

# **GREENVILLE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP**

## **REPORT OF THE SEARCH FEASIBILITY COMMITTEE TO THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

November 5, 2009

### **Preamble**

The Search Feasibility Committee was elected by the Congregation on September 27, 2009, and charged by the Board of Trustees to examine various avenues which might be available to the Fellowship in the search for a settled minister and to report to the Board with a recommendation as to the best way forward under present circumstances.

In conducting its work, the Committee has been mindful of the fact that the Fellowship does not fit the usual profile of a congregation that has recently lost its minister. Typically, congregations have some notice of a ministerial change and therefore often choose to secure an interim minister through the UUA and then pursue a formal search under a process and procedures familiar in Unitarian Universalist circles. The Committee believes the Fellowship is in a fundamentally different circumstance because, although our former minister left us with essentially no notice, under serious personal circumstances, and at a crucial time in the church year, we were almost immediately able to secure the services of Rev. Pat Jobe on a contract basis which will continue through June 30, 2010. The Committee believes that Rev. Jobe's presence and service to our Congregation is and should be an important factor in our considerations.

### **I. The "Traditional" Search Model**

The committee inquired with the UUA and researched available UUA materials concerning ministerial search models, policies, and procedures. We learned that, consistent with the UUA's fundamental principle of congregational polity, no particular method of ministerial search is required by the UUA. The UUA does provide various services to congregations in search for a minister, which are familiar to the Fellowship from past searches.

The traditional search model necessitates considerable congregational preparation in the early part of the church year, followed by an intensive review of potential candidates, interviews of selected candidates, arrangements for trial sermons for a final group of candidates, and invitation of a final ministerial candidate in the spring for a "candidating week" followed by a congregational vote on "calling" the candidate as a settled minister.

As a practical matter, the Committee concluded that it was too late in the church year for the Fellowship to begin a search now under the traditional search model.

## **II. “Interim” Ministry**

The Committee gave consideration to the idea that, often, congregations that have lost a minister engage through the UUA an interim minister for a year, or possibly two years. During this interim ministry period, a search process for a settled minister is carried out. The UUA recommends consideration of interim ministry not only for the practical purpose of continuing ministerial services to a congregation, but also to assist congregations through the often difficult circumstances surrounding the loss of a settled minister. Because Rev. Jobe is currently serving the Fellowship on a contract basis and is seen to have been effective in helping the Fellowship during the potentially very difficult time following the resignation of the former minister, the Committee did not see any need for serious consideration of a UUA interim minister.

## **III. Congregational Governance Requirements**

The Committee reviewed the By-Laws of the Fellowship, which require that “[r]ecommendation for any new Minister(s) shall be made by a Ministerial Search Committee,” and that “[t]he Minister(s) shall be elected by a three-fourths vote of the voting members of the Fellowship present at any meeting legally called for that purpose.” Article XII, §§ 1, 2. It appears clear that, in order to call a settled minister, the provisions of the By-Laws set forth above should be followed. Such a called minister is “considered to have indefinite tenure.” Article XII, §6.

Insofar as Rev. Jobe is concerned, the Committee is of the opinion that he has been validly retained by the Board, not of course as a called minister but as a person to perform the functions of a minister. Article XIII of the By-Laws provides that “[o]ther non-called religious professionals and staff employed by the Fellowship may be hired by the Board and may be dismissed by the Board... .” The Board may not change the status of such a non-called person from “hired” to “called.” The calling of a minister is specifically reserved to the congregation, as set forth in Article XII, §§ 1, 2.

## **IV. Rev. Pat Jobe**

The Committee believes that Rev. Jobe has served the Fellowship well under difficult circumstances. Many members and friends of the Fellowship have commented favorably on his work. Additionally, we are aware that Rev. Jobe has expressed his interest in being considered for long-term service as minister to the Fellowship. Given the Fellowship’s experience with Rev. Jobe thus far, the Committee believes that his candidacy as a called minister deserves consideration.

The Committee sees great strengths in Rev. Jobe, such as an engaging pulpit presence, an outgoing personality, an interest in RE and youth ministry, a commitment to leadership in social responsibility, an empathy for persons in distress, a practice of writing op-ed columns reflecting

liberal religious thought, and an interest in spreading the welcoming spirit of our congregation more widely in the community.

At the same time, the Committee notes that Rev. Jobe does not at this point have the kind of background that the Fellowship has ordinarily expected from ministerial candidates. Historically, the Fellowship has sought ministerial candidates who were “in fellowship” with the UUA, or at least were candidates for such fellowship. The Committee looked into the requirements of such fellowship and learned that they include a master’s degree in divinity from a recognized liberal religious educational institution, a one-year internship in a church or chaplaincy, a full semester of clinical pastoral education, and vetting by a committee of the Unitarian Universalist Ministerial Association. By contrast, Rev. Jobe has no graduate study in liberal theology, although he has taken several courses (1993-1998) at Erskine Theological Seminary, a conservative institution. He also has no training in clinical pastoral care. His ministerial experience is at a Methodist church where he served as minister from 1993 through 2003.

While it is acknowledged that credentials alone do not make for a good minister, the Committee understands that the educational and experiential background usually expected by the Fellowship in a ministerial candidate can be a useful predictor for ministerial success. Nonetheless, we recognize that the Fellowship is not in the typical position of a congregation in search of an ideal and unknown candidate for the ministry. Specifically, we have had the experience of Rev. Jobe’s ministerial leadership in our congregation, which makes him different from any other candidate the Fellowship might consider for called ministry. At the same time, we are careful to consider whether Rev. Jobe can serve the reasonable expectations of the congregation over the long term.

The Committee does not believe it is realistic to expect Rev. Jobe to pursue the educational and training requirements for ministerial fellowship in the UUA. At the very least, it would be impracticable for him to do so while serving as our minister. In an attempt to address that consideration Rev. Jobe has indicated a strong willingness to develop and present to the Board for its consideration a plan of study designed to provide clinical pastoral training as well as further liberal religious education, with a view towards availing himself of educational opportunities in Greenville (with respect to clinical training) and at summer residential or distance-learning programs offered by UU or other liberal religious institutions of graduate theological study.

The Committee has encouraged Rev. Jobe to develop and present such a program of study to the Board for its consideration as soon as possible. **The Committee recommends that the Board consult with Rev. Jobe in this initiative and support financially the program ultimately approved by the Board.**

## **V. Recommendation as to Settled Ministry**

The By-Laws of the Fellowship require that a settled minister be called by the congregation, after election of a ministerial search committee, as described in Item III above. **The Committee recommends to the Board that an election for a ministerial search committee be held in the spring of 2010 to carry out the duties of such a committee over the church year 2010-2011,** with particular regard to ascertaining the ministerial needs of the congregation. At the same time, **the Committee recommends that Rev. Pat Jobe, in consultation with the Board and under a program of study approved by the Board, continue as a contract minister through June 30, 2011** or so long as the Board and Rev. Jobe be willing to extend the arrangement after June 30, 2010. The Committee's expectation is that, should Rev. Jobe continue to serve satisfactorily to the congregation, the ministerial search committee would consider Rev. Jobe as a candidate for settled minister to the Fellowship. While the ministerial search committee, subject to the guidance of the congregation and the Board, would be free to determine its own best course and might well deem it appropriate to engage in a full search of many candidates, the Committee believes that the ministerial search committee could also reasonably conclude that Rev. Jobe would be the primary candidate for its consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura Christenbury  
Gene Conroy  
Matt Fitzer  
Sarah Fletcher  
Lucy Hoffman  
Jackie Weddington  
Marshall Winn