



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF ARLINGTON VIRGINIA

A Place to Connect, Grow and Serve

Ministerial Search Committee Update | July 2018

In June the Ministerial Search Committee began its work to find the next settled minister for our congregation. While the Board announced last winter that this search would last one year, the Search Committee has requested reconsideration of that decision in light of new information that has emerged since. The Board has agreed to make a decision on this request at the August 21st Board Meeting. The Search Committee and the Board also invite you to join us at one of our Town Hall meetings after service on July 15 or August 5 to further discuss this request. Here are some facts relevant to UUCA's search and answers to important questions congregants may be asking which we will also discuss at our Town Hall meetings.

The Facts: Our Search in the Context of Unitarian Universalist Churches

- A two-year search, which is the most common, results in a 90% success rate in finding a settled minister
- A three-year search, which is the second most common, results in a 100% success rate
- A one-year search, which is the least common, results in a 57% success rate and attracts half as many applicants as two-year searches
- The competition from other UU churches for a minister is greater in 2019 than in 2020. Several large churches and several DC-area churches are in search in 2019. So far, only one church similar to UUCA in size is expected to be in search in 2020 and no others locally.

The Ministerial Search Committee unanimously supports a two-year search for reasons specific to UUCA's circumstances. A two-year search would:

1. Provide time for the congregation to heal and establish a clearer narrative for prospective ministerial candidates as to why UUCA lost two settled ministers in six months.
2. Provide time to make meaningful progress on a systematic review of our governance now being undertaken by the Board.
3. Allow the committee sufficient time to hear from as many members of the congregation as possible, in order to accurately represent the needs and desires of our congregants to prospective candidates.

FAQ's

Q: We were told we would have a one-year search and needed a settled minister as soon as possible. Why can't we proceed with that plan?

A: We can undertake a one-year search, but we believe the chances for success would be significantly higher if we extended the process to two years. Why? A one-year search raises a red flag for many prospective candidates because of perceived instability in our congregation. Candidates will also want to know that we are undertaking a comprehensive review of our governance structure, because it will significantly affect their job responsibilities. A two-year search is particularly important to ensure that we get a robust slate of candidates, allowing our congregation to give full regard to diversity in our search.

Q: We already spent time interviewing the congregation about what they wanted in a minister and for the future of the church during the last search process. Why do we need another extensive review of who we are and what we want?

A: UUCA has changed since our last search four years ago. One-third of our congregants are new to UUCA and a slightly larger percentage of congregants who were here at that time have since departed. Our church has launched and embraced a variety of new initiatives over the past four years, including racial justice work. Our national society as a whole has also undergone significant changes in the past four years. It is important to survey the congregation again and conduct small group and one-on-one conversations to truly understand what our current congregants need from ministerial leadership and what they want for the future of our church.

Q: We've had two ministers leave in a short period of time. Shouldn't we get a new minister here as soon as possible to start rebuilding?

A: Because of the circumstances of our two ministers' departure, our congregation has experienced a breach of trust, and to some extent, trauma. We have begun to heal from this with the help of Rev. Beth and our lay leadership, and will continue that process with Rev. Terasa, whom the Board has specifically hired to be uniting, not dividing. We need more time to be in a solid, stable place as a congregation to both attract excellent candidates and to give a new minister the best possible chance to succeed in this role.

Q: What are the financial consequences of a two-year search versus a one-year search?

A: In regard to costs of either search, there is little difference. In regard to fundraising in particular, it is normal for ministerial transition to take a toll, especially when, as in our case, annual fundraising and ministerial turmoil coincide. Within the UUCA community as a whole, we have both the church's current official financial resources as well as further giving and fundraising potential.

While there are no guarantees, an active search can foster financial growth because of the increased intensity of interaction between church leadership and the congregation. Just as conversations with more than 450 congregants raised \$5.5 million during our capital campaign, similar interactions on the current issues shaping the future of the church can bolster fundraising in the next two years. In this regard, the board is taking the lead on the issue of governance reform and the MSC on finding a new minister.

Q: Won't a two-year search delay a needed capital campaign to pay down our debt?

A: The strategic plan includes a capital fund drive to pay down debt by the end of church year 2021-22. If we believe this is a sufficiently high priority, it can be incorporated into the expectations of our interim minister and/or our new settled minister as appropriate. A two-year search increases the chance of a good ministerial fit that would make a new capital campaign successful.

Q: What is the bottom line?

A: While a one-year search can be done, a two-year search has better prospects of producing a settled minister who meets our needs.