



## Seeking a Pastor: A Map for the Journey

Ministerial leadership is important to the life of any church. When that leadership must change because of the resignation or retirement of the minister, the church needs to take appropriate, thoughtful steps to secure new leadership. The journey of selecting, calling and employing a minister is one of the most important tasks undertaken by church leaders. Guidance and assistance are available from the United Church of Christ. A Conference Minister or other trained professional will help you to sustain the vitality of the church, train and guide your search committee in its process, and join with you to welcome the new minister whom you choose. Your local UCC Association will also support your search process and help to credential your new minister.

The purpose of this “map for the journey” is to present a very brief overview of the whole process, so that lay leaders of the church will see the journey that lies ahead of them as they seek new ministerial leadership. Once you have begun the process, other material will be available to you, including the extensive resource “A Local Church Seeks a Pastor.” The overview is keyed to the sections of that resource.

The first step in the process is to receive and accept the resignation of the minister who is departing. Thoughtful work at this point will prepare the congregation for the journey that lies ahead of them.

The second step is to make plans for the period between the end of one pastor’s tenure and the beginning of the next pastor’s tenure. Many important things can happen in the life of the church during this interim period. Appropriate ministry, usually from a trained Interim pastor, can enable the church to reflect on its past and prepare for its future, while attending to the needs of the congregation for worship leadership and pastoral care.

The third step is to organize the pastoral search process, making use of a committee designated by the congregation (in accordance with the church’s by-laws). The committee, often called the Pastoral Search Committee, works to develop a Local Church Profile, a document depicting the church’s past and present life, its intentions for the future, and the qualities it seeks in a new minister. Forms provided by the UCC, along with the direct help of the Conference Minister or other trained guide, will enable the Search Committee to tailor its work to the unique character of the church. Without question, the most difficult and important part of the process is in screening and evaluating the Ministerial Profiles, interviewing the most promising candidates, and selecting a single candidate.

The final steps may seem a long way from the beginning of the journey. The Pastoral Search Committee, acting in accordance with the church’s own by-laws, will propose the candidate the Committee has agreed upon. In an official meeting of the church, the new minister will be elected, and the church will begin to prepare for the new pastorate to begin.