

The UCC Search and Call Process
How Well Is It Working? How Can It Be Improved?
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INTRODUCTION

The Search and Call process represents a critical time for clergy, congregations, and the denomination as a whole if it is to be a vital, growing body in ministry to its members and in mission to the world. However, clergy, search committee members, and denominational staff sometimes find navigating Search and Call to be stressful, time-consuming, and difficult. As one pastor says: “*The UCC Search and Call system is broken, and spirit-breaking. Churches do not respond in a timely manner. Every single Association and Conference has a different way of handling Pastor profiles. . . . I dread going through the search process again.*” Therefore, in the spring of 2011 the Parish Life and Leadership Team engaged the church in a study of the process to determine how well it is working, where the difficulties lie, and how it might be improved.

Team members developed a series of four on-line surveys to gather data about the Search and Call process. Four groups -- 1. Ministerial candidates recently in a search, 2. Members of recent local church search committees, 3. Conference staff or others who resource the Search and Call process, and 4. Conference ministers -- were invited to complete on-line surveys about their experiences.

Team members elicited participation in several ways, including open invitations to visitors to the UCC website, where information about the survey was prominently displayed, notices in Keeping You E-Posted, and requests in three monthly bulletins to conference staff. In particular, conference staff were asked to encourage both clergy candidates and local church search committee members who had recent experience with the process to complete the appropriate surveys. In addition, team members personally encouraged people to participate both in meetings and through one-to-one contacts.

When data collection was completed, 12 Conference Minister Surveys (from 11 Conferences), 44 Association/ Conference Search and Call Coordinator Surveys (from 24 Conferences), 91 Surveys for from approximately 86 Local Churches in the Process, and 213 Surveys for Clergy in the Process had been received. This includes conference staff from 30 of the 38 conferences (79%), clergy in 32 conferences, and search committees from 18 conferences. Because some conferences were more intentional about recruiting search committee members, even among the 18 conferences, some large conferences were represented by only 1 or 2 surveys or not at all, while 14% of the local church responses came from only one conference. Because procedures differ by conference, the percentages may not accurately reflect the views of a cross-section of all UCC local congregations engaged in the Search and Call process.

The clergy who responded were 89% Euro-Americans, 5% African-American, 1% Latino/a, 2% Multi-racial/cultural, and 3% Unknown. Slightly over half were women.

Respondents included retired clergy, those who were seeking a first call (24% of all those who responded) and many in between. Those seeking positions as pastor, senior pastor, associate pastor and non-parish clergy all were represented. Although the responses from this group represent a wide cross-section of the denomination, caution should be used when interpreting the results. First, the high percentage of clergy who are experiencing the Search and Call process for the first time may not have a good background of experiences with which to compare their current experience. Second, and probably more important, people who have had problems with the system may have been more likely to respond to the surveys. While their responses are very important to know in developing improvements, the overall levels of satisfaction may be lower than if a random sample had been used.

CLERGY SATISFACTION WITH THE SEARCH AND CALL PROCESS

Satisfaction Overall

The majority of clergy seeking a call said they are satisfied with the system overall. However, their level of satisfaction was not high, and they had many suggestions for improvement. As Figure 1 illustrates, only 8% said they were very satisfied overall, while 51% were satisfied, but at lower levels. However, significant numbers were not satisfied overall, with 29% saying they were somewhat unsatisfied and 12% were very unsatisfied.

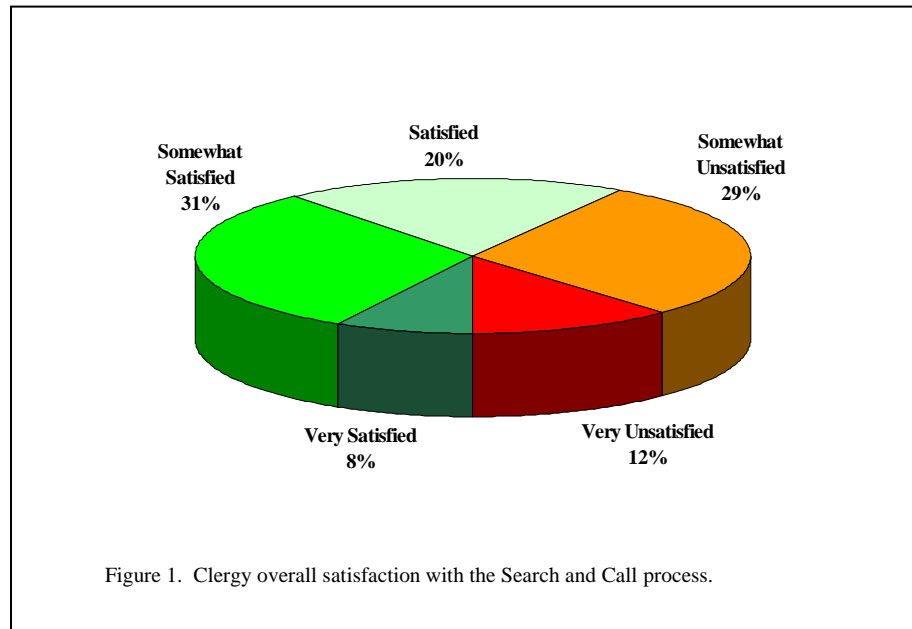


Figure 1. Clergy overall satisfaction with the Search and Call process.

In their comments, 18% of those making comments raised concerns with the system as a whole, 2% were positive about it, and 5% made suggestions that were neither positive nor negative. The most frequent negative comments were that the current system is too long and cumbersome (9%), with too many steps, layers of involvement (national, conference, association, and local church) with too many regulations and gatekeepers. A few clergy said that, while it had its problems, the system was better than others. Several people suggested greater use of new technologies throughout the system, and four people said that all clergy and local church profiles should be available on line so that clergy could search openings and local churches could search likely candidates without the need to go through a conference or association office. One person

urged that PL&L study the Presbyterian system. Another said that video clips of clergy preaching sermons or laity interacting in church meetings and activities would also be helpful.

Satisfaction with Aspects of the Process

Satisfaction with various aspects of the process varied, as can be seen in Figure 2. Clergy were most satisfied with Parish Life and Leadership (PL&L) staff, with 82% saying they were at least satisfied and 35% saying they were very satisfied. In their comments, some reported difficulties with some of the procedures of that office, such as delays in putting their profiles on the system or making changes to them, and a few said that the staff had not been helpful.

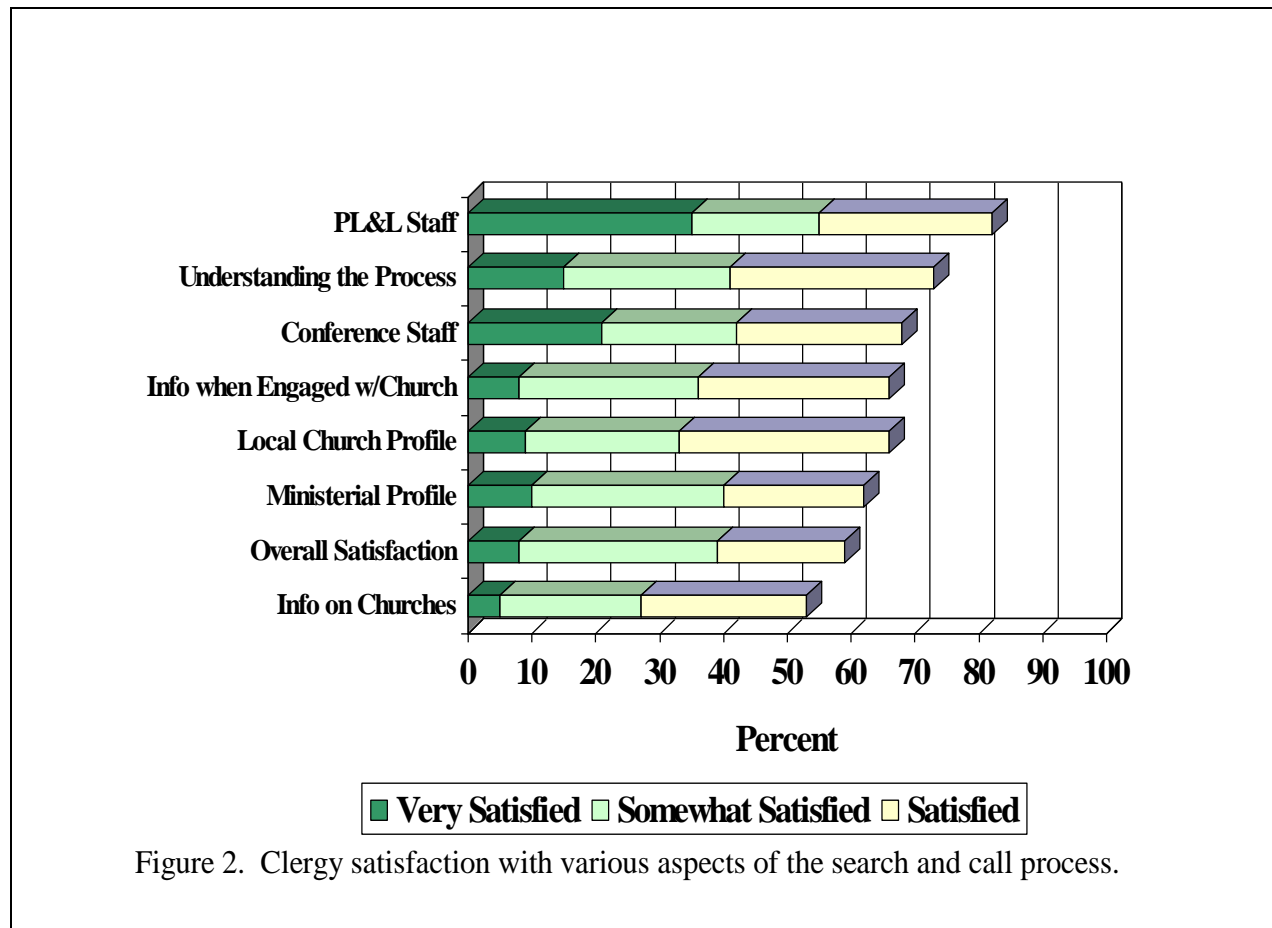


Figure 2. Clergy satisfaction with various aspects of the search and call process.

Generally, clergy were satisfied with their understanding of the process. Those who were using the system for the first time were less satisfied than others, but differences were not large and only approached statistical significance. One person suggested a “Green Book” for clergy similar to the one for Local Churches, while three people suggested that a mentor, such as the person who had mentored the clergyperson before ordination, might help those who were using the system for the first time.

Nearly two-thirds of clergy (62%) were at least satisfied with their experiences with conference staff, with 21% saying they were very satisfied. Although 4% of those writing

comments praised the conference staff they had worked with, 13% had negative things to say. Some criticized staff for not sending their profiles to churches, while others thought that staff should screen and send a limited number to churches so the search committees were not overwhelmed and bogged down in reading and processing 80 profiles. Another 9% had other comments about conference staff, often saying that more staff or more time was needed to do the job well. Where staff acted as matchmakers and enablers, they were welcomed and praised by clergy. Where they acted more as gatekeepers, failing to send profiles to churches or being slow in doing so, or where they failed to warn candidates of potential problems, they were seen as obstacles.

One frequent comment, made by 11% of those making comments, was frustration with the differences in procedures from conference to conference. Clergy reported on delays in the system caused by their not realizing that they needed to follow-up in one conference in situations where no further action on their part was necessary in their own or another conference.

About two thirds of clergy were at least satisfied with the information they found in Local Church Profiles and the information they received once they were engaged with a congregation. Those who were not satisfied provided many reasons that are discussed in the Local Church Profile section below. Clergy were least satisfied with the information available on churches before they contact them. Of those making comments, nearly a fourth, 23% were dissatisfied with this information. One frequent comment was that the paragraph in the Employment Opportunities listing did not contain enough information for them to decide whether to ask that their profile be sent to a church, and that a local church's profile could not be sent to the candidate before the church had received the ministerial profile. Some suggested that attendance figures be given instead of or in addition to membership figures, while a conference staff person suggested that the smallest attendance category should be divided. Some clergy admitted that church websites provided more information, but said that many were inadequate. One person asked why the Yearbook was not available on-line so that clergy could use it to learn more about congregations. Another thought that information on whether the church was Open and Affirming, or was open to the possibility, would be helpful in targeting congregations.

Just over 60% of clergy were at least satisfied with the Ministerial Profile. In their comments, 21% of those who commented shared problems about the profiles that are discussed in the section on Ministerial Profiles below. Some of the dissatisfaction was not with the Profiles themselves, but with the process of completing and submitting them. Some said that the directions were unclear. Others would have liked a word count on the text boxes, so they knew how much remaining space they had when they composed entries. Several people had difficulty adding references, and some inadvertently eliminated all previous references when they submitted new ones. One person questioned the security of the system if this was possible. Ten percent said that the Profiles took too long to be assembled and disseminated, or could not be updated or fine-tuned quickly enough because of the rule that changes cannot be made until six months after submission.

Some clergy, 15% of those who made comments, thought that local church search committees slowed down the process by taking too long to make a decision or to respond to candidates, either with their profiles or informing them that they were no longer a candidate.

They also thought that search committees sometimes screened out good candidates by not reading profiles carefully. Another 3% said that time was wasted when a church that might have been a good match was in a very different stage of the process than they were, and one person suggested that PL&L might have more designations than “Accepting Profiles” and “Hold on Profiles” to help them identify churches which were about to call someone.

Differences in Satisfaction

In general, satisfaction did not differ significantly by gender, race/ethnicity, longevity, or the type of position the clergy currently held. Generally, non-European-Americans were less satisfied than European-Americans, although the differences were statistically significant only for satisfaction with PL&L staff. Those currently in senior pastor, non-parish and secular positions generally were less satisfied than others, although again differences were statistically significant only for PL&L staff. Satisfaction did not differ by gender, except for PL&L staff, where clergywomen were more satisfied. Overall satisfaction and satisfaction with PL&L staff were highest among those whose last use of the system was over ten years ago.

Satisfaction differed significantly, however, by how long clergy had been searching. Those who had received a call recently and those who had been searching for six months or less were significantly more positive than those who had been searching for more than six months. Differences were largest for Overall Satisfaction and for Information about a Specific Church.

Problems Causing Long Searches

When asked why their own search experience took longer than they thought it should, 54% of the clergy responded, many in detail. Some reasons such as lack of geographic mobility (19% of those making comments), family issues (6%) or waiting for a good match (11%) were characteristics of the individual and their situation.

Other clergy said that recent economic problems have made the job market difficult with few openings as clergy are delaying retirement or not making moves (12%), or churches are not able to afford appropriate salaries or only hiring for part-time positions (4%). These concerns are supported by other sources. For example, recent research in several other denominations (Briggs, <http://blogs.thearda.com/trend/featured/what-me-retire-poor-economy-pension-issues-challenge-clergy-denominations/>) has found that clergy are delaying retirement because of economic issues. Also, the Faith Communities Today research on random samples of UCC congregations in 2000 and 2010 found that while 84% of participating congregations had full-time pastors in 2000, only 65% had full-time pastors in 2010. Of the 99 congregations that participated in the study in both 2000 and 2010, 86% reported that they had full-time pastors in 2000, while only 69% reported that they still had full-time pastors in 2010. For clergy seeking full-time parish ministry positions, the pool of available positions definitely is smaller.

Some clergy felt that, contrary to UCC pronouncements, discrimination is alive and well in local church search committees, by age (7%), female gender (6%), and being openly lesbian or gay (7%). A few individuals mentioned problems because they were second career, or right out of seminary, had a background from another denomination, had been forced to resign from a

previous position, sometimes due to issues beyond their control such as lack of funds, or had served several times as an interim minister. One mentioned that search committees seem interested only in hiring "a young man with a family." One person suggested having "teams deployed to intercept [lesbian and gay] anxiety, like the Universalist Unitarians have. Put on workshops and answer all kinds of questions for Search Committees that would be inappropriate if asked a candidate, but that help decrease prejudice in favor of understanding."

When men and women and clergy of different racial and ethnic groups were compared on the time that they have been searching, no significant differences were found. However, clergy who reported in the comments that they are openly gay or lesbian were more likely to have spent more time than other clergy in searching for a call, with 2/3 of them having been searching for 18 months or more. Because the survey did not contain any questions about age or marital status, the effect of these characteristics on time to placement could not be examined. Regional differences also were not significant.

SEARCH COMMITTEE SATISFACTION WITH THE SEARCH AND CALL PROCESS

Overall Satisfaction

Local church search committee members were much more satisfied with the Search and Call process than were clergy, as can be seen in Figure 3, with 38% reporting that they were very satisfied, as compared to 8%, and only 18% saying they were unsatisfied or very unsatisfied, as compared to 41% for clergy. In their comments, four people said that the process was too long, complex, or cumbersome, one each said the "Green Book" and the forms and documents were not helpful, although one was positive about the materials they received, and two said the process worked well. Two were dissatisfied with the surveys of congregations that were provided for their use, one saying that the questions did not always align with those in the Profile. Two said that, for their congregations, the time for grieving was too long, that they were ready to look forward, not backward.

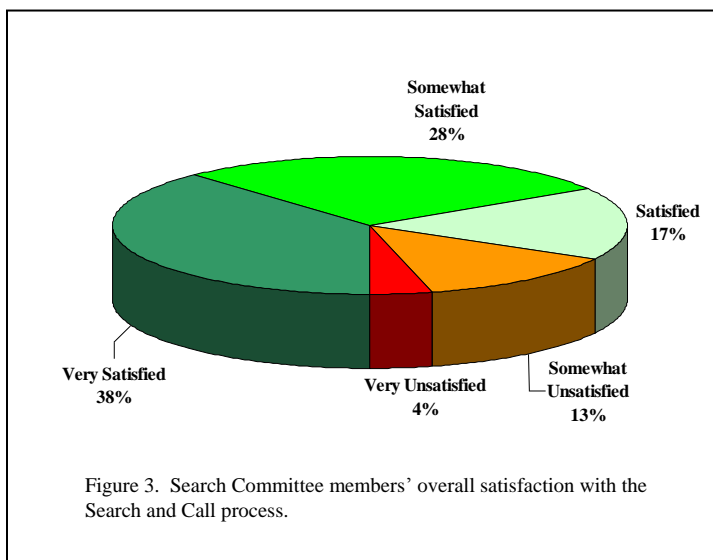


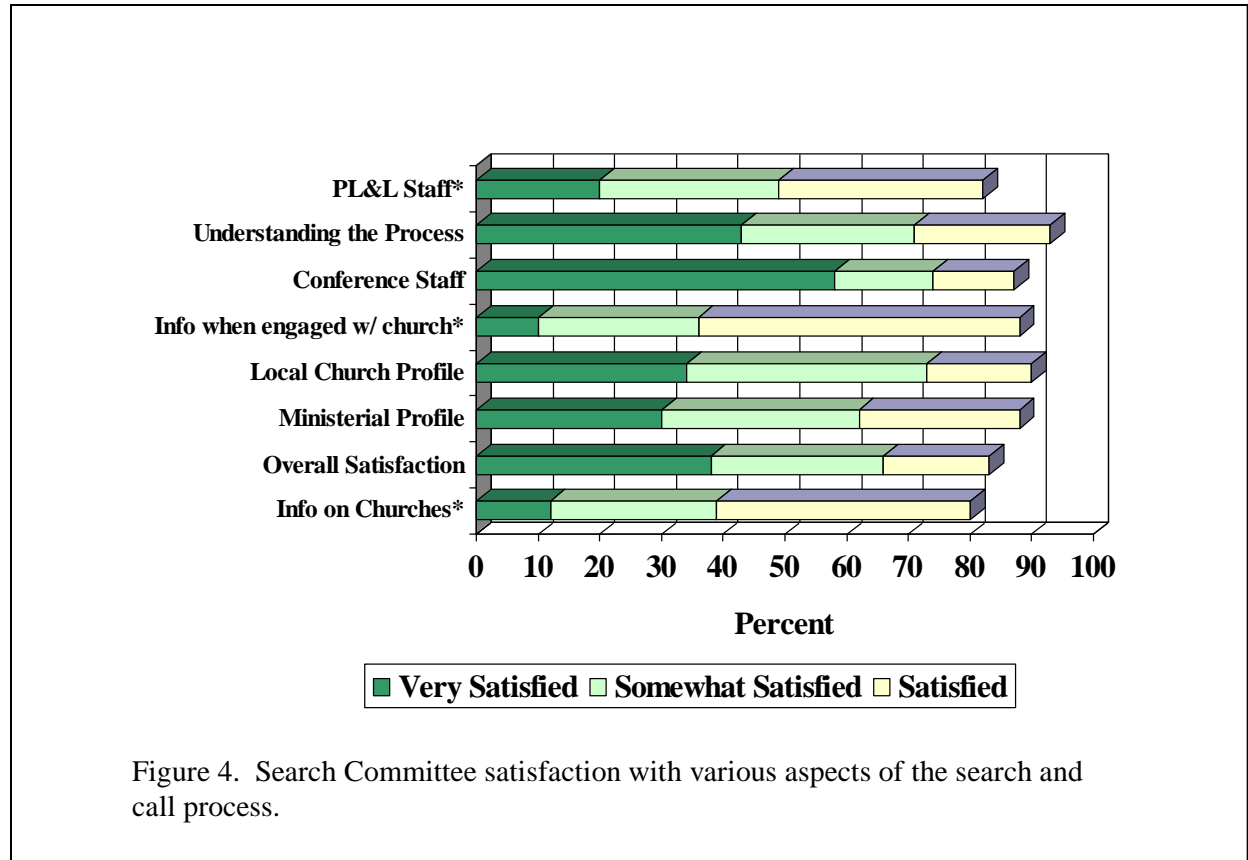
Figure 3. Search Committee members' overall satisfaction with the Search and Call process.

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Satisfaction with Aspects of the Process

Local church search committee members were more satisfied with some aspects of the process than others, however, as can be seen in Figure 4. The aspect with which they were most likely to say they were "very satisfied" was the support they received from conference or association staff. On this aspect, they were much more satisfied than clergy. Of the search committee members, 58% said they were very satisfied with this support, as compared to 21% of

clergy, and only 17% said they were unsatisfied, as compared to 32% among clergy. Most of their comments were about conference staff as well, with 14 of the 91 surveys (and almost half – 48% -- of all comments about the process) mentioning them. Of the 14 comments, 7 were positive, praising the help they received. However, 6 were negative, saying that a staff member had not been helpful or had taken too long to respond, and one was about a specific situation.



Because the same list of items was used on both the clergy and search committee surveys, several of these items, indicated by asterisks in Figure 4, did not really apply to search committees and some of the members said they did not understand or have any knowledge of them. They are included in the figure, although the results are difficult to interpret, and satisfaction was generally lower on these items. Almost all search committee members (93%) said that they were satisfied or better with how they understood the process, and nearly 90% said that they were satisfied with both the Ministerial and Local Church Profiles.

Problems Causing Long Searches

Search committee members gave a variety of reasons why their search process too longer than expected. The process itself, reading many lengthy profiles and meeting many times, was difficult for people, especially those with busy schedules. Several people mentioned the amount of work that was involved. Some congregations needed to do some internal work before the process could begin. Most were patient with the process, with 8% saying they trusted in God for the timing. One said *“You almost have to find the ones who don't fit in order to see the one who does.”*

Some churches (12%) said that the process was slowed for reasons related to conference staff. Some were slow in starting because they were waiting for a conference staff member, others had a change in staff, and some felt that staff had not given them the understanding or the training they needed so that they spent time floundering in the process.

In addition, 10% of those who commented mentioned wasting time on inappropriate or out-of-date ministerial profiles. They felt that these should have been screened earlier in the process, either by computer or by staff, by information that would help the clergy make better choices, or because the clergy were at a different point in their search than the church was.

MINISTERIAL PROFILES

Conference Ministers' Understandings

According to the conference ministers (see Figure 5), the most important function of the Ministerial Profile is to “vet” potential candidates (25% say that vetting is the most important function), while conveying a candidate’s personal gifts is the second most important function (17% say that is the most important). Creating parity in the system is seen as less important overall, although most conference ministers thought that all three functions were moderately important or better.

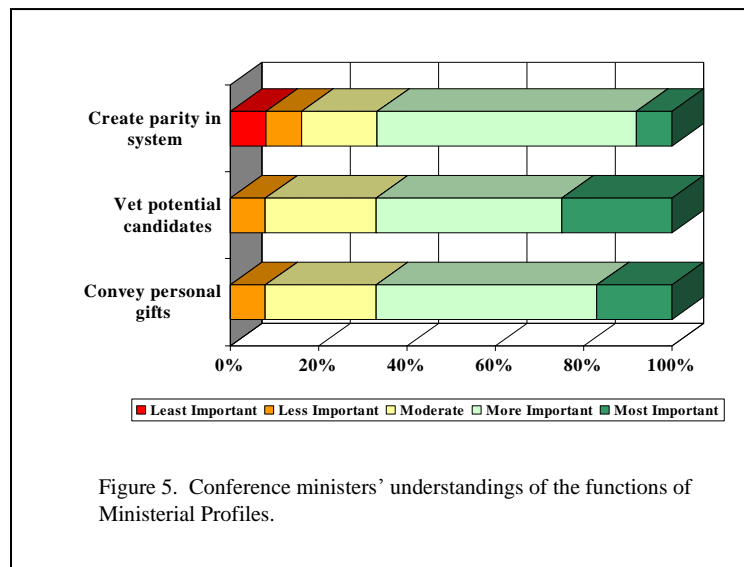


Figure 5. Conference ministers' understandings of the functions of Ministerial Profiles.

Clergy Ratings and Comments

Clergy's unenthusiastic ratings of the Ministerial Profiles were echoed in their ratings of particular aspects of them, as can be seen in Figure 6. On the Ministerial Profile, they were least satisfied with the Self- and Reference Appraisal boxes, rated as Very Helpful by only 10 and 12%, respectively, and Not at All Helpful by 37% and 29% respectively. The rest of the sections were rated as at least Helpful by 85% or more, with clergy preferring written statements, both by themselves and their references.

Clergy gave many reasons for their dissatisfaction and suggestions for improvement in their comments. Four percent of those adding comments were frustrated with having to develop an all-purpose profile, while in other fields professionals can tailor their profile for a specific opening. One person suggested that a short profile might be developed to be sent to churches initially, with a longer, more detailed profile containing information from a Background Check and References once the candidate and local church were in dialog. A few others said that the Profile was too long, redundant and costly.

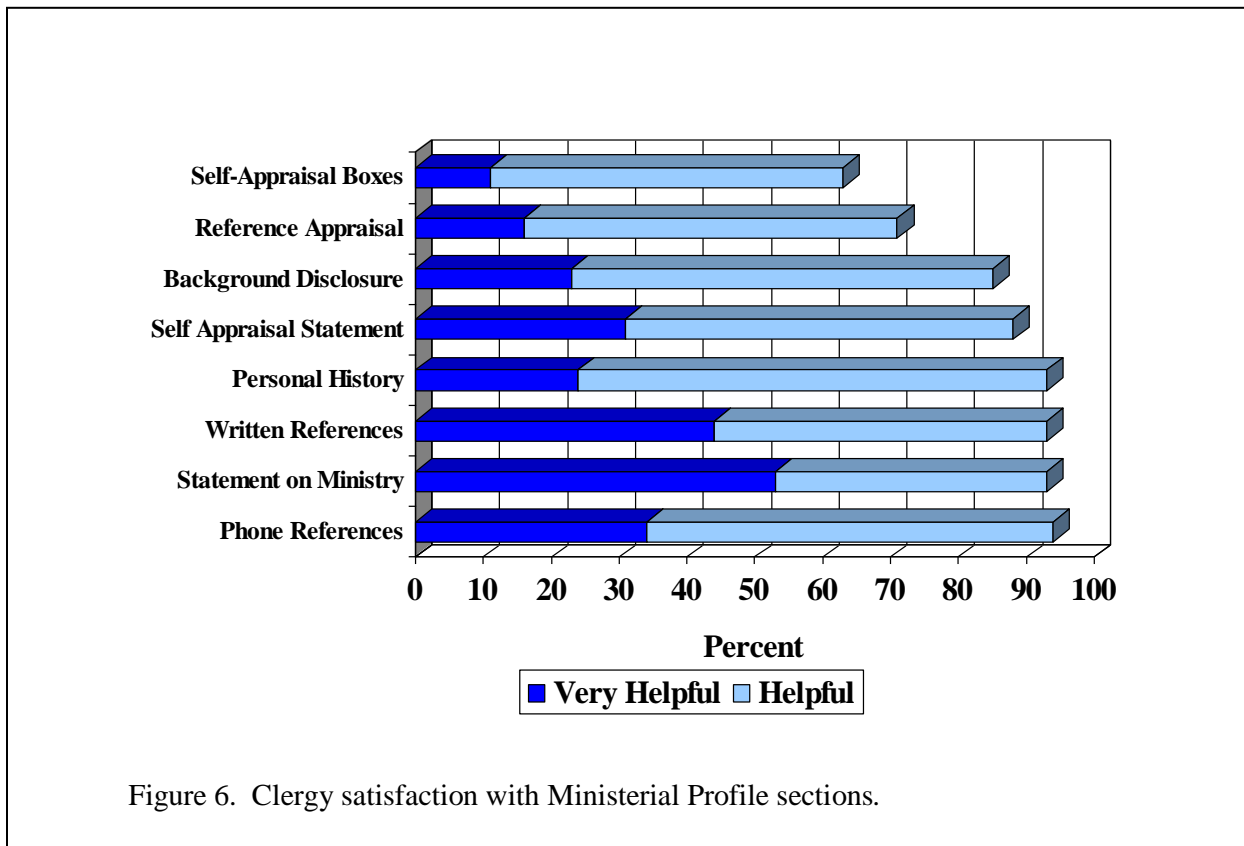


Figure 6. Clergy satisfaction with Ministerial Profile sections.

One problem that was cited frequently is that the Profiles are designed for first-career clergy, not for those coming to the ministry after significant time in other fields where they have developed many skills that are useful for ministry. This was cited by 18% of those who included comments. The Profiles also are not designed for bi-vocational pastors, who are increasingly important in filling part-time positions. Completing them is difficult for clergy who have just completed seminary and have little ministerial experience to describe, although they may have had extensive experience both in congregations and in other careers. They are not particularly useful for those seeking specialized ministries. One partial solution to this problem, according to many who raised it, would be to provide more space in the Personal History section which could be used to describe other relevant experience, such as previous employment, specialized ministries, and seminary placements.

The Self and Reference Appraisal sections garnered the most comments with 21% of clergy who wrote comments mentioning them. Some people said that choosing 12 items was too limiting, others said they were redundant, a few said that they used an outmoded concept of ministry. Two percent spoke favorably of them.

One suggestion for improvement included having an option to do a less extensive “Update Check” to the Background Check when over 18 months have passed since the original one. This is offered by some companies for a considerably lower cost than another complete check.

Several people said that they were not sure what was desired in the Statement on Ministry. One suggested that a series of questions that could be answered in one or two sentences, such as a person’s beliefs about the Bible, might be more effective. Another said that a similar approach could be used with the written Self Appraisal. Instead of writing a long essay, clergy could respond to a series of carefully worded multiple-choice questions about their strengths and approaches to ministry.

Of those commenting on what they wanted to say in their Profiles but could not, 12% said that they did not think the Profile captured what made them unique, their personalities, or level of energy, or skills and experiences that might make them the perfect match for a particular church. Another 4% said that any description of their personal theology was missing. A conference minister wanted to see a question in the Ministerial Profile about a pastor’s setbacks in ministry and their responses to them, with people who prepared written references commenting on those responses.

Search Committee Ratings and Comments

Local church search committees generally were positive about most of the specific parts of the Ministerial Profile (see Figure 7), just as they were about the Profiles overall. They were most positive about the written Personal History and Statement on Ministry sections.

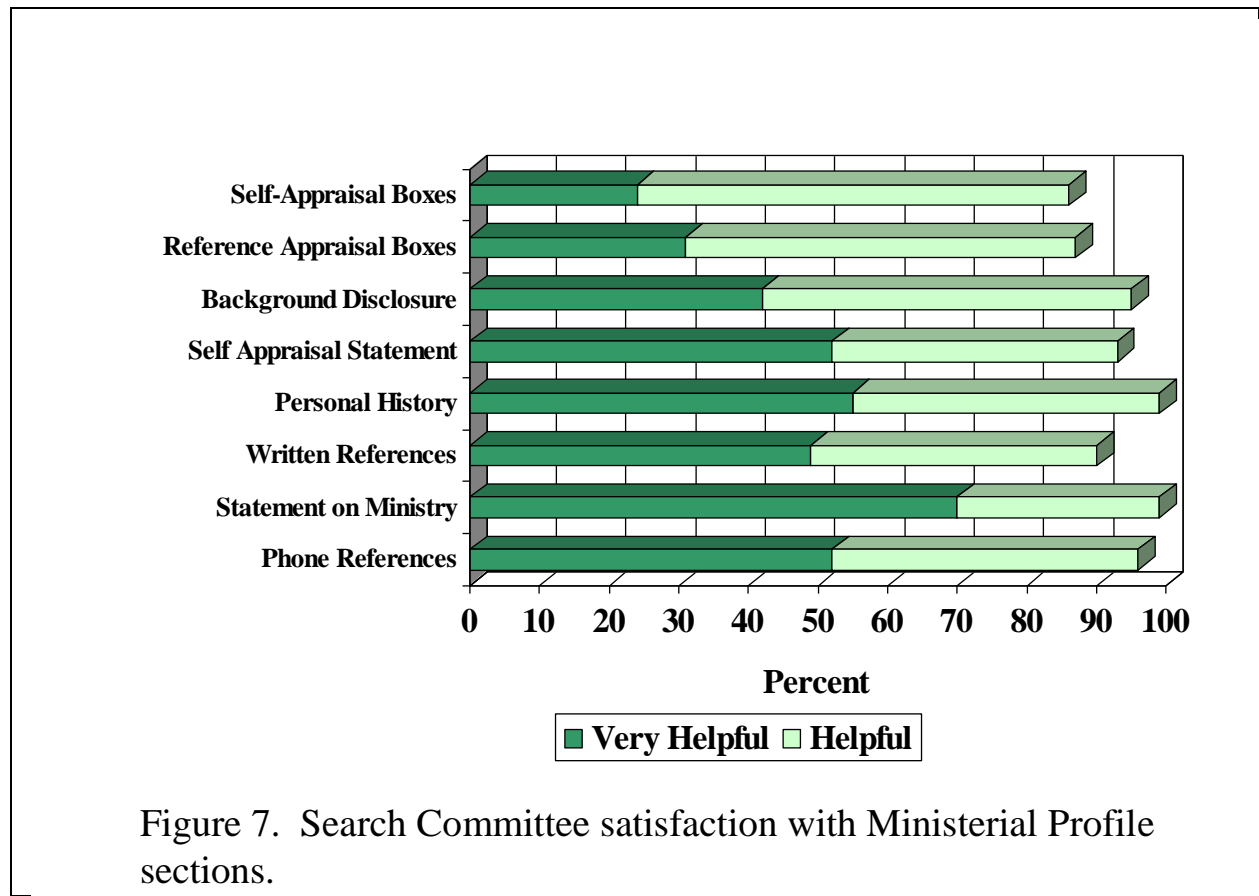


Figure 7. Search Committee satisfaction with Ministerial Profile sections.

Several people, 7 of the 34 who commented (21%), said that they found the entire Profile to be helpful, and that all parts were needed to give a more complete picture. One person felt that the Profile was too general, and wanted more information about how the candidate would help their particular congregation. Another person suggested that, if a candidate's most recent position was as an interim, they should be encouraged to describe their last called position in greater detail, rather than the interim position.

Like clergy, search committee members were least satisfied with the Self and Reference Appraisal checklists, with 15% of those who commented saying that the form had too many characteristics with too much overlap. One said it was not relevant for people seeking their first call.

Search committee members were positive about the Background Check, more positive than the clergy, with 12% of those who commented saying that it was useful to weed out candidates or as an independent verification of potential problems. One person said that somewhere in the Profile the candidate should be asked to address any issues that arose in the check.

Two people said that the Statement on Ministry was helpful, but a lot of clergy did not use it effectively, discussing why they entered ministry rather than their theology or their understanding of ministry. One missed any information about the candidate's faith in Christ. Two people suggested that copies of sermons, written, videotaped, or on DVD, would have been helpful for learning more about a candidate's theology. One person thought the Statement on Ministry and Self-Appraisal statement should be limited to one page each.

Although almost all search committee members rated the written and telephone references as helpful or very helpful, those who wrote comments were less positive, saying that anyone could get a friend to write a good reference, or that some of the written references were too old. One person suggested that written references should come from laity, while conference staff were more appropriate telephone references. Another suggested that the telephone numbers should have information on whether they were home or business numbers. Another said that references should be provided later in the process, rather than with initial profiles. This timing would solve the problem that one clergyperson described where references were contacted before the clergyperson had any knowledge of being considered and, in fact, had not been interested in the church. One search committee member thought that the written references should be linked with the checklists so that you knew which reference chose which checklist items. Another wanted more information about the positions the references had held in relation to the candidate.

LOCAL CHURCH PROFILES

Clergy Ratings and Comments

Clergy candidates generally found that the information on the Local Church Profiles was helpful, as can be seen on Figure 8, with not a lot of difference among sections of the Profile.

Financial sections and the congregation’s relationship with previous ministers and expectations of a new leader were most likely to be seen as “Very Helpful.” Congregational life and community characteristics were nearly as helpful. Membership information was the item they were least likely to say was helpful, although even for this, over 20% of clergy said it was very helpful, and most of the rest said it was helpful. Their concerns expressed earlier about not having enough information about churches applied to the information they received before they sent their Profiles to the churches, not to the information on the churches’ Profiles.

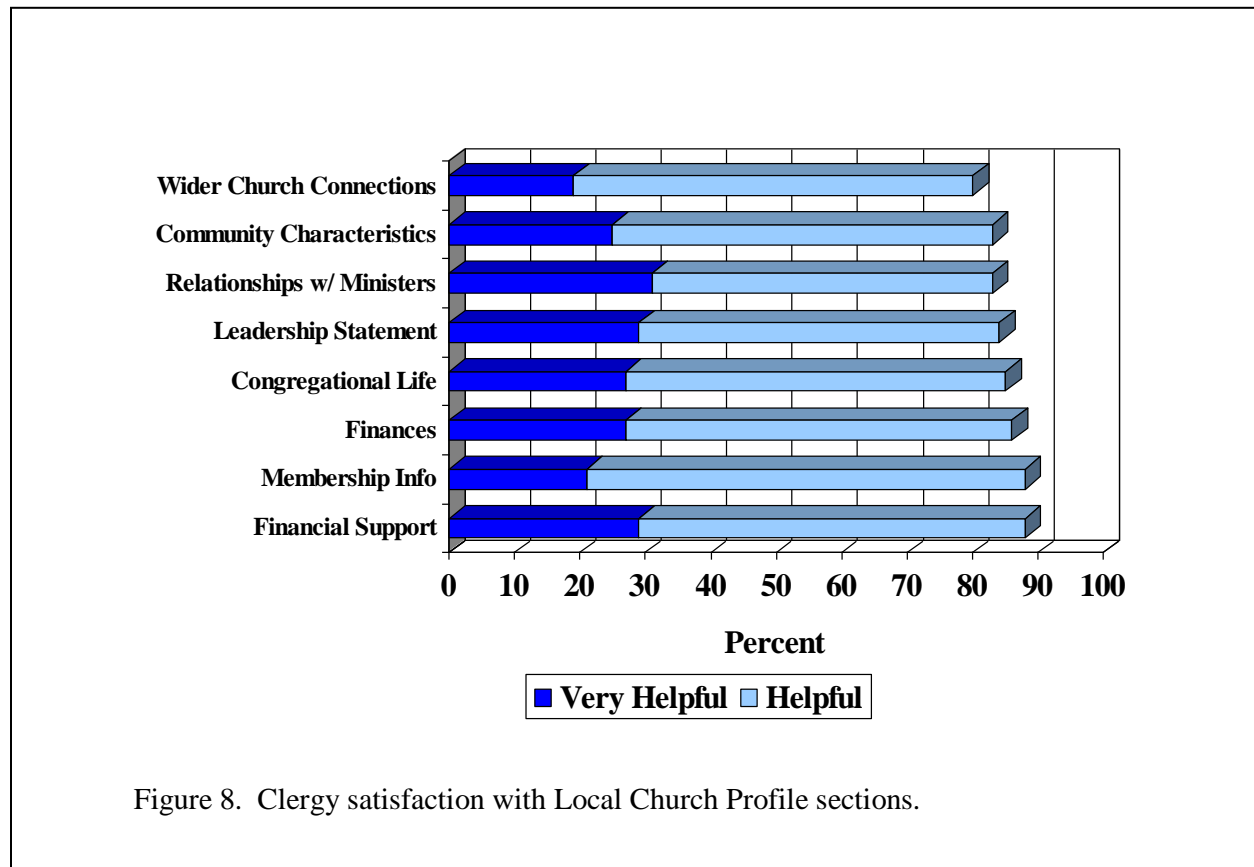


Figure 8. Clergy satisfaction with Local Church Profile sections.

Although they thought the Profiles were helpful, clergy made suggestions about them. Of their comments, 23% addressed problems in the Profiles. One person said that the emphasis in the Profile is on demographic information and not the ministry and health of the congregation. Several clergy mentioned that after they had accepted a call and began their ministry at a church, they learned that the profile was inaccurate and deceptive. One person suggested that the Local Church Profile should be verified for accuracy by someone at the association or conference level.

Although Financial Support was the area rated by clergy as most helpful, two people said that lack of clarity in this area made negotiation of the terms of the call difficult. Because the local church had not been clear about whether benefits such as family health insurance were included in their cash salary figures, the clergy learned that the total package was considerably smaller than they had been led to believe from the Profile. Sometimes congregations had

indicated that they follow the “Conference Guidelines” when they did not understand everything that the guidelines included and did not intend to offer some of the benefits.

Search Committee Ratings and Comments

Search committee members generally thought that all sections of the Local Church Profile were helpful (see Figure 9), although their ratings were somewhat different from those of the clergy (in Figure 8). They thought that the sections on Congregational Life, their Leadership Statement, and Community Characteristics were most helpful. One saw the Statement on Leadership as a key opportunity to sell their church.

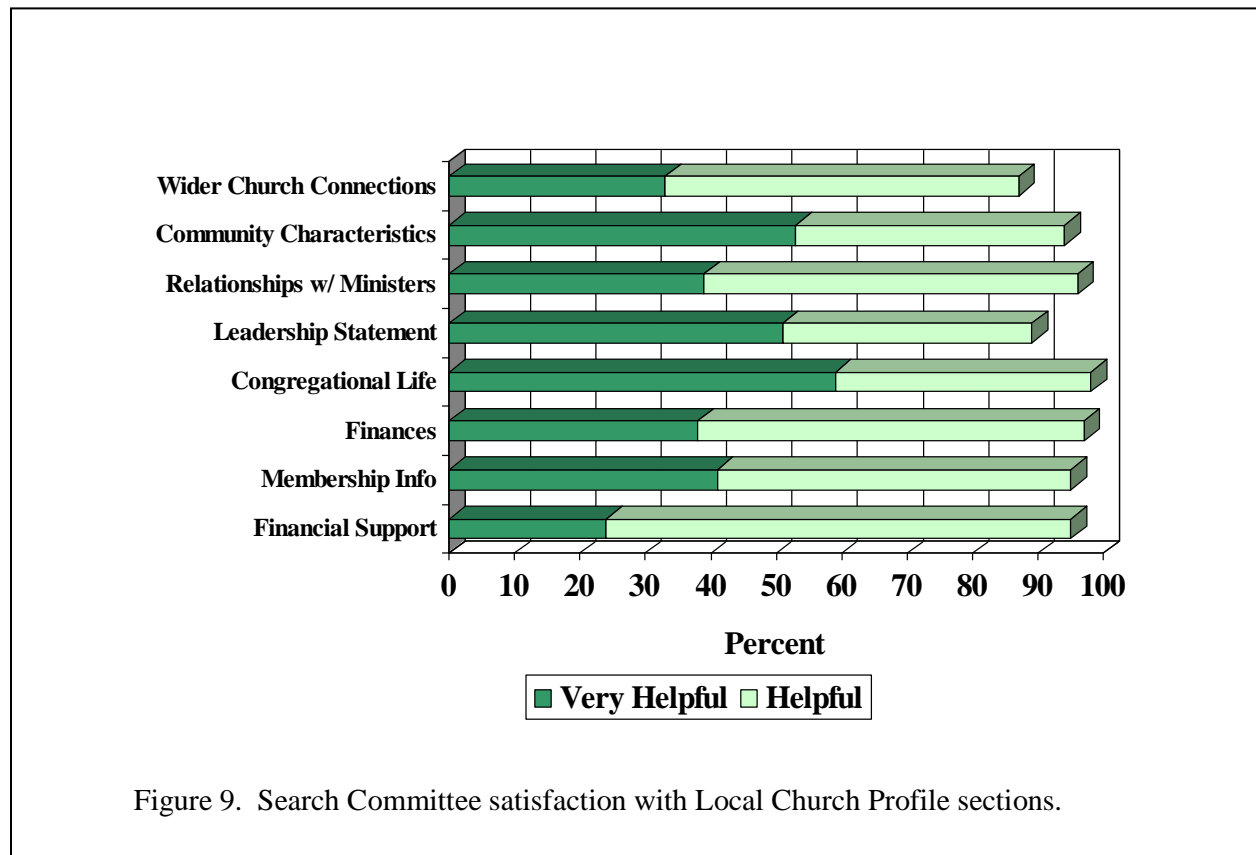


Figure 9. Search Committee satisfaction with Local Church Profile sections.

Respondents raised concerns in a few specific areas. Some thought that the Statement on Conflict was not helpful, but should be changed to a paragraph on how the church handled a recent conflict. Another said that expressing the nature of the conflict was difficult. One said that the family types listed were outmoded, with their congregation having a much greater variety of family types. They also wondered whether detailed information on race was still needed. Two people said that the terms to describe the theological stance of the congregation were political rather than theological, and that most said they were “moderate.”

The Leader Expectations checklist also provoked some comments, with two people saying choosing only 12 items was too frustrating, items duplicated each other, the approach was too simplistic, and that a written description would be better.

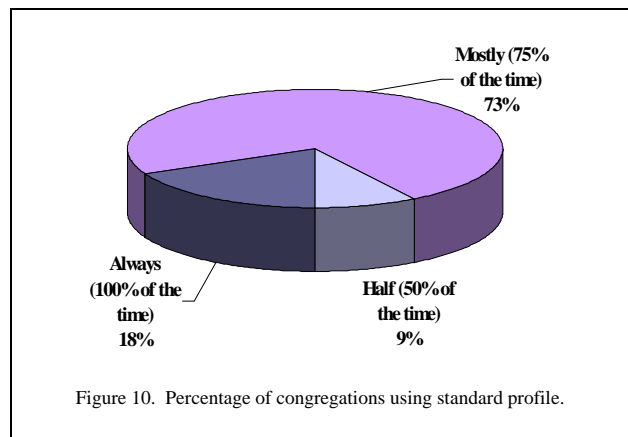
The section on Financial Support was the most difficult, with two respondents saying they did not understand how to complete it. One thought health insurance costs needed to be included. Three congregations reported problems in translating membership into Compensation Guidelines because they had many inactive members. Others wanted more clear Compensation Guidelines, particularly for part-time pastors. One feared revealing too much about their finances for fear of attracting people who only wanted a high salary.

The most common comment about the Local Church Profile, given by 12 of the 30 people making comments (40%) was that although it was time-consuming and sometimes difficult to get the congregation as a whole to understand, it was a very good experience. One, however, said that although the congregation spent a long time and involved many people, the result did not really reflect the congregation well. Some found the format rigid, but said they learned how to use it to say what they wanted. One person suggested that the form was too long and should be reviewed for redundancies, while another thought some of the information was already available in the church’s annual report and website. One respondent said that the Guidelines were very helpful, while another said that more guidance was needed on welcoming and integrating the new pastor.

Several people commented about problems with the computer format of the Profile form, saying that it did not format properly when printed or was otherwise difficult to use. Two people said that using email, shared documents on the internet, and other technological tools speeded the process greatly and recommended those tools to others.

Finally, one limitation of the Local Church Profile was that it did not capture what made the congregation special – its traditions and values, the many opportunities to participate, or the high degree of caring members exhibit. This comment was similar to one clergy made about their Profiles, that they failed to capture their personality or what made them special. One person suggested that a one-page cover letter or summary might be one way to emphasize their unique characteristics, with a similar cover letter for clergy as well.

Conference Ministers’ Comments



Conference Ministers reported that the standard Local Church Profile is used most of the time by most congregations, as can be seen in Figure 10. Eighteen percent (2 people) said that 100% of their churches use it without modification, while the majority (73% of Conference Ministers) said that about 75% of their churches use it, and another 9% (1 person) said about half of their churches use it. Of the congregations that do not use the standard profile, about 2/3 adapt it while 1/3 use something completely different. The most

common reason given for not using the profile is congregational size. Small churches seeking part-time pastors are more likely to use an adapted format or something else entirely. However,

one person said that very large churches sometimes do something else, and another said that *“Some churches just are not willing to work with a standard form and insist on preparing a narrative profile.”* And some churches embellish the profile with photos and other material. One Conference Minister said that *“We are contemplating a Church Profile especially for our part-time churches that would be more targeted and less extensive. We'll share!”*

CONFERENCE PROCEDURES

Each conference in the UCC is unique. Some are very small with only 1 or 2 professional staff members, while others have a team of several Associate or Area Conference Ministers (ACM's), specialized professional staff, and administrative and support staff. Some are geographically contained, while others are far-flung over hundreds of miles and several states. The racial/ethnic variety and number of part-time and rural churches varies as well. Because of this, the Search and Call process also varies widely across conferences. However, because Conference Minister surveys were received from only 11 of the 38 conferences, the results may not represent an accurate picture of all the conferences. Nevertheless, much can be learned from their responses about the variety of procedures that are used.

Staffing

Because of the differences in staffing patterns, congregational characteristics, and the unknowns of the search process, Conference Ministers struggled to describe the staff and time involved in Search and Call. The amount of time that staff, both professional and administrative, spent in Search and Call varied considerably. The two conference ministers without ACM's who did all the Search and Call work themselves reported spending half their time in Search and Call. In conferences with ACM's, the Conference Ministers typically spent 10 to 25% of their time on Search and Call, with the ACM's doing the remainder of the professional work, although not all ACMs did Search and Call. Half of the Conference Ministers with ACM's did not do any Search and Call. According to the Conference Ministers, most ACM's were involved with some Search and Call, although not to the exclusion of other duties, half spending 50% of their time, a quarter spending 25%, and a quarter spending 75% on Search and Call.

No conference used paid consultants, although one conference has recently contracted with one. Two conferences used volunteer consultants. One of these described their system as follows: *“We have a Placement Team . . . made up of former search committee chairpersons. They meet 6 times a year like a CPE group and do verbatims. After our Associate Conference Minister makes the initial visit to the local church council and then the local church search committee, a member of the Placement Team is assigned to work with that Search Committee throughout the entire call process, even chairing the congregational meeting on election day.”*

Typically one administrative staff member supported the professional staff in Search and Call functions. Four of the 11 conferences reported that Search and Call consumed 100% of one administrative staff person's time. Three reported that an administrative staff person spent a majority (50 to 75%) of their time, another three said 25%, and one said the staff person took less than 1% of their time on Search and Call.

The Conference Coordinators' survey included a question on the numbers of contact hours a conference spends on Search and Call in person, by telephone, and by email. Coordinators had difficulty responding, mostly because of the great variety of situations, difficulty of particular searches, or travel time to far-flung locations. Also, some people responded on a per-church basis, while others responded per week or per month of their time. Because of this mixture, the responses referring to time spent are not meaningful. Even with new technologies, most of the time is spent in person (and travelling), although email seems to be used more than telephone and nearly as much as in-person. One respondent said that part-time positions take much more time than do full-time positions.

Procedures

Most conference ministers reported that the largest source of candidates for local churches is having their Profiles forwarded by PL&L at the candidate's request, with the second largest source being profiles sent by PL&L automatically based on geographic preference. Next most common is conference recruitment, done at least half the time by 60% of the conference ministers who reported. Few candidates are identified by word of mouth or request of a local church, although most conference ministers say that happens at least occasionally. The searchable database is not often used, at least by these conference ministers, with only 20% saying they use it 50 to 75% of the time, and most saying they either never use it or use it about 25% of the time.

Conference ministers reported that the most helpful search criterion on the searchable database is type of ministry, mentioned by about half of those reporting. Next most common is geography, mentioned by about a fourth of them. A few said their most helpful search criteria are interest in rural ministry, church size, and assessments from Search and Call colleagues. Other criteria on which they would like to search include compensation requirements, openness to bi-vocational ministry, and what the other vocation might be, the type of church the candidate would consider, experience as a senior pastor, region, and experience, skills, and gifts in different areas of ministry.

Almost all (98%) Conference Search and Call Coordinators report sending Ministerial Profiles to local church search committees when requested by the candidates. The one who does not always send it reports that it is done "ALMOST always." About half (48%) report that they send local search committees profiles of clergy that have been sent to their judicatories without specific instructions on where to send them. About half (48%) report that at the request of a local church search committee, they ask a minister whether they would be interested in applying.

Only 25% of Coordinators send local church Profiles to potential candidates at their request, and only 11% send church Profiles to clergy who have not requested them (see Figure 11). Most Coordinators (77%) expect that the churches themselves will send their Profiles to candidates in whom they are interested. A more common practice is

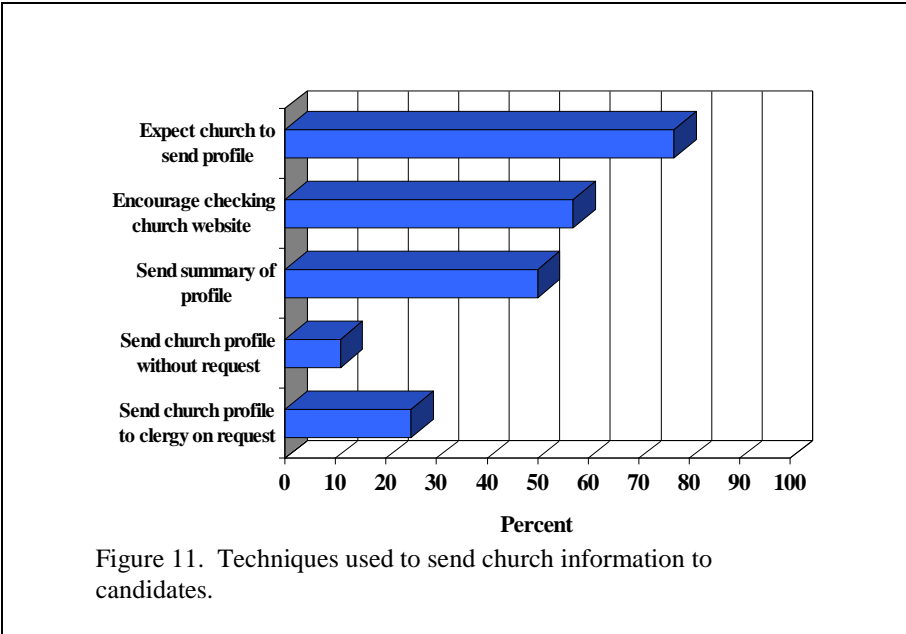


Figure 11. Techniques used to send church information to candidates.

for conference staff to send summaries of open churches (50%) or encourage clergy to check out websites of open churches (57%). These summaries or brochures usually are prepared by the local church search committee. Some conferences do this when clergy have expressed an interest in the church, while others also do it when they think the clergy might be a good candidate.

Training And Supporting Search Committees

All local search committees are instructed by conference staff about the UCC Search and Call process, according to the Coordinators, often on two or three occasions, usually at the start, and again when they are ready to receive profiles and/or interview candidates. Two Coordinators said that a staff person meets first with the church council or consistory about finding an interim or to explain the Search and Call process.

In addition, 84% of committees study UCC Search and Call materials. One respondent said *“It’s great to have the Search and Call materials on line - several churches have used them extensively on their own.”* and another said that *“The “new” manual is a great tool!”* Another reported that *“The first two chapters of “A Pilgrimage” is given to the council for their reference and the entire book is given to the search committee, when organized, for their use.”* In 9% of conferences responding, a member of a judicatory team of non-staff consultants also assists search committees. Some committees also learn from other churches or from their own members who have gone through a previous search (7%). Coordinators also reported that they continue to meet with churches on an “as-needed” basis. One coordinator asked *“Is there a role for Committees on Ministry here - especially with conferences/associations cutting staff?”*

Conference Coordinators report that they use a variety of sources to identify and “vet” candidates, as can be seen in Figure 12. A majority, 57%, say that they only use profiles of candidates authorized by the UCC. However, 64% say that they sometimes use profiles/resumes of non-UCC clergy who have been vetted. Sixteen percent say that they sometimes use the profile department of PL&L to assist in seeking potential candidates.

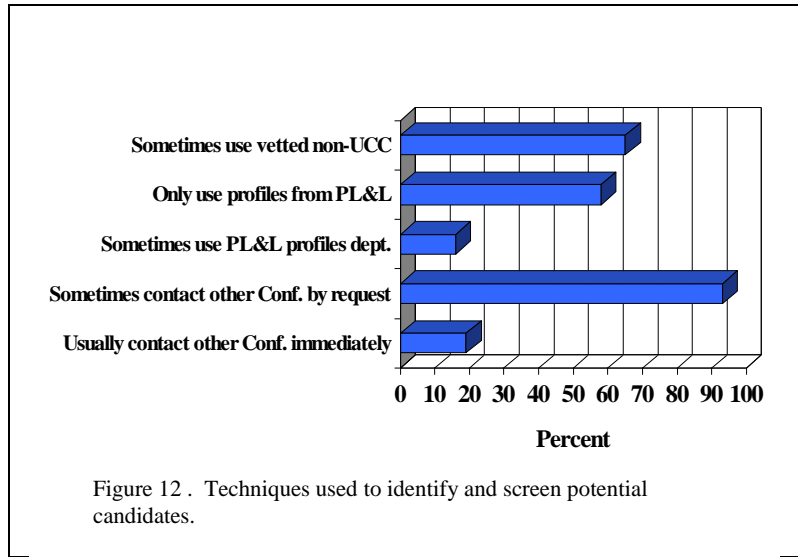


Figure 12 . Techniques used to identify and screen potential candidates.

When they first receive a minister’s profile, 19% contact their Association or Conference to learn more about the candidate. When a local church Search Committee requests more information, nearly all (93%) contact another Conference or Association on their behalf.

GOING OUTSIDE THE SYSTEM

Conference Ministers report that the Search and Call system is the primary but not the only system used to fill local church openings. In 38% of the conferences that reported, it is used for 100% of the openings, in another 39%, it is used almost always (70 to 90% of the time). However, in 3 conferences (23% of those reporting) it is used only half the time. It is less likely to be used with small churches, particularly those with less than a half-time pastor. In fact, every conference minister who described typical instances in which the regular system is not used mentioned part-time ministry, often less than half-time. One Conference Minister said “*Part-time positions - (the) regular process never works.*” Several others reported that the small churches work with conference staff but may “*work outside the standard system.*” One conference reported that the regular Search and Call system is not used for non-UCC churches (NA and Community Churches that pay for placement assistance from conference staff).

Going outside the system to seek a pastor for local churches is fairly common, as can be seen in Figure 13, with 11% of the Conference Coordinators reporting

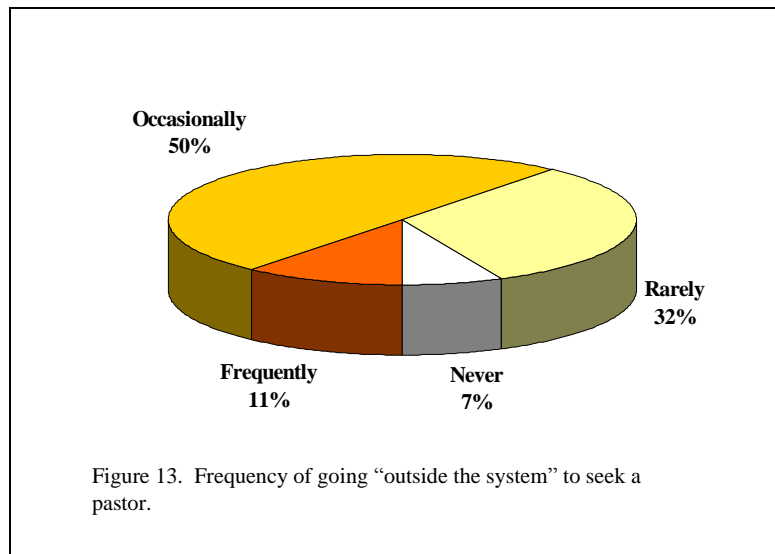


Figure 13. Frequency of going “outside the system” to seek a pastor.

that they do so frequently while 50% do so occasionally. Coordinators report that this is done most often for churches that do not worship in English, for rural churches and those with less than full-time pastors. Two people mentioned that sometimes “flagship” churches or large churches seeking associates go outside the system, and one reported that one of its congregations is now using a “Search Firm.” Two said that highly independent churches or those “on the fence” might do so. One said that conservative churches sometimes do not use the UCC system because of concerns about homosexuality. Another said that it is sometimes done for interim ministers. One conference said that churches ask them to “vet” candidates from outside the system, another said that the candidates are requested to seek UCC standing. Most said that going outside the system is discouraged except for small churches having difficulty finding pastors. One respondent said “*Half of our congregations have 50 members or fewer. Full-time seminary-trained pastors are often not either prepared nor suited to serve in many of these churches. The profile system frankly is not useful in a majority of our searches.*” A Conference Minister in a small, rural conference reported that 80% of the pastoral changes were Designated Pastors, thus not using the regular Search and Call process.

Nearly a third (31%) of clergy and nearly a quarter (23%) of search committee respondents said that they had been in dialog with other denominations during the search process. Among the clergy, our partner denomination, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) was mentioned most frequently, with 25 of the 67 clergy who named other denominations (37%) mentioning it. The Presbyterian Church (USA) was next with 22, followed by the Evangelical Lutheran Church with 10, the United Methodist Church with 6, and the American Baptist Church with 5. Also mentioned with fewer than 5 were the United Church of Canada, the Unitarian Universalist Association, the National Association of Continuing Congregational Churches, non-denominational churches, the Reformed Church in America, Metropolitan Community Churches, The Fellowship, the Moravian Church, the Episcopal Church, and the United Reformed Church in the United Kingdom, as well as non-pastoral positions with church and non-church agencies.

The search committee comments indicated that at least some of them were not using another denomination’s search procedures, but were talking with clergy from other denominations who had dual standing or had expressed interest in their church, or they had discussed Search and Call experiences with people from other denominations. Several said they looked for candidates from a variety of Protestant denominations, including Disciples of Christ, Baptist, Brethren, Episcopal, Methodist, Presbyterian, and Unitarian Universalist. Some of these congregations were federated or multiply-aligned. A few said that they turned to other denominations because they feared that UCC clergy would be too liberal. To others, denominational affiliation seemed to be less important than finding the best candidate. Both clergy in a tight job market who needed to stay within a particular geographical area and search committees in rural or part-time situations appeared to be maximizing their opportunities, rather than rejecting the UCC system.

Interdenominational searches seem to go both ways. One Conference Minister reported an increase in clergy from other denominations seeking placement in the UCC, as well.

MODIFICATIONS TO THE SEARCH AND CALL PROCEDURES

Part-Time Positions

Although 18% of the Conference Coordinators reported making no or very few changes to the process for part-time clergy, most reported making significant ones. The biggest change was in broadening the pool of candidates. Most commonly, very small churches were encouraged to consider licensed or student pastors (reported by 27% of Coordinators). In addition, clergy in good standing from other denominations, retired clergy, and bi-vocational clergy were suggested. One Coordinator tries to develop shared ministry opportunities with other part-time churches. Twenty-one percent of Coordinators said they use the Designated Pastor option or a very similar procedure. Sixteen percent reported helping search committees with salary adjustments for part-time ministry, while another sixteen percent said that they discuss adjustments to expectations of duties. Finally, 9% allowed simplification of a church's profile in some situations.

Interim Positions

Conference Coordinators reported making many adaptations to the regular Search and Call process for interim ministers, while only 7% (3 individuals) said they make few or no changes. In fact, 24% said that they rarely or never use the Search and Call process for interims, especially advertising openings. This response was most common from staff in the Plains Region, and some explained that one reason was because relocation was not feasible for an interim position.

The process is modified in several ways. The biggest modification is in number of candidates. Nearly two thirds of respondents (62%) reported that they screen candidates and send a limited number, 1 to 5, to the church for their consideration. This was common in all regions except the Mid-Atlantic. Twenty-one percent said that they are more active in seeking out candidates, sometimes from other denominations. Twenty-six percent said that they use the Interim Profile Form or accept resumes and other formats, and sometimes ask the church to prepare a mini-profile. Profile modifications were more common in the Mid-Atlantic Region, but not mentioned in New England. When clergy from other denominations are used, most said they require a background check, one said they do not. Fourteen percent said that they spend time with the local church educating people about interim ministry, and helping them set goals for the interim time.

New Church Start and Revitalization Positions

The most common response to how the Search and Call process is modified for new church start and revitalization pastors was that the Coordinators had no experience in this area, given by 45% of those who responded. The second most common response was that the staff were much more involved, in recruiting, assessing, and having a seat at the table in making the calling decision, which was sometimes done by the Conference Board of Directors in the case of a new church start. Particular skills and experience were mentioned by 21%. For new church starts, 16% said that they require use of the Center for Progressive Renewal's assessment

instrument. One conference said that they do it for revitalizations as well. Ten percent said that a pastor was already in place for their new church starts, so no Search and Call process was used. One Coordinator reported that the Search and Call system was not helpful because it could not be searched on new church start or revitalization experience or skills. Another said that in their experience, UCC seminary graduates were not interested in starting new churches. Another said that they *“may not require a full Profile for church planters who don’t yet have a track record.”*

Shared Ministry

Search and Call procedures in federated, yoked, or multiply-aligned congregations depended greatly on the situations and denominations involved. Some Coordinators, 29%, reported that they had no experience with such situations, while another 9% said the question was not applicable to them. Other Coordinators reported a variety of ways in which the UCC Search and Call system is modified to meet the situation.

For yoked congregations, usually a joint search committee is formed, although one person reported that sometimes the dominant congregation does the search and the other can veto the choice. A Coordinator said that sometimes two parallel church Profiles are developed. Another said that they try to scan profiles for clergy who are open to serving two churches.

Federated or dually- or multiply-aligned congregations present more of a challenge. Conference Coordinators reported that the agreements governing the particular church often control how the search is done. In some cases, denominations take turns supplying pastors, so that, in congregations affiliated with United Methodist congregations, the bishop may appoint the pastor. In other cases, staff from both denominations are involved in the search, using a hybrid of the various Search and Call procedures, and a wider pool of candidates including those from all denominations involved. In Vermont and New Hampshire, the UCC and American Baptists have an agreement in which the church chooses which denomination’s staff to use, but candidates are drawn from both denominations. In other conferences, the UCC staff may take the lead, but keep the staff person from the other denomination informed. One Coordinator said that in a federation with the Evangelical Lutherans, their profiles arrived more quickly, putting UCC candidates at a disadvantage.

Non-Euro-American Churches

Over half (52%) of the Coordinators reported that they had no experience with Search and Call in non-Euro-American churches. The most common response (29% of all or 60% of those with experience) said that they try to use the system, but widen the pool of possible candidates by speaking with colleagues or respected leaders in the particular racial/ethnic communities. A quarter of those with experience said that the churches, primarily Asian and Pacific Islander, located their own candidates, and Conference staff became involved in issues of Standing, including requiring background checks. Two Coordinators mentioned other actions taken in specific situations, such as allowing an interim to become a called pastor or doing screening and selecting before presenting one candidate to the church. One expressed frustration at a small congregation that had great difficulty using the system, going without a pastor for several years, and then not being willing or able to produce a congregational profile for another

search. Another was concerned that the candidates who use the Search and Call system seem to be “*marginal at best*” and better candidates are found through informal networks.

Other Adjustments

Over a third of the Coordinators reported that they make no other changes. Of those who mentioned some changes, the most common situation, cited by 48% of those making comments, was with a church that was “difficult” for some reason, whether small, isolated, or having had difficult previous searches or bad experiences in the recent past. In most cases, Coordinators reported some variation on a Designated Pastor, or making an “Acting” or interim pastor permanent. In others, staff helped the congregation widen the pool by contacting other conferences, other denominations, or Members in Discernment. Two people mentioned other situations such as chaplaincy or educational associate positions with candidates who might not be ordained. One reported recommending a person for an unadvertised vacancy, another recommending someone without a current UCC profile, and then “vetting” the person afterward.

Three Coordinators mentioned instances when a local congregation chose not to use the system or chose to modify it. In these cases, the staff emphasized preserving the connection with the congregation, while not necessarily approving of the adjustments that were made.

One Coordinator said *“While I don't make many adjustments I believe we need to make some major changes in the whole process. It really doesn't work well in a lot of cases. I am thinking not only of “settled” but also interim pastors. One of the best calls I was involved in went completely outside the current process.”*

ROLE OF CHURCH IN MINISTRY

Association Church in Ministry Committees play a varied role in the Search and Call process. Most frequently, they are involved in transferring Standing, granting Privilege of Call or Dual Standing, Licensure, and similar issues, with 38% of respondents mentioning these functions. Sometimes they also set standards and salary guidelines (7%), review the terms of the call (19%), and meet the clergy, either before or after they are called (17%). This practice was mentioned most often in the Mid-Atlantic Region, with over half of those who described this practice coming from that region. Because the survey did not ask specifically about these functions, the percentages of respondents who mentioned them are probably underestimates of those who would have agreed with these functions had they been asked directly. Similarly, while 21% responded that they had no role, some of these may have agreed that the Church in Ministry Committees perform these functions, if asked.

In 17% of the surveys, the Church in Ministry Committees had a more extensive role. This included providing a liaison to the local church search committee for support, conducting the election of the candidate, and installing the pastor. Two conferences are planning to use trained Church in Ministry Committee members to assist staff in resourcing churches. Two do so already in difficult situations. One Conference Minister, however, said *“I believe it is important to keep Church in Ministry members out of dual roles.”*

CONCLUSIONS

Responses from Conference Ministers, Conference Search and Call Coordinators, clergy seeking calls and local churches seeking pastors all suggest that the majority of users generally are satisfied with the process. However, in each case, a significant number say that the system has major shortcomings, and just about everyone believes improvements are needed. The more common problems include:

1. The Search and Call process takes too long and is too complex.
2. The process works least well in churches with part-time pastors, especially those who are less than half-time. These churches are a significant and growing proportion of all UCC congregations.
3. Different procedures in each conference make cross-conference searches difficult.
4. Conference staff play an important role in the success of the process, yet with decreasing staff in many conferences, they have less time for this function than in the past.
5. Clergy do not believe that the Employment Opportunities listings give them enough information on which to make a decision about submitting their profiles.

SOME RECOMMENDATIONS

A. SHORT-TERM IMPROVEMENTS TO THE PRESENT SYSTEM

Conference staff, clergy, and local church search committee members all had suggestions about how to improve the system. Many of them are worthy of consideration and could be done immediately without the need for major changes. They include:

1. Continue efforts to streamline the on-line system, including fixing computer issues such as difficulty printing forms, changing references, adding a text counter, etc. Add links to sermons either in written form or on Youtube.
2. Eliminate or shorten the 6-month waiting period to change a Ministerial Profile, or at least provide for exceptions.
3. Review both Ministerial and Local Church Profiles to shorten the forms and remove redundancies. For example, in the Local Church Profile, congregations are asked to describe both their strengths and particular interests, and then describe what they are now doing and what they want their new pastor to do in a list of areas. Not only does this repeat information but it probably encourages congregations to exaggerate what they do, so as to look as attractive as possible in every area. Also in the Local Church Profiles, choose which information is important enough to justify inclusion on every Profile, and

which, such as whether the church has a variety of written policies, is less critical for a candidate to know in considering the church.

4. On both Profiles, eliminate the checklists, possibly replacing them with an Appreciative Inquiry-type section where clergy reflect on the areas of ministry in which they feel particularly gifted or particularly enjoy. Ask references to do the same.
5. Provide an option for an Updated Background Check, rather than requiring a complete new check after 18 months.
6. Expand the Employment Opportunities listing to include additional key information about congregations, such as attendance trend information, a salary range, and a link to the church's website. The mini-profiles and brochures now used by some conferences may be a good starting point.
7. Add an item to the Ministerial Profile that briefly describes the pastor's theology, or provide more specific instructions to include theology in the Statement on Ministry.
8. Develop an online resource that summarizes each conference's Search and Call procedures. Encourage more consistency across conferences.
9. Continue to develop and use the "Designated Pastor" or similar options.
10. To address concerns from clergy that Local Church Profiles do not always accurately reflect the church, consider adding a few structured questions about church vitality such as those used on the Vital-o-Meter. Norms based on national samples of UCC congregations could be provided so that the church could be compared with others.

B. RETHINKING THE SYSTEM

Responses to the surveys suggest the need for two more significant changes in somewhat opposite directions. These could be developed and piloted in a few conferences to identify problems and test their acceptance by different groups of users before being implemented on a larger scale.

A Searchable National Database

Develop an even more computerized Search and Call system. Clergy seeking a call would upload their Ministerial Profiles on the system as at present. Local churches would do so as well. Then clergy, churches, and conference staff would be able to download Profiles of interest to them directly from the database. This would save conference staff time so they could spend more time training and coaching local church search committees.

The system would be searchable. Clergy would be able to search Local Church Profiles on size, geographic location, type of ministry (full or part-time, associate, senior, or solo pastor), salary range, and particular needs or skills desired in a new pastor (by selecting from a list of keywords). Local churches or conference staff would be able to search Ministerial Profiles on openness to and experience with different types of ministry or different geographic areas, salary range, and particular skills and experience (choosing from a list of keywords).

Information that could be used to discriminate against otherwise qualified candidates such as race, gender, age, and sexual orientation would not be available as search criteria.

Concerns have been raised that computerized searches can be used to discriminate, although research has shown that the reverse is more likely true. A computer list of candidates selected on the basis of skills or experience often includes people who might not have been considered because their race or gender makes them less visible to those of the dominant group.

Such a system would need confidentiality safeguards for clergy built in so that it would be accessible only to those legitimately involved in searches. However, the present system with requirements for ten recommendations, some from the current local church, also has potential confidentiality issues.

The system should provide multi-level information for both clergy and churches. A first level might include a few pages with key information. A second level would have more complete Profiles with references, while a third level could include supplementary information such as sermons, Youtube videos, links to websites, and church newsletters, annual reports, and reports from self-study processes.

The Presbyterian system (<https://clc.pcusa.org/asp/OpportunitySearch.aspx>) is an example of what such a system could look like. The church database has a page of searchable categories, which provides a list of churches meeting the search criteria. A click on a church identifier produces a fairly brief local church profile. The clergy database has a fairly brief profile that can be searched by regional executives.

More Limited Searches

Formalize the process used by some conferences in which churches are given a limited number of candidates to consider, rather than conducting a full search, and expand the existing “Designated Pastor” option. This alternative would be appropriate for small churches with part-time pastors or other situations where finding candidates is difficult. Conference staff could find candidates using both the PL&L database and their own resources. Openings would still be listed in the Employment Opportunities, and clergy who wanted to be considered would have their Profiles forwarded. Conferences that already use a similar process could help develop a more formalized model, sharing their best practices.

With the consent of conference staff, churches might complete only a brief first-level Profile, rather than engaging in a lengthy self-study. Similarly, clergy from other denominations, seminary students or recent graduates, and licensed ministers might be encouraged to complete and submit a first-level Ministry Profile along with a resume or profile from their own denomination.

Local churches could choose the alternative they thought fit them best, with the option to change to the other as their search proceeded. That is, some local churches might begin the process by searching the national database, but, if they become overwhelmed with the number of profiles to review or discouraged when few of their choices are available and interested in them, they might ask the conference staff for a limited number of “good” candidates to consider. Or they might start with a few candidates and then decide to search the database to widen their applicant pool. The two alternatives thus would compliment each other.