

Associate Conference Minister for Search and Call Annual Report 2019

I find it fascinating to look back over a year to see what has happened in life, what work has been completed, what work hasn't been completed, and what lies ahead yet to be done. It is with great joy and celebration that I share with you all that has happened over this last year in PSEC from my vantage point as your Associate Conference Minister for Search and Call.

This past year has been eventful on the personal side of my life. My husband broke 4 of his 5 lumbar vertebrae, not all at once but over a 4-month period, and then had another surgery to fix nerve damage. I had to have my hip replaced and cataract surgery on both eyes. This all happened between February 2018 and February 2019. I have to admit that keeping my personal life in somewhat of an order and fulfilling my role as Associate Conference Minister for Search and Call has been challenging at times. However, the staff at PSEC are the best people ever! They have always supported me and given me the time I needed. THANK YOU to an amazing group of people. I pray the churches in the PSEC understand the staff they have in our office and the amazing work they do on your behalf! Give them a call one day and just thank them! We do not get those kinds of calls often and I know the staff would appreciate them.

Now to the work part of my life. The main part of my job description is the Search & Call Process. I work with churches from the time their pastor retires or resigns until they call a new pastor. As of the writing of this article, Search & Call in PSEC is very quiet. I think I know why that is. 85 out of 160 churches (53%) have a pastor over the age of 60. 73 out of 156 church pastors (47%) are aged 62 and older. I am guessing that since 47% of actively serving pastors will be reaching retirement age (65) by 2022 that activity will be increasing quickly in the near future, but for now it is a waiting game.

If your pastor is nearing retirement, your church might want to consider doing the Local Church Profile now. This document was newly created in 2017 and there were two reasons for that, one reason was the church's need to have an assessment tool. This new profile can be done any time in the life of a congregation to assess where they are, who is their neighbor and where is God calling them. The second reason is that the Search & Call Process is taking too long in the UCC. Therefore, once this profile is completed, when your pastor resigns or retires, after some initial work, the church will be able to interview candidates. This will cut the Search & Call Process in half. At this time, I am working with two congregations who want to be prepared in order to expedite the search process. Please contact me at morris@psec.org if you would like to have this conversation at your church.

Our Committees on Ministry (COM), who hold the work of a bishop in the UCC, are doing a fantastic job. These are great folk who are given an enormous amount of work in and on behalf of the UCC. I want to personally thank them for their endless hours of work.

A new proposal that I have brought to our Committees on Ministry (COM) is a Joint Member in Discernment (MID) Assessment Team. With more and more work being placed on our COMs, there is simply not the capacity or time to work with people discerning ordained ministry. This team would not take away any of the authorizing piece from their Associations. This team would work with MIDs to assess where they are in the discernment of ordained ministry and then create a plan for them so that they meet the MARKS of Faithful and Effective Authorized Ministry. This proposal would create a standard of excellence for all going through the Member in Discernment process. This assessment and creation of a growth plan is essential and necessary given the possibility now that people can become ordained through the multiple paths of ministry. We have several licensed and commissioned ministers who are now looking at becoming an ordained minister in the UCC. I will be working on creating a team that will work with me to bring this proposal to fruition.

Our Pastoral Excellence Programs continues to grow in PSEC! I am thrilled to say that we now have 13 Communities of Practice—groups of 4-6 clergy who work together to support and share best practices in

ministry. This year we created a specific group for those looking to grow in their knowledge of spiritual disciplines and another group that is working with Christian Educators. We are currently at 70 clergy and lay folk participating in these groups. THANK YOU to all the facilitators who lead these groups and to the members who are willing to support one another and hold one another accountable in their ministry. If this is something you would like to be involved with, please contact me.

This past year directed by the Church & Ministry Council, I gathered actively serving female clergy for conversation. This conversation came out of the statistical info shared with you last year stating that our female clergy's salaries are around \$8,000 lower than our male counterparts. The Church & Ministry Council is continuing to work on this issue with the information we gathered at these events. This information also culminated in a workshop on "Negotiating Call Agreements". It was well attended and helpful for all.

Our "Necessary Endings" team held our second workshop this spring. Although this is not an easy conversation to have regarding church closure, the participants always seem to feel relief after attending. There is relief in knowing that they are not the only church going through this situation and relief knowing that it is ok and faithful to help their church close.

This year I am honored to have a sabbatical. Believe it or not, I am in my 7th year as your Associate Conference Minister for Search and Call. I will be on sabbatical starting after the Spring Annual Meeting in June through September 2, 2019. When I return, I am sure that I will have to jump onto the speeding train known as PSEC. It will be a joy to do so.

Together may we hold fast to the knowledge that we may not know what tomorrow holds, but we know that God holds our tomorrows.

Blessings,
Rev. Sharon S. Morris