

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

The following questions were compiled by the Countryside Moderator Team and the Transition Leadership Team (TLC) in response to questions about the process during the transition between the resignation of Countryside's called ministers and the hiring of the interim ministers.

Q: Can Pastor Tracey and Pastor Anna be considered for the settled minister positions filled by our future search committee? I know that was true at one point, but I thought I heard that had changed. Could you please clarify?

A: In the past, it was common for churches, including Countryside, to call ministers during an interim period between settled ministers, who would serve during that interim period only. Those ministers did intentional interim ministry for a living. They chose to only have short-term calls during an interim, and assist congregations to search and call their next settled ministers. The congregation moved that minister here to serve, and paid housing allowance during their tenure. Then, after a year or so, they moved on to the next town that called them. It was their intentional choice to move from congregation to congregation.

We (your elected Countryside leadership Moderator Team, and the Transition Leadership team itself) worked closely with both our UCC conference locally, and a number of folks nationally, last fall, to look at this interim period and discern what best fits Countryside. We were informed that about 20 years ago, the conventional wisdom about intentional interim ministers began to shift, to allow those called during interim to also be considered for the settled position.

This option, to allow interim ministers to be considered, if they choose, for the settled positions, honors the independence and congregational spirit of Countryside. If we as a congregation fall in love with one or both of our interim ministers, and they fall in love with us, it seemed to be in our best interest to allow the search committee and the congregation as a whole to have a voice in that. If we had chosen to not allow that process to go forward for an all congregation discernment and discussion, the small group committee of Council (TLC) would have had the only voice in that. We are congregational, and of course, we want congregational input as far and wide as possible throughout this process and beyond. That's the beauty of Congregationalism!!

And so, Pastor Anna and Pastor Tracey will have the choice to apply for the two settled positions that the search committee decides that Countryside needs. In the meantime, the Executive Leadership Team has been tasked with co-leading the discernment process with our congregation, with the help of those of us in lay leadership. That discernment and discussion, with a myriad of opportunities, and HIGH ENCOURAGEMENT to participate in the process for all in our congregation, will begin soon, after we give our two new ministers a chance to get their bearings. They have only been here a few weeks.

Q: Why didn't a search committee choose our new ministers? Isn't that how we choose ministers per our bylaws?

A: Indeed, we choose our permanent, settled ministers through a search process and a search committee that is prescribed by our bylaws. That is the process that we will begin over the next few months. This is generally a lengthy process that includes discernment on who we are as a church, what direction our church is headed, and what attributes we need to get us there. Only after that does the actual search, candidate assessment, interview process and contract negotiation take place.

There are a couple of ways the “interim” time period, between the exit of one minister and the call of a new settled minister, have been handled by Countryside. In some cases, the church leadership feels that the current staff and remaining minister can handle things during the entire search process. The remaining minister becomes the acting senior minister during this period. In other instances, like before Eric Elnes was called as our Senior Minister, the Church Council hires an interim minister to lead the congregation during the discernment and search process. In that case, the interim was Rev. Tom Zoelzer.

One thing we want to point out, since our congregation comes from such varied denominational backgrounds, is that these decisions are made by the congregation. That is, the conference, in our case the UCC, does not have authority to “appoint” an interim for us. The UCC can provide guidance, but they do not have ministers on hand that they appoint to churches in need. This is vastly different from many denominations!

In this case, after Eric Elnes announced his resignation, the church council acted quickly to appoint the Transition Leadership Committee, per the recommendation of the Personnel Committee, to hire an interim minister. We all felt that due to the breadth of our current ministry, as well as our additional responsibilities as the Christian partner of the Tri-Faith Initiative, that operating with only one minister was not a good interim solution.

We are pleased to have our new interim ministers in place, and look forward to the congregational discernment and official search process per our bylaws, to choose our permanent ministers.

Q: How was the TLC formed? Who was involved in the decision to form the TLC?

A: Once Eric Elnes announced his resignation, the Personnel Committee worked to come up with a recommendation on how to move forward for the interim. They recommended to the Church Council that a Transitional Leadership Committee (TLC) be formed to hire an interim minister. Four members were recommended for the committee - three from the Personnel Committee, and one for a different perspective. The Church Council, in an emergency session to get the process rolling as soon as possible, approved the formation of the Transition Leadership Committee, making the TLC a committee of the Church Council. All actions recommended by the TLC were approved by the Church Council before implementation.

The Personnel Committee, per our bylaws, is made up of the Moderator Team, the Chair of Trustees, the ministers, the Director of Administration and the Treasurer.

Q: How are major decisions made in our church?

A: As a congregational church, the authority rests with the congregation. The Church Council is the governing body that acts on behalf of the congregation. In addition to the eight church boards, there can also be any number of committees of the church council that consider certain issues or aspects of church life or ministry. For any major decisions, the boards and/or committees then bring their recommendations to the Church Council, who make the final decisions.

Q: What is the LRC, and how was it formed?

A: At its April meeting, the Church Council created an ad hoc committee of the Church Council, the Leadership Relations Committee (LRC). This is Countryside’s version of a Pastoral

Relations Committee. You may remember when Countryside had a Pastoral Relations Committee, or know other churches who have one. Countryside had one until about 12 years ago. Having a committee like this is highly recommended by the United Church of Christ. With two new ministers to acclimate to Countryside and to support their work, it seemed like just the right time to bring such a committee back to Countryside. As part of the discernment process, the congregation will assess the merits of the LRC and make a decision about whether to continue it past the next Annual Meeting.

The Leadership Relations Committee includes four members of the congregation: Emily Wadhams, Al Cardona, Annette Sterling and Tom Scates. The two ministers, Pastor Tracey Perry and Pastor Anna Crews Camphouse, plus Dan Loven-Crum, make up the Executive Leadership Team. The **Leadership** Relations Committee (LRC) will mainly serve:

- As an advisory group to the Executive Leadership Team: sharing ideas, dreams, expectations, and concerns of the congregation with the leaders;
- As a support group for the Executive Leadership Team: interpreting roles, functions, boundaries, opportunities, and needs of the leaders to the congregation.

Q: Has the direction of our church changed with the transition to new leadership?

A: No. The interim ministers are not here to change the direction of our church. They actually love what they have heard about Countryside and our commitment to the Tri-Faith Initiative. It's one of the main reasons they both gave for being interested in coming here.

Q: Where did the idea of a Collaborative Leadership model come from?

A: The Transition Leadership Committee (TLC) wanted to get ideas from Chris Alexander and the staff regarding what they thought was important in a new minister. The TLC had multiple conversations with Chris, the administrator, Dan Loven-Crum, and the program staff. Over and over we heard the theme of needing and wanting collaboration. We have a terrific staff, and it was important to us to take their input very seriously. Chris Alexander especially emphasized the importance of collaboration to her as the church moved forward.

The TLC also knew that we had two good leaders in Dan Loven-Crum and Chris Alexander. We started to research and discuss how we could best utilize the talents that Dan and Chris brought, ensure that the environment was collaborative, and design what we then really needed in an interim minister. We discussed this idea with our conference search and call minister, Rev. Darrell Goodwin. Darrell noted that more churches are moving to a collaborative model; that it appears to be the direction that a large number of churches are heading, or at least discussing seriously. In addition, he pointed out that an interim period is the perfect time to try out a different model; the church then gets to try it and make adjustments as necessary, then decide if it should be made permanent. We found a similar-sized church that had a good reputation that has used a collaborative model for over a decade, University Congregational UCC in Seattle. We contacted them, and had a lengthy conversation with two of their ministers. We learned that they love and are committed to their collaborative model.

After this and much more research, we put together an idea of how we could divide the leadership work of our church into three pieces, and have Dan, Chris and a new minister take those roles. We worked hard to have it be equal in authority, major duties and responsibilities. We then ran it by Dan and Chris for their input, and made some changes accordingly.

In October, we presented the Interim Model of Collaborative Leadership to the Church Council. They approved it.

Q: Why didn't we just start a search for a senior minister right away and form a search committee?

A: The search and call process is generally a lengthy process that includes discernment on who we are as a church, what direction our church is headed, and what attributes we need in a minister to get us there. Only after that discernment does the actual search, candidate assessment, interview process and contract negotiation take place.

In order to have leadership in place while the lengthy search and call process takes place, we formed the TLC to hire our interim minister(s).

Q: When will a search committee be formed?

A: As is the general practice when a minister leaves, the church needs to go through a congregational discernment process to assess where we have been, and what God is calling us to. Once that is well under way, the search committee will be formed and the search process begun in earnest. The search committee will need to complete a church profile, which is a lengthy document detailing who our church is and what we are about (learned from the discernment process). Once the congregational discernment process is underway, the process to form the search committee will begin.

Q: I was surprised when Chris Alexander resigned. Was this expected? What effect did it have on the work of the TLC?

A: We on the TLC were surprised with how things ended with Chris Alexander. Many ideas of options to proceed during this interim period between settled called ministers were discussed with our UCC Conference Minister and among members of Personnel, including Pastor Chris. With the urging of our UCC conference leadership, a small group was formed to answer to Church Council and work diligently during this interim period as a transition for the leadership to be able to get feedback from staff and membership and set up this interim time to run smoothly for Countryside.

The TLC had several conversations with Pastor Chris about what she thought would be best for Countryside, heard her desire for collaboration, and worked to develop a collaborative model and job description that met her skills and desires, even changing it again after hearing what she thought fit her best. We thoughtfully and prayerfully put together from this and all the other discussions, input and research we had done, what we felt was the best path forward for Countryside.

Unfortunately, it became clear to us pretty quickly that Chris was not happy with the results. We tried further discussions with her, to no avail. This was a very difficult time for the TLC. We were

worried that we had caused the church more trouble, heartache and pain. Obviously, this was the opposite of what we were attempting to do. (Yes, many sleepless nights occurred!)

When Chris ultimately discerned that her calling was not to stay with Countryside, we were wrapped up in the changes her decision brought for the next several weeks. Then we had to relook at the Interim Model of Collaborative Leadership, to determine if this was still the best path forward for Countryside. We decided it was, then had to add another church profile, another job description, and begin searching for not one, but two, new ministers. In all, it set us back for 2 - 3 months.

In hindsight, it seems God's will was with us. We were able to call two interim ministers to live into the model that we created with the input of our wonderful staff and our excellent administrator, now Director of Vision and Stewardship, Dan Loven-Crum, as well as Chris, who is no longer with us, but had a big hand in creating it. We know that this is just an interim model, and that the congregation will need to discern if it is truly the permanent direction Countryside will take, but we think trying this model will teach us a great deal during the interim, and help us together create the very best future for Countryside.