

Guide to Pastoral Search and Call



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There are four guides to accompany search and call processes:

1. Notes for the Local Church
2. Notes for the Intentional Interim Minister
3. Notes for the Supply Minister
4. Notes for the Minister in Search

Each guide overviews the practical work of transition, the faithful work of discernment, and the ethical expectations for a fair and honest search process. Liturgical and logistical tools are suggested as well.

This particular guide is for you, the minister supplying a congregation's pastoral and priestly needs. The leaders of the church and conference have asked you to serve in this role for a limited time during a pastoral absence (such as a sabbatical) or pastoral transition (perhaps serving until an interim minister is called). As supply pastor, your faithfulness in providing pastoral care and worship leadership will help the congregation feel cared for and encouraged during the unfamiliar season of their settled pastor's unavailability and/or until the congregation is ready to engage change.

UNDERSTANDING POLITY AND PROCESS

Congregations with pastoral vacancies are expected to publicly post available positions, including temporary positions, at UCC Ministry Opportunities with the help of their conferences. It's wise for you to have your UCC Ministerial Profile prepared when you make yourself available for a supply pastorate; within the policy of the Insurance Board, it is a best practice for all churches employing an authorized minister to use the UCC Ministerial Profile, including its criminal background check.



Your ministry alongside the congregation will be most effective if you and the church leadership have a shared clarity about the tasks you will undertake as the supply pastor. If the congregation needs significant change to its ministry and/or pastoral leadership, the conference will play a key role to provide tools and staffing for that process and to accompany the church's leaders in their decision-making. If the congregation's pastor is temporarily absent, the church's leaders will have the primary role in managing their programmatic and administrative ministries.

Congregations in the midst of leadership transition or pastoral absence experience a profound opportunity – and sometimes a significant challenge – to claim their identity and their vision for God's work through them. Your commitment as the supply pastor is to support the congregation's spiritual wellbeing so that the church can live its best ministry. Your own habits of excellence during this time are vitally important. Professional education, collegial relationships, and ongoing spiritual growth will help you thrive even during times of stress.

Your entrance in this particular congregation does not mean that you transfer local church membership and ministerial standing. Instead your ministerial standing is kept in the association of your home church, and you will need to abide by oversight requirements of that association. Be in collegial communication with the association to which the church you are serving belongs, so you can help the congregation maintain its local covenantal relationships while also clarifying to that association your accountability with your home association. If you are asked to participate in local covenantal relationships as the supply pastor, model positive engagement and promote the role of the conference in support of the congregation.



ESTABLISHING PARAMETERS

It's important for you to have clarity about the expectations and limitations of your role as supply pastor. You'll gain this clarity – and you'll help church leaders and the conference staff have a shared clarity – by asking questions about the rationale and purpose of the supply pastorate position:

IS THE CHURCH'S PASTOR EXPECTED TO RETURN?

YES

Yes, the church's pastor is on personal leave or taking a sabbatical.

IS THE ABSENCE LONGER THAN THREE MONTHS?

Yes. *Do you have to preach every Sunday? Is there a Scope of Work?**

No. *Which tasks are expected of you beyond worship and visitation?*

DOES THE BUDGET COVER BOTH THE CURRENT MINISTER AND THE SUPPLY PASTOR?

No. *Is the conference aware of the church's budget?*

Yes. *Are your compensation and time off written down?*



NO

No. The pastor will not be returning.

DID CRISIS OR CONFLICT INITIATE THE PASTORAL TRANSITION?

Yes. *What is the church's plan for addressing the conflict, and who will support that work?*

No. *How is the congregation preparing for a settled pastor search process?*

DOES THE CHURCH HAVE A PLAN FOR LONG-RANGE VISIONING?

Yes, the church has asked me to facilitate their visioning. *Is the conference aware of this arrangement?*

No. *How will you and the church assess this supply season? When will this season end?*

**Call Agreement
Workbook**

A Companion Resource to the
Brief Dictionary of Pastoral Positions

* Find Scope of Work information in the Call Agreement Workbook, available for order from uccresources.com.

PRAYING AS YOU BEGIN

You might incorporate the following liturgy into a worship service at the start of your ministry with the congregation:

CONGREGATION: *Gracious God, you have blessed and sustained us for years, through the wilderness and through gentle pastures, alongside strangers and good friends. Be with us now, we pray, as we enter this brief season with Pastor _____. Give us courage, patience, and understanding. Strengthen us in our Christian vocation of witness to the world and service to others, through Jesus our Christ. Amen.*

SUPPLY PASTOR: *As we begin this time together, we hold fast to faithful friendship and we welcome new relationships. As your supply pastor, I promise to pray with you, listen to you, love and encourage you as long as we are together.*

CONGREGATION: *We receive you as a servant of God and welcome your presence among us for this season. We promise to continue to use the gifts God has given us for the sake of the gospel in this place: in worship, education, witness, service, and stewardship.*

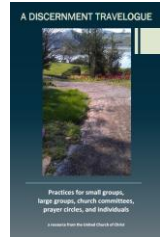
SUPPLY PASTOR: *May God bless us and lead us. May the Spirit encourage and sustain us. May Christ continue to teach and accompany us always.*

CONGREGATION: *Amen.*



PRACTICING DISCERNMENT

As a supply pastor, it's possible that your vocation is experiencing a time of transition and discernment much like the congregation you are supplying is in transition. Ask a few people to talk and listen with you to the Spirit's direction during this season of supply ministry. Choose people who know you well and are not part of your current ministry setting. With these conversation partners and in your own prayer time, use resources such as the *Discernment Travelogue* for grounding and illumination.



Practice Scriptural reflection:

DISCERNING

Read **1 Kings 3:3-14**.

Before Solomon was ready to begin leading the people of Israel, God appeared to him in a dream and asked a simple question: If Solomon could have anything, what would he request from God?

This was Solomon's chance to dream big – to ask for wealth, a long life, stability, or success. He could have asked for power over his enemies. Instead Solomon responded humbly to God, saying, “I am only a little child – who can govern this people?” The one thing that Solomon asked for was wisdom, an understanding mind, and God was pleased to grant his request.

What dreams do you have? Where is your longing or God's guidance being expressed in those dreams?

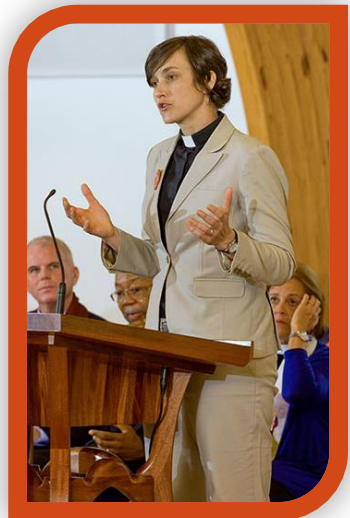
Of all the spiritual gifts God may be ready to give you, which one would you ask for right now?

How do you practice discerning what is right?



As you practice faithful listening to the Spirit's leading in your own life, be likewise faithful in your Scope of Work responsibilities as a supply pastor – saying yes to the tasks that are yours to do, saying no to the tasks that have not been designated to you, and overall being a non-anxious pastoral presence.

Pay attention to indicators of organizational transition that may be going on around you, even if facilitating change is not your given role. Indicators of life cycle transitions may include: limited capacity by the congregation to make bold decisions, financial concerns that limit an open-ended commitment to the next minister, profound disagreement among church leaders, and more. Equip yourself and the congregation to engage adaptive change by working with conference staff and/or seeking referrals for congregational coaching. Reinforce the good news of God's presence and the constant call of the Spirit to transformational community in your worship leadership and pastoral care.



PRAYING AS YOU END

When the time comes for your departure from the supply pastor position, good closure and good boundaries between you and the congregation will help the church welcome its returning pastor or make decisions about its future pastoral leadership. While you may be looking toward your next place of ministry, remember that good leave-taking contributes to the success of the congregation's relationship with its returning or next pastor. Attend to your own emotional process, including grief and loss.

Make sure that you leave the ministry space well-organized: notes about significant life changes among church members, church calendar updates, keys, bulletins, etc. Offer your contact information should the returning or new minister desire to be in touch with you for conversation. You might incorporate the following liturgy into a worship service as your ministry ends with the congregation:

SUPPLY PASTOR: *When I joined my ministry with yours, I took on the responsibilities of your pastor for a temporary season – leading worship, providing care, and encouraging our Christian faith. Will you now release me from these responsibilities?*

CONGREGATION: *We will.*

SUPPLY PASTOR: *As your Supply Pastor, I have been blessed to journey with you for this time, to know your lives more fully, to witness your ministry in action. Will you join me in thanking God for our time together?*

CONGREGATION: *We give thanks to God.*

SUPPLY PASTOR: *Together we have sought to sustain the life of this church and to grow responsibly in love and understanding and faith. Will you continue on the path of responsible love and understanding and faith?*

CONGREGATION: *We will, with God's help.*



SUPPLY PASTOR: *Will you commit to patience as your pastor returns / as your next pastor begins, supporting their leadership in accordance with the guidance given to this church by the Holy Spirit, and will you hold yourselves to wise communication practices to grow the relationship between congregation and minister over time?*

CONGREGATION: *We will, with God's help.*

SUPPLY PASTOR TO GOVERNING BODY/MODERATOR: *I return the keys you gave me when I came. I thank you for that trust.*

GOVERNING BODY/MODERATOR: *I receive the keys on behalf of this congregation. We express our gratitude and love for your wise and faithful leadership during this time.*

SUPPLY PASTOR: *The prayers of the Church Universal will be always with you, as your prayers are with ministers and congregations everywhere.*



