

AUGUST 2016

ANSWERS FROM MIDAMERICA ON QUESTIONS ABOUT DEVELOPMENTAL MINISTRY

?: What type of minister would we likely be getting as a Developmental Minister? A minister at the end of their career?...

A: In looking at the list of people who have taken up developmental ministries (DM), it is quite a varied lot. Some of them are people just entering our ministry, while others are seasoned interims who wanted a change of pace, and probably not the need to move every couple of years. There are also those who may be near the end of their career, but more often than not it is people who are truly committed to helping a congregation work deeply through long-standing issues, questions, or concerns in the way they are acting. It is different from interim ministry, in that they don't go through the same goals, but that they are there to help you intentionally work on the goals that you have set.

?: How many DMs are out there for the UUA/MidAmerica to choose from for us?

A: I believe that the way this happens is that ministers interested in DM apply to the director of transitions, and he talks with them about the various possibilities that are out there. Based on what he learns about those ministers, and what he learns about what your congregation wants and needs based on your application, and in conversation with us here in the region, Keith then makes a suggestion of one or maybe 2 people who would be good for your ministry. Your search team then has a conversation with them, and see whether or not something works out. I'm sure that we can figure out ways to make sure that your congregation has the options that they need, will not be overwhelmed with the job of trying to determine which of the ministers has the explicit skill base you would be seeking.

?: What specific type of training does a DM have that differentiates them especially from an interim minister?

A: This is a very good question, and it's not one that I have a sustained answer to. Interim ministers receive training in how to help the congregation resolve the past, clarify the present, and help them move on to the next stage. In a bad analogy, one might sort of say that they are like the ER docs in the health system, while the DMs are ones willing to hone their skills (if they don't already have them) in the particular areas of ministry that you need help with. I know that Keith does a screening of them to see whether or not he believes they have the necessary skill base to address the issues you have, and they work in close partnership with our MidAmerica Region staff, and we help them find resources they might need, and work toward making sure that they can help your congregation complete the developmental goals that you set out to work on.

?: When does the evaluation of our congregation happen and who does it? Is this before we have the DM or after?

A: As part of the application process, our MidAmerica staff will have conversations with you to see how the goals you articulate work in your system, whether there is a clear buy-in from the congregation, and to generally assess how you are doing, and whether or not in our opinion this would be a great next step for you. We work in collaboration with Keith and together we determine which congregations will be admitted into DM. Once you're in, then we go ahead full steam. Keith works on getting you a minister, and then one of our staff will partner with you on a long-term basis to do things such as the start up the first fall, then help you evaluate how it's gone at the end of the first in subsequent years. As stated in the documents that I believe I shared with you, we will be carrying out specific workshops or webinars for DM congregations etc. So there's no formal evaluation in that we come on board and check out everything, but we do have deep conversations with you to make sure that you know what you're getting into, and that you really are ready for the hard work that a DM will be.

?: When the final recommendation of DM is made, are we expected to accept that, or do we have the option to opt out?

A: At any point, you can withdraw from the program. One issue for you could be timing however, as the placement of DMs happens in the same timeframe as that of settled or called ministers. You cannot be in both processes at the same time. So, for example, if you were to drop out of the DM program because you didn't like the ministers offered, you would be too late in the search year to be able to have a called minister in your congregation. You may be able to find a contract minister at that point, but it would be very late in the search cycle.

Named 3 Possible DM goals:

1: Strengthen stewardship

2: Strengthen LFD

3: Increase trust within our congregation: with each other, with the minister, with the board and with committees

Reply: These seem like good goals to have. Some of the questions seem to be both born out of curiosity and perhaps a tad lack of trust within the system. These are reasonable questions but to the point where people's curiosity turns to leeriness, that's where you will find symptoms of distrust. It's hard to tell from your email which these are and it may be simply curiosity. But I do find myself a little amused by the talk of how can we get out of this before we're even in it.