

United Church of Christ

## **SEARCH AND CALL**

**A Pilgrimage through  
Transitions and New Beginnings**

### **SECTION THREE**

## **THE SEARCH AND CALL PROCESS in The United Church of Christ**

*"I am confident of this,  
that the one who began a good work among you  
will bring it to completion...."  
Philippians 1:6a*

## SECTION THREE

### THE SEARCH AND CALL PROCESS in The United Church of Christ

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***“A Call, not a Job; a Vocation, not an Occupation”***

### APPROACHING THE TASK: GOD’S COMMITTEE

#### **Selecting a Search Committee**

Just as the local church is not “our” church but rather God’s, so too the Search Committee is really God’s committee. A search for a new pastor is one of the most spiritual ministries in the church. The selection of Search Committee members is a task that is approached with prayer, wisdom, sensitivity, and awareness that God may be calling certain church members to consider serving in this particular capacity.<sup>1</sup>

One “best practice” for committee selection includes publicizing the criteria for membership on the Search Committee and inviting persons in the congregation to submit nominations to the governing board.

Submitting nominations is one of the many ways that the entire congregation can be informed about and included in the search process; it should be made clear, however, that not all nominees will be selected. Those who submit nominations should include a brief description of the reasons why that person would be an asset to the committee. The governing board may then designate a subcommittee to review the names in light of the identified criteria and make recommendations to the entire board. The governing board will either appoint the committee or (if required by your church bylaws) recommend the slate for ratification by the congregation.

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Unless required by your bylaws, it is strongly recommended that you avoid the practice of assigning “slots” to various church committees. The Search Committee should be carefully selected based on specific criteria and should not be composed of persons

<sup>1</sup> Your local church bylaws may include requirements regarding the Search Committee composition. Be certain to consult that document before beginning the Search Committee selection process.

who serve automatically because they happen to be members of a specific church board or committee. While those persons may possess exactly the skills needed for their committee or board, they may not bring the particular gifts needed by the Search Committee.

There are a number of personal qualities and attributes to consider in the selection of Search Committee members; individuals should have:

- a passionate commitment to Christ's church;
- a positive attitude (no grudges!);
- a capacity to approach the task with openness rather than a pre-determined agenda;
- a sense of integrity and respect for others;
- an ability to be absolutely confidential;
- a capacity to listen, to participate in a group, and to come to consensus.

In addition, an individual under consideration for the Search Committee should be:

- an active supporter of the church as demonstrated by worship attendance, financial support, and participation;
- trusted and respected by the congregation;
- willing and able to make this responsibility a very high priority.

The experience of other churches would suggest that the Search Committee be composed of five to nine members with the president/moderator a non-voting member. Two persons from the same family should not be asked to serve. As much as possible, the committee should be selected to include an equal representation of men and women, young and old, new and long-time members, as well as persons with involvement in varied aspects of church life (choir, educational ministry, women's or men's groups, deacons, mission and outreach). The members should reflect, as much as possible, the diversity of the congregation (racial, cultural, economic, sexual orientation) and there should be at least one youth member. All persons on the Search Committee should be full members of the congregation.



**A Search Committee should reflect the congregation's diversity**

When individuals are invited to serve, they should be given an accurate description of the responsibilities involved. The following "commitments" are designed to be reproduced and shared with persons who are prayerfully considering service on the Search Committee.

## **FIVE COMMITMENTS FOR SEARCH COMMITTEES**

**A Faith Commitment . . .** The task of the Search Committee is very simple and very complex. Initially the task is spiritual. Search Committee members make a faith commitment to develop as faith-centered, prayer-directed people of God willing to listen to God in the process of seeking a new pastor. Search Committee members engage in a 4-Way Covenant—a Covenant with their prospective pastor, the congregation, the Conference and Association, and the Holy Spirit.

**A Time Commitment . . .** Search Committee members make a time commitment. By the time the search process is completed (from first organizational meeting to the calling of a new pastor) the committee may have been working together for as little as 9 months or as long as 18-24 months. Initially most Search Committees meet weekly. Once committees begin considering pastoral profiles and scheduling interviews, the frequency of meetings increases. At times the Search Committee must travel to hear prospective pastors preach. All in all, it is a significant time commitment.

**A Commitment to Confidentiality . . .** Search Committee members make a commitment to confidentiality. Members must not talk about the content of their work. That is to say, the sharing of names of individuals under consideration is a serious breach of process. Even to speak in generalities about location or experience or gender can risk folk guessing who the committee is considering. The congregation must be kept informed at every step of the process. Sharing where the Search Committee is in the process is critical. However, until a final candidate is presented, all conversation about any candidates is closely guarded.

**A Commitment to Openness . . .** Search Committees make a commitment to genuine consideration of all candidates. The commitment involves understanding that the gifts, skills, and experience of candidates are primary in determining their ability to serve the congregation.

**A Commitment to Consensus . . .** Finally, Search Committee members make a commitment to consensus. Members need to be of one mind in recommending their prospective pastor to the congregation. Any unreadiness on the part of any member of the Search Committee can and often does spell disaster down the road. Everyone must be able, with a clear and positive conscience, to support and endorse the individual presented before the congregation.

*(Adapted, the Penn Central Conference)*

*Available in Resource Section—Resource #15*

### **Dedication of the Search Committee**

**Resource #1** offers a brief dedication/commissioning service for use in worship the Sunday following the announcement of the Search Committee membership. The covenant reminds everyone that the Search Committee undertakes this task on behalf of the whole church.

## **ORIENTATION MEETING WITH CONFERENCE/ASSOCIATION STAFF**

A Search Committee customarily begins its work by meeting with the Conference/Association Minister. The staff person will bring resources that describe the process and will talk with members about the covenantal relationship between the Conference/Association and the local church Search Committee. Much of the material that follows will be reviewed in that initial meeting. While there are common understandings within the UCC about the basic steps involved in a Search and Call process, there are also significant differences among the 38 Conferences; your own staff person may supplement this Search Committee Book with additional material.

### **A Search and Call Covenant**

At the orientation meeting, your staff person from the Conference/Association may invite committee members to review and adopt a covenant (**Resource #2**) describing mutual expectations between the Search Committee and the Conference/Association. Committee members will indicate their commitment to a Spirit-led UCC Search and Call process and affirm their intention to maintain close communication with their UCC staff person. The Conference/Association agrees to assist the Search Committee by offering guidance, providing resources, publicizing the vacancy, seeking potential candidates, praying for your committee and your church during this transition time, and providing other support as needed.

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### **Biblical Resources for Search Committees (Resource #3)**

Your Conference/Association Minister will also introduce you to "*Biblical Resources for Search Committees.*" (**Resource #3**) The Biblical Resource asks that your committee designate one person to serve as chaplain; the chaplain will lead short periods of scripture study, reflection, and prayer in order to emphasize God's active participation in the search process. "*Biblical Resources*" contains brief scriptural reflections that are coordinated with the major steps of the Search and Call process:

*Beginning your work;*

*Gathering data for your Local Church Profile;*

*Completing the first draft of your Local Church Profile;*

*Publicizing your pastoral vacancy;*

*Reflections on decision-making;*

*Reading ministerial profiles;*

*Preparing for interviews;*

*Attending worship;*

*Choosing your recommended candidate;*

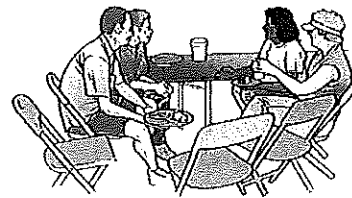
*Concluding your work.*

Committees who made regular use of this resource—often supplemented by other devotional and scriptural material—testify that they found themselves “listening to God” in surprising ways as a result of the decision to include a very intentional reflection time in the agenda of each meeting.

## **BEGINNING THE WORK: DEVELOPING YOUR COMMITTEE AS A FAITH COMMUNITY**

**Chaplains:  
See page 3  
“Biblical  
Resources”**

Everyone on the Search Committee will be eager to “begin the work” as you come together for your initial meetings. However, it is essential that you build the foundational faith community necessary to carry out this unique task. Your committee must offer an opportunity for members to share stories of their own faith development and their relationship to the church. Even in small churches where the members may have known one another for years, it is often rare for them to enter into a discussion of their own history (or lack thereof) of participation in a particular religious tradition. Awareness of the diversity in religious backgrounds and perspectives will be helpful when you begin to share your assumptions about the role of an ordained minister. Your Conference/Association Minister may have a particular scripture study process that he/she will use with you for this faith-sharing experience. A process based on one of the parables of Jesus is available in the “*Biblical Resources for Search Committees*,” and your chaplain may suggest using this material. Some Conferences/Associations recommend a day-long retreat and suggest names of retreat leaders with specialized skills; such retreats are often designed to encourage your members to develop communication guidelines that emphasize listening, cooperating, and entering into the search process in a spirit of openness. The extent to which a Search Committee develops spiritually will influence and shape the entire call process.



**Take time to build  
a faith community.**

### **Getting Organized**

The organizational and practical work begins with the selection of persons for leadership of the committee (unless already designated by the governing board). Customarily there will be a chairperson, a secretary, and a chaplain.

#### **The chairperson will:**

- serve as the primary liaison with the Conference/Association staff person;
- facilitate all meetings of the committee;
- oversee and organize the work flow;
- move the process along in a timely fashion;
- encourage discussion of various viewpoints;
- make certain that each member has an equal voice;
- ensure that decisions reached are the consensus of the group;
- ensure that the committee follows non-discrimination guidelines;
- remind members of their confidentiality pledge;
- make certain that hospitality arrangements are in place;
- report regularly to the congregation.

#### **The secretary will:**

- correspond with all candidates in a timely fashion;
- maintain a careful "tracking" system on the status of candidates;
- facilitate the circulation of ministerial profiles among the members;
- record the major decisions of the committee.

#### **The chaplain will:**

- study the *"UCC Biblical Resources for Search Committees;"*
- consult with the chairperson and incorporate regular times for study and prayer within the meeting agendas;
- remind members of the need for scripture and prayer when they face difficult discernment moments;
- encourage the congregation to hold the committee in prayer.

Committees usually rely heavily on email for their basic, non-confidential communications with one another (schedules, meeting arrangements, etc.). All communication about candidates is confidential and care must be taken to prevent

others from seeing confidential emails. Each member of the committee is encouraged to secure a temporary email address (an address only the committee member can access) to use for the duration of the search process. Members should never write disparaging or flippant remarks about candidates in email correspondence.

The computer will be utilized for the composition of the Local Church Profile and the transmission of various documents; additionally, in many Conferences, Ministerial Profiles for candidates are transmitted to Search Committees electronically. It will be essential for the chairperson and the secretary to have basic computer skills and email availability, and the overall work will go quickly and smoothly if all members have email access.



**Email access makes  
work go more smoothly**

Setting regular meeting days and times is essential. While the process of developing the Local Church Profile is not a confidential one, it will be very important for the committee to have a meeting room that ensures privacy once you begin reading and discussing Ministerial Profiles.

### **Communicating with the Congregation and the Governing Board**

After the Search Committee has completed an orientation meeting, it will be important to send a letter to the congregation as soon as possible. (Or you may choose to develop an insert for the Sunday bulletin.) The letter should describe the basic steps involved in the UCC Search and Call process and should assure them that they will have an opportunity to offer input for the Local Church Profile. Informing your members about both process and progress is essential (**Resource #4**). Once an initial mailing has been sent out, updates can be included in the newsletter or the bulletin. While they cannot know the names of individual candidates, the members will benefit from specific information about the status of your committee's work; regular updates will reduce anxiety and create a sense of partnership with the entire church as you move through this discernment process.

The **Search and Call Progress Poster** (included with this material) should be displayed in a prominent place (fellowship room/social hall) where members will have an opportunity to see it on a regular basis.

Reporting frequently to the governing board is also essential. During a search process, many governing boards include a brief report from the Search Committee on their regular agenda. Again the information should be focused on process and progress but never on names of individual candidates.

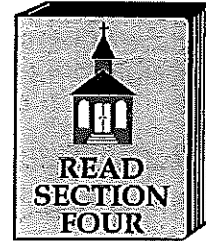


## PREPARING THE LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE

### TO BE USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH SECTION FOUR

**Chaplains:  
See Pages  
5 and 6  
Biblical  
Resources"**

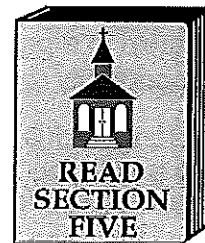
The preparation of the Local Church Profile is the first major task facing the committee. **Section Four of this Parish Life and Leadership Search Committee Resource contains a copy of the Local Church Profile along with instructions and resources that will assist you in completing that document.** In some settings preparation of the Local Church Profile is assigned to a specially appointed group who work loosely with the Search Committee. In other settings the Search Committee itself is responsible for the development of the Local Church Profile. In either case, the preparation process must involve input from the entire congregation, and a variety of possibilities for obtaining that input are suggested in **Section Four**. Once a first draft is completed, members of the congregation should be given an opportunity to offer feedback on that material. A draft of the Local Church Profile should also be shared with your interim pastor and your Conference/ Association staff person before it is finalized; the latter will be expected to sign off on the final document. The Profile's description of the church's life and mission as well as the qualities sought in the next pastor will guide your Search Committee throughout the remainder of your work. Decisions about distribution of this document will rest with your Search Committee and will also be influenced by practices in your Conference/Association office.



## DEVELOPING A CALL AGREEMENT AND COMPENSATION PACKAGE

### TO BE USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH SECTION FIVE

The compensation section of the Local Church Profile requires thoughtful and careful preparation by a group of church leaders. **Section Five contains a copy of the UCC Pastoral Call Agreement for Local Churches along with background material and resources needed for developing a compensation package and call agreement.** The compensation preparation is a two-step process: salary and housing amounts as well as a list of benefits must be clarified so they can be included in the Local Church Profile. At a later date, step two will involve detailed negotiations with the person chosen by the Search Committee as the final candidate.



### **Commitment to a Fair and Just Search Process**

The Local Church Profile asks your committee to answer the question, "Does your Search Committee or governing body have a policy against discrimination?" You are asked to answer "yes" or "no" and to write a comment. Responding to this question

provides an opportunity for your committee members to discuss your commitment to a fair and just process. The expectation of the United Church of Christ is that you will review Ministerial Profiles with a commitment to consider all applicants on the basis of their skills and gifts in the context of the criteria you have identified for your next pastor.

Your Search Committee materials include a DVD resource titled *"Sailing on Faith: Look Who God Sent."* This 25 minute production is based on the true story of the Search Committee at Kenilworth UCC in Buffalo; the story is told—from hindsight—by the members of that committee. Their challenging and faith-filled search process involved struggles, disappointments, surprise, and joy. A discussion guide accompanies the film. Viewing the film in the context of the subject of non-discrimination will demonstrate how one committee that remained open to God's leading was truly surprised by the Holy Spirit.



### **Publicizing Your Vacancy**

**Chaplain's  
See Page 7  
"Biblical  
Resources"**

When the Local Church Profile has been completed and a basic compensation package agreed on, your Conference/Association office will list your vacancy in the national document, United Church Employment Opportunities. Your committee members may view that employment listing on-line by accessing the UCC web page ([www.ucc.org](http://www.ucc.org)). Once on the UCC homepage, type "UCEM" into the search engine. You can also access the document by typing <http://www.ucc.org/classifieds/pdfs/UCEM.pdf> into your browser. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of each month, a new list of opportunities for clergy and laypersons is posted. There you will see that the listing asks for your church membership, type of position (pastor, associate pastor, etc.), and salary offered. In order to be listed, your committee will also need to draft a four-line "snapshot description" of your church and the qualities you seek in a pastor; that statement should be forwarded to your Conference/Association office. UCC candidates who are seeking new calls read the listings carefully each month. Anyone who is interested in your position will then contact your Conference/Association office; **candidates may not submit their ministerial profiles directly to your committee.** Please be wary of any candidate—whether from within the UCC or another denomination—who attempts to send material directly to your Search Committee. Refer all such inquiries to your UCC staff person.

Publicizing your pastoral position on the UCC website is an essential step in the Search and Call process. However, it is NOT desirable to attempt to seek candidates by advertising on the internet, in newspapers, or in other "public" settings. It is not in your church's best interests to open yourselves to unsolicited applications from candidates about whom you will have difficulty obtaining honest and reliable information. You have a covenantal responsibility to provide the safest possible environment for the children, youth, and adults who participate in your church. By remaining within the UCC Search and Call system, you can be assured that both an employment history and a criminal background check have been carried out for each candidate whose Ministerial Profile you receive. Your committee is also urged to use discretion in terms of the information

about the search process that is included in your own church's web site; posting updates for your members may be helpful, but you should emphasize that you are not open to unsolicited applications because you are receiving all Ministerial Profiles through your Conference/Association office.

### **Receiving Ministerial Profiles: Varied Practices**

At this point in the process—once the Local Church Profile has been completed and the vacancy listed nationally—the next steps in the Search and Call process will vary somewhat among Conferences and Associations; it will be important for your committee to work closely with your designated staff person to understand the procedures you will be following. (In some settings, you may be asked to prepare a one-page description of your church for distribution by your Conference/Association office; candidates will be expected to read that material and respond affirmatively to the Conference/Association before their Ministerial Profiles are forwarded to your Search Committee.)

In the midst of the varied practices, there is one **norm** that must be followed by all Conference/Association offices: a candidate who has completed a UCC Ministerial Profile, whose ecclesiastical credentials are in order, and who has followed the procedures of a particular Conference or Association has the right to have that profile submitted to any vacant church in the United Church of Christ. UCC staff are not allowed to withhold Ministerial Profiles from your Search Committee; our covenantal process assumes that your Search Committee can be trusted to make the best possible decision concerning pastoral leadership for your church.

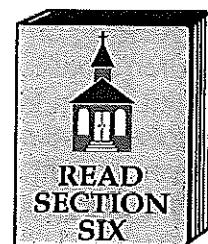
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## **READING UCC MINISTERIAL PROFILES**

### ***TO BE USED IN CONJUNCTION WITH SECTION SIX***

***Chaplain:  
See Page 10  
"Biblical  
Resources"***

It is astonishing to realize—as you begin to receive Ministerial Profiles—that the process of discerning the one God calls to serve your church may slowly “emerge” as the written material “comes alive” through your committee’s process of reading and discussion. You devoted many hours to the preparation of your Local Church profile; so, too, pastors and seminary



students devote many hours of prayerful reflection and hard work to the preparation of their Ministerial Profiles. **Section Six ("Reading Ministerial Profiles") includes a copy of the UCC Ministerial Profile along with a step-by-step guide to assist you in reading and reflecting on the profiles you will receive.** Careful study of **Section Six** is essential at this step in your process. You will also find a resource in that Section to help you in "rating" Ministerial Profiles (**Section 6 Resource #2**). **Pages 6-8 to 6-9 of Section Six** contain an addendum that will answer your questions about the process involved in obtaining profiles from candidates who serve as pastors in our partner denominations.

### **Communicating with Candidates**

Once your vacancy has been publicized in "United Church Employment Opportunities," your Conference/Association office will receive inquiries from interested candidates; the staff will correspond with those candidates and begin to gather Ministerial Profiles from clergy and seminarians who have expressed an interest in your position. (They may also initiate correspondence with candidates in order to develop a larger pool of applicants for your Search Committee.) Once your committee receives those Ministerial Profiles, all further communication with candidates is your responsibility. If you allow long periods of time to elapse without communication, applicants often assume you are not interested in their candidacy; and so they focus their energies on other churches.

You are responsible for:

- Acknowledging receipt of a candidate's Ministerial Profile as soon as possible. A simple note indicating receipt of his/her material—with a statement that you will be back in touch with them after your entire committee has had an opportunity to review the profile and reflect on it—is sufficient. Courtesy and promptness make a big difference. (See Sample Letter, **Resource # 5**)
- Determining when in your process you wish to send candidates a copy of your Local Church Profile and forwarding it to them.
- Promptly notifying candidates if they are no longer under consideration. (**Resource #6**)
- Informing candidates in whom you have "some interest" that you have read their profiles and will communicate with them every four-six weeks. (**Resource #7**)
- Informing candidates in whom you have "particular interest" that you will be back in touch within a few weeks and encouraging them to contact you if they have questions; include information about your next steps and overall timetable. (**Resource #8**)

While the sample resource letters are valuable "starting places" for your correspondence, please consider personalizing them to reflect the uniqueness of your particular Search Committee.

## FROM PAPER TO PEOPLE

### Viewing “Sailing on Faith: Look Who God Sent”

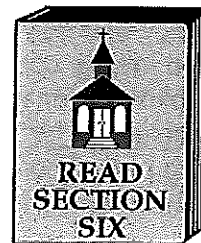
The UCC Resource, “Sailing on Faith: Look Who God Sent,” is described on 3-9. If you have not previously viewed the DVD/video, it will be very important to take a few moments and do so before you move on to next steps. Discussing the film will assist you in the process of discerning God’s will in the Search and Call process.



### Gathering Additional Information

**Section Six includes detailed suggestions for a specific process that will assist you in reading and prioritizing Ministerial Profiles.** When you have identified a small group of candidates in whom you have serious interest, you will want to gather additional information from them/about them before moving ahead.

You may request a tape of a sermon/worship service for your committee to hear and discuss. Most candidates are prepared for this request and will have one or two available; sermons may be video or audio, depending on the circumstances in which the sermon was delivered.



You may wish to schedule a preliminary telephone interview with some or all of your members present. Questions and conversation topics should be prepared ahead of time. Committees sometimes will use a speaker phone for such a telephone interview; it is important to remember that the situation is an awkward one for the candidate because you are in a position to observe one another's facial expressions and interactions while he/she cannot. Such a phone conversation may be useful (especially with geographically distant candidates) as your committee discerns whether to invite the candidate for a face-to-face interview. However, because of the artificiality of the situation, it may be wise not to base your decision to eliminate or retain a candidate solely on the experience of the telephone interview.

### Checking References

When you have identified several (often three to five) candidates you believe you wish to interview, then it will be wise to check the three phone references listed on the ministerial profile. A suggested process for the phone reference checks is found in **Resources #9A and 9B**. Remember that you may not violate the candidate's confidentiality by phoning persons other than the ones on the reference list. If you happen to know someone who attends the pastor's church or you have a

***Remember: at this point in the process, it is essential that you request your Conference/Association staff person to do a “Conference reference check” on any candidate you plan to interview.***

family member in that community, do not call and ask questions about the pastor. If you want additional phone references, ask the candidate for more names. If you have questions/concerns, ask your Conference/Association Minister.

**Remember: at this point in the process, it is essential that you request your Conference/Association staff person to do a "Conference reference check" on any candidate you plan to interview.** It is an accepted practice in the UCC for Conference/Association staff to check in with one another when a pastor is under serious consideration by a Search Committee in another Conference. The purpose of the reference check is to make certain that there are no factors in the pastor's present ministry situation that would make it difficult for that pastor to accept a call to a new congregation.

### **A Practice Interview**

When you have identified your interview questions and begun to set up face-to-face interviews, your Conference/Association staff person may recommend a practice interview. Often a neighboring pastor in a similar sized church will be asked by your staff person to serve as your candidate for this role play. Feedback from that individual will be invaluable as you seek to evaluate your process, your sense of "welcome," and the clarity of your interview questions.

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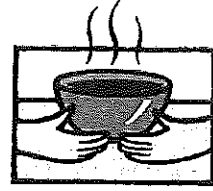
### **A Circular Search Process**

When the basic steps in the UCC Search and Call process are described, the first impression one receives is that it proceeds in a linear fashion: candidates apply; the committee reads and screens; the committee seeks additional information; the committee moves toward interviews. However, it is important to remember that while the committee is proceeding through the various steps with your first batch of profiles, you also continue to receive new applications. Thus while you are viewing a sermon tape for one candidate, preparing for a phone interview with another, and checking references on a third, new Ministerial Profiles will continue to arrive! Carefully tracking the status of each candidate may sometimes be a challenge. But each candidate deserves the same careful attention that you gave the first few. Somewhere in the midst of those whose names you have just received may be the one God sent! Evaluating new profiles while simultaneously finding time to implement steps with "earlier" candidates requires a renewed commitment on the part of each committee member.

When your committee believes you have received an adequate number of strong, viable, available candidates, you may ask your Conference/Association office to put a "hold" on all new profiles.

## **Hospitality**

Scripture offers us countless stories of individuals who experienced miraculous moments in the context of hospitality that was offered and received.



*Abraham and Sarah saw strangers coming from afar and prepared food immediately . . . only to discover that they were encountering "angels unawares" who predicted a miraculous pregnancy for the elderly Sarah.*

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*The people who gathered on the hillside to hear Jesus were hungry; the disciples wanted to send them away to a nearby village so they could buy food, but Jesus collected bread and fish from a child and provided nourishment for the entire group.*

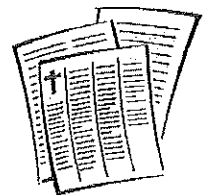
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*After the crucifixion, two followers traveling to Emmaus insisted that the stranger they met join them for a meal . . . and Jesus was revealed to them in the breaking of the bread.*

These Biblical acts of hospitality each created an environment where there was room for God to act in astonishing and unexpected ways. When your committee members relate graciously to candidates, when your hearts and minds are open to hope-filled possibilities, you will approach each personal interaction as a potentially "miraculous moment" rather than another step to be checked off on your progress chart.

## **INTERVIEW ARRANGEMENTS**

### **A Packet of Materials**

If you have not already done so, two-three weeks before the interview your committee should send a candidate a packet of material that provides additional background information on the church. Include two or three annual reports, a copy of the bylaws, a few newsletters, church bulletins, and any other relevant material. Churches sometimes have such documents on their web sites; if that is the case in your situation, such a mailing may not be necessary. However, it would still be important to ask a candidate if there is additional material that would be helpful in her or his preparation.



### **Where to Hold the Interview?**

The committee may choose a "private" room in the church, the living room of one of the committee members, or a community room (such as might be found in the town library). A cold room in the church basement conveys little sense of welcome! A comfortable place where there will be no interruptions is essential. Remember the commitment you have made to confidentiality, and be certain that church members do not "accidentally" encounter you and the candidate.

Both committee members and candidate should have clarity about the time frame and clear directions to the location.

Candidates and partners/spouses who come from a distance will need overnight accommodations. This expense is the responsibility of the church. Some candidates will prefer a motel room while others will appreciate the opportunity to be hosted by a member of the committee.

If a spouse/partner accompanies the candidate, it is important to have an informal social event so committee members can chat with him or her as well as with the candidate. A snack or light supper before the interview usually works best. Restaurant meals may offer delicious food but rarely give the candidate or spouse an opportunity to get to know more than one or two people seated nearby. The spouse/partner should not be present for the formal interview; someone whose confidentiality can be trusted (often someone from a committee member's family) should invite the spouse/partner to spend the interview time at their home.

### **Visiting the Church and Parsonage**

If the church owns a parsonage and it is occupied, arrangements should be made with the occupants for a showing of that home. It will also be necessary to walk through the church building during a time when other church activities have not been scheduled; encountering church members unexpectedly can create a very awkward situation. Unless they are already familiar with the area, most candidates will also want to spend some time becoming acquainted with the community.

### **Reimbursements**

Candidates will want to know when to expect reimbursement for their expenses; if a candidate has purchased an airline ticket, have the person send you documentation before the interview so you can have that check ready when you first meet the candidate. Motel costs, travel miles, meals, and other expenses should be reimbursed as promptly as possible. A form for submission of expenses is found in **Resource #10**.

## **INTERVIEWING**

**Chaplains:  
See Page 11  
"Biblical  
Resources"**

Interviewing offers an opportunity for Search Committee members and candidates to look at the whole ministry of your church. As such, the interview time is neither a casual conversation nor a rigidly designed "grilling" of the candidate. The goal is one you and the candidate hold in common: seeking the guidance of God in order to discern whether you and the pastor are being called by God to serve together in this one particular community of Christ's church. It is an awesome responsibility, and committees and candidates view it as the most important part of the search process. As such it deserves careful planning, thoughtful preparation, and gracious hospitality.



**Remember Throughout the Interview that This Is a Mutual Discernment Process.**

- Review the candidate's profile prior to the interview.
- Review your church's Local Church Profile.
- Wear name tags.
- Plan the interview questions carefully (**see Resource #11A "Interviewing Pitfalls"**).
- One person, usually the chair, should manage the flow of the interview.
- Pray together.
- Plan for no more than 1½ hours.
- Leave ample time for the candidate's questions of your committee.
- Listen.
- Ask questions for clarification but do not argue with the candidate.
- Avoid the danger of "side conversations" with one another.
- Be honest about the church.
- Know the duties, expectations, salary and benefits of the position.
- Take notes.
- Treat all candidates fairly.
- Be clear about your time frame and your next steps.
- Never offer the position to a candidate during the interview.



**Organizing Your Questions**

**Resources #11B and 11C** offer a list of possible topics and questions for an interview. The list is lengthy, and your committee should be selective in identifying the essential questions you intend to address to each candidate. Divide the questions among the committee members so that those most interested in a particular topic/issue can ask those specific questions. In addition, you should identify specific questions that relate only to that particular candidate based on your reading of the individual's profile.

**At the Conclusion of the Interview**

Before beginning a post-interview evaluation, spend a few minutes in silence jotting down your impressions, noting the places where the candidate seemed to particularly meet the gifts and skills your committee had identified; make a list of topics where there

was a lack of clarity. Initially your individual reflections should be shared without comment from others until each member of the committee has spoken; such a process ensures that more reserved members will have an opportunity to summarize their notes before the more verbal members begin talking/evaluating. If at all possible, do not make a definite decision until you have gone home, prayed, reviewed the candidate's materials again, and returned for the next meeting.

### **Worshipping with a Candidate**

**Chaplains:  
See Page 13  
"Biblical  
Resources"**

You will now be ready to experience your candidates as worship leaders. It is likely that you may have eliminated one or more ministerial candidates after a cycle of interviews. Contact each remaining candidate and express your desire to hear her/him lead worship. Most pastors do not want their parishioners to know of their search. Visit the church where the candidate presently serves only with that person's permission. If you do have permission, be unobtrusive about your visit. Do not sit together. Do not arrive together as a committee of nine! Sometimes a candidate will ask that the committee send only two or three persons on any given Sunday.

Often the committee and candidate will agree to worship together in a "neutral" congregation. Your committee would attend a church in your region where arrangements have already been made for your candidate to preach. Setting up neutral pulpits often is arranged by the Conference/Association office. Remember that it is difficult for a pastor to arrange a Sunday off in order to preach in a neutral setting. Because of that, be certain you limit your requests for neutral pulpits to those candidates whom you consider to be finalists. (Note: if you are interviewing a candidate from another part of the country, you will want to follow a slightly different schedule to save expenses. Both your first interview and the neutral pulpit should be on the same weekend.) When you travel to a church for a neutral pulpit, remember your confidentiality commitment; you may not bring family members with you nor should you reveal to people in your church where the neutral pulpit is taking place.



Candidates should never be invited to preach in your congregation. Only your final, recommended candidate will lead worship and preach in your church.

### **DISCERNMENT**

**Chaplains:  
See Page 15  
"Biblical  
Resources"**

Nehemiah's story reminds your committee to consider the ways in which your church has been "rebuilt" during the interim time; such a reflection on recent changes within your own faith community should be part of your conversation as you discuss, evaluate, and pray about the persons you have interviewed.

To discern is to seek to understand God's will for a particular situation. **Resource #12** contains a Biblical reflection that will aid you in discovering how your committee is being led to a decision to select one or two finalists.

### **Second Interviews**

It is usually customary to invite two candidates to return for second interviews. Because you have already become acquainted, this second time together is designed to be more focused on particular topics that will assist both parties in deepening the relationship with one another and discerning whether God is calling this candidate to your church. The agenda for a second interview sometimes varies from one candidate to another. There may be unfinished topics from the first interview that you or the candidate wish to explore. There may be some important questions you simply did not get to in the initial interview. There may be specific questions related to the proposed time frame or the compensation package. Again it is suggested that your committee not offer your position to either candidate until you have had an opportunity to "debrief." The process of quietly writing a few notes and then sharing them with the group will also serve you well during second interviews. **Resource #12** (Discernment) may be helpful once again as you seek God's guidance before making this significant decision.

### **Offering the Call**

Procedures and practices for specifically offering the call to a "recommended candidate" vary from one locale to another. Your Search Committee may be expected to make your recommendation to the governing board, and that body will then extend the invitation to the recommended candidate. Or your committee itself may be authorized to pick up the phone and tell a candidate that she/he has been selected. The candidate may respond immediately or may ask for time to prayerfully consider the offer; it is important that there be clarity about the time frame. Until you receive a definite response from the candidate, maintain your confidentiality and do not tell the congregation that your committee has made a decision.

***Until you receive a definite response from the candidate, maintain your confidentiality and do not tell the congregation that your committee has made a decision.***

### **Final Negotiations**

Once your candidate accepts your invitation (pending financial negotiations), it will then be time to enter into final negotiations. Someone from your committee (and often representatives of the governing board) will meet with the candidate and review the proposed Call and Compensation agreement. **(Section Five)** As needed, adjustments will be made. A start date will also be discussed. Often the financial arrangements involve several phone calls back and forth as particular requests and needs are

discussed. When the negotiations are final and the document ready to be signed on the candidating Sunday, then a mutually agreed upon date for the candidating weekend will be identified.

### **Meeting with the Committee on Ministry**

Some Conferences/Associations have a standard practice of scheduling a Committee on Ministry meeting with the selected candidate before the name is announced to the congregation. Such a practice results in the church and candidate both knowing that there will be no future concerns about the transfer of this person's ecclesiastical credentials. Your staff person will inform your committee if a Committee on Ministry meeting is an expected part of your process.

### **Informing the Congregation**

The call to the congregational meeting should include background information on the candidate, her/his family, experience in ministry, and educational background. It is helpful to share the enthusiasm of the Search Committee by including comments that will indicate the ways in which this candidate possesses the skills and gifts identified in the Local Church Profile. A reflection on the spiritual journey the committee traveled is often included. The letter also should contain specific information about the arrangements for the candidating weekend and an indication of the start date.  
**(See Resource #13)**

***If you wish to announce  
the date for the  
candidating Sunday on  
your church web page,  
do not reveal the name  
or other specific  
information about the  
candidate.***

If you wish to announce the date for the candidating Sunday on your church web page, **do not** reveal the name or other specific information about the candidate. Information about the candidate belongs in an all-member mailing but not in a setting where people "around the world" may discover it. Remember that a pastor cannot resign from her/his present position until after the new congregation has actually voted to extend a call.

### **Preparations for Candidating Weekend**

This weekend should be a time for "getting acquainted" as well as conducting the formal business needed to meet your bylaw requirements for calling a pastor. Both the pastor and the church members will want to have a time for socializing before they join together in worship.

Informal gatherings will offer an opportunity for the pastor to share a bit about her/his background, special interests, faith journey, and perspectives on this new opportunity. These occasions should not have the context or feeling of a "formal interview." The pastor's family members may also be given an opportunity to tell about themselves.



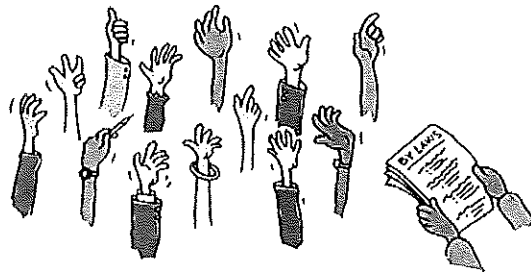
Churches can be creative about the weekend arrangements in order to offer one or more possibilities for members to meet the candidate in a personal way. Be certain the schedule is not so full that it will exhaust the pastor! Options for one or more informal events include:

- all church dinner Saturday night;
- coffee times with the pastor at a couple of designated hours on Saturday;
- a gathering specifically for members of boards and committees;
- lunch with the youth.

The candidate will want to be involved in designing the worship service within the context of the church's standard worship format. Following the worship service, someone should be designated to spend time with the pastor and family in another area of the church or even a nearby home. They will wait there until the conclusion of the congregational meeting. If your church has a tradition of meeting for this purpose at some time other than immediately after worship, arrangements should be made with the candidate so she/he will know when to expect the information about the call.

#### **Suggested Process for the Congregational Meeting:**

- meeting is called to order;
- prayer for guidance is offered;
- a motion is presented to extend the call and approve the compensation arrangements following the Search Committee report and discussion;
- Search Committee presents a thorough report summarizing its search process;
- Search Committee members describe the particular reasons they were led to choose this candidate;
- Search Committee members respond to questions;
- compensation agreement/terms of the call are presented;
- additional questions;
- a time of prayerful discernment;
- congregation votes on the motion according to its bylaw procedures.



The interim pastor should not be present during this meeting. It is often the custom for the interim to have the weekend off.

Assuming an affirmative vote, the pastor and family return to the congregation where the pastor is given an opportunity for a brief response to the congregation's action. The

covenant should be signed that same day and a copy mailed to the Conference/ Association.

## CONCLUDING THE SEARCH/PREPARING FOR THE NEW PASTOR

### Next Steps for the Search Committee

*Chaplains:  
See Page 17  
"Biblical  
Resources"*

During the following weeks, the Search Committee chair will work closely with the new pastor to finalize moving plans and other arrangements. The church should be prepared to offer assistance (if requested!) by hosting the pastor while he/she is house-hunting. If the church owns a parsonage, the Property Committee/Trustees and members of the governing board may also be involved in clarifying such issues as parsonage repairs, renovations, and availability. The pastor and pastor's family should be consulted before any redecorating decisions are made. If there is a church office, discussion will take place about needed renovations. Pastors will be expected to obtain bids for moving expenses, and you will want to clarify financial arrangements for all move-related expenses.

A dinner together for the Search Committee members is a wonderful way of reflecting on your spiritual journey; it also offers opportunity for members to express gratitude to one another.

### Next Steps for the Governing Board

With the excitement of a newly called pastor, it is often possible to overlook the needs of your Interim Pastor. Interim pastors know that they have done their work faithfully when church members are focused on and excited about future possibilities for ministry and mission. But, in the midst of the joy, an important relationship is also coming to an end. There will be a sense of loss on the part of the Interim Pastor and the congregation. The grieving process needs to be acknowledged and the pastor's ministry in your midst celebrated. An Exit Interview is one way to move toward closure. In **Section One Resources #3, 4, and 5** you will find suggested Exit Interview designs for a "settled" pastor; one of these can easily be adapted for the interim setting by including an emphasis on specific goals that were identified for the transition time. Plans should be made for a thank-you/farewell celebration that provides an opportunity for gift-giving and expressions of gratitude. The liturgy of farewell for an interim should be used on the final Sunday. (**Resource #14**) If the interim has served for an unusually long time (two years or more), it may be helpful to have a small break with a few weeks of Sunday pulpit supply between the time the Interim Pastor leaves and the first Sunday the new minister conducts worship.

## **Installation**

The UCC Book of Worship describes the Order for Installation of a New Pastor in the following way:

*"In this order the Association, at the request of a local church, confirms and celebrates the covenant between a local church and a newly called pastor and teacher and reaffirms the covenantal relationship of all the churches in the Association. In planning the service, set the time so that people from other churches within the Association, representatives of other Christian communions, and guests from synagogues or other communities of faith may participate."*



An installation service may be scheduled by the Association quite soon after the pastor's arrival or after the new ministry has been underway for several months. Because the Association conducts the installation service at the request of the local church, the setting of the date is dependent on the Association's schedule (for other ecclesiastical events) as well as the local church calendar. The installation service offers a joyous opportunity for the congregation to celebrate the conclusion of a search process, to give thanks for new pastoral leadership, and to welcome the new pastor to the community, the Association, and the Conference.

*Note: All scripture passages are taken from The New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.*

***"I am confident of this,  
that the one who began a good work among you  
will bring it to completion...."***

***(Phil 1:6a)***

United Church of Christ  
**SEARCH AND CALL**  
A Pilgrimage through  
Transitions and New Beginnings

**SECTION THREE**  
**THE SEARCH AND CALL PROCESS**  
in  
**The United Church of Christ**

**RESOURCES**

*"I am confident of this,  
that the one who began a good work among you  
will bring it to completion...."  
Philippians 1:6a*



## **LITANY FOR COMMISSIONING A PASTORAL SEARCH COMMITTEE**

**Resource 1**

**Invitation**     *(President/Moderator/Chair of the governing board invites members of the Search Committee to come forward; each one is introduced.)*

**The Word**     1 Corinthians 12:4-12

### **Response**

**President:**     There are different gifts.

**People:**       **BUT IT IS THE SAME SPIRIT WHO GIVES THEM.**

**President:**     Each one is given a gift by the Spirit.

**People:**       **TO BE USED FOR THE COMMON GOOD.**

### **Address to the Committee Members:**

Sisters and Brothers, you have committed yourselves to a significant leadership task on behalf of the entire congregation. In recognition of the importance of your work, we pause to express our gratitude and to remind ourselves that you do not undertake this task alone; you will be guided by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, the prayerful support of the members of this church, and the assistance of the United Church of Christ through the Association and Conference.

### **Covenant**

Committee Members: We, who are serving on the Search Committee for \_\_\_\_\_ (name of Church), promise to perform faithfully the vital task of searching for a new pastor. We pledge, with God's guidance and your prayers, to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit in all we do, say, and decide.

We will endeavor:

to establish a harmonious working relationship within our committee;

to maintain consistent attendance at our Search Committee meetings;

to be open and patient listeners to each other and to the congregation;

to listen carefully to your hopes and dreams as we consult with you, the members, in the development of a description of our church community and the style of pastoral leadership we seek;

to maintain strict confidentiality in all we read, say, and hear—protecting both the privacy of each other and of potential candidates;

to review all profiles with open minds and hearts, treating all candidates fairly and justly;  
to seek decisions not made by majority rule, but by the coming together of minds, hearts, and souls in a consensus that will build a firm foundation for the effective future mission and ministry of this church.

**People:**

**WE PLEDGE, AS A GATHERED COMMUNITY OF FAITH, TO BE PATIENT WITH YOU AND TO RESPECT YOUR NEED TO BE CONFIDENTIAL IN YOUR TASK. WE RECOGNIZE THAT THE WORK OF OUR SEARCH COMMITTEE IS A DIFFICULT ASSIGNMENT AND WILL TAKE MUCH EFFORT. WE PRAY FOR YOU AND OFFER OUR SUPPORT AND WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT THROUGHOUT THIS TIME.**

**THESE THINGS WE PROMISE IN THE HOPE AND BELIEF THAT YOU WILL BE OBEDIENT TO THE GUIDANCE OF THE SPIRIT AS YOU SEEK A NEW PASTOR TO MINISTER WITH US.**

**Closing Prayer:**

*(An appropriate closing prayer may be offered by the Interim Pastor or the President/Moderator/Governing Body Chair.)*

*(Adapted, Rhode Island and Connecticut Conferences)*

## **COVENANTING AROUND THE PASTORAL SEARCH PROCESS**

### **Resource 2**

As your congregation undergoes the search for new pastoral leadership, the staff and congregations composing our \_\_\_\_\_ Conference/Association family of the United Church of Christ covenant with you in the following ways:

We promise to:

1. Provide spiritual and moral support to your fellowship during this interim period between past and future pastoral leadership.
2. Provide names of qualified clergy persons whom the congregation may wish to consider to serve as Interim Minister.
3. Assist in your search for new pastoral leadership by
  - a) advertising your vacancy nationally,
  - b) introducing tested denominational materials to aid in your search,
  - c) instructing the Search Committee as to how it may best use these resources,
  - d) seeking potential candidates.
4. Furnish information regarding salary, housing, and benefit guidelines as well as arrangements operative in other congregations of comparable size within the Conference family.
5. Evaluate the Local Church Profile before it is circulated among potential candidates, suggesting ways in which it might be strengthened.
6. Share other materials and information as requested by the Search Committee, or as may be deemed helpful by the Conference/Association Staff Person.
7. Supply ministerial profiles for all candidates who request that their names be shared with the Search Committee, as well as those suggested by the staff person, upon obtaining the candidate's permission.
8. Instruct the Search Committee as to how best to study and evaluate a ministerial profile, make a comparative analysis of such a profile, and develop a ranking system.
9. Offer a personal and candid evaluation of any candidate upon request. If additional information is needed about the final list of candidates, the staff person will do whatever research is necessary to gather the missing data.
10. Be responsive to all other requests of the Search Committee and congregation for additional assistance.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Conference/Association Staff Person

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

The Search Committee of \_\_\_\_\_, United Church of Christ, agrees as its responsibility to our mutual covenant, to the following:

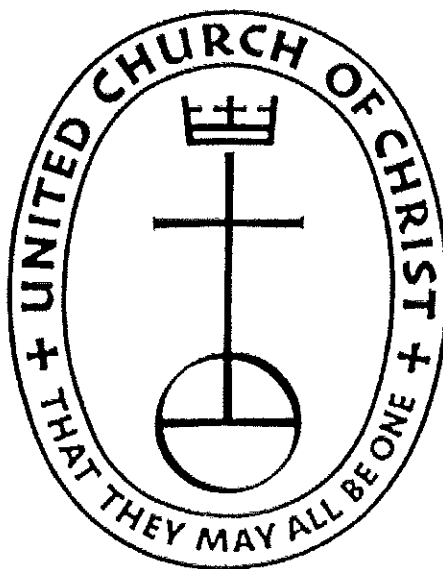
1. Interpret to the congregation why the Interim Minister will not be considered as a candidate for the pastoral leadership position.
2. Complete the Congregational Profile as carefully, accurately and rapidly as possible, having sought input of the whole congregation.
3. Correspond at least twice with each candidate whose profile we have received:
  - a) to confirm that we have received the profile and are considering it;
  - b) to notify candidates no longer under consideration as soon as that decision is made.
4. Consider only clergy persons recognized as having professional standing within the United Church of Christ or those non-UCC clergy persons who have been granted a current privilege of call by an Association within the United Church of Christ.
5. Inform the Conference/Association Staff Person of all names of candidates received independently of the Conference Office; cease interaction with such candidates and inform them that you will only consider those profiles and applications which come through the UCC office.
6. Strictly respect the confidentiality of the candidates, and maintain that confidentiality in discussions with others outside the Search Committee.
7. Give equal consideration to all candidates regardless of their age, race, gender, nationality, marital status, or sexual orientation.
8. Schedule face to face interviews with candidates only after the Conference/Association Minister has been requested to secure references from other Conference Staff.
9. Invite only the Search Committee's recommended candidate to preach before your congregation.
10. Consult with the Conference/Association Staff Person before making revisions in the recommended pastoral search process.
11. Keep both congregation and Conference/Association Staff Person regularly apprised of our progress, seeking clarification and counsel when needed.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chairperson, Pastoral Search Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

*(Adapted, Michigan Conference and Minnesota Conference Pastoral Search Covenants)*

# United Church of Christ



## Biblical Resources for Search Committees

*Also available in its original format at  
<http://www.ucc.org/ministers/pdfs/brsc.pdf>*

# Biblical Resources for Search Committees

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## **AN INVITATION TO THE SEARCH COMMITTEE**

### **Suggestions for Use of This Resource**

The search process in the United Church of Christ is an astonishing blend of employment work and spiritual work. Seeking to hire a well-qualified pastor, you will identify qualities and skills you desire in your new employee, and you will conduct yourselves professionally as you advertise, recruit, read applications, and interview candidates. While you follow these steps, you also are on a spiritual journey. What you do is much more than recruitment and hiring work, for you affirm that God is an active force in this search process. You seek to choose the candidate you believe God desires for your congregation. It is that dimension of God's active participation in the process which makes your task quite different from any other kind of personnel activity.

The candidates you will interview go through exactly the same delicate process. They are "job searching," looking for situations that will offer adequate compensation, healthy work environments, professional growth, and communities that are comfortable for their families; at the same time, they too seek to discern God's will for their next ministry.

In the church, we use the word "call" to reflect that distinct blend of practical and spiritual issues. The local congregation does not "hire" a new pastor but "calls" a pastor; that call process comes in response to a careful and business-like search combined with a strong sense of God's leading. The pastor does not seek a new "job" but rather enters into an employment process whose end result will be rooted in God's call to a new ministry.

Your Search Committee resources prepare you well to do the personnel portions of your work. By utilizing scripture passages and reflection questions, these devotions enable you to develop a pattern of intentionally speaking "faith language" as you go about your work. You will have structured opportunities to talk frankly about your understanding of God's will for your church. At every step of the process, you will be encouraged to "ask the God question."

The work of a Search Committee is demanding and time-consuming. You may be tempted to avoid the faith conversations suggested by these devotions. But learning together to listen to God is indeed the "real" work of your committee.

## **THE ROLE OF THE CHAPLAIN**

The Conference and Association suggest that your committee select a chairperson, a secretary/scribe, and a chaplain. The chaplain should be someone who enjoys scripture, is sensitive to group dynamics, and is willing to invest the time necessary to study the various devotional pieces and share them with the committee. Two of the sessions are designed to last approximately one hour; the first is a "get acquainted/community building" time; the second occurs as you begin to read ministerial profiles. The shorter reflections may be used as 10-15 minute opening devotions whenever your committee moves to a new stage of the search process.

## YOUR SEARCH COMMITTEE BEGINS ITS WORK

### We Each Bring a Story

*"...Are you envious because I am generous?"*

*(Mathew 20:15b)*

*(45-60 minutes)*

Each pastoral Search Committee offers a mini-picture of the total congregation. Among you are some life long members as well as newer members; you also represent various ages and arenas of church involvement. You may come from a variety of religious backgrounds; some of you may have had no formal religious involvement until recently. A few of you may have had previous experience serving on a pastoral Search Committee while others feel bewildered about the upcoming process. Some of you will approach this Search Committee work analytically while others will use intuition and feelings to aid in the discernment process. Whether you are a choir member or the treasurer, a recent confirmand, part of the retired men's group, a person with extensive experience in personnel matters or a newcomer to this work, you are a member of this committee because you care deeply about the ministry of this particular church and the quality of pastoral leadership needed to carry out that ministry.

Because you will be working together for a period of 9-18 months, you will find it beneficial to become acquainted with one another at a deeper faith level than may customarily happen in church meetings. A four-step process is suggested.

**First**, take three-four minutes for each person to share both his/her religious background and current involvement with this particular congregation. Rather than simply listing committees on which you have served, talk about what energizes you, what discourages you, what hopes and dreams you have. You may want to tell something amusing about your first memory of this congregation. Try to include one piece of information that others in the room may not know.

**Second**, go around the group again and invite the members to relate an experience when they felt the closeness of God's Presence; (such experiences might include the Christmas Eve service, a period of illness or loss of a family member, the birth of a child, etc.)

**Third**, the chaplain or person leading this meditation time should briefly summarize what you have learned about yourselves as a group after listening to these personal histories.

**Fourth**, read together **Mathew 20:1-16**. This story is one of the most challenging and difficult of all the parables Jesus shared. A first reaction is usually expressed with the simple words, "But it's not fair!" In your Search Committee discussion, focus less on the economics of the parable than on the image of God's relationship with us; remember that Jesus frames the story to emphasize the giver rather than the gift.

- How do you feel about the "picture" of God presented in this parable?
- Are you angered by God's generosity?
- How can this story help you develop common understandings about respecting one another and listening to one another?



**PRAYER:** *God of surprises, we are astonished by your overflowing love. We offer you thanks that—through many different routes—we each have come to an experience of faith in you. We rejoice in the fact that we are equally valued by you, whether we have been life long followers of your Son Jesus or whether we have come to our faith very recently. May we rely on your guidance as we begin to work together in this committee. In Christ's name, Amen.*

### Matthew 20: 1-16

<sup>1</sup> For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup> When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace <sup>4</sup> and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went. <sup>5</sup> When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock he did the same. <sup>6</sup> And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" <sup>7</sup> They said to him, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, "you also go into the vineyard." <sup>8</sup> When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." <sup>9</sup> When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage. <sup>10</sup> Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage. <sup>11</sup> And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, <sup>12</sup> saying, "these last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." <sup>13</sup> But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? <sup>14</sup> Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give you. <sup>15</sup> Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? **Or are you envious because I am generous?"** <sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first will be last.

## BEGINNING DATA GATHERING FOR YOUR LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE

### Understanding Our Church Family

*"Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."  
(Mark 3:35)*

During these first weeks together, your committee will be asked to spend a great deal of time gathering data, conducting a survey and exploring perspectives on your congregation. The process may feel time-consuming and frustrating. But the work you do at this stage is essential because it will enable you to understand the unique characteristics of your congregation and to interpret them effectively to prospective candidates.

#### Read Mark 3:31-35

Jesus reminds us that all family ties are subordinate to attentiveness to God's will. In your work as a Search Committee, you might use these verses from Mark to help you reflect on the question: who is it who makes up our family of faith? Congregations committed to urban ministry may view their constituency as a community far more extensive than the membership rolls. Congregations in communities experiencing rapid demographic changes may be exploring ways of welcoming and incorporating a more diverse population. In many small towns, the church pastor is expected to provide a ministry to the entire community. It will be important for your group to have some clear definition of your own understanding of the pastor's relationship to the wider community. Whatever the size of the church, outreach to the community and mission/service within the community are both essential to the church's ministry. It will be your task to talk honestly about how that outreach is balanced between the pastor and the people.

- What do you believe Jesus meant when he made this statement?
- Do these words of Jesus give you any help in describing the unique qualities of your particular church?

#### **Mark 3:31-35**

Then his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside, they sent to him and called him.

<sup>32</sup> A crowd was sitting around him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers and sisters are outside asking for you." <sup>33</sup> And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" <sup>34</sup> And looking at those who sat around him, he said, "Here are my mother and brothers!" <sup>35</sup> **Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother."**

*Prayer: It is far too easy, O God, to forget that we first joined the church because we wanted to learn more about you and do your will. As members of this committee, we ask for your guidance as we seek to discern your will; help us to know where you would lead us, to know what work you call us to do. Broaden us, challenge us, for we remember that the work we do describing our church is designed to reflect your glory. In Christ's name, Amen.*

## COMPLETING YOUR FIRST DRAFT OF THE LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE

### Reflections on Truth Telling

*"...you will know the truth,  
and the truth will make you free."  
(John 8:32)*

Completing the first draft of your Local Church Profile has required both diligent individual work and teamwork. Data has been gathered and processed, questions have been discussed. Sometimes it has felt tedious, sometimes frustrating, occasionally very revealing. Some of the questions about congregational history and future goals may have received input from the entire membership. As you move toward completing the document, it will be vital that the material reflect the perspectives of the whole committee.

Truth telling is not easy. You want to present a positive view of your church because you want to attract strong and committed pastoral candidates. You do not want to be deceptive, and it is sometimes difficult to determine "how much" to tell. Every church experiences conflict. Every church has unpleasant "skeletons in the closet." Discussions about your history and the process of describing that history in a written form will probably present some difficult moments for your committee; these discussions will also offer you the opportunity to create common understandings that will be very beneficial when you begin interviewing candidates.

Even as you seek to be candid about the not so good, perhaps even harmful, events in your history, don't forget to be proud of your achievements. Celebrating the work you do in the name of Christ is not bragging; rather it is witnessing to the power of Christ's Spirit working in your midst.

### Read John 8:31-32

- Share with one another what you think Jesus means by "If you continue in my word..."
- Give some concrete examples of how the truth can set us free.
- If a previous pastor has been asked to leave by your church leaders or your whole congregation, how do Jesus' words apply to your perspective on that situation?
- If a previous pastor has been involved in inappropriate or unethical behavior, how do Jesus' words apply to your perspective on that situation?

### **John 8:31-32**

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; 32 **and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."**

*Prayer: O God of truth, help us in our desire to take risks. Set us free from those things which bind us in order that we may be free for the new life Christ offers. Give us strength and courage to face difficult truths in order to free our church to follow your Son more fully. Let your peacefulness surround us even as we remember that Jesus did not avoid honest anger and confrontation. In our Savior's name, Amen*

## PUBLICIZING YOUR VACANCY

### Facing Our Fears As We Move Forward

*"The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?  
The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?"  
(Psalm 27:1)*

#### Read Psalm 27

Psalm 27 is both a cry for help from God and a song that reflects absolute trust in God. The psalm evokes a wide variety of emotions because it paradoxically acknowledges our deep fears and our absolute belief that God is with us. God is our strength and God will not abandon us in the midst of our fears. Take some time to read all of Psalm 27 aloud. You may want to identify the verses that seem to speak most directly to your current committee discussions.

- What are your greatest fears as you begin to receive applications for your position?
- What are the greatest fears of the congregation?
- If you have a recent pastorate that has been difficult, how does that history impact your fears?

***Prayer: Strengthen us in the midst of our fears, O God. Remind us again and again that nothing can overwhelm us if we remember to turn to you. Give us courage to sing; give us joy as we embark—with you—on the next phase of our important work. Amen.***

#### Psalm 27

**The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?** <sup>2</sup> When evildoers assail me to devour my flesh--my adversaries and foes--they shall stumble and fall. <sup>3</sup> Though an army encamp against me, my heart shall not fear; though war rise up against me, yet I will be confident. <sup>4</sup> One thing I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: to live in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple. <sup>5</sup> For he will hide me in his shelter in the day of trouble; he will conceal me under the cover of his tent; he will set me high on a rock. <sup>6</sup> Now my head is lifted up above my enemies all around me, and I will offer in his tent sacrifices with shouts of joy; I will sing and make melody to the Lord. <sup>7</sup> Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me! <sup>8</sup> "Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, Lord, do I seek. <sup>9</sup> Do not hide your face from me. Do not turn your servant away in anger, you who have been my help. Do not cast me off, do not forsake me, O God of my salvation! <sup>10</sup> If my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me up. <sup>11</sup> Teach me your way, O Lord, and lead me on a level path because of my enemies. <sup>12</sup> Do not give me up to the will of my adversaries, for false witnesses have risen against me, and they are breathing out violence. <sup>13</sup> I believe that I shall see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. <sup>14</sup> Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!

## DECISION-MAKING

Reflections on Decision-making  
(45-60 minutes)

*"Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people,  
able to discern between good and evil....  
(I Kings 3:9a)*

### Read I Kings 3:3-14

You have now finished your congregational description; your position is being advertised, and you are beginning to read profile material from candidates. It would be very helpful to devote one meeting during this period to your own spiritual nurture. If you have not done so before, it is time to come to agreement about the process you will follow in your decision-making.

Your committee now has an opportunity to reflect together on the wisdom that you will need to make careful decisions about candidates. Such wisdom comes from being attentive to the Holy Spirit and to one another. Wisdom in scripture is seen as a companion, a quality of the heart as well as the head. As committee members, you may wish, like Solomon, to ask God to give you wise and discerning minds.

Reflect together briefly on this passage from I Kings. Then enter into a discussion, facilitated by your chaplain, of different patterns of decision-making. This "waiting period" is the perfect time to evaluate how you are working together, how you are listening to one another, and how you will make decisions. Think back to your first or your second meeting and spend some time evaluating how you are functioning now. After you have had discussion on this topic, focus on the following questions.

- What do you understand the word "consensus" to mean? Is it possible for someone to disagree with a particular decision and still support the work of the committee?

### I Kings 3:3-14

Solomon loved the Lord, walking in the statutes of his father David; only, he sacrificed and offered incense at the high places. <sup>4</sup> The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the principal high place; Solomon used to offer a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. <sup>5</sup> At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, "Ask what I should give you." <sup>6</sup> And Solomon said, "You have shown great and steadfast love to your servant my father David, because he walked before you in faithfulness, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart toward you; and you have kept for him this great and steadfast love, and have given him a son to sit on his throne today. <sup>7</sup> And now, O Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, although I am only a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. <sup>8</sup> And your servant is in the midst of the people whom you have chosen, a great people, so numerous they cannot be numbered or counted. <sup>9</sup> **Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil;** for who can govern this your great people?" <sup>10</sup> It pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this. <sup>11</sup> God said to him, "Because you have asked this, and have not asked for yourself long life or riches, or for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern what is right, <sup>12</sup> I now do according to your word. Indeed I give you a wise and discerning mind; no one like you has been before you and no one like you shall arise after you. <sup>13</sup> I give you also what you have not asked, both riches and honor all your life; no other king shall compare with you. <sup>14</sup> If you will walk in my ways, keeping my statutes and my commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your life."

- What are the dangers of “voting” on candidates and letting the majority rule?
- What will you do if one member truly discerns God’s will in a way that is different from the others?
- How will you maintain confidentiality about your various candidates?

*Prayer: When Solomon became King of Israel, his one request of God was that he be given “an understanding mind,” the wisdom to discern between good and evil. May Solomon’s prayer be our prayer, gracious God. Amen.*

## READING CANDIDATE PROFILES

"Can You See Anything?"

*"I can see people, but they look like trees, walking."  
(Mark 8:24)*

### Read Mark 8:22-26

This healing episode, recorded only in Mark's gospel, is a peculiar little story. The man is indeed healed of his blindness, but the process is slow. His vision is restored in stages. Jesus appeared to need extra time to allow the man's vision to develop; only then could the man see with absolute clarity.

So it is with the process of reading profiles. It is sometimes overwhelming, and there is a tendency to have difficulty differentiating among candidates. At times you may feel concerned about the lack of extensive parish experience among your candidates. You may be seeking particular administrative skills or you may have identified preaching as a high priority, and the qualifications of candidates do not seem to match your expectations. Sometimes it is discouraging because there simply are too few applicants.

Reading and re-reading this little healing episode can be very instructive for your Search Committee. Even with Jesus' best efforts, the man's vision was still distorted. The healing took longer than expected. Even for Jesus, the process of carrying out God's will was slow. Yet, at the end of this little account, the author of Mark says, "...he saw everything clearly." Relying on God's grace and guidance, so will you.

- What can you learn from this story that will help you read profiles carefully?
- What are the dangers of "rushing" the reading process, hurrying to find the "right" one?
- How will you know when you have found candidates who seem to "fit" your church setting?

*Prayer: Gracious God, we remember that your Son needed to take time with the blind man from Bethsaida before the man could see clearly. Give us patience. Give us wisdom. Give us insight. May we rely on you and you alone for our clarity of vision. In the name of the one who heals, even Jesus Christ our Savior, Amen.*

### Mark 8:22-26

They came to Bethsaida. Some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch him.<sup>23</sup> He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village; and when he had put saliva on his eyes and laid his hands on him, he asked him, "Can you see anything?"<sup>24</sup> **And the man looked up and said, "I can see people, but they look like trees, walking."**<sup>25</sup> Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again; and he looked intently and his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.<sup>26</sup> Then he sent him away to his home, saying, "Do not even go into the village."

## PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS

### Anticipating Seeing Candidates "Face To Face"

*"...for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart."*

*(1 Samuel 16:7)*

#### Read 1 Samuel 16: 1-13

Samuel was instructed by God to seek out the man named Jesse, a resident of Bethlehem, and to anoint one of Jesse's sons to be King of Israel. As the sons of Jesse paraded in front of Samuel, the prophet assumed that God would want him to anoint the tallest, the most handsome of the sons. But God said,

"Samuel, don't think Eliab is the one just because he's tall and handsome. He isn't the one I have chosen. People judge others by what they look like, but I judge people by what is in their hearts."

Each is rejected. Eventually Samuel asks Jesse to send for his last remaining son, a young boy who is taking care of the sheep. And he, David, is the one God chooses to be the new King.

One of the most difficult challenges during the interview process is treating candidates fairly. Sometimes it is difficult to determine what is in the heart of a person because we stumble over the person's age, or gender, or race, or sexual orientation, or weight, or disability, or outer appearance. Each of us has a mental picture of the candidate we had imagined; then we are faced with the reality of interviewing individuals (or clergy couples) who may be quite different. Judging—not by outer appearance but by what is in the heart—is a great challenge and can only be done with wisdom and insight that comes from honest sharing with one another and prayerful time with God.

#### 1 Samuel 16:1-13

The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." <sup>2</sup> Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.' <sup>3</sup> Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." <sup>4</sup> Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" <sup>5</sup> He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. <sup>6</sup> When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." <sup>7</sup> But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; **for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.**" <sup>8</sup> Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." <sup>9</sup> Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." <sup>10</sup> Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." <sup>11</sup> Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." <sup>12</sup> He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." <sup>13</sup> Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.



As you read the story from I Samuel, notice how the tension builds. Everyone is waiting. God wants Samuel to choose the one with the "right heart." Eliab passes by. And Abinadab. And Shammah. And then four more unnamed sons pass by. And Samuel says, "The Lord has not chosen **any** of these." The eighth son is summoned from the fields, and the whole group must have waited a long time for his arrival. Young, not a soldier, clearly inexperienced and unqualified, dirty, and yet God says, "...this is the one."

Obviously you seek a well-qualified candidate. But the power of this story lies in its ability to remind you that God's choice may be the unlikely candidate. It is a reminder of the importance of not rushing to a hasty decision and of praying for God's guidance at this critical moment in your committee work.

- How are you working together to make certain that personal biases or discriminatory attitudes do not influence your decision-making?
- Samuel had a clear advantage: God spoke directly to him and told him which person to anoint as King. How can we listen to God's guidance when it may come to us in much more subtle ways?

***Prayer: God of wisdom, you spoke to Samuel and guided him in the selection of a new leader for your people. So too speak to us in the silence of this moment and guide us as we prepare for personal interviews. In the name of David's Son, Amen.***

## ATTENDING WORSHIP

### The Challenge of Worshiping While Evaluating

*"If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love,  
I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal "  
(I Corinthians 13:1)*

#### Read I Corinthians 13

You will now hear selected candidates lead worship. In that process you will have an opportunity to evaluate their skills as liturgists and preachers. You will listen to the earnestness of their prayers. Personally you face the challenge of being worshipful while also perceiving the pastor's leadership from an evaluative stance. It will be important for you to enter into the worship experience as fully as possible; if you remain detached, you will miss the opportunity to know what it is like to truly worship in the context of this person's leadership.

There is a saying among clergy that we need to bear in mind at this stage of the process: "Every pastor has at least ONE good sermon." Church members always rank "good preaching" high on their list of qualifications; yet it is only one of the skills and gifts that you seek. The joke-telling, humorous preacher may indeed be amusing, but the entertaining, superficial style will not necessarily be helpful when a young church member has been killed in an automobile accident.

Some preachers are extroverted, others quiet and reflective. Some are gifted storytellers and others are skilled at "opening up" a scripture passage. Some preach from manuscripts, others from notes, still others with no notes at all. Some seem to reflect God's love while others resemble a "noisy gong." You will sense when someone truly is genuine. And you will have the joy of discovering that some candidates have the love of Christ so deeply internalized that it will radiate through all they say and do.

Paul's words about the centrality of love are sometimes so familiar to us (from wedding services) that we lose sight of their power. The message of the

#### I Corinthians 13

**If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.** <sup>2</sup> And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing. <sup>4</sup> Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant <sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; <sup>6</sup> it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. <sup>7</sup> It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. <sup>8</sup> Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. <sup>9</sup> For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; <sup>10</sup> but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. <sup>11</sup> When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. <sup>12</sup> For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. <sup>13</sup> And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.

centrality of love will help you in the process of evaluating the worship experiences you have shared with various candidates.

- How can you tell if a preacher is “entertaining” you rather than proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ?
- If love is the greatest of the three—faith, hope, and love—how do we evaluate candidates to determine whether they are truly loving human beings?
- How do you experience love in a pastoral prayer, children’s sermon, or choice of hymns and liturgy?
- How do you balance a pastor’s gifts for preaching/teaching/worship with gifts for administration, pastoral care, mission, and justice action?

*Prayer: We are easily tempted, gracious God, to be swayed by superficial qualities. Help us to look for the inner faith and love that a worship leader demonstrates as we share together in singing your praises and honoring your name. Amen.*

## Choosing Your Recommended Candidate

### The Work Is Almost Completed

*"O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give success to your servant today..."*  
(Nehemiah 1:11)

#### Read Nehemiah 1:4-11

For the Old Testament figure Nehemiah, the word "success" always referred to two distinct realities—one structural and the other religious. Nehemiah led a group of Hebrew exiles from Babylon back to Jerusalem where he personally spent many years supervising the overwhelming task of rebuilding the wall that had surrounded the entire city. As an administrator, Nehemiah obtained building material, dealt with complaints, and organized the workers so that some labored while others stood guard and offered protection from groups who resented the return of the Hebrews. The dedication of the wall represents the successful completion of Nehemiah's administrative responsibilities.

But Nehemiah was equally concerned with rebuilding the ruins of the people's religious community. Prayers and sacred observances had disappeared from the lives of the people; they had lost their awareness of their own faith traditions because they had lived for decades among people who worshiped many gods. Nehemiah prayed constantly for God's active guidance in both "rebuilding" efforts. When he and the priest, Ezra, read portions of the laws of Moses to the assembled people, they all wept as they made a new commitment to their own faith heritage.

- ☐ As you are about to choose your final candidate, spend a moment reflecting on the ways in which your community has been "rebuilt" during this interim time.

#### Nehemiah 1:4-11a

When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven. 5 I said, "O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments; 6 let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant that I now pray before you day and night for your servants, the people of Israel, confessing the sins of the people of Israel, which we have sinned against you. Both I and my family have sinned. 7 We have offended you deeply, failing to keep the commandments, the statutes, and the ordinances that you commanded your servant Moses. 8 Remember the word that you commanded your servant Moses, 'If you are unfaithful, I will scatter you among the peoples; 9 but if you return to me and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts are under the farthest skies, I will gather them from there and bring them to the place at which I have chosen to establish my name.' 10 **They are your servants and your people, whom you redeemed by your great power and your strong hand.** 11 O Lord, let your ear be attentive to the prayer of your servant, and to the prayer of your servants who delight in revering your name. Give success to your servant today...."

- ☐ How do you want to approach God in prayer as you make this significant decision?
- ☐ Assuming that your candidate accepts your offer, how can you—like Nehemiah— share with your congregation the role God played in your decision-making processes?
- ☐ Do you feel that your work has come to a successful conclusion? And/or a faithful conclusion? How are the words different?
- ☐ Are there issues of transition for your staff or your congregation that still need “rebuilding” as you anticipate calling a new pastor?

***Prayer: With gratitude, O God, we approach you this day. You have sustained and supported us through each step of our work. You have been our solid foundation as we have searched for pastoral leadership to help us rebuild, recommit, and move forward into your future. Surround us with your loving arms as we make this major decision, for we ask it in the name of Jesus the Christ. Amen***

## Concluding Your Search Committee Work

### A Time for Rejoicing

*"I thank my God every time I remember you...."*  
(Philippians 1:3)

#### Read Philippians 1:3-11

When the details of the letter of call have been finalized and the congregation has called the new pastor, your official work as a Search Committee is complete. You may find yourselves asking if there is anything else you should do.

Some Search Committees make an agreement with the new pastor to gather together at a specific time (three months after the beginning of the ministry, for example) to have an informal conversation and to ask "How is it going?" If your church does not have a pastoral relations committee, during the early weeks of the ministry your Search Committee could play a key role in advocating that such a committee be established.

In addition to making certain there is support for the new pastor, you will want to find a way to celebrate the work you have done together. Serving on a Search Committee is an intense experience! You have prayed together, laughed together, disagreed together, and sometimes cried together. Your faith has deepened, and your understanding of your own congregation has grown and changed.

Whether it is a potluck supper or some other informal gathering, you will want to seek out an opportunity to rejoice and to "debrief" your experience. As part of that closure time, read together Paul's opening words in Philippians 1:3-11. Written from prison to parishioners he loved, Paul gives thanks for their faithfulness and expresses confidence that the work they have done in the name of Jesus Christ will be brought to a fruitful conclusion. These words from his prayer may form an appropriate blessing for the conclusion of your work:

#### Philippians 1:3-11

**I thank my God every time I remember you,**  
<sup>4</sup> constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, <sup>5</sup> because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. <sup>6</sup> I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. <sup>7</sup> It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel. <sup>8</sup> For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. <sup>9</sup> And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight <sup>10</sup> to help you to determine what is best, so that in the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, <sup>11</sup> having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

*"And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you determine what is best...having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God."*

All scripture quotations are taken from the  
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**Parish Life and Leadership Ministry Team  
Local Church Ministries  
A Covenanted Ministry of the United Church of Christ**

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for a 2000 sabbatical leave that provided the reflection time necessary  
to develop this resource.)

**SAMPLE LETTER TO CONGREGATION**

As members of the Search Committee, we want to express our gratitude for the trust you have placed in us. This past week we concluded our orientation meeting with Rev. \_\_\_\_\_, our Conference/Association Minister who will work closely with us. The purpose of this letter is to share with you a brief summary of the Search and Call process in the United Church of Christ.

1. We will seek your perspectives on our church and its ministry through a questionnaire and a series of small group meetings; as a result of this listening process, we will incorporate your ideas about new pastoral leadership into the "Local Church Profile" that we will develop.
2. Our vacancy will then be listed in "UCC Employment Opportunities."
3. Persons who have been authorized to complete a UCC Ministerial Profile will submit profiles for our committee through the Conference/Association office. The Ministerial Profile includes information about the candidate's educational background, experience, a detailed faith statement, eight written references, a background check form, and a criminal background check.
4. While the work on the Local Church Profile requires the input of many in the congregation, the names of candidates are held in strict confidence within our committee; we ask you to respect the essential confidentiality of this process. We will make every effort to keep you informed—on a regular basis—about our progress.
5. We will share our Local Church Profile with candidates, and we will begin to follow up with persons in whom we have particular interest. The follow up will include telephone reference checks, telephone interviews, and requests for sermon tapes. While pursuing these steps, we will also continue to evaluate new Ministerial Profiles.
6. We will select a small number of candidates for personal interviews, following which we will make arrangements for our Search Committee members to worship with them, most often in a church setting arranged by our Conference/Association office.
7. We will invite at least two candidates back for second interviews, following which we will seek God's guidance and prayerfully make a decision on a candidate.
8. If the candidate we recommend chooses to accept, compensation arrangements will be clarified, and a date for a "candidating Sunday" will be established.
9. You will have an opportunity to meet the candidate (and family) that weekend in an informal setting as well as the formal worship service where the candidate will preach. A congregational meeting following the worship service will offer each member an opportunity to ask questions of the Search Committee, and to vote on the Call to our new pastor.

We are grateful during this time for the excellent interim leadership of Rev. \_\_\_\_\_. We profoundly trust that God will guide both our candidates and the members of our Search Committee. We ask you to pray for us regularly. We are blessed with a wonderful church community; with hard work and God's guidance, we will be blessed with a wonderful pastor to guide us as we minister in the name of Jesus Christ.





**SAMPLE LETTER TO CANDIDATE – Acknowledging Receipt of a  
Ministerial Profile**

**Resource 5**

Dear

This letter comes to you from the Search Committee of \_\_\_\_\_ Church, United Church of Christ, located in \_\_\_\_\_. We want to acknowledge receipt of your UCC Ministerial Profile recently forwarded to us by the \_\_\_\_\_ Conference/Association office.

We are very grateful for your interest in our pastoral position, and we want to assure you that your profile will be read carefully and will receive thoughtful consideration by the members of our Search Committee.

As you know, the process of reading and evaluating Ministerial Profiles is a time-consuming one. We plan to move as quickly and prayerfully as possible, and we will be back in touch with you after all of our members have had an opportunity to review your material.

We pray for God's continued guidance on your search process.

Sincerely,

**SAMPLE LETTER TO CANDIDATE - No Longer Under Consideration**

**Resource 6**

Dear

The members of our Search Committee have prayerfully and carefully reviewed your Ministerial Profile. At our most recent meeting we came to the point of decision about your materials, and we want you to know that you are no longer under consideration.\*\*

Making these decisions is a painful process—for committee members and candidates alike. We are grateful for your interest in our church, and we ask that God continue to bless your life and ministry.

Sincerely,

\*\* Your Search Committee could be more personal and more specific in the next sentence, sharing information that may help the candidate understand why you made your decision.

*We made the decision to eliminate you from our pool of candidates because one of our expectations is that the new pastor will have...*

*several years of previous parish experience . . .  
more experience working with small, family-sized churches . . .  
firsthand experience with mission and outreach programs . . .  
more experience supervising church staff . . .*



**SAMPLE LETTER TO CANDIDATE – *Whose Profile You Have Retained***

**Resource 7**

Dear

The members of the Search Committee of \_\_\_\_\_ Church have completed our careful review of your Ministerial Profile. We want you to know that we decided to retain your profile for further consideration.

We are still in the very early stages of our process, and we are continuing to read a number of profiles. We will try to be in touch with you every few weeks to keep you updated on our progress.

In the meantime, we would ask that you contact us if you accept another offer.

May God bless your ongoing ministry.

Sincerely,

**SAMPLE LETTER TO CANDIDATE - *In Whom You Have Particular Interest***

**Resource 8**

Dear

The members of the Search Committee of \_\_\_\_\_ Church have completed our careful review of your Ministerial Profile. We have retained the profile because we are enthusiastic about your ministry experience as well as your many gifts and skills.

As you know, we are still at a very early stage in our process; we will continue to review profiles for several more weeks. We will keep you informed at regular intervals because we do have particular interest in your candidacy.

We would ask that you be in touch with us if you are seriously considering accepting another offer.

Our committee members will hold you in prayer, and we ask that you do the same for us as we move through our discernment process.

Sincerely,



## **CHECKING WITH REFERENCES - Sample A: Brief Form**

### **Resource 9A**

As a committee, develop a list of questions you would like to ask a candidate's telephone references. It is best to have one committee member speak with all references for any single candidate. There may be a new question that grows out of one conversation that requires follow up or clarification with the other references. Take careful and extensive notes on each conversation in order to report back to the Search Committee.

1. Create a connection.
  - a. Introduce yourself and your reason for calling.
  - b. Ask if it is a good time for an extended conversation of about \_\_\_\_\_ minutes. If not, set up another time.
  - c. Briefly describe your church setting and your pastoral needs.
2. Seek specifics – for instance . . .
  - a. How closely have you worked with or known this person?
  - b. What do you most like or appreciate in this person?
  - c. In what kind of congregation do you think this person would be most effective?
  - d. Can you tell me of a time when this person had to handle conflict in his/her ministry?
  - e. What are this person's strengths . . . weaknesses . . .? Give me some examples.
  - f. These are some of our pastoral needs . . . These are some of the things our congregation values. What do you know of this person's experience and skill in these areas?
  - g. Is there anything else you want to tell me about this person?
3. Thank the reference for their time. Ask if you might call again if more information is needed or another question arises.
4. Trust your instinct if there appears to be any hesitation or lack of enthusiasm on the part of the reference. Follow up.

*(Adapted, Vermont Conference)*



**CHECKING WITH REFERENCES - Sample B: More Detailed Form**

**Resource 9B**

**Telephone Interview with a Reference Person**

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Name of potential candidate \_\_\_\_\_

Reference person contacted \_\_\_\_\_

Home phone \_\_\_\_\_ Office phone \_\_\_\_\_

**Introduction to Reference Person**

\_\_\_\_\_, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a member of the Search Committee from \_\_\_\_\_. We are in search of a pastor, and \_\_\_\_\_ is being considered for this position. Your name has been given as a reference. Is this a convenient time to answer a few questions? (If yes, proceed; if no, determine when a call back can be made.)

Thank you for being willing to speak with me. Please know that information you relate to me will be kept within our pastoral Search Committee.

**Background Information on Reference**

1. How long have you known the candidate?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. What is/was the nature of your relationship to the candidate?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. What church/ministry position is the candidate currently serving?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Administrative Qualities, Style, Effectiveness**

4. How effective an administrator do you consider the candidate to be?

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



5. How would you describe the candidate's administrative style?

---

---

6. Is the candidate organized in his/her work and personal habits?

---

---

7. Would you consider the candidate to be goal oriented?

---

---

### **Preaching Ability and Style**

8. On a scale of 1-10, how effective was/is the candidate in his/her preaching?

---

---

9. Would you consider the candidate's preaching style to be:

☐ Biblical      ☐ Topical      ☐ Story-telling  
☐ Contemporary      ☐ Other

10. How long, on average does the candidate preach?

☐ 20-30 minutes      ☐ 15-20 minutes      ☐ 10-15 minutes  
☐ 8-10 minutes      ☐ other

### **Church Programming & Implementation**

11. What do you know about the growth of the church during the candidate's years?

---

---

12. What kinds of programming did the candidate initiate during their most recent ministry?

---

---

13. What kind of emphasis does the candidate place on missions?

---

---

14. What has been one of the candidate's most effective programs?

---

---

### **Relationships with People & Ability to Motivate**

15. How would you rate the candidate in ability to get along with others?

☐ Excellent      ☐ Very Good      ☐ Fair      ☐ Poor

---

16. Is the candidate able to motivate people? \_\_\_\_\_ If yes, in what ways?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

17. In your opinion, is there any reason the candidate should want to leave their current position?

Figure 1. The effect of the number of iterations on the accuracy of the proposed algorithm. The figure shows two plots. The top plot shows the accuracy of the proposed algorithm (red line) and the accuracy of the standard algorithm (blue line) as a function of the number of iterations. The bottom plot shows the accuracy of the proposed algorithm (red line) and the accuracy of the standard algorithm (blue line) as a function of the number of iterations. The x-axis for both plots is 'Number of iterations' and the y-axis is 'Accuracy'.

## Gifts, Graces and Growing Edges

18. What would you say are some of the candidate's greatest gifts in ministry?

1. [Introduction](#)  
 2. [Background](#)  
 3. [Methodology](#)  
 4. [Results](#)  
 5. [Discussion](#)  
 6. [Conclusion](#)  
 7. [References](#)  
 8. [Appendix](#)  
 9. [Bibliography](#)  
 10. [Index](#)  
 11. [Glossary](#)  
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19. What would you say are some of the candidate's growing edges in ministry?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

20. From your experience with the candidate, what would you say could be done to help the candidate become more effective in ministry?

\_\_\_\_\_

21 Is there anything else you would like to add about the candidate?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Comments & Reflections on This Reference Call

If you have any comments or reflections about this reference call, please add them here:

[illegible]

*(Adapted, Penn Central Conference)*



**CANDIDATE REIMBURSEMENT****Candidate Expense Form**

In order for us to reimburse your expenses, please complete this form and attach receipts. Return it to \_\_\_\_\_ (contact name) at \_\_\_\_\_ (address.) We will then authorize a check for you. Mileage will be reimbursed at the current IRS rate.

**EXPENSES**

Travel \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Meals \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Motel \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
TOTAL EXPENSES \$ \_\_\_\_\_**PLEASE PRINT**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone/email \_\_\_\_\_

**SIGNATURE**



## **COMMON INTERVIEWING PITFALLS**

### **Resource 11A**

1. Not asking questions clearly.
2. Interrupting when interviewee is doing preparatory thinking before answering.
3. Cutting off responses interviewee thinks are important.
4. Overlooking "little clues" of a "big negative."
5. Probing beyond an interviewee's willingness to talk.
6. Permitting an interviewee to wander.
7. Using leading questions (Would you say . . . ?).
8. Asking questions which can be answered by a yes or a no.
9. Paying more attention to the things you like about the interviewee than the things you don't.
10. Determining response based on your agreement with their philosophy, theology rather than their ability.

*(Adapted, Connecticut Conference)*



## **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - Sample A**

### **Sample Questions for a Candidate Interview**

These questions are not intended to be exhaustive, but to stimulate thinking. The questions are designed to enable you to learn enough about a candidate so you can determine if the candidate meets the needs of your parish. Adapt or change them as your congregation's needs see fit. It is suggested that you ask the same questions in the same order at each interview.

#### **I Mission and Ministry**

1. What is the purpose of the church?
2. How do you measure success in the church?
3. From a review of our congregation's mission statement, do you see areas of conflict?
4. What roles or functions do you see the pastor assuming? The laity assuming?

#### **II Worship in the Church**

1. What is the place of corporate worship within the Body of Christ?
2. What concepts do you hold relating to "innovation" in traditional worship?
3. What is the role of the laity in regard to corporate worship?
4. What subjects have you dealt with in sermons in recent months?
5. How do you determine subjects for sermons?
6. What is your style of preaching?
7. How would you describe yourself as a worship leader?

#### **III Pastoral Ministry**

1. In what ways do you seek to provide pastoral care for individuals?
2. Tell something of your style of ministry with weddings, funerals, baptisms.
3. How much of the responsibility for visitation should be shared with trained groups of laity?
4. How do you identify, recruit, and train lay persons for this ministry of visitation?
5. What are your concepts of premarital counseling, pre-baptismal counseling, and pre-confirmation counseling?

#### **IV Evangelism**

1. What plans do you envision for training children, youth and adults for church membership?
2. What is your understanding of "the good news"?
3. What motivates you to invite persons into church membership?
4. What types of programs do you now use in order to maintain and increase spiritual growth among your members?

#### **V Christian Education**

1. Reflect on your understanding of the teaching role of pastor.
2. How do you view the role of Christian Education in the church?



3. What are your views on training, assisting and supervising the teaching staff?
4. Have you been involved in planning and/or leading retreats with persons from your church? If yes, can you share the format, participation and outcome?

**VI Administration**

1. How do you allocate your time as a pastor? What takes priority?
2. How do you deal with persons who fail to fulfill the tasks or responsibilities they have accepted? If they are paid staff? If they are volunteers?
3. Is there a plan for developing leadership in your current church?
4. Describe the administration of your present church; for example, committee structure, evaluation processes, setting of goals, program planning, budgeting.

**VII Community and Denominational Relationships**

1. What involvements have you had beyond your local church? (in the secular world, ecumenically and within the United Church of Christ)
2. How have you encouraged/supported Association, Conference and Denominational involvements?
3. Describe your understanding of your responsibility to the UCC.
4. What issues are important to you?
5. What is your concept of the pastor's role in the community?

**VIII Continuing Education**

1. What experiences have contributed most to your growth as a pastor in the past five years?
2. What book or books have you read recently that have challenged you the most?
3. What plans do you have to continue to remain fresh and current in your ministry?
4. How have you integrated your new learnings into the life of your church?

**IX Personal Life**

1. Do you have regular times for relaxation, play and rest? What do you like to do?
2. Does your vocation as pastor enhance or strain your family?
3. What prompted you to say "yes" to the call to become a pastor? What keeps you at it?
4. Who ministers to your needs? How do you tend to your spiritual life?

**X Miscellaneous**

1. What experiences in your present call have you found satisfying?
2. How do you deal with religious or social extremists of any kind?
3. How would you describe God? What is your favorite image of God in scripture?

*(Adapted, Penn Central Conference)*

## **INTERVIEW QUESTIONS - Sample B**

### **DEVELOPING INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

- 1) Choose questions to be asked of each candidate you will interview. For instance . . .
  - What is it about our church profile that attracted you?
  - What strengths, skills, talents, do you see yourself bringing to our church and its stated needs and challenges?
  - What is one thing in our church's profile that will be hardest for you to accomplish?
  - What is your weakness? The most difficult thing for you to do?
  - What has been your most challenging experience so far? Most rewarding?
  - What is your favorite part about ministry?
  - What do you do for fun?
  - What are some of the most important things to do when arriving in a new church?
  - How might you go about (building a stewardship program) (managing church conflict) (participating in Christian education programming) (supporting lay leadership) (pastoral visitation)?
  - How do you see yourself relating to the community? To other churches and faith communities?
  - Describe how you approach your preaching preparation.
  - How do you take care of yourself? How do you expect to maintain boundaries between home and ministry?
  
- 2) Add those questions which grow out of particular profiles. For instance . . . "You've always lived in urban/suburban areas. What led you to apply to a church located in a rural setting?"
  
- 3) Develop case studies—based on your church's experience—that are designed to test leadership style, flexibility, sensitivity or a particular expertise required by a church. For instance, how the candidate might manage the handling of a conflict your church has experienced; a temperamental organist; church school creativity, etc.

*(Adapted, Vermont Conference)*



## WHAT ARE WE DOING HERE?

## Resource 12

or

## THE CHALLENGING WORK OF GROUP DISCERNMENT

In the early stages of your Search Committee work, you developed a list of skills and gifts you hoped to match with the skills and gifts of ministerial candidates. During recent weeks you have evaluated and prayed about Ministerial Profiles, and you have slowly narrowed the pool of candidates. As you now select candidates for personal interviews, or (later) as you reflect on those interviews and make decisions about hearing candidates preach or inviting them for second interviews, a somewhat different perspective on your decision-making may be helpful—a perspective that will also be valuable as you choose your final candidate.

God has created men and women with an amazing array of emotions, feelings, senses, searching minds, and compassionate hearts. You will now bring all of these aspects of yourselves into a discernment process that will ground you as you make challenging decisions. Within the church, we frequently think of the word “discernment” as an intentional spiritual discipline that usually is part of an individual’s faith journey. Discernment involves recognizing God’s activity in your own life and attempting to bring your own decisions and desires into harmony with God. Group discernment is also possible, and an Old Testament story may help set a context for your decision-making.

\*\*\*\*\*

You may have heard sermons about the prophet Elijah and his experience of listening to God’s “*still, small voice*,” as it is described in the King James Bible. The story begins immediately after Elijah had experienced the “high point” of his prophetic ministry. In a fierce contest with the 900 prophets of the gods Baal and Asherah, Elijah successfully called on his God to send down fire on a water-drenched altar. After all 900 of the “false” prophets were killed, God then responded to Elijah’s appeal and sent desperately needed rain. An enraged Queen Jezebel, furious at the deaths of her prophets, vowed to kill Elijah within 24 hours. Elijah fled into the wilderness, stopping and pleading with God to take his life. An angel urged him to “*Get up and eat.*” With that nourishment, Elijah continued on for 40 days, eventually hiding in a cave on Mount Horeb.

*“Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ He answered, ‘I have been very zealous for the Lord, (and) . . . I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.’ He said, ‘Go out and stand on the mountain . . . for the Lord is about to pass by.’ Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces . . . but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’ . . . Then the Lord said to him, ‘Go . . . anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha . . . as prophet in your place.’”*

*I Kings 19:9-16*

God had not instructed Elijah to go to Mount Horeb. Was Elijah fleeing Queen Jezebel or running from God? Whatever the driving force, the prophet kept running for 40 days before crawling into a cave on Mount Horeb. And God found Elijah in that cave. Having summoned Elijah out of his cave, God then put on an amazing display—one that certainly impacted all of Elijah’s senses: a great wind that split mountains and broke rocks into pieces, an earthquake, a fire, and finally “*a sound of sheer silence.*”

Having gotten Elijah’s attention, God then sent him back where he came from . . . to continue the work from which he fled. But there would be a change in the land; Elijah was now to anoint a new king over Israel and to anoint a new prophet, Elisha (note the similar name), as Elijah’s successor. God may have recognized Elijah’s weariness, for God said that Elisha had been selected “*as prophet in your place.*” Elijah had no reason for his self-pity; he was not alone, and his work would have a successor. In fact, history shows us that Elijah founded a prophetic movement that would challenge the kings of Israel again and again, whenever they strayed from God’s ways.

\*\*\*\*\*

It is not always easy for you, members of a Search Committee with different individual backgrounds and unique faith perspectives, to recognize as a group how much God needs and wants to be part of your decision-making process. God is always present, summoning you out of “the cave” when you may want to withdraw from the Holy One. Elijah experienced God in that sound of silence and each of you may experience God in a unique way. You may draw on your intellect to analyze sermon tapes. Or you may experience an “Aha moment” (“an earthquake”) in the course of reading a profile or talking with a phone reference for one of your candidates. Another of you may have keen insight and may have unique observations to share about the facial expressions—“the body language” of a candidate—as she/he connected (or did not connect) with your committee. Still others among you may be quietly praying about your major decisions and finding that God is directing you with a “still, small voice.”

As you listen carefully to one another, you will begin to see the amazing creativity of God as God’s gifts are expressed in the uniqueness of each of you. Inviting God to be an active participant in your deliberations reminds you that group decision-making is not about individual preferences or individual self-interest; rather it is about a group’s openness to God’s participation in the decision-making in the very midst of those individual differences. Calling on God’s wisdom while acknowledging your personal differences and perspectives will also help you understand the importance of consensus; remember that a prayerful decision sometimes cannot be unanimous but will be a choice everyone can and will support.

*Many helpful resources are available if you wish to learn more about group discernment. Two that Conference/ Association Ministers often recommend are DISCERNING GOD’S WILL TOGETHER (Danny E. Morris and Charles M. Olsen, published by the Alban Institute by arrangement with Upper Room Books, Bethesda MD: 1997) and PRACTICING OUR FAITH (edited by Dorothy C. Bass, especially chapter 8 by Frank Rogers Jr., “Discernment,” Jossey-Bass, San Francisco: 1997).*

## **ANNOUNCING ARRANGEMENTS FOR A CANDIDATING WEEKEND**

**Resource 13**

NOTE: This particular all-church mailing often contains two or more documents. The first is the formal "Call" to a congregational meeting; such a notice should be crafted in accordance with your bylaws and signed by the elected leader (secretary/clerk/president) who customarily announces such meetings. (Some bylaws also require announcements from the pulpit on Sunday or Sundays prior to a congregational meeting.)

Church bylaws usually will specify who is eligible to vote for a new pastor and the percentage of affirmative votes required to extend a call. It is often helpful to summarize those bylaw requirements in the letter. Some church members may have no previous experience participating in this process; such would particularly be the case if the previous pastor's tenure extended over many years.

-----

The second letter usually comes from the Search Committee. The committee may also choose to prepare a brochure with more information about the candidate and family.

### **SAMPLE LETTER FROM SEARCH COMMITTEE**

Fifteen months ago, the members of this church entrusted the Search Committee with the responsibility of prayerfully selecting a candidate for your approval. We gathered "input" from many of you as we assembled our Local Church Profile. We carefully reviewed the UCC Ministerial Profiles of 24 candidates; after checking references, we interviewed four candidates and arranged to hear three of them preach. Following second interviews with two candidates, we unanimously selected—through prayer and mutual consent—The Rev. Sandra Johnstone as our candidate for the ministry of our church.

Sandra was raised in Iowa and has been part of the United Church of Christ since childhood. She pursued her undergraduate studies at Carleton College in Minnesota; following college she returned to Des Moines and worked in health care administration for ten years. She often wondered whether God was "calling" her to consider pastoral ministry, but she was actually at the point of applying for graduate work in business administration when she realized that God was clearly leading her to enroll in the UCC United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. She received her Master of Divinity degree from the seminary this past May. Her seminary field education experience included opportunities to preach regularly, plan special worship services, conduct funerals, support and train church school teachers, and work closely with the stewardship drive. Following our candidating Sunday, Sandra will forward a copy of the terms of her pastoral call to her Committee on Ministry in Iowa and move toward completion of her ecclesiastical journey toward ordination.

Sandra met her husband, Patrick, at Carleton College. He is a copy editor for a publishing house in Minnesota, and he has continued to do this work from their home during their 10 years in Iowa. He competes regularly in marathons, and Sandra is an enthusiastic gardener; they both enjoy sports, outdoor activities, movies, a wide range of music, and volunteer work with an affordable housing project in Des Moines.

Sandra will bring many gifts to our church. She is wise and mature, a strong preacher and a creative worship leader. She possesses a compassionate spirit and a keen sense of humor. The following comments were made by some of her references:

*" . . . an amazingly deep sense of faith . . . "*

*"Sandra is trustworthy and confidential."*

*"The Bible study sessions she led made the prophet Jeremiah 'come alive.'"*

*"Sandra was a natural at preaching; she was always well prepared and comfortable in the pulpit. She is one of the finest public speakers and best story-tellers I've ever encountered."*

*"She is comfortable with persons of all ages. I've observed her interacting with noisy toddlers and withdrawn teens, overwhelmed single parents, and the long-time members of our church. She built strong relationships because she focused on each one individually."*

*"You experience Christ's love when you talk with her."*

The members of our committee look forward to talking with you about our joyful interactions with Sandra. We hope you will make every effort to attend the Saturday night potluck supper where you will meet Sandra and Patrick in a more informal setting as well as the Sunday morning worship service and congregational meeting.

**Saturday night, February 3, 6:00 p.m** All church potluck. A program will be available for young children following the supper; older children and youth are encouraged to participate in this opportunity to become acquainted with two wonderful people.

**Sunday morning, February 4, 10:00 a.m. worship** Sandra will conduct the worship service. Following the service, a congregational meeting will be held to hear a detailed report from the Search Committee, discuss the terms of the Call Agreement, and vote on the recommendation to call Sandra Johnstone as our new pastor. Assuming a positive vote, it is our hope that Sandra will start with us on April 15.

We believe that God has led us to this exciting moment in our ministry . . . and so does Sandra. We look forward to growing together as a faith community, serving others and proclaiming the good news of God's love.

Thank you for the privilege you have given us.

Sincerely,

The Members of the Search Committee

## **INTERIM PASTOR DEPARTURE LITURGY**

**Resource 14**

**Interim Pastor:**

Last \_\_\_\_\_ (date/month), I took on the responsibility as your Interim Pastor. I was responsible for worship and all services of this church, for pastoral care of this congregation and for assuring Christian education of these people. Will you release me from these responsibilities of Interim Pastor?

**People:**

We will.

**Interim Pastor:**

Together we have sought to maintain the life of this church and to grow in love and understanding and faith. Will you continue on this path?

**People:**

We will, with God's help.

**Interim Pastor:**

As your Interim Pastor, I took on a leadership role as you reviewed your history, explored needed leadership changes, resolved old conflicts, explored new directions in ministry, and prepared to move forward with new pastoral leadership. Will you, with me, give thanks to God for the hard work we have done?

**People:**

We will, with God's help.

**Interim Pastor:**

You have grown in readiness for a new Permanent Pastor. Will you be patient as your new pastor begins his/her ministry among you and support his/her efforts?

**People:**

We will, with God's help.

**Interim Pastor:**

Will the (council/consistory) please come forward (all stand)? You are the elected leaders of this church. Will you ensure that the responsibilities I carried be carried on?

**Leaders:**

We will, with God's help

**Interim Pastor:**

Will all of the members of the congregation support the elected committee members of this Church?



**People:**

We will, with God's help

**Interim Pastor:**

I return to you the keys (and \_\_\_\_\_) you gave me when I came last  
(\_\_\_\_\_). I thank you for that trust.

**Moderator/President:**

I receive them as the representative of these people. We express to you our gratitude and love for your wise and faithful leadership during this transition time.

**Interim Pastor:**

My prayers will be always with you.

**People:**

And ours with you.

**Interim Pastor:**

Let us pray (Prayer)

*(Adapted, Rhode Island Conference)*

## **FIVE COMMITMENTS FOR SEARCH COMMITTEES**

**A Faith Commitment . . .** The task of the Search Committee is very simple and very complex. Initially the task is spiritual. Search Committee members make a faith commitment to develop as faith-centered, prayer-directed people of God willing to listen to God in the process of seeking a new pastor. Search Committee members engage in a 4-Way Covenant—a Covenant with their prospective pastor, the congregation, the Conference and Association, and the Holy Spirit.

**A Time Commitment . . .** Search Committee members make a time commitment. By the time the search process is completed (from first organizational meeting to the calling of a new pastor) the committee may have been working together for as little as 9 months or as long as 18-24 months. Initially most Search Committees meet weekly. Once committees begin considering pastoral profiles and scheduling interviews, the frequency of meetings increases. At times the Search Committee must travel to hear prospective pastors preach. All in all, it is a significant time commitment.

**A Commitment to Confidentiality . . .** Search Committee members make a commitment to confidentiality. Members must not talk about the content of their work. That is to say, the sharing of names of individuals under consideration is a serious breach of process. Even to speak in generalities about location or experience or gender can risk folk guessing who the committee is considering. The congregation must be kept informed at every step of the process. Sharing where the Search Committee is in the process is critical. However, until a final candidate is presented, all conversation about any candidates is closely guarded.

**A Commitment to Openness . . .** Search Committees make a commitment to genuine consideration of all candidates. The commitment involves understanding that the gifts, skills, and experience of candidates are primary in determining their ability to serve the congregation.

**A Commitment to Consensus . . .** Finally, Search Committee members make a commitment to consensus. Members need to be of one mind in recommending their prospective pastor to the congregation. Any unreadiness on the part of any member of the Search Committee can and often does spell disaster down the road. Everyone must be able, with a clear and positive conscience, to support and endorse the individual presented before the congregation.

(Adapted, the Penn Central Conference)

