

Frequently Asked Questions about Calling Rev. Brett as our Lead Minister

Why do we vote on our minister? The use of the democratic process within our congregations is the fifth UU principle. We live into that principle by voting on key aspects of congregational life including the selection of a lead minister. This makes us unlike many other denominations where the leaders are assigned or picked by the heads of the denomination. Because calling a lead minister is one of the most important decisions that a congregation can make, our bylaws require that 25% of our membership (roughly 190 members) be present at this meeting. Only members are allowed to attend the meeting and to vote.

I have never been to a meeting to call a minister. What can I expect? Like our annual meeting, the meeting to call a minister is hosted by the Board; unlike our annual meeting, the only topic on the agenda will be the question of whether or not to call Rev. Brett as our lead minister. The meeting will last approximately one hour and will be held online to ensure that everyone can participate. You can expect to see the following agenda items: 1) opening words and chalice lighting; 2) a confirmation that we have a quorum (at least 25% of our members) in attendance; 3) a description of procedures for voting and discussion; 4) a presentation by the Search Committee on their process and an opportunity for you to ask questions about the process; 5) a presentation by the Search Committee on the findings from their data collection activities and an explanation of why they selected Rev. Brett; 6) an opportunity for members to ask questions about and comment on the Search Committee's recommendation; and 7) a vote to call Rev. Brett. Our by-laws require that 80% of members in attendance vote "yes" but the UUA notes that many ministers will only serve if there are at least 90% in favor; Rev. Brett is following this practice and will need a "yes" vote by more than 90% of attendees to agree to serve. Because of the importance of this vote for ERUUF's future, all members are strongly encouraged to attend and participate.

I kept hearing that Rev. Brett was an internal candidate. What is an internal candidate and how did that affect the process? ERUUF's elected Search Committee was guided by the rules and procedures established by the Unitarian Universalist Association Transitions Office, which helps congregations navigate the complex process of calling a new lead minister. Much of this information is available online at <https://www.uua.org/careers/ministers/transitions>.

An internal candidate is someone who is eligible to serve as a minister and is employed by the congregation to which they are applying. UUA Transitions rules require that a decision must be made on an internal candidate prior to any external candidates being considered. Although congregations can offer internal candidates a position without going through any parts of the search process, the UUA does not advise this. ERUUF went through nearly all the same procedures as we would have done with an external candidate. At the June 2021 Annual Meeting, ERUUF elected a Search Committee to lead this process. The Search Committee engaged in extensive data collection with the congregation over the fall of 2021, including administering a survey with 216 respondents and conducting 21 focus groups that were attended by a total of 132 members. The Committee created a Congregational Record, and interviewed Rev. Brett and her references. We developed a draft contract and compensation package. The only part of the regular process we did not do was go listen to her preach at another congregation, because this was unnecessary.

This all seems very fast. Why are we voting on her at the end of January when Rev. Cayer is not leaving until June? From a congregational perspective, we do have plenty of time. However, the UUA

recommends that decisions on internal candidates be made by the end of January and the Search Committee strongly agreed that this timing was most fair to Rev. Brett. The normal denomination-wide ministerial search process is currently underway and, if Rev. Brett's call is not approved, this timing would allow her to be considered by other congregations who are currently seeking ministers. If we wait and the call is not approved, Rev. Brett would have missed this year's regular search process.

What happens if we vote to approve Rev. Brett? Does this mean that we will have two lead ministers at the same time? Rev. Cayer will remain our lead minister until June. Rev. Brett's contract as a lead minister will start after Rev. Cayer leaves. We anticipate that the two ministers will use the time to create as seamless a transition as possible.

What happens if Rev. Brett does not receive a sufficient number of votes? Once Rev. Brett entered the search process, she was covered by UUA Transitions guidelines. These guidelines strongly advise that she leave ERUUF if her call is not approved; therefore, she would not stay as an assistant minister. ERUUF's Board of Trustees has already determined that, if the call is not approved, they will hire an interim minister for two years. During that time, ERUUF will elect a new Search Committee and will undergo the same process as we just did, except looking at external candidates.

Why couldn't we consider other ministerial candidates at the same time as we considered Rev. Brett? UUA guidelines require that a decision first be made on an internal candidate prior to any external candidates being considered. This is based on their long experience with ministerial transitions and is designed to protect the ministerial applicants (both internal and external) and the congregations.

If Rev. Brett becomes our new lead minister, we will need a new assistant minister. How will that process work? As a large congregation, ERUUF has traditionally employed at least two full time ministers. Under policy governance (which is how we operate), the Lead Minister has authority to hire all personnel. Rev. Brett will have responsibility for selecting a new assistant minister and we expect that she will consult the Board as part of this process.

I have heard a lot about the Congregational Record. What is it and how can I see it? The Congregational Record is an extensive overview of our congregation that is intended to help ministerial candidates understand if this congregation is a good fit for them. The Search Committee used data from the focus groups and surveys, along with data from the staff and our annual reports, to create the Record. The UUA advises that the Record is most useful when it is an honest assessment of our strengths and areas for growth. You can see a copy of the Record here (add link). Please note that it has been downloaded from the UUA system and all of the formatting did not transfer so the headers for different sections are not always in bold, which can make it hard to follow at times.

What were the roles of the Board, the UUA, and the Search Committee in the process? The Nominating Committee developed and implemented a process for identifying six candidates for the Search Committee. The congregation voted on these candidates during the 2021 Annual Meeting.

Board Role. The Board identified a seventh candidate for the Search Committee, carefully considering the gaps in the background and experiences of the already selected members of the Committee. Here is a link to the members of the Search Committee: <https://eruuf.org/board-committees/ministerial-search-committee.html>. The Board developed the charge for the Search Committee and a Negotiating Team (consisting of members from the Board and the Search Committee) developed the draft

employment contract. As per our by-laws, the Board was asked to concur with the Search Committee's final recommendation. The Board is also responsible for scheduling and running the meeting to call a lead minister.

Search Committee Role. All other activities were completed independently by the Search Committee, including data collection and analyses, creation of the Congregational Record, interviewing Rev. Brett, interviews with her references, development of the recommendation for Rev. Brett and the scheduling of Candidating Week. The Board had no role in any of those activities.

UUA Role. The UUA has established guidelines (link to the Ministerial Search Handbook) that the Search Committee followed throughout the process. A consultant worked with the Search Committee around the process and another consultant worked with the Negotiating Team. The UUA reviewed the Congregational Record. The UUA also hosted a Beyond Categorical Thinking workshop that was open to all ERUUF members and was designed to encourage members to think about a diverse pool of ministerial candidates.

Where can I find more information?

Here is a link to the Congregational Record:

https://eruuf.org/images/content/governance/board/CONGREGATIONAL_RECORD_01-10-2022.pdf

Here is a link to the call for the Congregational Meeting: <https://eruuf.org/board-news/letter-to-the-congregation-board-of-trustees.html>.

Register for the Special Congregational Meeting here:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZluduivrD4tH9ZCzs1GW7laVJj7KPOyAQFr>

Here is a link to the Search Committee's recommendation: <https://eruuf.org/news/december-letter-from-the-ministerial-search-committee.html>.