

September 12, 2018

Dear Colleague,

I truly enjoyed being the Interim Minister for 2017-18 at the UU Congregation of Sterling, and so it's a pleasure to be writing you this letter for their search packet for a potential new settled minister.

But if I enjoyed it so much, why did I leave after one year?? My decision had nothing to do with UU Sterling and everything to do with my personal life and priorities. The spring 2017 market for interim ministry was a seller's market and the congregation had trouble competing for a full-time interim. The opportunity for a half-time interim year fit my needs, and I was authentically open to exploring a second year. Ultimately, my own desire to return to retirement and supporting my wife's ministry prevailed.

I think the transition is actually working out well. By experiencing two different half-time interims the congregation has had a chance to appreciate what full-time ministry means to them, and to recommit to that goal. This year they will be exploring and stabilizing a new staffing configuration and running a canvass to realize this goal and make it sustainable for the future.

Everything in this congregation's history with settled ministers points to their mature appreciation of what professional ministry offers them. Their first "founding" minister (Robert Finkelstein) and their previous long-term settled minister (Anya Sammler-Michael) are both respected colleagues who had excellent ministries on which to build. The lay-led Worship Associates team and Pastoral Care teams that have evolved to support the professional minister's role in these two important areas are accomplished, skillful, and deferential to ministerial insight and leadership.

Coming from a history of settled ministries in which I sought and was given executive authority over the committees and operations of my congregations, I wondered if it would be hard for me to adjust to the dynamics of a substantially lay-led smaller congregation. It really wasn't! The lay leadership covers the essential bases like any good baseball team. If you (the minister) are the pitcher, you quickly realize that there's a lot on your shoulders but you're still nothing without the rest of the team playing their roles. As in any team, the players come and go – injuries, personal issues, even conflicts. But there's a good bench and people step up eventually when needed, and they do well.

Ask the search committee for my annual report from May 2018 to get a more detailed overview of the congregation's strengths, problems and challenges from my perspective at the end of the interim. There are enough of each to make for a satisfying long ministry for colleagues of diverse backgrounds and experiences. Living in Loudoun County can be expensive, and your own financial base in the real estate market makes a difference in how easy it is to move here, but the congregation recognizes this. They are doing their best to be realistic about sustaining full-time ministry from their pastoral-sized congregation base. They have aspired for years to grow towards program size, and they have had a clear vision and strategic plan for what that would look like. They know they need a full-time minister with a strong understanding of membership attraction and retention, willing to be a committed part of the larger Loudoun County community, to move forward towards that goal. It could be you! You'd be a lucky minister if this challenge suits you and the congregation buys in! Good luck!

Call me with questions, anytime. My cell is 440-653-0817. I'd be glad to talk to you.

Rev. Dr. Wayne Arnason