

**The Website...And the Beat Goes On  
Prepared for Consistory March 16, 2012**

**Background**

As you all know the focus for January and February was to get the website back online with the most crucial information-discerned from the usage statistics from previous website hits and the responses to the survey taken by our churches last June. During that process, questions arose about the evolving definition of "crucial information" and what kind of information should be shared appropriately on the website.

The questions have revolved around two primary issues:

- Access to information versus privacy and safety, and
- List of supply pastors

**Access to Information versus Privacy and Safety:**

While there are those who might wish it were otherwise,, the world has changed. The reality of the technology makes a difference in what we do and how we do things. There was a time when people thought that it was fine to put our "paper" directories online. But it is not, because the difference is that our paper directories were sent *ONLY* our *pastors, churches and lay leaders*, while online directories are immediately accessible to *the World Wide Web*. While most people will use the contact information only to make legitimate collegial contacts; there is a very real possibility that the information would be used in unhelpful ways. For example, during a conversation, one of our staff members mentioned that one pastor's contact information should not be available online because that pastor was experiencing a very dangerous situation. We would not have known about this situation if we were not having this conversation, and under the old policy, we would have published the information that could have put the pastor in further jeopardy.

This of course prompted a wider conversation about the advisability of putting personal information on the website. The solution we chose was to provide two lists on the website and **(this has subsequently been approved by the Consistory):**

- **a list of PSEC churches with church contact information, and**
- **a list of pastors serving PSEC churches with the church contact information and the email address that the pastor had provided to receive information related to the church.**

As a result of that decision, we have heard several comments. Those who have called have been told the concern about safety and personal information, but it has been difficult to relay that to everyone. In addition ordained clergy with standing who are not serving a church are not included in the above listings. This was especially difficult for retired pastors. While this was not the intent, a few expressed that they felt that the removal of their contact information from the website was a dismissal of their ministry and that the Conference was adding to their sense of isolation.

Given, these ongoing concerns, we have contacted several conferences to determine how they are handling these directories, and we have spoken to Don Clark the UCC Attorney. Here is what we have learned:

- Conferences do a variety of things. Many use a password-protected system so that contact information is available only to pastors or people who have registered on the website to gain access to the information. **Most DO NOT have unfettered listings of all of their pastors online for anyone and everyone to access.** They changed this access years ago because they were concerned about privacy issues.
- When I spoke with Don Clark, he was very clear that returning to our previous method of listing all clergy with their contact information (home and office address, phone numbers and email addresses) on the website *was not an option* as it shows no due diligence for support and protection of the privacy of our pastors. He suggested:
  - using the system we currently have in place (samples attached). Both lists contain the same information. The PSEC Churches list is sorted by church name and contains the contact information for the church and the email address the pastor provided to receive church information. The PSEC Pastors list is sorted by the pastor's last name and contains the identical information – the church contact information and the email address provided by the pastor to receive church-related information, or
  - providing online access through a password-protected registration, or
  - listing nothing and putting a statement online that people could contact the conference office for contact information.

These two lists provide contact information for PSEC churches and pastors serving in PSEC churches. The recommendations to address the other “contact” concerns are listed below.

**Recommendation as approved by Consistory:**

**For Persons Serving in Settings other than Churches, including Retired Clergy:** Create a list that has the names of clergy serving in other settings and retired clergy. The list will include the place they are serving and the email address of the person if we have it. Email addresses for retired clergy (if we have it) will be included.

**For Consistory Leaders, Association Leaders and Other Lay leaders:** We suggest listing that information with their email addresses for now.

**List of Supply Pastors**

The other concern we have received is that the list of supply pastors is no longer available online. It is not online because:

- there are concerns about the public nature of confidential information, and
- we wanted to think through the nature of supply pastors

Previously, the list of supply pastors was available online and was basically a dial-a-pastor process-call and see who is available. I have not heard concerns from churches about the list not being available online. But I have heard concerns from pastors - pastors serving churches who are looking for a person to cover for vacation, and supply pastors who quite frankly are looking for the income that comes from the supply work.

In thinking this through, there are actually several kinds of supply pastors:

- Supply pastors who are called to “fill in” for church pastors who are going away on vacation or have some emergency that takes them out of the pulpit. We believe that it is perfectly appropriate for pastors to have immediate and easy access to information about their colleagues who might be willing to fill the pulpit for them.
- Supply pastors who are needed when the church is in a time of transition because of the church pastor’s resignation, termination or other critical transition in the life of the church. I have heard from some of the pastors who were contacted from the supply pastor list that they found themselves in uncomfortable situations. They had not been told when they received the supply request that they were walking into the midst of a church crisis. They indicated this was very difficult and less than Ideal.
- Supply pastors who are needed when the church is searching for an interim and needs someone to preach until the interim is found and selected. It could be that the church has already negotiated a contract for a settled pastor and there is a time gap to fill after an interim has left and the settled pastor arrives. In these cases, it is very likely that the Conference has already been working with the church, and that the Conference staff person is the person best situated to help that church find a supply pastor. Therefore, in this case, the dial-a-pastor list may not be the most helpful process.

**Recommendation as Approved by Consistory:**

A list of supply pastors will be made available on the website. The only *contact* information listed will be the email address and the association where the supply pastor is residing. This should provide enough information for church pastors to contact short-term supply pastors. **In addition there will be paragraph at the top of the list that states:**

*This list is for the convenience of pastors who are seeking a colleague to fill the pulpit while they are on vacation, or otherwise away from the pulpit for a very short duration. If you’re are a Consistory Chair or other leader in your local congregation, looking for a supply pastor because your pastor has resigned or left for other reasons, please contact the Conference Office so we can assist you in locating the services of a longer-term supply pastor.*

*We request that you respect this process.*