

Your Search Committee:

## January 2021 Report to the Congregation: A New Year, Hopeful in So Many Ways

I write this on Sunday morning as I await our worship service and the subsequent Annual Meeting – an auspicious moment for our Search Committee and for our congregation writ large. So much has changed, so dramatically, since that late December report. Hope and promise are in the air, tempered by the need for careful discernment and some hard choices ahead, for the Search Committee, for the congregation, for our country. What a time to be alive.

We on the Search Committee have been blessed, through this troubled, sometimes terrifying month of January, by the task of watching or listening to some extraordinary sermons, first by 21 applicants, then even more by the six we selected to interview. To select those six, we met in person, masked, and socially distanced by at least 6 feet, in the Parish Hall. There was strong agreement on those choices. We set up the interviews, listened to more sermons, and talked with references provided by the candidates. Every one of them got our serious consideration and every one of them has strengths that would serve South Church well. After the interviews, we came together in-person a second time to consider whom to invite for a candidating weekend. Though some of us had different people who touched our hearts, we came to consensus, settling on the final three. Those three have been scheduled for candidating weekends in February and March, including leading worship in neutral pulpits.

Suffice to say, January has been a full, and fulfilling, month. As a committee, we have, as former committees virtually promised we would, bonded as friends and colleagues. It has been and continues to be, always time-consuming, a continuing process of growth and learning, stressful and anxiety producing as well as rewarding and gratifying. We are deeply grateful to the congregation for entrusting us with this opportunity for sacred work.



Special thanks this month to Charlie Murdach for creating our very own Search Chalice. For each of the interviews, the lighting of this special chalice set a tone of camaraderie that put everyone immediately at ease. We would begin by lighting this chalice, sharing with our candidate the legend that we created immediately:

*At some point in our discernment, the light shining through our chalice magnifying glass will produce the name of our future minister.*

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So, what's to come? In February and March, we will be hosting those candidating weekends. Each of the candidates has agreed to come to Portsmouth for in-person time to meet with us and with Rev. Susan and Kirsten as the other half of the collaborative governance leadership model we anticipate we will be forging as a church community. After those candidating weekends, the Search Committee will have a final discernment: Is one of these candidates the minister South Church needs for the future? If yes, we will so recommend to the congregation. If no, the search will continue for another year.

As the UUA has charged us – and through us the congregation – to keep in mind. The only unsuccessful search is the one that ends in calling new leadership that does not meet the congregation's unique and particular circumstances. We on the Search Committee are committed to a successful search.

May it be so.

Jim Verschueren for the Search Committee