

Report form the Ministerial Search Committee 3/28/10 – KEO

Reflections of the UUA video on Interim Ministry

The Ministerial Search Committee found the video you just watched very helpful in crystallizing our thoughts about the next step in settling a minister.

When we were selected in May of 2009, we thought our task would be complete by November. At that time Brent Smith was our inside candidate and although we explained to ourselves and to all of you that it was possible we might NOT call Brent, none of us thought that likely.

When Brent announced, after his period of intense discernment, his withdrawal from candidacy, we briefly considered changing directions and looking for an interim, but we believed at the time that Interim Ministers were primarily for churches where the minister had left in the midst of conflict and thought **our** church was prepared to move directly to a national search.

As we reviewed candidate profiles, conducted phone interviews, and held our Beyond Categorical Thinking program, we went through our own period of discernment and came to understand what an Interim Minister could do for All Souls.

All of our candidates, as well as the consultant ministers that we talked to raised questions that we could not satisfactorily answer. They wanted to know how the congregation would accept a minister other than Brent. They wanted to know what our relationship was to Fountain Street Church. They asked questions about our organizational structure – its complexity and the burden on the congregation. They offered alternate visions of worship, and the relationship between the adult and children's worship programs.

They offered potentially exciting new visions, but we realized that we could not visualize **any** of our diverse candidates moving directly into a successful ministry at All Souls. Too many of us have known only one UU minister, Brent Smith, and our vision of a UU church and a UU worship service are determined by Brent's vision. (Perhaps you have also noticed the way the congregation stiffens with any variation in the usual morning worship service.)

Although we had followed the recommended procedures for a search - held cottage meetings, conducted focused interviews, and surveyed the congregation, all these information gathering activities occurred while we all thought we were discussing calling or not calling Brent. Comments were generally phrased in terms of wanting things just the way they were vs. wishing for a shift in the way Brent does things. We did not seriously consider what we would want if we were starting again.

Brent has said that All Souls is thought of in UU circles as “the Church of Brent.” When I first heard that phrase it had no meaning for me. At the end of our first year of the ministerial search, I have developed the following understanding in the form of this metaphor. Brent birthed the church, and has raised the church community in the best way he can, based on his considerable wisdom and experience. He has given us a sound foundation in what it means to be UU and how churches work. He has brought us to adolescence as a church. Now we need to move into the “late adolescent or young adult” period of our life as a church. It is time for us to leave home. This is a time for experimenting, seeking our own identity and visioning our future. We will likely retain much of what Brent has helped us develop, but we need to look at our mission, our purpose, our structure, and many other things - revise them if needed, and make them our own. Guiding this self reflection and visioning is a critical role of the Interim Minister.

The cottage meetings and survey raised many issues – internal communication, the burden of volunteering, our complex structure, the gulf between children’s RE and Adult programs, the limitations of our rental home at Ahavas. As a Search Committee we noted these concerns, but could not really address them. Many of these issues need to be explored before any candidate can be successful. The Interim process demands that the church set priorities and goals to work on as a church.

Although at first I thought it would be great to sail smoothly into settling a new minister, I now see this not only as an unrealistic fantasy, but as a missed opportunity. I am very excited about the opportunities of an Interim Period and expect our church to emerge refreshed, energized, and with a new vision of who we are and what we need in a minister.