

Report on Congregational Input Regarding a New Minister for PCF

Small Group Conversations, Questionnaires and Telephone Conversations

Introduction

In preparation for the selection of a new minister for the PCF it was decided to involve the congregation and ask for input before any other preparatory work was started. In November 2019, 96 singles and families on the PCF Congregational roll were called and invited to small group conversations. These groups ranged between 5 and 12 members to fulfill the purpose of interactive conversations. Some people responded by e-mail and answered an on-line questionnaire and some people responded by telephone. All of the participants were thoughtful and engaged; some came with written notes. Everyone was asked to give opinions and ideas from their own personal point of view.

This report is “your words” and not a summary analysis. While the report uses the word “minister” all information would apply equally to an Anglican priest or a Mennonite pastor. Any percentages used were for only those members who commented on a point or answered a question.

Point #1

Man or Woman – 100% were willing to accept a person of either sex as minister

Regarding a minister who is gay or lesbian, (with or without a partner), the majority were willing to accept this person BUT every group had one or two members who commented about “the older people might not be accepting” or “small town morals might make it difficult” or “we don’t want to split the congregation” or some other impediment was suggested.

There were comments also about the Anglican and Presbyterian main churches not accepting a minister or priest who was gay/lesbian.

A few members (less than 9%) would prefer a minister who would be willing to perform same-sex marriages.

Point #2

Suggested Age-Age doesn't matter to the majority. The person and their skills are more important.

The following are comments were given regarding the age of a new minister:

- NOT near retirement
- younger preferred but not right out of seminary
- young but with 4-5 years of experience (around 30 so they have some maturity)
- age doesn't matter but they must have energy and recognize that we are an older congregation
- young with a young family would be ideal
- only willing to accept an older minister if they would commit to a 5 year term

Point #3

Musical talent or ability seen as a bonus, not a requirement.

The following are comments regarding music and a new minister:

- would like the person to be able to sing or play an instrument
- must have some musical appreciation and recognize that music is important to our service and helpful to the congregation in worshipping
- choir and hymns are both important to us
- new minister must be willing to accept help if musical ability is not a strong point
- must see the value of music and provide some leadership in this area
- musical comprehension and appreciation would be an asset
- music skills or a sense of connection to music would be preferred
- music is important to our outreach programs (personal care homes)

- need appreciation of music so that hymns that have the right text are also singable
- need to have the ability to work with our musicians to prepare the service
- would like a minister who could interest kids in musical worship

Point #4

While any minister must have both preaching and pastoral skills our congregation is divided about which is the more important. It was almost a 60% preaching skills over 40% pastoring skills. Age of the PCF member did not factor into their choice. A good preacher needs to have a heart and show he cares.

Those favouring pastoral skills recognized that anyone new needs time to get to meet us, know us and grow into the role. It was also felt that the congregation needs to take on more responsibilities for pastoring.

Both sides were repeated : 1. preaching skills can be learned with more education but it is harder to teach the necessary personality skills to be a good pastor and 2. pastoring skills can be learned through education but it is harder to teach preaching skills. Congregational members could be trained for pastoral care.

We go to church to worship, not for the minister, but many felt people would not come if they couldn't understand the sermon.

Our outreach to the senior care homes is mainly pastoral care through a service.

Point # 5

Sermons and Sunday Service– What do we like and appreciate? What would we want to hear from a new minister?

The following are comments given:

- prayers clear and short
- like using the lectionary but occasionally studying one book of the Bible is OK; need both the Old Testament and the New Testament for balance

- minister must monitor the service to make everyone feel comfortable, use clues to read the congregation
- need consistency in the mechanics of the service; ritual is important
- thought provoking, challenging, reflective sermons that keep you interested
- sermons that give a different perspective on the Bible
- sermons that relate to the Bible readings
- able to use the Bible but make it relevant to the world as it is today and help us live in this world
- storytelling in a sermon is admired (or personal tidbits)
- relate to present day societal issues but be non-judgmental
- give us lessons about what we should be doing when we leave Sunday service
- relate the scripture reading to daily life
- teach something about church history.
- understandable, at a day to day level in plain language
- preaching that comes from an educational perspective with history, time and place included
- occasionally incorporate other religious thought
- don't preach dogma or "fire and brimstone", nor "hell and damnation"
- must be cognizant of who we are when planning services and sermons (4 different theological faiths)

Point #6

Four Denominations- 100% were willing to accept a minister from any of our four denominations. There were comments that generally speaking we don't know a lot about the Mennonite Faith. There were a few requests that we actively search for a minister from the United Church.

Comments included:

-must have an interest in ecumenicalism or be willing to learn and be involved with other denominations. There is a lot of meetings with four denominations and the minister must be efficient and able to select the most important.

-able to delegate some meetings to the members of the PCF.

-must be willing to worship with the Lutheran congregation when necessary (summer and some services throughout the year)

-see our four denominations as an opportunity to interact in new ways and try new things

Point #7

Personality Traits – while everyone acknowledged that a new minister would have to be “superman” to be the person with all of the following traits they are listed in order of most frequently mentioned to least mentioned. The first four were repeated most often.

-good communication skills; easy to talk to and a good listener; eloquence

-flexibility; open to change and willing to try new things; adaptable and without predetermined ideas

- open-minded; willing to take on the challenge of 4 different denominations

-friendly; interested in people and their lives; able to get along with both young and old; able to deal with a divergence of people; good social skills; approachable; outgoing

-kind, compassionate, caring, helpful, sympathetic, empathetic, a comforter, warm

- inclusive, everybody person, genuine, respectful, adapts to individual needs, makes everyone feel important, accepting of everyone; tolerant
- positive, upbeat, cheerful, happy, good sense of humour, enthusiastic
- curious, willing to try new things and learn
- energetic

Point #8

Skills Requested

- computer and technology skills; we have a one person office and the minister must be capable in these areas, also computer skills for the church screen
- leadership skills; we do have a General Committee but there are a lot of areas where the minister would have to assess information, listen to all involved and then make decisions.
- have the ability to self-recognize needs. We are in an area of Manitoba where there is little interaction with other religious leaders unless an effort is made. Ministers must make their own link with a denomination of their choice for their own support.
- a solid education and well-read; intellectual; willing to be a life long learner
- good collaboration skills
- sound theological grounding and able to use religion for our Christian life (we are not a service organization)
- teaching skills; we have sermons, Bible study
- some background in Indigenous issue
- some counselling skills

Point #9

Community Minister – All felt that the PCF minister should also be our community minister. Our office in the mall is very visible and welcomes the community.

The following comments were made:

- the ability to reach out to the community is important.
- minister would have to balance the needs of the PCF members with community members.
- historically marriages and funerals for persons outside the PCF have used the PCF minister and services
- important that our minister be willing to reach out and meet people who aren't church members
- community outreach is a part of services and visits to Ironwood, the personal care homes in Lac du Bonnet and Whitemouth, as well as children's programs held in the office
- our PCF members include people living in Lac du Bonnet and the surrounding area. They need to be included as both members and a part of outreach beyond the town of Pinawa. (eg. Support for refugees committee)
- the PCF is a part of the community through members' interaction with local groups

Point # 10

Notes about Who We Are to assist the Search Committee

- A. Our congregation was asked for personal theological viewpoints on a sliding scale from far left liberal to far right orthodox conservative.

The majority of our congregation, 43% place their thinking and beliefs in the middle; 32% were slightly left of middle and 24% were slightly right of the middle.

A minority are further left and another few are slightly more conservative in their beliefs and viewpoints. All agreed on the Bible as a foundation.

B. We come from four different denominations that are recognized as the foundation of our fellowship, but there are many who worship with us from other faiths . There are many who have worshipped with the PCF for over 40 years and feel they are” PCF’ers “, and do not have the same feeling for the rituals and form of one of the four denominations.

C. The congregation is an aging population as evidenced by these comments:
-people with hearing impairments find it difficult to hear on Sundays when the screen is set up because the screen covers one of the speakers
-a permanent screen would help with vision difficulties
-for people who have difficulty getting up and down out of their chairs the added effort of holding papers and books is awkward, a permanent screen would help
-we recognize the difficulty with set-up each week and the diminishing number of persons physically able to assist

D. –one person’s comment guessed that the average age of the congregation would be 70 and perhaps we are not physically and mentally as capable as we once were of many of the tasks desired and required for operation of the PCF as it currently operates.

E. We are passionate about, and love our musical worship. We are grateful for all the people who dedicate themselves to this service.

Advice for and Questions to the Search Committee

-is it possible to hire someone for a trial period?

-check and double check references

-can the candidate write his/her own sermons?

-we need a transitional period, could we offer an assistant position to work with Rob?

-many points were noted that might entice a new candidate and suggest a fit with the PCF, beyond the ministerial duties and life of a minister. Suggested were:

Look for someone who likes or has experience in rural living or small communities

Look for an interest in sports, outdoor activities, or arts and culture

-95% of the congregation want a full-time minister who lives in Pinawa(recognize that this is not possible to put as a requirement). Full-time should be encouraged.

-not looking for a couple where they are both ordained ministers

-start the search by asking Rob questions about his initial experience in Pinawa

-think about what we don't want from our experiences with past ministers

-money for salary and pastoral account expenses is always a consideration but be prepared to offer a living wage and not necessarily just what a particular denomination prescribes. We don't want to pay a "superstar" or hire the person requesting the cheapest salary, but we want the minister to have a comfortable living.

-we are a financially secure congregation and would be willing to loan a young minister some money toward a house down payment

-search committee must do digging beyond just references (what has the applicant done in their community and talk to someone involved in that activity). Try to find out the difference between what they say and what they do.

- an outside the box suggestion : could we have a dual ministry or a different configuration than we have now, for example: a paid minister and a paid parish visitor.

-involve the spouse or partner as much as possible

-spouse or partner must be considered when hiring; what careers could we offer? Don't forget the opportunity for entrepreneurs and small business with help through North Forge. The partner must be committed to acceptance of the position.

-many want to meet any new candidate beyond just at church

- don't take whoever we can get to apply, would rather wait if necessary
- should we consider talks with the Lutheran congregation before looking for a new minister?
- give thoughtful consideration to a new minister with the previous minister still living in town
- perhaps there needs to be a talent survey (beyond what we mark on the Fall Survey) in areas where a minister might need assistance
- has a job description been written in the last few years?

What Could We Offer to a New Minister?

Beyond the amenities that the town of Pinawa and the area can offer, the PCF congregation has some unique advantages.

- competitive salary with a financially stable congregation
- full-time position
- affordable housing; moderate cost of living and a good quality of life
- a safe place to raise a family; low crime rate
- good educational system and freedom for children
- a congregation that is willing to make changes and compromises with the minister
- a congregation with a long history of volunteerism; there is a list from our Fall Visitation survey of time and talent volunteers available and ready to use
- we have no building so none of the worries associated with one
- a welcoming community without small town thinking (accepting of newcomers)
- we are a "safe" congregation to express different points of view
- a General Committee with all its sub-committees to assist in day-to-day decisions and direction

-exercise in walking everywhere

Other Comments-

All comments regarding Needs in the PCF Not Currently Being Met have been detailed in a separate document. It also includes all your comments about current services, music, missions and our use of the space in the F.W. Gilbert School. This separate report has been given to the Chairs of General Committee and will be passed on to the appropriate person or subcommittee for consideration.

Thank you to all for your active participation.

Leny Ohta, volunteer for the PCF