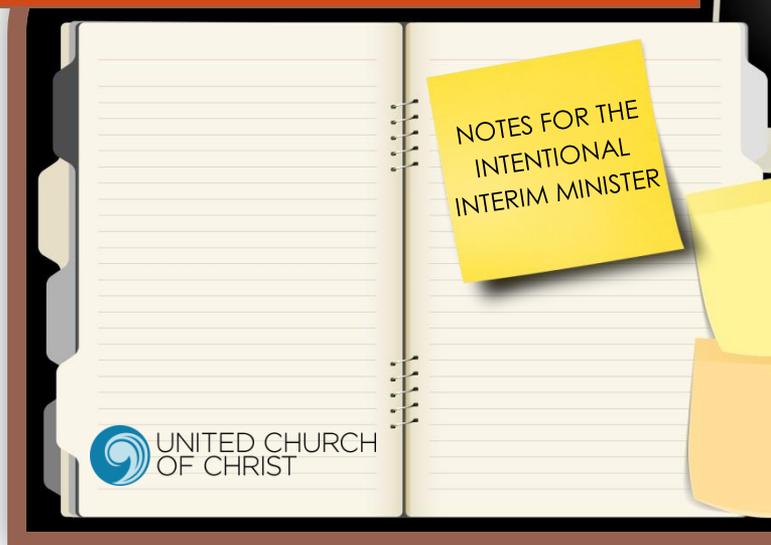


Guide to Pastoral Search and Call



 UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST

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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 minister serving an intentional interim season in a UCC congregation.

If you have not trained in the leadership tasks and organizational dynamics involved in intentional interim ministry, take advantage of the educational opportunities publicized through AUCCIIM (“awesome”), the Association of UCC Intentional Interim Ministers, which is connected with the ecumenical Interim Ministry Network. The practice of ongoing learning and professional reflection on transitional ministry will distinguish your ministry from that of a supply pastor, who provides short-term pastoral coverage.



JOINING THE TRANSITION

Congregations in the midst of leadership transition are experiencing profound opportunity – and usually significant challenge. In pastoring intentionally for a limited time during a church’s interim season, your commitment is to support the congregation so that it can best do the work of transition which accompanies change. Your own habits of excellence during this time are vitally important. Professional education, collegial relationships, and ongoing spiritual growth will help you thrive even during times of stress.

Your entrance in this particular congregation usually does not mean that you transfer membership and ministerial standing. Instead your ministerial standing is kept in the association of your home church, and you will need to abide by oversight requirements of that association. Be in collegial communication with the association to which the church you are serving belongs, so you can help the congregation maintain its local covenantal relationships while also clarifying to the association your accountability with your home association. Model positive engagement in local covenantal relationships, and promote the role of the conference and the financial giving that enables the ministry of the conference to UCC churches in transition.

You might incorporate the following liturgy into a worship service and/or leadership meeting at the start of your ministry with the congregation:

CONGREGATION: *Gracious God, you have blessed and sustained us for years, and you have given us sacred symbols of Christian life together in this church community. Be with us now, we pray, as we enter this in-between time. Comfort as we process the emotions of the past, and as we look anxiously toward new leadership in our future. Bless us and guide us as we reflect on our history and as we dream dreams about our future, so that we might prepare one another for the next portion of this*



congregation's journey. Give us courage, patience, and vision. Strengthen us in our Christian vocation of witness to the world and service to others, through Jesus our Christ. Amen.

INTERIM PASTOR: *As we begin this intentional interim time together, we begin new relationships. I have been called as your interim pastor, to support the work God is calling your church to do at this time. As a minister of the Gospel, I will pray for you, listen to you, encourage and challenge you as we move through this time together. As an interim minister, I will assist you in the tasks of this season: [add agreed-upon Scope of Work tasks here, as developed using the Call Agreement Workbook].*

CONGREGATION: *We, the people of _____ Church, receive you as a servant of God and pledge our partnership as we continue to use the gifts God has given us for the ministries of the Gospel in this place: worship, education, witness, service, and stewardship.*

INTERIM PASTOR: *May God bless us and lead us as we together embark on this interim time. May God's spirit instruct and prepare us for the future mission and ministry of the church in this place.*



ASSESSING THE TRANSITION

As an intentional interim minister, you will attend to each church in a unique way. Not every congregation is dealing with significant conflict, not every church has suffered pastoral misconduct, not every church is mourning the conclusion of a decades-long thriving pastorate. Choose wisely which tools to use. Some interims adopt a framework of *conflict utilization* to uncover and unpack difficulties in the life of the congregation. Some interims apply *systems theory* to deal with trauma related to past leadership/departure issues. Some interims assess *organizational intelligence* in order to stir up existing possibilities and new creativity.

During the interim season, not all congregational issues will be resolved but the church as a whole will be newly prepared to affirm and enter a relationship with their next pastoral leader. Assist the congregation in keeping track of the progress they are making toward leadership transition. Practical tasks are sometimes visible and sometimes less visible. Help the congregation to name their intentions, to see their progress, and to affirm the sacred calling of the church.

Use the following Bible study with lay leaders to reflect on change and uncertainty:

FACING OUR FEARS

During a time of changing pastoral leadership, many churches experience a variety of emotions and organizational dynamics. To focus on God's creative work amidst uncertainty and to prepare for the next pastorate, a congregation does well to center itself on scripture and worship.

Psalm 27 is both a cry for help from God and a song that reflects trust in God. The psalm evokes a wide range of emotions because it names our deep fears as well as our



foundational belief that God is with us. God is our strength and God will not abandon us to our fears and anxieties.

Read **Psalm 27** aloud together. Identify verses that seem to speak directly to discussions among the church leadership team.

Ask: What are your greatest fears as the church embarks on this ministerial transition? What are the greatest fears of the congregation? If a recent pastorate has been difficult, how does that history impact the fears?

Reflect together: In the psalm, how does God strengthen the people despite their fears?

CONNECTING IDENTITY TO CHANGE

Communicate regularly with conference staff during the church's process. Review the congregation's timeline, tools, and expectations for the UCC Search and Call process. Identify and guide the process structure for the congregation during the interim time, learning from the past and creating a chosen future with God's help. Convey your intention and affirm the congregation's progress during the interim period at every opportunity.

Support the church and work with its leaders to facilitate the all-church activities and exercises of discernment, assessment, and visioning that will inform the content of the Local Church Profile. Pay attention to the "five focus points" from intentional interim training as well as the "three questions" in the Local Church Profile: *Who are we? Who is our neighbor?* and *Who is God calling us to become?* Notice the natural connections between the five focus points and the Local Church Profile, for example:

- **Heritage:** 11-Year Report, Story-telling Timeline, All-Church Survey



- **Mission:** Narrative Activities, Engaging Community Members, Engaging New Church Members, Mission Insite Demographics
- **Connections:** UCC Statements of Witness, Ecumenical and Interfaith Activities
- **Leadership:** Ministerial History, Welcoming Diversity Inventory
- **Future:** Financial Information, Behavioral Covenant

The Local Church Profile is a demonstration of the congregation's discoveries and reflections through the five focus points and three questions. The Local Church Profile should be completed midway through an interim period, with more or less time depending on specific circumstances. An intentional interim minister can assist the leaders of the church in facilitating an all-church process of discovery and discussion to generate input for (and shared ownership of) the Local Church Profile. The leaders for this church-wide process might be organized as a transition team or be part of the governing body; these leaders encourage broad participation from the congregation before the Search Committee is formed to begin its confidential work.

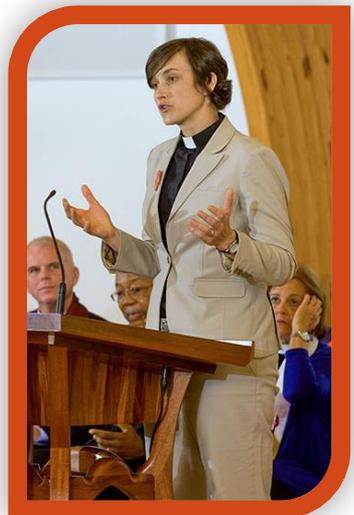
Once the three profile questions are completed, help church leaders convey the Local Church Profile to the Search Committee, perhaps in worship as the Search Committee is commissioned by the congregation. The Search Committee will seek the best pastoral candidate to advance the church's calling as articulated in the profile. A small overlap in membership between the church leaders who created the profile and the Search Committee is recommended.

In its final and validated form, the Local Church Profile provides relevant information to pastoral candidates who are discerning their own call and potential commitment to this particular congregation. Likewise the Search Committee will have relevant information on candidates through validated UCC Ministerial Profiles. As an



intentional interim minister, you may provide one of the church references for the Local Church Profile.

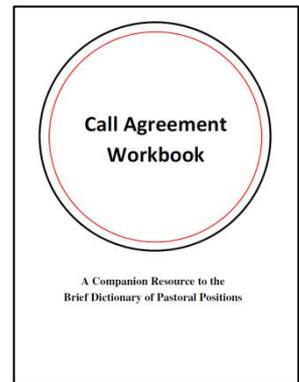
After the Search Committee identifies a final candidate, the congregation will return to its responses in the Local Church Profile in order to discern and affirm (potentially) its shared sense of call with the candidate. In years to come, the governing body will also return to the Local Church Profile to assess and evaluate its ongoing ministry and its settled pastor's ministry in response to *Who are we? Who is our neighbor?* and *Who is God calling us to become?*



ENCOURAGING RESPONSIBILITY

Although in some interim positions you will be expected to work with the Search Committee before they begin to receive UCC Ministerial Profiles, in most cases the conference plays this role and your work as the intentional interim minister will focus on the governing body and other church leaders (such as a transition team). Assist with communication in the life of the church: between the governing body and Search Committee, leaders and members, church and conference, etc. There can never be too much clarity about process, roles, and decisions made during search and call.

Familiarize yourself with tools the conference is providing to a Search Committee. The *Call Agreement Workbook* contains a sample Scope of Work for pastoral positions, which might prompt conversations about the church's expectations of its pastors. You might field general questions about the capabilities ministers are expected to demonstrate, as outlined in the *Marks of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministers*. Processes of support and oversight of ministers by associations, as evidenced in UCC Ministerial Profiles, may need your clarification as church members seek to understand how ministers enter the search process.



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Sometimes the experience of the Search Committee leads to new questions for the governing body or new commitments for the church. Questions may be raised such as: Is the compensation and benefits package appropriate for full-time ministry, or should the Scope of Work be adjusted? Might the next season of the church's life involve sharing a pastor or sharing ministry with another congregation? Help the church understand and make use of these questions as part of –



not an interruption to – a Spirit-filled process. Faith often takes shape along a labyrinth or cruciform journey, not as a direct linear path.

Conference staff will guide the Search Committee with best practices during their confidential interviewing and discernment process toward a final candidate. Beyond the Search Committee, no one in the church should know the names or details of candidates being considered, both to focus the committee on its own discernment and out of respect for the settings that candidates may currently serve.

While the Search Committee's work progresses, continue your work with the church on any organizational changes that need to be accomplished during the interim time. Examples include: governance restructures and bylaws changes, resizing committees to fit the church's size, program initiatives, an Open and Affirming decision, financial best practices, and personnel policies.

At times, the work of organizational change will reveal (or reflect) symptoms of larger life cycle changes in the life of the congregation. Indicators of life cycle transitions may include: a long but unfruitful search, limited capacity to form a Search Committee at all, financial concerns that limit an open-ended commitment to the next minister, profound disagreement in the church's engagement with the three questions of the Local Church Profile, and more. In these cases, the church's transition toward its future might involve a season dedicated to a designated purpose, for which time-bounded pastoral leadership can be sought: a designated-term pastor. You may be asked to familiarize the congregation with pastoral skillsets outlined in the *Call Agreement Workbook* that reflect the adaptive possibilities of a church embarking on life cycle changes, such as revitalization, hospice/legacy, or new ministry start. As the congregation identifies its designated purpose, the conference works with the Search Committee or governing body to seek out, interview, and select a designated-term candidate for a congregational vote. As an interim, you are not eligible to become the designated-term pastor.



Reinforce good closure and good boundaries between the congregation and its former pastor, which may have been outlined in a departure letter. These guidelines prepare the congregation to invest in its relationship with a new minister. Help the governing body process and respond to significant learnings from the exit interview with the outgoing minister, if there was one. Assist with requests for and leadership in conflict facilitation (if needed) between former pastors and current leaders.

DEPARTING FROM THE TRANSITION

As the congregation nears the end of its pastoral search, this is a good time for you to teach and reaffirm lessons of basic church life: forms of worship, practices of faith, and mutual care. Consider using the following Bible study with church leaders.

THE CHALLENGE OF WORSHIPPING WHILE EVALUATING

On the candidating weekend, the church will experience a candidate's worship leadership and preaching. This is an opportunity to evaluate the candidate's skill in liturgy and prayer, in preaching and pastoral presence. This is also a challenge: to be worshipful while also being evaluative.

It will be important to enter into the worship experience as fully as possible; those who remain detached will miss the opportunity to know what it is like to truly worship in the context of this person's guidance.

How can the congregation, with the help of the Holy Spirit, measure a good match?

Read **1 Corinthians 12** aloud together.



Although church members always rank “good preaching” high on their list of qualifications for a pastor, preaching is only one of the diverse skills and gifts that the church is seeking – and every minister embodies those skills and gifts in diverse ways. Some preachers are extroverted; others quiet and reflective. Some are gifted storytellers and others are skilled at “opening up” a scripture passage. Some seem to radiate God’s love while others resemble a “noisy gong.”

Paul’s reminder of the diversity of gifts and the centrality of love can help the congregation be receptive to diverse gifts and attentive to the demonstration of God’s love in worship on the candidating weekend. To help church leaders consider their own evaluative measures, ask:

How do congregants discern if a preacher is aiming to entertain or aiming to proclaim the Gospel?

How does the church prioritize its expectations for a pastor’s gifts for preaching and teaching, arts and worship and pastoral care, with gifts for administration, mission, and justice action?

How is God’s love experienced by congregants in a pastoral prayer, children’s sermon, or hymns?

Reflect together: How did the congregation express its hopes for the next minister in the Local Church Profile? In what way can the Search Committee’s candidate equip the church to pursue the vision that was expressed for “who we are,” “who our neighbor is,” and “who God is calling us to be”?

Eventually the congregation will vote on whether to affirm the Search Committee’s candidate, corresponding to the church’s vision for ministry and leadership as expressed in its Local Church Profile. Your presence is not expected during the events of the candidating



weekend, worship, and congregational vote. A positive vote is overwhelming in favor of the candidate. (Candidates have been known to decline a call if the vote is less than 90% favorable.) If the vote is not favorable or if the candidate declines the call, the work of the Search Committee resumes with the assistance of conference staff.

If possible and with the conference's awareness, plan your exit to coincide with the arrival of the new minister. If this is not possible and there is a slight gap in pastoral coverage, the congregation might use a supply pastor between your departure and the new pastor's arrival.

In the United Church of Christ, an intentional interim minister is expected to stay throughout the interim but is not eligible for the subsequent position (whether designated-term or settled). The UCC Ministerial Profile repeats this expectation. Your ministerial standing can be evaluated by your willingness to abide by this professional ethic. Faithfully complete your exit tasks to make the next minister's entrance smooth:

- Write a formal good-bye letter to the congregation, naming the positives of your experience and reiterating the ministerial boundaries you (and the congregation) must recognize for the sake of the church bonding with the new minister.
- Fulfill an exit interview with the church governing body and with the relevant Committee on Ministry.
- Make sure a welcome file is prepared for the new minister, including: member directory; keys and floorplan of facility; church calendar; employee handbook/policies; documents such as newsletters, annual meeting reports, bulletins, and pertinent historical information; financial and committee information; association/conference contact information and community resources; your contact information should the new minister desire to be in touch with you for conversation.



- Attend to your own emotional process, including grief.
- Use liturgy to conduct a final goodbye with the congregation.

You might incorporate the following liturgy into a worship service and/or leadership meeting as your ministry ends with the congregation:

INTERIM PASTOR: *When I joined my ministry with yours, I took on the responsibilities of your pastor for an interim season. I led worship services, provided pastoral care, and encouraged Christian faith formation. Will you now release me from these responsibilities?*

CONGREGATION: *We will.*

INTERIM PASTOR: *As your Interim Pastor, I took on a guiding role as you reviewed your history, explored needed 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?*

CONGREGATION: *We will, with God's help.*

INTERIM PASTOR: *Together we have sought to sustain the life of this church and to grow in love and understanding and faith. Will the [governing body] please come forward? You are the elected leaders of this church. Will you continue on the path of love and understanding and faith?*

LEADERS: *We will, with God's help.*

INTERIM PASTOR: *Will all members of the congregation support the elected committee members of this church?*



CONGREGATION: *We will, with God's help.*

INTERIM PASTOR: *Will you commit to patience as your next pastor begins ministry among you, supporting their leadership efforts in accordance with the guidance given to this church by the Holy Spirit, and will you hold yourselves to wise communication practices to grow the relationship between congregation and minister over time?*

CONGREGATION: *We will, with God's help.*

INTERIM PASTOR TO GOVERNING BODY/MODERATOR: *I return the keys you gave me when I came. I thank you for that trust.*

GOVERNING BODY/MODERATOR: *I receive the keys on behalf of this congregation. We express our gratitude and love for your wise and faithful leadership during this transition time.*

INTERIM PASTOR: *The prayers of the Church Universal will be always with you, as your prayers are with ministers and congregations everywhere. Let us pray. [pastoral prayer]*

Through your example, a congregation may learn how to say hello and goodbye appropriately, gaining confidence in welcoming new partnership and pastoral leadership.



