Excerpt from UUA Transitions Handbook

<https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/transitional_ministry_handbook.pdf>

**Contract Ministry Overview**

Contract ministry is simply a congregation and minister making certain basic agreements for ministerial service. Most often, it is seen in part-time congregations. Any ministry of less than 75% (3/4 time) is considered a contract ministry by the UUA Transitions Office.

Contract ministry searches are for second ministry positions (assistant ministers), part-time ministers, and for smaller congregations seeking a solo minister. A congregational call is still possible with a solo contract minister, even one who is serving part-time (see the **contract-to-call process** in this handbook). Contract ministries are usually for a 1-year (or less) time agreement. They may be renewed. There should be no expectations by the congregation or the minister that the ministry will last longer than its term when the contract is agreed upon by both.

The process for finding a contract minister is simpler than a settled ministry search. It sometimes takes longer than congregational leaders might wish, depending on a number of factors such as timing of the search in the annual search cycle, geography, and compensation/percentage of time. Most contract ministries have a smaller scope of search. Contract ministry searches are expected to be conducted through the Ministry Search system, which will allow your search team to review the ministerial records of interested ministers. Using the Ministry Search system will require your search team to complete a profile in our system with questions about your unique ministry context.

**Search Process for Contract Ministries**

Contract ministry searches are expected to be conducted through the Ministry Search system, which will allow your search team to review the ministerial records of interested ministers. Using the Ministry Search system will require your search team to complete a profile in our system with questions about your unique ministry context. The contract search process is more flexible, sometimes faster, easier on volunteers, and less expensive than the settled search process.

**Timing of Contract Searches**

While a contract search does not have the series of deadlines and requirements that the settled search has, the settled search cycle influences all other types of search. Ministers, in general, search each year between December and April for positions which will begin on 01 August. Search teams will have a larger pool of potential applicants when they post a contract search profile in this window. If a congregation needs to find a new minister in the fall, it may be better served by a short-term contract with a Targeted Ministry Program minister so the contract ministry search will align with the main search cycle (see Targeted Ministry Program information in this handbook). Reaching out to your Congregational Life staff member or the Transitions Program Manager can help you determine how best to proceed.

**Steps to the Contract Search**

1. Since the board hires a contract minister, the board assembles the search team for a contract minister. The search team often has several board members on it. The board should choose search team members who understand the congregation’s ministry needs and context, are trusted in the congregation, work well with others, and do not have a personal or controlling agenda.
2. Even though formal surveys and focus groups are not required for a contract ministry search, leadership should spend some time listening to the needs and wishes of the congregation before a contract search, especially if trust is an issue in the congregation. Small group meetings, where some questions like the following are explored, will increase trust, buy-in, and momentum for the search process:
   * Why did you come to our congregation?
   * Why do you stay?
   * In the last ministry, I wish our congregation had had more \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
   * In the last ministry, I wish our congregation had had less \_\_\_\_\_\_\_
   * What do you hope never changes in our congregation?
   * What do you think could be improved with fresh perspective and energy?

If leadership wants to discuss what it learns from such conversations, they should feel free to contact regional staff. Questions such as these provide valuable guidance to the search team as it does the work of presenting the congregation to potential applicants and discerning the best choice of the ministers who apply for the position.

1. The board should work on the minister’s contract and let the search team know the minimum amount they expect to pay for the position. Our UUA website has comprehensive information on ministers’ salary and benefits [Compensation Standards and Resources]. UUA compensation consultants are available to help the board navigate decisions about compensation and benefits, as well [Compensation Consultants].

* UUA Geo Index Listing 2020-2021
* UUA Geo Index Listing 2021-2022
* Guide to UUA Salary Recommendations
* Benefits, Compensation, and Aid Funds (note: some benefits are required)

1. Once the search team is in place, the chair should share the names and email addresses of its members with the Transitions Office. UUA transitions staff will open a profile for the search team in the Ministry Search System, an on-line portal where searching ministers and congregations connect.
2. The search team should complete the profile, then let the Transitions Program Manager know that it is ready for review. The Transitions Program Manager is the member of our UUA’s Congregational Life staff group (field staff) who works exclusively to support congregations in ministerial transition. She and/or members of the regional staff team will review your profile for clarity, consistency, and a balanced view of your congregation’s unique strengths and challenges before posting your profile.

6. Once the search profile is posted, ministers will apply to the search team directly through the Ministry Search System. Search team members will receive emails from the system to let them know when they have applicants. They will be able to see applicants’ full ministerial records in the system. The search team should plan to gratefully acknowledge each application with a brief email and stay in touch with applicants throughout the discernment process (ministerial record and website review, interview, reference checking, etc.). The search team should provide applicants with a link to a folder (Google Drive, Dropbox, etc.) with:

* Bylaws
* Policies
* Recent board and annual meeting minutes
* Recent budgets
* Benefits information
* Employer Participation Agreement for the UUA Retirement Plan
* Anything else leadership wants to share with applicants

The search team may reach out to regional staff for a unique perspective on top applicants as part of the reference-checking phase of discernment.

1. As the search team makes decisions about applicants, they should be sure to use the “dismiss” button in the Ministry Search System. Doing so opens an email (which may be customized) to thank and release applicants who are no longer in consideration. Do not be shy about using this button! It frees applicants up to focus on ministries where their gifts align with congregational needs.
2. When the search team finds the minister who is best for the congregation’s needs, they may recommend a hire to the board. The board will negotiate and finalize the contract with the minister.

Important reminders about any ministerial search:

* Ministers are often looking at multiple congregations
* Ministers want clarity about what percentage of time they are being asked to serve
* The first consideration in a minister’s decision-making process is often compensation and benefits
* The more authentic a search team is about who they are and what they need from a minister, the more likely they are to get a minister who can serve them well
* Using the UUA’s Ministry Search system is more likely to get interest than just trying to get the word out. Use of the system is limited to ministers who are cleared for search. Ministers who have lost fellowship, not been credentialed as Unitarian Universalist, or have misconducted are not eligible to have their names released to search teams.

If you have questions, ask for assistance from the Transitions Program Manager or the Transitions Office.

**What to Expect**

Often a part-time position will best be filled by a minister who lives nearby, especially for a geographically isolated congregation. Your regional staff are often aware of local ministers who may be a good fit for your congregation.

Once you have hired your minister, please let us know so we can add your new minister's name to your congregation's record in the UUA database and the online directory and remove your listing from the Ministry Search system.

**Sample Contract Ministry Evaluation**

This form may be submitted electronically here.

Congregation:  
Minister:  
Evaluation for Time Beginning: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ and Ending: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
Person, completing/submitting evaluation form:  
Role in congregation:

1. What was effective/worked well during the contract ministry?
2. What did you want more of from the ministry?
3. What did you want less of or differently from the ministry?
4. What else should be known about the congregation and/or minister?