

BEYOND CATEGORICAL THINKING

Publicity Blurb #1

“Will the new minister hear me? Will my concerns and needs be met? Will the minister understand what I’m living with? How will the community respond to our minister?”

In answering these questions, a picture of the “ideal minister” (categorized by age, gender identity, nationality, physical or cognitive ability, race, sexual orientation, etc.) comes to mind. With this picture in place, it can be easy to unintentionally exclude ministers who fall into certain categories. At times, as we get caught up in comparing candidates to our “picture,” we can even forget what it is we hoped for in a minister.

On the weekend of [date], [name of congregation] will participate in the Beyond Categorical Thinking workshop offered by the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) for congregations involved in the search for a new minister. The [name of congregation] Search Committee invites all congregational leaders, members, and friends to participate in this workshop.

The Beyond Categorical Thinking program is designed to promote inclusive thinking and help prevent unfair discrimination in the search process for a new minister. This program includes a three- hour BCT workshop and a Sunday morning service with facilitators trained by the UUA. In the workshop, [NAME OF CONGREGATION] members will:

- Consider the hopes, expectations, and concerns they have for a new minister
- Learn more about the ministerial search process, and
- Explore how thinking categorically about people sometimes interferes with choosing the best candidate.

Come on [day, date] at [time, place] to participate in this UUA-sponsored workshop, led by [names].

SUGGESTION: You may insert a closing sentence that emphasizes the importance of attendance. An example follows; however, use language that you know will motivate your particular congregation members, friends, and staff to attend.

The selection of a minister is important. The Beyond Categorical Thinking workshop is another opportunity for everyone in our congregation to be a part of that process. This experience will provide guidance for the search committee in our work.

BEYOND CATEGORICAL THINKING

Publicity Blurb #2

THINK OF A MINISTER. DON'T THINK OF AN ELEPHANT.

Chances are, you thought of both. And distinct images perhaps came to mind. In terms of a minister, what images came to mind? Was it a person of a particular gender, race, or age?

Beyond Categorical Thinking is a highly recommended part of the search process for our congregation. In finding the person who would be the best match for our minister, we could potentially overlook or even let biases keep us from knowing that a particular person would be the best match for us.

Other congregations have assumed that their ideal minister looks a certain way, and often ministers who are not white or male or heterosexual or able-bodied or of a particular age or class are discounted and seen as “less than” in some ways.

Credentialed ministers in our faith who are People of Color, LGBTQ+, disabled, young, old, working class, etc. still face discrimination as part of the ministerial search process.

In our efforts to find the best match, our congregation will host a Beyond Categorical Thinking worship service and workshop on *(date)*. We will have trainers come and meet with our Search Committee, lead the Sunday service, and facilitate a three-hour conversation where we will have a chance to examine how we can avoid letting prejudice become a part of our search process. This is yet another way for us to put our faith into lived experience and improve the odds that regardless of identity, we will find the minister who is the best match for us and who will serve us well.

This opportunity allows the entire congregation fuller participation in the search process. It will allow us to explore our hopes and concerns for a new minister, learn more about the search process, and see how our own history (both personal and congregational) might interfere with our efforts in this search.

So, come on *(day/date)* to participate in this service provided by the UUA. Our trainer(s) will be _____ and _____.

You may include reference to lunch being provided, that attendance is encouraged for everyone in the congregation (and if you can, that you are providing child care). You may also adapt any of this as suits your needs.