

DESIGNATED TERM MINISTRY DRAFT

Massachusetts Conference, UCC

BACKGROUND

In the changing landscape of ministry new situations in our churches call for a wider menu of responses to times of transition. There are times and situations when called or interim pastors are not always available to a church or appropriate for its immediate future. While there have been experiments in search and call processes for local churches in the past, more flexibility has been in practice in the Massachusetts Conference since 2011 resting on some of the learning of companion Conferences of the United Church of Christ.

Since 2011 the idea of designated term ministry has been enacted in churches in the MA Conference. We are evaluating this shift while expecting it may be utilized with more frequency as churches face an uncertain future.

Designated Term Ministry is intended to be applicable only in specific situations. Interim Ministry and Designated Term Ministry must be clearly distinguished because the effective and ethical practice of Interim Ministry rests upon the principle of the Interim Minister's not allowing him/herself to be considered as a candidate for the called position. Also, the goals of Interim Ministry and Designated Term Ministry may vary significantly.

DETERMINING WHETHER TO SEEK A DESIGNATED TERM PASTOR

When a church is in need of a pastor, the Associate Conference Minister will meet with the congregation or its governing board to guide their reflection on their current situation as a congregation and their hopes for the future. Following that time of reflection, the congregation will most likely prepare to search for an interim minister, but staff may discern and recommend that a designated term pastor be sought instead.

The most typical situations in which a church would seek a designated term pastor are:

1. A church in process of major restructure, assessment of viability, physical re-location, uniting or yoking with another congregation.
2. A church coping with the aftermath of major conflict or trauma.
3. A church whose continuing viability is doubtful.
4. A church where the regular search & call process may have proved difficult due to size, geographical location, or other issues.
5. A church in process of staff reconfiguration, where a particular ministry will be staffed to maintain needed programming while the reconfiguration of responsibilities is designed and accomplished.

In each of the above circumstances, the church needs and desires to spend a designated period of time (usually 2-3 years for situations 1-4, and 1-2 years for situation 5) addressing a particular aspect of its life or discerning its future. During this period the congregation focuses primarily on its current situation. The search for a settled pastor may be deferred until the major issues facing the congregation are resolved; or the church's decision to dissolve may pre-empt the calling of a settled pastor.

HOW THE TERM DESIGNATION WORKS

Generally, in situations 1 & 2 (above) the designated term pastor would work with the congregation for the designated period of time, after which the church, if it continues to be viable, would seek an interim minister and proceed with the tasks of the interim period concluding with the calling of a settled pastor.

In situations 3 & 4 (above) the designated term pastor could continue as the settled pastor after the designated term is completed.

In situation 5 (above) the pastoral position to which the designated term minister was called would not exist beyond the completion of staff reconfiguration.

SEEKING A DESIGNATED TERM PASTOR

After conversation with the Associate Conference Minister and after church leadership has determined the tasks and scope for the designated term the Conference 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, 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, 1-3 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.

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.