

September 15, 2024

Dear Friends,

Three months ago, I last updated you on the lead pastor call process. In that update I mentioned that if you looked at the bulletin board, you would see that the needle has not moved a bit, and it looks like “nothing” has happened and that one of these days I would be here to tell you that the call committee had finally found that special one.

Candidly we have not yet found that special one and not only has the needle not moved a bit on the bulletin board, but the entire call committee bulletin board has been moved to a less prominent spot. While you may not have said it out loud, I know many of you are thinking: “It has been 13 months since Pastor Bonnie preached her last sermon and now, we have not only one but two vacancies to fill. Every pastor should want to come to All Saints. What in the world is this call committee doing?”

From the outside looking in, the situation looks like death by committee.

Knowing that the names of the candidates and their current roles in the church and the deliberations of the committee must remain confidential, I want to give you the best glimpse of what the call committee sees from the inside looking out:

While the lead pastor position has been vacant for 13 months, only six months ago did the committee meet for the first time and only five months ago since our first candidate interview. Then remove the two months this summer that Pastor Abrams was on sabbatical, Bishop Dillahunt was attending to other things, including the Youth Gathering (no blame intended) and pastors typically are thinking about vacation and the start of school, not potentially starting a new call. If you do the math, in a period of three months, the call committee reviewed the applications received and requested and conducted interviews of multiple candidates. This equates to preparing for, meeting and assessing a candidate, including a two-hour interview, about every two weeks during that three-month period.

I will not speak to the qualities of any individual candidate or compare the qualities of the candidates as a group within the universe of ELCA pastors. However, the process of interviewing the multiple candidates has been robust, intense, conversational and spiritually enlightening. Those interviews have provided greater clarity to the call committee in a unifying way as to who is the right person to be our primary candidate for consideration by you.

Intuitively you would think that given All Saints' reputation in the Southern Ohio Synod, applications would abound. But remember that only 187 congregations are in the Synod and only 8900 are in the ELCA. In either group, large congregations are not the norm, while it may be tougher to find pastors for some of our smaller, more rural congregations, finding candidates who are qualified to lead a large congregation and its staff is not easy because that experience can be found in so few congregations. Yet we have already interviewed more candidates than most congregations receive in the call process.

The resignation of Pastor Scott was unexpected but not uncommon. Many associate pastors move on for personal or professional reasons after a close working relationship with a lead pastor. This call committee's task is to recommend a lead pastor and we will not be involved in anything related to the associate pastor vacancy. After the lead pastor is called and installed and has an appropriate time to acclimate to All Saints, Church Council will form another call committee to recommend an associate pastor. That call process will not likely have to produce a new ministry site profile since we did one so recently.

One last observation from the call committee from the inside looking out. If you think about the last 13 months, we have hired Deaconess Katharine, Older Wiser Lutherans has been resurrected, over 36 youth and 7 adults went to the National Youth Gathering in New Orleans, we have a budding young adults group, we have changed our worship times to allow for an enhanced educational time, we have two traditional and one contemporary services, our giving remains solid and maybe most importantly we have been blessed to have the consistent, wise and calm presence of Pastor Bill as our interim lead pastor. The Holy Spirit remains alive and working in this congregation despite having not called a lead pastor! You were shepherded in the past by good lead pastors at All Saints to do this and you should be proud of this. I can't think of any more important quality -- the Holy Spirit remains alive and working and you have responded to it -- that would attract a lead pastor candidate to this congregation and that other congregations in this Synod would aspire to.

Bishop Dillihunt, Pastor Abrams, the Church Council and the Call Committee remain confident and excited, and willing to be patient, in finding that right person to be called as our next lead pastor. And you should be, too.

That's the view from the inside looking out.

Tom Counts

Chairman

All Saints Call Committee for a Lead Pastor