

Mission Bite: from your Conference Staff

from Rev. Rick Wagner, Associate Conference Minister

Over the next four weeks, the **COMMAntary Mission Bite** will feature a series on how the Conference assists congregations during a pastoral transition.

Search & Call, Part 1

Q: "Our pastor has announced his/her resignation or retirement. What do we do?"

A: Call your Associate Conference Minister (ACM). Your ACM will assist you with resources and guidance. For example, take a look at the Search and Call resources found on [the UCC website](#). Here you can find a description of the actions lay leaders should take when faced with a pastoral resignation and forms for exit interviews, a farewell liturgy, a checklist for the departing pastor to complete in order to ensure an orderly transition, and much more.

Q: "What about finding an Interim Minister?"

A: Your ACM will work with your governing board to identify the qualities you want or need in an Interim Minister, and will advertise the position so that qualified ministers apply. Usually it will be your governing board that hires an Interim Minister.

Q: "Do we really need an Interim Minister?"

A: Most congregations benefit from the special skills and training that Interims can provide. There is much more to interim ministry than providing temporary worship leadership and pastoral care. Interims can help a congregation assess what they do well (and not so well) and provide a general "tune-up" that will put the congregation in a much better position to attract someone who will be a good match as their next settled pastor. Interims may also be trained to deal with conflict, grief, the aftermath of misconduct, visioning, and questions about viability.

Q: "How long does an interim usually last?"

A: Most interims take about 16-18 months, though they can be shorter or longer. A typical interim contract is for 12 months, with extensions that can be for six months, or month by month.

Q: "When should we elect a Search Committee?"

A: Most Search Committees are elected and begin their work after the Interim Minister is in place. A major responsibility of the Search Committee is to complete the Local Church Profile, and sometimes the Interim Minister can help the Committee ensure that the Profile accurately and positively describes the church.

Q: "Who should be on the Search Committee?"

A: First, check your church's constitution to see whether the Committee is elected or appointed. Invite people to be nominated but don't ask for volunteers! People who are recognized as thoughtful, wise, humble, insightful, committed team players tend to make the best Search Committee members. People with a particular 'agenda' or who are very forceful in their opinions can make the work harder and should be avoided. A Committee of

7 or 8 people usually is enough. The larger the number, the more complicated things become. The best Search Committees are broadly representative of the congregation, and have members who listen well to each other and who are committed year-round members of the church. Remember, their work must be done carefully and confidentially, always seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Next week: Working on the Local Church Profile, assessing finances, and more!

Mission Bite: from your Conference Staff

*from Revs. Elena Larssen and Rick Wagner,
Associate Conference Ministers*

This is PART TWO of our special **COMMAntary Mission Bite** series on pastoral transitions and succession plans. Last week we discussed the resignation/retirement of a pastor, and how to begin to prepare for an interim time; this week, we'll look at the interim pastor's role and the pastoral profile.

Search & Call, Part 2

Q: How do we say a good goodbye to our out-going pastor?

A: The departure of a pastor is an important time to celebrate all that has been accomplished, to say 'thank you,' and to move past any regrets. Your outgoing pastor should have an [Exit Interview](#) conducted by the Committee on Ministry; the pastor should also leave 'hand-off' information about the life and management of the congregation (including lists of shut-ins, financial information, calendars of church events, etc.). We also strongly recommend parties, gifts, and [a celebratory worship service](#) (Section 1, Resource 7); if you are having a painful farewell, it's alright to acknowledge the pain, but don't allow the difficulties to overshadow the on-going mission and faithfulness of the congregation. You may be closing a chapter, but the story of the congregation continues to move forward.

Q: We've got an Interim Pastor, and we've got a Search Team...now what?

A: Your Interim Pastor is specially trained to support the congregation to healthfully transition to new leadership; they may counsel any grieving, they may identify areas for growth or repair in the organization, and they will support the congregation's reflection and research, answering the question, "Where are we going, and what kind of pastor do we need to lead us there?"

Q: What is the typical budget we need to have in order to call a full-time minister?

A: Many congregations experience sticker shock when it's time to hire a new pastor, especially when the outgoing pastor has been on staff a long time, causing the church to drift away from 'industry average' compensation guidelines. ([UCCMN Guidelines are posted here](#); reflective of actual salary averages in Minnesota, they are updated every year in sync with the Council of NonProfits by the Professional Development of Authorized Ministers Team. [Current insurance costs are listed here](#).) David Greenhaw, president of Eden Seminary, estimates that the average congregation needs an overall budget of 115,000 to afford a full-time pastor, and we recommend looking at [Mission InSite](#) for average household income in your area. (For more info on [Mission InSite](#), contact your Associate Conference Minister.) Using the following formula, you can get a good picture of your financial capacity to fairly compensate your pastor: take the number of contributors, and average contributions, compare that number to your local average income: that percentage

tells whether there is a stable giving pattern or whether growth is possible. It's a helpful reality check!

Q: Good to know...but how do we find the right person?

A: The first job of the Search Team is to collect the data and input of the congregation and formulate a Congregational Profile. This is where the National Offices of the United Church of Christ are essential (see [profile writing software](#)), as they hold a national data base of congregations and pastors who are searching for one another (see [how congregations advertise](#)). After writing an honest and visionary profile, congregations can accept the profiles of interested pastors...kind of like a dating website!

Next week, we'll talk about trusting God and finding - not the "Perfect Pastor," but finding the perfect fit!

Blessings,
The Reverends Elena Larssen and Rick Wagner

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*from Revs. Elena Larssen and Rick Wagner,
Associate Conference Ministers*

This is Part Three of a four part series on the Search and Call process for congregations seeking new clergy. Last week, we talked about the insights of the interim time, and this week, we'll talk about how the committee works with candidates to find that perfect match...not the perfect pastor!

Q: You said that Search Committees shouldn't look for the "Perfect Pastor" but for the perfect fit - what does that mean?

A: Congregations are often looking for someone who can do it all and has no flaws... but none of us is good at everything and all of us have flaws! A good minister usually excels at three to five things, and that's really about how much a productive pastor can accomplish at one time. For example, a congregation might want someone who preaches, plans good worship, leads in the wider church, is a crack administrator, and is great with young people, and is growing the church... whoops! That's six - and we can pretty realistically predict that at least one of the six would consistently become a low priority - and pastoral care isn't even on the list!

On top of that, there are some skills that are "out of style" at any given time. For example, it's hard to find a pastor, right now, who is extremely well trained and experienced with evangelism, but we have some of the finest pastoral counselors and pastoral caregivers in all of American Christianity (Surprised to hear that? See how many hospital chaplains are UCC!). Also, someone who is an excellent counselor may not be much of an evangelist, or vice versa. There are some important skills that, if well cultivated, run counter to other valuable skills, which is why large churches hire staff with a variety of complementary skills. In a solo-pastor setting, the Search Team needs to choose carefully which four or five skills are non-negotiable; in a larger setting, the skills need to be carefully communicated in the hiring materials.

A big part of the search team's work, therefore, is about studying the congregation and

praying about the future of the church, with an eye to those three to five top skills. Really, the Search Team becomes a kind of visioning team for the future of the congregation and works to hire someone who can help expand and fulfill that vision. So, it's really important to work through the fantasies about who you might hire and be as specific as possible with your criteria. Then, when the Team is reading profiles, they can read with their list of criteria in one hand and profile in the other.

Q: Do Search Teams ever disagree?

A: Oh, sure! But less than you'd think... often times the search process becomes very spiritual and bonding for the team. Folks always say, "It was so much more work than I thought it would be and it was so much more rewarding than I thought it would be!"

Q: What does the candidate do in the process?

A: First of all, they prepare and circulate a Ministerial Profile; it's great for committees, because if they get a valid UCC profile they have the educational history, ministry credentials, legal background check, references, resume, writing samples, background disclosure... all in one, formal document that is processed by the Conference and the National Offices. AND it's great for the candidate because they write one resume and then all they have to do tell the Conferences where to send it, which we automatically do, in accordance with our commitment to open hiring in the UCC By-Laws.

If a Search Team is interested, they typically contact the candidate for a writing sample (Something like, "Say more about why you're interested in this church?") or a phone interview. With the job market as tight as it's been lately, open positions have been getting many, many candidates, so Teams are looking for ways to narrow the field, by asking for writing samples or sermons before they commit to a phone interview - it saves time, but surprises some candidates who remember days when churches were desperate for strong candidates. The *Christian Century* predicts that when the economy turns around and more Baby Boomers start retiring, the days of clergy shortages will return quickly.

If the phone interview goes well, a Team will check the candidate's references; if they like what they hear, they may initiate a second phone interview or a face-to-face interview. When candidates start meeting face to face with a team - it's getting serious! A Team may want to hear a candidate preach, and often our offices will arrange a Neutral Pulpit, where the Team and candidate meet up at a neutral, third-party church so that the pastor can show their leadership style in worship and preaching; usually, a Neutral Pulpit is a sign that the candidate is one of a very few candidates. If that goes well, a Team will often make an offer, and negotiations begin!

Q: What is the candidate pool like?

A: Great question! We have many pastors, both first and second career, in their 50's and 60's; we have very few pastors in their 40's, and are starting to see a resurgence in ministry as a first career, so there are some pastors in their 20's. The 1950's image of the pastor: 40 years old, with 15 years of experience... wow - that person is extremely rare right now. So, the chances that a church will hire someone with a lot of experience is good, and the chances that they'll hire someone with no experience is good. The middle range is where we have few pastors; Gen-Xers were rarely encouraged or supported to consider ministry. We always say, "Talent trumps Experience. Commitment trumps Talent," because we'd rather see you have a talented pastor that just needs some training and support to excel, than someone who has been 'just ok' for a long time. Also, we don't want a Team to work hard and hire a rock star who doesn't stick around!

It really is about that perfect fit, and that is where the guidance of the Holy Spirit is made clear. This is a hiring process, but it's also a spiritual process of self-discovery and courage. It's really fun and an honor to coach Search Teams as they do this work!

Blessings,
Revs. Rick Wagner and Elena Larssen

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*from Revs. Elena Larssen and Rick Wagner,
Associate Conference Ministers*

This is the final part of a four part series on the Search and Call process for congregations seeking new pastoral leadership. Last week we talked about finding the person who is the best match for your congregation. This week we'll talk about the final stages of the search and call process.

Q: The Search Committee has identified the person it wants to be our next Pastor. What happens next?

A: If this person is truly the best match for your congregation, the Search Committee should be very excited. They (or other authorized parties) will negotiate the terms of call with the person including salary, housing, benefits, professional expenses, and other details which can be found in the Compensation Guidelines and Pastoral Call Agreement [available here](#).

Q: You speak of this as a "call" rather than a "hire." What's the difference?

A: Ministry is a vocation and not just a job. The care of souls is involved here, and God is intimately involved. If God as well as the Search Committee isn't calling a person to be your Pastor, then that person would do well to reconsider. The search process is holy work requiring spiritual discipline on the part of both the minister and the Search Committee. This is why the word 'discernment' is used so often here. Long hours, confidential matters, and direct involvement in some of the deepest spiritual and emotional moments of peoples' lives (births, deaths, celebrations, difficult decisions) make ministry a very high calling. It's not just about making a good 'show' on Sunday mornings, and the Search Committee has to look for personal depth and character as well as professional skills in its candidates.

Q: Ok, assuming everyone believes God is calling this person to be the Pastor, what do we do?

A: A 'candidating' weekend is scheduled when the candidate and his/her family come to the community. The weekend usually has at least two parts. On Saturday, a "Meet and Greet" is arranged to which the whole congregation is invited. There the Search Committee introduces the candidate and identifies the things that led them to select her/him. Then the candidate shares some of his/her personal faith journey and talks about why s/he feels called to this particular congregation. A time for questions and answers follows, along with refreshments and casual conversation. This helps the congregation know more about the person they will be voting on when a special congregational meeting is held following the next day's worship service. Assuming the vote by secret ballot is overwhelmingly positive, a call is officially extended.

Q: What about moving expenses?

A: The standard practice is for the church to pay all normal and customary expenses to move the Pastor and his/her household to the community. Recognizing that these expenses can range from \$3,000 to more than \$10,000 depending on the distance and size of household, some churches negotiate a maximum dollar amount or offer to pay everything up to a certain weight. The United Methodists, for example, pay to move everything up to 14,000 pounds. Weight above that is the Pastor's responsibility.

Q: If the Pastor is coming from a different state, are there special things to consider?

A: Yes, but first it's important to know that the Minnesota Conference UCC complies with MN Statute 148a, which requires that we check for sexual misconduct with the minister's employer(s) for the previous 5 years. This is true for all ministers, regardless of where they have served. For those coming from another state, the Conference requests a transfer of ministerial standing, and the minister schedules a meeting with the Subcommittee on Authorized Ministry (SAM). When 1) the 148a check has been completed, 2) the minister has met with SAM, 3) their standing has been transferred or granted, and 4) they have joined their new church, a Service of Installation can be scheduled. Installation services are usually scheduled at times other than Sunday morning so that representatives from the Committee on Ministry and other parts of the Conference can attend. We recommend that the Ordained Minister's Code ([Resource 1](#)) be included as part of the service. Search Committees are usually thanked and officially released from further duties at this service, though we recommend that one or two Search Committee members serve on the church's Pastoral Relations Committee during the Pastor's first year.

Q: Anything else?

A: We (the ACMs) have a checklist of things we go over with new pastors, from registering their credentials with the County Clerk to legally solemnize marriages, to notifying them of the time and place of their local clergy cluster, to pointing out that at 1 pm on the first Wednesday of the month they will probably hear tornado sirens go off. The list includes many more items, but the most important thing is for you, the members of the congregation, to do everything you can to welcome the new pastor and join as partners in Christ's service.

Blessings,
Revs. Rick Wagner and Elena Larssen