

**MODELS FOR PASTORAL LEADERSHIP WHEN A POSITION BECOMES OPEN**  
*SYNOPSIS OF CONVERSATIONS TODATE*

For the last 30 years a model has been crafted, researched, updated and fine-tuned to provide 'Interim' leadership in churches following the resignation of a Called pastor. This has been and continues to be the standard of wisdom and practice for the majority of our churches.

In the last decade we have become more keenly and sometimes painfully aware of the Changing Landscape of Ministry. This term has been used to describe the decline in attendance of churches all across the political and theological spectrum. It describes the growing trend in our culture to view institutional religion (of any faith) as irrelevant, boring, rigid, hypocritical, meddlesome and harmful or dangerous.

The result has been the observation of increased stress within the church and on it from finances, culture, system dynamics, membership, etc. Research estimates indicate that every denomination all along the theological spectrum is experiencing membership decline. Increasingly, churches are moving from full time to part time (currently 7 out of 10 UCC churches have less than 100 in membership and less than 75 in worship) and many churches are closing (1 UCC church moves into legacy/church closing plans each week. Across the Christian faith the net closures, accounting for new church starts, is around 3000 per year or nearly 9 net closures each day)

Across the UCC and many other denominations, there have been explorations and experimentation with additional models for churches who find a vacant pulpit. Churches and denominations are wrestling and scrambling to find the most faithful and effective approaches to serve the ministries of Jesus Christ in and through their churches. The terminology used is even more diverse than the models. And the processes and policies used to implement those models have lent towards confusion and misperception.

In New England UCC Conferences there have been a number of conversations by email, small group, large group gatherings, and new projects. This has been echoed by those same conversations across the country. To date the vast majority of these conversations have been among clergy and conference staff; there has been little input from laity. Laity input will be an essential additional perspective as this conversation continues forward. It should also be noted that the conversation may have another level of complexity when addressing an Associate Pastor position.

There is now a movement towards some common understandings and strategies on the following:

1. What do our churches need to move forward healthfully, faithfully and effectively?
2. Could we have a common terminology and understanding of the emerging models?
3. Are there best practices for protocols that guide a church as they seek for a pastor to fill an empty pulpit or position?
4. What do our pastors (interim, settled, etc) need as skills, resources, training, support in this moment in the life of our faith.
5. What assessment, support and evaluation are needed to determine healthy, faithful and effective interim ministries and interim ministers?

This document attempts to capture a snapshot of the current moment of these conversations as they have happened in Mass Conference, New England UCC Conferences, the new Intentional Ministry Networks curriculum revision, national UCC conversations and other think tank conversations.

*It is by no means, a complete synthesis or document,*

*but the hope is to provide a foundation for moving forward  
with greater clarity and conversation*

We are using a model emerging out of the Connecticut UCC Conference and the work of Charlotte Wright and Laura Westby as a foundation. It also incorporates a model for designated term pastors developed in the Northern California Nevada UCC Conference and revised for reflection in the Massachusetts Conference UCC.

*This is meant to be descriptive of terms used and not an assessment of the motivation or value of them. You will note that some terms appear in more than one category and with more than one definition....that is the current state of the conversation.*

**In the Changing Landscape of Ministry it is not enough to make the church healthy.  
It must also be healthy and moving with a new awareness/discernment  
of its role, identity and potential in that Changing Landscape of Ministry.**

**SETTLED PASTOR**

At several points a question has been raised as to the appropriateness of the title ‘settled’. This term applies to a pastor who has been Called by vote of the Congregation to a position that is open ended, typically with termination based on 60 or 90 day notice. Fundamental to our UCC polity is the recognition that Search Committees can best discern the Will and Guidance of God’s Spirit when bias and external influence are minimized. The aim is to provide an open, transparent and level ‘playing field’ where all candidates can come equally into the awareness and prayerfulness of a Search Committee. While extensive resources and conversations are happening with and among settled pastors around developing healthy, faithful and effective churches in the changing landscape of ministry, this document focuses primarily on the time of transition when a position is open in a church.

**INTERIM/TRANSITIONAL PASTOR:**

This term is based on two primary principles: 1) the pastor is temporary because this allows an individual who is not part of the church system to accompany the church as it does a unique kind of reflection and visioning in preparation for Calling a Settled Pastor and 2) the temporary pastor can not be considered as a candidate for the settled position to allow the search committee to be free and unbiased as it discerns God’s will with an open and level field of candidates. There has been a traditional presumption that if an interim pastor is part of a church/congregational system for more than 18 months they lose some of their ability to be a neutral, objective and differentiated presence in that system.

- Stated Supply: This is a very minimum level of pastoral coverage with worship and essential pastoral care only (sometimes it is only worship). This is normally part time and may be used by some for the Bridge Interim time or short term.
- Sustaining Interim: This is a full time position, maintaining continuity of key ministries while the church undergoes an abbreviated Search Process. This could also be used for the Bridge Interim Time.
- Some conferences are combining the above two models with a consultant who comes in to provide some of the interim work.

- Classic Interim: This continues to be the form of interim ministry folks are most familiar with utilizing the 5 focuses (formerly the 5 tasks) from the IMN training (Heritage, Leadership, Mission/Identity, Connections, and Future). This is by far the most common form in use in our churches.
- Consultative Pastor: (in some areas the term Designated Pastor is used) a pastor brought in to complete a specific task within the church, that needs to be accomplished before the church can move into the Search Process. This requires clergy with specialized training or experience. This usually follows a traumatic episode in the life of the church. This should be done in clear initial and ongoing partnership and supervision with the Association leadership and Conference Staff. The Consultative pastor has a contract with a clear end (often 1-4 years), that would lead into either an open search process or another pastor serving as a classic interim. The types of these include:
  - After misconduct or criminal activity, a traumatic event or disaster, a financial crisis, a high level of entrenched conflict, a move from full time to part time.
  - Churches going through a substantial building or governance restructure or considering a move to a new location or a merger with another church.
  - Churches that are reconfiguring their staffing model and needs a pastor temporarily while they complete their strategy. This may also apply to churches looking to merge with or into another church.

### **DESIGNATED TERM POSITION**

In this model the church is in a particularly difficult set of circumstances. Some are facing a financial reality that their current funding is not sustainable or viable for more than 3 years. Some are in geographic or demographic situations that have led to fruitless open searches. Some churches are of a unique size and complexity. Some have chosen to become legacy churches. And new situations keep presenting themselves in this era. In some cases this is temporary with a 2 – 5 year contract/covenant. In some cases the pastor may need to continue on beyond the contract/covenant. In all cases this should be entered into after only there has been a period of reflection and decision with the whole congregation in partnership with Association leadership and Conference staff (and possibly a church coach or consultant) leading to a congregational vote to approve the process, church profile and the position's contract/covenant. (See Appendix A for a model of this process) There are pros and cons, advantages and disadvantages to each of these models.

- New Ministry Pastor. There are some lessons learned from new church or new ministry starts that require the selection of assessed and trained and experienced individuals.
- Designated Pastor: Typically this church is either in a geographic or demographic setting where an open search has been proven to generate no interest from candidates. Or this church has already discerned the move towards becoming a Legacy church. Or this church is making plans to merge with another church or enter into adoption/partnership with another church. This requires clergy with specialized training or experience.
- Repositioning Pastor: Some would call this Turnaround or Revitalization or Redevelopment: This ministry is with a church seeking a specific path towards revitalization and need a pastor trained or experienced in revitalization. These churches are in a building or financial crisis that indicates there is only 2-5 years of resources left before the church cannot pay its bills and compensation. It is a situation requiring immediate work to assess, stabilize, discern. Some of these are focused on a parallel start of a new ministry

with and through an existing congregation, a plan for turnaround, etc. This pastor may also be considered for the settled position in some cases in order to maintain the momentum.

- Succession Model: In this model the existing pastor and/or church leadership choose the next settled pastor while the current pastor is still in place. This has been used most frequently in two settings: a large Corporate sized church (membership exceeds ~500 and worship attendance exceeds ~300), and a new church start where it is one of the recommended strategies for transition from the founding pastor.
- Candidacy: in this model (sometimes called 'Acting'), the transitional pastor may be considered for the settled position. This is most commonly used for judicatory positions that are in transition. Occasionally it has been used in local church settings. In the ideal this will be the option supported from before the transition ministry begins as a partnership with church, association, conference.

***The fundamental goal is to help our churches  
become Healthy, Faithful and Effective  
in the Changing Landscape of Ministry.***

## APPENDIX A

### SEEKING A DESIGNATED TERM PASTOR

- First there will be a conversation with Conference staff and leadership from the Association to discuss the situation and the options with the pros and cons (A Consultant may be included).
- Second, in conversation with Conference Staff and Association Leadership, church leadership will determine a preferred course of action.
- Third, the Congregation authorizes church leadership to engage that course of action.
- Once this is completed and church leadership has determined the tasks and scope for the designated term the Conference staff and Search & Call Team will:
  1. Work with the church's governing board to develop a description of the congregation, its needs in a designated term pastor, a position description and a compensation package.
  2. Undertake an active search for ministers who may be able to fill the position.
  3. Provide, due to the degree of specialization required and dependent upon availability of candidates, 1-5 ministers to be considered by the search committee.
  4. Assist in designing a Call agreement appropriate to the position.
- Because a designated term ministry is a Called position, the church would follow its bylaws regarding the Calling of a pastor.
- Conference Staff and Association leadership will continue to meet with the pastor and church leadership team to monitor progress and to integrate new learnings into new strategies.

### THE CALL AGREEMENT WITH A DESIGNATED TERM PASTOR

The Letter of Call to a Designated Term Pastor should clearly state the length of the designated term and the goals for the designated term, along with one of the sets of understandings noted below regarding the conclusion of the designated term.

- A. If the church has called a designated term pastor to serve during:
- Assessment of the congregation's viability,
  - Major restructure,
  - Physical re-location,
  - Uniting or yoking with another congregation,
  - Coping with the aftermath of major conflict or trauma, or
  - A period of staff reconfiguration to maintain a particular ministry,
- the church will, after the designated term is completed, bid farewell to the Designated Term Pastor and seek an interim minister with whom to begin the process of searching for a settled pastor.
- OR
- B. If the church has called a designated term pastor
- To address issues of survival and viability, or
  - Due to difficulties with the regular search process, caused by small membership, remote geographical location, etc.,
- the church, at the end of the designated term, will determine whether to:
- a. Enter into the regular search and call process: engaging the service of an interim minister, carrying out the interim tasks, and then calling a settled pastor.
  - b. Extend to the designated term pastor the call to be the settled pastor.
  - c. Renew the designated term call to the current pastor, or
  - d. Seek another designated term pastor.

Since a designated term ministry is a called position, the responsibilities of the Association and Conference are the same as they would be for authorization for ministry in any other situation.