



Ministerial Settlement System

Ministerial Record

This record provides information about a minister during the ministerial search process. It is made available to member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association and to UUA staff. It is not intended to substitute for a complete resume. Search committees receiving this record are cautioned not to share it. When a committee has completed consideration of the minister, all records are to be deleted and destroyed.

Ministerial Record of:

First name: Gretchen **M.I.:** E. **Last name:** Weis

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Present position: Just finished ministerial internship and summer ministry at UU Church of Arlington, VA **Since (mm/dd/yy):** 9/1/2012

Date of preliminary UU fellowship (mm/dd/yy): 12/23/2013

Ordination (ordaining body, place, date): Scheduled for 01/12/14 at my home congregation: First UU Church of Houston, TX

Why are you seeking a ministry now?

What does love call us to do? I recognize now that I was being called to ministry several times throughout my life. But I struggled to answer that call because my faith context had been Christian, and I no longer believed in the divinity of Jesus. If only I had known about our faith earlier in life!

In 2010, I heard the call to ministry yet again. As a Unitarian Universalist, I was finally ready to answer the call to love and service with all my heart. I entered seminary that fall at Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago. I graduated from seminary in May 2013, completed my ministerial internship and was asked to stay on as summer minister for the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, VA. I went before the UUA's ministerial fellowship committee and was welcomed into preliminary fellowship in December 2013. Ministry is a second career for me, as I bring significant leadership and management experience, as well as substantial life experience to my future ministry. I seek to serve a congregation as a full-time, called parish minister, as we learn and grow together in covenanted, beloved community.

Describe the new ministry you hope for:

Ours is a healing faith – a “saving” faith that offers an essential, loving alternative to traditional orthodox beliefs. Our church communities offer multiple paths towards healing and personal transformation – from the weekly worship experience celebrating wonder, mystery and the gift of life together in shared community; to the deeper meaningful connections found in small groups, where people find support in their search for truth and meaning; to religious exploration classes for children, youth, teens and adults; as well as justice making activities where we live out our values as we seek to make the world a better place. I believe that many of those who claim to be “spiritual, but not religious,” would find a comfortable home within our church communities.

I seek a congregation interested in deepening relationships of trust and support with one another, willing to engage in healthy community building. I yearn for a congregation willing to stand by and care for one another to celebrate the joys of our lives, as well as journey together through times of deep loss, pain, suffering and sorrow. I hope to be of help and comfort to those facing a difficult diagnosis, or the loss of a beloved, those struggling with difficult relationships or divorce, or those suffering from the economic downturn, to name only a few of life's difficult milestones.

I hope for a congregation willing to work towards the inclusive ideal expressed by Francis David, one of our Transylvanian faith ancestors martyred in the 1500s for refusing to accept the Trinity. David is credited with saying, “We need not think alike to love alike.” I wish to work with a community willing to make room for the difference in one another’s beliefs, with grace, respect and humor. I hope for a ministry where we live into our third principal together: “Acceptance of one another and the encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations.”

While this ideal sounds simple, to live radical hospitality and inclusiveness out loud is often difficult, ongoing work. It begins when we dust off, revisit and refresh our congregational behavioral covenant together (or in some cases, create a covenant for the very first time), outlining how we intend to behave towards one another in right relations.

This ideal also calls us to make the emotional room among us to agree to disagree from time to time. It is difficult, but not impossible work -- to be willing to live in the temporary discomfort that happens when there is strong disagreement among us. Despite our discomfort, our congregational covenant guides us to treat one another with kindness and respect as we find healthy ways to express our differences of opinion. I want to help build a community willing to stay at the table, in dialogue, even when there is strong disagreement present. I wish to help a congregation hold our respective differences as a “both/and” instead of an “either/or” experience -- even when honoring the “both/and” creates discomfort that we need to move through, together.

This simple inclusive ideal also calls us to make room for the democratic process – or majority rule – in our decision-making. The use of the democratic process reminds us that differing ideas is a normal part of all human community. There is that oft-told UU joke: whenever you gather 5 UUs in a room, you are bound to hear at least 7 or more opinions.

Sometimes, people mistake consensus building for the democratic process, believing that all members must agree before the church can make a decision. Consensus decision-making can often leave congregations paralyzed, as members churn and churn over the same issues hoping that eventually, everyone will agree. Our fifth principle clearly calls for democracy, not consensus. We are blessed by our diverse ideas, opinions and viewpoints. We may not agree with one another, but we can agree to disagree and still remain in close, covenanted relationship together.

In addition, this ideal also calls us to radical welcoming and inclusion if the community seeks to become

more ethnically, culturally, and socio-economically diverse. Again, this is difficult work, to engage with and welcome in those who come from significantly different life experiences, who may hold completely different views on theology, politics, culture or that work that is needed to create a more just world. Congregational diversity does not happen overnight, but requires attention and intention over the life of the congregation. But it is work our faith calls us to engage in, if we are to broaden our circle of love and care.

I hope to work with a congregation who is open to the challenges that difference brings, so that some day, in some ways, we would be living out the ideal that “we may not think alike to love alike.” That ours might just become a radically welcoming, radically inclusive community where there is always room for one more at the table in our beloved community.

Putting our faith into action involves not only living in covenant with one another, but also engagement in justice issues beyond the church walls. I look forward to working with a congregation to explore what direction, and around which issues people wish to place our collective hands and hearts. Where is the church currently engaged? Are there other multi-faith activities that might call to us to join in? Or, what multi-faith effort might we help start up to meet a burning need in our community? Who are our neighbors? How has the definition of “neighbor” changed as technology continues to shrink our world? Are there language barriers or other obstacles that keep us from engaging more fully with people who live in the neighborhoods near our church? What trainings do we need? What issues call to us in other countries? Where might the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee call us to become more involved? What family-friendly social justice activities call to us so our children, youth and teens can work side by side with adults to learn the value of serving needs greater than our own? How can we work with local media to call more attention to the justice issues we care most about? What are the most important things our minister can do to help inspire and motivate us in our justice work?

Those are some of my dreams, but what are yours? What is your congregation’s history? What do you hope for in your quest to live meaningful, ethical lives and to help transform some of the brokenness of the world? Come, dream a dream with me, that I may know your mind.....

Education and certification:			<i>Add a School or Degree</i>
Degree	College/University/Seminary	Area of Concentration	Date (mm/yy)
Bachelor of Arts Degree	UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN - MADISON	Philosophy	06/1979
Master of Divinity	MEADVILLE LOMBARD THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL	Preparation for UU Ministry	05/2013

Awards, honors, and published writings:

Meadville Lombard: The 2013 Clayton Bowen Prize in New Testament Studies

Meadville Lombard: A 2012 Wertheim Grant Recipient (seminary scholarship based on need, leadership and future promise as a UU minister)

Personal and family situation:

I am divorced, single, and am not currently in a committed relationship. I also do not have children.

Therefore, my personal/family situation allows me to be extremely flexible in answering a call and relocating to any number of communities throughout the U.S.

Background and development:

From your late teens forward, describe your higher education, the three or four most important events in your life experience, the context in which you felt called to ministry, and your professional development, continuing education, and work history; include every ministry (include dates by month/year) and what you bring from it and your other work to a new ministry:

Midwestern Middle-Class White Collar Background: I was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, the older of two children – my brother is two years younger. My Dad was in industrial sales and marketing and my Mom was a homemaker. They will celebrate their 63rd anniversary in January 2014. I grew up a tomboy, playing in the nearby woods and creeks – swinging on vines like Tarzan, or watching tadpoles turn into frogs, catching and releasing salamanders and turtles. I did very well in school and participated in ballet and tap lessons, piano lessons and scouts. From age 12 through high school, I grew up in a middle- to upper-middle-class white-collar professional suburb of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. I attended Methodist and Lutheran churches in early childhood and was confirmed Presbyterian at age 15.

Family life-shaping event in teen years: When I was 16, my mother was in a horrible car accident that left her temporarily crippled and hospitalized on and off for several years. It was horrific to see my mother so physically crushed and incapacitated. She was in tremendous pain in the prime of her beautiful, active 35-year-old life. I was asked to assume the role of homemaker; including meal planning, grocery shopping, cooking, cleaning, laundry, ironing and anything else needed doing around the house. What little social life I did have in high school was now put on hold as I spent evenings and weekends assuming my new homemaking responsibilities. I remember feeling isolated from my peers, as they talked about the Beatles, go-go boots, or their current boyfriends, while the biggest news of my week was that chicken had just gone up to 19-cents a pound. It took more than two years, and multiple surgeries, but my mother was finally able to walk without crutches to my high school graduation.

Majored in Philosophy in Attempt to Find Beliefs to Guide Me: Attending the University of Wisconsin in Madison, beginning in fall 1970, was a wonderful, life transforming experience. In hindsight, I believe my college studies were the start of my ministerial call. I had rejected the divinity of Jesus at this point. Majoring in philosophy was perhaps a fumbling attempt to develop a personal theology – to explore a variety of metaphysical theories to find beliefs to guide me. Had I only known about Unitarian Universalism at the time!

At Madison, I found acceptance among my peers and made friends with four other women in the dorms who remained my roommates throughout the remainder of our college years. The Roomies remain close friends 35+ years later. We have truly shared the journey, and continue to be a loving presence in one another's lives.

Social Justice Involvement: America was at war in Viet Nam during my college years. I became actively involved in the antiwar protest movement helping to publicize and protest University research in chemical weaponry for the U.S. Department of Defense. As a result of student protests, UW declined to renew its research contract with the U.S. government. In my sophomore year, I was elected to student government from a student body of 58,000 people. Perhaps a harbinger for the public relations career that would follow, I was the one who thought about and made sure 20,000 candles were on hand for the antiwar candlelight march on the State Capital. I also participated in early experimental women's studies classes (before women's studies became a department at UW) as well as consciousness raising groups. I also marched for reproductive rights issues in the early days of the women's movement. During these years, I also served on the student board to create the first and only nonprofit student pharmacy that still thrives in Madison today.

Social justice activism often got in the way of my studies, leading to some grade challenges and strife with my parents over future job prospects in my chosen major. I dropped out of school for a few years to earn money to finish paying for college myself, so I could finish my degree on my own terms. As a result, I

completed my degree in Philosophy in 1979.

Successful PR Career Shaped Leadership, Communications Skills: I worked for both large, multinational companies and smaller firms in the energy, petrochemical and health-care related fields during my 35+-year career. I've spent time on offshore oilrigs, down in coalmines, and have hosted press conferences and managed sensitive business issues around the world. I have been successful working with such media outlets as CNN, CNBC, MSNBC, CBS, the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, the Financial Times, USA Today and countless other major daily newspapers and trade publications. My career has brought me into close relationship with some of the most powerful business people in the U.S., which has allowed me to speak truth to power, in most cases, as a trusted, respected colleague.

My first career experience taught me many skills that will serve me well in my ministry. For a deeper discussion about that, I refer readers to other questions in this Ministerial Record that ask about leadership skills, about working with staff and future ministerial colleagues, as well as what experience I bring leading organizational change.

Failed Marriages Led to Deep Personal Growth Work: I have been married twice. My first marriage lasted four years, ending when my husband found the courage to reveal he was gay. I met Jack and married again five years later and thought I had an ideal, happy marriage. However, the conflicting values that we held around scarcity, abundance and the use of money became our undoing over the course of 11 years. As a result of this second divorce, I began deep personal growth work to understand my part in the failure of two marriages and to make needed changes to improve my relationship with myself and with others.

CoDependents Anonymous Led Me Back to Spiritual Growth: In addition to counseling, I became an active participant in CoDependents Anonymous (CoDA) as part of my post-divorce growth work. CoDA is a 12-step recovery program for those who have suffered failures in their core life relationships and are seeking to establish and keep healthy boundaries and maintain healthy relationships with the self and others. As in all 12-step programs, a belief in a higher power greater than ourselves is the foundation upon which we rebuild our lives. I joined First UU Church in Houston during this time based on the messages of love and hope, the intellectual stimulation, the spiritual nurturing and the deep friendships I was to find there.

Answering the Call to Ministerial Service: Despite a highly successful PR career, I found my professional work was no longer feeding me. Rather, the time I spent volunteering at First Church, or sponsoring others in the CoDA 12-step recovery program were the activities that nourished me most.

I began to meditate and pray in early 2010 for guidance, knowing my life needed to change in a profound way. I prayed that my life change would be something huge, something meaningful, and, whatever the change, it would bring me great joy. The answer that came up repeatedly in response to my meditation and prayers: attending seminary and becoming an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister. When I imagined serving as a minister, I became filled with deep peace, centeredness, satisfaction, love and excitement about the future.

I met with First Church's interim minister Rev. Dr. David Keyes to talk to him about my call. "It's not a glamorous life, and you won't get rich," he warned. "But it is an extremely rewarding life. Don't do this unless you absolutely have to." I laughed and declared, "Oh yes, I have to, I truly do have to." Rev. Keyes validated my call and was most willing to support me in this effort. He has been an invaluable support for me on my journey towards ministry, and served as my teaching pastor in my final year of internship at the UU Church of Arlington, VA.

I entered seminary in Fall 2010 at Meadville Lombard Theological School and completed the program in

three years, graduating in May 2013. I appeared before the Ministerial Fellowship Committee in Fall 2013 and was subsequently accepted into preliminary fellowship and cleared for search. My ordination is planned for January 12, 2014 in my home congregation in Houston, Texas.

Ministerial Aspirations and Experience: I feel called to serve in parish ministry. I yearn to journey with a group of people over an extended arc of time as we grow spiritually together and thrive in beloved community. Unitarian Universalists have a "good news" story to tell. I hope to reach out to share our liberal religious faith with others who need the love, acceptance and permission we provide to discover and live into their own spiritual beliefs and values.

I served two full-year part-time ministerial internships as part of my seminary training. I completed my first internship (8/2011-6/2012) at First Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY. When my teaching pastor was called to serve a congregation in a different part of the country, I completed the second half of my internship at the UU Church of Arlington, VA (8/2012-6/2013). The Arlington church was so tremendously supportive of my ministry there that they asked me to continue on and serve as their summer minister (6-8/2013). What a wonderfully rich solo ministering experience we shared together this past summer!

Continuing Education/Professional Development: I maintain professional membership in the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association as well as the local Chesapeake UU Ministers Association, and attend regular meetings, conferences, and workshops for collegial networking and professional development activities. Ministerial trainings I have attended include workshops on healthy sexual boundaries for ministers, and on diversity and multi-culturalism.

As part of my seminary and hospital chaplain training, I participated in a Healthy Sexual Boundaries for Ministers training as well as a workshop on protecting children from sexual predators and abuse in a church setting. I attended the annual 3-day Allies for Racial Equity conference for ministers and interested lay leaders in March 2013, which provided workshops on how to build more culturally and ethically diverse congregations in our faith movement.

In addition, I am active in the Joseph Priestly District activities and have attended conferences and workshops throughout the Washington, DC, Virginia and Delaware areas, including participation in the Growing Healthy Congregations curriculum.

I love General Assembly and wish to continue attending and participating in both the annual UU Ministers Association meeting and GA going forward. In November 2013, I participated in a UU College of Social Justice trip to Haiti. It was a powerful, heart-felt social witness shared with UUs from other parts of the country. I hope to encourage participation in future UU College of Social Justice trips with future congregants.

Denominational and community activities:

Describe with dates active membership in and significant volunteer service to local congregations, the UUA and its districts, and civic, political, social service, and interfaith organizations and programs:

Following my divorce in the late 90s, I began attending the First UU Church of Houston and became an active part of the congregation. Some of my leadership roles there included:

Led the Youth Group (2008-2010), responsible for coordinating with four other adult co-leaders and our Dir. of Religious Education to plan, schedule and lead RE for our high school youth. Also coordinated YRUU and social justice volunteer activities with the youth and coordinated with other area youth leaders throughout the greater Houston cluster for shared youth activities such as district-wide rallies. I stepped down upon acceptance into seminary to focus my time/attention on full-time schoolwork.

Worship Associate (2003 to 2011), assisting ministers in the selection of readings and leading portions of worship. Worship is a sacred, shared community space and I have enjoyed being part of the creation of that spiritually nurturing experience. Have served as worship associate for six ministers. I stopped my worship associate activities upon moving away from Houston for my ministerial internship.

Member of Worship Task Force (2007). A delicate position, charged with the responsibility to identify the components of worship most important to our congregation and to help identify what about our worship practices were perceived of as broken. The task force was part of several concurrent studies being done within our congregation at the suggestion of the Alban Institute at a time when many people were unhappy with one of our called ministers and wanted to seek his removal. Worked closely with a team of six others and led the communication efforts to report findings back to an angry and sometimes hostile congregational audience.

Member of Nominating Committee (2006-2007), responsible for recruiting, vetting and nominating prospective board members at a delicate time when a large number of congregants were unhappy with our current minister and wanted to remove him. Politics within the congregation were becoming disruptive as people began jockeying to support prospective board members depending on how they might vote to remove the minister. Our committee had to walk a very tense tightrope with integrity and dignity, above the fray, attempting best efforts in locating and putting forth candidates who would serve all of the church in the long-term best interest of the congregation and not answer to any particular faction on any one issue. I again helped coordinate communication during this difficult time in reporting the slate to the congregation for voting and helped facilitate an extremely ugly congregational meeting -- asking people to remain on task and to stick to discussing issues instead of attacking personalities.

Adjunct member of Stewardship Committee (2005-2006) charged with responsibility to hold face-to-face meetings with members of congregation to survey their feelings about the church and to help identify underlying issues related to a significant drop in pledges from prior years. Met with a number of people in their homes who were unfortunately unhappy with our newly called minister. Prepared a summary report of findings for the Stewardship Committee.

Committee on Ministry (2004-2005), served as sounding board to church ministers and to help liaise between the ministers and issues important to the congregation. This was a very difficult and delicate job at a time when the congregation was becoming increasingly unhappy with the performance of our most recently called minister.

Search Committee (2003-2004). Shared responsibility with 8 others in all duties and responsibilities related to calling a new minister as part of a team ministry. Had to manage delicate political issues, as there was a small but vocal group in the church who wanted to unseat our existing called minister and replace her with a single new male senior minister rather than finding a team minister to complement her work at our church.

Non-Profit Community Organizations:

Anti-Viet Nam War Organizer and Protestor (late 1960s into the 1970s). Was an active student leader against the war in Viet Nam. Was elected to the student government at the University of Wisconsin (58,000 student body) in my sophomore year based on my anti-war leadership activities. Had direct responsibility for organizing several candle light marches on the State Capitol during these years, marches that typically drew 100,000 people or more.

Early Stages of Women's Movement/Reproductive Rights issues (late 1960s into the 1970s). Became an activities in the early women's rights movement while a student at Madison as well, including attending demonstrations, organizing and leading consciousness raising study groups for women (in some ways an

early form of small group ministry). Was also active in protests against the reproductive rights laws of the day, which made it illegal in the State of Wisconsin to access birth control pills unless women were married and had their husbands sign a permission slip for them to receive birth control pills. (Yes, that's the way it was, back then.) Have been an active financial supporter of Planned Parenthood ever since. I am thrilled that this year's denominational study action is reproductive rights, which are under renewed attack in today's conservative religious right climate.

Ministerial volunteer intern at Emergency Aid Coalition (2010-2011). Helped distribute food and clothing to the Houston area homeless as well as working families earning below the poverty level. The work took me out into the streets to talk with the homeless, predominantly African American men in this particular part of Houston, to encourage them to come in and get flu shots for the fall/winter season. The work also included making sandwiches and stuffing bag lunches for distribution at the center five days a week, as well as picking up and shelving food donations from area grocery stores and bakeries, and helping to distribute the groceries to families in need. Other work included sorting donated clothing by type and size and helping families select clothing and toiletries for themselves and/or for their family members. We also distributed back-to-school book bags/school supplies and uniform vouchers each August for qualifying families.

VOICE (Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement). (2012-2013) Participated as a clergy activist during my ministerial internship in Arlington, VA, to advocate for fair housing in Arlington County, one of the most expensive counties to live in the U.S. Attended Saul Alinsky-based community organizing training in preparation for my work with VOICE, a grass-roots multi-faith community development organization.

Social Witness. (2012-2013) Attended several social witness activities as a robed clergy representative in Washington, DC, including demonstrating on the steps of the Supreme Court in favor of marriage equality when the Defense of Marriage Act was struck down in June 2013, and walking the halls of all three buildings of Congress, calling on key legislators with a group of more than 150 clergy from all faiths, to pray and protest the government shut down in October 2013.

Main Street Theater Board of Directors. (1994-2004) Helped to guide strategic visioning and planning for the organization's growth and expansion into two theater spaces, as well as assist with numerous fundraising and publicity activities for the non-profit organization. The theater won numerous awards for its work, including its nationally renowned children's theater program, which provided a live theater experience in partnership with the Houston Independent School District for more than 85,000 to 100,000 children and youth each year.

Houston Masterworks Chorus. (1989 – 2009) A founding board member of this 130-member community chorus, which performs classic works multiple times a year. Helped to start a program where a smaller subset of the chorus also performs holiday caroling at the MD Anderson Cancer Center in the Texas Medical Center. Helped to create a children's choir camp summer experience for disadvantaged young people in the Houston community. Also helped to raise the visibility of the organization community wide to the point where the city mayor began to include HMC in its annual televised holiday tree lighting ceremony in front of city hall. Also assisted the organization in numerous fundraising campaigns over the years.

Houston City Breakfast Club, (1983 to 2011) a professional women's networking and service organization. Have been a member of the organization for nearly 30 years, having served multiple times on the board of directors, as well as the scholarship and service committees. The organization transitioned over the past 30 years to become not only a professional networking organization where we supported one another in business, but also a tightly knit group of close friends, who have witnessed and supported one another throughout the ups and downs of our personal lives as well. In my various leadership roles, I helped link the

group to graduating high school, college-aged, and older women seeking financial support for additional education. I also helped link the organization to a variety of area non-profit organizations for our annual charitable giving and volunteer service work.

Non-professional interests:

In my free time, I love reading, especially novels and poetry. I also have a deep love of the theater, and served on the board of a regional theater in Houston for many years. Perhaps it is more accurate to claim that I love good, compelling storytelling of many different forms, from books to the theater, music and movies as well. I love being challenged to perceive the human experience from multiple points of view.

On the home front, I am a fairly good cook (an omnivore). I love sharing good food, good wine and good fellowship with family and friends. I also love art festivals, and have surrounded myself with interesting and playful jewelry, paintings, sculptures and other artistic creations.

I love to ski and try to go at least once a year, if time allows. I am also a scuba diver, but have not been able to dive for quite awhile. I enjoy traveling throughout the world, including both the developed and developing world. My travels to date have taken me to East Africa, China, Spain, France, the UK, Canada, Mexico, the Bahamas, Haiti and New Zealand.

Other hobbies include photography, yoga and tai chi, as well as walking/hiking. I also enjoy music of nearly all types, and love going to concerts and live performances. My daily spiritual practice involves meditation and journaling.

Ministerial development:

What are your current developmental needs, and how might a congregation assist you in addressing them?

It has been awkward, at times, transitioning from the business world to ministry. The corporate world focuses on results, driven by fast-moving opportunities, deadlines, profits and problem solving. My personality lends itself well to the quick “on your feet” thinking and problem solving required in the Fortune 500 world. But I no longer serve that world.

Ministry is focused instead on the development and nurturing of human beings in relationship with one another, with whatever they experience as sacred, and with the larger human community of need. While I may sometimes be called on for fast “on my feet” problem-solving in ministry, I am mostly here to provide deep listening, loving pastoral care, social justice witness, and community building as well as spiritual guidance and nurturing. I am here to journey with people in love -- to witness and to provide comfort, not to “fix” another’s problems or pain. My personality also lends itself to this work of loving compassionate presence. Although from time to time during my internship, I had to remind myself to dial back my strong, fast moving corporate presence to return to my calm, non-anxious ministerial presence.

This work requires me to bring an ongoing level of self-awareness to my work as a minister. And, other people’s feedback has helped me as I transitioned. For example, I asked my volunteer intern committee to observe me in various settings throughout my involvement in church life, to note if I exhibited a corporate demeanor, and to give me timely, valuable feedback to help me realign my ministerial presence as needed. In the year we worked together, no one on the committee ever observed me being too business-like or too powerful a leader. Rather, they praised me for the flexibility they saw in my leadership style. I remain grateful for their observations and their support to help me transition fully into ministry.

As I continue forward in my professional development, I will seek feedback from the board and trusted lay leaders about all aspects of my ministry, as we work to build the church and ministry we dream of, together. And, I intend to continue to participate in ministerial professional development conferences and workshops

as I work to hone all aspects of my skills and abilities.

Describe a mistake you have made in the past, and how you have addressed it:

Here is a story about challenges transitioning from a business career to ministry: During the early part of my internship, I behaved very professionally with congregants, including the lay members of my internship committee. At first, the committee enjoyed the benefits of a minister with business experience: one who started and ended meetings on time, came fully prepared, with an agenda and all pertinent paperwork to distribute, etc. Over the next several months, the intern committee members observed me preaching, facilitating/teaching a small group ministry class, officiating my first memorial service and so much more. My previous business experience speaking before large crowds and facilitating meetings found me comfortable and competent in whatever setting my team had observed.

After about six months, one of the committee members looked at me in exasperation and asked facetiously, “Is there anything you DON'T do well? Other committee members chimed in. They were frustrated, I realized in hindsight, because they didn't know how to help me in my ministerial development. They had yet to witness me in moments of stumbling, painful vulnerability in my work as a minister. I had plenty of moments of doubt and growth, I can assure you, but they tended to happen in more private moments -- at times when members of the committee weren't observing me. Times, for instance, when I doubted if I had said or done the right thing tending to a parishioner in deep emotional pain, or the struggles I was having working with someone in the congregation with schizophrenia.

I had been debriefing and sharing most of my developmental fumbblings and vulnerabilities one-on-one with my teaching pastor. By the time I met the following month with my intern team, typically my painful vulnerabilities had already been processed and incorporated into my learnings. I was forward focused and failed to remember to backtrack and debrief and share these same developmental struggles from weeks past with my intern team as well.

This was certainly not because I was trying to hide my failings from them. My teaching pastor, intern team and I met together to try to unpack more about what was going on. Together, we realized that part of the problem lay in my professional demeanor – I was exhibiting business professional behavior with my team, not ministerial professional behavior.

The difference is subtle, but huge. While most people treat one another with kindness and respect in a business setting, managerial people in large, multi-national corporations do not tend to open up and share personal vulnerabilities. Business environments can be highly competitive and cutthroat -- revealing personal vulnerability is not typically part of most Fortune 500 (i.e. male-dominated) business cultures.

And, yet, being able to open up and share personal vulnerabilities is key to a minister's authenticity. Here, at church, we meet one another and connect in the places of our own brokenness. Congregants want and need to hear stories about the times ministers have struggled, and failed, and yet found the strength and courage to endure, learn, grow and try again. Minister's stories of struggles, doubt and faith help congregants come to know, trust and feel comfortable opening up their deepest selves for pastoral care. When we are willing to reveal ourselves as perfectly imperfect, we give others permission to be the perfectly imperfect human beings they are, as well.

That being said, there is a fine line for ministers – a thin boundary between what is an appropriate level of personal sharing versus sharing so much vulnerability that a congregation feels they need to care-take the minister. It is a tricky boundary for all ministers to navigate. It takes practice – including the practice one gets during a ministerial internship and the guidance of a teaching pastor – to become more skilled in opening up our authentic vulnerabilities with congregants.

Once we identified the issue, I was able to work on transitioning my professional behavior from business-like (non-vulnerable) to more ministerial. I was comfortable opening up and sharing during sermons, reflections and small group ministry about past failings in my life and how they led, ultimately, to personal growth and transformation. I shared where I was struggling in my ministerial development with my intern team. It made a huge difference in our relationship going forward.

I was also able to incorporate my learnings from this mistake directly into the first meeting I had with second-year intern committee in Arlington, VA. In that initial meeting, I shared all about the growing edges in my ministerial formation and asked them to help me as I transitioned from the business world to ministry. They had a clear idea of how to help me and they provided invaluable insight and feedback as I continued to grow and stretch into my growing ministerial presence. And that, as the poet once said, has made all the difference.

Ministerial roles and functions:

How would you wish to function with lay leadership? Comment on your leadership style:

I was an active lay leader in my home congregation just a few short years ago. That experience is fresh enough to help guide me forward as a minister. As a volunteer, I appreciated being on a first-name basis with my minister. Ours was a warm, collegial relationship built on trust and genuine caring. In a 400+ member congregation, I appreciated that the minister always seemed to know what committees or activities I was currently working on. He made a point to ask me questions about how my projects/activities were going.

As a minister, I can now imagine our relationship from the other side. His ongoing check-ins with me might have been a way of checking for signs of frustration or burnout. And, I suspect he probably was also gauging if it might be time to suggest I shift my volunteer focus to a new area – either one where he would like to see me stretch and develop further in my lay leadership skills, or one where someone or some situation at church might benefit from my particular skill set and leadership.

I also felt cared for pastorally as a volunteer -- I trusted the minister would step in and minister to me, or provide additional volunteer help, or help resolve obstacles or problems, before I got to a place of complete “overwhelm” and burnout. He always made time for me whenever I knocked on his door. He interacted with me enough for me to know my leadership was highly appreciated and valued, but he didn’t attempt to micro-manage me in any way.

I bring the insights from these and many other wonderful lay leadership experiences, as well as business leadership experience to my ministry. Corporate experience taught me a broad range of leadership styles – and that different styles work best in differing situations, depending on the goals and the issues that must be addressed. In addition to my years of “learning leadership and people management by doing,” I attended countless leadership development conferences, classes and workshops in my first career. I also taught leadership classes in the business world, including training in facilitation and conflict management, teaching people how to lead meetings where all participants felt heard. My leadership style experience includes a range of skill sets to draw from as needed, including:

Administrative leadership skills and style, which includes everything from strategic visioning, planning and goal setting to weekly meetings with staff, ongoing meetings with the board and key leadership councils and committees, etc. Ongoing regular communication helps us trouble shoot the obstacles and resource challenges that often pop up and stand in the way of the work we need to complete. Ongoing check-ins also allows us to identify individual stress levels – to minister to the emotional needs of people as the stress of their work ebbs and flows.

Collegial team management leadership style: I have played a role in leading corporate-wide projects, including change management initiatives that would bring change, as well as upset, to familiar routines,

processes and procedures. I helped assemble and lead multi-departmental, multiple-location teams that brought people together from different hierarchical levels within an organization, with differing skill sets, educational levels, personality styles, approaches to problem solving, as well as different ethnic and cultural backgrounds (including people from different parts of the globe). I found it helpful when leading these groups to spend some initial time with team building exercises – ideally in a retreat setting – to add some fun to our bonding work as we got to know and see one another past the labels of job titles, skill sets, gender, race, or geographic location. Other team creation work included creating a pact to define what we expected from one another (i.e. we defined how we will behave with one another, as well as clarified who would be responsible for what roles, how and how often we would best communicate with one another, etc.) That sure sounds like creating a covenant to me!

Powerful, authoritative leadership skills: There were countless times in my career when I was called up to a CEO's office to provide leadership and expertise to define how best to respond to a difficult, often emergency situation in front of television cameras. That involved stepping up and into the role of "the person in charge" in those settings. There may be tough times in a congregation's life, where the minister will need to step forward and take visible leadership to help shepherd people through times of shock, grief, tremendous loss or to respond to a highly emotionally charged or unusual issue. I have the experience to be able to assume that leadership style when the board and/or congregation turns to me and needs that kind of leadership from their minister in a difficult moment.

Leadership is an art, not a science. There are as many ways to lead, as there are people to help and problems to be resolved. My years of leadership experience in both business and church environments bring flexibility and multiple skills to meet the variety of needs in the daily life of a church.

How would you wish to function with (paid) church staff?

Church staff will be some of my most important on-the-ground teachers. Their experience and insights will be immeasurable to help me get up to speed about a church and its people, passions, programs, policies, processes, procedures and unique culture. Church staff offers the all-important day-to-day perspective into the current challenges as well as the promise of all the church can be. I look forward to being their eager student, trusted collaborator, supervisor, supportive mentor and coach.

I have managed groups of up to 40 people, including people from different walks of life, different ethnic backgrounds, and differing levels of education and skill sets. I earned a reputation as being fun to work with – I work hard, but I also believe there is a place for laughter and playfulness in our work together, as well. I take great pride that I continue to share wonderfully close friendships today with former bosses, co-workers and colleagues from every company, organization or church I have ever worked.

Just as congregations create behavioral covenants to define how we intend to be in right relationship with one another as a beloved faith community, it is also essential for a staff and minister(s) to create working covenants together – to help define how we will be in right relations with one another as a work team. One of my favorite lines from a staff covenant where I served as a ministerial intern: We will not let one another fail. That is the kind of trust and teamwork I hope to help build, nurture and support as a minister.

Trust is an underlying ethic in my working relationships. I have built many trust-based work environments over the years, where we share accountability as a team for the ongoing successful operations of a department or organization. We trust and expect one another to accomplish what we say we are going to do, when we say we are going to do it. I have no desire to micromanage anybody. Rather, I want to delegate and trust someone to apply their own best thinking and best effort, and to come to me for help if they feel stuck. I have an open door policy – I want people to come in, ask questions, express concerns and raise red flags whenever obstacles, issues or unexpected needs create new kinks in work loads and deadlines. As supervisor and coach, part of my job is to help run interference for the staff – to help resolve problems and remove resource

obstacles wherever possible, so people can go back to focusing on what they do best.

I support professional development and career growth among church staff. I would want to look at current roles and responsibilities and explore where staff has passion to grow into new roles over time. I also wish to plan and budget for staff members to attend professional development workshops as well as district and regional conferences, perhaps even GA, as time and budget allow.

I am also charged to hold accountable staff members who consistently struggle in their work performance, or who exhibit difficult behavior that is disruptive to the workplace. It is important to clarify individual work roles and responsibilities, and to counsel someone who is failing to uphold those roles and responsibilities. My past work experience has taught me to document performance problems in writing and to counsel the troubled employee, having them sign the written documentation to acknowledge the performance or behavior problems and to take ownership for the actions needed to address the issues.

I believe it is essential to share in confidence, any personnel problems and written documentation with the appropriate board/personnel committee members. Hopefully, an employee is able to turn things around. If not, then the minister must follow the established church procedures, and involve the required leadership in decisions about whether to discontinue employment. I have had to fire people over the course of my first career. Firing someone is never easy, but is often necessary for the ongoing health of the organization, and for the rest of the working team. I am able to help a church walk through this difficult path, to let go of someone using processes and procedures that respect both the individual, as well as protect the needs of the church.

Having been in the communications field for decades, it is important to me that work teams have open, transparent communications with one another on an ongoing basis, so we work together as a coordinated team, not as individual silos. The smooth running of a church is itself a ministry, and it is important the entire team understands how their work portfolio fits into and supports the overall ministry and mission of the church.

Oh, and meetings should include great snacks, whenever possible, right?

How would you wish to function as part of a ministry team?

I have worked within hierarchical reporting structures in the business world, so I am comfortable working for and reporting to other people, which might include a senior minister supervisor. That being said, throughout my career in both the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors, I have built relationships with bosses and other senior people throughout an organization to become more of a trusted colleague and partnering collaborator than a subordinate.

I certainly experienced collegial minister relationships in my internship. I joined a staff of three full-time ministers in my work at the UU Church of Arlington. My teaching pastor gave me assignments where I needed to work with one or both of the other ministers to accomplish those tasks. Sometimes I was asked to take the lead, even though I was the intern, and in other cases, I was there to support the other minister as they led an initiative. I am comfortable stepping up or stepping back, as a situation or colleague requires.

What a treasure trove of ministerial resources to aid me in my internship year – I was able to brainstorm and learn best practices and most effective ways to accomplish any number of assignments from all three ministerial colleagues -- from restructuring the church's small group ministry program to the creation of a lay leadership pastoral care team. We worked well as an entire team, as well as within the various mini-teams we broke into in order to work on specific activities. I am tremendously grateful for this hands-on experience in collaborative ministerial teamwork!

I believe it is important for ministerial colleagues to put our day-to-day tasks aside, from time to time, to put our feet up together and focus on bigger picture issues – to take the time for “blue sky” visioning and other organizational Big Idea discussions. It is important to include lay leaders in this kind of work, too. This informal strategic thinking and deeper sharing helps build stronger co-leader relationships among ministers -- as well as with lay leaders -- and ensures we continue to pull our metaphorical oars in the same direction as we help staff and other volunteers do the same.

No one of us – including a minister -- has all the answers to all the many human and organizational challenges churches face. Other clergy become important resources and emotional support as we wrestle with delicate situations, often having to make painful decisions to protect the greater good of the entire congregation. Whether I am called as part of a ministerial team, or as the sole minister in a congregation, I intend to build collegial friendships and mentoring relationships with other nearby clergy, as we support one another’s ministries.

How would you wish to function in the communities beyond the local congregation?

My church internship experience taught me that there is much to be gained through active participation in multi-faith social justice and community building initiatives. Well-coordinated, multi-faith efforts can beam a brighter spotlight and garner greater attention on a public issue that needs addressing. For example, I joined in with more than 150 other ministers, rabbis and a local Imam, in our respective clergy garb, to walk all three halls of congress this past October to sing together, pray and protest the government shutdown. Given the size and strength of this multi-faith delegation, television cameras and reporters began to follow us from office to office of key leaders, as we called for ongoing dialogue and cooperation among our elected officials to end the impasse. We established a large enough peaceful protest presence that congressional leaders and staff felt somewhat forced to come out and engage with us -- several issued statements that the time had come to overcome difference and end the shutdown.

I have experienced the expanded power of other multi-faith congregational witness to gain fair housing rights in Arlington County, VA, through VOICE – Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement. Wherever I am called, I hope to become engaged in multi-faith community action organizations, and to encourage the congregation towards multi-faith grassroots justice work as well. It is a wonderful way to build relationships between other people of faith throughout a community, and a powerful, effective way to find a deeper voice for justice beyond the power of one, single faith community.

I also believe that we build richer, longer-lasting transformational community relationships when we seek out on-the-ground partners to help collaborate and guide us in our social justice work. It becomes especially important as we expand our outreach work within multi-cultural, multi-ethnic environments. Let’s face it. So many of our faith communities tend to represent one particular cultural experience and viewpoint. There is much we can learn, and our work can take on so much deeper significance, when we partner with, listen to and work alongside others who may have more on-the-ground knowledge around a particular issue or a particular community. No matter where I serve, I would love to encourage and support existing community justice partnering, and to help a congregation build additional partnering relationships, if they so desire.

There are also opportunities to explore partnering with other UU churches nearby informally, or through more formal cluster and district conferences, workshops, and retreats. These gatherings offer wonderful leadership development training for clergy, staff and lay leadership, and provide a forum to learn more about current “best practices” throughout our area.

What has been your experience in leading organizational change in multicultural settings?

I bring years of experience as a facilitator and team leader to help lead change management initiatives in large multinational companies. I helped build trust within differing levels of the organization as people worked together to transition to a new way of doing things.

I played a key role in setting up processes to facilitate 360-degree communication throughout the transition so as many people as possible felt heard – people at all levels of the company had a chance to voice dreams as well as concerns around the change. Communication must be ongoing to acknowledge and identify challenges that surface at different stages of transitions, and to help identify, validate and address people’s emotional reactions to change.

My experience teaches how very difficult it is for all of us to experience change – how transitions involve not only the introduction of something new, but also involve the loss of something comfortable and familiar. During change, even small changes, it is normal for us to experience some discomfort and grief in response to this loss of the familiar. Most often, we don’t realize that one of the underlying feelings in response to change is actually grief.

In the business world, so many companies and consultants make the mistake of responding to human feelings with logic – people will feel better once they have more data and facts. In truth, what people really need during times of transition is ministry. They need a safe space to express their feelings around change and to feel heard and respected in that process. And they need leadership they can trust who listens and cares, and helps them move through the discomfort that is normal in transitions of any kind.

I also played a lead role as a facilitator in my home congregation to help the board manage some contentious congregational meetings where people were expressing unhappiness with one of the ministers and desired to negotiate a leave settlement. My business experience, plus my experience helping to manage conflict during a particularly difficult time at church, will serve me well helping to lead people in a multicultural setting through change and conflict as a minister.

Ministerial skills and current special interests:

Special Skills	Special Interests
4 = those functions in which you are gifted and expert	4 = those functions on which you are urgently moved to focus
3 = those in which you are accomplished	3 = those to which you wish to give energy
2 = those in which you are competent	2 = those to which you will give adequate attention
1 = those in which you have little experience	1 = those which you would prefer to ignore

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|--|---|
| <p>Skl: 3 Int:2 Administration</p> <p>Skl: 4 Int: 3 Adult religious education</p> <p>Skl: 2 Int: 3 Children's religious education</p> <p>Skl: 2 Int: 2 Committee work</p> <p>Skl: 4 Int: 4 Community building</p> <p>Skl: 4 Int: 3 Staff relations</p> | <p>Skl: 3 Int:3 Personal counseling</p> <p>Skl: 3 Int: 4 Preaching</p> <p>Skl: 2 Int: 1 Scholarship</p> <p>Skl: 3 Int: 3 Social action</p> <p>Skl: 3 Int: 4 Spiritual guidance</p> <p>Skl: 2 Int: 2 Denominational activities</p> |
|--|---|

Skl: 4	Int: 3	Facilitation	Skl: 4	Int: 4	Worship
Skl: 3	Int: 4	Fund-raising	Skl: 4	Int: 3	Youth work
Skl: 3	Int: 3	Home visitation	Skl: 3	Int: 4	Conflict/Change Management
Skl: 3	Int: 3	Hospital calling	Skl: 2	Int: 3	Policy Governance, if applicable
Skl: 3	Int: 4	Leadership development	Skl: 4	Int: 4	Small Group Ministry
Skl: 4	Int: 4	Membership growth	Skl: 4	Int: 3	Raising Visibility of the Church beyond Church Walls
Skl: 4	Int: 4	Music and liturgical arts			

What is your approach to the religious education of children, youth, and adults?

I served as the lead advisor for my home church youth group for several years, and also participated in or observed different aged children's RE classes, as well as taught several adult classes as part of my ministerial internship. There is no question that healthy, growing congregations must offer quality lifespan education experiences in order to attract and support families as well as serve the needs of adult members and welcome newcomers into beloved community. Here are just a few learnings from my experiences working with children, youth, teens and adults, which have shaped my philosophy of RE:

The importance of healthy, consistent boundaries: I assumed lay leadership for a youth group on the heels of some previous adult leader boundary violations. The interim minister dismissed all the previous youth leaders simultaneously. The teens were angry their leaders were "fired" without the youth group's input or consent. I worked with the RE director to build a new volunteer adult leadership team. Our ministry began by providing a safe space to allow the youth to vent their anger and frustration. Their venting did not change the outcome of their prior leaders' dismissal, but the youth began to feel heard. Over time, we built trust between the teens and their new leaders.

Together, we established a new behavioral covenant. It was important to reinforce it consistently. To begin, I was the primary covenant keeper, the one who stood up and walked over to our covenant on the wall to point to our agreed upon boundaries. Happily, over time, the teens themselves also became enforcers of the covenant.

Given the teens' earlier frustration that they weren't consulted about decisions impacting the program, we provided them an opportunity to express program direction preferences by selecting which curriculum we would use going forward. We held a weekend lock-in retreat for the youth, and allowed them to review and choose from among five pre-selected possible RE youth curricula for the coming year. As a result, we watched movie clips each Sunday and held fun, meaningful discussions guided by Michelle Richards' "Popcorn Theology." At the end of the first year, one of the graduating seniors sent me a hand-written note, expressing thanks for what he termed "saving the youth program." The DRE and I did a little celebratory jig together behind closed doors at receiving that note at the end of a challenging, but very rewarding year.

The importance of building relationships at church with teens that encourages lifelong UU church involvement: A significant number of our young people raised UU go away to college and fail to return to a congregation as adults. It concerns me that in some churches, our RE programs are completely "silo-ed" -- children/teens grow up and leave church without experiencing adult worship or developing comfortable

familiarity with our rituals, hymns and other worship elements. I believe it is important children, youth and teens begin each Sunday in the sanctuary before going off to class to help build familiarity and comfort with what happens in the sanctuary during worship.

One unintended side-effect of “silo-ing” -- the RE program can sometimes become a separation of “the church upstairs” from “the church downstairs.” That breaks my heart, as we are truly one large multigenerational church family. When this happens, many children/youth/teens fail to develop meaningful relationships with the minister(s) or other adults beyond their RE teachers and youth advisors.

In her book *Full Circle*, Kate Tweedie Erslev provides a template to address these challenges. She cites reasons why many cradle UUs DO ultimately return to church as adults, including: the minister knew them on a first-name basis as children/youth/teens; and the minister invited them personally to participate in a non-RE multigenerational leadership role/activity at church during their teen years.

As a minister intern in a church with a 500-children RE program, I made it a point to ask as many children, youth and teens his or her name and did my best to greet them personally going forward. As a parish minister, I want to encourage teen involvement as volunteer participants in multi-generational activities beyond the RE classroom, so teens experience firsthand becoming known and respected as important participants within the larger church community.

We don't typically train or ask our teens to make a commitment to join church as members, as so many other denominations do. I wonder if there might be value in exploring the pros and cons of creating such a pathway to membership for our young people. I would be happy to work on that with a congregation if they expressed interest in developing this kind of program. I have a lot of passion around building relationships and creating any program that sows the seeds for our young people to return to active church life as young adults.

The importance of developmentally age-appropriate curricula: Some background -- congregants were asked to cut their family's holiday spending in half and donate the unspent half to the church's annual Greater Good fund. Because this fund is raised from monies that might otherwise have been spent on children's holiday gifts, the church's fund is given as a donation from the children of the congregation to support several local children's charities each year.

The situation: It was two weeks before Christmas, and I was asked to observe the first-grade RE class. The RE lesson was to celebrate the \$50,000 raised in this year's Greater Good fund, and to teach the children it is more important to give than to receive. The volunteer teacher had prepared wrapped “presents” – little gift-wrapped boxes that contained cut out pictures of possible gifts. At the start of the class, each child picked a wrapped present out of “Santa's sack” and unwrapped it to see what they “got.”

There was a mad, excited scramble, as each child reached in and began to unwrap his/her “present.” The excitement quickly turned to confusion and huge disappointment for most, as only some of the gifts pictured were age-appropriate or involved toys. Many were cut out pictures of gifts only adults would appreciate. The little boy next to me was close to tears when his friend unwrapped a picture of a toy fire truck and he unwrapped a picture of a diamond ring. One girl unwrapped a photo of a jewelry making kit, which was quickly identified as the most desirable gift in the circle. Jealousy ensued. The kids focused on wanting to see the photo of “her” gift, upset they hadn't unwrapped an equally cool present.

The students remained stuck in their emotional reactions to the literal picking and unwrapping of “presents.” First graders are very concrete learners at this stage, and the exercise stimulated additional developmental expectations and excitement because Christmas was only two weeks away. The teacher never could move the children to an abstract discussion about the importance of charitable giving. She began to lose patience;

failing to understand why some children had such negative reactions to what she thought would be a fun opening class activity.

This experience gave me greater appreciation for the challenges our staff and volunteer teachers face, especially if they are asked to create age-appropriate curriculum from scratch. Despite the availability of age and developmentally appropriate materials available online through the UUA's Tapestry of Faith program, I have witnessed more than one RE staff team scramble week to week to create new curriculum for every age group in order to match a particular theme being explored that Sunday in adult worship. Creating ongoing curriculum plans week after week for every age group and hoping/expecting volunteer teachers to have enough time to review the materials, absorb the lessons and build developmentally appropriate teaching experiences around the materials is a very noble venture, but it might be too difficult to sustain over the long term. I have concerns about both staff and volunteer teacher burnout.

What a difference in the quality of learning I observed when comparing the Greater Good first-grade class using curriculum created that week versus a first grade OWL class, where teachers taught from tested, age-appropriate curricula. The first graders were fully engaged, as teachers used drawings and dolls to show children the correct names for male and female anatomy. A hands-on art project in the second half of the OWL class had the first graders enthusiastically engrossed in creating collages representing various body parts.

The importance of ongoing training to support and nurture volunteer teachers: Our RE programs could not function without the large group of enthusiastic, devoted, reliable and safe volunteer teaching staff. We ask a lot from this group of folks. Quality training seems key to ensuring ongoing success in the RE classroom as well as ongoing satisfaction for our teachers and students alike.

Teacher volunteers benefit from understanding more about the teaching/learning process itself, including: different learning styles; the power of "hands on" engagement; and differences in comprehension levels they might expect to see in different aged classes. This understanding might better prepare teachers to help get classes back on track when learning gets stuck or breaks down due to age-level curricula challenges, such as the "Greater Good" giving lesson. In addition, I have observed firsthand the challenges our teacher volunteers face in managing a full classroom when mental illness, autism spectrum issues or acting out behaviors occur. I would want to assure our teacher volunteers have the training and support they need to address these challenges comfortably and effectively, including partnering with parents as needed.

Many adults are hungry to dive deeper and explore topics that encourage rich personal reflection and spiritual growth: The good news is that there are a wide variety of beliefs and theological diversity in any one of our congregations. The bad news about our diversity is that many times, people are afraid to voice their beliefs for fear of judgment or of being shut down by a larger or more vocal majority. Yet, it is just these kinds of open dialogues -- where people share a diversity of beliefs --that enrich our own search for truth and meaning, as we encourage others along their own spiritual journeys as well.

In creating, teaching or co-teaching adult spiritual development classes, I have found many congregants eager to sign up for a Bible exploration class, for instance. They want to take a fresh look at familiar teachings through the eyes and ears of their newfound UU values and faith. In addition, I have also seen enthusiastic adult participation and deep class relationships build among the participants and the minister in a poetry reflection class, a writing/spiritual journaling class, a class on prayer as a spiritual practice, as well as classes on how to create and sustain a daily spiritual practice.

Faith development is a lifelong journey. Adult spiritual development classes offer numerous opportunities to find and to make new friends as people open up to share and to make meaning around their personal experiences of ultimate mystery. It is essential programming to help plug people into the rich

“belongingness” that church offers – a belongingness people cannot find in other organizations and social institutions.

Direct ministerial involvement helps RE programs remain vital, healthy and growing: Religious education programs benefit tremendously when ministers are actively involved, teach occasional adult classes, and are visible advocates for RE staffing, budget and programming needs. Ministerial leadership is needed to close any gaps that might exist between the perceptions of an upstairs/downstairs church – we are a single multigenerational faith community. I also believe it is beneficial for ministers to drop by and observe RE classes first hand as they are able -- especially when guest ministers help to free up worship responsibilities -- to build direct relationships with the children, youth, teens and teachers. And it is important to attend RE parent meetings, to hear parental concerns, to support staff and to encourage ongoing volunteering to meet the church’s lifespan religious education needs.

What do you see as the role of music and the arts in the life of a congregation?

There is a common misperceived stereotype of UUs as being more intellectual than emotional. But my experience suggests we come to church to have our whole selves challenged, nurtured and fed – we seek to engage both hemispheres of our brains.

Words can certainly express values, ideas and ideals that inform, guide and inspire us to action, to live meaningful lives. But music, poetry, dance, theater and other art often stir our hearts -- they touch and heal us more deeply than words alone might do. How often has a piece of music carried you away to a place of contemplation, or reverence, or joy? How many times has music opened up your heart and moved you to tears? How often has music marked the milestones along our lives’ journeys? When hearing just the opening notes of a piece can transport us back to a moment in time as if it was only yesterday?

Christians refer to the first four books of the New Testament as the “gospel” – their collation of inspiring good news. I have often wondered if I was to create my own “gospel” -- if I were to assemble a collection of what has inspired me, transformed me, and helped me through the difficult times of my life – what readings, what poetry, what music, what art would my personal “gospel” contain? OK, yes, the second movement of Beethoven’s 7th Symphony, as well as the Rolling Stones. And, of course, the poetry of Mary Oliver and e.e. cummings. It would have to include certain Impressionist paintings, as well as reflections from Buddhist philosopher and poet Mark Nepo. But what else? Perhaps, like my “gospel,” your collation of personal "good news" might also contain examples of music and art that have invited you to experience your life in new ways?

Music and art can help us build generational and cultural bridges. It can open us to new understandings in an increasingly multi-cultural, multi-ethnic world. Poems by Langston Hughes or novels by Toni Morrison might have more to teach us about racism in America than a conference panel discussion might, for example. And the global diversity of poetry, music, literature, dance and art can evoke feelings of deeper connectedness to the universal human experience.

I have sung in choirs since my teen years, in school, in church, during college and as an adult singing with both the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Houston Symphony. I know first hand the transformative reach music provides.

I consider music and art indispensable elements of the worship experience and value the work our music directors and volunteer choir members provide. We build community together whenever we sing together. Children’s choirs can lift our spirits as we celebrate together in multigenerational worship. Hymns, choral anthems and vocal and instrumental solos can carry and move us further in the worship experience. Music brings us into contemplation, meditation and prayerfulness together, as well as helps us hold our shared sorrow as a community, especially during memorial services. Anyone who has sung “We Shall Overcome,”

or “Standing on the Side of Love” during social justice witness activities knows the power of music to unite us in this all-important work.

During my internship, one church offered three worship services each weekend: a service on 4:30 p.m. on Saturday and two Sunday morning services. The opening words, chalice lighting, readings, sermon, meditation/prayer and benediction remained the same for all three services. What set each service apart was the music. Saturday was the rock and roll service, with a house band made up of talented congregants. The 9:15 a.m. Sunday service offered a mix of musical styles, from classical to contemporary. The 11:15 a.m. Sunday service offered traditional classical music and hymns. I was amazed at how changes in music alone created an entirely different feel and generated significantly different energy in the worship experience.

Obviously this was a large church, with enough staff, volunteer and financial resources to prepare such diverse multi-service musical offerings each week. No matter what sized church I am called to serve, I look forward to working with the music director, the choir and other arts groups to make sure music, drama, and the arts continue to be a vital part of our congregational life together! Let us make sure that our whole selves continue to be nourished and fed.

What involvement do you desire in the stewardship of a congregation, most particularly its financial affairs?

As we are called to serve needs greater than our own, what we value most is often reflected in how much and where we choose to spend our time, our talent and our treasure. One of the most important roles a minister can model is the expression of generosity as a spiritual practice – a practice of gratitude that gives thanks for being able to drink water from wells we did not dig, or sit under the shade of trees we did not plant. I believe a minister should help support a church financially through pledging and weekly offerings, the same as we ask of congregants.

I bring direct line responsibility for managing departmental budgets anywhere from \$200,000 to \$2 million annually, to the work of a church. And, I have had plenty of experience cutting budgets over the years to find creative ways to do more with less financial resources. In addition to my corporate experience, I have also served on the board of several non-profit arts organizations; so have helped lead my fair share of fundraising campaigns over the years. As a lay leader, I also served as part of my church’s Stewardship Committee.

I believe a minister shares fiduciary responsibilities with the board, treasurer and the financial team, and works collaboratively to assure the church is maintained on solid, healthy financial footing. In an ideal world, there should be a reserve fund set aside in the budget as ongoing savings, to address large, ongoing facilities maintenance issues, as well as to meet those pesky emergency needs that always pop up: the roof is leaking, or the copier broke down, etc. If a contingency fund does not currently exist, I would want to work with leadership and the congregation to create those savings as a regular budget line item, even if we have to start slowly and build from there.

Long-term, once a facilities management/emergency fund is created, and mortgages/capital debt obligations are met, I would encourage a congregation to explore creating or building an endowment fund. As a former member of a church’s Stewardship team, I have ideas to bring to that effort.

Experience has taught me that no one pledges because they’re excited to pay the church’s electric bill. People pledge to fund their dreams -- visions of creating a more loving and just community, both within and beyond the church’s walls. People support organizations that they believe are making a difference in their lives, and in the life of the world. Ministers can help a congregation identify and shape their dreams -- to help people identify their unifying vision of love and service. This is essential work, like oxygen, that not only helps fuel our shared fire of commitment, but leads to growth and to greater financial health over time as well.

Unfortunately, it is normal for pledges to fall off during times of transition, including changes in ministerial leadership. Studies have shown that having a regular, positive ministerial presence in the pulpit helps fuel an increase in pledging and offering donations. I hope to bring that stability of positive, loving ministerial presence to wherever I am chosen to serve. And, sometimes, so many other factors beyond our control impact a church's finances, such as our recent economic downturn. I have faith in the ultimate abundance of the world, and have no doubts what a creative, impassioned community of people can accomplish together to not only survive difficult financial challenges, but to find ways to ultimately thrive together.

Theological orientation: What is your dominant theology, and how do you deal with other Unitarian Universalist theologies with which you may not be in sympathy?

I come to my call to ministry out of a deep sense of gratitude and wonder for the miracle of life, and for the opportunities and choices we have to be of comfort and good use in this beautiful and brutal world. I consider myself a panentheist, believing there is a spark of divinity, or holiness, extant in all things. The most compelling and informing source of our free and responsible search for truth and meaning is rooted in personal experience. I certainly have witnessed transcendent wonder, mystery and ultimacy in the power and beauty of the natural world, whether gazing up at a star-lit night sky, watching the sun rise from a mountain top, walking the shoreline where the water meets and mingles with the earth, to witnessing the violent power of a volcanic eruption or the destruction of hurricane force winds, to name a few.

These experiences help lift me out of my own ego-inflated self-importance to reframe the one fragile, particular life I live in humbler terms, against the grander sweep and needs of humanity, history, nature and the universe, both known and unknown. My experiences of immanent holiness around and within me calls to me over and over again to transcend my own self-interest to become a better, more compassionate self – calls me to live in ethical, loving connection and right relations with myself, others and with the larger world. Answering this spiritual call, to rise above our baser, herd-animal nature, is a never-ending process. This is our work, to be open to the power and presence of wonder and agape, or compassionate love, allowing it to transform us again, and yet again, to engage in the healing of human suffering and to honor and preserve the interdependent web of all existence, upon which our very lives depend.

Process theology speaks to me, locating the sacred within the scientific paradigm of how the physical world works all the way down to the subatomic level. The divine is found in the process of ongoing continuous becoming. Similarly to Buddhist theology, process theology normalizes continuous transformation as the way the world works. I find this a useful lens with which to view and understand the world, as it helps us open to change as a divine process, and challenges us to look for gifts in the discomfort that often comes when the ground shifts beneath our feet.

God, for me, represents all possibilities that result from the continuous ongoing random intersections of people, places and things. I believe this transforming process of chance interconnection is indiscriminate and amoral – it is neither good, nor bad, it just is. Human beings, as meaning-makers, create stories to provide a context for the connections of happenstance that occur in our lives, and to locate hope in the face of these random occurrences.

Another way of saying this is that, for me, God is not The Guy in the Sky who decides to give a six-year-old cancer. Rather, the six-year-old has cancer as a result of random intersections of genetics and/or physical exposure to a carcinogen. We make meaning around this happenstance through stories about the tragedy of one so young having to struggle against such a difficult diagnosis. God, or the sacred, is with us in this story, not as the supernatural perpetrator of the happenstance, but as the natural unfolding process of all possible future outcomes, including a hope for cure and survival. God is the grace that walks with us through the journey of whatever happens to us randomly throughout our lives.

Process theology also provides a context for ethics that springs from our understanding of human

interconnectedness. Process theologian Robert Mesle explains Alfred North Whitehead's take on the relational origins of ethical thought: "If I see my life as totally disconnected from others, no moral vision is possible. It is only as I see that you and I are connected, that our lives and actions affect each other, that the possibility of ethical thought and action emerges."

I also locate hope in a theology of relational connectedness – in honoring the sacredness that exists in the space between you and me. In the words of Rev. Victoria Safford, "God is the space in between, the bridge between solitudes, the ground where we meet, you and I, or any two, by grace." Our churches offer the relational opportunity to be supported by people who love and care for one another – to reinforce the hope that no matter what an individual is forced to face in their life, there are others standing beside us to help share our burdens. Healing begins when an individual feels safe enough to name and claim their anger, denial, grief, pain, and suffering out loud to another. When we name our deepest fears and losses out loud, those feelings often begin to lose their power over us. And hope gains a foothold as an individual begins to feel less overwhelmed as they are seen, heard and held in loving concern by others.

Faith and the experience of the sacred also provide hope for those who suffer. Ours is a faith that believes in second, third and thirty-third chances to live our lives in right relations. We often sing the Rumi poem to celebrate that our faith "...is no caravan of despair," as we are encouraged to "come, yet again come" into a beloved community of faith and hope, to come back into right relations. Reflection/prayer/meditation – sitting with that mystery greater than ourselves, whether we name that power God or know holiness by any number of other experiences and names -- reminds people they are not alone with only their limited human capabilities to face hardship and suffering. Human beings can call on internal resources – that still, small voice within -- to find new or renewed strength and courage to face whatever must be endured. Our experience of the sacred teaches us the importance and worth of this one precious gift of life. It is my hope that the honoring of this invaluable life force within can often provide a reason to continue to live, even if for one more day, in the face of unbearable sorrow.

I believe the sacredness of human life is also located in the miracle and wonder of our sentience, our conscience and our capabilities as moral agents for love and goodness. I do not view human beings as possessing an immutable soul that survives death; nor do I believe humans are "created" by a supernatural deity in His (sic) image. Rather, the sanctity of human life is rooted in the story of evolution itself – understanding evolution as an ongoing sacred process of dynamic change and becoming. I concur with religious humanists such as the Rev. Dr. William Murry, that evolution is our mythic, religious story of creation.

At this point in my faith development, I struggle to articulate a clear theological grasp of the concepts of evil, redemption and salvation. I grapple to comprehend the horrific evil and senseless violence human beings are capable of perpetrating against one another. My heart breaks at such intentional acts of human evil as the Holocaust, the Khmer Rouge killing fields, or the wholesale ethnic slaughters in Rwanda or Bosnia/Serbia/Croatia. I also feel moved to minister to the ongoing discrimination, oppression and violence against women and girls worldwide. Closer to home, I continue to ache over the problems of mental illness and of bullying, especially as those issues seem to be factors in the rise of gun violence and mass murder in the U.S. And I am appalled at the ever-growing disparity of wealth and resource distribution, and the problems of gut-wrenching poverty everywhere in the world.

I turn to humanism for the concept of evil rooted in human behavior and self-centered choices. Rev. Dick Gilbert describes the line between good and evil running right down the center of each human heart. Or, as Rev. Bruce Southworth notes, "We have the ability to choose for the good or the bad, to choose our better or our worse selves. Part of the graciousness of creation is that there is so much beauty in the world, but we are not saved by the graciousness of creation. We are saved by our choices." The concept of right relations helps

me locate hope in the face of human evil -- hope found in the ability to make different, more loving and ethical choices that honor the inherent worth and dignity of all people everywhere.

As a minister, I am called to witness and to encourage others to witness the whole of life with awe, wonder and compassion. To witness stories of transformation, grace and hope. To bear witness to the holiness found in the first of life and the last of life, and in key milestones along the journey. To witness oppression, discrimination, hate, violence and egregious suffering. To speak truth to power, naming and claiming injustice, helping to stop it whenever and wherever we can. To bear witness to the power of compassion, love, forgiveness and reconciliation. And, in turning to our Universalist roots, we are here to model and to share a love so powerful, so strong, so all inclusive, so all forgiving, it will not let any one of us go. No exceptions.

I expect us to hold a wide range of differing beliefs, and to be able to minister into that diversity with respect and love. There is a wonderful parable credited to UU minister Forrest Church, which calls us to religious tolerance: Imagine the world as a large cathedral. The cathedral walls are lined with many different stained glass windows of varying sizes, shapes and colors. Each window represents a different form of human religious expression found in the world. The same light shines through all the windows. And there is only one rule: No rock throwing in the cathedral!

Theological diversity is one of the greatest strengths of our faith. Our third and fourth principles call us to put down our rocks. As beloved community, we encourage and promote the free and responsible search for truth and meaning. And, we covenant to accept one another and to encourage spiritual growth in our congregations.

It is exciting to share with one another our deepest experiences of wonder, mystery and awe. How stimulating to be in this dialogue, to ask one another curious questions about each other's beliefs with respect and care. Our life together is so much richer when we help open up new ways of seeing the world through one another's eyes.

Additional information: Finish introducing yourself in any way you would like to.

I built a first career on my ability to work with reporters from local, national and international media to encourage interest in and coverage of a particular organization or issue in both traditional media such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television, as well as social media. That work included writing editorials for the Op Ed pages as well as working with video pros to create clips that might garner broadcast television coverage, or gain additional exposure posted on You Tube, or embedded on Websites, Facebook, etc.

People sometimes say that Unitarian Universalism is one of the world's best-kept secrets. I don't want who we are and what we have to give the world to be a secret! I want our faith to be a light unto the world – to bring healing and wholeness to as many kindred spirits as we can reach.

I hope to leverage my media relations skills from time to time in my ministry to help raise the visibility of the congregation and its programs, activities and social justice work among local media outlets. I found that even when I was able to garner a little media coverage of my teaching congregations, the increased visibility reinforced feelings of pride among congregants and helped bring more visitors to the church doorstep in the weeks that followed. Media relations experience is a unique “extra party bonus” skill I bring to my ministry, to the benefit of the congregation and the work we will do together.

On a final note, seminary students undergo a number of psychological evaluations as part of our preparation for ministry. During my career assessment testing in seminary, my Meyers-Briggs style was measured as an ENFP – which means I exhibit a preference for extroversion, intuition, feeling and perceiving. According to my evaluation report, the ENFP personality style is one of the most common among professional ministers.

The report also provided these observations about me in their assessment: “Gretchen is likely to be warmly enthusiastic, high-spirited, innovative and imaginative. She is quick with a suggestion for any difficulty, empathetic and ready to help anyone with a problem. She is energized by being around other people and is likely to be described as highly sociable and expressive. She takes in information from the world around her by utilizing abstract, imaginative and original thinking and by searching for patterns and interrelationships.She prefers daily tasks to be carried out in a casual, relaxed manner with flexible plans and an adaptive style.Gretchen appears to have many gifts for ministry.” Amen, and may it be so.