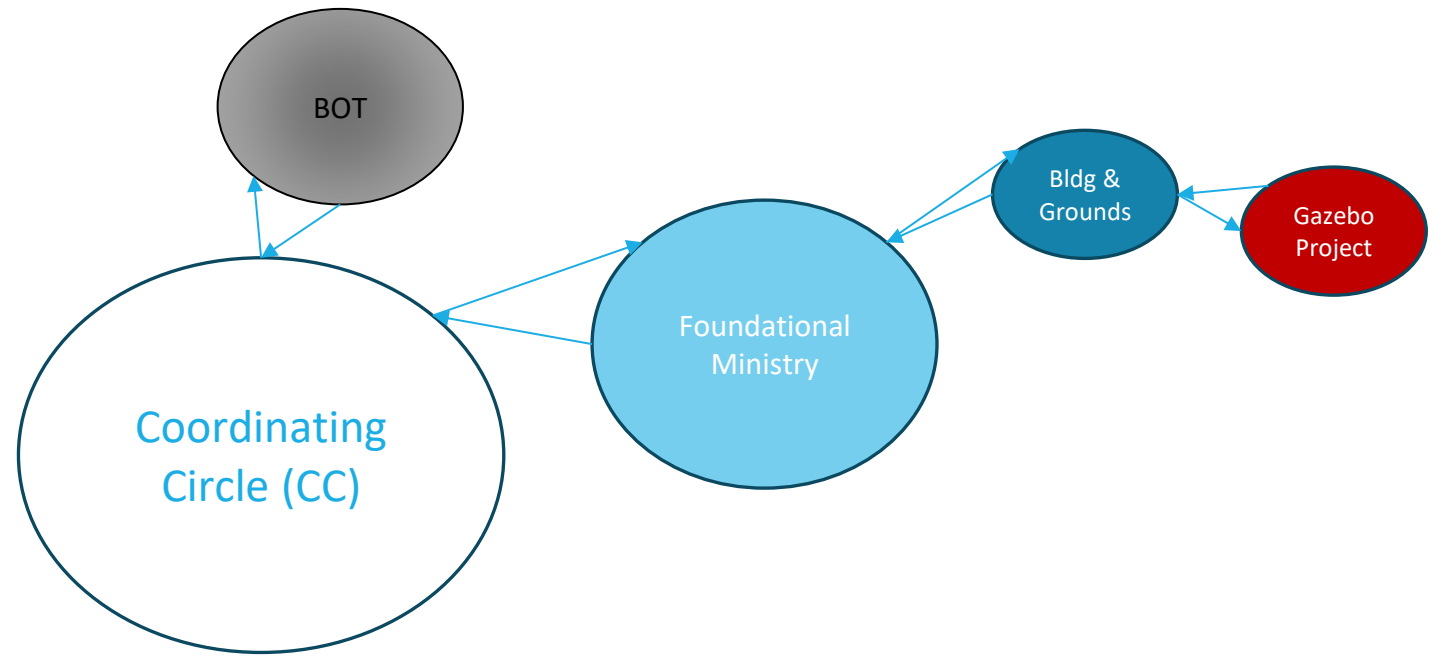
Real Life Example of an Outer Circle: Stewardship

Stewardship has 6 members, including Brenda Cooper and Jeff Norris.

Brenda could be a Delegate from Stewardship to Foundational Ministry. She's then part of the FM circle. She could also be chosen to be the FM's Delegate to the Coordinating Circle. If she's a delegate to the coordinating circle, she could be chosen to be the delegate to the BoT. With each more inclusive circle, she represents each of the offshoot groups as a delegate to the larger circle. Brenda could also be the leader from the Foundational Ministry circle to the Finance circle.

An alternative is Brenda is the Delegate from Stewardship to FM for one quarter, then Jeff Norris takes on that role as Delegate. Jeff may not be chosen from the FM to be the delegate to the CC. That may be someone else. Jeff or Brenda are able, in both cases, to convey info between Stewardship and a more central circle, the FM circle, and they trust that the FM delegate to the CC will represent their best interests.

What about temporary circles, like for a project?



Real Life Example of a Project: The outdoor space where a gazebo needed to be removed

Building and Grounds has several members. They meet in April, along with interested congregants, to make a plan to renovate the space.

Connie Newkirk takes on project management. This particular project does not need Connie to be in the PM role forever. The temporary circle sets its goals & parameters (start/end, budget, desired outcome) with guidance from Building and Grounds. Connie is entrusted to make the decisions within the parameters provided. She comes to Building and Grounds with any questions. If questions cannot be answered, she or another delegate from B&G would pursue guidance from FM, and so on. There's no need for the BOT to be involved in the project. Once the project is done, the circle disbands.

# I'm a current committee leader. My team doesn't really meet. Am I going to have to have a lot of meetings now?

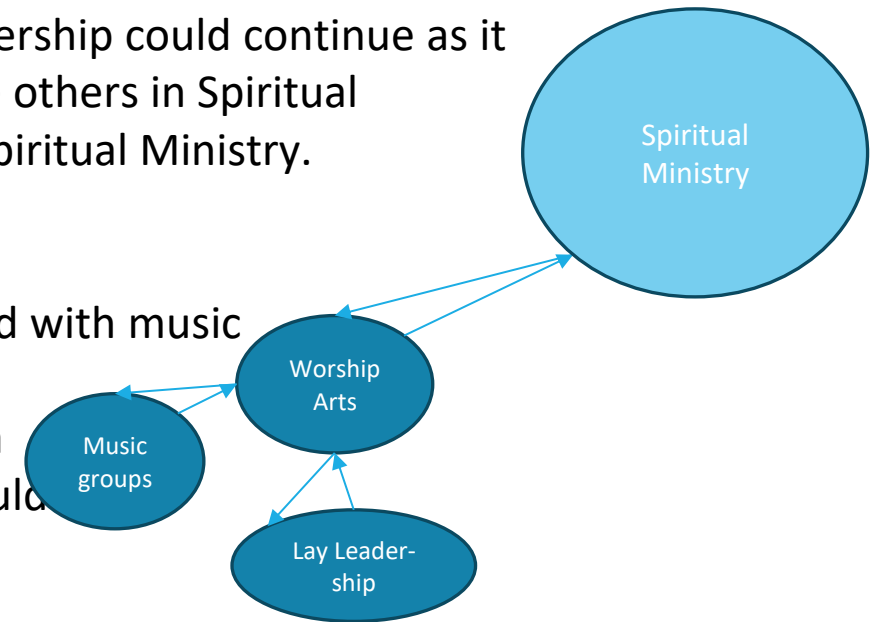
## Real Life Example: Worship Arts

Worship Arts has occasional brainstorming meetings to help determine the direction of Worship Arts. Otherwise, no meetings – just electronic communication. With the proposed structure, Worship Arts would connect/overlap with Spiritual Ministry, Music Groups, and Lay Leadership.

Maybe Music Groups don't need a circle. Communication with Lay Leadership could continue as it does now. What WOULD change is Worship Arts would overlap with the others in Spiritual Ministry. Anyone connected to Worship Arts could be the Delegate to Spiritual Ministry.


Potential real benefits of Worship Arts connecting to Spiritual Ministry:

- A new member (who Member Care knows about) wants to get involved with music
- Coordinating Circle discusses date for Arts in Action, passes on to Spiritual Ministry > Worship Arts – WA does not need to be at a meeting for this, and should find out info more quickly (or, could choose or be chosen to be part of any more central circles)




# WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?


Adopting a sociocratic governance structure would impact our Bylaws, because our current bylaws include an organizational structure.



The proposed Bylaws change related to sociocracy is to remove the organizational structure entirely and refer to a sociocratic circle-based structure.



Bylaws require a particular quorum of members to vote and then a majority of that quorum to affirm proposed changes. This fall, Northwoods Leadership would like to hold a special congregational vote to make this change (and a few other minor Bylaws modifications which will be shared as well).



Assemble a Coordinating Circle and practice sociocracy.



# WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

Your voice is important. Please let me know what your feedback is. I will receive all of your ideas, improvements, and excitement.

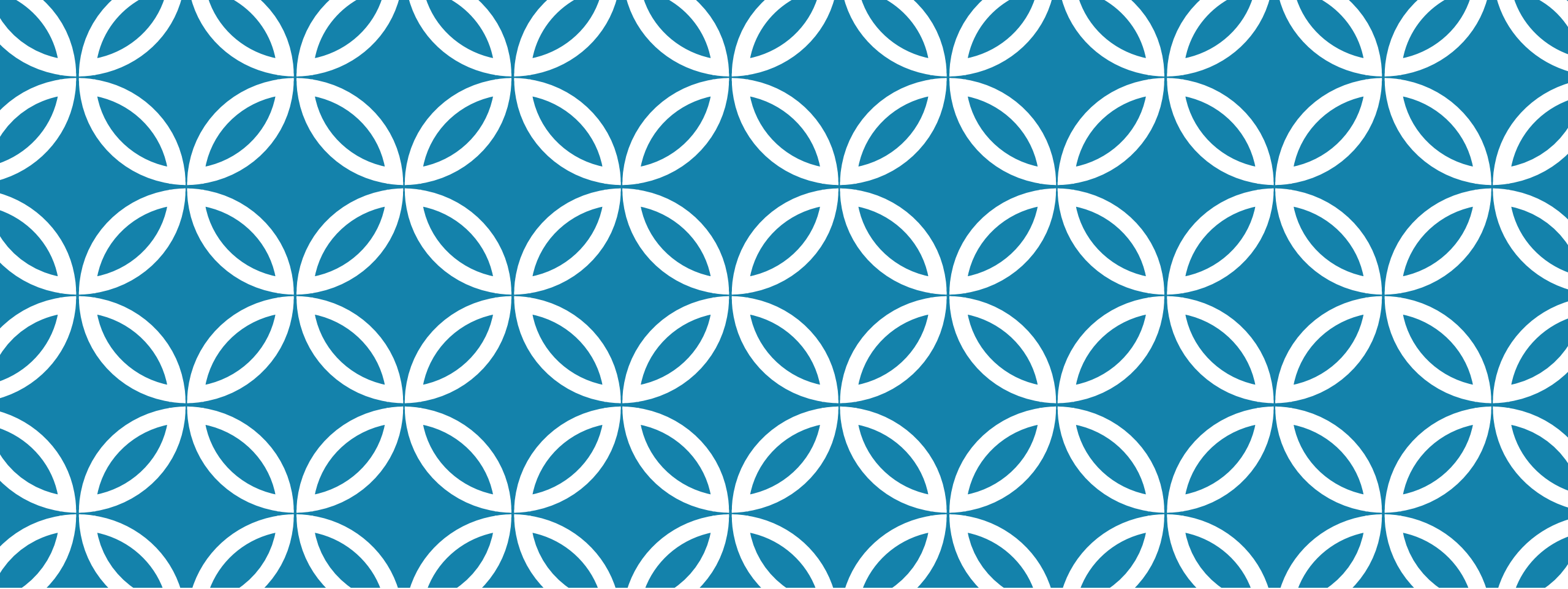
I'm still learning myself. I'm not trying to dictate or exclude anything, but we must right-size how "perfect" this looks on paper and prioritize practice.

If you're a current committee leader, let's talk about how this might or might not change how you operate.

Change is difficult for all of us. It is intentional that this process has been somewhat slow, and we have tried a few pilot areas to see how Sociocracy "feels."

Church leadership believes we are ready for this, it will be a positive change, and we can collectively make it work. What it will require is trust, communication, and a little patience.

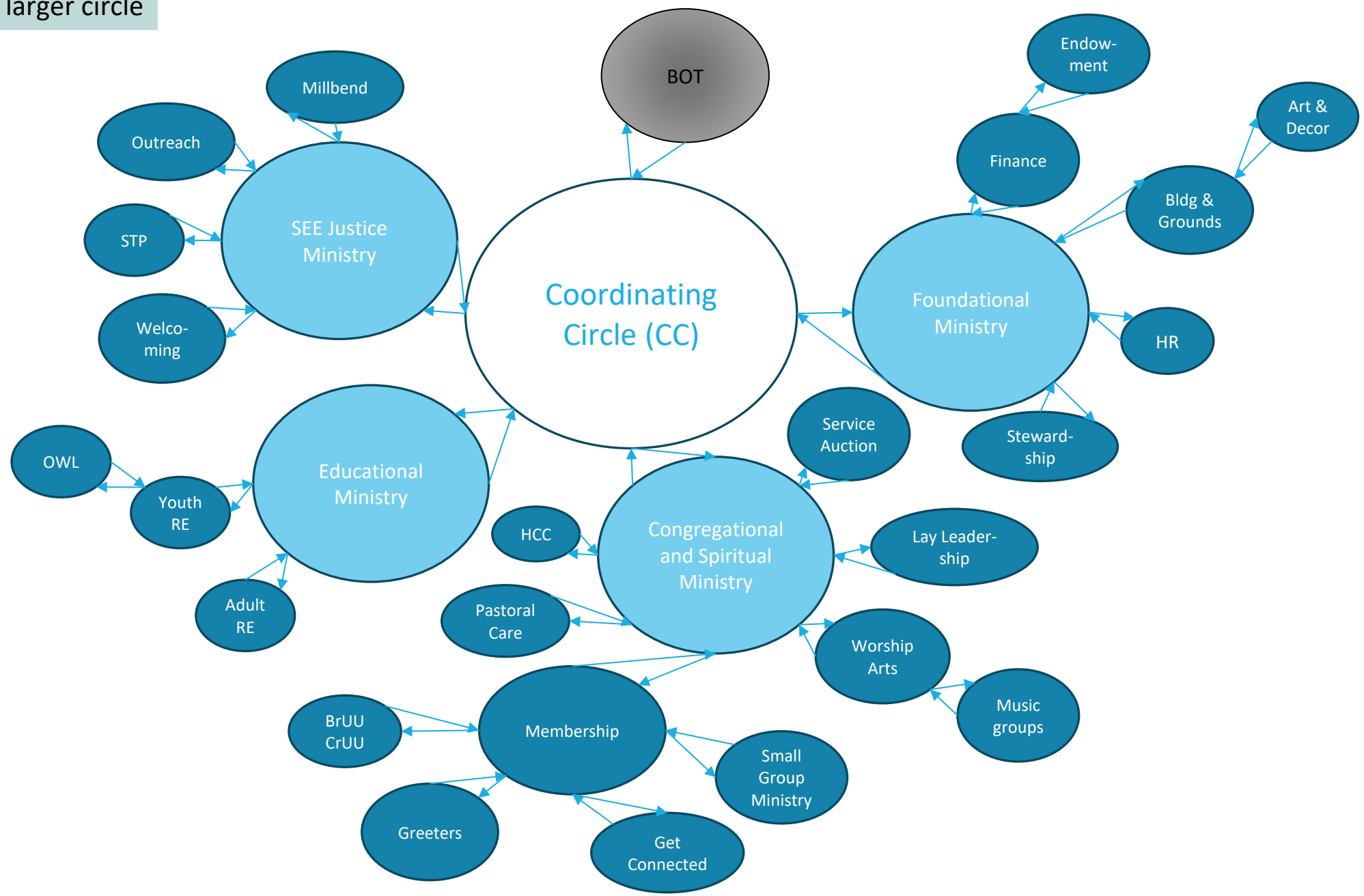
**Are you in?**



# PREVIOUS ITERATIONS OF CIRCLE STRUCTURE



Membership as a larger circle



Congr + Spiritual Together,  
no LDC, split membership  
into a couple parts

