

First Unitarian Church of Des Moines
Board of Trustees Special Meeting Minutes
Saturday, January 14, 2023

In attendance:

Board Members: Kevin Boeckholt, Reba Eagles, Jeremy Guenther, Crystal Loving, Sally Merritt, Greg Nichols, Fern Stewart and Rev. Victoria Safford

The meeting was called to order at 4:00 p.m. by Board President Reba Eagles. The chalice was presented. Crystal Loving provided an opening.

Reba Eagles explained, following the announcement by Rev. Victoria Safford that she will not renew the transitional contract minister position for a second year, the Board needed to meet to ascertain the steps forward for the church.

The four options through the UUA were explained and discussion was held regarding each of them:

Interim—a transitional ministry most commonly seen to help a congregation move from one settled ministry to the next settled ministry. Most often the duration is 24 months, though occasionally the ministry may be longer or shorter. The interim minister(s) assists the congregation in moving beyond its last ministry and equipping itself for a new, different ministry. This preparation involves helping the congregation look at practices that may or may not be serving them well, assisting through the emotional process of transition, setting sights forward, and connecting the congregation to needed resources. The interim minister is hired by the board of trustees. Interim ministers may not be called by the congregation. Most congregations looking to continue in full-time ministry use this option for their transition.

We are in an excellent position to begin the process of pursuing an Interim minister. It was noted that there are many more congregations seeking ministers than ministers available. Starting the process soon will place us in a better position to secure an interim minister.

Contract—often used by a congregation that is seeking less than full-time ministry, or that is uncertain that other types of ministries are a fit. The minister(s) is contracted for a specific period of time, most often for a year with a list of specific tasks, like preaching and pastoral care, though it may include more tasks, depending on the percentage of time. Not all ministry tasks will be covered. Contracts may be renewed and modified. Contract ministers are hired by the board. They may be called by the congregation, generally after a period of a couple of years.

Our contract with Rev. Safford was very effective, however it was believed we needed to take the next step forward to obtain an Interim minister, in-residence, trained to assist the congregation to equip itself for a new and different ministry.

Developmental—is an option for congregations with a history of repeated short ministries or chronic conflict. They exhibit a need to make systematic changes, and/or a general inability to thrive, AND a desire to make serious changes to remediate these issues.

Developmental Ministry is a cooperative program between Congregational Life (CL) Staff and the Transitions Director. These UUA staff colleagues work with a congregation to identify the deeper issues underlying the recurring symptoms of burnout, inadequate financing, low volunteer satisfaction, ministerial turnover, or conflict. Congregations may ask for developmental ministry as they recognize their troubling situation, or developmental ministry may be recommended by an interim minister or by CL staff. The congregation works with CL staff during a transition to prepare for developmental ministry and the congregation must be recommended by CL staff and Transitions Director before they enter the program. During a developmental ministry, the congregation and minister work collaboratively with CL staff and the UUA to increase the odds of realizing the deep change sought by the congregation.

Developmental ministries have been most successful with a 4-7-year contract with the board. The developmental minister is not a possible candidate for the called ministry of the congregation. In the last year of a developmental ministry, the congregation typically engages their next search for a settled minister. It is understood that after this significant work in the congregation, there is no desire to have an interim challenge or shift the culture the congregation is striving to maintain.

In reviewing the purpose of the developmental ministry, we did not believe we were candidates for this in depth, collaborative program.

Settled—this minister is called by the congregation after a search. Ministers in search for a settled ministry are rarely interested in following a settled ministry without some sort of transitional ministry. This is mentioned here as a transitional option only for congregations where an assistant/associate minister may succeed the current senior minister. In general, the senior minister has worked with the congregational leadership and the second minister on a succession plan. Even then, outside help can be invaluable. Settled ministry is of an unlimited duration, but both minister and congregation would do well to remember that this ministry will end.

We are not in the position to call a minister, and it would be a two-three year process to be ready to do so.

The Board, with the support of Rev. Safford, identified the Interim process to best fit the current needs of the congregation. It was also pointed out that we were in a good position in the process which would be to our benefit as there are fewer ministers than there are churches seeking ministers.

It was moved by Greg Nichols, seconded by Crystal Loving to move into an Interim Minister Search process and appoint an Interim Search Team. Approved.

The Board will meet within the next week to approve the members serving on the Interim Minister Search Team. Members interested in serving were encouraged to submit their names to the Board. Information will be posted.

Crystal Loving provided the closing and the chalice was extinguished.

Meeting was adjourned at 4:30 p.m., submitted by Fern Stewart, Secretary