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## TESTIMONIALS FROM PRIOR SEARCH COMMITTEE MEMBERS

### **Chris Tanner**

I am happy to provide some comments about my experience in serving on the last senior minister search committee 10 years ago. I agree with everything Linda and Ameena have said about the power of the experience. The time we each gave to the work was a natural extension of our growing love for one another and for the church.

It might be helpful to have an understanding of the nature of the work and how it varied over the year long process. The first quarter (May-June) we met with a UUA consultant to lay out a timeline and develop our goals and “to do list”. Our major goal was to get to know the church in a much deeper way by hearing from both congregants and staff, to develop an understanding of the key issues, needs and priorities for the senior minister. It also included getting to know one another, which we started through a weekend retreat where we shared our stories, our aspirations and fears.

Through summer and fall we collected lots of data through meetings with the congregation and through individual meetings with staff. This work was divided up among committee members and we conducted two surveys of congregation — one with mostly numerical responses, the second to dig a little more deeply into the first responses and was mostly open-ended questions. Committee members worked on their own to review these data, and begin to make sense of it. We met to discuss our findings and conclusions. Individual committee members volunteered to write summary reports to share with our informants e.g., summary of surveys sent to congregation and posted to website.

An important aspect of the time commitment is how it’s distributed. The committee met twice a month for 2 hours each time. Members could do the other work at a time convenient to them — For example in this case, reading responses to surveys, drafting or responding to drafts of summary reports. It’s also noteworthy that the committee work was shared among all 9 members. I should mention that some of us wanted to be involved in everything — leading to more expenditure of time than was absolutely necessary.

Later as we began to review applications, we could also do that at a time convenient to us. I often went to sleep listening to a sermon posted on the web by a prospective candidate.

When it came time to interview references, one or two members of the committee would decide on times we could schedule those, then do them together.

What worked for us was to have regularly scheduled meetings twice a month, then the rest of the work time was at the discretion of individual members — an hour here, two hours there while the kids were doing their homework. I can truly say that the time investment was not at all stressful for me because of this flexibility and because I loved doing it!

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Once we selected 3 candidates to come to Portland for weekend visits in January- February, we had a different schedule and tempo. We had arranged for each candidate to do a guest sermon at a church in Seattle. So Saturday was spent in conversation with him or her, then traveling to Seattle Saturday night for the services on Sunday morning.

We selected the final candidate by the end of March (a schedule set by the UUA) and scheduled the candidating week for early May. Really by March the majority of the work was done.

I hope this information is helpful. If you feel called to do this, I encourage you to apply. It was truly the most meaningful spiritual experience of my life (so far anyway!)

I would be happy to talk with you as you ponder your application. Just contact me via email and we can set up a time.

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## **Linda Fitzgerald**

I have been asked to provide a few examples of my experience on the search committee that brought Rev Sinkford to our congregation for decision to call him to be our minister. First I want to say that this collaborative experience was the high point of my experience on committees. We all learned to love one another and the important work we were doing for the congregation. The time commitment would ebb and flow, but it became such a spiritual labor of love that we all gladly worked with joy. I never heard anyone complain about the time commitment and some of our members were very busy people.

I learned a great deal about our denomination and our specific church. We interviewed staff, did surveys with the congregation and had open meetings to make sure we were representing the wishes of the congregation.

If anyone feels moved to serve in this way and can work in a collaborative way, I would urge them to step up. It will be an unforgettable experience.

We still meet a decade later for potlucks and reconnections. We became family. I'm still very grateful for the experience.

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## **Ameena Amdahl-Mason**

The thing I tell people about my experience being on the ministerial search committee that selected Rev. Bill Sinkford as our senior minister in 2010 is that it was the best committee experience of my life, and I have served on my fair share of committees. When we began working together, a few of us knew each other a bit, but not much, so we set out to get to know

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each other and build trust in the group. We ate a lot of really great food and learned about each other's lives. We created norms of respect, consensus, collaboration, and deep listening.

Once we had established ourselves a group, we began the work of examining our congregation so we could accurately describe it to ministerial candidates. Although I have been attending First Unitarian since the second grade, creating our profile, called the congregational record, gave me the opportunity to learn about all aspects of the church. We talked to staff, ministers, congregants, and conducted surveys to learn about who we were as a church and where we wanted to go with our next minister.

From the very beginning, we made trust and open communication our top priorities. Being on the search committee was spiritual work for us. In every interaction, whether it was committee meetings, interactions with ministerial candidates, or information gathering within the congregation, we were mindful of the trust put in us by the congregation. We worked collaboratively and used a model of consensus in our decisions. We were also aware that being in search is a risk for both a congregation, which must examine who they are and be ready for an unknown future, but also for the ministers in search who were sharing so much of themselves with us. We tried to be cognizant not only of what we were asking but how we were asking it. Any time we had to break up with a minister, our chair called them rather than using digital communication. We prioritized human relationships in all of our work.

In the end, our search was successful. After a year of online dating, we found a candidate that we were in love with and were ready to introduce to the congregation. But more than that, we had the experience of a lifetime getting to that moment. It remains one of my more cherished memories of the work I have done at First Unitarian.

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