



1213 Washington St.
Genoa, OH 43430
November 11, 2024

Dear Members,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Pastor Search Team with some great news. We are recommending Rev. Philip Balla be named our new Pastor. The team reached this consensus just a few weeks ago. Attached you will find a short biography that Philip wrote for this purpose. Our team found Philip to be a great match for which we were searching. He is young, energetic and has an amazing resume. We also found Philip to be very personable, easy to talk with and well-spoken.

The process began in the Summer of 2022, when Pastor Don informed us that he would like to retire. After we caught our breath, we went to work. We reached out to the local UCC Association office and gathered facts about the process. We hired a church coach to help us learn more about our church and what kind of person would help us realize our ambitions. We also designed and sent a survey to our members. All of this was very helpful in discerning who we were looking for. We discovered that we wanted to be the church in the community where all in the community knew they were welcome. We wanted more outreach to the other ministries that we offer on our campus, including the Nurturing Center and our Elderlife community. We also realized that we wanted someone who could preach a thought-provoking sermon and was also very good at reaching out to our ill, homebound and members in nursing facilities. We believe we found that with Reverend Balla. The process was slow and often a little disappointing. We struggled to get resumes, and we tried new approaches to garner interest. Eventually it paid off.

We enjoyed some great fellowship, met some interesting people, and I believe, all grew in our service to God. We have planned a dessert reception with Philip on Saturday, November 30th in the fellowship hall. We encourage you to come and meet Philip from 3 pm until 6 pm, to get to know him and ask questions. On Sunday, December 1st at 10am, Reverend Balla will conduct the worship service. Afterwards there will be a short meeting and go vote.

Please feel free to reach out to any of the pastor search team members should you have any questions on the process. Please keep in mind that there's still some confidentiality issues as we continue with the process.

Respectfully,



Glenn Melter, Co-Chair

Search Team Members include: Kara Boulerisse, Mark Chapinski, Tom David, Jeff Feller, Julie Humbarger, Bev Hoffman, Glenn Melter, Adam Mihalko, Eillen Palmerton, Gaylord Sheldon

Rev Philip Wesley Balla

Born in Toledo, OH, and raised in Rossford, Philip is excited to be returning to NW Ohio and is thrilled by the prospect of being St. John UCC's pastor. Philip's grandmother, Shirley Balla, was baptized at St. John's, and his great aunt Betty Wilka taught Sunday school at St. John's, making a potential call at St. John's a story of a return to familial roots. Originally a member of Memorial UCC in Toledo, Philip is a lifelong member of the UCC who experienced a call to ministry at the young age of 15. After graduating from Rossford High School in 2011, Philip went to Defiance College, where he earned a BA in Ministry Studies and a BS in Psychology, which was done to prepare for entrance to seminary. At Defiance College, he went twice to Cambodia to conduct ethnographic research in the form of interviews on Theravada Buddhism in SE Asia. Following those experiences, Philip was honored and recognized as a Harvard Divinity School Ministry Fellow and admitted to the school with a full scholarship and stipend.

At Harvard, Philip prepared himself thoroughly for a life committed to the ministry by learning several ancient languages, visiting archaeological sites in Greece and Turkey, and engaging in two-year-long ministry internships and regular coursework. After three years at Harvard, Philip applied for and was accepted into a PhD program at Fordham University in New York City. Always keeping close to his passion for ministry throughout his academic pursuits, Philip became fully ordained in October of 2022 as he accepted a part-time call at Memorial UCC, where he has led that ministry and charted a course for its future while completing his PhD. While at Fordham, Philip has also taught 11 undergraduate courses in topics relating to theology, Christian history, and the study of religion.

Philip is passionately committed to the work of parish and community ministry and sees his extensive academic preparation as the development of tools in the toolbelt of that ministry. He deeply believes that his journey has afforded him time to explore his faith and to explore how best to be a leader and guide to others.

Outside of church and professional life, Philip is a fan of the Ohio State Buckeyes, loves to spend as much time as possible in the outdoors, and loves to travel as much as he can to continue to explore the world. Most of Philip's family lives in NW Ohio, and he is the proud uncle of 8 nieces and nephews. Philip identifies as a gay man and believes the journey he has taken to understand who he loves has only deepened his love of Jesus and his desire to spread that love and heal hearts wherever God calls him.

Philip wants you all to know that the abiding passion that has governed his life over these past 14 years of preparation for ministry is to love God and to love people. Philip is excited about the work that can happen on both of those fronts at St. John's, and he wants to close with this message: God is good all the time; let's get to work! Amen!