

# Our path to a new settled pastor

Dear Church Family,

The process of finding a new settled pastor takes an important next step with the commissioning of a Pastoral Search Committee on Sunday, October 1. We started on this path in August of 2016 when Pastor Andrea Ayvazian announced her retirement as the leader of our spiritual community. As we move forward with the search process, the Transition Leadership Team offers this brief overview of what will happen now and how we got here. (The documents referenced here also appear in Transition Documents in this section of our web site.)

## **Where we are today**

The blessing and commissioning of Pastoral Search Committee members marks the formal start of their work.

On Sept. 10 the Church Council accepted the recommendation of the Transition Leadership Team and appointed the seven-member committee: Cate Shaw, Toby Davis, Susan Farrell, Tina Marini, Richard Spencer, Ellen Tobiassen and Nancy Winninger. The Council also adopted the Church Profile, which will be used by the Search Committee to guide its work. The Search Committee has already met with Rev. Jill Graham, our area conference minister, to understand their mission.

The Search Committee does not call a new pastor. They only make a recommendation to the congregation, which takes a vote on who to call. In the United Church of Christ, the congregation makes the decision.

The Search Committee members are on a weekly schedule of meetings. They started with a close read of the 60-page Church Profile, which identifies the key skills and gifts church members say they want in the next pastor. They will then review the Profile of Acting Pastor Chris Mereschuk and interview him for the position. This includes checking references.

The Search Committee must then decide whether to recommend him to the congregation as our next settled pastor. Their decision must be unanimous. Their decision and their reasoning will be conveyed to the congregation in a letter. If they do recommend Chris Mereschuk as our next settled pastor, he will be asked to preach a sermon at a Candidating Sunday. At the end of that service, the congregation will vote on whether to call him as our next settled pastor. If the Search Committee or the congregation say no to Chris, then the UCC will provide the Search Committee with the profiles of other UCC ministers to consider. Chris will leave and an interim pastor will be appointed until a new settled pastor is called.

**What is the timetable for all this?** The Search Committee is hoping to make its decision by the end of October, but it could take longer. There is no deadline. This needs to be a thoughtful and deliberative process.

**Why is Chris considered first?** Based on years of experience, UCC has found it best to consider internal candidates first before opening up the process. This is meant to be fair to those candidates and it also acknowledges that other ministers will not apply for pastoral opening when there is an internal candidate. (UCC Policy on Pastor Search can be found in the Transition Documents.)

**What will guide the Search Committee?** The church profile is their primary guide. It draws from the visioning work conducted in 2015, the all-church meetings held last spring, the small group discussion in June, numerous conversation with church leaders and others, and the written church-wide survey. The Profile is the touchstone for Search Committee members in their deliberations.

**How can the congregation help the Search Committee?** Respect that their deliberations and discussions need to remain confidential. Pray for them and offer gratitude as they undertake this sacred and serious task on behalf of all of us.

**How did we get to this point**

Following Pastor Andrea's announcement of her retirement after 12 years of leading the congregation, a Transition Leadership Team was named to guide the search for a new pastor. The first TLT consisted of Lynn Fogg, Church Council moderator; Alice Barber, chair of trustee; Pat James, co-head deacon; Jo Cannon, treasurer; Jim Foudy, Human Resources coordinator. We consulted with UCC officials and read up on the process, which was new for all of us. We soon understood that the search for a new pastor would take a year or more. Andrea's last service and farewell event was set for Sunday, Jan 1, 2017.

In September of 2016 trustees announced that a decline in contributions and other financial considerations would make it impossible to maintain the assistance pastor position, which Chris Mereschuk then held. The congregation faced a difficult choice: to let Chris go and accept an interim pastor from UCC or make Chris the acting pastor during the search and transition to a new settled pastor.

On Sept. 20 the Transition Leadership Team held an open meeting attended by about 50 people. The two options forward were spelled out. The pros and cons debated. There were many questions and a lot of comments on how to proceed. (See minutes in Transition Documents.)

The transition team also solicited opinions by email and in person over the next few weeks. An all-congregation meeting was called following Sunday services Oct. 16. On behalf of the transition team, trustee Alice Barber made the case for why Chris should be the acting pastor. (See Transition Documents.) While acknowledging congregational concerns with that approach, Alice noted the "potential risk of an unknown Interim Pastor, who may or may not understand or embrace our welcoming, justice seeking, diverse community." The congregation voted 64-25 to offer Chris the acting pastor position, which he accepted.

In March a Profile Writing Committee was appointed by Church Council. Members met regularly throughout the spring and summer to complete the profile template from the Massachusetts United Church of Christ. They were asked to consider and answer a number of questions as we explore where we have been as a church, who we are today, and what our vision is for the future. Serving on the Profile Writing Team were Fred Goodhue, Pat James, Jan Varnon, Mariel Addis, Nancy Winninger and, for several months, Anne Warner. They were guided by Rev. Peter Wells, a former Area Minister for the Massachusetts UCC.

On Sept. 10 the completed profile was accepted by Church Council with expressions of deep gratitude for all the work and thoughtful deliberations that went into it. The same Council meeting also appointed the Search Committee.

In prayer and peace

Your Transition Leadership Team

*Jim Foudy, Jo Cannon, Carolyn DuBois, Sam Icklan*