

Updates from the Pastoral Search Committee

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August 2010 "Night Driving"

Greetings, dear Olivetian friends,

We are now nearing the end of our time with The Rev. Anne Swallow Gillis. What a tremendous gift it has been to have her leadership and heart. It seems almost a miracle that we could attach so positively, warmly, and beautifully with someone else following our long and beloved relationship with Rev. Marc Cox. We have learned so much from this. That we are more than our minister. That God is our true lead. That God is faithful. That in loss there is space for gain and healing and hope. That our community holds such space and that creation continues to unfold right in our midst.

We now face transition again. There will be a period of time between Anne's leaving and the arrival of a new settled minister. I know in my own life that these transitions and griefs are times when I lean into God more strongly. It is time for my faith to grow stronger in what I can not see. It is like night driving and I can only see a little bit ahead, but enough to get me where I need to go and when I get there, I drop to my knees with thank yous to God! (Night driving is not my favorite thing to do!).

Please know that the search committee's vision is becoming clearer and clearer. It won't be too much longer and our night driving will turn to day. It always does. It is how our skies are made.

We have been in the midst of dialogue with four candidates, intensely so with two. Four remarkable human beings. We are filled with hope and promise. It is difficult to know exact dates of anything as I write this, but the goal of inspiration and call is finally feeling within reach. We will notify you of clarity when we can.

Again, thank you for all your input with the survey, focus groups, informal

conversations, and prayers. Your placing this task into our hands has been of a great and humbling honor.

All with love, every step,
Rachel Awes, Co-Chair,
Olivet Pastoral Search Committee

July 2010 “Clarity”

Years ago, when I spent my early morning hours writing in a corner table at Coffee News Café, I would often glance across the street with mixed feelings of longing and bemusement at the empty storefront with the hand-painted sign “Clarity” above the door. The notion that one could walk into a store and find “clarity” for sale seemed strange; stranger still that there didn’t seem to be enough demand for it to keep this small enterprise afloat.

As the Search Committee winds its way along the final stages of calling a new pastor to join us in ministry at Olivet, I am reminded of that sign above the abandoned storefront. I wish that I could offer all of you some clarity at this point, something more, that is, than the bare fact that out of the more than 55 candidates presenting themselves for consideration there remain only two final candidates with whom we are engaged in conversation. We have read, and re-read, and re-read once or twice more everything the two final candidates have submitted in writing. We have heard their voices and seen their faces – albeit only digitally, and from a distance (arrangements are being made to meet both separately and in-person in the coming weeks). There is much that we could tell you about each one, much that we excitedly WANT to tell you, and yet much that at this point we can’t. There is still much to be talked over with the candidates and much to think through and pray over individually and in concert with each other. Each candidate is remarkable. Each is different. Each will inevitably play a role in renewing Olivet in different areas and in different ways. Each is deeply rooted in a faithful relationship with the triune God who has called them, as Jesus called Peter, to “feed my sheep” (that much IS clear!)

The choice will not be easy, or clear. The need to maintain confidentiality and to honor our call to prayerfully consider and finally choose one candidate to present to the congregation for a final vote at the end of this long process has all eight of us longing at times for a storefront we could walk into and emerge from moments later with as much freshly minted clarity as anyone could want. That kind of clarity – alas! – is not available, at least not yet. Which is not to say that clarity of some kind, the kind we implicitly ask for when together we sing that old hymn, “Be Thou My Vision,” is not available. That much I learned two weeks ago when as that day’s lector I read the epistle for the day. I can’t tell you the feeling that washed over me when I read the passage where Paul clears things up for the church in Galatia by setting aside all the Law can do to save them – all, by extension, that we in our own time try to do by

creating rules and structures, liturgies, committees and mission statements –declaring openly “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”

Now, that’s Clarity! Together, with a new minister of God’s choosing, we shall continue to claim and live toward it.

Roger Larson
Co-Chair
Pastoral Search Committee

June 2010: “Creation is at work”

The current season outside seems to be busy doing a number of things. One day full lilac blossoms and sunshine. Another day refreshing rains and a dimmer sky. Then come more birds singing and children wearing shorts and then back to a cozy sweatshirt. Sometimes everything in one day. Somehow we need it all. One part of life seems to feed into another and that bird and child and you and me wouldn't be the same without it.

Right alongside this season is the Pastoral Search Committee’s own with a variety of activities in our search process. The UCC conference office continues to send us Ministerial Profiles/applicants. We have now had two ads published in *The Christian Century* and we have received some letters of interest from potential candidates. The search committee continues to read all of these and compare notes with each other about whether we would like to pursue any of them further (while keeping in mind and heart the input of our congregation from our surveys and focus groups). We have also sent out a round of questions through e-mail to a handful of applicants of possible interest, to assess if we would like to continue to pursue them through phone interviews and in-person interviews. The search committee is also busy brainstorming questions for these e-mails, phone, and in-person interviews.

To circle back, there's a lot going on here, similar to our outdoor season! In one moment, a beautiful bird song in how a candidate responds to an e-mail question and in another moment, the committee members' heads down and right to business with discerning what questions to ask and reading, reading, reading...and then prayer, refreshing rains, sunshine, God in it all. Simply a lot going on, and I imagine that's what happens when creation is at work.

One last note and that is of gratitude. I recently visited a family member's church. While it was lovely, I found myself restless. I tried to figure out what was stirring in me and then it was all so clear. I was homesick. I was missing my dear Olivet friends and home. A gift in the gut tug. I simply want to thank God for this and am faithful and hopeful for our sweet Father to be working ALL of this out for us, for our shared heart home.

Thank you for your ongoing prayers,

Rachel Awes, Co-Chair,
Olivet Search Committee

May 2010: “Surely this is the one.”

In the 16th chapter of I Samuel, Israel’s chief talent scout is scouring the back roads of Judea in search of a successor to his first “find,” Saul, who turned out not to be “the one” after all. Being naturally inclined toward orderly schedules and bedeviled by a near-worshipful regard for deadlines, Samuel sees Elias, the first of Jesse’s brood, and with an eye toward quickly putting

the “rustic charms” of Bethlehem behind him by sundown and returning to the comforts and customs of home and temple, pronounces “Surely the Lord’s anointed is now before the Lord.”

"Not!" said the Lord (or words to that effect). “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him: for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.” You know the rest of the story: after seven sons walk down the runway strutting their stuff, the eighth son, David, is summoned from hills where he is wrestling lions barehanded, throwing stones at imaginary giants, teaching himself to play harp and otherwise watching over his father’s sheep.

The Pastoral Search Committee, of course, is not looking for a king, however much the pressure of finding a successor to a 38-year ministry might sometimes make it seem that way. Still, the report filed on Samuel's talent hunt is instructive. We have received roughly three dozen profiles since filing Olivet's search profile with the UCC in early March, from which four or five have emerged as being sufficiently promising to merit further consideration by the eight-member committee. By that I mean that after privately spending anywhere from a half-hour to several hours poring over the 15-25 page profile submitted by each candidate, we each bring our best judgments to the table, discuss the merits or demerits of each candidate based on their profile (supplemented in some cases by additional insights gleaned from Google-assisted web research), then decide whether or not to move them to the next stage of the process.

To understand the effort that goes into reviewing each profile, I would urge you to recall the 43-item checklist of qualities you would like to see in the next minister, from which you were to select 12. Each of the candidate’s profiles includes this same list of qualities, with a column showing which 12 qualities the candidate checked off and eight columns showing which 12 their references checked. A 1-4 paragraph essay/letter of support from the eight references--friends/church members/ministerial colleagues follows. Poring over this section proved very time-consuming, particularly if, like me, the temptation proved irresistible to revert to childhood obsessions with baseball statistics. I devised an arcane system of tallying items checked, sorting and weighting them according to the priority Olivet members assigned each item, arriving at a total score by which each candidate could be measured against the others. Fun, but of dubious value, i.e., “the Lord doesn’t see as mortals see” (or calculate).

Of greater interest and insight--and hence requiring a greater investment of time--were the candidates’ essays dubbed “Statements on Ministry,” “Self-Appraisal Statements” and in some cases, “Supplementary Statements,” from which one gleaned the nature of each candidate’s call to the ministry and the gifts that he or she might bring to ministering with us at Olivet. A simple turn of phrase might be sufficient to light one committee member’s interest in a candidate and dim another’s. Which is where the collective discernment of the entire eight-member committee, and the love and trust that we have been blessed to nurture over the past year, inevitably comes into play. We are repeatedly drawn back or urged forward in our enthusiasm by one or more chastening or encouraging voices among us calling to mind all that we know of the congregation that called us, knowledge accrued through long or limited years of membership among them, or through the direct input of the surveys and discussions conducted last autumn in preparation of Olivet’s Church Profile.

We are moving prayerfully, deliberately, and faithfully toward calling a new minister in a timely manner, mindful all the while that for as much as we, like Samuel, would like to control the timetable, it is not for us to say “when” (or “Surely...”). We have four or five impressive

profiles in hand, and are soon to embark on a three-part investigative journey involving 1) e-mail queries and responses, 2) telephone interviews and, should there continue to be a high level of mutual interest, 3) in-person interviews. We anticipate receiving a second wave of profiles in response to ads placed in the April 20 and May 4 issues of *Christian Century*, from which we hope another four or five strong candidates will emerge and undergo a similar three-part investigative journey. We hope, but don't assume, that the three-step process can be completed with the first group in June and with a second group in July/August. Review of taped sermons and relevant written material, follow-up conversations with the candidates' three listed telephone references, possible visits to neutral church sites to review one or more candidates leading a worship service will ensue, followed soon thereafter by intense--or perhaps not-so-intense--committee deliberations that one hopes will yield a candidate to present to the congregation for consideration in early autumn. What that part of the process might involve and will require of the committee, the congregation, and the candidate will be the subject of a forthcoming update. In the meantime, please continue to keep us in your prayers as we patiently move forward toward the day when we might rightly say, "Surely this is the one."

- Roger Larson
Co-Chair

April 2010 Pastoral Search Update: "March Forth!"

I write this just a couple of days after March fourth. Last year our son Sam pointed out the double meaning of this date. It is also "March forth." Nestled in the expanded definition becomes an unfolding. A new birth. Courage. Taking deep breaths. Marching forward. Last year in our family this was a reference to my dad marching into heaven. This year for me it was about placing my artwork into a more public realm. My joy is expanded to imagine all the marchings for each of you at Olivet and all this is beckoning to become and blossom in you and in your families.

We also have a collective marching forth with our search for a new pastor. Here is also a new birth and asking of us courage and deep breaths! Although early in the stage of this process (having just completed our wonderful church profile with your helpful input!), we have begun receiving ministerial profiles. As this is beginning, we are working out new systems, like wording letters for acknowledgement to these candidates, and figuring out the best way to respond to them. We have also placed our Olivet ad with the UCC conference office and with the highly regarded national magazine *The Christian Century*.

We are also just beginning to imagine the interview process. Anne Swallow Gillis joined us in our most recent meeting to share her thoughts and wisdom regarding the interviewing process. (Thank you again, Anne!).

In sum, we are busy with some paper shuffling, file organizing, initial readings, interview imaginings, taking breaths, and marching forward. All with one little step at a time. Thank you again for your ongoing prayers and support in this process.

Yours in Christ,
Rachel Awes, Co-Chair

March 2010 Pastoral Search Committee Update

At the Annual Meeting on January 31, preview copies of Olivet's Church Profile were distributed to the congregation, marking the conclusion of the first step in the journey

to find Olivet's next settled minister. For those of us on the Search Committee it is the culmination of months of research, discussion, writing, and editing, which we are both relieved and grateful to have behind us. Olivet's 30-page profile, includes financial data and descriptions of church programs and committees. But most importantly, it is a narrative of who we are and what we hope and pray for the future. Preparing the profile was an opportunity for discernment. It now becomes a recruitment tool.

So now it is time to turn our hearts and minds to the next step – reviewing ministerial profiles. By the end of February we will have a short “ad” posted on the UCC employment opportunities website. (<http://www.ucc.org/classifieds/pdfs/ucem.pdf>). We will also be advertising in the *Christian Century*, a nondenominational magazine, considered to be the journal of record for American Protestants. Candidates who are interested in Olivet will submit their profile to us, and in exchange, be given a copy of Olivet's profile. After reading candidates' profiles, the Search Committee will decide which ones we want to get to know better by conducting interviews.

As we enter this next phase of the process, seeking to know the candidates' hearts by reading how they describe themselves, we will be leaning heavily on you for patience and prayers and on our Gracious God for inspiration and insight. We are reminded of the story of the blind man at Bethsaida. Jesus led the man out of the village, laid hands on him, and then asked if he could see. The man responded “I can see people, but they look like trees, walking.” (Mark 8:24) Then Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again and he saw everything clearly. May God give us such patience and clarity of vision.

Holly Stoerker
Member, Pastoral Search Committee

February 2010 Pastoral Search Committee Update

As we begin together into year 2010, we invite you into a summary reflection of our work together in 2009. Beginning with a hearty thank you, your prayer and input has been an enormous prize and we couldn't have accomplished what we have without you. As well, we thank God who is a lamp to all our feet and whose light and grace we are most dependent.

We began this work together with a couple meetings of getting to know each other more deeply. We then met once with the Reverend Elena Larssen, MN Conference UCC Minister, to learn more about the process involved in being on a search committee, and we soon after appointed members roles within the committee. Next we launched into a six-month process culminating in the final drafting of Olivet's church profile (primary recruiting document by which a congregation introduces itself to prospective pastoral candidates).

Much time and effort was put into putting this profile together from the entire

congregation. The committee put together a couple surveys for congregational input and also facilitated three focus group sessions. Following this, the committee worked to translate the congregation's responses into the format of the profile. We hope to have this document available to members for review by the end of January.

Also in January the congregation is invited to attend a contemplative and prayer-filled time called Vespers. At Vespers, there will be a recognition of winter, with its barren trees and stillness. There will be a listening for God's voice and pondering where He is leading us. This is true too for the search committee now. We do not know what tomorrow will look like but we lean into this deep winter forest and listen.

Yours in Christ,
Rachel Awes, Co-Chair
Pastoral Search Committee

January 2010 Pastoral Search Committee Update

The Pastoral Search Committee has been making steady progress on Olivet's search for a new settled minister. Thanks to all who took the time to thoughtfully – and patiently – fill out the congregational surveys; as noted last month, over 120 people completed the full survey. A statistical summary of responses was made available to the congregation in November following the third, and final, set of focus group discussions. These parleys were lively and informative. The opportunity they provided to reach beyond the limitations of solo performance the survey form demanded to share thoughts and feelings in a dynamic ensemble environment was both invigorating and illuminating; fittingly, the final session was held immediately following the worship service featuring the semi-annual Choir-for-a-Day.

With the conclusion of the survey process, the Search Committee has gathered weekly to begin analyzing and interpreting the voluminous narrative and statistical data harvested in the fall (well over 100 pages), faithfully and methodically kneading it into a first draft of the church profile. Upon completion of a final draft in mid-January, copies will be made available for members to review prior to the Annual Business Meeting on January 31. The profile will then be submitted in February to Elena Larssen, our conference minister at the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ, after which time the position will be publicized online for clergy candidates within the UCC, and ads will be placed soliciting candidates outside of the UCC. (Note: Hiring the latter would not in any way signify or enact a change in Olivet's status as a UCC congregation).

The eight members of the Search Committee ask for your continued support, input and prayers as we move through this enormously intense, time-consuming, but withal, uplifting process. We remain ever humbled by and ever grateful for the faith you have shown in us, knowing all the while that, at bottom, it is your faith in God and God's

patient willingness to work through the likes of us that truly matters.

Yours in Christ,
Roger Larson, Co-Chair
Pastoral Search Committee

December 2009: Pastoral Search Committee Update

Anne Swallow Gillis spoke about some things she is noticing lately outside. Mud and brown leaves. Blowing, stirring wind. A sense of wonder about what is coming next.

We have our own stirrings *inside* as well. 121 individual surveys. 77 household demographic surveys. 3 focus groups. Behind these numbers are people and their ponderings who matter greatly. Much time and care has been placed into such a task from so many of you. Much has been stirred. We also come to this place with a sense of wonder about what is coming next.

As for our search committee, we enter a time now of cradling your hopes and hearts' desires. As I write this, I sense hope as something that has life, it breathes, and is both strong and tender-hearted. This will also be a time of being on-task, crunching numbers, crafting summaries and sentences and imperfect symphonies, so that we can translate our collective voices into the format of our church profile.

There is one other involvement that is ongoing and deeply needed as we all move forward. This is the invitation of prayer. Prayer that the committee would have ears to hear and eyes to see what you all have just shown us and where God keeps leading us. Prayer that even right now, we would sense God's friendship and care for us amidst the stirring leaves... and prayer that we might all share this sense of wonder about what is coming next.

I just went on a walk. Stirred up my thoughts. I recalled Anne's children's sermon (which is always for me too...I listen intently). She spoke of learning to read and the excitement of reading the dear word *Jell-O*. Isn't it a yummy one? Oh, (and I think of) all the flavors...grape, orange, raspberry, lime...The word that bubbles up for me right now is *thank you*. Thank you to each and every one of you. We need you. We really do.

Happy Thanksgiving. Merry Christmas. Enjoy this time of pause and rest after such good work. Bless your precious being.

Rachel Awes, Co-Chair
Pastoral Search Committee

November 2009 Pastoral Search Committee Update

As many of you know, I have never been greatly enamored with deadlines.

Conversely, I have always been in awe of those who meet them, a feat no less than 80 of you have managed thus far with more than two days remaining before the October 25 deadline for returning the Pastoral Search/Congregational Survey issued October 4.

To me this seems nothing less than a miracle, a sign of grace. It is a gift, a reassurance, a reminder and confirmation of what I said when the committee was first called – that each of us were humbly aware of how many others in the congregation might serve equally well or better on this committee and that the task before us was not a burden we would bear in isolation, but a blessing given by God, a journey that we would share in common through the active input, presence and prayers of the full Olivet community of faith.

That same communal/collaborative spirit and process manifested by the congregation as a whole has informed the work of the committee from the beginning. I was reminded of that this week when, while soliciting a deadline extension, I simultaneously sought the committee's thoughts on what I might write: "I think it is critically important at this midway point in the profile process to, in a sense, unfold the map and lay it out on a flat surface, retrace the route we've journeyed together on thus far, then carefully walk and talk our way through the near and far reaches of the path ahead, with particular stress on the need to pay close attention to the next stage--the focus groups/congregational conversations--to ensure we stay focused and bound together in general agreement and resolve."

In response I received an e-mail from Holly Stoerker that said what most needs saying at this point, better than I could manage with an endless succession of deadline extensions, as evidenced in the following brief excerpts:

"...the fact that many members have spent the past few weeks working on the survey is worthy of note. We have all been taking this same journey (survey), during the same time period. Although we have answered the questions in the privacy of our own homes and hearts, it is, in fact, a shared experience.

"...I have been told by a few people that they really liked the survey because it gave them an opportunity to reflect on some important and fundamental questions and get a better sense of their own perspectives and confessed biases.

"I wonder....what does the confidentiality of the survey allow people to say that they would not offer in a focus group or even in a conversation among friends? How would responses be different (how would my *own* be different), if given as part of or following a community conversation, rather than in the echo chamber of my own thoughts? While the survey may have stimulated our private thinking, my hope is that the focus groups will bring us into community. As you say....'stay focused and bound together in general agreement and resolve.'"

Thanks be to God!

Roger Larson
Co-Chair

October 2009: Pastoral Search Committee Update

Greetings, dear Olivetians!

The Pastoral Search Committee is steeped in a work phase, are worker bees, buzzing with reviewing what we need to ultimately complete a comprehensive church profile, and with that, developing bridges/surveys/forums, to invite your insights and wisdom about our Olivet community to inform this document. Your feedback will be the needed sweet honey (speaking in worker bee language!). The church profile is what we will send out to possible candidates when the time comes.

To translate this more concretely, by the time you read this, you will have already received a one-page household questionnaire (due September 30). In addition, a larger survey will be mailed out to each of you in October. *This larger survey will likely be the most time-consuming effort we'll be asking from you this year.* Your participation is vital as we will dearly depend on listening to what your hopes and visions for Olivet are. We will also be facilitating forums in November (4, 8 and 11) at Olivet to invite in-person feedback about your hopes and visions, and we will bring particular questions and topics to explore to the table. More to come on that!

The surveys and forums are some of the more structured ways of providing communication with us and a system of mutual transparency/information sharing. We, as well, welcome your questions, ponderings, desires...to be shared with us at anytime! Please feel free to approach anyone on the committee in person and/or e-mail. In addition to our individual e-mails (found in the Olivet directory), we also now have a new e-mail for the committee as a whole and it is: OlivetPSC@gmail.com.

Our hearts thank you continually for entrusting us with this process and our joy will be complete as you increasingly join us in this journey. Please continue to hold us in your prayers.

Rachel Awes
Co-Chair

September 2009 Pastoral Search Committee Update

This week marks the beginning of yet another cross-country running season at the Larson house, a late summer/early autumn ritual going back to Soren's freshman year at St. Paul Central. My seven years' experience watching cross-country races may help shape or reshape how you see Olivet's pastoral search process.

Unlike track races that are run in repetitive laps around an oval track in full sight of fans in the stands, 4K and 5K cross-country races are run on golf courses, in city parks and nature preserves. The starting line and finish line are the only two places where the spectator can see the runners clearly. In many ways, your role as members of the congregation and the role of the Search Committee members are analogous to those of spectator and runner in a cross-country race. I know it's hard for you, wanting to know how the race is going, but not being able to see much of anything at this point. All I can do is assure you that we will soon be back in sight for a brief stretch in September and October.

We have steadily made our way this summer through the initial steps of putting together the UCC church profile, determining which informational gathering tasks are best assigned to individuals and/or committees outside the PSC and which should remain within and deciding on realistic deadlines. Meeting two successive Mondays at the end of August, we will craft a single, comprehensive survey for Olivet members to fill out in September and settle on a course for survey collection and follow-up incorporating individual conversation and correspondence, one or two focus group sessions, and larger, freer-form Wednesday evening forums in October and November.

Once that phase is completed, we will disappear from sight again, taking time to carefully craft within the committee a church profile that will faithfully present our church whole: as it was, as it is, and as it prayerfully thinks it might yet be called to be. When we reach that point in "the race" where the profile is completed and ready for submission, ready, that is, for candidates to read, you will see us again and will have a chance to review and comment (January seems like a safe and sober target date). For now, I would urge you all to look at the poster hanging outside the kitchen to get a sense of the process, of the course over which the race will be run. For all the frustrations built into it, open and hidden stretches, it does include a finish line. I look forward to seeing you there and at other points along the way.

Roger Larson
Co-Chair,
Pastoral Search Committee

July 2009 Report from the Pastoral Search Committee

In reflecting upon what I wanted to say in this report, I was thinking about how there is a time for everything under the sun, and what this initial season of our own formation as a search committee is looking like...it's hues and intonation and lines.

The committee together watched a video about other churches going through the search process and staying open to who God was calling to their church and of the joy in this revealing. The video opened with sunshine glistening on a body of water. I'm not sure why that image was selected by the filmmaker, but what I found striking was how we

are all moved by such illumination. We seek it out, take pictures, and share it with one another. Likewise, as the committee is just forming now, we are seeking light and sight, of God, each other, and our beloved church community. We are taking time to pray, with the leadership of our appointed committee chaplain Tim Polk. As well, we are deeply grateful for prayer from and for our congregation, as our appointed committee secretary (and Olivet's senior deacon) Holly Stoerker has initiated a prayer in our weekly bulletin. We are also taking time to get to know each other on the committee, both personally and in regard to the roles we can each contribute to the process.

We have only begun to acknowledge the initial tasks ahead: of coordinating our work with the important work the church's transition committee has been accomplishing, and of selecting a survey to begin to listen to what is stirring in our dear Olivet member's hearts and minds in regard to what specific desires/hopes/values are there for our next pastor, and in creating a church profile. We are so thankful for your prayer and support of this process!

In full reliance on our great Shepherd's leading and sweet pasture,

Rachel Awes, Co-Chair