

First Church Congregational Special Council Meeting via Zoom

Thursday, March 10, 2022 (Happy Birthday David!)

In Attendance: Moderator Jim Muschett, The Rev. David Spollett, Carrie Curtin, Assistant Moderator and Personnel Chair Patty Bilotto, Joy Nazzaro, Joy Nazzaro, Jacque Paige, Rita Skog, Wendy Williams-Brown, Teresa Harris, David McKinnis, Mark Engstrom, Patty Gregory

Absent: Craig Way, Elisabeth Pavlofsky

Minutes

Meeting was called to order by Personnel Board Chair Patty Bilotto at 7:35pm.

The Invocation was delivered by Rev. David Spollett

The Interim Search Committee's work over the last year was reviewed by Mark Engstrom including the review of the process of discernment, Cottage Meetings, and guidance from the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ .

Mark Engstrom, Chair of the Search Committee and representative from the Personnel Board, made a Motion to call the Reverend Vanessa Rose as Pastor of First Congregational Church based on the unanimous recommendation from the Search Committee and Personnel Board. Full Motion and Memorandum detailed below. The Motion was seconded by Moderator Jim Muschett and discussion and questions followed. The Search Committee was excused from the Meeting prior to the vote. The Council of First Church unanimously approved the Motion.

***Motion to Call the Rev. Vanessa Rose as
Pastor of First Church Congregational***

WHEREAS, the congregation of First Church Congregational, in accordance with its bylaws, convened an interim pastor search committee to recommend a path forward with respect to spiritual leadership following the retirement of the Rev. David Spollett and the termination of the co-pastorate between Rev. Spollett and the Rev Vanessa Rose; and

WHEREAS, the interim pastor search committee worked in concert with the personnel committee of First Church to discern the will of God and our congregation with respect to our future leadership and to identify our future leadership needs; and

WHEREAS, Rev. Rose presented herself as a candidate to become the Pastor of First Church upon the termination of the co-pastorate; and

WHEREAS, the interim pastor search committee consulted with the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ to define a procedural path forward with respect to our future leadership and was advised to consider the candidacy of Rev. Rose prior to evaluating any external candidates; and

WHEREAS, the interim pastor search committee considered the needs of First Church as expressed by the congregation in cottage meetings, an open forum, and additional communications shared with the committee by individual members; and

WHEREAS, the interim pastor search committee reviewed the updated profile of Rev. Rose, interviewed her, considered her performance as Co-Pastor and Associate Pastor of First Church and found her to be a strong candidate committed to the ministries and strategic pathways of First Church who would fulfill the expressed and perceived needs of the congregation and our wider community if called to serve as our Pastor;

WHEREFORE, having duly considered the response of the Holy Spirit, the needs of First Church, the opinions of the congregation and the qualifications of Rev. Rose to serve as Pastor, the interim pastor search committee, with the unanimous support of the personnel committee, hereby moves that the Council of First Church accept the committee's unanimous recommendation that Rev. Rose be called to serve as the next Pastor of First Church Congregational.

Respectfully submitted,

The Interim Pastor Search Committee

Mark Engstrom, Chair
Patty Gregory
Teresa Harris
David McKinnis

Interim Pastor Search Committee Memorandum in Support of Motion to Call Rev. Vanessa Rose as Pastor of First Church Congregational

Having considered the apparent needs of First Church going forward, the qualifications of Rev. Rose to serve as Pastor, and the will of the congregation as expressed in the cottage meetings and thereafter, the interim pastor search committee, with the support and endorsement of the personnel committee, is pleased to recommend that Rev. Rose be called to serve as the next Pastor of First Church, effective with the expiration of the co-pastorate on September 1, 2022.

The interim pastor search committee and the personnel committee have worked together for many months to discern the best path forward with respect to our future leadership. A critical part of our work was the cottage meeting process and the subsequent responses that this process precipitated. A significant majority of our congregation has expressed support for calling Rev. Rose as our next Pastor. While some members questioned her level of experience and qualifications, most of the reservations expressed about calling Rev. Rose at this time had to do with whether First Church would benefit from an external search that would allow us to evaluate Rev. Rose against other interested candidates. In consulting with the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ, we were advised that the

Conference’s recommended protocol when a qualified internal candidate has expressed interest in filling an opening for a settled pastor is to consider the internal candidate prior to embarking on an external search. The committee saw wisdom in this advice, and proceeded accordingly.

In addition to the cottage meetings, the committee considered the updated profile of Rev. Rose, her references, our extended interview with her and our personal perspectives as members of the congregation that Rev. Rose has served since 2015. One persistent theme that emerged from all of this input was that Rev. Rose is a person of deep faith who loves First Church and feels a strong call to lead our ministries in a manner consistent with our strategic pathways. She is committed to ministering to our congregation with spiritual leadership and pastoral care. While the view of the congregation was not unanimous in this regard, a number of members shared their personal experiences with Rev. Rose in which she helped them weather personal and family crises through her pastoral care. She is also committed to furthering the established role of First Church as a beacon shining God’s love into our wider community and using our resources to further God’s purposes on this earth.

The cottage meetings identified 14 important pastoral leadership categories, and our committee and a majority of the congregational feedback we received was of the opinion that Rev. Rose fulfills almost all of them. The feedback also acknowledged that we were unlikely to find any one individual who would fulfill all of the requirements on this aggressive wish list:



In summary, the committee believes that Rev. Rose has the necessary qualifications to lead First Church from this point forward, and that an external search would be unlikely to produce a more qualified candidate. Additionally, the committee was mindful that an external search would entail a significant period of interim leadership, and did not believe that would be in the interest of the congregation in the wake of an unsettled period during the pandemic. The committee believes Rev. Rose has the necessary qualifications and commitment to First Church to assume the role of Pastor immediately and lead the church forward without delay.

A number of members who supported calling Rev. Rose did express their view that a strong staff support, including a capable Associate Pastor, would be important to the church going forward. We mention this concern for Council’s benefit, but it is beyond our role to address it at this time.

Plans for a hybrid Special All Church Meeting on Tuesday, March 29 to call a Congregational vote were discussed.

The Benediction was provided by The Rev. David Spollett.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:41pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Carrie Curtin, Clerk