



Local Church Profile for Churches Seeking an Interim Pastor

Church Information

Full Name: United Church of Gainesville
Address: 1624 NW 5th Ave., Gainesville, FL 32603
Phone: 352-378-3500
Email: info@ucgainesville.org
Website: <https://ucgainesville.org/wordpress/>

Search Committee Chair: Hannah Norton, hannah.norton@gmail.com

Additional Denominational Affiliations:

UCC Conference: Florida
Association: No Association
Area Conference Minister Name: Rev. S. LaTrell Harrison
ACM cell phone: (404) 734-4986
ACM email: LHarrison@uccfla.org

Position Details

1. Describe the ministry position for which you are seeking a pastor.

The United Church of Gainesville (UCG) seeks an experienced Interim Minister for this vibrant, dedicated congregation. Located in the heart of a university city in North Central Florida, UCG is a theologically diverse, intellectually curious congregation with a rich history of active ministry. UCG is an Open and Affirming Church and a Creation Justice Church, and welcomes people with a range of theological and religious convictions into the full life and ministry of the church. UCG has a collaborative leadership style and strong, gifted lay leadership. The church's ministries support environmental and social justice, diversity and inclusivity, education and

outreach. Following recent changes in ministerial leadership, UCG yearns to be renewed and inspired. The congregation is poised for growth. UCG’s core values are rooted in the Judeo-Christian faith and draw from the wisdom of other religious traditions. Sermons that are personal and relevant to daily life, while providing insights and new perspectives, are most cherished. UCG seeks an Interim Minister who is good-natured, spiritually grounded and visionary, and will nurture the church’s vision moving forward through thoughtful teaching and compelling preaching. The ideal candidate will have an awareness of interfaith dynamics and the ability to initiate meaningful conversations and connections. Experience in mediation, conflict resolution, grief support, and pastoral care are attributes UCG seeks. Additional competencies sought include excellent communication skills, patience in addressing differences, experience in organizational planning and development, and superior management skills. UCG offers a competitive compensation package, including comprehensive benefits, to support the ministry and well-being of an Interim Minister. Throughout the years, UCG has been blessed with gifted, insightful, and loving ministers, and the congregation looks forward with hope and excitement for what is to come.

2. Name 3 core competencies that you feel you will need in your Interim Pastor.
 - Dynamic and creative worship leadership that inspires the congregation intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually.
 - Change and conflict management skills, including the ability to build on existing strengths, guide the congregation through healing and forgiveness, and help us envision a fresh future.
 - The ability to connect with congregants of all ages, our existing minister, lay leadership, and staff.
3. What aspects of the 5 focus points of interim ministry (*listed in separate document titled: “types of transitional ministers”*) do you anticipate being the focus of your interim time?

Congregational heritage and story, discovering the congregation’s mission and purpose, leadership changes and gifts development.

4. Position Scope: Fulltime _____ 3/4 time _____ 1/2 time _____ 1/4 time
5. Position Duration: _____ 12 months 18 months other: with option for 6 month extension upon mutual agreement

Who We Are

1. Church’s Mission Statement (*or name that one needs to be developed*):

Our church compact best reflects our spiritual beliefs and practices: “We join as a spiritual community in this compact: to worship God, however known; to welcome into our church those of differing understanding and theological opinion; to learn from our religious heritage, yet to grow by seeking new dimensions of truth; to follow, even imperfectly, the way of Jesus in personal involvement with each other; and strengthened by this bond, to act in Christian concern for the welfare of all people.”

2. Brief Church History:

The United Church of Gainesville is a member of the Florida Conference of the United Church of Christ. In 1964, a time when North Florida was still largely segregated, a group of Gainesville residents talked of forming a new church willing to deal with the social, political, and spiritual questions of the day. An ad in the University of Florida student newspaper invited anyone interested in forming a liberally minded Protestant church to a meeting. Fifty people showed up. The decision was made to carry out the mission of the new church with the United Church of Christ denomination. We have led on social justice issues since then. UCG has remained loyal to the Christian principles on which it was founded, as evidenced by its commitment to follow what Jesus called the first and greatest commandment, to love our neighbors as ourselves. The congregation grew consistently until the COVID-19 pandemic, building a new sanctuary and office building in 1991, and with the easing of pandemic restrictions UCG continues to attract new members, including young families. While we maintain many worship traditions from week to week, worship services often incorporate dance, drama, visual art, teachings drawn from other faiths, and music from bluegrass to Broadway. We are proud to say, “It’s not like this every Sunday.”

3. 2-3 Significant Events:

The church has taken strong advocacy positions on social justice issues. UCG became an Open and Affirming Church in 1992; has been a community leader for racial justice since 2015; became a Sanctuary support congregation in 2018; and was designated a Creation Justice Church in 2023. Our congregation was one of the first Open and Affirming Churches in Florida at a time when being gay carried a stigma. Now, the political climate in Florida is even more antagonistic to all of these justice movements, increasing the stress on the staff, congregants, and the LGBTQI+ community. The cultural shifts around gender expression, especially among youth, have created a need for safe spaces and educational programs. The church continues its important work, and yet is also in need of deep listening and education.

Currently, the Children, Youth and Family Ministry supports three main avenues of outreach: a) supporting intergenerational partnerships within our church family through hosting monthly Kids Night Out events and yearly mission trips for our youth; b) offering annual UCC *Our Whole Lives: Human Sexuality Training Across the Lifespan* (OWL) programs to support the needs of

families in our church and our community and to honor our commitment to being an Open and Affirming church; c) establishing UCG as a Certified Cognitive Center by the International Board of Credentialing and Continuing Education Standards (currently in process) to support cognitive disorders and learning differences in our children's and youth programs, and to offer a safe and inclusive space for children in our community. These programs for children and youth distinguish UCG in our family-friendly community of Gainesville.

4. Church Strengths:

The United Church of Gainesville's greatest strength is the energy and enthusiasm with which its members translate their faith into action. Under the direction of a broadly representative Church Council, the leadership of a dedicated lay moderator, and the guidance of responsive ministers, UCG church members confidently engage in productive activities that nurture church member families and partnerships, provide avenues for the artistic expression of its talented members, advance social, racial, and environmental justice in the surrounding community, and support the financial and organizational structures required for effective ministries. By recognizing the many contributions of its members, UCG also empowers its members to willingly participate in a potpourri of committees and boards. This leads to the development of a core group of lay leaders who emerge from the action-oriented congregation. Church members' enthusiasm is also exhibited in their support of projects initiated or led by fellow members who have a passion to which they have been called. Examples include the Food4Kids weekend food supplement program, for children in families that are struggling economically, and programs supplying unhoused people with personal hygiene supplies.

A second strength is the church's commitment to embracing the diversity of its members and their theological beliefs. This strength is frequently renewed with recitations of the church's Compact during worship services. It also takes the form of an Open and Affirming welcoming of gay, lesbian, transgender, and queer people, including those who are still exploring their sexual orientation and gender identity. This commitment to embracing diversity extends across the generations, beginning with the Critter Camp for elementary school age children, through the UCC *Our Whole Lives* human sexuality education for middle school age children, the Youth United program for teens, and the Friendship Group for members with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This commitment is also evident in the church's Friday prayer meetings, its weekly Buddhist meditations, and its bag lunch groups frequented by retired members. All of UCG's strengths depend upon the free and open social networking encouraged by a variety of activities such as after-worship coffee hours, time-of-life celebrations, fund-raising banquets, monthly supper clubs, Sunday seminars, small group gatherings, and retreats for families and gender specific adults.

5. Church Challenges:

The church is navigating complex challenges affecting both its cultural atmosphere and organizational structure, compounded by a historical reliance on strong ministerial leadership to provide vision and direction. Unresolved feelings about former ministers, coupled with the loss of a third full-time minister and the reorganization and adjustments made necessary as a result, have created high expectations for current ministers, with some groups vocally expressing their dissatisfaction. While the church has been committed to being Open and Affirming since the 1990s, there is a need for continued dialogue around what it means to be Open and Affirming in today's society.

Organizationally, the church faces structural challenges as it seeks to clarify governance and align the roles of its three leading bodies: ministers, lay leadership, and the congregation. The current policies, procedures, and bylaws contain gaps that make supervision and accountability for ministers difficult, while at times leaving the ministers and staff vulnerable to misunderstandings in times of crisis. And as the church continues adapting to a post-COVID world, there is a need for improved technology use, including an updated website and enhanced social media engagement, to expand outreach and foster a more connected, informed community.

6. Experience of Conflict:

1. Every church has conflict, some minor, some larger. On a scale of 1-5, where would you rank your church's level of conflict? 3.5
(Based on this work by Speed Leas 1. Problem to solve 2. Disagreement 3. Contest 4. Fight or Flight 5. Intractable)
2. Please explain why you chose this level.

We chose this level based on a few periods of conflict which we have navigated. First, following the resignation of senior minister Shelly Wilson in 2019, we embarked on a discernment process around the leadership model for the ministerial team. Our ministerial leadership has always been collaborative in nature but we had operated with a senior minister as head of staff. There was a lot of debate within the congregation about a more formalized collaborative model that ultimately resulted in a compromise, and we selected the title of "coordinating minister" who was functionally the head of staff.

The second involved a poorly-communicated administrative restructuring which led to the resignation of the office manager after 18 years of service, citing a "toxic work environment." This resulted in significant turmoil, additional information-gathering via a Pathfinding Committee, and, ultimately, the resignation of the coordinating minister.

In both instances, camps formed and sides were drawn within the congregation. The severity of this disagreement felt escalated and criticism seemed more personal in nature during the most

recent incident. The transparency of the pathfinding process, which elucidated the history of the personnel conflict, was generally appreciated by the congregation.

7. Describe your congregation’s values and practices when it comes to conflict.

When it comes to conflict, we lean into process. Leadership strives for transparency and utilizes surveys, chalk talks, town halls, seminars, and listening sessions to understand the congregation’s feelings. The weight falls heavily on lay leadership to sort through and characterize the source of all the emotion and criticism. Some feedback from congregants has been mean-spirited or personal in nature, which has been difficult for lay leadership to absorb and manage.

We recognize that we need help in resolving conflict and are committed to growing in this area. We are developing a behavioral covenant and updating our grievance policy to better navigate times of conflict in the future. Our lay leaders would welcome the expertise of an Interim Minister in this area.

Basic Church Statistics
Yearly average

	Church Membership	Weekly Worship Attendance	Children & Youth Participation	Adult Ed Participation
Pre-pandemic	603	325	70	29
Current year	590	216	65	29

	Income	Overall Budget	Mission Giving	Reserves & Endowment Principals
Pre-pandemic	\$795,071	\$839,899	\$53,814	\$400,959
Current year	\$727,632	\$956,791	\$65,377	\$590,591

Compensation

Total Compensation Package Amount or Range: \$110,000-\$120,000 annually

Package offered: ___ Total Package, no additional monetary benefits offered
(choose only one) _X_ Total Package includes optional benefits to be negotiated (health

insurance, annuity, life/disability insurance)

Housing:

- Housing allowance only (included in salary)
- Parsonage only
- Either Parsonage or Housing Allowance Provided

Please explain briefly your process in discerning your compensation:

Salary is based on that of our continuing minister and is included in our 2025 challenge budget (currently being pledged), with some flexibility based on which benefits the interim minister selects.

Church body responsible for hiring the Interim Pastor is: Board of Business and Board of Human Resources negotiate compensation and contract. United Church of Gainesville congregation votes to call a minister.

Ministry Description

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Statement of Consent

The covenantal relationship between a church and those called by that church to serve as pastors and teachers and in other ministerial positions is strengthened when vital information is openly shared by covenantal partners. To that end, we attest that, to the best of our abilities, we have provided information in this document that accurately represents our church. We have not knowingly withheld any information that would be helpful to candidates. As the committee charged with the responsibility for identifying and recommending a suitable leader for the interim time for our church, we have been authorized to share the information herein with potential candidates.

We understand that a candidate may wish to secure further knowledge, information, and opinions about our church. We encourage a candidate to do so, recognizing that an open exchange of relevant information builds the foundation for continuing and healthy relationships between calling bodies and persons seeking a ministry position.

Hannah Norton
Signature of Search Committee Chairperson
(typed or Jpeg is sufficient)

Dec. 16, 2024 _____
Date