

Conference Minister Discernment Committee

2024 MMS Conference Annual Gathering Report

At the request of the Missouri Mid-South Personnel Committee, the discernment team began meeting in November of 2023. To begin our work, we compiled and reviewed documents, including but not limited to our current conference minister job descriptions, previous job descriptions, and job descriptions from conference ministers of other conferences.

After reviewing these documents, we held discussions with Mary and Damien to hear how their current job descriptions aligned with the lived realities of their jobs so that we could discern if there were areas of the job description that needed to change.

Seven listening sessions, with a total of 45 participants from throughout the conference, were then held to obtain broader feedback about conference leadership needs in the future. An additional two sessions were cancelled due to lack of registered participants.

We heard a lot of thoughts, hopes, opinions, and ideas through these sessions. A few highlights are as follows:

- Many people are feeling disempowered and disconnected
- There are differing opinions about requiring the conference minister to hold settled residency in our conference; however, those who support required residency do so with strongly held conviction.
- There are many qualities, roles, and tasks that we expect from a conference minister. Expected qualities include deep and uplifting spirit, trusting, transparent, visibility, excellent communication skills, relationship-building skills, ability to address trauma, availability in a crisis, ability to speak about sensitive and difficult topics effectively and in love, understanding nuances of rural/urban/suburban communities, and a desire to love and honor traditions. Expected roles and tasks include serving as pastor to the pastors, visionary, financial manager, HR manager, theologian, preacher, prophetic voice, representative and networker for us to the wider Church and vice versa, serving as a heart for the UCC and Church universal, and resource for churches and leaders.
- A few folks acknowledge that this is more than one person can do and it was named repeatedly that the conference minister needs to delegate and empower others to participate in this work.
- We heard a lot of competing responses to the question about the conference minister's social media presence. On multiple occasions individuals named that it should not be a priority, but in the next breath said that they liked seeing where the conference ministers had been in worship or gatherings that day.

With all of this information in mind, we worked to discern which pieces needed to be named in the job description. We agreed that it was not necessarily the list of tasks that needed to be greatly altered in the job description, but rather the spirit with which the tasks are presented. We added a substantial section about covenant, acknowledging and naming that the job of the conference minister is beyond a list of tasks and requires a sense of connection and accountability, both from the conference minister to the people of the conference, and from the people in our local churches to the conference minister. This will require a change in culture of this conference. While we know that putting this in the job description of the conference minister will not solely achieve this, we feel that it can be a starting point for naming the cultural change that needs to happen.

For the Committee,

Rev. Andrea Asselmeier, Chair

Committee Members:

Rev. Andrea Asselmeier (Grace UCC, O'Fallon)

Jon Bauer (member Zion UCC, Union)

Rev. Betsy Happel (Peace UCC, St. Louis)

Rev. Monty Jackson (Kindred UCC, St. Louis)

Tammy Linningham (Peace Christian UCC, Kansas City)

Rev. Brittany Scarangelo (St. Peter's UCC, Billings)