

From Your Ministerial Search Committee

We're nearly done!

We expect to have a new Senior Minister soon! As you read this, your Search Committee will have completed our four weekends with our four pre-candidates (including hearing each one preach at a nearby “neutral pulpit”), and we’ll be engaged in the process of deciding which one to call – which one is the best match for our congregation. If all goes well, we’ll announce the final candidate around the second week of April.

That final candidate will visit the congregation from April 25 to May 3 (this is known as “candidating week”) and will preach on two successive Sundays (April 26 and May 3). You’ll have various opportunities to meet the candidate. We have a team working on the planning of candidating week, chaired by Joann Coviello and Betsy Wacker, and details will be published soon. You’re welcome to get involved and help out – see their call for volunteers in this Soundings.

At the end of that week, on Sunday, May 3, there will be a meeting of the entire congregation at which you will vote whether to call the candidate to be our new Senior Minister. A vote of at least 90% of those present is usually needed for the minister to agree to serve. In accordance with our Constitution, a notice will be sent out by the Clerk of the Board of Trustees at least 21 days before the meeting, i.e. by no later than April 12. Watch for this notice and reminders, and plan to be there (we need a quorum of at least 40% of the membership).

Make sure you're eligible to vote!

To participate in the vote on May 3, our Constitution says you must be on the list of members in good standing as certified by the Clerk of the Board of Trustees 30 days prior to the vote – that means by April 3. Our Constitution defines a member thus:

ARTICLE VI Membership

Section 1. Any person fourteen years of age or older may become a member of the Congregation by 1) signing the membership book, thus affirming sympathy and understanding with the purposes and programs of the Congregation and the Unitarian Universalist Association, and 2) indicating a willingness to join with other members in supporting the activities of the Congregation with their time and talent, and 3) making and fulfilling a pledge of financial support to the Congregation, or making a charitable trust gift recommendation in support of the Congregation.

ARTICLE XI Ministers

Section 1. There shall be no absentee ballots for the call of a Minister.

If you are in any doubt about your eligibility to vote, contact David Vita, Membership Director. David@uuwestport.org, 203-227-7205 ext. 14. And if you are not currently a member and want to be in time to participate in the vote to call our new minister, you must arrange to sign the book and make and fulfill a pledge this month. Do not defer or neglect it! – the deadline is April 3.

Why do we only get to vote for one candidate?

A question sometimes asked by people not thoroughly acquainted with the UU search process is: “Why can’t we meet all of the top candidates and hear them preach? Isn’t it undemocratic for the search committee to present us with only one final candidate?”

This is certainly an understandable question. But there are good reasons why this is not recommended. Serial candidating — the process of presenting more than one candidate to the congregation — can lead to conflict and division. That’s because it’s possible that some congregants would prefer Candidate A, others would prefer Candidate B, and so on. As a result, no one candidate would receive the overwhelming vote of confidence needed for a successful ministry, and the congregation would be divided — not an optimal beginning for a new minister.

From the point of view of the candidates, too, it could be a major problem because some of them have not told their current congregation they’re in search, and prefer not to do so unless and until they receive and accept an offer from another congregation. Serial candidating would break the confidentiality of the process and could seriously impair their effectiveness in their current congregation. Few if any candidates would agree to participate in such a process.

So, at the end of a long process of interviewing, evaluation, reference-checking, and consensus-building, your search committee will present you with the one candidate who is, in our opinion, best for our congregation. This is what you entrusted us to do when you voted for us. Then, after a full week of meetings and social engagements where you will have abundant opportunities to meet and size up the candidate for yourselves, plus hearing him or her at two Sunday services, you will make the final decision whether to call or not to call.

Your Ministerial Search Committee:

Jim Cooper, Charles Harrington, Linda Hudson, Kristen Leddy, John Mason, Carrie McEvoy, Catherine Onyemelukwe, Anita Pfluger, Kathy Roberts