

Report to Pennsylvania Southeast Conference Annual Meeting Spring 2023

Rev. Kevin J. McLemore, *Associate Conference Minister for Search & Call*

Overview of Search and Call

I continue to be thankful about being part of the search and call journeys for many of our congregations. Churches often find ways of completing their searches and finding a minister who is right for their setting, and whom God has called to serve them. But the challenges of doing search and call for both churches and those of us guiding the process remain, especially with the lack of available clergy and the decrease in full-time positions. At the AM 21 (Authorized Ministry 21 – discussed below) gathering in December 2022, ACMs and others involved in Search and Call lamented the continuing decline in profiles circulating in their conferences. It is a not PSEC phenomenon, but one being felt across the United Church of Christ. I often must break the bad news to churches in search that they should not expect the volume of profiles coming to them that they would have seen a decade earlier. Thankfully, many of them understand this challenge, though it doesn't alleviate their frustration at the lack of profiles for them to review.

Additionally, we also noted an even steeper decline in available trained interim ministers. Our move to changing some newly open positions from interim to designated-term has alleviated some of that problem, but there are churches who need the good work an interim can provide, especially after a long-pastorate. There is some good discussion about putting together a team of trained interims to offer coaching to designated-term pastors, and others, who find themselves pastoring a congregation in transition.

As I say often, the future is shared, and I would invite congregations to remember this truth, as they begin thinking of their future ministry.

Search Materials Reviewed and Consolidated, Including the Call Agreement

Additionally, Brea and I have worked on consolidating and streamlining the voluminous number of materials we send to churches as they begin their search process. When a church began its search, we would send them an initial batch of 9-13 separate Word or PDF documents, depending on the situation. Throughout the process, churches would (and currently) do receive additional batches, totaling around 34 by the end of the search. This gave us flexibility on what pieces to send for different situations, but it often overwhelmed Transition chairs and teams, with the printing and tracking of those documents through the process.). In the last few months, we've edited and consolidated some of those documents, and will end up with likely four different packets of distinctive materials for different stages of the search process. The first set of consolidated packets are being made ready, and completing the other packets is the goal of the next few months.

The other piece that is being re-worked is the call agreement. All the pieces of the agreement will remain in place, but instead of including the financial figures throughout the document, we've created a last page of the agreement for the actual dollar figures at the time of

employment/call. With the addition of this end page that includes those figures, a church can update this end document every year without needing to update the base call agreement, which names the terms of the call itself and what benefits will be included. The truth is that the initial call agreement with the financial details embedded in the document becomes outdated within the first year, as the yearly cost of benefits changes, and increases or decreases to the salary are made after that first year. When this new call agreement format is rolled out, we'll also ask our churches to send us that final/end page every year, as they update it, so we can gather additional information on the state of clergy salaries in our conference. Brea, who does much of this work, brings such wisdom and experience as she works with our Conference churches on these call agreements. We are truly blessed by her presence in our conference.

Authorized Ministry 21 (AM 21) Conference on December 6-10, in Atlanta, GA

Both Brea Rarick and I attended AM 21, which was in person for the first time since 2018. This conference gathers those involved in Search and Call, as well as those judicatory staff supporting Committees on Ministry. There were various workshops around these topics, but that wasn't really the focus of the gathering. It was used to introduce the Manuel on Church, a highly anticipated document meant to explore the meaning of Church in the UCC, and how to measure effective and vital congregations. The final document may be helpful both in resourcing congregational vitality, and resourcing COM's and Associations on doing the same. The language and Marks in the document may also be a challenge to many of our congregations, since it calls on congregations to engage with vitally needed work on justice issues in their congregational settings, something many of them are resistant. I remain hopeful for the final document, especially with our own PSEC member Beth Walker being a part of the process.

From the perspective of Search and Call, Communities of Practice, and Committees on Ministry, the AM 21 Conference was a mixed bag. My sense was that the national setting's MESA (Ministerial Excellence Support, and Authorization) team, as gifted and hardworking as they are, was disconnected to the crisis around the lack of circulating clergy profiles. It was only at the AM 21 Conference itself that it was decided to set time aside to discuss this issue, though it was the number one topic among the ACM's and Search and Call support staff that I met at the Conference.

Additionally, a new Community of Practice manual was shared, and additional helpful material was provided, especially regarding some online resources.

As with most conferences, the greatest area of learning was with our colleagues doing this sort of judicatory work. Ideas were shared, models of conference staffing were shared, and connection with others doing this sacred and sometimes discouraging work proved to be most valuable. I am thankful for being the Conference allowing us to attend this conference.

Designated/Interim Church (Short) Profile Change

In light of our increasing dependence on designated-term position to attract candidates for our churches, due to the shortage of interim ministers, a change to the Short Profile is needed. The short profile is used in the search for an interim or designated-term pastor. As pastors consider

the possibility of becoming a settled pastor after the designated-term period has ended, which is allowable, the more information the clergyperson has at the beginning of their search seems wise. Some information that was normally included in the Long Church Settled Profile will soon be added to the PSEC version of the Short Profile, such as additional financial information, more attendance and participation statistics, and a listing of recent pastors and the length of their tenure. We also decided to include this information on the profile used to search for an interim minister, since this would likely prove to be useful to these ministers as well. This will be rolled out soon. Always, my thanks to Brea for her wisdom on what to change and for her reshaping the actual materials themselves.

Committees on Ministry

I continue to be the PSEC Conference representative to our 5 Committees on Ministry (6 separate meetings, because Covenant divides their COM).

Final Note

I continue to be grateful to the PSEC churches for their embrace of my ministry, as well as their patience as I continue to learn about how to serve our churches more effectively. It is good to be here among you.

Peace,

The Rev. Kevin J. McLemore

Associate Conference Minister for Search and Call