

Guide to Pastoral Search and Call

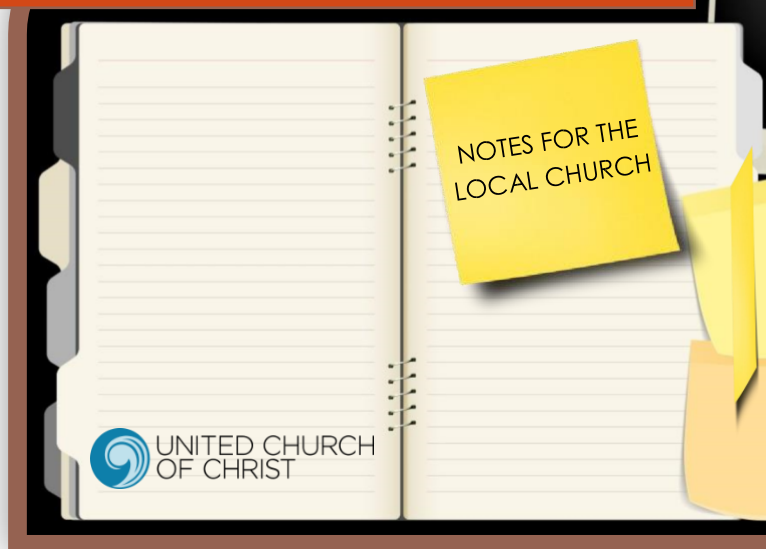


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There are four guides to accompany search and call processes:

1. Notes for the Local Church
2. Notes for the Intentional Interim Minister
3. Notes for the Supply Minister
4. Notes for the Minister in Search

Each guide overviews the practical work of transition, the faithful work of discernment, and the ethical expectations for a fair and honest search process. Liturgical and logistical tools are suggested as well. This particular guide is for you, the leaders of a congregation that is in a season of ministerial transition.



INTRODUCTION

The United Church of Christ provides three primary tools for the process of Search and Call, which your church will use with the support of your conference: the *UCC Ministry Opportunities* website to publicly list positions, a Local Church Profile template to help congregations claim and convey their vision, calling, and diverse gifts for the discernment of candidates, and validated UCC Ministerial Profiles to share candidates' skills and ministry potential with Search Committees.

The timeline for seeking and calling a new minister varies, though many congregations find that the process can be completed in a year. The process has three distinct seasons: a time of internal preparation before the search, a time of seeking and selecting new pastoral leadership, and a time of affirming and welcoming the newly-called minister.

The search process in the UCC is a blend of employment work and spiritual work. We use the word *call* to reflect that distinct blend of the practical and the sacred. A congregation does not *hire* a new pastor but *calls* a pastor, following a careful business-like search that is infused with prayerful attention to God's direction. Candidates do not seek a new *job* but enter into an employment process in order to be rooted in new ways within God's call. For your church and for the candidates, the search and call process is a spiritual journey that trusts God to be an active participant.

Praying over and discussing the search process with "faith language" will help the congregation pay attention to God's will for your church. Because the work of search and call is time-consuming, you might be tempted to skip faith conversations, however listening to God is the essential work of the process.



LITANY THROUGHOUT THE SEARCH

For God's holy presence amidst change, we pray.

For comfort because loss is part of change, we pray.

For Christ-like steadfastness during the challenges of transition and seasons of faith, we pray.

For reassurance through frailty and failings, we pray.

For the abundant creativity the Spirit provides, we pray.

For our loved ones in this community of faith, we pray.

For God's children beyond this community, we pray.

GOVERNING BODY: BEGINNING TASKS

Meet with your conference to discuss the departure and exit tasks of the outgoing minister and to outline an appropriate timeline for the search. Consult your bylaws to clarify relevant aspects of process and decision-making in your congregation. Communicate these processes to the congregation, including by letter to all church members.

WE EACH BRING A STORY

As the governing body gathers with the support of conference staff to plan the transition process, take time – three to four minutes each – to share something about yourselves and your experiences of God through this congregation. Rather than simply listing committees on which you've served, talk about what energizes you, what discourages you, what hopes and dreams you have. You might share an amusing first memory of this church, for example. Try to include something that others in the room may not know.





Read **1 Corinthians 2:7-12** aloud.

Have each person share a story of experiencing the gift of God's presence because of this church. (Examples might include a particular Christmas Eve service, a period of illness or difficult transition, the birth of a child, etc.)

Your faith stories are part of a rich, sacred tradition that includes many stories of transition and change. No matter how daunting the present moment may be, our faith tradition can help us remember and claim a fruitful past, a blessed present, and a marvelous future.

SAMPLE LETTER TO CONGREGATION

Dear members and friends of _____ Church,

In the days since Rev. Amy Dreisbach sent her resignation letter, we have experienced a profound sense of loss. Her eight years among us have been very significant in our congregation. These next two months together will be a precious time, and we will inform you soon about



our plans for special events to celebrate Pastor Amy's ministry before her departure.

We want to assure you that we have been in touch with our Conference Minister, Rev. John Keahi, about the process of seeking new ministerial leadership. We will schedule a special governing board meeting with him to learn about and begin UCC best practices during a time of pastoral transition.

In the meantime, Rev. Keahi suggested that we share with you this brief overview of the process:



1. The governing body will select an intentional interim pastor to provide continuity in worship, pastoral care, and program/staff oversight. This pastor will not be a candidate for the “settled” position as our pastor, but will help to facilitate our transitional work in preparation for the settled pastor search. Rev. Keahi will advise us on this process and provide ministerial profiles of intentional interim pastors for the governing board’s consideration.
2. After the interim pastor is in place, we will invite all of you to be part of a self-study and community learning process that will identify our church’s imagination for the future and corresponding pastoral needs. We will develop a church profile for potential candidates, and we will form and commission a search committee.
3. We will initiate a search process for a new pastor in accordance with our bylaws. Our conference office will advertise our open position to UCC clergy across the country. Our search committee will read ministerial profiles, screen candidates, conduct interviews, check references, and eventually select a candidate who will be recommended to the entire congregation.
4. Our goal is for the congregation to elect, in a unified way, a new pastor whose gifts God can use with us and among us for the sake of the Gospel.

The tradition practiced in the United Church of Christ of “calling” a pastor affirms the active presence of God’s Spirit in the search process. We will prayerfully seek a pastor with particular gifts and skills while recognizing that candidates are also engaged in a Spiritled discernment process. We will keep you informed on a regular basis as we move toward God’s future as a congregation.

For now, let us express our gratitude for Pastor Amy’s ministry and enter into a time of celebration and prayer with her.



In Christ's name,
The Governing Board



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Even as the news of the minister's departure is shared, the governing body should be working with the outgoing minister to clearly outline and communicate ethical departure boundaries between the church and outgoing minister. Hold an exit interview with the departing pastor in conjunction with the Committee on Ministry. Plan a last date in the office and a final worship service.

If your governing body and conference staff agree that an intentional interim or supply pastor is needed (see "What Kind of Pastoral Leadership Are We Seeking?"), the position can be posted online by the conference right away to *UCC Ministry Opportunities* with information completed by the church's governing body. The search for a designated-term or settled pastor involves a Local Church Profile that is written through an interactive process with the congregation before the position opening is posted on *UCC Ministry Opportunities*.



The task of preparing the Local Church Profile is undertaken by the governing body or transition team, or it may be assigned to the Search Committee, with the support of an interim minister. While each church delegates these tasks differently, what matters most is clear communication and a cohesive process to encourage maximum participation by the whole congregation.

The search for a new settled minister will involve a small and discrete Search Committee, according to most church bylaws. The commitment of the Search Committee, in the tradition of the United Church of Christ, is to pray and discern together with the guidance of the Holy Spirit in consideration of the best pastoral leadership for the congregation. The Search Committee will receive UCC Ministerial Profiles of candidates, conduct interviews, check references, meet candidates, and select a final candidate for vote by the congregation.

First, however, the governing body with the help of conference staff will determine which type of pastoral leadership is needed by the



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church at this time, using the questions below alongside the *Call Agreement Workbook* for clarity. You'll use the workbook now to name the type of call and Scope of Work desired (e.g. settled pastor for $\frac{3}{4}$ time); later you'll use the workbook to negotiate the terms of compensation.

WHAT KIND OF PASTORAL LEADERSHIP ARE WE SEEKING?



SETTLED

The goal of a settled pastorate is partnership in ministry over time. A settled pastorate may be full-time or part-time. Varieties of settled pastor titles include: Senior Pastor, Lead Pastor, Associate Pastor, Solo Pastor, Co-Pastor, Yoked or Shared Pastor.



INTERIM

The goal of an intentional interim pastorate is a successful transitional season, with specific tasks that prepare the congregation for its next settled pastor. A congregation's investment in an interim pastorate is typically 18 months with compensation equivalent to what will be provided to the settled pastor.



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 DESIGNATED-
TERM


The goal of a designated-term pastorate is to work toward the church's declared purpose for a specific season; often the pastor's skills match the congregation's declared goals. Examples of designated-term pastors include New Ministry Start Pastor, Revitalization Pastor, Hospice/ Legacy Pastor, or other for the purpose of a merger, relocation, reunification, cultural reassessment, staff transition, selling a building, or healing a crisis.


 SUPPLY

The goal of a supply pastorate is to focus on the maintenance of pastoral care and regular worship for a year or less, usually at a time when the congregation is not positioned for an intentional process of pastoral leadership transition.

Is your church currently in crisis?


 Yes: interim or
designated-term


 No: interim,
designated-term,
supply, or settled

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Do you anticipate this pastor will lead the church

*Yes: interim or
designated-term*

*No: supply
or settled*

transitional tasks?

through

for a minister beyond the next three years?

*Yes: settled or
designated-term
or interim*

*No: supply or
designated-term*

Is the
church financially capable of ongoing support



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Is there a specific and significant change happening (e.g. merger, new church start, move)?

Yes: settled or designated-term

No: supply or interim

Have there been tensions with the outgoing minister?

Yes: interim or designated-term

No: supply, settled, interim, or designated-term

Do you anticipate the pastor will help the congregation identify and live into a future vision for its ministry?

Yes: interim, designated-term or settled

No: supply

SPECIAL NOTE: DESIGNATED-TERM PROCESS

If early discernment by the governing body points to a possible designated-term pastorate instead of a settled pastorate as the next chapter for the church's ministry, then the governing body might choose to act as a Search Committee: reviewing UCC Ministerial Profiles, holding interviews, and recommending a final candidate for congregational vote. The choice to search for a designated-term pastor

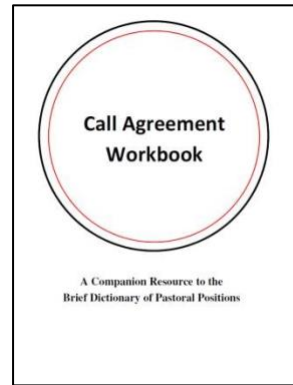


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and the use of the governing body as a Search Committee are best undertaken in conjunction with the whole church's discernment.

Here again, a separate team may be useful to guide church-wide discussions and activities that will inform the Local Church Profile. Such a transition team could be small but would provide critical leadership for the congregation and perspective for the governing body. In addition, this team may be called upon to support the designated-term pastor in pursuing the designated-term visions articulated by the congregation in its development of the Local Church Profile.

At the end of the designated-term, a church might create a Search Committee to prepare for the search of a settled pastor. Whether or not the designated-term pastor is considered as a candidate for a settled position depends upon the original terms of the designated-term call agreement. See the *Call Agreement Workbook* for examples.



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LOCAL CHURCH PROFILE

UNDERSTANDING OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY

The governing body or team tasked with developing the Local Church Profile will spend a great deal of time engaging the congregation: gathering data, responding to surveys, and exploring perspectives within the church and from community members. The process is time-consuming, yet the work is essential because it will enable you to understand the unique characteristics of your church and interpret them effectively through the Local Church Profile to prospective candidates.

Read **Mark 3:31-35** together.

What do you believe Jesus meant when he made this statement? Do these words of Jesus help us describe the unique qualities of our congregation?

Who comprises Jesus' family of faith? Who comprises our family of faith? How do we define that family: membership, participation, other parameters?

Congregations committed to urban ministry may view their constituency as a community far beyond their membership rolls. Churches in communities with rapid demographic changes may be changing their definitions of "church family" in order to welcome a more diverse population. In many small towns, the church pastor is expected to minister to the entire community.

How does our church define and relate to its community? What are our expectations for the pastor's relationship to the wider community?

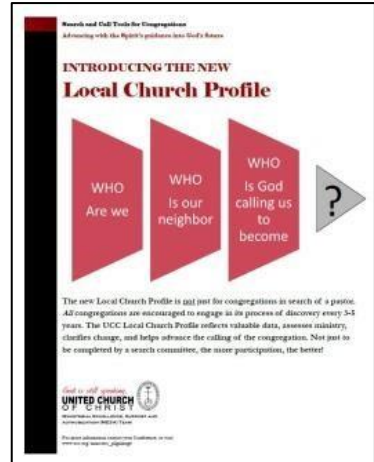
Whatever the size of your church, outreach to the community and mission/service within the community are essential to the church's ministry. In developing the Local



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Church Profile, reflect honestly on how outreach is balanced between the pastor and the people.

Working with the intentional interim minister if there is one, the governing body or transition team guides the Local Church Profile development with high engagement from the friends and members of the congregation. A template for the Local Church Profile is provided by the conference staff assisting the church. The conference can also provide summary data from the church's 11-Year Report in the UCC Data Hub, demographic information from MissionInsite, and other tools and resources.



The Local Church Profile is structured to ask three primary questions: *Who are we?* *Who is our neighbor?* and *Who is God calling us to become?* Renewed discovery of the congregation's purpose will make the search clearer and more efficient for the Search Committee, and more appealing for candidates. When the Search Committee identifies a final candidate, the Local Church Profile will help the congregation assess a match.

REFLECTIONS ON TRUTH-TELLING

Completing the first draft of your Local Church Profile requires both diligent individual work and teamwork: questions have been asked, surveys have been gathered, data has been processed. All of this work has been timeconsuming, sometimes tedious, and often very revealing. With the completion of the first draft, it is vital to

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review whether the material reflects the genuine character and priorities of the church.

Truth telling is not easy. You want the *UCC Ministry Opportunities* listing to give a positive impression of your church in order to attract strong pastoral candidates. You also know that an honest Local Church Profile will help the Search Committee find a well-suited candidate. Between the two, it can be difficult to determine how much to tell. Every church experiences conflict. Every church has “skeletons in the closet.” Writing your history for the Local Church Profile may present some difficult moments for your group, yet the fruit of your discussions will provide the Search Committee with meaningful reflections that will be especially beneficial during the interview process.

Even as you seek to be candid about the not-so-good (and even the 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; it is giving witness to the power of Christ working in your midst.

Read **John 8:31-32** together. Share what you think Jesus means by “If you continue in my word...” Give concrete examples of how the truth can set us free.

If a previous pastor was asked to leave or was involved in unethical behavior, how do Jesus' words apply to your perspective on that situation?

SEARCH COMMITTEE

The congregation will elect a Search Committee to serve on their behalf with wisdom, maturity, and creativity. Typically the Search Committee is comprised of 5-9 people who have relational and detail skills and a



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willingness to dedicate time to meetings; who are compelled less by a personal agenda and more by a commitment to the future of the church; who represent diverse ages, races and cultures, genders, life experiences and perspectives present in the church. It is recommended that a Search Committee be commissioned in a regular worship service along with the Local Church Profile.

Before diving into business, the Search Committee should take time to build intra-committee relationships and a shared openness to the work of the Holy Spirit in your midst.

HOW ARE WE WITH EACH OTHER?

Each Search Committee is a snapshot of the whole congregation. Among you are some lifelong members as well as some newer members; you represent many ages, gifts, and areas of church involvement. You may have varied religious backgrounds; some may have had no formal religious involvement until recently. A few may have previous experience serving on a Search Committee while



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others may feel bewildered about the process. Some will approach this work analytically while others will lean on intuition to aid in the discernment process.

Whether you are a choir member or church treasurer, a person with personnel experience or a newcomer to this work, a confirmand or a regular at the men's breakfast, you are a member of the Search Committee because you care deeply about the ministry of your church and the quality of pastoral leadership needed to carry out that ministry.

Because you will work together for many months, you will find it beneficial to become acquainted with one another at a deeper faith level than may customarily happen in church meetings.

Read **Matthew 20:1-16** together.

A first reaction to this parable is often, "It's not fair!" As a Search Committee, focus less on the economics of the parable and more on the image of God's relationship with us: giving the same blessing to the newest and to the longest-serving persons, to the last as well as the first.

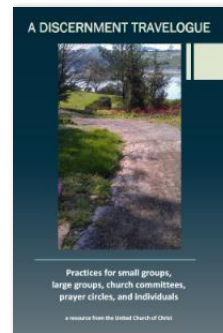
How do you feel about the image of God presented in this parable? How can this parable help your committee respect and listen to one another with equal grace and authority?



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The Search Committee’s initial business includes time with conference staff, prayer, reflection on the Local Church Profile, clarification of the Search Committee’s role and work, discussion of agreed-upon criteria for the next minister, clear definition of consensus, and reiterated commitments to confidentiality. Establish a sacred pattern of work: a meeting calendar with dedicated time to prayer and team-building. Use the Discernment Travelogue to identify methods of reflection and decision-making, and use its “Rules of the Road” for habits as a committee. At the end of the search process, each member of the team should be able to reflect on the work as a positive spiritual growth experience.

- Be fully present, extending and presuming welcome.
- Listen generously and suspend judgement about one another’s stories. Hold stories with care and respect.
- Author your own story and share your own gifts.
- Wonder. Welcome discomfort. Love the questions.
- Be mindful and respectful of time.
- Practice hospitality and inclusion, especially where diverse cultures meet.
- Believe that it is possible to emerge from our time together refreshed, surprised, and less burdened than when we came.



Your Search Committee should work together with the governing body to add “Position Posting” information to the nearly-complete Local Church Profile, including compensation guidelines, housing expectations, and a description of the Scope of Work. Finalize the Local Church Profile with references and the statement of consent, then ask the conference to validate it for circulation. Your conference will post the Local Church Profile (or the Position Posting information) online at *UCC Ministry Opportunities*.



REFLECTIONS ON DECISION-MAKING

With the Local Church Profile completed and the arrival of your first stack of Ministerial Profiles, this is good time to come to agreement about the process you will follow in your decision making.

Read **I Kings 3:3-14** together.

The wisdom needed to make careful decisions about candidates comes from being attentive to the Holy Spirit and to one another. In scripture, wisdom is viewed as a quality of the heart as well as the head and often described as a companion along the journey.

Reflect on the passage from I Kings. As a committee, how will you ask God to give you wise and discerning minds? Discuss different patterns of decision-making, and evaluate your early habits of working together, listening to one another, and making decisions. How are you each contributing to the collective wisdom of the committee? How is the committee functioning so far? Reflect further:

What do you understand the word "consensus" to mean? Can someone disagree with a decision and still support the work of the committee?

What are the dangers of "voting" on candidates and letting the majority rule?

What will you do if one member discerns God's will in a way that is different from the others?

How will you maintain confidentiality about your various candidates?



CAN YOU SEE ANYTHING?

Read **Mark 8:22-26** together.

This healing episode, recorded only in Mark's gospel, is a peculiar little story. Although the man is healed of his blindness, his vision is restored in stages. Jesus appears to need extra time for the man's vision to develop before the man can see with absolute clarity.

So it is with reading ministerial profiles. The process can be overwhelming, and it may feel difficult to differentiate among candidates – like a forest of trees walking. You may not recognize in the candidates what you hoped to see:

extensive pastoral experience, perhaps, or stellar preaching credentials or particular administrative skills.

Reading this healing episode may be very instructive for your Search Committee. Even with Jesus' best efforts, the man's vision was still distorted. Healing took longer than expected. Even for Jesus, the process of carrying out God's will was slow. Yet by the end, the man saw 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 through the reading process in search of the "right" one?

How will you know when you have found candidates who seem to "fit" your church setting?



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There is no “right” number of UCC Ministerial Profiles for Search Committees to receive and no “one” way to process the profiles as a committee. Some committees like to read through the entire stack of profiles to determine which candidates to interview. Others read through small batches of profiles to identify candidates to interview, returning later to the remaining profiles for consideration.

Plan in advance how your committee will communicate with candidates. You are under no obligation to let candidates know their profiles have been received, but if you do, be sure to let the same ministers know promptly when their profiles are no longer under consideration.



Prepare for the interview process as your next step in discerning who could, with God’s help, advance the calling of the congregation. Create interview questions based on your Local Church Profile. Consider also using the *Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers*, a rubric of eight areas of expected excellence for UCC ministers, to shape some of the interview questions. Practice interviewing a minister who is not a candidate, and work with the conference to review what types of questions can and cannot be asked during an interview. Personal characteristics that have no relationship to candidates’ skills in ministry include marital status, disability, sexual orientation, age, national origin and ethnicity; questions about these are inappropriate. Interview questions about past ministry experiences, challenges and accomplishments, strengths and weaknesses are important. Include questions that will draw out the pastoral perspective and biblical imagination of candidates.



Plan to ask the same questions with each interviewed candidate, knowing that additional questions and surprises will surface naturally in conversation.

FACE TO FACE

You have thought carefully about the pastoral role to be filled, and now you are ready to meet candidates who God might have available to fill that role.

Read **1 Samuel 16: 1-13** together.

One of the most difficult tasks during the interview process is to treat candidates fairly. Like Samuel, we can assume that we're looking for the tallest and handsomest candidate, or the most educated or most experienced candidate, or the candidate who looks and thinks just like us. Sometimes it's difficult to determine what is in the heart of a person because we stumble over their age, gender, race, sexual orientation, weight, disability, appearance, or family composition. Each of us has a mental picture of the ideal candidate, but then we interview candidates who are quite different. Judging not by appearances is a great challenge and can only be done with the wisdom and insight that comes from honest sharing and mutual accountability within the committee and before God.

Obviously you seek a well-qualified candidate. The power of this 1 Samuel story is its reminder that God may choose an unlikely candidate and call you to do the same. It is a reminder of the importance of praying for God's guidance at every step in your committee's work.

How are you working together to make certain that personal biases or discriminatory assumptions do not influence your shared decision-making?

How can we listen to God's guidance when it comes to us in subtle ways?



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For many Search Committees, the interview sequence begins with initial interviews with candidates drawn from the pile of Ministerial Profiles. (See “Organizing for Search and Call” at the end of this guidebook for a sample outline.) Then the committee identifies which interviewees were compelling and reviews online materials shared in the Ministerial Profiles (with caution against bias). The next step is to offer follow-up interviews to a select group of candidates.

After the follow-up interviews, the committee checks candidates’ references and considers whose availability for ministry could feasibly support the congregation’s stated goals in its Local Church Profile. A neutral pulpit invitation may be extended to one or more candidates, providing travel reimbursement to those candidates. The neutral pulpit is also the opportunity for an in-person interview, if one has not already been conducted in the initial and follow-up interviews. Following the neutral pulpits, the Search Committee discerns the final candidate it wishes to recommend to the church, and an invitation for a candidating weekend is extended to the final candidate, for which the church reimburses travel, room and board expenses. Throughout these interviews, ask your scripted questions and allow time for each candidate to share their own questions, anticipating some back-and-forth dialogue.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW REQUEST

Dear _____,

The Search Committee of _____ Church has completed our careful review of your UCC Ministerial Profile. We would like to schedule an initial interview with you. Please let us know your availability for an interview by phone/Skype on any of the following days and times: _____. Should you be moving toward a final interview for any other

position, please keep us informed of this timeline. Meanwhile, we look forward to further conversations with you.



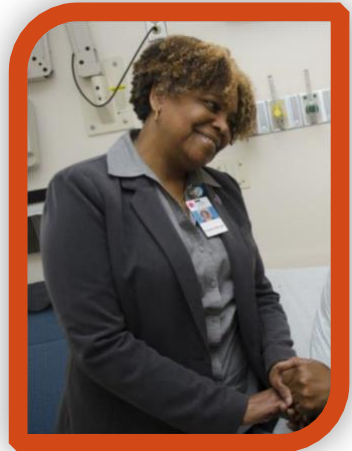
SAMPLE CANDIDATE REJECTION

Dear _____,

The Search Committee of _____ Church moved to a point of decision based on our prayerful discernment after recent interviews. We write to let you know that you are no longer under consideration for the _____ position. We wish you well in the directions God will lead you. Thank you for your prayer, participation and time in this process.

INTERVIEW SEQUENCE

After the initial interview, review any online material provided by candidates. Different aspects of a candidate will be interesting to different Search Committee members; what is intriguing to one may lead to a second interview by all. Invite compelling ministers to a follow-up interview. Use this conversation to discern feasibility of a potential call and shared ministry. Let candidates know how many



candidates you hope to identify as candidates for a neutral pulpit interview.

After the follow-up interview, call references for the candidates who might be on your list for consideration. Ask your conference for a conference-to-conference reference check on your top candidates. As a committee, clarify any questions you need to answer or resolve before inviting particular candidates to a neutral pulpit interview.

The neutral pulpit interview includes the opportunity for a candidate to preach and lead worship at a neighboring church (which may be a “private pulpit” with the Search Committee rather than a regular worship service) as well as informal conversation time with the Search Committee. Some Search Committees include a tour of the community and initial compensation talks during this time. Because of a wide diversity of neutral pulpit practices, communicate your purpose, your timeline for final negotiations and decision-making, and how many neutral pulpits are being conducted at one time. Financial expectations for candidates’ travel should be clarified in advance; costs are expected to be borne by the church.

This stage of interviewing should be kept confidential by the committee. Any Search Committee visits to a candidate’s current ministry settings are discouraged.



SAMPLE REIMBURSEMENT WORKSHEET

Candidate's Name & Dates of Travel: _____

Name of anyone accompanying the candidate, if the Search Committee plans to reimburse their travel as well: _____

Plane / Train / Cab / Bus Fare(s): _____

Mileage: _____ miles roundtrip, reimbursed at \$0.____/mi

Hotel: _____

Meals: _____ (as agreed, not to exceed \$__ per day) TOTAL:

All receipts submitted to accompany reimbursement.

Candidate's Signature: _____

Search Committee Approval by: _____



SPECIAL NOTE: INTERNAL CANDIDATES

Candidates for a settled position expect to be considered equally during a search. Unfortunately there is no good way for an internal candidate (someone who is already on staff in a church that lists a position opening) and external candidates to be considered equally by a Search Committee. The best recommendation is to consider an internal candidate first in the process, after which the search is opened more broadly.

If a church's constitution and bylaws allow for an internal candidate, the Search Committee should proceed as described already, using the Local Church Profile and Scope of Work, reviewing the internal candidate's UCC Ministerial Profile, and holding interviews to discern the match of vision and abilities. If the Search Committee's decision is "No" to the internal candidate, the candidate should plan an appropriate and graceful departure from their staff position. (The Search Committee and governing body should clarify in advance the potential for both succession and resignation of an internal candidate.)

An internal candidate's application and consideration can be held in confidentiality. If a church needs to change its bylaws to consider an internal candidate, however, then a broader policy conversation should be held across the church.

A designated-term pastor is considered an internal candidate if they choose to apply for a settled position at the conclusion of their term, as allowed by the original terms of the designated-term call agreement.



THE WORK IS ALMOST COMPLETED

Informed by the congregation's work on its Local Church Profile, with a spirit of discernment surrounding the interviews, confident in the skills a candidate brings to minister among you, you are ready to choose the final candidate who best correlates to the vision expressed by the congregation.

Almost.

Read **Nehemiah 1:4-11** together.

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. The dedication of the wall represented the successful completion of his work and leadership.

But Nehemiah was equally concerned with rebuilding the ruins of the people's faith. Prayers and sacred rituals 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 sacred texts aloud to the assembled people, they all wept to make a new commitment to their own faith heritage.

As you prepare to choose your final candidate, take time to reflect on the ways your community has been “rebuilt” during this interim time.

What is your prayer as you make this decision?

Assuming that your candidate accepts your offer, how can you—like Nehemiah— tell the congregation about the role God played in your decision-making processes?

Do you feel that your work has come to a successful conclusion? Is it also a faithful conclusion?

Are there issues of transition for your staff or your congregation that still need “rebuilding” as you anticipate calling a new pastor?

When the Search Committee has clarity on its final candidate, make an invitation to schedule a candidating weekend and ask the final candidate to seriously prepare to say “Yes” to being called with your church toward God’s future. If a candidate declines the invitation to a candidating weekend as a result of their own discernment, the Search Committee continues its prayerful consideration of profiles.

The governing body will negotiate the terms of call with the final candidate before the candidating weekend is held. Refer to the UCC’s *Call Agreement Workbook* for a terms-of-call template and recommended benefits, as well as your conference’s compensation guidelines. These terms of call are not expected to change after the candidating weekend, although the call agreement is not signed until after the congregational vote.

The Search Committee should discuss with the candidate what percentage of approval they expect to receive in the congregational vote



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in order to accept the call; often the expectation is 90% or 95% approval. If all are in agreement, announce the candidating weekend.

The committee's letter presenting the candidate to the congregation should be sent with enough notice for a congregational meeting to be held according to the church's bylaws.

SAMPLE LETTER TO CONGREGATION:
CANDIDATING WEEKEND INVITATION

Dear members and friends of _____ Church,

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 prayer-filled process of reviewing profiles and interviewing candidates, ultimately reaching a unanimous decision. We are pleased to recommend to you our final candidate for the position of _____, to be considered by the congregation at a special meeting on Sunday, _____, following worship.

We are grateful to our Conference Minister, Rev. John Keahi, who worked closely with us in the Search and Call process. To review our steps that led us to this point of confidence in the Spirit's leading:

1. The governing body sought your perspectives on our church's ministry through a questionnaire and a series of small group meetings. Your insights and ideas were incorporated into the Local Church Profile that candidates read.
2. Our vacancy was listed in *UCC Ministry Opportunities* where hundreds of ministerial candidates saw it. We also publicized the



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vacancy within our local networks, and directed any interested candidates to the conference.



3. Persons authorized to complete a UCC Ministerial Profile submitted their profiles through the conference office for our committee. These profiles had information about the candidates' sense of calling, formation for ministry, faith and leadership experience, references, an ethical self-disclosure form, and a criminal background check.
4. We received profiles, reading with our own Local Church Profile in mind. We arranged a select number of initial and follow-up interviews. We called references and completed due diligence through the conference, before inviting our top candidates to a "neutral pulpit" interview. We hosted three neutral pulpits, so that we could hear what God might be saying to us through a diversity of candidates.
5. Following the neutral pulpits, we sought God's guidance and prayerfully made a decision. We were glad when our top candidate responded enthusiastically to our invitation for a candidating weekend. Terms of call were explored by the candidate and our governing body, with agreement.
6. Confidentiality has been essential to the entire process of profile review and interviews, so we kept you in necessary suspense. It was important to honor the integrity of our committee's discernment and to respect candidates' current ministry settings. Now, we ask you to keep in close confidence the candidate's name their current ministry, until such time as the congregational vote is affirmative and we have the candidate's consent to publish the news of their new call to ministry with us.



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7. Our candidate is _____. Their letter of selfintroduction is attached.



8. You will have an opportunity to meet the candidate on _____, in an informal setting on Saturday and in worship on Sunday when _____ will lead worship and preach. A congregational meeting following worship will offer each member an opportunity to ask questions of the Search Committee and to vote on the call to our new pastor.

We have been grateful during this search process for the excellent interim leadership of Rev. _____, and for their support and assistance with appropriate communication throughout our church.

Please plan to attend church on _____ to hear more from the Search Committee as we present our candidate to you. You can review our congregation's Local Church Profile ahead of time, found online at _____ and also posted in the church office.

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.

In Christ's name,
The Search Committee

During the candidating weekend, the congregation meets the candidate at one or multiple events, and then experiences worship with the candidate leading and preaching, after which a congregational vote is held by members in attendance. The Search Committee takes the lead in presenting the candidate to the congregation, celebrating the discernment process and the movement of the Holy Spirit, and affirming the candidate's suitability to the vision expressed in the Local Church Profile. The governing body conducts the vote prayerfully and



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in accordance with the church's bylaws. If the congregational vote is negative or if the candidate declines the call (for example if the vote is less than 90% favorable), the governing body and Search Committee work together to comfort the congregation and guide its continued discernment and search.

If the congregational vote is affirmative, follow the candidate's lead in determining when to publicize their candidacy and new call, out of respect for setting(s) they currently serve. Be sensitive about how and when the candidate's name is communicated before and after the candidating weekend. Help support the minister in relocating and getting established in the community, including announcements in local media (once the minister allows this information to be public). Some members of the Search Committee might form the initial Pastoral Relations Committee, a group that attends prayerfully to the qualities and habits of relationships between minister and congregation.

A TIME FOR REJOICING

Once the congregation has called the new pastor, the official work of a Search Committee is complete. While some of you may be asked to participate in new support structures for the incoming pastor, your final task together as a Search Committee is to celebrate your time and faithful work. Serving on a Search Committee is an intense experience! You have prayed together, laughed together, disagreed together, even cried together. Your faith has deepened, and your understanding of the congregation has grown and changed.

Read **Philippians 1:3-11** together. 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 bear fruit.

What hopes do you have for the fruit that will ripen as a result of your committee's work? How was the experience of



digging, planting, waiting, watering, and waiting some more for discernment to grow among you?

These words from Paul's prayer may form an appropriate blessing for the conclusion of the Search Committee: "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."

GOVERNING BODY: CONCLUDING TASKS

The governing body will further be involved in completing a covenant with the association and new pastor (typically a Three-Way or Four-Way Covenant), and planning the service of installation with the association. Any required new-employee screening (such as fingerprinting in the state of Pennsylvania) is the responsibility of the governing body to communicate and oversee. Complete the reimbursement of the new pastor's Criminal Background Check fees (from their UCC Ministerial Profile) and costs associated with relocation as provided in the call agreement.

Keep a copy of the Local Church Profile, Scope of Work, and call agreement for the sake of periodic evaluation and updated negotiation with the new minister. Help the congregation observe boundaries with the previously-departed minister and the now-departing intentional interim minister. The goal of these boundaries to protect the beginning bonds between the newly-called pastor and the congregation, so that healthy habits of communication are established in the pastor-parish relationship and the new pastor is granted the opportunity to earn trust and authority with the congregation.







- Local Church Profile
(who are we?)
- Search Committee Forms
- Listing on UCC Ministry Opportunity
- Interviews, Discernment
- Discernment, Interviews
(who resonates? why?)
- Neutral Pulpits
- Call Agreement Negotiation
- Candidating Weekend
- Final Vote
- Next Steps

KEEP TRACK
OF THE
CANDIDATES

Are we ready
to be
surprised?

Designate a
communicator
for the committee
to all candidates.

Remember that
Paul can't meet
on Tuesdays.

Ask conference
for access to
MissionInsite.

What can we
use besides
post-its???



Organizing for Search and Call



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	<i>Amauri Goodwin; received 5/12</i>	Minister's Name / Ministerial Profile Received
	<i>emailed 5/20</i>	Local Church Profile Sent
	<i>requested /1; accepted 6/</i>	Request for an initial interview / Letter of rejection
	<i>interview 6/10; reserved but thoughtful; enthusiastic about pastoral care and mission</i>	Initial interview / Impressions
	<i>delegated to committee member after interview; Amauri's profile noted a blog and YouTube link</i>	Review of Online Presence
	<i>requested 6/29, accepted 6/30</i>	Request for follow-up interview / Letter of rejection
	<i>interview 7/14; theological depth of conversation has committee energized</i>	Follow-up Interview / Impressions



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<i>Meeting with the Conference Minister to reflect on implicit bias</i>	Other Communications	
<i>Confidence and clear articulation of Amauri's skills from all three references</i>	Contact with References	
<i>Invitation sent 8/5, accepted 8/6. Date set for September when schedules allow.</i>	Neutral Pulpit Invitation/ Letter of rejection	
<i>Neutral pulpit 9/10. A measured preacher; personable and pastoral during in-person interviews.</i>	Neutral Pulpit / Impressions	
<i>Governing body president and treasurer report on a pleasant negotiation to agreeable terms.</i>	Call Agreement Negotiation/ Letter of Rejection	
<i>requested and accepted 9/18. date set for 10/4- . Saturday social, evening picnic at president's home.</i>	Candidating Weekend	
<i>% vote 0 n 10/5 and Amauri has accepted. Start date of 11/29 set so Amauri is with us for Advent.</i>	Final Vote and Next Steps	



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A RESOURCE OF MINISTERIAL EXCELLENCE, SUPPORT & AUTHORIZATION

