

Search Committee
March 2010 Parish Notes

We are nearing the end of the search process. By the time this newsletter arrives, we will have completed four pre-candidating weekends where we invited four ministers to spend a Friday evening to Sunday afternoon with us. During this time, extensive interviews were conducted. Each interview contained standard questions we asked of all the candidates as well as very specific questions based upon the candidates' ministerial record and packet. No topic was off limits.

The interview questions were grouped into the following categories: Personal Questions, Vision, Preaching and Worship, Theology, RE and Lifespan Education, Administration and Leadership, Pastoral Care and Spiritual Guidance, Social Responsibility, Growth (congregational focus) and Finance. We allowed plenty of time for each minister to ask us any question they wanted about our congregation. We also asked each minister how we, as a congregation, could help them grow in their ministry so they have the opportunity to achieve their personal objectives for professional and personal growth.

On Sunday, each candidate had to design a Sunday service at another UU church including the music, readings, children's story and sermon. Once we have spent a weekend with each, we hopefully will have found a match for our church. Then we must persuade the candidate to accept our offer of ministry at our church.

The Search Committee has evaluated each of these ministers against a long list of demonstrated skills and knowledge based upon all of the information we gathered from the Congregation. The list includes specific criteria under the following headings: Inspirational Speaker; True People Person; Shared Leadership; Leadership; Lifespan Education and the "10 C's" of ministry. In total, there are 40 individual characteristics under these headings. A complete list will be posted on the Search Committee bulletin board.

We acknowledge that finding the right "match" for our church also relies on some degree of "gut feeling". Of the 37 candidates who expressed an interest in our congregation, about one third were seeking their first settled ministry. There were ministers from this group that had extensive life experience and involvement in the UU Church that we knew we wanted to explore a possible match with them. There were also an equal number of "experienced" ministers with ministerial tenure ranging from one year to over 30 years. Within this group, we found ministers who had lots of experience but were not a match for us for one or more reasons such as a mismatch in Theology. There were more male than female candidates.

As we approach the time where we will deliberate each of the four pre-candidating ministers, we remind ourselves that we will never find the "perfect" minister who is brilliant in all aspects of ministry or one who can be "all things to all people". We hope to find a match in a minister whose talents and strengths compliment the strengths we bring to the table in the context of a shared ministry. We hope to find a minister that we

believe will care for us as a congregation, who we can grow to trust and care for, one who can inspire us to live out our UU principles in all aspects of our lives.

In terms of using the church survey in the decision making process: the survey provides us with a profile of our congregation. Keeping what we learned about categorical thinking in mind, we will evaluate each minister who contacted us regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation etc. Should we find two candidates who are equal in skills, experience and their ability to be a good match for our congregation, we will then turn to the survey to choose between the two candidates.

Hoping that we will be able to offer our ministry to a candidate and he/she accepts, we are moving forward with developing plans for candidating week; that week when the minister spends an entire week with us, meeting our members and asking and answering questions. The candidate will also design and preach at two church services for us. After the second Sunday service, the minister leaves and we, as a congregation, vote on whether to call him/her as our next settled minister.

We have been told repeatedly by the UUA and our District Executive, Rev. Mary Higgins, that the worse decision we, as a Search Committee could make, is to settle for a candidate that we do not have 100% confidence in. Again, 100% confidence does not mean perfect. It means we are sure that this minister has the passion, skills and knowledge to grow with us, and to realize a mission and vision that is built on shared ministries. Should we not find someone, we will recommend a third year of Interim Ministry and a continued search. We remain hopeful that this won't be the case. Time will tell and you'll be the first to know.

Back to Candidating Week: In the past month, the Search Committee asked for the help of the church leadership and membership in putting together a candidating week schedule that would help as many people as possible spend meaningful time with the candidate and which would give the candidate a good chance to meet as many people as possible to learn about the church. Several committees and members have offered up exciting options, but we need more if the candidate is going to learn about our various facets and if members are going to experience the candidate in several different settings. If your committee hasn't responded yet, we would very much like to hear from you in the near future. Please contact Susan Feltus by email: sfeltus@comcast.net or Linda Williams by email: lnilemud@msn.com.