

Ministerial Search Committee Update on “Puttin’ on the Search”

Congregational Meeting Report | February 12, 2023

Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley (UUCB)

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Introduction

None of us need to be reminded that we have been conducting our search for a minister during challenging times. We are living through the upheaval of a pandemic, catastrophic ecological threats, and rapid, destabilizing cultural change and self-examination. With all of the demographic shifts, we are being forced to examine the shape of church to come. On top of these contextual challenges, this beloved church community is emerging from several years of ministerial transitions.

Despite all of this, you, the congregation, have supported and participated in the search process with commitment and a warm-hearted spirit. We, the search team, want to extend our huge and heartfelt thanks to you for this. We also want to express our gratitude to you for being the amazing community you are. The descriptions of yourselves, our church and its accomplishments and aspirations that you contributed by generously participating in the survey and focus groups became the basis of the congregational record that so many amazing ministers have read and responded to with great interest and appreciation. You have laid the groundwork for a successful search.

Our Work in the Fall

To recap the search process for you, in August our main focus was preparing the congregational survey, which ran September 4 through October 6. 42% of you participated. When we had your responses in hand, they were tabulated, analyzed, and summarized.

Once the survey was launched, we turned our attention to the focus groups and cottage meetings we held in October. We met with 17 committees, groups, or interest areas of the church, with one additional cottage meeting open to all.

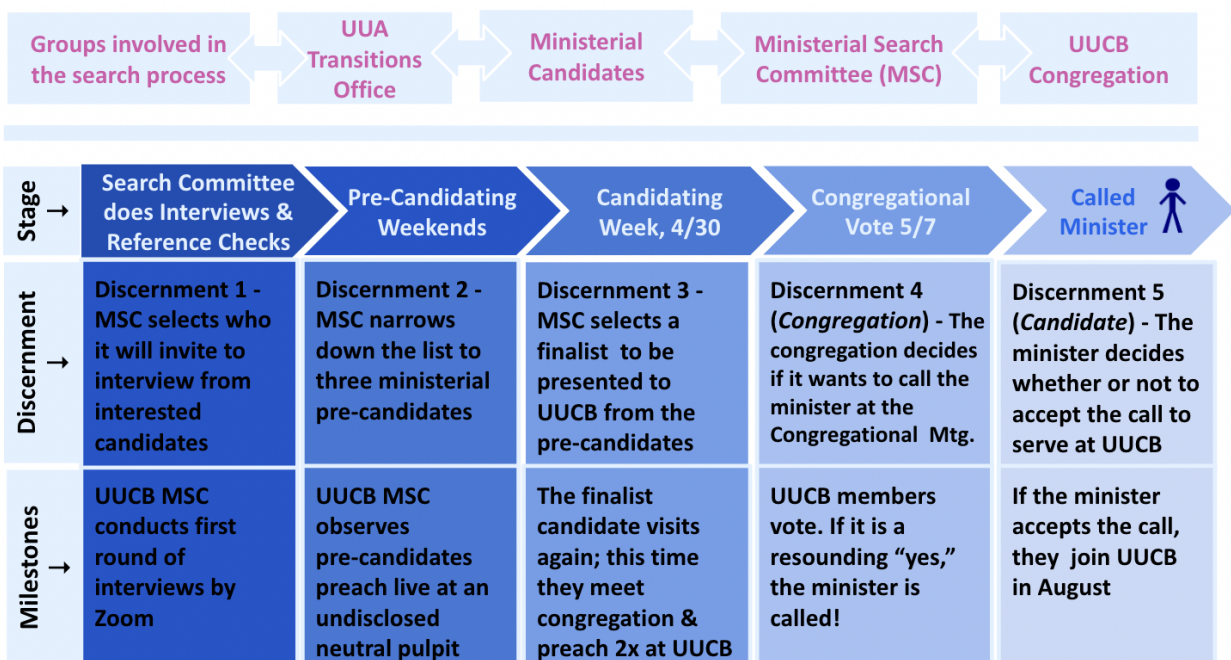
Responses to both the survey and the focus groups were very heartening, showing in general a high degree of involvement, passion, faith and hope in everything that UUCB has to offer. More particulars are discussed later in this report.

At the same time, we were preparing for the Beyond Categorical Thinking (BCT) workshop, conducted November 5 by UUA Transitions Director Keith Kron. The BCT was designed to counter the bias that ministers of marginalized identities encounter in their search for a congregation to serve. The workshop left us with new awareness and tools to counter our own implicit biases and assumptions.

Also in November, using your survey and focus group responses, we answered the many questions in the Congregational Record, the primary document that ministers rely upon for a detailed picture of our congregation, and we assembled our documents packet, designed to give prospective ministers comprehensive access to all the nitty-gritty details behind the functioning of a church. Documents in the packet include by-laws, budgets, board minutes, job descriptions, and annual reports, to name just a few. Our record and packet were published to prospective ministers December 1st.

Looking Ahead

This second half of the ministerial search process, January - May, is exclusively focused on the candidates. The search committee will be conducting interviews, checking references, and hosting our prospective ministers during their pre-candidating weekend. This flurry of activity is designed to help us get to know each candidate, identify their strengths and growing areas, and assess how well they align with our needs and aspirations. Then the search committee will deliberate on selecting a final candidate to present to the congregation during Candidating Week. The minister preaches on the Sundays that bookend Candidating Week so that the congregation can get a flavor of their worship style as well as interact with them during scheduled “meet and greet” activities. On the second Sunday, the members of the congregation will vote on whether or not to call the minister. The charts below outline the groups that work together in the search process discernment phase of the search process, occurring now, for settled ministry.



Search Highlights

What UUCB Values

You may recall that the congregational survey was the first step UUCB took toward formally engaging in the ministerial search process. Surveys are a cool “snapshot in time” because they take the pulse of a community to identify trends or patterns or benchmarks that are indicators of the group’s perspectives, desires, gaps and/or need for change.

The survey report, linked at the end of this document, provides a fascinating in depth analysis of the congregation’s responses. For the purposes of this update, the top response from three separate questions in the survey is highlighted to underscore the expectation that any future ministry will continue to center community because it is at the heart of most people’s reason for being at UUCB. Also highly valued by the congregation are inspiring services, pastoral care, and a minister who possesses strong leadership skills in the areas of spiritual guidance, lay leadership and staff mentorship, as well as being versed in how to facilitate the church’s community involvement and connection to groups who deeply care about issues that are also important to UUCB: widening the circle of well-being for all through social action to side with love in a wide range of interests from advocating for environmental justice, disability rights, and housing to working to dismantle oppression, racism, and supremacy culture.

Table 1 top response	Table 2 top response	Table 3 top response
Favorite Things about UUCB <hr/> 61.0% - Community	Top Functions of UUCB <hr/> 55.4% - Building and Fostering Community	Top Functions of the Minister <hr/> 67.5% - Inspiring People & Facilitating Connections throughout the Community
Please note that each table represents a separate question and only the top response from each question, which is the % of congregants who selected the option, is listed in the table.		

Qualities and Skills We Look For

Based on congregational feedback in surveys and focus groups, it is no surprise that we want a LOT from a minister. However, the resounding thread is that our future (forever we hope) minister is a master CONNECTOR! The search committee has heard your charge. The ability to connect on a personal level, deepen collaboration between groups, and help UUCB have a more impactful presence in the surrounding community is one of the many qualities we are looking for in our ministerial candidates. Other areas we consider when evaluating candidates and their records include their approaches to conflict and pastoral care, and to what degree are youth and families are integrated into their ministry. We also listen to sermons. Lots of sermons, because we want to know if they are able to speak to the spirit, touch hearts, and stimulate thinking.

Since ministry is a profession of selflessness and deep service, the UUA encourages ministers to develop self-care practices to remain balanced, and search committees to inquire about sources of

replenishment, such as hobbies and a strong support network, to ensure ministers are also tending to their well-being.

What Candidates Say About Us

Ministerial Candidates are attracted to our Congregation because of our passion, connectedness and desire to grow as individuals and together as a community. They can feel that we love our church and love each other. They are also impressed by our health, and that's not just about finances or location. As part of this process, the search committee had to answer over 50 questions covering hard facts (the church's history, culture, operations, programs) and perspectives (what we are proud of, what we wish could do better, and what we hope for the future). Our record shows that it has not all been rosy, and candidates appreciated our honesty about deeply hurtful events (ministerial misconduct, financial hiccup) and resilience (ongoing Freestone conversations and pandemic). And of course, the vibrancy of all of our social justice programs and widening the circle activities were often mentioned during the interviews.




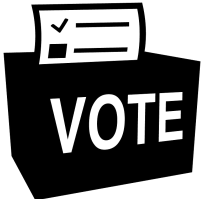
The other thing that went over well with the candidates is that we have a strong Executive Director and operational team. While many of the candidates are experienced administrators, their joy comes from attending to preaching and pastoral care, and not so much from the business-y side of ministerial responsibilities.

We Have Candidates!

Of course we are bursting to tell you more than we can right now, but suffice it to say that we have been absolutely delighted with the number and quality of the ministers interested in UUCB. After reading the minister's packets, we narrowed the field down slightly to those we conducted preliminary video interviews with. For those chosen candidates, we completed a dynamic, exhilarating (and exhausting!) week of interviews and reference checks. We also listened to a lot of sermons. Initial video interviews went fabulously well. At that point we entered the second discernment phase, in which we narrowed our video interviewees to those we are inviting to pre-candidate with us. We are delighted with the ministers who have agreed to pre-candidate with us. We have candidates who shine and present amazing possibilities for a future shared ministry, both experienced ones who have stayed the course and young ones who freely bring their gifts to this chosen path. We are moved by their presence and commitment during our troubled times. Pre-candidating weekends are scheduled for March; the process will be briefly described below.

On the Horizon

We started in June and are now 8 months into the search process, with hearts full of hope as we approach the May finish line. Now more than half-way through the search process, we are in the thick of the critical phase - discernment. Discernment is both fun (very social because we get to meet the candidates in-person) and a nail-biting endeavor (narrowing down the list to a single finalist). The key events the search team will be engaging in are outlined below. Please save **4/30 & 5/7** on your calendar.

	March	3 prospective ministers (Pre-candidates) visit CA for a weekend.	Incognito - only the search team meets them. They preach at an undisclosed church that is serving as a “neutral pulpit.”
	April 30	1 minister will have been selected as a finalist for UUCB.	You get to meet the prospective minister & hear them preach:) Save the Date!
Important Note - The week of May 1-6 will provide scheduled opportunities for members of the congregation to meet the finalist candidate in various church settings.			
	May 7		BIG DAY You get to hear the prospective minister preach a 2nd time & then... Special Congregational Meeting! Members get to vote on whether or not to call the Minister.

We are excited about the prospective candidates and hope that when May 7 finally arrives you will be so delighted by the finalist that you will be doing somersaults on your way to voting;) We hope to get a resounding “yes” (at least 90%) to call the minister so that we can collectively leap for joy.

Reference Documents

A few of the documents mentioned in this report have been shared on UUCB’s website and publications: *The Week Ahead* and *Beacon on the Hill*. If you haven’t already done so, feel free to review them at your leisure. They have been linked below for easy access.

[Overview of the Search Process Audio Recording](#) - Rev. Keith Kron is the Director of the UUA Transitions Office, which manages the ministerial search process.

[UUCB Congregational Survey Report](#) - summarizes congregational responses to nearly 60 questions, ranging from respondent demographics, to thoughts about the important functions of UUCB, to what are important characteristics and functions of a minister.

[UUCB Focus Group Summary](#) - reflects upon the ideas that frequently occurred in response to three focus questions that were asked in each of the 17 focus groups and one cottage meeting.

[Beyond Categorical Thinking Workshop Summary](#) - summarizes the purpose of the workshop (to practice confronting biases that may cause us to dismiss or privilege individuals based on their actual or perceived identity) and shares a few of the case studies that were presented to participants.

[Congregational Record](#) - UUCB’s response to over 50 questions designed to provide a comprehensive, historical profile to prospective ministers: our accomplishments, operational and governance structure, challenges, and aspirations.