

MINISTERIAL SEARCH TEAM

How Are We Going to Choose?

Jennie Smith on behalf of Unity's Ministerial Search Team

During a Ministerial Search Team (MST) meeting last fall, we donned our new MST t-shirts, a thoughtful gift from Richard Lau's wife, Heather. As we delved into the congregational record, discussions revolved around the messages and themes gleaned from the congregation, uncovering universal themes like our music program, while conflicting opinions arose on matters such as "good preaching," the role of humor in the service, and what constitutes good pastoral care. The challenge of how to find someone who aligns with diverse preferences, makes discerning choices amid unknown options, and upholds our covenants, seemed daunting.

Surrounded with a word cloud of considerations, the words "choose" and "how" echoed persistently. How are we going to choose? Noting our setting in the Gannett Room, Angela Wilcox drew a parallel with the church's history (which we were well acquainted with at that point in writing the congregational record). According to our church's historical documentation when referring to William Channing Gannett, the congregation had once faced uncertainty about his liberal views, his lack of ordination, being considered too young, and lacking enough experience to minister to our congregation. While we have no way of knowing what Gannett or the congregants truly felt, empathy abounds in the millions of experiences and stories. (Please refer to Unity's website for the complete story.)

In Rev. Cooley's book, she writes about the purpose of the church:

When we think that our purpose is to make everyone completely happy about all things that happen in a congregation, we end up hamstringing the church's ability to



make progress on a mission. Trying to make everyone happy turns our attention inward rather than outward. It allows the needs of certain individuals to overtake the needs of the whole and, in essence, to hold the congregation hostage. And on the individual level, it impairs the ability of people to really learn and open themselves up to the transformational opportunities of conflict.

Rev. Cooley's insights caution against the futile pursuit of making everyone happy, emphasizing the necessity of progress over unanimous contentment. It means embracing transformative opportunities, turning our attention outward and prioritizing the needs of the entire community.

During our December, "Engaging Awareness, Disrupting Dominance," workshop, Alfonso Wenker reminded us that we are a non-prescriptive religion of diverse, independent thinkers who tend to not like being told what to do or think. So the idea that we're all going to agree on one person is unlikely, and the necessary result of 85 percent of the congregation voting to call a minister is challenging. While there is no fantasy minister that

will be the answer to all the needs of our congregation, there truly is beauty in imperfection — it means there is room for transformation... together.

After reflecting on what Angela had reminded us, about our church's first ministerial selection, we all took a deep breath, ate something sweet or salty (or both), and returned to work on the congregational record. On our way out, we stopped to take a team photo, in our MST t-shirts, with Gannett's picture behind us.

Gannett is on the team. We extend this team spirit to all involved. Past search team members, candidates, staff, volunteers, and you, who chose to read this long article, are all a part of this team. What can you keep doing during this stage in the search? Keep listening to each other, keep talking to each other. Listen, share... repeat.

With humility and courage, we move forward with this work, in service of the beloved community that we seek to make real.

Unity's Ministerial Search Team (as pictured left to right in the photo on this page): Ray Wiedmeyer, Angela Wilcox, Rebecca Flood, Tara Romanov Messana, Kat Sherman-Hoehn, Jennie Smith, Richard Lau