

# Frequently Asked Questions

February 26, 2017

updated 2/28/17 following our meeting

## **1. What is the objective criteria that the East Shore congregation will need to meet in order to "call" a minister?**

Our Search Committee said the following in their recent statement:

While our congregation has begun making important progress in addressing various areas of concern we determined that further work is needed to heal wounds related to loss of staff and changes resulting from that loss:

- clarifying the church's unifying mission and vision;
- stabilizing our governance structures;
- developing greater trust among the congregation; and
- embracing an active culture of Right Relations in resolving conflicts

Each of these bullet point items is in progress now. We are currently engaged in clarifying our mission and vision. We will vote on March 5 on our new mission. The Board, Staff Leadership Team, lay leaders and the church as a whole have been working to clarify and stabilize our governance structure. The congregation, leadership and individual members are striving to develop greater trust in one another. Finally, the need for a Right Relations culture has been identified and planning to bring this to fruition is underway.

East Shore is a vibrant, values-driven community of passionate people. Our search was not a failure but rather an opportunity to continue to give our full attention to achieving wholeness with one another.

## **2. What is Right Relationship mentioned in one of the bullet points of development needs? How does it relate to our current principles?**

Right relationship is a process where differences can be shared in safe space. The specifics of it can be learned and practiced to help congregations deal with conflict in more harmonious and productive ways. It can become an agreed upon covenant or code of conduct for the whole congregation. Models for this are

being actively researched and no decisions have been made yet about next steps but this work is a priority.

### **3. What is the change we are implementing with policy based governance that is different from what we adopted ten years ago?**

Clearer designation of board, staff, and member authority and roles, effective ways to monitor policy implementation and adjust it based on feedback from stakeholders, more diligent use of goals and strategic planning to provide direction toward mission. More detail can be found in the Power Point used in the three Governance 101 sessions held in November and December of 2016.

### **4. What do we do next?**

Unlike settled ministers, who are voted by the membership, our bylaws give the Board of Trustees the authority to contract with interim ministers. Despite this authority, the Board actively seeks membership input. The Board could decide for a one year interim or a two year interim. If we choose one more year of interim, we may essentially repeat this year with energy and attention on forming a search nominating committee to then form a search committee that begins their work before ESUC has confidence that the interim work is completed and the congregation is truly ready for search.

The Board also decides if we are to retain our current interim minister or enter the UUA application process. Rev. Peresluha is available for either a one or two-year period. There is also a choice of developmental ministry that usually lasts between 3-5 years and is highly coordinated by the UUA.

### **5. Is there a timeframe where the criteria will be met and what is that timeframe?**

The timeframe depends on us. We thought we could accomplish our interim work in this time period, but we were unable despite our best efforts. This is okay. We have done a lot in this past year. Now is a time to reflect on our achievements and as well as a time to more deeply understand the work that is yet undone. We may need more than one year to complete our interim work.

**6. How far do we need to go in each of the four bullets to be ready for a new minister? And what can we do as individuals to help that process? What does it look like?**

We can know East Shore's purpose. As individuals, we can accept and embrace new members while still honoring those who have sustained this church for many years. We can act in appreciation of our community and learn to have difficult conversations in harmonious ways. We will know it when we are on the road to doing this.

**7. Does the minister search committee have feedback from candidates that would establish what is missing and can those be shared?**

Our Search Committee has said the following:

“Over 20 ministers indicated an interest in becoming our settled minister. We spent numerous hours reading and assessing their Ministerial Records and reviewing their websites and sermons. We reached out to references and had hours of video conference calls with the final list of candidates. It was noteworthy that a recurring inquiry from candidates was whether East Shore was ready for a settled minister. It appeared to some candidates the congregation was still working on completing many important tasks: implementing Policy Based Governance, developing its mission and vision, revising bylaws and policies, and grieving over the loss of two ministers.

We decided to wait until the completion of the congregation's weekend retreat to do a final assessment of the needs and desires of our congregation before identifying the ministers to bring to bring to East Shore for in person interviews. Now, after evaluating all the information available to us, we determined that none of the candidates were a good match for East Shore's current needs.”

**8. Will a new search committee be formed when the search is resumed?**

According to our by-laws, we will vote to dissolve the current search committee (or not) at our upcoming June meeting. If it is dissolved, we will then form a new search committee, beginning first with the work of a search nominating committee, appointed by the Board of Trustees.

**9. How much of what was done can be reused or does the committee start from scratch with the resultant cost?**

Our Search Committee did a tremendous job. Much of their work can be updated and used in subsequent searches. We again, thank them for their hard and thorough work.

**10. How much did the UUA affect the decision that East Shore was not ready to call a settled minister?**

The Search Committee came to this decision after considering first and foremost input from the congregation through Listening Sessions, Cottage Meetings, Town Halls, and the Summit weekend. UUA and Rev. Elaine Peresluha were consulted about the search procedure and options open to us, but both were careful to avoid making recommendations or giving advice concerning the decision, which lies solely with the Search Committee.

At the outset of ESUC's search process, representatives from the UUA believed that ESUC needed a longer interim period than the one that we set forth for ourselves given the length of Peter's ministry and the way that it concluded. It is important to note that the UUA did not influence East Shore's search process in any way.

**11. How much did the interim minister affect the decision that East Shore was not ready to call a settled minister?**

Rev. Elaine Peresluha has been incredibly responsive to the desire of ESUC to call a minister this year. She has worked tirelessly to prepare us. She has been a key resource in the strengthening of our governance structure, a leader in surfacing and managing conflict, and a grounding presence in our pulpit. She was not part of the Search Committee's decision. The Search Committee alone made the decision that no candidate was a good match for East Shore's current needs.

**12. Since we have spent a year with this interim minister and not reached a point of calling a minister, is the board considering that a different match with a**

**different interim minister needs to be considered? This would include different techniques rather than replaying the process that has been used to this point.**

Yes, this is being considered. There are pros and cons associated with continuing with our current minister and with engaging a new person. Both scenarios are being weighed. The Board will ultimately make this decision but a conclusion has not yet been reached. This open Q & A is one of the ways that the Board is soliciting feedback from members. Members are also encouraged to share their thoughts with Board members individually, in person or via email.

**13. Is there a cost difference between Elaine and a new interim?**

Contracts for both are negotiated confidentially. However, both would be in standard range for church of our size and location. So the difference either way might be a few thousand dollars.

**14. Since some of the resolution of concerns appears to be around staff and governance, is the board considering reviewing the current staff and how well the governance is working with all of the staff, board, and membership?**

Yes, our policy based governance model is not fully implemented. It is an iterative, dynamic process. To help further our goals, the Board recently created a Policy Committee. This will be a Board standing committee. The charter will be available soon for all to review. Membership recruitment for this important committee will be finalized in March and their work can begin immediately.

The Board does not have significant concerns about the qualifications or performance of our staff and does not believe that they were a factor in the outcome of our search process. However, through the strengthening of our policy-based governance model, the Board's oversight of the staff leadership team (minister, DFO, DRE) has strengthened considerably.

**15. Was the interim process between Leon Hopper and Peter Luton this difficult?**

Bob Kaufman was here for two years as an interim. There were numerous significant differences of opinion about him, not unlike what we are experiencing now.

**16. I'm unhappy with the wording of our mission statement. Why can't we change it?**

ESUC has been working to update its mission statement for the past 3-4 years. The process that we just undertook was the work of several months beginning with the listening sessions and culminating in the January Board Town Halls and the February All Church Summit.

On February 5<sup>th</sup>, the majority of the people attending our meeting agreed that they wanted to move forward with a vote on one of the seven options. Two top choices were selected and a vote will be taken to select one on March 5<sup>th</sup>. Keeping the current mission was an option throughout the process, but it did not gain enough support for it to be one of the choices now. It is important to note that not a single person in January Town Hall concerning our mission statement, knew what it was.

**17. Can we reconsider our process/timeline for our Mission Statement now that we have more time before a new minister comes?**

We have already spent a long time working on Mission/Vision while using an old one that does not provide the needed active verbs to provide effective direction for visioning, goal setting, and strategic planning. We used a democratic process to determine the desire to vote. At that time, we knew that the process and words may not be perfect, but could be reviewed more often in the future and changed as we develop further. This is a necessary step for further governance work to occur this spring.

**18. What will happen with all of the other work we did at the All Church Summit?**

The goals and vision statements created during the summit are being followed up on to assure their completion and integration into our governance structure, vision statement and ongoing programming such as out reach, earth/social

justice, worship and membership. Each of the 12 groups either has a facilitator or staff member following up with them to make sure they achieve their goals or redefine them.

Once a mission is voted on, a Vision Task Force will be formed to pull together the great work we produced at the Summit. A draft vision will be presented in a Town Hall prior to our Annual Meeting. We will vote to approve (or not) our vision statement at the Annual Meeting.

The Board will also review all of this material and reformulate our “Ends.” “Ends” are similar to strategic goals in the parlance of policy-based governance.

Statements/Comments from people in attendance:

- Let’s move forward with the mission statement so that we can accomplish the other important work.
- We are making good progress in a tough situation. Let’s respect the process and vote for a mission. We can debate exact words forever. Let’s embrace this change and see how our chosen mission stands the test of time. If we don’t do this, how will put in the place all that is dependent on it? We may still not be ready next year. The process is not perfect, but when will it ever be?
- I hear there are concerns about the mission statement. At the same time, we are in a period of rapid spiritual growth, so we may need to change more often-like the shoe metaphor. Let’s not let perfection get in the way of good enough.
- I can take or leave the mission statement. What is really crucial and vibrant is the group work that went into statements and plans on the walls of this church.
- A lack of leadership will continue to create discord. Create methods for input in addition to Town Halls. Please set a time frame for when we will have a settled minister.
- Elaine has worked to do in one year what is usually done in two years. There are differences of opinion about how she has done. We need to think about whether she is part of the problem or part of the solution. We should advocate with the UUA for what we need and look broadly for the best match.

- I am more comfortable than some with the dissonance; sometimes you have to zig-zag to the top of the mountain. It feels like an exposed nerve, but we need to allow what is under the surface to come up. This is just the way the interim process is. The desire to make the discomfort go away can override our dealing productively with issues. We are doing exactly what we need to do. Getting a new interim means starting all over again and doesn't address the underlying problems.
- We need to have some success and feel like we are moving forward on mission statement and minister. I sympathize with difficulty of the issues.
- Elaine brings a strong and stabilizing influence especially in matters of social justice especially for these trouble political-social times. Many are heartbroken right now about what is going on. Being active on these issues is helpful.
- Suggest putting a link within this document to additional information that will clarify concepts such as Right Relations. Also have the name of one or two individuals to contact to learn more. \* There are many moving parts, but we are making progress through trial and error, step by step.
- We need to accept where we are. We need two years of Elaine. One year won't be enough.
- I've had negative experience with Elaine. Interim period should not be that hard. Maybe we didn't communicate clearly about what we wanted the interim to do. One year is not time to do the list. Congregation should e-mail Jack as to what they want.
- Regarding talk of it being common for interims to be let go, her research with UUA showed this to be the case in only 2 interims in the last seven years. There are individual differences in who each person might consider a good fit. It's the nature of the beast with us Unitarians.
- Few with young families are represented here. Elaine would be OK for one more year, not two because then it would like a developmental minister. How we treat and care for each other is important. Can we be healthy ourselves before helping the rest of the world?
- Interim ministers enter a mine field. Although some difficulties with staff and Elaine, there has been lots of good learning. We have invested a lot in that learning curve. Elaine gets along well with staff and supports their growth. A new interim may not have that strength.

- I can feel the tension and conflict. Who we get as minister reflects who we are. Are we committed to the process necessary to get someone more stable?
- Want to acknowledge the heart break of losing two ministers. Losing an interim would be another loss to deal with.

\*In order to publish this document in a timely manner, I was not able to find a good link to explain Right Relations as was suggested.

Please send all comments and questions to Jack Slowriver, Board of Trustees President, at [jackslowriver@gmail.com](mailto:jackslowriver@gmail.com).