

**WHEN AN ASSOCIATE PASTOR EXPRESSES INTEREST
IN THE SENIOR PASTOR VACANCY**
(Suggested policy to be adopted by the local church)
(Adapted from the Connecticut Conference and Amended 9-11-2012)

Background principles and best practices.

Over the years there have been times when there was a candidate for a staff position who came from within the church. Churches along with the denomination have learned from the best practices and difficult struggles of churches who have wrestled with this dilemma. These are some of the background concepts, insights and principles gained from those churches.

1. In the congregational polity and theology the belief is that the will of God can best be discerned when the congregation prayerfully and humbly and openly gathers to listen and seek God's will. Therefore we have a search committee discernment process rather than an appointment process for the selecting Ordained pastors to Called positions.
2. Our Search process for a Called staff position is based on discernment of the will of God. It is mindful that God does not always perceive leadership qualities and needs as humanity perceives. This is apparent from the Biblical stories such as the selection of David as King over his apparently superior brothers. 1 Samuel 16:7 "But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the LORD does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart." (NRSV)
3. Our Search process presumes that as much as possible there should be a level playing field among all candidates that allows a Search Committee to view them all equally. It increases the possibility of honest, humble openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
4. Normally, a church engages a time of Interim Ministry with a trained interim who helps the congregation view, grieve, learn from and release the past in order to be open to God's future. As a rule of thumb the interim time will last at least one month for each year of the previous pastor's ministry.
5. New models of Search and interim have emerged that are being evaluated and explored. Some of these have historical routes in the congregational tradition where a new pastor was designated or selected before the end of the ministry of the current pastor. This allowed for an overlap or succession into the new ministry with a minimum loss of momentum.
6. Associates have not normally been considered for the position of Senior Pastor of the same church because the gifts, competencies and skills they have were matched to the needs of the Associate position and may not be sufficient for the Senior Position. Additionally, it may be difficult for members of the church to be able to let them shift to the role and relationship of senior pastor. However, there are stories throughout our UCC history of this transition from Associate to Senior working faithfully and effectively.
7. Pastors and churches in the UCC tradition have not wanted Conference staff to limit the pool by filtering or recommending specific candidates. There are some instances and some Conferences where the Conference Staff have given a Search Committee only one or a small

pool of select candidates. At the firm request of churches and pastors that has not been the policy of the Massachusetts Conference of the United Church of Christ except in rare and unusual circumstances.

8. Pastors have asked that they not be included in a pool of potential candidates when there is an 'in house' candidate in the pool. They have felt that the process is too often perfunctory with a foregone conclusion. They have felt that the 'in house' candidate has an unfair advantage over every other candidate.
9. Pastors have noted that it is difficult enough to follow a long tenured and beloved pastor. That is compounded when they are selected over an 'in house' candidate (eg. The Associate) who must then also leave the church. Pastors do not want to begin a ministry with the double grief of the loss of both Senior and Associate and potential resentment of their being chosen over a loved and respected Associate.
10. As a result, when there is an 'in house' candidate our experience, and the request of our churches and pastors, tells us it is best to Discern first if the 'in house' candidate has the gifts, skills, and competencies needed to journey with the congregation in their God-discerned vision and future. This Discernment process should be completed before the church considers an open and complete Search Process.

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It has been the experience of the Regional Ministers that a number of congregations have recently faced the challenge of responding to an Associate Pastor who expressed interest in the vacant Senior Pastor position. In some of those settings, the Associate was indeed called to the Senior position, and the match proved to be an excellent one. In others, the Associate Pastor's interest in the Senior Pastor position led to many weeks of conflict; the congregation became so badly divided that the search process was seriously compromised. And there are instances where the Associate was called to be the Senior Pastor only to have the ministry deteriorate and come to an end within a couple years.

The following process is suggested if your church finds itself in this situation. The process grows out of the actual experience of several different congregations where this challenge faced the church leaders.

When a Senior Pastor resigns in a church where an Associate Pastor is in place:

- Moderator and Chair of Deacons should ascertain whether the Associate Pastor (or other staff person) intends to apply.
- Church Council (or Governing body) should establish a clear process and communicate the process to the staff person and to the church. It is important that the congregation understands and agrees to the process and the principles behind the process.
- Church Council (or Governing body) should clarify how long the staff person would be able to stay after a possible "no" decision; this information should be communicated in writing to the staff person. In most cases churches establish 60 to 90 days as the period within which an Associate would offer a resignation following a "no" decision (the termination clause within the call would determine how soon thereafter the pastor would conclude her/his service).
- With these procedures firmly in place, the Council should move ahead and form a Search (DISCERNMENT) committee.
- When possible the Search (Discernment) committee will include or consult with an individual or individuals who are not part of the church and can bring an outside, independent, detached perspective to the discernment.
- The Search (DISCERNMENT) committee will work with Church leadership and the Congregation in a process to assess the past and discern God's vision for the future of the church (the next 3,5,10 years). With this Vision plan in place the Search (DISCERNMENT) Committee will determine the competencies, skills, assets, training, resources, gifts needed by staff and congregation to become and do what is necessary to move into the vision. A position job description will be developed.
- Search (DISCERNMENT) Committee will work with the Regional Minister on the church profile, a document depicting the life of the church now and its vision for the future. The profile also identifies and articulates the specific leadership needs of the church.

- During the period that the Search (DISCERNMENT) Committee is engaged in the work of developing a church profile, the Associate Pastor will adhere to appropriate ethical guidelines¹ The Associate Pastor will be responsible for communicating guidelines as needed to the congregation. An Associate Pastor who does not adhere to these guidelines will be held accountable by the Association Committee on Ministry
- The search committee decides what kind of vote will constitute a decision (i.e. super majority, consensus, unanimous) for its work. When considering a staff person, the degree of favorable vote within the committee should be at least 90%. Consensus is preferable. (This is the recommendation for all candidates under consideration)
- The search committee then considers the application of the staff person. The individual should supply a current UCC Ministerial Profile and updated references. The staff person should be interviewed.
- The search committee carefully and prayerfully discerns whether to extend an offer to the staff person.

If the decision is yes, the Search Committee will:

- Figure out compensation and identify a candidating Sunday.
- Prepare an announcement for the whole congregation that details the particular gifts and skills of the candidate and explains the reasons for the search committee's decision.
- The church will follow the church's bylaws regarding the congregational vote for calling the recommended candidate.
- A determination should be made as to what kind of congregational vote will be needed to confirm the discernment of God's will. At least 85% is recommended.

If the decision is no, the Search Committee will:

- inform the staff person and church leaders.
- confirm the resignation and departure plans for the staff person with church leadership.
- communicate the decision to the church.
- open the search to outside candidates.

Here are some questions for consideration as the committee considers whether an internal candidate is a match:

- Does the candidate (in partnership with church membership and leadership) have the skills, competencies, gifts, and readiness to lead the church into the discerned Vision. And/or are they able to learn these through training, coaching and mentoring?
- Does the candidate have appropriate experience with administration, including supervision of staff, or show promise in handling these matters?

❖ ¹ See the code of ethics. The pastor is expected to continue to minister impartially and not use his or her position for her advantage or advancement. The minister is expected to discourage all attempts to petition or persuade the search committee, and to place his or her trust in this duly appointed committee. The Associate Pastor will not engage in conversations or discussions about his or her interest in the Senior Pastor position

- Does the candidate demonstrate maturity in worship planning and leadership, preaching and sacramental ministry?
- Does the candidate have experience in pastoral care in a wide variety of settings?
- Does the candidate demonstrate maturity and wisdom in dealing with conflict?
- Does the candidate demonstrate maturity in vision and leadership?
- Does he or she know how articulate a vision for a diverse body and win support?
- Does the candidate inspire confidence in those he or she leads?
- Does the candidate demonstrate a commitment to covenantal participation in the United Church of Christ, and a commitment to the mission interpretation and teaching polity expected of a Senior Pastor?
- To what degree does the congregation/ candidate expect his or her ministry to be a continuation of the ministry of the departing pastor?
- How will the candidate and congregation manage the transition from the lower visibility/ responsibility, the difference of degree and scope of the Associate position to the demands and challenges of the Senior position?
- How will calling the candidate best serve the interests of the church?