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PREFACE

This manual strives to tell "how to." It seeks to aid ministers in "finding and getting the church of your choice." I suspect all "how to" manuals offer instant enlightenment, if not gratification, with the implicit promise, "Just follow what you read here and all will be well!" If you believe that, you are too naive to be in the parish in the first place.

First, for every "how to," there is probably an exception. We can codify collective wisdom, but when we lift it to ex cathedra promulgation, we take ourselves too seriously and we propound a universality to the process, which does not exist in this incarnation.

Second, this manual leaves out what is central to ministry. No section highlights the meaning of the ministerial vocation or the nature of the call. We do not dwell on the trust relationship between parson and congregation. In short, the theology and theory of ministry find short shrift here. This effort deals with the praxis of the ministry and this sentence proves that I've encountered professors from the University of Chicago.

Third, this effort is informal, even irreverent. More than one member of the laity has charged that the word "case" (i.e. to look over a place to see its potential for one's own advantage) is to take a less than dignified view of the candidating process. I happily plead guilty. Too much writing on ministerial/congregational relatedness veers toward the overserious, the general, and the pompous. I've tried to fall the other way and look at the harsh (and sometimes wonderful) realities of the process.

This booklet in its first edition was written solely with Unitarian Universalist ministers in mind, which inevitably, I suppose, made it attractive to laity, who wanted insight into ministerial concerns in candidating--a sort of counter espionage sortie! While I welcome this lay concern, my focus in this document is on candidating from a ministerial perspective. I make no pretense that this is comprehensive. Some day I may write a sequel on "How to Case a Minister." In this edition, I give such an effort a possible incipient start by including a Postlude on what I hear search committees asking about ministers--a sort of counter-counter espionage! Let the lay leader take heed that this booklet is written from the vested interest of the clergy and thus should carry some warning similar to the Surgeon General's caveats on cigarette packages.

The first edition of "How to Case a Church" appeared over thirteen years ago and the second some six years ago. What continues to surprise me is not only the number of lay pur-

chasers, but the popularity found beyond the Unitarian Universalist Association. This demand by clerics in other denominations suggests that the issues inherent in candidating are similar in various traditions and polities.

In North America, whatever the polity of a denomination, the truth is that the relatedness between minister and congregation stands central. Ecclesiastical authority in many churches may temper this centrality, but if a minister and congregation come to fundamental odds, the cleric's present placement is inevitably short-lived, whatever the denomination. A "failed" ministry by any standard is costly--in time, in morale, in money. For the minister, it may lead to career or family disruption or psychic wounds that take years to heal. For the church, the loss is heavy as many adherents leave parishes which they deem conflict-ridden, and squabbling churches are usually unhappy places. To make a success of the search for a new minister is not just an exercise in doing something important with intentionality; settlement relates as well to weal and woe in human lives and institutions. I am pleased that this document has found favor beyond the Unitarian Universalist world, for it suggests that beneath all surface denominational differences, there are great similarities in the basic structures of church life on this continent. All denominations can stand improvement in their settlement processes. I hope this booklet helps.

Candidating is a stressful activity. If a minister's church seeking also carries particular tensions because of economic need to find a placement, pressure to move from one's present charge, or psychological bent to be in a new church, then the whole process becomes emotionally complicated. The greater the minister's need to move, the less security the cleric feels about raising unpleasant or probing questions. For all kinds of reasons we, as ministers, do not perform with full adequacy during candidating. Such failure should not be a matter of blame or judgment. I would hold no one to a "counsel of perfection." This booklet simply strives to provide a manual of practice, which may at some points be beneficial, as we go through the rigors of candidating.

Despite all its frustrations and inadequacies, candidating stands central to our congregational polity. The right of ministers and congregations to choose each other arises out of a hard-won heritage. It declares an important principle of relatedness and calling. It honors all who participate in it. Even as we confront the harsh realities of candidating, we should recall this "choosing" as the touchstone of our religious movement.

Many, too numerous to name here, assisted me in the earlier editions of "How to Case a Church." Again, I express my thanks to the wisdom and perception of those who have contributed. Whatever truth is mined here comes from the experiences of hundreds of colleagues who have taken seriously the challenge of placement.

Peter Spilman Raible
April 1987

CHAPTER ONE

THE CANDIDATING PROCESS

Every minister mulls the possibility of changing churches, even if only in occasional fantasy. The desire for change may grow out of frustration, or a sense of ennui, or a desire for new opportunities. The enticement toward change may be momentary, spurred by temporary problems in one's present charge. The possibility of moving may be quickly abandoned by some, when they assess the realities of other churches. But most ministers, sooner or later, find strong the attraction toward a change of settlement. At this point, some hard assessments need to be made. The article "To Move or Not to Move" by David C. Pohl, Director of Ministry for the Unitarian Universalist Association, gives some excellent advice, particularly on the factors to consider (See Ministerial Settlement Manual for Ministers by Charles Stephen, UUA, 1987).

I suspect that at some point a minister crosses an invisible line, often unconsciously, which moves him or her toward another placement. If he or she has struggled a long time prior to reaching the decision to change churches, then the psychological desire to move may quickly overwhelm. In reality, candidating is often a long and onerous process. The time lapse between initiating procedures to move and actually being called to a new church usually takes six months to a year, sometimes far longer.

This period of ambiguity many ministers find harder than any other part of the process. The minister wishes to be professionally adequate in the present church, yet emotional detachment is inevitable. For example, how can a cleric seriously engage in long-range planning with the church board, if the he or she expects to be gone in a few months? If the parson lacks enthusiasm for the present placement, then this may communicate negatively to potential new settlements, where the minister is under consideration. Patience is obviously the proper advice but that is fatuous suggestion unless practical steps to cultivate patience are initiated.

Because confidentiality is central in the candidating process, ministers usually cannot be open with their present congregations or lay leadership about their search. Most ministers keep hidden their seeking a new pulpit, even from colleagues. The tendency is for the mini-

ster to be isolated during the candidating process, often only sharing the experience with the immediate family, who are undergoing their own anxieties about moving. ~~Every minister~~ needs a minister. A close, confidential, concerned relationship with an understanding colleague can be particularly useful during the emotional throes of candidating. Such a colleague can provide the outside benchmarks, advice, and independent consultation which are invaluable during the process. Ministers too often go through trials and tribulations in loneliness, and sometimes make bad decisions because they have no peer with whom to share their questions and concerns. In times of pressure we should allow ourselves the ministrations of another.

Candidating is arduous. At every step along the way, the responsibility for making the process work right lies with the minister. It doesn't appear to be that way on paper, but that is how it works in actuality. We may not like this, but we should not ignore the reality. To go through candidating with perspicacity and care requires the minister to discover and evaluate a large body of information. Little help will be volunteered along the way. The cleric must ferret out what needs to be known. This requires push and perseverance. To do the process well has impact because:

- 1) *Your livelihood is at stake;*
- 2) *Your professional future is in the balance;*
- 3) *Your family can be deeply affected by a move; and*
- 4) *You have the professional obligation to uphold standards for ministry.*

We need hardly add that the settlement process has great potential for harm or benefit for congregations. A bad settlement is often as disastrous for a church as it is for a minister.

CHAPTER TWO

CAVEATS

How the minister plunges into the candidating stream makes a difference. The cleric may go in slowly, only getting the toes wet at first, or s/he may dive in boldly or, perhaps, even get pushed into the water. The ideal situation is to be enticed in, when you are happily settled and not looking for a move. In such case, any church seeking your services must overcome your predilection to stay put. Sometimes, ministers get upset when they find themselves being considered by a church when they are not seeking a move. Perhaps they fear the enticement, but rather than dealing curtly with such inquiries, a minister might better listen. Being asked to consider moving is an excellent way to reevaluate one's present situation. A wise colleague once said, "I never refuse any proposition until I've heard it!" Indeed, ministerial lore is resplendent with tales of ministers who were reluctantly brought to consider a change, and then embarked on a significant new placement benefitting both themselves and the church. When a minister does not want to move, he or she can engage in the whole candidating process in a relaxed manner and with surer convictions about what blandishments are needed. But be warned. The flirtation with candidating can open repressed feelings of dissatisfaction in one's present charge. To entertain seriously the prospect of moving can set in motion the process whereby possibility becomes reality.

A denominational official who once worked with placement observed, "The only thing worse than moving is never being asked to move--voluntarily!" Some sharp search committees learn quickly not to take a parson's immediate turn down at face value. They have asked ministers in whom they have a serious interest, "What would it take to move you?" In a time when many ministers are increasingly recalcitrant about moving, for a myriad of reasons, such an approach tells a minister that s/he is wanted and gets to the heart of the matter without the coquettishness of "courting" as in usual candidating.

A quite different situation obtains when a minister is thrown into the stream of resettlement. The Department of Ministry tells us that about one settlement in ten is plagued by serious conflict--possibly not a bad average given the nature of congregations and ministers. In a frustrating situation, a minister can seek abatement of present problems by resignation, often without thinking the matter through. While this may be understandable, it is inevitably

a serious mistake. A long standing dictum is: "Never voluntarily resign a church until you have a new settlement!" While this seems obvious, every year ministers ignore this advice to their peril and regret.

A bad placement is virtually always a mutual mistake; so both church and minister should feel responsibility for salvaging the least disruptive solution possible. The minister should not try to salvage an impossible situation, but rather should inform key leadership that a search for a new placement is underway. The minister should hold the present charge as a bargaining tool. Only a foolish church will force a minister to resign before all other options have been considered. Ethically, churches should strive to be model employers and exemplify religious values. Often they do not. If this appeal to "high ground" does not move a church, then laity should frankly be told about the power of the "clerical grapevine," which can carry far and wide a church's reputation as "a minister killer." Such a reputation can seriously damage a church in seeking a new minister. Again and again, churches are amazed to find that they are rejected in the placement process because they are deemed to be cheap, harsh, or nasty. When there is pronounced tension between a minister and congregation, this often spills over into punitive attitudes toward termination conditions or interpretation of contract. I can categorically say that in every case known to me, the penurious and punishing approach by a church has been counterproductive. Some members, sympathetic to the departing minister, will be put off by such behavior by their church. Other members will simply slide away because of the conflict within the church. The wider denomination and its ministers will hear quickly about the ungenerous ways of the church. On the other hand, in cases where churches have walked the second mile to try to share responsibility for a creative solution for a bad placement, the church comes to have a pride in its own decency, and its reputation for generosity becomes widely known.

The minister who feels the imperative need to move should beat a strategic retreat. First, the minister should indicate that a search process is underway. Second, if a chance to candidate elsewhere does not work out after some months, a future date for a resignation can be entertained. At this point, it is important for both cleric and church that outside consultants be used. A beleaguered minister is usually too hurt or upset to represent her/his own best interests, and local lay leadership seldom has the knowledge to act according to denominational norms. Too often instead, church leadership repairs to common business practice or to legal adversarial approaches. This inevitably pours gasoline on an already volatile situation. The time to seek the fire department of the wider denomination is prior to a full scale conflagration. The most serious mistake any minister can make is to be in trouble and not seek consultation and intervention from an experienced colleague.

Frequently a minister laboring in an unhappy settlement will admit that "gut feelings" or "plain danger signs" were ignored during the candidating period. Sometimes a cleric's need to move may have been so great that warning signals were overlooked. More often the problem was simply that the candidating situation blunted perception. Both minister and

church tried to look their best for each other. Romantic infatuation allows each side to see only lovely possibilities (and not stark realities) in the other. The issue is not one of deception, but rather the way the search process unfolds.

The usual norm is to declare belief in the "truth-trust" model, namely that it is good to tell the truth and to trust that the other party is proceeding the same way until evidence proves otherwise. This model may be ideal, but there are powerful reasons to shade the truth and not trust fully the process. Both church and minister want to preen their merits and discount their liabilities. Search committees often have wild expectations of their church's potential; ministers are often seduced to discover their own abilities in the church's profile of needs. The rewards in candidating are weighted toward optimistic, subtle misrepresentation. Unfortunately, once a call is extended, a minister and congregation must live in reality, not with the image projected. For example, a search committee conveniently neglected to tell the candidate about a strong and growing group in the church who were pressing for direct involvement by the minister in the church school program. The candidate had little interest in religious education, no rapport with children, and no gift for working with teachers. There was soon a serious disruption in the church. In another situation, the church profile revealed that the church wanted a minister who would have a deep, personal involvement with members in the social life of the church. The chosen minister somehow presented herself as such a person, when in actuality, she kept a reserved professional distance from members and rarely attended church social events. The settlement was of short duration.

The misrepresentation, again, is rarely intentional; it is inherent in the process. Ministers should make every attempt to stay in touch with their own below the surface issues, as the candidating process unfolds.

1. Look for contradictions. Try to monitor yourself on this, particularly in reviewing how you present yourself during interviews. Be alert for tensions, ambiguities, and ambivalences by the search committee. Watch particularly for vagueness, glossing over problems, or switching off difficult subjects. Review your feelings and, if comfortable, try perception checks with the committee (e.g. "Let me check something out. I felt in talking about the church school that there was some reason that we moved away from discussing the sense of isolation which the religious education committee feels. Am I right, or was there something I didn't understand?").

2. Where does the conversation point? Beyond the words of the immediate conversation, what is the issue at hand? If a search committee speaks about the need for harmony in the church, what are they reacting against? If the church survey indicates a desire for inspirational sermons, what is really sought? If there is an expressed emphasis on the diversity of the church, is that really a code remark that no social action is wanted?

3. Is the search committee together? Search committees usually represent a broad spectrum of the congregation. Be alert to interactions within the committee in non-verbal ways (e.g. silences, gestures) and open differences. You might even ask, "On this committee, what do you find are your most important disagreements about your church?" Do certain members of the committee dominate? Is the chair good at drawing everyone out? If not, you may need to take initiative in getting the more silent members to participate.

4. How good is the whole process? Does the committee handle details well? Does the group show care and kindness and concern for you as a candidate? Are promises carried through in getting information, informing you where the committee is in its time line? Are expenses paid promptly? Most of all, does the committee arrange for ample interview time in a productive setting? Does the group honor your need to have time to get your questions asked and answered? There are many tipoffs in observing how a committee functions.

Ministers, particularly if they've been in a parish for a time, should have basic counseling skills. Often these crucial skills are forgotten when it comes to a minister's own "counseling" with a search committee. Listening with the "third ear" can be crucial in trying to make the most of an interview with a committee.

Ministers are public persons, even if unwillingly so. For many clerics this means they present better than they hear. It takes a certain chutzpah to be a minister. We are apt to believe in our own invulnerability. In candidating this can translate as, "There is nothing wrong with this church that a good minister (namely myself!) couldn't cure." We may note in passing that the last six ministers failed in the church, but, of course, they did not have our superior talent, winning ways, radiant personality, and understanding of depth ministry. We are called to usher in a new age in the life of the church! Once upon a time delusions of grandeur were a symptom of the advanced stage of syphilis; today, they simply mark the terminal stage of ministry.

Candidating week is a hotbox, where the minister is on constant display and every word is harkened unto (were our weekly sermons taken as seriously!). As with political candidates in the midst of a campaign, a certain unreality begins to creep in. It is easy to view oneself in a figurative royal toga (the root of the word candidate is "dressed in white") sent to the benighted as a sure winner. The Apostle Paul remarked on "the Macedonian Call" (Acts 16:9). The search committee, having gone on the line for you as its candidate, now feels a need to justify its choice to the congregation and will present you as some kind of savior figure. Everything plays into incipient ministerial narcissism. There is no quick cure for this malady. At some point a discussion, even a short one, with an outside, independent consultant can be invaluable. Sometimes spouses can provide this, but only if they have an ability to transcend their own needs in the candidating process. Usually a competent colleague is a best person with whom you can raise issues and who can alert you to the questions which need to be probed.

Ministers may not like it, but they bear the primary responsibility for making the candidating process work. In much of the process the minister is the only professional involved. Clerics often complain, usually with good reason, about the laggard and slipshod ways of search committees. Search committees, however, are composed of lay volunteers, usually without past experience in such a venture. Search committee work wrestles with many other commitments in members' lives. The minister, on the other hand, should be knowledgeable about the process and the standards to be upheld in candidating.

Before being swept fully into the process, a minister should read the UUA's Ministerial Settlement Manual for Ministers. Search committee members have all received a similar document, the UUA Settlement Manual, but that they have learned its contents should not be assumed. It may fall upon the parson to remind the committee about proper practice and ethical standards, which the committee is overlooking due to neglect or the inevitable tendency to want to do things "our way." The cry for uniqueness often masks unreality, slovenliness, or dubious practice. At every stage of candidating, ministers have the opportunity, even the obligation, to demonstrate to the laity standards of professional practice. For example, one search committee was amazed to have several potential candidates comment on the fact that there was no mention of the minister in the church bylaws. After several such interventions, the church moved to remedy the situation.

Any minister who contemplates any vacant church has the right to obtain all relevant information. How often, when a placement goes sour, a cleric bewails, "If I had only known!" A high price is too often paid for the failure to dig out the necessary information. If the potential candidate is reluctant to address some questions directly to the search committee, there are other avenues of information. The district executive (whatever the title given) or the Ministerial Settlement Representative can be helpful, either in answering questions directly or in pointing the directions to explore.

My observation is that churches rarely misrepresent themselves deliberately. What too often happens is that unpleasant topics are avoided; or no effort is made to press for information when first answers are vague; or ministers do not follow up on initial doubts. Congregations and ministers who select each other have to live with the results; so it is crucial not to ignore irritations and uncertainties during the candidating process. No committee or minister should blame the denomination for any placement result. Ministers cannot claim to be dependent children; they must do what is necessary to make the search process go well, and that includes ferreting out the important information needed.

Much concern is given to confidentiality in the settlement process. Confidentiality should be sought and respected, but not expected. Our denomination is too small for anything to be secret for long. In addition, there are simple breakdowns along the way. Rather frequently, churches asked to provide a "neutral pulpit" for pre-candidating, despite all caution to the

contrary, announce the name of the guest minister and the fact is that s/he is appearing at the behest of the search committee of such and such a church.

Search committees are also culpable even when they think they are being careful. They simply don't understand the ministerial hotline. Recently I read a search committee report in a church newsletter. The committee said that it had conducted preliminary interviews with several candidates, one of whom brought lobsters for supper from his catch of the day before. The search committee did not realize that it had identified the minister in question to a number of his colleagues. Every effort should be made to keep confidences, but do not assume that you can engage in candidating without word leaking out. A good rule seems to be to inform in confidence the president of your present church that you are engaged in exploring a move. That is called trying to cover your bases.

CHAPTER THREE:

IN THE BEGINNING

The process of moving means passing certain markers. The first mile-post is to answer the general question, "Why move?" Sometimes the answer is obvious, but frequently the matter needs cogitation (See article "To Move or Not To Move" cited in the introduction to this booklet). A simple first cut at the issue is to do a force field analysis. Take a blank sheet of paper and divide the page in two columns, plus and minus. On each side list the appropriate concerns for moving or staying. Where appropriate, the parson's family might contribute to the analysis.

Pro-moving motivations may be obvious (e.g. more money, family needs). The negatives may also stand clear (e.g. spouse's job, an approaching sabbatical). Other concerns will be more subtle (e.g. feelings of staleness, desire to be close to a major university). An analysis may help the parson identify the important motivations. As a general statement a change dictated by assessable reasons (e.g. seeking more income) is healthier and more helpful in focusing the search than are vague feelings of dissatisfaction (e.g. difficulty in thinking up new sermon ideas). The more clearly needs unmet at present can be set down, the easier it is to know whether a particular potential new church fits what is being sought.

The trend in recent years has been toward longer settlements. The present average stay of a cleric in the UUA is seven years--usually shorter in beginning career stages and longer in later placements. Because of such factors as two career families, a greater desire for "rootage," and high housing costs, many ministers are reluctant to move. Some search committees have found that in order to get the kind of potential candidates they wish, certain extra inducements need to be offered (e.g. a housing down payment loan, finding the minister's spouse a job).

The important psychological moment for the minister arrives when the candidating stream is actually entered. At this point, moving is no longer a theoretical question, for a minister begins some kind of exchange with actual search committees. Because ministers like to feel that they are "masters of their fate," the relocation process often batters their sense of self-reliance. Church seeking becomes pervaded by chance, serendipity, and capriciousness. My

father, a UU minister, used to observe that the most important placement of his career began to happen because he missed a train. Frustration can tear the seeking minister apart, if constant self-reminder doesn't reinforce the happenstance nature of the process. Ministerial cynics declare that candidating is 90% luck. Whatever the percentage, realize that search committees often screen potential ministers out for the most mundane reasons--peculiar, strange, even bizarre. I think of ministers eliminated because they wore beards, refused a social drink, were thought (mistakenly) to have a certain theological position, were on the "wrong" side of some denominational issue, or happened to have a spouse who smoked. An ample appreciation for the absurd helps preserve mental health during the candidating process.

With full acknowledgment of "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" which mark candidating, a cleric can still shorten the odds by following certain procedures:

1. Fill out a new Ministerial Record Sheet. Make sure it is updated. (It is embarrassing to have such a sheet go out listing you as married to the wrong spouse!) Pay particular attention to the final page (Brief Statement on Your Understanding of the UU Church and Ministry in Contemporary Society). The approximately 500 words set down here are usually the first introduction of who you are to a search committee. Search committees, despite injunctions not to do so, use this single sheet to weed out ministers, particularly if they are overwhelmed by a list containing many names. The form can also make an irrevocable impression on a committee. A wise parson will strive to make this statement:

- A) well written and neatly typed,
- B) presented with clarity,
- C) clear in positions taken,
- D) provocative to read.

The biographical sheet makes an important initial impression, so make sure that it truly represents you with factual accuracy and cogency. You will also be asked to fill out other appropriate forms by the Department of the Ministry.

2. Do your background preparation. Read the Ministerial Settlement Manual, the UUMA Code of Professional Practice, and you might find the following helpful:

"So You're Looking for a Minister?" by the Selections Committee, UU Congregation of Atlanta (\$9.95 from the Atlanta church, 1985)

Lyle Schaller, The Pastor and the People (Abingdon, 1973). Later books by Schaller also have sections relating to ministry.

Roy Oswald, New Beginnings (Alban Institute, 1977). Other materials from Alban (4125 Nebraska Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20016) are also helpful. Write for a current publications list.

3. Get a packet together. This is usually the most onerous part of the process and it takes time, so get started on it as soon as you decide to start searching. Colleagues who have recently moved or the Department of the Ministry can provide samples if you need help. Make sure information in the packet is current. Get a new professional photograph (no out of focus snap shots!). Make the packet look neat (no sloppy typing, no added-on updates, no tossed-in materials). Some clerics take a supercilious attitude toward what they deem Madison Avenue packets, but search committees have a full right to want evidence that you take the presentation of yourself seriously. There is a difference between a packet which is simple, neat, and clean and one that goes overboard in being slick and showy. A good packet reveals an intentionality toward candidating on your part.

4. Get the vacant pulpit list. Ask headquarters to continue mailing you the monthly updates. This will give you current information on vacant churches, long before the news appears elsewhere.

5. Do personal research. If a church provokes your interest, there is much you can find out about the congregation and community. Your library should have a good bit on the city or area. Write the local Chamber of Commerce for a packet. As for the church, look at past UUA Directories. Use your personal network, contact the district representative, and use other denominational sources. Remember, though, that persons in official positions may have to be guarded about what they can say. UUA staff must represent churches as much (or more) than they do ministers. Do not ask for confidential information (e.g. what other ministers are under consideration by the church). The phone is the modern communication link--it is fast and it allows response without anyone having to leave a trail in writing.

6. Respond promptly to all inquiries. If contacted by a church in which you are not interested, simple courtesy demands a quick response note saying thanks, but no thanks. If you are uncertain or need time, write back and say that you'll give a definitive answer by a certain date. Ministers still allow themselves to fall by the wayside simply because they are careless in responding to their mail. They deserve their fate. When clerics do not respond to search committees, they slow down the whole candidating process and that hampers their colleagues and gives a poor impression of the ministry.

7. Maintain patience. The process may be vital to your future, but it is not so primary to others. Search committees work on their own schedules, which are dictated by personal and

church calendars. Almost inevitably any committee task takes far longer than was initially expected. Denominational bottlenecks often impede flow, as busy officials can neglect to keep anxious parsons updated. Rather than stewing about it, use the phone to discover where things sit. You should be pro-active on your own behalf. Do not sink into passive dependency waiting for others to make things happen. These things you can do, but know also that the process at best will probably proceed far more slowly than you hope.

8. Keep reality. If you put restrictions on your moving (e.g. "I'll only consider a church in California"), then accept that your limits impose severe blocks to your opportunities. Even without any strictures from you, supply and demand enter in and it is far more than just a matter of numbers. There may be 25 entry level churches open, but that doesn't help you, if you have ten years of experience in the ministry and there are virtually no pulpits vacant which would be suitable for you. Denominational officials say that a minister ought to expect six months as a minimum period for resettlement. Rhythms of the church year also intrude. Whatever their good intentions, search committees rarely function during the summer months or from Thanksgiving to New Year's. Candidating tends to bunch into the late fall and spring. The whole process can be feast or famine. Many a minister can tell a tale of a long, frustrating quest for resettlement with nothing forthcoming for a year; then, suddenly, in a week's time, three churches offer the chance to pre-candidate.

9. Remember how churches work. No one needs to tell an experienced minister about how drawn out committee decisions can be, particularly on issues that involve the welfare of the total church. Search committees are usually selected to represent a cross section of a congregation, so they are likely to have wide diversity of interest and concern. A newly formed committee must then master a large body of information, set up calendars, conduct an all-church survey, prepare a packet, and, most important, form itself into a working group that can truly function together. There are ways to speed this process, but usually the committee exists for six months before it can conduct effective interviews with pre-candidates. Rarely does the search committee consciously understand this, so its initial task is to learn how to function effectively as a group. In this process, sadly, some ministers on the first list become sacrificial lambs. They find other placements because the schedule is so drawn out or because they are interviewed by search committees which cannot effectively do their work. The reality is that no outside denominational official constantly monitors search committees. Once they are formed, search committees are left to function on their own unless they ask for outside help.

10. Accept that the candidating process favors churches. Churches can live longer without ministers, than ministers can exist without remuneration. A church may feel temporary relief that it does not have to provide a minister's salary. There may be initial enthusiasm in the church for "doing it on our own" and having a different voice in the pulpit each Sunday. This euphoria may continue four to six months before there is a sudden realization that church attendance and pledge payments are dropping off. The search committee begins to feel the

pressure and sometimes moves from lackadaisical to near panic pace. I know a church which kept a minister on hold for three months, then suddenly phoned from out of the blue and asked the minister to candidate. The search committee chair was aghast when the minister asked for several days to make a decision. There is no cure for waiting, but a cleric can do more than simply watch the mailbox each day. A phone call can find out what the current situation is, and it is always appropriate to ask a committee what its current timetable is. Never forget, however, an elemental truth: the whole candidating system provides a great advantage to the church in the decision-making process.

CHAPTER FOUR:

THE COMMUNITY

Churches do not live in isolation. They exist in a wider community. This community affects the church, but how much will vary. In one community, the church will reflect the city's power structure; in another, it will be the center for community dissent; and in still another, it will seem detached. In looking at any particular church, the potential minister will wish to learn its relatedness to the wider community and what the community is like. The following hints may suggest appropriate pathways to follow:

1. Seek out from the local library (or through inter-library loan) books on the region, particularly if it is unfamiliar to you, and the city or town. Don't neglect to consult Reader's Guide to Periodicals to see what magazine articles may exist.

2. Write the local Chamber of Commerce for its introductory information kit on the city. This will obviously present the city in its best light. If the community is in transition, the local Planning Commission may have useful information, for that office is more apt to have materials relating to long-range trends.

3. Pull together the basic census information. Look for population trends, school enrollment figures, large ethnic or religious groupings, community growth patterns. How do the statistics of the church relate to the larger community patterns? If all this is too confusing for you, ask the local reference librarian for help in getting the information and ask some knowledgeable colleague what it all means in terms of the church.

4. If you get seriously interested, follow the local paper. It is usually relatively inexpensive to get the Sunday edition for a minimum number of months. This perusal should convey a sense of local issues, what things cost, cultural opportunities, and who provides community leadership.

5. Certainly if you reach the point where you are going to candidate, you need to look at the "community concern" factor. In recent years, several widely available guidebooks have tried to rank cities as good places to live. Some of the factors used in these evaluations are

per pupil expenditure for public schools, budgets for health, library, parks, and a number of other indices likely to be of interest to UU's. This is an area to check out and the depth of your research will relate to the level of your concern.

6. Discover what groups exist within the community. A telephone book is a resource, if you have no other readily available guide. You or your family may have particular interests (e.g. stables, ice-skating rinks, ski areas). A certain social climate may be suggested by the presence (or absence) of certain groups (e.g. Planned Parenthood, ACLU, NAACP). If you get as far as candidating week, you might wish to have the arrangements committee set up appointments for you with certain community leaders. Such persons can not only give you a sense of the community but also help you understand the influence (or lack thereof) of the church in the wider community. Community leaders invariably are flattered to be asked their opinion and, if you actually move there, these initial contacts may be helpful later on.

7. Compare community trends with the needs of the church. For example, if the community is losing population, yet the church expects growth, there could be a problem. On the other hand, a long static church, now being drawn into a commuter belt, has a potential for growth. What sustains the community? How volatile is it? If the economic mainstay of the city is oil, the future for the short run may be pessimistic, while if the community has a large naval base, prosperity may look good for the years ahead. Churches often exhibit trends several years behind the community, so that a city moving from bad times to good may be perceived by church members as still having limited potential.

8. How does the UU church relate to the community? As a general delineation the church should fall into one of three categories:

- A) The church has no impact of any consequence on the community, so the congregation has no defined community hopes.
- B) The church itself takes no formal position in the community, but the active involvement by many UU's as individuals in community organizations gives the church a wider influence.
- C) The church has identity with certain concerns in the community. This can be important even if the delineation is not completely accurate.

A church with a community involvement may be social-service in concern and be identified with established groups (e.g. mental health or Red Cross). This is different from a church known for its social action involvement on controversial community issues (e.g. AIDS or minority housing). A good question for any search committee is how it conceives of its church in relationship to the wider community. The cleric can watch for signs of division, confusion, or uncertainty within the committee. In general, know that most UU churches tend to overestimate the importance of their churches impact on their city.

9. Look at the church's physical location. Can it be easily reached from all parts of the city? Is it on a major arterial? Is it in the path for projected future growth? Do 80% of the members live within a fifteen-minute drive of the church? How does the church location relate to where other UU societies in the metro area are? Beyond such questions has the congregation demonstrated any concern about these matters? If so, what have they done in concrete planning? A church that will not look realistically at its own future will usually have other problems as well.

10. What is your own sense of the community? You cannot get a feel for a city second-hand. If you get to candidating week, be sure to save some time to find out in your own way about the community. Such time may not be provided by the search committee unless you ask for it.

CHAPTER FIVE:

LOOKING AT THE RECORD

Casey Stengel of baseball fame frequently ended a session of recollection with reporters by declaring, "Well, you could look it up!" As with every baseball player, every church has a statistical profile, which is important, even if not fully accurate. Statistics may bore you or strike you as gibberish. If so, find someone who is able to make a statistical analysis for you and give you the key conclusions. The lesson of this chapter is that innocence is not a blessing when it comes to candidating.

The place to start is with the UUA Directories (or the similar document from another denomination). You'll need the appropriate volumes from the past five years or so and then selected earlier years. Theological schools or colleagues will have what you need, if you do not possess them.

Take a sheet of paper and make five columns across the top and line out the years along the side (here is an example):

YEAR	ADULT/MEM	CH/SCH/EN	CONTRI/UN/	BUDGET	DEN/GV
1961	651	621		\$ 57,000	
1966	821	845		109,000	
1971	745	385	507	115,000	
1981	481	140	362	209,000	\$4,390
1982	552	144	459	213,000	4,810
1983	493	144	459	216,000	5,520
1984	477	152	457	221,000	5,916
1985	511	192	493	243,402	6,330
1986	517	210	499	257,650	6,773

Look for trends, but watch carefully for the following (Note that there is more about the financing of churches in a later chapter):

1. Sudden and abrupt changes in figures from year to year. Usually a sudden decrease in membership is a cleaning of the church rolls. If in doubt about what happened, be sure to make a note to talk to the search committee about it. It can be revealing to find out if the search committee knows about trends in its own church.

2. Discrepancy between membership and number of pledge-unit ratios. The rule of thumb is two pledge units for every three members. Churches within cities will tend to have a higher ratio and those in suburban communities a lower ratio. This reflects marriage patterns. If pledge units are less than half the number of members, then either membership is padded or the church canvass drive is so poorly done that a high percentage of members do not even pledge. Either reality is a bad sign. If there is a high number of pledge units compared to members, the church probably keeps a tight membership roll and does a good job at solicitation, but not as well at bringing friends into membership.

3. Rounded figures reported in the directory, such as 500 members, 200 in the church school, \$200,000 in the budget, indicate inaccurate statistical reporting, which needs further investigation. When a church has such figures in the directory, a minister should look with particular care at the financial materials provided by the church to see if they are precise.

4. Beyond the denominational directories, there are materials provided by the church in its packet. Look at the local church's directory with its listing of friends and members. Count the number of members listed. How does your figure compare with the number reported last year to the UUA? There should be no wide margin of difference. Do many members live far away from the church, so that they cannot participate? What percentage of the families listed are members? If under 75% then it is probable that too little is being done to encourage church membership.

5. The search committee compiles the results of an all-church survey. What percentage of the total membership participated in this effort? It should be at least half. If less than a third returned questionnaires, all kinds of warnings should be taken. Is the survey skewed by many non-members responding? (If over 20% of the responses are from non-members, the results may be questionable.) What does the survey reveal about age categories, marital status, the number of children in the congregation? If the congregation is appreciably older or younger than the UUA average age of about 50 years, then that is significant. Is half the congregation single? If so, the church has different program needs from most churches. Are there many more children of church school age in the congregation than are enrolled in the church school?

6. The church bylaws should be studied. Is there a provision for cleaning "deadwood" from the membership? What commitment is required to continue membership?

7. Find out how many members have attended district meetings and the UUA's General Assembly in the past five years. Is a full delegation usually on hand? How many members serve on district/UUA committees/boards? Are those who go to denominational conclaves presently active in church leadership? The greater such participation, the more it can be expected that member concern is wider than simply the local congregation.

CHAPTER SIX

A STATISTICAL PROFILE (Raible's Ratings)

Every UU congregation is unique and its leader quick to proclaim its uniqueness. Despite such proclamations we can still draw a general profile from the statistical picture presented by a church. If a church is consistently low in the ten areas cited here, then there are undoubtedly real problems with the congregation. Conversely, a church often above the average norms should have a high level of commitment.

1. Pledge Units as a Percentage of Membership. If the total number of pledge units is under 50% of membership, then either the pledge drive is abysmal or membership figures are inflated. Expect city churches to be higher and suburban churches to be lower in the number of pledges in relation to members. The usual figure should be around 60% (e.g. a church of 200 members would have 120 pledge units).

2. Expenditure per Member. \$300 per member is a good standard. Under \$200 or over \$500 is noteworthy. This needs to be considered in conjunction with the church's non-pledge income (see below).

3. Income Sources. Church pledges should add up to at least 60% of the total church income. If pledges are lower then members are probably not carrying a real fiscal responsibility. Most churches have roughly 75% of income from pledges, but many churches depend (often far too heavily) on endowments, rentals, or special fund-raising for current expenses. Such funding sources can erode the feeling by members that their pledges are important. (Many churches have heavy endowments and use these funds for special projects, capital needs, scholarships, social concerns, etc. which would not normally be a significant part of a church's annual expense budget.)

4. Annual Fund Giving per Member. This has been moving upwards at a good clip in recent years. A minimum standard should be \$10 per member (twice what it was six years ago), but this will continue to move upward from the present "honor level" of \$12 per member until the denominational asking will be \$20 by the end of the current decade. For a minimum standard, I would suggest the following: 1987 - \$10; 1988 - \$11; 1989 - \$13; 1990 - \$14;

1991 - \$15. Projecting forward figures beyond then is too much guesswork, but it could be expected that the one dollar per year increase could be used until at least 1995. These are, again, minimal figures; honor churches will do better and the directory each year lists the honor societies. Annual Fund giving is the best single index of a church's denominational concern and ability to look beyond its own isolationist needs.

5. Church Attendance as a Percentage of Membership. Attendance as a percentage of membership will be lower in the east, particularly New England. If attendance is under 25% of membership, there are real problems. In southern and western churches, the figure should be around 50% (this, of course, does not mean that 50% of the members attend on any given Sunday, only that the total attendance, including guests, will average 50% of adult membership during the main church year (September through May). Be careful if children from the church school regularly attend part of the church service that they are not included in the count. Some experts on church consulting hold that attendance is a far more significant figure than membership, given the varying standards used to define membership.

6. Church School Attendance as a Percentage of Religious Education Enrollment. Church school re-enrollment should be annual and is usually by filling out some form, though some churches use an attendance figure (e.g. any child attending three times is deemed enrolled). During the school year attendance should average 60% of enrollment. If attendance is under half the enrollment, then something is amiss. Expect figures to be lower prior to October and after Easter, particularly in New England.

7. Plate Income as a Percentage of Total Church Income. This is not a significant statistic, but if loose plate offering is over 5% of church income, then the pledge drive is being done in a slipshod manner, since those permanently associated with the church will give more in the unidentified (plate) giving than they would if they were pledging.

8. Debt Service as a Percentage of Expenses. Some churches devote 40%-50% of their budgets to debt, which is a tremendous burden even for a rapidly expanding congregation. Given the present climate of church growth across the continent, a debt retirement program which requires more than 25% of the church budget is dangerous. Exceptions will be rare. These figures do not include any funding from current capital fund pledges. Ten to fifteen percent of the expense budget is normative for debt and a church that is not providing that much ought to be involved in some fiscal commitment to expansion or extension, either on its own or in cooperation with other societies.

9. Total Staff Salaries as a Percentage of Budget. If a church devotes over two-thirds of its budget for staff, then it is overextended. The church budget for all staff should be about 60%. In a multiple staff situation the senior minister should receive about 20% of the current operating budget. This is not just salary, but the total line item so that the cost of the senior minister is one-fifth of church expenses. (Non-church programs should not be in-

cluded in the budget for figuring this percentage, e.g. the costs of operating a private nursery school.) A departure of more than a percentage point or two from the 20% figure is significant.

10. Average Plate. How significant the average pledge is will depend on average community income. The average UU church pledge is now about \$400 (roughly a dollar a day), if the church keeps a clean membership roll. If the average pledge is under \$300 per year, then the financial support is weak. The expectation should be higher in suburban churches and less for inner city churches. A pledge level of \$400 per unit represents about 1% of UU family income. Average income of UU families is over \$40,000 per year.

CHAPTER SEVEN

EVALUATING THE PRESENT

Every church seeking a minister prepares a packet about its congregation and community. This packet is sent to every minister whom the search committee deems worthy of consideration. The potential candidate should study what is and what is not included. Divide the packet into two piles. In the first pile place all the material which is not generated from the church (e.g. from the Chamber of Commerce, the Tourist Bureau). If most of the material ends up on this pile, realize that you may be getting a skimpy picture of the church itself, whatever the attractions of the community.

The second pile is the material which comes directly from the church. Look it over first for a general impression--how does it strike you? Is it homespun, honest, slick, detailed, superficial? Next, look for the omission of any of the following:

1. the complete results of the profile of the church members which resulted from the search committee's questionnaire;
2. the reports given at the last annual meeting of the congregation (you may also want to request specifically the reports for the last five years and it is revealing to find whether the church has these on file);
3. the financial report for at least the last complete fiscal year with detail of actual income and expenditure for all church accounts;
4. the current budget with actual income/expenditures to date;
5. the church bylaws;
6. the current membership/friends directory.

With these materials you can have some excellent grist to mill. Strangely, often the least useful document is the church profile which the search committee has worked so hard to

produce, mail out, tabulate. The problems are several. The results usually are from less than half the members and often have a heavy percentage of non-members included. Sometimes the questions asked are of limited usefulness. For example, if asked "What is important for the next minister to do?" most respondents will say that everything listed as a possibility is at least "somewhat important." Surveys, which force respondents to delineate priorities, are usually more revealing.

Look over the survey results for anything unusual, such as a heavy centering on a particular theological viewpoint or top ministerial priority given to some other activity than preaching. Be particularly sensitive to inept questions. For example, given the choice, most congregants will opt for the next minister to have a "broad liberal" theology. Such vagueness does not reveal much.

Many ministers note wryly that little correlation seems to exist between the congregational profile revealed by the survey and the actual minister ultimately called. A church may give priority to a forty year old married male, who is a Christian, and yet call a twenty-five year old single woman, who is a humanist. The reason for this is simply the reality that in the actuality of the candidating process, the interpersonal dynamics between minister and search committee becomes far more important than the church survey.

Profiles have interest to the degree that they depart from "ho-hum" responses. Check the survey to see if it indirectly reveals attitudes regarding the adequacy of the last minister. The usual dictum is that churches look for strength where the last minister was deemed inadequate, and neglect the former cleric's areas of strength. Congregations do not feel concern for the areas in which their needs have been met. For example, if the prior minister was notable as a community activist, but limited in pastoral functioning, the church survey may not emphasize social action as a priority. But once a new minister is settled, there may well be significant demand from the congregation for the cleric to take an active role in the community.

Read the annual reports. While such always tend to emphasize success more than failure, they will usually contain references to program inadequacies and what yet needs to be done. Such reports may also reveal by omission. For example, do they mention anything about the church's involvement in the wider denomination? It can be instructive to read the reports alongside the church budget. If reports call repeatedly for church social involvement, but there is no item in the budget for such activity, then this lack of congruence is important. Annual reports tend to point up what a congregation takes pride in. Read the congregational minutes. What mood shines through? If there was a dispute, how was it handled? This may indicate norms of how controversy is handled in the church. Is there an attempt to celebrate significant service to the church, perhaps by awards to members? If so, it may indicate a serious regard for lay leadership.

The budget and financial reports require analysis (See Chapter 10 on "Finances"). Churches in financial turmoil are apt to have other difficulties and to be places of anxiety, preoccupied with long Board discussions about minor fiscal matters.

Dollars state fundamental values. Every church budget has relatively set amounts for basic services to keep the doors open. Beyond this are core services, which theoretically could be changed, but usually will not be (e.g. caretaker, office maintenance). When these "fixed" expenses are figured, what amount is left and how is it distributed? This "discretionary" money tells what programs are most valued. If 25% of the program budget goes for music and 5% for the church school, that is revealing. Learn what the congregation values, for unless there are drastic changes in the budget, these commitments are usually difficult to modify significantly in the short run. A budget represents vested interests within the congregation. Each program area in the budget may not be important to the majority of the congregation, but particular groups in the church have a strong voice in budgeting. How these demands are handled is usually revealed in the line items set into the budget.

The bylaws are the single most essential document, for they provide the structures for church life, particularly if disputes arise. Peruse the sections that mention the minister, if any. Is it clear who calls and dismisses the minister, and is a procedure provided for these processes? Bylaws should state clearly that only the congregation can dismiss the minister and vote the minister's compensation. Are there clear statements about the minister's prerogatives (e.g. control of worship) or limitations (e.g. the minister shall not sit with the nominating committee)? What rights are reserved to the congregation, where the board is limited in action? Are the bylaws potentially a force that abets open procedures or do they open the way for clique control (e.g. the board appoints the nominating committee)? In general, does the church have adequate safeguards for democratic process, and does the minister have adequate protection from surprise moves?

If you find anything in the bylaws which could affect your accepting a call from the church, then bring the matter before the search committee. The power of a potential candidate is strong here. One church had a bylaw providing for the annual re-election of the minister. This requirement was quickly removed when several potential candidates refused to negotiate with the church as long as that bylaw remained. Each year several churches update their bylaws simply because of the interventions made by potential ministers.

A minister should do the necessary homework long before pre-candidating occurs. A reflective, private study of materials is far more beneficial than a last-minute swift perusal, mid-flight, on the way to an interview.

When pondering a vacant church, all its history is relevant. A church may wish to hide or soft-pedal unfortunate incidents in its past. While there is little point in bringing to the fore old controversies, how churches handle such disputes often portrays the total church atmos-

phere. For instance, I was first attracted to a church, where I became minister, because in the midst of a disruptive episode leading to the dismissal of the minister, the majority of the congregation insisted that the "severed" minister be given a termination package far beyond contractual requirements. That generosity in the midst of church division was reassuring, even though I was fearful about what had happened for its potential harm to the future of the church.

CHAPTER EIGHT

WHAT TO INVESTIGATE

Every church has a track record in relating to ministers. Ignore it at your peril! Some items are easily known--length of former pastorates, remuneration levels for ministers, etc. Other matters are less easily tangible, such as why the recent minister left. The search committee should be asked about this, but it is also wise to check the matter out with others knowledgeable about the church.

A prime source is the previous minister. Many potential ministers are reluctant to speak to a former minister, for they feel they'll get a biased view. Of course they will, but that is no reason to refuse important information. Every parson knows from counseling that bias enters all accounts and no presentation can ever be accepted at face value. One minister puts it simply, "You will live with the ghost of your predecessor, so you might as well know what that specter is." Any conversation with prior ministers should, of course, be confidential.

Frequently the prior minister may have no desire to comment on the church, either refusing to divulge impressions or responding only with generalities. As a rule, though, the last minister knows the professional dimensions of the job better than any other person. Whatever insights s/he can share should be helpful. Despite feelings of ambivalence, most ministers want their former churches to be well served and their successors to succeed there. Don't be afraid to ask the last minister the tough questions (E.g. "Why did you leave?" "What do you think will be the greatest problems for the next minister?", "What are the worst things about the church?" Again, the answers need not be fully correct, but why go into any situation with less than the fullest information possible?

A church that has a pattern of short settlements is a danger sign. Unless the church is a small, "starting church," which feeds ministers to better positions, short pastorates indicate problems: a lack of verve in the church, low remuneration for the minister, or an inflexible lay power structure. Whatever the cause, you should discover it.

An even greater danger is following a long settled minister, i.e. one who has been serving a given church over ten years. Not many years ago, the record was dismal; close to 80% of the successor ministers following a long-term settlement left shortly. The recent practice to use interim ministers after a long pastorate has sharply altered this result. Interim ministers, incidentally, often have particularly sharp perceptions of a church, since they know it without the personal involvement of a regularly settled minister. You will wish to glean the interim minister's insights. If you negotiate with a church being served by an interim minister, it is still important to go back and see what the patterns have been. What were the particular strengths of the last cleric, and how good are you at filling them? Are there long neglected areas where there will be tremendous expectations of a new minister? Is the last minister now an emeritus and, if so, is there some continuing relationship with the church (e.g. budget provision, annual visit, etc.)? If the former minister is still in the community, it is important to meet with that person during candidating week. Do not take global assurances ("I'd never interfere in the church") but seek specific policies. For example, how will you both handle it when a longtime beloved member of the church dies two weeks after you arrive? If you can work with an emeritus, there is a potential strong support for your ministry, particularly in the initial years. If at all possible, it is wise not to let fear or insecurity block the judicious use of an emeritus. But remember that once you are called, it is your church and you have the prime responsibility for defining relationships with other ministers who have formerly served the church.

Most churches have some paid staff in addition to the (senior) minister. If there is other full time professional staff, they can become the single greatest aid or hindrance to a new minister. How do they conceive of staff relations and does their perception fit your conception? If they are used to their own fiefdoms, where each staff member works independently, and you strive to introduce a collegial system, there will undoubtedly be difficulties. Are other staff members called by the congregation or are there policies which make certain staff not report to the minister? Who has authority for staff employment—not just according to written policy but also in reality? For example, can the organist who has been there twenty-five years be replaced without a major church disruption?

Churches have administrative patterns. In many churches, ministers allow the administrative assistant (or some staff member) to be responsible for the administrative functioning of the church. Other ministers perform this function as one of their duties. If there is a shift in who does the "running of the church" when a new cleric comes, then there is bound to be disruption. You need to assure yourself that your administrative approach is understood by other staff and accepted by lay leadership before you are called.

In larger churches, conflict between staff already in place and a new (senior) minister is the single most prevalent cause for conflict in the initial years of settlement. Find out what are the staff realities in any church you're considering and do not move there if you cannot live

with those realities. In any new settlement where there is multiple staff, an early priority should be a staff retreat with an outside facilitator.

Ministers often neglect to take a close look at the church's property. Time to visit the church building during pre-candidating is often limited, particularly since the minister and search committee usually make this trip in secrecy to avoid meeting other members of the church. If the church is shabby and rundown, the congregation may lack "ownership" of its facilities or be constantly delaying routine maintenance because of budget difficulties. The appearance of different areas can also be revealing. Is the parlor kept immaculate, while the church school rooms are dark and dirty? What kind of office/study is provided for the minister? What are the inadequacies of the property? Are there plans for expansion? Do certain areas (e.g. the chapel) have a "sacred" set-aside appearance, so that they cannot be given over to multiple use? On the other side, is everything so used for every purpose that there is no area with aesthetic attraction for worship? A perception inspection of the church facilities can reveal much, particularly unspoken attitudes.

CHAPTER NINE:

WHAT HAS BEEN

Every church has a history. Part of that history, as noted in the last chapter, relates to ministers; but a congregation also has its own picture of itself, real and fictional. The latter may be more important. The oral tradition of a congregation has tremendous power, particularly among older members. Too rarely do potential candidates look at this institutional perception held by the congregation. The kind of beginning questions to pose are: Is there a harkening back to a particular minister as the golden age of the church? When longtime members talk about the church, what do they cite and why? Is the congregation preoccupied more with what has been than what can yet be? Conversely, is there a denial of the past because it is unpleasant?

Look at the church survey made by the search committee. What percentage of the membership joined over twenty years ago? A pronounced lack of such members (under 10%-15%) should indicate either internal problems in church life or some sharp changes in community employment. If, on the other hand, 25% or more of the members have been around for over a score of years, historical pressures are apt to be heavy. If the majority of the members have recently joined (say, in the past five years) this usually indicates a willingness to move in new directions, but it may also suggest a tendency to program with a fickle faddism. Have a significant number (10% or more) been members of other UU churches? If so, there may be less isolationism than in most other UU churches.

Most churches have their own written history. Usually this document overestimates the importance of the church to the community and glosses over the unhappier periods in church life. Nonetheless, such a document will give a sense of the church and what is deemed as important in the former years of the church. Does the history suggest certain continuing issues in church life? For example, in one church there is a major discussion once each decade about moving the church to a new site. The argument is always the same: on the one hand, those who would not abandon the core city versus those on the other hand, who hold that the church must move if it is to grow and to continue functioning over the long pull.

Churches have a personality profile. Any candidate should assess it. Small matters can sometimes indicate deeper attitudes. For instance, some churches are celebrative; they look for events to mark their ministers (e.g. the tenth anniversary of ordination). Other congregations tend to ignore such occasions. Some churches attempt to be nurturing; others rarely do. In the practical rewards for ministry, some congregations evince a continuing commitment to provide for their ministers. Other churches are noted for their parsimonious ways; so that every remuneration review is like a collective bargaining session with a strike deadline at hand. Some churches are dominated by business attitudes, which hold that congregations can be run like a modern corporation. (They cannot!) Once a church's patterns are established, they tend to become ingrained. Sometimes church leaders are perceptive enough to see present ways as detrimental and wish to transcend them, but do not think that verbal intention is enough. The implicit attitude is usually that any abrupt change from past behavior will irritate influential, long-term members. If a church is ambivalent about wanting to change and yet at the same time stay the same, the new minister can well get caught in the middle.

The potential candidate should discover what seems important in the history of the congregation and then dare to find out if this agenda still remains. If a search committee evinces that it seeks new directions, delve into the reasons. Is that simply a vague statement of desire or is it a strong commitment? Does the search committee reflect church attitudes? Search committees can easily oversell the potential for new initiatives, subtly or unconsciously, out of a desire to seem enticing to prospective ministers.

If a church reflects a great influx of new members in recent years, how is the gulf spanned between new and older members? Sometimes older members wish to emphasize the church's heritage, while new members relate more to what they perceive as unmet problems in church life. An incoming minister must tread carefully to avoid seeming to be captured by either group.

History influences every church. A new church once announced in its newsletter a "traditional annual event"--it had taken place two years in a row. Usually the more stable the membership, the more important will be the church's history. A sense of history can build strong institutions and deep loyalties; it can also sometimes stifle. A lack of historical sense can make a church rootless tumbleweed blowing from enthusiasm to enthusiasm. Such openness can also make it possible to develop new directions and programs. Whatever the history of a particular church, a potential minister should come to grips with it.

CHAPTER TEN

FINANCES

Harsh realists know that the budget is the single most revealing document in any church. Money represents values and so a church budget proclaims what a church truly values. In an earlier chapter, the statistical picture presented by a church was analyzed; now a similar examination of church finances is necessary.

1. Does the total expenses reported each year in the UUA Directory convey accuracy? Odd jumps can occur in the figures in any given year due to the mistaken reporting of capital/building expenses (e.g. \$100,000 for a new church roof) as part of the current operating budget. But if a church reports in strange zigs and zags (e.g. 1987 - \$146,000; 1988 - \$83,000; 1989 - \$204,000; 1990 - \$138,000), then either the reporting is bad (not a good sign) or there is something mighty peculiar going on in the life of the church.

2. Review the material in "Raible's Ratings" for per capita and per pledge giving (See chapter six).

3. Study the most recent financial report for the last full church year when there was a regularly settled minister. Can you make out from the budget what was the total ministerial remuneration with all benefits included? Note that frequently certain expenses (e.g. travel to conferences, auto expenses) may not appear under the ministerial line item. If there is a parsonage, then a rental value has been set for it. What is it? In smaller churches, roughly those under 200 members, the total ministerial remuneration may surge between 50%-60% of the current expense budget. But if the figure is much above that (certainly if it is 75% or more), that is a severe fire warning. Such a remuneration percentage means that there will be little for other church programs and this can cause pressures. Ministers may also feel in such case a need to keep everyone happy, for every departure from the ranks can seem to promise fiscal doom. In general, whatever the church size, all staff salaries should be on the upward side of 50% and hover around 60% of the budget. If the package offered the minister (or senior minister) in a multiple staff church is not extremely close to 20% of the total budget, then the church could well have its sights raised. (Of course, these figures will be in-

accurate when a church funnels through its budget grants, endowments, etc. for programs not ordinarily a part of the budget in most churches--e.g. a church run pre-school.)

4. A key figure to sift out is the church debt, if any. Many a minister has rued accepting vague figures offered by members of the search committee. A minister is foolish if candidating week begins without an understanding of the debt. You need to know the amount, to whom the debt is owed, the annual rate of repayment, the interest rate, the expected payoff date, and any peculiarities of the debt. For example, there may be a large balloon payment at some future date. Church debt is usually a fixed budget expense and if either high or long-term, it brakes church programming and salary increases. A debt load of 25% or more of the budget is a real millstone even in a rapidly growing church. A mortgage of 10%-15% of the budget is normative (and can even be healthy), but all debt hurts current program needs. In addition, heavy debt may put all kinds of subtle pressures on the minister to assist in schemes to increase the income, as well as limit spending for innovative programs and staff pay raises.

5. Never, no never, get seriously involved with any church until you have a crystal clear picture of the the total finances. If you have difficulty understanding the nuances of financial reports, then take them to a knowledgeable person for analysis. If anything is unclear, start asking questions and continue to ask until you get the answers. Do not accept generalities (e.g. "I think our financial picture is pretty good"). How frequently (and sadly) ministers report woeful tales of finding major surprises (e.g. a \$200,000 balloon payment on the property due in two years with no provision for it) only some months after they are settled. The blame in such cases must rest on the minister for naivete.

6. Look at the income side of the last annual report. Does an appreciable part (over 20%-25%) come from sources other than pledging? If so, what are these sources and are they reasonably assured for the future (e.g. what about a school rental of \$20,000 a year that will end next year)? Does the church have investments/endowment? If so, how are they managed, who has the responsibility for appropriating income, and what is the current rate of return? Are there restrictions on certain income (e.g. an endowment which can only be used for church music)? Are there special grants (e.g. \$10,000 offered for matching gifts to further a church housing program for the recovering mentally ill)? Is important income dependent on the gift of others (e.g. the yearly gift presented by the independent church singles group)? Is significant income derived from rentals? Are these stable? What is the actual pledge income received as compared with the amount pledged? Is the shrinkage more than 5%-7%? If so, monitoring and billing are inadequate. What percentage of total church income comes from pledges? If, for example, the total church income is \$200,000 but only \$60,000 comes from pledge income, then the members are obviously "riding" on other income and are expecting others to support the church for them.

7. On the expense side, look at the last report. Are there costs which seem strange or extraordinary? If so, what are they and what caused them? Are there special interests in the

church, which have essentially inviolate amounts set for them in the budget (e.g. \$3,000 for a scholarship given each year in the name of a beloved former minister)? Try to divide out the budget into (a.) fixed expenses (e.g. mortgage, utilities), (b.) staff costs, and (c.) program. If the third figure is under 15%-20% of the total then it will be hard to get dollars for new programs.

8. What is the total church asset and liability picture? Are assets realistically valued (e.g. a building listed as worth its \$200,000 construction cost of 25 years ago, but probably worth a cool million today)? Are there some hidden nest eggs (e.g. a minister's discretionary fund of \$20,000)? Are there liabilities beyond building debt (e.g. a long-term loan from a member of \$10,000)? Are there ways in which invested funds might be shifted to create a higher rate of return? Are endowments restricted or can the principal be invested?

9. Get together a list of questions and then make sure a time is set aside to sit down with the church financial experts during candidating week. See to it that your questions about financing are covered, but also that you learn how the church annual fund drives are conducted. You may have your own prejudices on this matter, but the proven rule is that the more personal a canvass is, the more serious the church is about its financing. Any church that conducts its fund raising solely by mail is laggard, poorly organized financially, and deficient in fiscal responsibility. In such a case there is no real concern to deepen pledge commitment. On the other hand, a church that has a serious face-to-face canvass is striving mightily to be responsible. A church that makes a sustained effort to call personally on every potential pledger is a congregation with serious commitment, no matter how inept may be the conduct of the canvass in any given year. Avoidance of money is a prime sign that concern for the church is casual in its members' lives. A church where there is serious intent in the pledge drives usually is also an optimistic and enthusiastic congregation.

10. Watch for "poor mouth" attitudes. Recurrent studies of UU's reveal them to have on the average the highest personal income of any denomination. Only rarely does the mean income of UU's in a local society fall below that of the community in which the church is located. In every society, there are the many on limited income, but we rarely also note the many, many more who have income considerably above the average. It is safe to estimate (1987) that UU total family income averages \$35,000-\$40,000 per year. UU's, as study after study portrays, give about 1% of their income to their churches. If that figure could be moved to simply 2% (certainly a figure exceeded by many UU congregations), we could expect the average pledge in the Unitarian Universalist Association to rise between \$700-\$800 per year. Ministers need to remain skeptical of the poverty claims made by too many churches. A casual brush with most UU churches would convince the visitor that (1.) money is too sacred to be spoken about or (2.) all UU's are living at the poverty line.

11. Every UU church will declare through its search committee, and later through its other structures, that it is unique, even that it is the "most unique of the unique." UU's have an intrinsic need to believe that they belong to a local congregation which is in no way like any

other. This attitude is amusing unless it becomes the opening wedge for ridiculous proclamations about church finance. When uniqueness becomes a code word for fiscal irresponsibility, perceptive UU's ought to shudder. What claims of uniqueness boil down to is that the church is satisfied with its present evasive approaches to money. The tales told will be long, calculated to bring tears to even the glass-eyed. The empathetic minister will be convinced that there is no one in the church where settlement is sought who is not (a.) living on a fixed income that has not changed in years, (b.) existing in penury as a student, or (c.) financing three children in college and two parents in a nursing home. Let ministers simply be warned that part of the candidating "game" before compensation is discussed is to convince the cleric that 90% of the church membership is about to declare bankruptcy.

This approach may be accepted bargaining technique, but it is counterproductive if it buttresses excuses for refusing to change church patterns of financing. Such lethargy about money often goes further to become an unwillingness to change other patterns in church life. Any potential minister should know that, in going to a church where money is avoided, it will be a long time, if ever, before attitudes are altered. If the minister can't endure fiscal avoidance, then s/he should stay away.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MINISTERIAL COMPENSATION

In initial negotiations, a remuneration figure or range for the minister will be set forth by the search committee. The potential candidate should check what is included in that figure (e.g. some churches offer expenses for attending the General Assembly but do not include this in the remuneration package). If the figure presented by the church is simply out of line with what you would consider, then confront the matter. The only appropriate response is to write back and politely say that you could not consider a church were the "package" less than \$..... . If the offer by the church is modestly different from your expectation (say within 10%), then as "wooing" continues, it is important to discover how much "give" is possible. Certainly it would be a rare church that could not find enough for a %10 raise if the church really wants to do that. Should a church be offering less than it did to its former minister, it is obvious that the church has the ability to pay more. Churches usually begin by thinking that they can cut back their pay for the new minister. Rather frequently, if the last minister has been settled for some time, search committees are amazed to discover how out of line is the church's offering. Denominational officials probably have pointed out this reality, but it does not sink in on the search committee until it is refused for penury by a couple of ministers. Often at this point the search committee will seek board approval to offer a larger remuneration. If there is anything silly in church proposals, it is a range salary. To announce a range is to declare that the top figure is possible. Any minister worthy of doing the job is worthy of receiving the best remuneration the church can offer. A cleric who agrees to a figure less than the maximum proclaimed by the church is selling her/himself short. Ministers are well warned to avoid congregations that try "to take it on the cheap." It is a bad sign for a total miserly attitude in church life.

The actuality of our system of candidating and congregational choice is that the minister must really bargain on her/his own behalf. Many ministers feel inadequate, unequipped, or embarrassed to do this. They want to avoid haggling over remuneration and deem such effort to be self-seeking. It may help to recall that in candidating each minister represents a total profession. When we bargain well for ourselves, we not only meet personal needs; we also assist colleagues. Upward trends help all ministers, who as a total group have not kept

pace with the inflation of past years. Put another way, most churches are offering less in real dollars than they did a score of years ago.

Some ministers insist that remuneration and other conditions of employment be negotiated before the actual candidating week. They make sure that both church board and search committee are involved in the process. This approach allows remuneration issues to be clear from the start and not to becloud other matters during candidating. Other clerics count upon the impression made during candidating week to lift church sights toward thoughts of higher remuneration. There are obvious problems with this approach, including that even its success may cause resentment. On the other hand, some boards set a figure with the idea that they can come up during negotiations. Since ministers are essentially left to bargain for themselves, no general rule can be set forth. The practice of keeping the "conditions of employment" issues apart from candidating week has much to recommend it, for such time is not usually good for unhurried and careful negotiations.

More and more ministers now insist that the full details of the contract, including all items of compensation, be presented to the congregation at the same time as it acts to call. This procedure is forthright; it avoids future misunderstanding; and it allows all contract matters to be aboveboard with the congregation. Since we live by congregational polity, this practice should become normative, for it is the congregation and not the board that elects and continues the minister.

The essential factor in negotiating remuneration is to get started on the matter as soon as possible in the process. Whatever has been presented in written form prior to pre-candidating, the remuneration should be reviewed at that time. The general remuneration package should be established no later than pre-candidating. If there are major questions remaining about the ministerial package, these should be dealt with prior to the offer and acceptance of candidating. No minister should move into candidating with basic uncertainties about remuneration unless there is a clear agreement with the search committee about how these questions will be resolved. If a minister goes into candidating fixed on one figure, while the church leadership is fixed on another (and undoubtedly lower) figure, that is asking for trouble. Given the dynamics of candidating week, a well-received candidate can often jack up the total remuneration, but this tactic can lead to resentments which carry over into the new settlement. Fiscal reality should enter the candidating process early.

One recurrent problem is that potential candidates talk only with the search committee, while it is the church board which makes official recommendations to the congregation about remuneration. If the search committee and the board fall into a misunderstanding, the cleric gets inadvertently caught. As the professional involved, a minister should strive to ascertain that the search committee is working with full disclosure of contract conditions to the church board.

Ministers differ vastly in personality and in approach to settlement negotiations. Each parson has to proceed in ways acceptable to the self. What seems still to be only vaguely understood by most laity, and sometimes even by ministers, is that parish ministers are self-employed (by federal government definition), even if all their remuneration comes from the church. For example, every minister must pay his/her own social security tax; it is illegal for the church to pay it. (Any amount set in the budget for ministerial social security is deemed income to the minister by the Internal Revenue Service.)

Unlike any other profession paid a salary, an extraordinary percentage of total ministerial remuneration goes for expenses. Expenses include such items as professional costs for auto, conferences, courses, books and magazines, church entertainment, staff lunches and presents, supplies and equipment. In business, these costs are usually fully covered by the employer and are not deemed part of compensation. For independent professionals, whether on salary or not, such costs are always deducted before income is reported. For example, an attorney's income never includes expenses and often excludes such items as insurance policies, a firm automobile and perhaps even a club membership. Parish parsons by law must pay their own income tax (by quarterly estimate), and it cannot be paid by the church through withholding.

Too often quick comparisons of ministerial compensation to the income of others neglect these harsh realities. A parishioner sees a bottom line church budget figure for "Minister" as \$40,000 and compares that to a professor receiving the same amount in salary. The truth is that the minister absorbs 15%-20% in paying fringe benefits (e.g. medical insurance), which elsewhere are usually paid by the employer. In addition, professional expenses probably will take another 20%-30% of the minister's total remuneration. Thus the truth is that the \$40,000 ministerial package is actually equivalent to under \$25,000 in income. From the last figure the minister must still pay the total social security tax.

Clergy do receive a special benefit in a tax-free parsonage or rental allowance set aside by the church. The deduction is, however, not automatic; the amount set aside must be actually spent for housing needs. In short, it is probable that few, if any, members of a church will understand ministerial compensation. No matter how much explaining is done, most laity will continue to believe that a minister is "paid" the amount listed under the line item for the minister in the church budget. For this reason, the strong trend is to remove to other lines in the budget all compensation for the minister that is not salary and housing.

If there is an open negotiating session with church fiscal leaders as part of the total candidating process, then the minister has a rare chance to do a little educational work. The cleric should insist that there first be listed an amount for all expense items (car, entertainment, books, travel, etc.). Next, all fringe should be set forth (medical, dental, disability, travel, term life insurance and pension, etc.). Only then can a figure be set down for salary/housing, which is the cleric's true income. This will allow church leaders to see what

they are actually paying their minister. The minister's tax saving on house will largely be spent on paying his/her total tax for social security.

If you feel inadequate to negotiate your own remuneration, then you confront a particular problem. Although deemed novel, a few ministers ask a fiscally aware colleague to sit in on such negotiations as their advocate. Be prepared for some resistance to this approach, but as ministerial compensation continues to decline in comparison with the cost of living index, some new ways need to be found to better educate parishes about the true nature of ministerial salaries.

Churches generally respect a minister who approaches remuneration seriously and sagaciously. That does not mean that a minister need be confrontive and squeeze for every last dollar. A realistic minister will declare needs and desires and negotiate without being, on the one hand, testy or disagreeable, or on the other, diffident and unrealistic. Compromise is a part of the exchange. Laity, particularly those with experience in business, respect ministers who show perceptiveness about finances, including their own.

A number of ministers now have contracts with a provision that cost of living increases shall be automatic. Once that is established they can then bargain each year for merit raises.

The basic rule for ministers is to make sure that the total remuneration figures are clear. Beyond that ministers are challenged to take some control of their own fiscal fate. The financial side of church life has led many ministers as sheep to slaughter because the cleric has tried to act innocent or unconcerned.

CHAPTER TWELVE

POWER STRUCTURES

A minister chosen to pre-candidate or candidate for a vacant church may be pardoned some egotistical preening. After all, others were eliminated, but you survived. The obvious reason, as you ponder this fact with true objectivity, is simply that you stand head and shoulders over the usual run of your colleagues. Exult, if you like, but in private. After you have sufficiently celebrated your triumph, come back to reality and ponder the sobering matter of power structures.

Power is a word many prefer not to use around churches. But let all know for certain that power is real, present, and operative in church life. One reason you've been chosen to advance in the ministerial selection process is that your profile appears to dovetail with the power needs of others. This may not be consciously known. The power needs of the search committee may be healthy, skewed, or neurotic. The important understanding is to ascertain what you are triggering. This chapter is not on theories of power; it is a practical primer on how power works in a church.

1. What power lines run through the church? Is it dominated by particular groups or is it open in its procedures? What groups actually have the prime influence in decision making? What are the ties and working arrangements between the board and committees? Do committees work with great independence or are they kept on a short leash by the board? Does the board act mainly on committee recommendations or does the board insist on doing the committee's work all over again? How is fiscal control over committees exerted? How often and on what matters does the board touch base with the congregation? In what ways does the board strive to keep the congregation informed about its work? Do board attitudes and practice suggest trust or worry or sensitivity or neglect of the congregation? Churches have a general pattern by which important decisions are made. Learn what that process is.

2. Who runs the church? Where does authority lie in the bylaws (look at provisions regarding the minister, board, congregational meetings, membership)? Every organization has an overt structure, as provided in policies, bylaws, elected officials. But every organization also has a covert structure, which is not readily apparent. A good starting point for looking at the

covert structure is to ask the church leaders who would be consulted if an important decision about the church's future were about to be made. If this doesn't reveal much, then ask further, "Who outside of the board would it be important to consult if a significant move in the church were under consideration?" Get some focus on this question or be ready to live with the uncertainty stemming from your ignorance.

3. What are the church's limits? Every church has boundaries for what it will accept and not accept. In one church, marital stability by the minister may be essential. Another church will care mainly that the minister is on the forefront in community issues, while yet another will place a premium on fulfilling pastoral duties, and still another expects a minister to be the unofficial chaplain to a small clique which essentially runs the church. The potential new minister should know the boundaries of the church, not only for the cleric but also in other areas. Some churches react sharply to social action resolutions passed by UUA General Assemblies, while most societies couldn't care less. Some churches deem themselves cathedrals, which provide leadership to other UU groups in the area, while other churches delight in their isolation. A wise minister discovers what a particular church will and will not abide.

The limits may be internal. Policy manuals may declare that the minister is the administrative head of the church, but it may not actually work that way. One minister was given assurances during candidating that he could have a free hand in picking his own staff. Once settled, he dismissed the church's long-time religious education director. A major church conflict ensued. The minister felt betrayed--after all he'd been assured of his authority. He could not accept his own foolishness in the matter. No minister should transgress the boundaries of a church unknowingly. A candidate cannot possibly know all the subtleties of a church, but a cleric can ask during the candidating process, "What would be the fastest way for a new minister to get in trouble around here?" Even if the answers are diverse, they will highlight the areas of concern.

4. The first major relationship by a minister with a church is the search committee. The committee works diligently over many months to secure a new cleric. After the call is made, the search committee is not only formally discharged, its members are likely to feel that they are due a sabbatical from leadership involvement. Such loss is a great and dangerous one for the new minister, who is deprived of a chief support group right at the beginning of settlement. Many ministers try, therefore, to get a core of the search committee to become members of the ministerial relations committee. There is a trust bond already established, which can help a minister during the sometimes difficult initial phases of getting established in a new church.

5. Sometimes through miscommunication, the search committee and the church board get into a dispute. The candidate is in no way at fault, but can be caught in the squeeze. If the candidate inadvertently becomes part of the problem, then there is no alternative but to cut

and run. For example, in one church, the search committee promised a candidate a larger salary, thinking the matter had been cleared with the board. The board rejected the search committee's offer and the minister was blamed for "holding up the church." In another case, a strong board clique wanted a different candidate from the one chosen by the search committee. Ministry is difficult enough to practice in a new church without being garroted in internal church power struggles before even arriving on the scene.

6. A key question in any church is: how are controversies handled? Are they met or avoided? If met, does the decision-making process settle the matter or does a forceful minority refuse to abide by the result? If avoided, then how is the issue resolved or is it simply left to fester? Every church has some "sickies," that is, individuals who find in church life a primary outlet for neurotic needs, which are not fueled by the realities of the church, but rather their own internal illusions. How are such persons handled? Are they allowed to wreck havoc again and again? Are they excused and tolerated even if they dominate and destroy groups? Are they lovingly neutralized? Are they harshly confronted? Are they forced out of the church? How a church handles its obvious, overt problem personalities often signals how it will deal with significant issues in the church.

7. Some ministers like to have an informal meeting during candidating week limited to long-time members. Such persons are rarely still active in the formal leadership positions of the church, but they are usually easily identified. Such a meeting can be informative about the concerns of older, influential members. The gathering can also reveal much about the living institutional memory. Sometimes such members have unusual insights since they are not burdened with the practical problems confronted by the current church leaders.

8. A minister should try to discover during candidating why s/he was picked. It is not hard to ask, "What did you consider my strong points? What factors led to your decision? What about my ministry seemed to fit your profile of needs?" The answers the parson receives to such questions may be a revelation, for they can reveal a perception far different from the cleric's own. The choice of any search committee carries certain expectations. It is good to know what these are and whether you wish to live with them.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE CANDIDATING EVENT

The stellar moment arrives when all the preliminaries are over. A search committee invited you to be THE candidate. It is now between you and the congregation which will vote on your call. There is ample room for elation at this point, for you know that you've been chosen after a long and arduous process taking many months. You are now asked to engage in an event which is central to our heritage and highlights the dictum "freedom of the pulpit and freedom of the pew."

This booklet rivets on the practical aspects of church seeking, yet candidating is more than a pragmatic task. The linchpin to our whole system is that a congregation and a minister choose each other. For all its terrors, upsets, mistakes, and peculiarities, it is a profound process. Any minister stands privileged to take part in candidating. Every cleric who engages in it well reinforces a tradition and enhances the entire ministry.

The dual dominant emotions during candidating tend to be euphoria and exhaustion. Both conditions blunt perceptiveness. The week should allow both congregation and minister to get acquainted, discover mutual strengths and weaknesses, and find out if there is emotional and spiritual compatibility. Candidating is a trial run and evidence should be brought out and examined. The right questions need to be asked, but this does not always happen.

1. Candidating is a process where both parties tend to put forth their best qualities. This precondition can create a mood of politeness rather than candor. Church and ministerial needs begin to meld. The congregation wants to convince you that it is the most dedicated group to exist since the Socinian exiles of the 17th Century. You want to show the congregation that you are the reincarnation of Olympia Brown and William Ellery Channing. As a candidate, you want to be liked and to receive an overwhelming positive vote. All the world may love a lover, but keep pressing the nagging, searching questions.

2. Usually the search committee selects one of its members to be in charge of arrangements. Be sure that is done; otherwise the schedule will become confused and conflict as several persons try to arrange dates. Before the calendar is even opened, make certain that

what you need is on it. It might not occur to the search committee that you need time to look over the community, talk with other UU ministers in the area, have appointments with community leaders, etc. Most of all, if you want free time, get it on the schedule, for the tendency is to schedule chockablock all the time available. Do not hesitate to suggest meetings which you would like, such as open houses, extended periods with other key staff, etc.

3. Think about hospitality. Frequently a church will suggest staying with a church member, often with fervent assurances that the facility offered is private. However attractive the offer, there is good reason to think first of a hotel. Private hospitality can involve obligations with a host. At the end of the day, you may want a complete retreat to relax and sort out what is taking place--why worry about whether you're using all the hot water or talking too loud or how you find a bag of ice? You may find that your host is identified as a member who represents some clique in the church and thus dwelling with that member is misinterpreted. There may be overarching reasons not to insist on a hotel, but begin with a bias toward public facilities. A great boon during candidating is to have the loan (or rental) of a car. This allows you freedom of movement and begins to let you get oriented in the community.

4. There will be all kinds of meetings during candidating week. It is a good idea to have some sessions which are simply open to all, where you are available for questions and answers. In turn, you should feel free to pose questions about matters that interest you.

5. Make sure that there is ample time to talk with other staff, particularly full-time office and professional staff. You will have to work closely with these persons if you become the minister. Understanding and acceptance are essential for a smooth entry into your duties.

6. Churches tend to forget that candidating is a two-way street. You are not just on trial before the congregation, the church is also being evaluated by you. Sometimes it is important to emphasize this dual nature of candidating in your first Sunday service. There is no need to be disagreeable about the matter, just make certain that the proper reality check is given. Power is equal during candidating unless you surrender it.

7. Ask questions galore and listen to the answers. The tendency in large gatherings is to want to hear from the candidate, so that it is easy to go through the week speaking constantly and hearing little. Ask everyone for information and make a special effort to elicit negative information. You should begin the week with a list of particular concerns. If the answers to your concerns from different groups are similar, then you are probably getting the right information. If the answers are divergent, then try to find out what leads different persons to their conclusions. The caution flag should go up when knowledgeable parishioners perceive their church in different ways, since that probably means that the church has contradictory drives within it.

In your listening, strive to differentiate among (1.) what people say is so, (2.) what they say should be so, and (3.) what is really so. Each is a different reality; a candidate should grasp the distinctions.

8. If there are further negotiations to be undertaken regarding the contract, get on with it early in candidating week. Such matters should not be left to the frantic final days of candidating. Before candidating week begins, make sure that both board and search committee members have received the UUMA Guidelines. Ask all members of these groups to read them before you arrive, so that they will be aware of the ethical standards you are pledged to uphold and what our professional expectations of a church are. Remember that all contract provisions need to be in writing. Informal understandings are worthless and often lead to later bad feeling, due to different interpretations of an oral agreement. The letter of contract should be typed in final form and agreed to prior to the congregational meeting to call. The existence of such a letter in no way obligates you to accept the call, only to accept the conditions in the letter should you decide to take the call.

9. Once you are finished candidating, leave! Even if you do not depart the community immediately, go off on your own. If the congregational meeting comes on the final Sunday of your candidating, you will wish, of course, to have the result phoned to you. Whatever the news--good or bad--it is better to get it by phone, rather than by personal interview. The interview is too subject to being sad, filled with hurt, or, more likely, ecstatic joy which carries heavy psychological pressure for you to respond positively on the spot.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE CALL

In the Unitarian Universalist Association, the contract between a minister and a congregation becomes binding through an exchange of letters. No call should be accepted as final until the contractual letter is in hand. A wise minister will never announce during candidating week that a call will be accepted if extended. No minister should accept a call over the phone. This can seem "kill-joy" amid the enthusiasm generated by a congregation, when it votes overwhelmingly to call you, but nothing is worse than to accept a call in the joyful outpouring of a successful candidating week and then to fall into a sapping wrangle about conditions of employment. This situation can be avoided by having the final letter of contract drawn and ready for signing before a call is extended. Lacking such a letter, if a minister wishes to give a positive response, the proper reply is, "I am grateful for your confidence. If the letter is as we seemed to have agreed, then I am prepared to accept your call, as soon as I have received it formally."

Every call should be extended with a report of the actual vote to call as recorded by secret ballot of the congregation. While a second vote to make the call unanimous may be flattering, the important vote is the original one. Church bylaws usually provide for a call to be by some margin greater than a majority (the usual provision is for a two thirds vote). The usual wisdom is that a call that is less than 90% affirmative is shaky. If the call is under that figure but substantially favorable, then the minister may wish to ascertain from several sources what were the reasons for the negative votes. This report should draw from the congregational discussion about the matter, not just the surmise of individuals. In general, negative votes cast because of objection to a particular provision of the contract (e.g. the loan of a down payment for a house) is less serious than negative votes cast because members believe the candidate would not make an adequate minister for the church.

Whatever the vote, the candidate deserves the most objective summary possible of the congregation's discussion prior to the vote. All negative votes should be taken seriously. The highest confidence level a minister will enjoy is at the time of call. To begin a ministry with 10% or more of the congregation against your ministry is to initiate your work with a sig-

nificant handicap. If there are more than a handful of negative votes, it is wise to counsel with others before responding to the call.

A candidate should also note the percentage of the voting membership of the church which attended the meeting. If less than 50% of the congregation attended, it is worth looking at the matter in terms of usual attendance at congregational meetings. A meeting to call a minister should be half again or twice as large as a normal annual meeting of the congregation. During candidating a minister may wish to emphasize the importance of a large turnout as being influential upon her/his decision to accept a call.

Again, all expected conditions of employment should be in the contractual letter. Even if there are loose ends, they should be covered. For example, the church agrees to consider providing for a sabbatical, but does not contract to give it presently. The letter might read, "A sabbatical program will be considered and a recommendation made by the board for congregational action within two years after settlement." At least this guarantees a process for making sure consideration is given.

A letter of contract has legal force. More important, any violation of a clear contract provision will bring the UUMA to your aid. Usually contract disputes begin with lack of clarity about provisions. Even experienced ministers can fall prey. For example, one church provided that a certain budget amount would be set aside each year to accumulate a sabbatical fund. The problem was that the minister thought that the money would be for his sabbatical expenses, while the church assumed it was for supply ministers during the sabbatical period. However elusive, clarity should be sought.

A minister's call should be indefinite (i.e. without term). The only exceptions should be interim ministers (limited to not more than two years' service to a church), extension ministers (where a total evaluation of the program is required after a set period--usually three years), and the rare, limited call, such as the minister coming at age 65 and agreeing to serve at least three but not more than five years. It is unusual for the initial contract to have a minimum length (other than the standard three month termination provision). Sometimes, particularly if there has been a history of unhappy settlements in the church, there may be an agreement that the call shall have an initial set period (say three years) and that obligates both minister and church for that time period. Given the occasional exception, all should realize that the indefinite call is basic to our polity and ministerial practice. No minister should be subject to the whim and whine of an annual re-election. There are ample provisions in any amply drawn bylaws for the dismissal of a minister should there be widespread dissatisfaction.

The standard contract provides that either minister or church may end the contract with three months' notice. Sometimes the notice for involuntary termination is gradually extended as the minister remains with the church. For example, the church might provide that after a cleric is settled ten years, a notice of six months is required in the case of involuntary ter-

mination. Any accumulated benefits are also due a minister upon leaving a church (e.g. accumulated vacation). Contracts should be clear about remuneration for any accumulated sabbatical time. The fairest provision is that, if the minister resigns, the sabbatical is lost, but if the minister is terminated then any accumulated sabbatical time is due.

Ministers and congregations are free to choose each other and also free to unchoose each other. Since dismissals usually take place amid rancor, they deserve particular attention. No church or minister should proceed along the road to dismissal without careful consultation with outside experts. It is highly important that close attention be paid to due process, fairness, and generosity. This is difficult when people are upset and disputatious. The UUMA insists that no minister shall be dismissed except by a congregational vote and according to accepted processes and procedures. The UUMA will hold a congregation accountable for ethical decisions regarding the termination of a minister's service. A basic truism is that potentially disruptive situations are best dealt with long before they reach crisis level.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

CONCLUSION

The whole complex process of candidating seems like an esoteric rite to those unfamiliar with it. Its practice results from an evolution of experience over centuries. Since candidating is a relatively infrequent event in the life of both minister and churches, there is a tendency to forget how it should be done. Certain strictures along the way seem limiting or cumbersome to churches. Ministers often feel that as independent professionals they can do it better their own way. The common desire by both churches and ministers is to shortcut the process. In a small denomination, such as the UUA, we are apt to be impatient of formal procedures and to believe that all matters can be dealt with informally in an "over the back fence" manner.

Behind every step of the way we do things lies a rationale built upon our polity and tried by long experience. The process is continually evolving, but it tries to maintain certain standards. The process strives for fairness, so that every minister recommended will be considered, and every minister so desiring will have his/her name sent to the vacant church. It strives for professionalism, so that ministers will not be subject to popularity contests before a congregation. It strives for church survival, so that churches can consider a number of ministers without the potential problem of splitting the congregation into various camps. It strives for good mating, so that minister and congregations will feel productive with one another. The settlement process works the overwhelming percentage of the time and thus it is trusted. Most congregations that have departed from the usual processes have lived to regret it. Nonetheless, settlement failures stand out because they are so noteworthy and widely reported. No process can ever replace the care and the concern of the persons, clergy and lay, who engage in it.

Ministers carry a particular responsibility throughout the whole candidating process. Laity volunteer their time to serve on search committees out of their commitment, but ministers act out of loyalty not just to a particular church but also to a profession. To candidate well poses a particular challenge for ministers. For reasons of professional pride, inherent self-interest, concern for churches, and collegiality, ministers should enter upon candidating with seriousness and a commitment to uphold standards. When ministers slop through the search

effort, they insult our heritage, our profession, and themselves. Each minister who negotiates with a search committee represents not only the self but all UU ministers. Whatever a search committee ends up feeling about the adequacy of any particular minister for its church, the committee should sense that it has dealt with a professional.

A minister once suggested that we might do just as well by replacing present candidating practice with a lottery system. Candidating, said this minister, was wasteful, complicated, and expensive. Such charges could be true, but they hardly confront the real issue. Our approach to settlement stems not from a desire for efficiency, but from our conception of who we are as a people. Congregational polity was bought for us in blood. Our call system is a covenant between a congregation and a minister who choose each other. In free churches settlement is a sacrament, for it is holy to the ideals and practices of our religion.

EPILOGUE

WHAT SEARCH COMMITTEES SEEK--

THE EXPRESSED AND THE UNEXPRESSED

I have often been asked when I would write a booklet on "How to Case a Minister." In a sense, that subject is still beyond my purview, but increasingly I have become aware of the usual focus of concerns that search committees carry in looking for a minister. I suspect that this is a little like being an espionage agent--an attempt to alert ministers about what "the other side" is about. I am also aware of areas that seem important in the search process, yet are rarely articulated by committees. With these thoughts in mind I offer ten observations.

1. Search committees ask many questions that are truly different ways of asking a single thing, "How can we really find out about this minister?" Every minister not just starting out has a track record. It is not hard to discover by a little diligent research how the minister has done in general. Ministers, however, do not run a track against the abstraction of a stopwatch, they work with a congregation. It is not fair to evaluate a minister's performance in any settlement without having some sense of the nature of the church served. For example, a minister serving a parish in a small Vermont town where the population has been in decline for the past century, is not likely to do much to demonstrate competency in leading church growth. Churches also have personalities and sometimes a church/minister match does not work, not because either is inept, but simply because the fit is bad.

A search committee should list out the statistics for every congregation each minister under consideration has served. Write out the record for each year the minister was settled in the church and also note what was the statistical profile before and after her/his settlement. These figures will reveal only a small part of the story, but they it will draw some kind of picture.

If a search committee has specific questions about a particular minister it can usually find informal ways to get the answers needed. Committees, however, need to take special care that they do not proceed in ways that "tip" a minister's present congregation to the fact that s/he is seeking a new placement. If informal procedures are used, then it is a good rule not to accept any information that comes only from a single source. For example, one search committee contained a member who had met a congregant of a potential minister's present church at the last General Assembly. A personal call resulted in a negative impression of the minister, but it was not revealed that the minister's present congregant was part of a tiny clique that had opposed the minister throughout her settlement, even from candidating. The search committee lost a good candidate because it harkened only to gossip.

2. Most of us find it rather easy to work with people to whom we feel close. A test of a minister is the ability to be present to a variety of people. Do older people comment about the sensitive job a young minister does with funeral services? Do congregants not sympathetic to church social action note that their minister, though a flaming radical, still is careful to preach across a spectrum of concerns and not just harp on social concerns? Such reports indicate a minister sensitive to diversity and a variety of needs with the congregation. Some ministers with strong positions are delightfully open to variant views. Other parsons, who seem less empathetic in their ideas, may display a peculiar rigidity in certain areas. This ability to encourage genuine diversity in a church may be far more important and basic than the particular views a minister holds.

3. Ministers are generalists and are expected to function well in a vast number of areas. No minister is adequate in every area. The important question, then, is how the minister covers the areas where s/he feels weak. This may reveal how a minister actually works in daily practice far better than brilliant competence in particular areas. A minister's awareness of weak areas and an effort to compensate display a desire to have a full ministry.

4. Search committees tend to emphasize preaching, counseling, education, and, sometimes--depending on the church--community involvement as the central tasks of the minister. Rarely do churches take much interest in administration, organization, denominational participation, or leadership development as important parts of a full ministry. Wise search committees look for ministerial competence in areas that sustain the institution of the church as well as present the personality of the minister. A given in the search process is that it favors ministers with outgoing personalities at the expense of more reserved types. How often, though, search committees end up fooled by a minister who is personable but has little beyond that to sustain a ministry. Search committees should look more at a minister's institutional record than they do at winning personalities. Put simply, search committees are oft their own worst enemies because they look for superficial rather than depth factors in a minister.

5. Does the minister know how to set limits and yet demonstrate a basic enthusiasm for the job? Ministers are deficient who have no ability to say "NO," who cannot play with some

humor, who constantly carp about their jobs, who live from crisis to crisis, and who do not take their profession seriously (though not necessarily with seriousness). (A.) Be careful of the minister who is all extrovert and winsome; he or she may not wear well. (B.) Look for a preacher who shows thoughtfulness and vitality, but also says things that help get you past Monday. (C.) Look for a pastor who listens well and who will be there when really needed. (D.) Look for the educator who has the facility to draw ideas out from others. (E.) Look for the minister who demonstrates a commitment to self-growth by engaging in systematic programs for development of ministerial skills and knowledge. (F.) Other things being equal, seek out ministers who are respected by their colleagues for being good parish ministers. (G.) Look for a worship leader not to fit your own theology, but a cleric who thinks worship is important and tries to make the total church service work. (H.) Look for the administrator who takes the institution of the church seriously and wants the congregation to prosper long after her/his ministry is over. (I.) Look for the organizer who is constantly striving to find better ways to involve people in church life. (J.) Look for the denominational person who will pay back some of the benefits the minister has received from the wider denomination over the years.

6. Every church has certain key requirements of a minister. These things the minister must do to "pay the rent." If these "rent" tasks are performed adequately, the minister is given wide freedom to develop other aspects of church/ community/personal life. In terms of your own church, will each particular minister "pay the rent"? Will s/he take seriously and try to meet the needs expressed by the church community? Will this be done with concern, commitment, and joy?

7. The word "spiritual" is being used constantly in UU churches. To ask, "Is the minister spiritual?" is perhaps to pose a question of vagueness and so subject to individual interpretation as to be meaningless. Instead, the matter may be illuminated by questions such as, "Is the minister interested in questions that abide? Does the minister strive to illuminate the quest, sharing his/her personal journey, and showing an openness to new religious understanding?"

The hard question in candidating is to know whether the minister will wear well. Sometimes search committees are taken in by those glib of speech or outgoing in personality. In looking at a minister's record, how did s/he wear in the present placement? One indication is the length of time settled, but other factors can make this an unfair test. Perhaps the best indication is to fathom whether the minister is respected where presently located. Most congregations want to love their minister, but love can be a fickle emotion, while respect indicates an integrity that will serve and abide over the long run.

8. Can the minister handle theology? The minister may have any theological position, but questions relating to depth issues need to be entertained seriously (though not necessarily in a scholarly fashion).

9. A parish minister serves a church. What is the minister's doctrine of the church? If a minister cannot understand the question or has no feeling for what the church is about, that is a danger sign. If a minister lacks a fundamental respect (even if a critical respect) for the institutional church, then the ability of the cleric to serve in a parish setting may be limited. This is not to say that the minister cannot be critical of many aspects of church life. Rather, it is the sense that when all is said and done the church has import for helping people in their religious quest and for cherishing the values which will be important for the human future.

10. Is the minister life affirming? If we do not appreciate the gift of life, then what can be the meaning? Churches want a minister who is able to, beyond all else, proclaim and live an affirmation of existence.

