

If Your Settled Search Needs to be Virtual

We have no idea when a COVID-19 vaccine will be available and no idea when it will be safe for all to meet in person. Knowing that, the work of settled search may be completely or partially virtual this year. The good news is that the experience of search from 2020 and other years has proven that it can be done.

Search Committees

We've had virtual search committee retreats done successfully through video technology. These have been done most likely spread out over two or three days in two or three-hour intervals.

Search teams have already used video over the years to meet remotely, or to include one person who was traveling. Interestingly, the technology seems to lead to shorter meetings and some parents of children report they might consider being on a search team if they don't have to meet in person.

Pre-candidating Weekends

The last three weekends of 2020's settled search were virtual. We learned ways around everything.

1. A tour of the church building can be done effectively via video. One search committee did a live tour in a video meeting and the precandidate was able to ask questions, while the rest of the search team provided information. In other cases, one person did a video which was shared with precandidates and then there was conversation. This year, in addition to the other two options, a search committee could do a virtual tour at any time and include it in their documents packet ahead of time.
2. Interviews—usually, these are Saturday mornings in person and last three hours. Search teams and ministers seemed to prefer spreading this out over a couple of days, which is definitely an option.
3. Meals—there's no reason a search team could not spend a meal or two with the candidate and their spouse/partner over lighter conversation before the neutral pulpit. The final meeting after the neutral pulpit should be with the precandidate only.
4. Neutral Pulpit—Congregations did this in one of two ways; either the minister preached just for the search committee or the minister was a guest at a neutral congregation elsewhere while the search committee viewed the sermon. We do not recommend watching the minister in their home congregation (if they are serving one currently). The home congregations will have different expectations of the minister, and if you were known to anyone in the congregation or they did a web search on you, they might figure out their minister was in search, which would break confidentiality.
5. Tours of the area—you might check your chamber of commerce, ask a local realtor (not in the congregation), or create your own virtual tour.

These were often spread out over a longer weekend (Thursday-Monday, for example). Each of the weekends should be as consistent with others as possible.

Candidating Weeks

Every candidating week was virtual in 2020; all had successful calls. Most congregations spread these out over two weeks, though some did them in a week. Often more informal time was arranged and

there were, in some cases, fewer committee and small group meetings. Even interfaith clergy or UU clusters were gathered virtually to meet the candidate.

Congregations learned how to have meetings online and even vote. The UUA created this page as a resource for congregations with impending congregational votes:

<https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/voting-online>

Mutual Agreement

Any virtual schedule should come from mutual agreement between the search team and the minister.