

November 2025

Dear colleagues,

Many of you participated in the listening session jointly hosted by the UUMA and senior UUA staff in October to share your concerns and hopes related to the UUA search process.

We are grateful for your participation. All those who share their experiences and perspectives help move us forward toward what we hope will be a more efficient, equitable, and effective process for matching clergy and congregations.

Each year, the UUA Transitions Team gently shapes the search process based on broadly applicable feedback we receive. We are encouraged by the early work of the [Transitions Review Task Force](#), which will offer additional support and guidance in assessing and reimagining our search process for the 2028 search cycle and beyond.

Here are some ways we have adapted the process in recent years in response to clergy feedback:

- **Increasing Congregational Candor in Search:** Since 2019, Regional UUA staff (Congregational Life) have reviewed each congregation's search profile to be certain that congregations are sharing nuanced views of the ministry opportunities they are offering.
  - In 2024, we improved our search profile question set to include information about trust issues, relationship skills, widening the circle of concern, and conflict.
  - Regional staff are prepared to offer additional support, such as customized start-ups and on-going coaching, to ministers and leaders in congregations with patterns of clergy mistreatment, poor boundaries, conflict, etc.
- **Holding Congregations Accountable in Search:** Since 2022, the UUA has had a policy of holding congregations accountable in the search process. This was announced in UUA communications, search materials, a UUMA webinar, and the UUMA newsletter in early 2022.
  - We presently have about 30 congregations held to some form of accountability in search by UUA Congregational Life staff, ranging from prohibition from using our search system until the congregation has done some needed relationship or anti-bias work to requiring congregations to tell the truth about



their treatment of past ministers and/or the level of conflict before they seek a new minister through our system.

- This fall, the Congregational Life Leadership Team is working to standardize what they've nick-named the "Special Care" program for congregational accountability in search (across congregations and across regions).
- **Asking More of Congregations in Contract Searches:** Since the 2024 search cycle, we have advised congregations that hope to call a contract minister after a couple of years, or to do developmental-style work with a contract minister, to offer multi-year initial employment agreements and relocation expense reimbursement. We are also encouraging those congregations to engage the UUA's anti-racist, anti-oppression training for congregations in search: Break Barriers, Build Beliefs, also known as B4. We are offering the first large group B4 training for contract ministry searches in December of 2025 at no cost to participant congregations.
- **Standardizing Support for Negotiated Endings:** In 2023, UUA Congregational Life staff, UUMA staff, and UUMA Good Officers did a joint training on negotiated endings, generating a shared guide for UUA staff and UUMA Good Officers supporting ministers and congregational leaders through such endings.
  - We are committed to continuing joint education to better support ministers and congregations in ending well.



#### **New in 2025-2026:**

- **Providing Up-Front Employment Agreements for ALL Searches:** Since the 2025 search cycle, we have required all search teams to share their board-approved draft employment agreement, indicating any and all changes from the recommended UUMA/UUA template, by including that information within their search profile.
  - We used to limit this requirement to settled ministry searches. Now we are requiring this for all searches, so that ministers will encounter fewer surprises at the negotiating table.
- **Creating Ways to Apply for Distance or Creative Ministry Partnerships:** In the 2023 search cycle, we added a signifier to positions on the Jobs Board for congregations that would consider remote or mainly remote ministry partnerships.
  - Late in the 2025 search cycle, we added a signifier to the jobs boards to highlight congregations which were open to creative

ministry partnerships (like pastoral care or preaching only, or half-time instead of full-time).

- **Aligning The Contract Search With The Settled Search Timeline:** For the 2026 search cycle, in response to the increase in the number of contract ministries for ministers and congregations in 2025 and the lack of clarity around offer timing and process for ministers who participate in both contract and settled ministry consideration, we have timed the main contract search to the settled search in the 2026 search cycle ([contract search calendar](#)).
  - In addition to simplifying the timeline for consideration and offers, adding contract searches to the ranking and matching process (previously reserved for all the other types of ministry search) will raise the match rate, overall, since an alignment with a second choice is possible if one's first choice has a different alignment.
- **Increasing Clarity and Agency in Determining a Timeline for Contract-to-Call:** Starting in the 2026 cycle, the UUA Transitions Team is reminding search teams and ministers that they have agency and choice in determining a timeframe for a Call.
  - We have added the timing for a call process to the [Unified Ministerial Agreement](#) template so that ministers and congregations can include a commitment to moving toward a call in writing, up front ([UUMA announcement](#)).
  - While waiting two years to engage a call process has worked well for some ministers and congregations, that timing has been a suggestion.
  - There are congregations in contract search that are prepared to call a minister at once, such as congregations that engaged in the settled ministry search in 2025 and pivoted to contract ministry search when they didn't find a match.
- **Continuing To Align Across Regions on Offering New Ministry Start-Ups:** As more ministry partnerships form using the contract search process, Congregational Life leadership is planning to offer more new ministry start-ups, especially for multi-year contract ministries.

As we navigate the ever-changing landscape of ministry and professional service, we know that we do so together as one interconnected whole. Across the UU ecosystem, we are asking ourselves to deeply listen to one another, hold the complex truths that arise in the midst of great change and respond as faithfully and as concretely as possible.

We are so grateful that you took the time to be in conversation with us and we hope these shifts to the process, along with the ongoing analysis of the

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newly created Transitions Review Task Force, will guide us forward with mutual care.

Collegially,

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Interim Settled Ministries Director

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P.S. Please join the UUA Transition Team for its annual overview of the search process on 12 December! Registration info is available on the UUMA calendar.

