

Frequently Asked Questions – Transition to a new pastor

- 1. Why do we have this period of weeks after Mark leaves before we have an interim pastor? And then why such a long period with that interim? Why don't we just choose a new senior pastor?**

There needs to be a separation period between Pastor Dowdy and the new settled pastor. The intentional interim pastor will help us make that time productive by helping us look at where we have been and where we want to go. Both the Presbytery Executive and the UCC Conference Minister have had lots of experience with transitions between pastors, and they both have advised us to have such a separation period. Likewise, the literature for both denominations supports the process the Council has adopted. We have heard that without such a separation period the transition between pastors does not work, and the search process will need to happen twice.

- 2. When and how will the intentional interim pastor selection committee be formed, and who will be on it?**

The intentional interim pastor hiring committee, established by the Council, will include no more than five people, and it will work with both the UCC Conference Minister and the Presbytery Executive to hire an intentional interim pastor who has the training and experience to be successful. That work begins soon. The hiring committee will include members from the planning committee, Council, personnel and the congregation at large.

- 3. Why does there have to be such a strict prohibition of contact with Mark after he retires? Does that create unnecessary hardship for him?**

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The most important goal for the church is to have a smooth transition and “call” a new senior pastor who we will love and who can lead us into the future. Unfortunately, this can’t happen when Pastor Dowdy is still amongst us. This is very clear when you speak to the professionals, and Pastor Dowdy will be the first to tell you that it is a necessary condition. Rules in both congregations are very strict about him leaving the church and not doing any weddings, funerals or any other functions. As for Pastor Dowdy, he also must start on a path of new beginnings and we can’t hold him back from that.

4. When and how will the senior pastor selection committee be formed, and who will be on it?

The senior pastor selection committee will be formed in about a year; it is too early to know who will be on that committee. These committees are usually no more than seven people; members are selected on the basis of individual talents, their willingness to serve, and demographics within the church.

5. What do we hope to accomplish during the term of the interim pastor?

There are five main objectives:

- ◇ *Coming to terms with history: Grieving, working through conflict, acknowledging and learning from the past, deciding what is important and worthwhile to carry into future.*
- ◇ *Facilitating shifts in leadership: Honoring past leadership, keeping them involved; encouraging and equipping new leadership.*

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- ◇ Clarifying identity and purpose: Determining whether the congregation's image is realistic; discovering a realistic and promising identity for the future.

Note: There is normally some planning around the time the senior pastor leaves. It is important, however, not to make drastic changes during the tenure of the interim pastor. The focus should be on clarifying identity and purpose.

- ◇ *Creating a healthy partnership with the denomination.*
- ◇ Committing to new leadership and the future: Consensus and excitement about a shared vision for future.

Note: The interim pastor is not a pastoral candidate. It is important that the congregation understand that the interim pastor is employed for a set period of time in a bridging role between vacating and new pastors.

6. What will happen to staff during this transition?

We view the staff's role as particularly important during the transition, given their experience and institutional memory. We acknowledge that in some situations staff may need increased support from the congregation.

7. Is Jan van Pelt a candidate for interim pastor?

Reverend Van Pelt is a trained and experienced intentional interim pastor. If she is available, she would certainly make a good candidate. We also know that we must let the process work and not just jump to a candidate. We must get the best person for the church and be thorough about our process. Other churches in Washington State have tried to circumvent the process and had terrible luck.

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8. Are we without a leader during the period between Mark's retirement and the beginning of the term of the interim pastor?

Yes, and this is part of the proven process. The church must have a clean break. The period of time is approximately a month, and during this time, we will make sure that crucial pastoral duties are provided.