

Ministerial Record

Rev. Shari Woodbury

Spring 2020 (version lightly edited for public sharing)

Experience & Preparation

Preliminary Fellowship: 2015 **Final Fellowship:** 2019

Ordination: 2016

Seminary: MDiv, Meadville Lombard Theological School, 2015

Congregational Ministries Served:

Years	Position	Organization	Location
2016 - Now	Minister	Westside UU Church	Fort Worth, TX
2015	Summer Minister	UU Congregation of Columbus, Indiana	Columbus, IN
2015-2016	Interim Connections Coordinator	UU Church of Bloomington, Indiana	Bloomington, IN
2013-2015	Intern Minister	UU Congregation of Columbus, Indiana	Columbus, IN
2012-2013	Young Adult & Campus Ministry Coordinator	UU Church of Bloomington, Indiana	Bloomington, IN

Other Ministries and Work Experience:

Years	Position	Organization	Location
2012-2013	Chaplain Intern	Shalom Community Center	Bloomington, IN
2013-2013	Chaplain Intern	Bloomington Hospital	Bloomington, IN

Other Education:

- * Certificate in Congregation-Based Spiritual Direction for UU Clergy (2015)
- * Certified Facilitator, PREPARE/ENRICH couples counseling program (2013)
- * MA (Sociology), Indiana University (Bloomington, IN, 1999)
- * BA (Sociology & Psychology), Iowa Wesleyan College (Mt. Pleasant, Iowa, 1996)

Other noteworthy work experience outside of UU ministry:

- * Development Director, Sycamore Land Trust (Bloomington, IN, 2011-2012)
- * President & C.E.O., Community Foundation of Bloomington and Monroe County (Bloomington, IN, 2006-2011)
- * Development Manager, Blue Mountain Center of Meditation (Tomales, CA, 2005-2006)
- * Executive Director, Community Foundation Partnership (Lawrence and Martin Counties, IN, 2001-2004)

Denominational and Community Activities:

Some highlights:

- * Offered small group spiritual direction in several settings, most recently including codeveloping and co-delivering a program at the annual retreat of the southwest UU ministers' chapter sharing the practice (scheduled for spring 2020).
- * Delivered keynote address at the annual luncheon of North Texas UU Congregations (NTUUC), a regional entity connecting about a dozen UU churches (January 2019).
- * Participated in the first joint N. American – Transylvanian Unitarian ministers' retreat in Transylvania, helping to build cross-cultural ties (July 2018).
- * Contributed to the book series *_A Documentary History of Unitarian Universalism_*, edited by Dan McKanan (published by Skinner House in 2017).
- * Co-planned and led worship at several Mid-America Regional Assemblies, for ministers in Naperville, IL (April 2015), for all attendees at the Bloomington, IN site (April 2014).
- * Served on the boards of my local food co-op, as well as the Voces Novae chamber choir, and my home congregation (all in Bloomington, IN). In the latter, my contributions included facilitating retreats and board work to implement Policy Governance, and writing a successful grant that created a new membership coordinator staff position at the church.

More on the above, plus other service at <https://www.shariwoodbury.com/service.html> and <https://www.linkedin.com/in/shariwoodbury/>

Background

Give a story that embodies your ministry:

"When you listen generously to people they can hear the truth in themselves, often for the first time."
~Rachel Naomi Remen

Listening is at the heart of my ministry. I listen for where people might fit in, connect, and lead. I witness to people's experiences in pastoral care visits. I listen to the needs of the congregation to help me choose worship topics and shape services. I tune into what's important to the church and who they want to be, and help guide them toward that vision.

One example is my work with Westside to develop a covenant group program. Early here as I was doing a lot of listening and relationship-building, I learned that members were sincere about wanting to grow the church – and that making connections was not happening as organically as it did get bigger. People craved depth, intimacy, and opportunities for spiritual growth. I talked with leadership about the benefits of small group ministry, and key leaders agreed on this direction.

I felt it was important to tailor the program to the congregation and to build ownership and leadership from within the membership. So I found the right chair and with her, put together a steering committee. We took our time talking to a range of members about what they wanted, explored different models of small group ministry, and then selected a program (Soul Matters) and adapted it for this church. The steering committee helped launch the program and we've worked to nurture and support our facilitators, as they help spread the ministry of deep listening and deep sharing.

More people now participate in covenant groups than in any other program except worship. People love it! Both newer and long-time people are finding this a good way to find belonging and connection, and to explore questions and topics in ways that support their diverse journeys.

As this example illustrates, in the process of my listening to the congregation, I also help people listen to

themselves, to each other, and to the ways that Love or Spirit may be calling them forward.

Why are you seeking ministry now?

I am currently settled in a rewarding ministry where there is good work to be done and good people to work with.

I am considering new opportunities because I feel ready for a new challenge, perhaps with a more established congregation. And ideally, I would prefer to be located in a different part of the country – less distant from aging parents and the rest of my child's extended family, and with four seasons more as I have known them. The Midwest is home to me.

If the right opportunity arises, with both a congregation and a location that look like a potential good match, I will explore it.

What ministry do you hope is ahead for you?

I seek to collaborate with the congregation I serve to build community, foster individual and collective spiritual growth, and put our values into action to build the world we dream of. For me these threads are all interwoven in liberal religious community. That makes a UU church, at its best, a force for good well beyond its numbers. I understand my role as a minister to be one who helps to nurture and harness that potential.

I enjoy many facets of parish ministry. I feel called to serve both those who are already UUs, as well as many more of those who might "be UUs but not know it" yet, who come from so many varied life experiences. So I am drawn to serve a congregation with an expansive vision, one interested in stretching spiritually as well as in terms of richness of people, and possibly, numbers of people.

Together in intergenerational and multicultural community we celebrate, learn, and cope; we find inspiration and resources for renewal and growth; we build the social and spiritual capital necessary for change, and marshal them in the service of Love.

Describe your call to ministry. What life events have led you to this moment?

I have loved the arts for as long as I can remember, especially poetry, fiction, and choral singing. In college I found my niche in the social sciences. I also began to study religion then, through minors and independent reading. After a few years in a PhD program for Sociology, I realized that I am more of a generalist by nature than a specialist. I wanted to make my ideals a reality in the world and create social change. I turned to applied sociology.

I started my professional career as a project manager in a consulting firm focused in the areas of community and economic development. After working with a number of community foundation clients, I was intrigued by their ability to build financial and social capital, and to draw diverse segments of the community together to develop and pursue shared visions. I served almost a decade in that field, most of them as executive director or CEO of two community foundations in Indiana. I have done fund development for spiritual and environmental missions too.

The landscapes of my life have left a deep imprint in me, especially the rivers and woods of the Midwest. It began with camping as a child. My spiritual life is anchored in a sense of interconnectedness with all life, and wonder at the natural world.

I discovered UUism in 1996 and quickly knew that it was my spiritual home. The one thing missing for me was a spiritual practice. I'd be happy to tell you the story of how I was introduced to the teachings of Eknath Easwaran while in India, and took up his method of passage meditation in 2000. I became deeply involved not only in that spiritual discipline, but in the meditation center he founded, and moved to California for a time to work for it.

As far back as 2000, a close friend had suggested that ministry was a fit for me. A seed was planted. Over a decade later, I had found my life partner, started a family, and come to a sense of completion in my philanthropy career. It was then that, at the urging of one of my ministers, I began to lean into the gentle pull of this vocation. When I looked back at my artwork and poetry of that period, a religious calling was so evident. And the idea sent strong, clear energy flowing through me. I realized that ministry is, as Parker Palmer might put it, the life that is wanting to live through me.

I've been in ministry now in one form or another since 2012: campus ministry, supply preaching, chaplaincy roles, working with families for weddings and memorials, facilitating small groups, membership coordination, and settled parish ministry. I love ministry.

In the above roles, I have had the opportunity to apply and continue to grow the skills carried over from my previous non-profit career. I have also gained considerable new experience in preaching and worship arts, pastoral care, rites of passage, social justice, and the art of building trust and guiding a congregation toward its vision. I have been delighted that my creative and intuitive sides, as well as my prophetic voice, have proven to be a natural part of how I show up in this work. I feel fortunate that I get to work with amazing people, love them, and serve them and the world together.

Ministerial Roles & Functions

Share your ministerial presence and leadership style:

I have a gentle presence. I am a curious person and like to learn about others; I also become quite fond of the people I work with. I cherish the bonds that deepen over time, as we work together to touch lives and bring our UU values to life through the church.

One of my mentors during seminary, Rev. Dr. Nicole Kirk, once offered her take: "Shari is truly dedicated to this call and brings the best of the scholarly, the compassionate, and the deeply spiritual self to the role and duties of ministry. She also has uncommon complexity and depth, and is wickedly funny! I heartily recommend her."

I focus on building relationships of mutual trust, and partnering with church leaders to work deliberately, with persistence and care, toward the strategic vision. I believe I have a gift for helping others to grow into their capacities more fully. I also understand my role as a spiritual leader to include good modeling: maintaining my own well-being, as well as nurturing the spiritual well-being and maturity of the congregation.

I believe that JOY and FUN are important, too. The journey toward realizing the vision involves not only dedication and handling challenges, but also appreciation and celebration as milestones are crossed, and being present to all of the moments of connection as they occur.

How do you function with church staff? What are your thoughts on staff relations and supervision?

I enjoy working with a group to serve the mission. At a minimum I function as a colleague and coach. Whether it's working with the religious educator on a theatrical, multigenerational worship service, or

guiding our administrator in developing our publications, I want to make the most of each person's talents and interests. Peers have observed that I have a knack for creating supportive, trusting environments in which religious professionals can learn and thrive together.

In my first ministry and in other non-profits I have served as an executive, I have provided day-to-day supervision of key staff and conducted evaluations. I have headed up hiring and, when necessary, firing, in varying degrees of cooperation with volunteer leaders. What's important to me about this role is that it be defined clearly, so there is shared understanding, and so the power granted to me is sufficient to carry out the responsibility I am given.

I understand the importance of building strong staff teams, including designing positions to meet organizational needs, getting the right people "on the bus," setting position goals, providing ongoing feedback (including addressing problems promptly), and building the staff team as a core group within the organization – one whose cohesion supports the mission. In a church setting, this has included developing a staff covenant and convening periodic staff meetings to coordinate work and build the team's identity.

Regarding shared ministry what do you see as your work as minister? What do you see doing in partnership with the congregation? What do you see as the work of the congregation?

I believe in shared ministry. While a minister has a unique role as spiritual leader, ideally there are respected elders serving in leadership roles who also embody a mature faith. And in virtually every area of congregational life – leadership, worship, pastoral care, faith formation, social justice, small groups, right relations – the mission of the congregation will be well served by having in place teams of people (both staff and lay) who are dedicated to the work and who are charged and supported in doing it.

The work of developing the mission, vision, and goals of the church is a collective endeavor in which a minister participates. The vision itself must be owned by the people.

In any area of church life, the work may be parceled out in a variety of ways, depending on church size, how it understands its mission, volunteer enthusiasm and staff available to support the work. Clarifying roles is important at the beginning of a new ministry and on an ongoing basis as a church evolves. What is more important to me than the specific division of duties is that lay leaders work with me to build trust and develop that clarity.

What role would you see yourself playing in the larger community?

I value opportunities to connect in interfaith groups, particularly to speak with a shared prophetic voice and bring moral values to bear on community and justice issues. For example, a group I am part of here in Fort Worth, Cattle Country Clerics, has published joint op eds and marched together for Love Not Hate after Charlottesville.

Other ways I have participated include delivering the invocation before the City Council, offering public input to the County Commissioners, offering the blessing at a National Philanthropy Day luncheon, and as a visible clergy presence at marches and vigils.

As a solo minister in a mid-size parish, and one that was under-staffed when I arrived, I have not been able to prioritize taking a leadership role in community organizations. However I might be interested in greater engagement if my church role left time for it, particularly in relation to those issues that I feel most compelled to act on – racial equity & justice, and the climate crisis.

How have you seen change happen in a congregation or community? What role would you see yourself playing in congregational change?

Sometimes change happens in part by seizing opportunities – even unexpected ones. Ask me about Westside's transition to family worship for one such example.

Change can also come through intentional leadership. I've done this by growing the congregation's understanding of its music program as a core part of its mission. The strategic plan identified the need to hire a professional music director. This church has relied on volunteer music directors with a love of music and the church, but neither professional training nor accountability. As a result the music program had been pretty anemic and failed to either tap the talent in the congregation, or leverage the power of music for our mission.

I engaged in conversation with members and leaders about their experience of the current music program, and their hopes for it in the future. With the board's support, as part of planning for my installation service, I put together a Music Task Force, wrote a successful grant to boost the music program, and hired a professional guest conductor to work with a Special Choir for the installation. Four times as many people as had participated in the regular choir turned out to work with this talented director and experience another level of musical enrichment as part of our celebratory event. The congregation was elated.

Since then, I have continued to work with the Music Task Force, nurturing lay leadership as well as maximizing the contributions of our enthusiastic pianist; she has leveraged the talents of more instrumentalists in the congregation for special music offerings. We have had to bide our time with hiring a new music director staff position, since the church had committed some time prior to parting ways with its long-time tenant in 2018, and needed time to grow pledge income to close the gap from lost rental income. Meanwhile, we continued to convene the Special Choir a few times per year, built the music library for our regular choir, added a weeknight rehearsal for the regular choir (a first), have increased collaboration for worship music, occasionally offer a special children's choir opportunity, started a music fund in memory of a long-time volunteer music director after her death, and have held a number of fundraisers for the music program, raising thousands of dollars through musical and theatrical events at the church that also built community and reflected our liberal religious values.

While we have not been able to make this change quickly – ah, "the pace of church" – I have worked to develop the support of our musicians, members, leaders, and funders to the point that momentum is strong, and we anticipate hiring a Music Director in the next church fiscal year. Music is no longer regarded as a nice "extra," but an essential part of our ministry.

As a leader I am grounded, pragmatic, relational and visionary. I honor the past and am primarily oriented toward the future and the possibilities that lie before us. I gauge how far I can help a group move and try to hit that sweet spot that is neither stagnant nor overwhelming, but delightfully dynamic. Of course, with any change, there is also an important pastoral role, of simply witnessing the emotions of those who find the changes challenging, and being with them through that process, with empathy and care.

Describe how you handle being in a conflicted situation:

A couple of years into my first settled ministry, some anxiety flared in the congregation after a new group formed. We were shifting to a new Sunday schedule, which created a Religious Education hour between our two services, and accordingly, put the first service earlier than it had been. Right at that same time, a new Humanist Seminar began meeting. I had known this was coming and was supportive of the idea. Like many congregational leaders, however, I was surprised when the new offering was scheduled during the

same time as our now-earlier first service.

Folks were getting nervous, fearful that this program was competing with worship (in the very time slot where attendance needed to be built up). Plus, some participants found conversations at early sessions to be divisive. Facing a sometimes modest gathering at the beginning of the first service, while 30-some people met next door in the Humanist Seminar, I understood the concern about whether this new program had been rolled out in a way that undermined our overall mission and sense of unity as a congregation.

I modeled and coached others in self-differentiated leadership – assuming good intentions while communicating directly both concerns and appreciations. I encouraged lay leaders to be mindful of our covenant and some did go on to express their experiences and concerns directly and respectfully. I met with the founder and facilitators of the new group myself. I listened to their intentions and experiences, affirmed my support for their effort to meet a need in the congregation, and invited them to be mindful of our covenants, and work together to meet the overall goals of the congregation, as well as those of the new group. We established a problem-solving stance together as a leadership team.

In conversations and even in worship, I returned repeatedly to our congregational covenant, mission and vision. I reiterated our commitment as UUs to theological pluralism – as a defining feature of UUism, and one always present in this congregation (though for a time in its history this diversity had been less visible). I showed and encouraged empathy for a small portion of self-identified humanists in the congregation who were struggling with the shift from a humanist-centered minister and worship style (with the previous, and only long serving, settled minister) to a more theologically pluralistic minister (with me).

I also offered individual pastoral where needed, and continued to build my pastoral relationship with a range of people. This was one of those situations where my non-anxious presence as the minister made a difference to a variety of individuals, and helped calm the system.

As we continued to tweak our Sunday line-up to serve the needs of both current and future members, the scheduling shifted in a way that benefited both Seminar leaders and worship attendance, with the Seminar moving to the RE hour between worship services. But more significant than how we respond to a technical challenge like scheduling is how we are responding to the adaptive challenge of becoming (or accepting that we are) culturally a more pluralistic congregation. We are practicing what it means to be a diverse religious community: encouraging one another to spiritual growth, with respect for different paths and a commitment to covenant and the good of the whole.

Tell a story that deepened your understanding of what ministry is:

Ministry relates to the development of whole persons and the channeling of Love in the world. The relationships gain more nuance and depth the more time goes by.

The experience of ministering to a congregant in failing health, and her family and church friends, over a period of several years, deepened my understanding of ministry. [*much omitted here for sake of privacy*]

One of the more visible steps I took as a result of witnessing the struggles and needs of this family and the surround church community was that I preached to the congregation about "Life and Death, Woven Fine." A retired colleague told me with appreciation after this service, "Every preacher's job is to prepare their congregants for death, and you have now done it well."

I will simply be with all of these feelings, and all of my congregants' varied and evolving states of mind and heart, as events unfold. I have learned to process my own sadness and other feelings in my self-care

time, so that I can be that pastoral presence for others. I experience my role with greater richness in this instance than in the first memorial service I officiated here. With each year, the web of relationship and feeling grows thicker. My heart knows sorrow and yet also grows stronger in the ability to discuss any topic a congregant needs to discuss. They know I can "take it" and am thus a safe person in whom to confide, or simply to have hear them. I know it too.

What needs do you have to strengthen your ministry and how might a congregation assist you in this?

A congregation can help me strengthen my ministry by:

- * Developing agreement about priorities to guide my focus. Opportunity always outpaces capacity. The church will benefit most over the long run if we agree on priorities and set an intentional, sustainable pace. Each year, I draft my annual position goals and share them with the board. I need dialogue, especially if they see my priorities differently.
- * Allocating funds and supporting the use of my time for ongoing professional development.
- * Allowing me to discover what schedule and rhythms make me effective in this particular ministry, while maintaining balance – and supporting the boundaries I set accordingly.
- * Embracing risk and accepting occasional failure as an inevitable part of learning and growth. As I push the boundaries of my own growing edges, or simply experiment with new things, I want to know that perfection is not expected – that it is okay to take risks in order for me to learn and grow, and to help the congregation learn and grow too.

Describe briefly your ministerial approach to the following:

Worship and preaching: I like to craft services so that all the pieces fit together to form a coherent whole – music, stories, prayers and guided meditations, responsive readings, the sermon and more. This often entails coordinating with musicians, story-tellers, and other talented people to create a compelling experience.

Ritual can be a powerful part of worship, whether it occurs every week – like a particular chalice-lighting ritual, or way of marking Joys & Concerns – or is an annual occurrence, as in water in-gathering, candlelight Christmas Eve, or flower ceremony. I love ritual.

I enjoy working with a Worship Team and empowering lay leaders to take an active part in our worship life. I have also taught sermon-writing classes for interested lay people.

As for my preaching, perhaps more than any other aspect of ministry, I relish the challenge of crafting and delivering a meaningful message week after week. I like to mix it up: from tapping a variety of topics and tones over time (spiritual, pastoral, prophetic... serious and silly... meditative and energizing... intellectual and moving); to drawing upon different voices and life experiences (reflecting the wide range of people that are – or could be – in our pews); to engaging those present with poetic imagery, pictures, the occasional music-infused sermon, perhaps a spoken congregational refrain, and even, from time to time, skit elements or opportunities for those present to respond individually.

In my second year of parish ministry, I won a national award for one innovative sermon, "Torda 450: A Legacy for Today." It put King Sigismund of Transylvania into dialogue with Martin Luther King, Jr., combining history, theatrics and a call for UUs to continue working for religious and political freedom.

Earlier, I was honored to receive the Chautauqua Award for an Outstanding Student from Meadville Lombard. This meant serving as minister-of-the-week to the UU fellowship at the Chautauqua Institute in New York that summer, preaching in the Hall of Philosophy and sharing conversation with UUs at the Unitarian Universalist House on campus. Marjorie Girth, who coordinated summer chaplains at the UU Fellowship of Chautauqua that year, had this to say about my presence: "Shari coordinated the components of the Sunday service beautifully, using musical segments to complement the effects of her sermon... Fellowship members were still talking favorably about Shari's preaching skills and her overall Sunday morning service for the several weeks that remained in Chautauqua's season after her chaplaincy. [Her ministry] leading the subsequent 'discussion/talkback' session later in the week was similarly excellent... Overall, [her] performance as Chautauqua's weekly chaplain was outstanding."

Back in seminary, where I studied preaching with former UUA president and then-UUSC president Bill Schulz, Bill shared this statement: "Rarely do I meet a theological student who has more promise than Shari Woodbury. My contact with her, especially in preaching and leadership courses, convinced me that she will be one of our greats. Her quiet passion, deep authenticity, poise and eloquence mark her as a superb minister."

I have curated a number of sermons that give you a sense of my style and variety in the pulpit. You can find them at www.shariwoodbury.com/sermons.

Pastoral Care / spiritual guidance / counseling / home and hospital visitation: A warm and caring community is an integral part of church life. As a pastor I aim to offer this warmth to newcomers - people who often feel vulnerable or lonely when they first come through our doors - as well as to create opportunities for healing and connection within our walls, and to be there with members when illness or death comes. I refer congregants to community resources for specialized or longer-term support.

I work with lay pastoral teams to offer congregational support – including hospital and home visits, calls, cards, and concrete support like rides and meals; I see this work as a vital part of our shared ministry. Together, minister, Pastoral Care Associates and small groups in the congregation care for our community and bring a compassionate presence to those experiencing pain or transition.

I embrace the pastoral and priestly roles of ordained ministry that come with rites of passages. Working with congregants in weddings, child dedications, and memorial services provides special opportunities to offer a caring pastoral presence. I value these times of deepening connection and am especially moved to work with families to honor loved ones at Celebration of Life (memorial) services.

Here are some observations from others about my pastoral ministry:

"When it comes to counseling, Shari is exemplary. We know of at least two people who felt so safe with Shari shortly after meeting her that they confided very private concerns and received loving support and good guidance. She has visited with many people in the congregation (from newcomers to long-time, elderly members) and has formed supportive relationships. She is also a strong ministerial presence at Coffee Hour." ~Intern Team, UUCCI

"[In Shari's chaplaincy internship at our hospital], Her compassion and intelligence shone through, especially in her work with patients on our Behavioral Health unit, many of whom brought significant health challenges and deeply troubling life situations. Shari's loving presence and advanced listening skills helped many patients make it through a time of crisis. She will be an asset to any congregation she serves." ~John Vanderzee, Director, Spiritual Care & Chaplaincy, Indiana University Health Bloomington (now retired)

Children's religious education: I honor, support and participate in the vital work of religious education. In children's RE, mostly I do this as supervisor and colleague of the religious education staff, and by honoring the work of the volunteers who power our RE programs. For example, I have worked with the DLRE to commission teachers in worship. We sometimes help each other identify people who fit different volunteer roles. And of course, I supervise the DLRE, serving as a point of support, accountability, a sounding board, and when needed, trouble-shooting the occasional sticky situation or helping this key staff leader to remain self-differentiated in conflict.

The worship service can also speak to children, not only through the Time for All Ages, but through songs, affirmations and rituals that they take deep into their being, and the occasional incorporation of child-oriented anecdotes or materials into the sermon. I occasionally deliver the Time for All Ages myself, as one way of building a relationship with the children. I like knowing their names, having a sense of who they are, and them knowing that I am their minister too.

Youth work: Youth and young adults often have deep spiritual questions and longings. I did myself - it is how I became a committed meditator. When I was doing UU campus ministry, I developed and adapted curricula for students to meet their yearning for spiritual exploration, including discussion of some of the big theological questions, as well as the chance to try out different practices.

In talking with the youth at one congregation I served, I heard similar needs and desires. So I offered them a UU Spiritual Exploration Group that addressed key questions they wanted to know about - things like finding your purpose, images of the divine, and coping with time pressures. It is powerful for young people to explore such questions and resources, all in the company of trusted peers and supportive adults.

Lay leaders I worked with at that time said of this endeavor: "Shari demonstrated that she could create compelling and valuable programming... four of our teen-agers have been deeply touched and challenged by these varied spiritual sessions that help them learn and use spiritual practices to ease the stress of their everyday lives... This entire experience is a wonderful illustration of her program development, communications, group leadership, volunteer recruitment, and teaching skills."

Where I serve currently, the DLRE and youth advisors are the point people for the youth group program. I value opportunities to connect with youth at key points, such as during the Coming of Age program.

While I see value in age-based groups and programs, building cross-generational relationships is important as well. Too often our youth become segregated from the rest of the congregation, which is not good for their experience of connectedness or that of the rest of the church. I support involving youth and young adults in ministries and programs of the church, not only as program "recipients," but as volunteers serving others – it's one way to build those relationships across generations and create a wider sense of belonging, beyond the youth group. I have been pleased to work with young people, along with established adults, in a variety of committees and capacities, from delivering readings in worship, to supporting the stewardship campaign... from youth singing with adults in a Special Choir, to taking part in social justice projects.

Adult religious education: In the traditional sense of classes, we have so many solid UU curricula and resources to help people of all ages to engage the big questions, to find grounding in our UU tradition, to articulate their own evolving beliefs, and to act on their convictions. I have a particular passion for adult spiritual growth and like to spend some of my time in this area. This may take the shape of training and supporting small group facilitators; teaching (and empowering others to teach) adult RE classes; and encouraging groups that share a spiritual practice or explore a Source together.

Back when I was completing my ministerial internship, my teaching pastor saw this as one of my strengths. Rev. McCarty wrote, "Shari is a good teacher. Adults and youth, particularly, have responded to her with excellent energy... Her group leadership skills are impressive." I have continued to enjoy teaching in my first settled ministry.

The most basic adult RE starts as people make the decision to join. I have appreciated working with the Faith Forward model, working with others to adapt series like Inquirers and Beyond Inquirers to fit the church I serve. I also value working with a religious educator whose portfolio includes some degree of support for adult RE. We have responded to the talents and interests in the congregation, as well as putting a particular focus on identifying people and curricula that can advance the congregation's learning in areas of social justice and inclusion within the church.

As mentioned elsewhere, I have found small group ministry to be particularly rewarding and effective as a ministry. I am also trained in Congregation-Based Spiritual Direction, including small group spiritual direction. It wasn't a fit for most people in the congregation I currently serve, but I would be delighted to offer it should it be so in the future.

Incorporating music, the arts, and creativity into congregational life: This has been a highlight of my first settled ministry. When our choir director shared a piece of music he was eager to program, I built the whole service around it – and have welcomed other such ventures. I have likewise built several services around music performed by our Special Choir under the direction of a guest conductor. If a picture's worth a thousand words, a powerful piece of music is worth 10,000. The congregation has also been receptive to my occasionally singing during a sermon and sharing a few of my own original (very simple) compositions for choral or congregational singing.

During my tenure we have gone from a one-man volunteer Audio-Visual staff to an AV Team of a bunch of folks, who support vibrant multi-sensory experiences in worship. In addition to hymn lyrics, I sometimes include pictures, videos, or sound clips.

I love poetry and sometimes springboard a sermon off of a poetic reading. Occasionally I bring my own poetry into worship through liturgical pieces (opening words, guided meditations), poetic passages in sermons, and readings set for multiple voices.

I have written skits, and worked with talented people in the congregation to create sets and props, cast and play roles. One of these was the kick-off service for our covenant groups in the second year of the program. From a brainstorming session with key lay leaders of the program, I scripted a conversation with a nervous potential participant and two past covenant group members. I played Mrs. Who (a character from *A Wrinkle In Time*), interjecting with evocative poems and quotes to illustrate points made in the dialogue – complete with sparkly spectacles and colorful garb. Another production was an intergen service I created from Tommie DePaola's telling of *The Legend of Old Befana*, an accessible Christmas story. I worked with our volunteer children's choir director to integrate music from the children as well, and the intergenerational cast made use of simple props to help tell the story in our sanctuary-turned-theatre.

It has been a special joy to make the most of the talents and interests of several fabric artists in the congregation, and incorporate new pulpit cloths and banners that mark different seasons and evoke different moods – even special colorful cloths for our water ingathering ritual table. I appreciate color and form.

Music, poetry, and visual arts are a wonderful avenue for bringing diverse voices into church life,

speaking to the range of people who are present among us – and who might like to find a spiritual home with us. Diverse guest speakers can help accomplish this, as can intentional curation and sharing of stories and songs from diverse creators.

I also like to create opportunities for all people – regardless of perceived talent – to use the arts for spiritual exploration and growth. One year at a retreat for a group of lay leaders, I laid out Soul Cards – evocative images that open up to the viewer – and invited folks to select one that spoke to them. We worked with the images in relation to people's sense of how they are called to contribute to the church's mission. Creativity is a force of healing, beauty, insight and empowerment that can benefit us all.

Community building / facilitation skills / coffee hour and social times: In the congregation where I completed my ministerial internship, in my home congregation where I served as an interim Connections Coordinator (membership professional), and in my first settled ministry, I have enjoyed building community. Sometimes I do it directly, circulating at coffee hour and social events, greeting newcomers and introducing them to friendly long-timers, and working consistently to make worship accessible to visitors (watch out for jargon and acronyms!). I also do it indirectly, by working with usher-greeters, the Membership Com., staff and others to create a culture of genuine welcome.

I have an eye out, as well, for how to create opportunities for people to form and strengthen connections. I have supported a variety of small groups, from young adults to groups for Buddhist meditators and humanist explorers. I have also created new opportunities, such as working with the Small Group Ministry Steering Committee and covenant group facilitators to create a periodic potluck for all the covenant groups – and for people who want to try out the model and consider joining one.

Committee / Task force work: I enjoy working with teams and have been doing it all of my career in the non-profit sector, with both paid staff and, even more often, volunteers. When I am running a meeting, I do the pre-work to create a clear agenda and structure decision-making processes that fit the group's purpose. In the church, I am usually coordinating with a lay leader chairperson to shape the group's work. I am a strong believer in clear committee charters and alignment across teams with the overall mission, vision and strategic plan.

Leadership development: This is constantly in flux as people develop, reach new stages of life, join or go, hit term limits. I always have my radar up for what is the right fit for someone at a given time, or what is becoming ripe. I can't do this with the whole congregation, but zero in on the core leaders and those who might potentially rotate into that core. This requires coordination with other staff, too – likewise with the Nominating and Leadership Development Com. – so that we have the big picture together and do not double-dip on our asks.

I like to make the most of the formal leadership development opportunities that are available – from programs offered through the Region to curricula used in our church. A lot of leadership development also happens informally, as I work individually or in small groups with key lay leaders. We learn with and from each other as we pursue the church's mission and vision. I also frequently connect leaders to other resources – past leaders of the particular ministry area they are serving, larger UU networks, congregants with expertise they might loan, videos and courses through UU entities, and so forth.

Long range planning / mission / vision / covenant: I see it as my role to keep casting out the mission, vision, and strategic goals of the church, like a lighthouse guiding ships home. Clarity around these guiding lights, conviction about the world's need for the church to do this, and simple repetition and persistence are a core aspect of leadership. I hearken back to these over and over in communications to the congregation as a whole, and to leadership groups within the church.

These guideposts shape the priorities I set for my own position as well. For example, in a congregation that wants to grow from a pastoral size/style church to a program church, I have worked with others to make informal or fuzzy policies & procedures more explicit and clear, make the pathway to membership and engagement more visible and supported, move from a minister-focused to a (shared) ministry-focused Com. on Shared Ministry model, and help the board define and delegate more, so they can focus on higher-level conversation rather than the minutia of management. I have invested my time in nurturing small groups – which become the "cells" of relationship in a program-size church; crafting staff positions (and hiring the right people and coaching those people) to not only carry more of the workload, but provide greater professional leadership; and building and empowering strong lay teams that help to carry out core ministries (like pastoral care, worship and small group facilitators), so that we can scale more readily to larger numbers of participants.

I play a similar role with covenant. We are all responsible for living into covenant (and calling others back in, and answering the call to come back in when others issue it to us). And, I certainly use the power of the pulpit and my relationships with individuals and groups in the congregation to advocate for and model a culture of covenant.

Membership and membership growth: I have experienced the membership process as a prospective member / new UU myself, as a young adult and campus ministry coordinator (whose charge included engaging and integrating young adults into the congregation), as a membership professional (tending visitors and new members in general), and as the senior minister. I do my part to create a warm, accessible environment for newcomers, while also equipping and encouraging specific groups / positions to offer a genuine welcome and create pathways to engagement for new people.

There are many ingredients to engaging new people effectively and fostering growth. I would need to take time in a new setting to get to know the church and its people, before suggesting strengths to build on or areas to improve. Doing so would be a team effort.

Anti-oppression work: I have been doing racial justice work through UUism for most of my adult life. It was my longest-standing involvement as a member in my home congregation. This began in the late 90s, when I organized our participation in the UUA's Journey Toward Wholeness program, and supported many other opportunities for multicultural learning within the congregation. One of my last involvements at my home congregation, before I left to begin parish ministry, was co-facilitating the Beloved Conversations program.

My initial impetus for participating in this work was a sociology graduate course on Gender, Race and Class that opened my eyes to the complexity, endurance and damage of racism in our country. My church gave me a place to respond to my inner urgings to continue learning and to engage with others in positive action. Since 2010, when my biracial daughter was born, this work has become more personal than it might previously have been for me as a white person. I want for her, and for all our children – of all backgrounds – to see the longstanding promise of a multicultural beloved community at last become a lived reality in our denomination. We are making progress. We must keep on keepin' on.

In my ministerial internship, I developed several efforts in congregational learning and community action related to racial justice. I returned there to guest-preach while visiting in-laws in Indiana over Thanksgiving, and the former board president was eager to share all the good work they were continuing to do – and to let me know that my initiative in starting the conversations, and my faith in their ability to make a real difference in their community, was continuing to bear fruit.

This work at Westside in my years here has included things like a New Jim Crow book discussion series, three teach-ins during worship, an adult RE course called Overcoming White Supremacy from Within, participating in the national fundraising campaign for Black Lives of UU, board conversations considering our covenant and personnel practices through an anti-racism lens, and most recently, a White Fragility book discussion series, as well as sermons that educate and inspire for action.

We are working on our Welcoming Congregation renewal at Westside also, and have particularly been engaging over the last several years in education around transgender identity and inclusion – our growing edge in this area. Another growing edge for UUism is inclusion and accessibility for people of all abilities. I had learned something about this years before, when I was in community philanthropy and formed a partnership to create an accessible playground. I am gratified that the church I currently serve embraced the opportunity to begin working on these issues, when I put out a call for folks to take part in the AIM (Accessibility and Inclusion Ministry) program offered by EqUUal Access and the UUA.

Social justice / social action: Social justice is an important part of what drew me to Unitarian Universalism as a young adult. I was passionate about this work as a lay leader, and I have discovered in ministry that I am able to reach people from the pulpit, inspire learning and action, and nurture the leadership of others in a sustained way.

I have a longstanding interest and record of work in the areas of racial justice and multiculturalism, peace & principled nonviolence, environmental conservation and democratic economic forms. Today I find no concern more compelling in my sense of ministerial calling than the climate crisis. Time is short to prevent the worst scenarios of climate change. We must cope with the losses we face, and center justice and equity in all our relations, as we adapt our ways of life.

I embrace opportunities to learn with and from the congregation I serve, as well as to help lead our witness work. In Texas, and especially in these times, this has led me to action on immigration and dreamers – issues I had not learned much about before I lived here. I have marched before city hall, offered testimony to public officials, and with other clergy and a congressperson who generally shies away from public meetings, behind closed doors was able to discuss US policies toward the triangle countries from which many refugees are coming.

During my years in Fort Worth, I have listened to various voices in the community and learned about the history of inequity here and efforts to address it. I can tell you more in conversation about the strained relationship in particular between the police and the African American community, and how I have led the congregation in engaging.

My other major area of focus is the climate crisis. I have preached on it periodically, from different angles; worked with our Green Sanctuary group on a worship service centering a Climate Ribbon Ritual; rallied others to join me at a Climate Strike; and am in deep discernment about how to support people through the grief and overwhelm this crisis brings, as well as moving into constructive action.

These two core passions of mine – racial justice and the climate crisis – are not separate, of course, but intersect. This was brought home for me during the Standing Rock protests. I organized local events in support of the indigenous water protectors and their allies. Later, I also worked with the church I serve to support Red Fawn Fallis, one of the indigenous people most persecuted by the powers that be for her peaceful activism. She was held at a special prison in Fort Worth for a large part of her sentence and we UUs were her only local support, becoming pen pals, raising money for her commissary fund, and supporting her visitors from afar. That relationship continues.

The congregation is engaged in a variety of projects, from ongoing service work to special actions, that

are driven by members' passions and local needs. I keep in touch with the chair of the Social Justice Council and work to support these other areas of interest too, where my words and actions can make a difference in their success – such as the church's work to become a Reproductive Justice Congregation.

Anti-oppression work within our congregations, to me, is of a piece with work in the wider community. I believe our efforts inside churches and other UU institutions, to de-center whiteness and dismantle white supremacy culture, are a form of what Gandhi called Constructive Program – and some of the most powerful work we can engage in to "be the change we wish to see in the world." I am committed to continuing this work for the long haul. I am interested in supporting it both at the congregational level and beyond, in other UU institutions and the community at large.

Interfaith / community work: I participate in a community clergy group for shared justice work and collegial relationships. I have worked in concert with lay leaders to build supportive relationships with an area synagogue and mosque in a time of increased risk to religious minorities. I also encourage the church's continued participation in an alliance of congregations that serves people in our geographic area who are facing periods of economic hardship. I further advocate for building relationships with organizations serving and led by those most affected; we host several to meet in our church and are becoming known as a reliable source of allies for specific actions.

Denominational activities: I am active in the UU Ministers Association, including national, chapter and cluster levels. I belong to Allies for Racial Equity and the Association for UU Music Ministries as well. I often attend G.A. When I lived in a region that offered it (Mid-America), I participated in and contributed to regional assemblies as well. For more, go to <https://www.shariwoodbury.com/service.html>

Stewardship: I have played a variety of roles in stewardship: working with stewardship volunteers to select a theme, put together messaging, and roll out special events; visiting individually with top donors during the annual canvas; developing a challenge for one campaign; preaching on giving and the campaign; contributing to the auction and visibly supporting the event; writing several successful grants.

Before I entered ministry, I spent over a decade leading community foundations – organizations that exist to raise money for a community and steward it wisely – as well as doing fund development for several other non-profits. So stewardship is second nature to me. I have extensive experience in annual giving (the bread and butter of most nonprofits); grants, from both the giving and receiving sides; and planned giving and endowments. I am no stranger to events or capital projects. While fundraising is not what pulled me into ministry, I understand how to support and participate in this vital aspect of our shared work. I do my part with skill and joy.

Finances: I believe it is important to be well informed of church finances, including perusing the Treasurer's monthly reports to the board and keeping an eye on the financial health of the organization. I participate in the budgeting process and in planning for the future. I advocate fair compensation for all staff, and other investments to help our budget reflect our values. I appreciate financial controls and the work of the audit committee as well.

How do you build trust with a congregation and individuals?

When new to a community, I build trust by intentionally creating more opportunities for interested people to connect with me and begin a relationship. Not only through routine programs and committee work, but house meetings, individual visits, and – something that worked well in my first year in my current church – holding a rotating series of Coffee Shop Office Hours in different locations throughout the region from which the church draws members, and at different days of the week and times of day... resulting in many

wonderful connections with individuals and small groups who turned out.

I build trust by getting to know the particularities of individuals and a church – hearing their questions and stories, being with them through the triumphs and tragedies of life, listening to who they are and who they want to be, and letting my love for them grow and show.

I build trust by being real with people. Being authentic, honest, and mindful of my own human limitations, as well as a conscientious steward of my particular gifts. I build trust by being reliable – keeping confidences, doing what I say I will do, cleaving to the higher purpose that calls us all. I build trust by being patient. It takes time to build relationships, to develop trust, and to do the vital and often challenging work we are called to do as religious liberals.

These words from the Tao te Ching, which are dear to me from use in meditation, speak powerfully to me of how a leader earns trust: "Can you love people and lead them without imposing your will? / Can you deal with the most vital matters by letting events take their course? / Can you step back from your own mind and thus understand all things?"

Describe your theology and the role of the ministry in a congregation that has multiple theologies:

I am delighted to belong to a tradition for which theological diversity has been a hallmark for almost 200 years. My personal faith is shaped by forces similar to those that shaped UUism: direct experiences of wonder, awe, and connection, often in nature; the best of the Judeo-Christian heritage, including the call to prophetic action and to build the beloved community; the ever-unfolding revelations of science about our amazing universe; the rich insights and beauty found in the arts; and deep encounters with Eastern sources of wisdom.

I accept the labels eclectic, seeker, mystic, poet, panentheist, religious naturalist, lover of life. I have had moments of spiritual bliss and moments of existential despair. In my personal spiritual life I use many names for the holy, feeling that collectively all these words and images may come closer to capturing our vast reality than any single name could. Yet ultimately I am left with an intimate Mystery. In worship I tend to favor poetic imagery and be more sparing in the use of God-language, which connects for some people but disconnects others. The cornerstone of mysticism – the recognition that the spark of the divine is within everyone – is at the heart of my theology. I once wrote a Co-Mingling Chant that expresses much of my own theology poetically. You can find it at <https://www.shariwoodbury.com/theology.html>.

As a UU minister I support people as they develop and live out their own theology. Since I left the mainline Protestant church of my childhood for our faith of "deeds not creeds," I understand that well-worn path to UUism. I also recognize that people come to us from many other heritages – Catholic, evangelical, Jewish, pagan, humanist, Hindu, Muslim, Mormon, secular, and born-and-raised UU. And people have a whole variety of relationships to previous traditions, as well as eclectic affinities developed over lifetimes.

I invite people into a spirit of curiosity, respect and mutual enrichment as we engage in meaning-making with a variety of viewpoints. I believe our diversity is itself a resource for our collective growth.

When I did my ministerial internship in preparation for ministry, my teaching pastor offered this observation about me: "A socially conscious mystic with a genuine passion for the work of the Beloved Community... Shari is subtle in her representation of her theological leanings. In a tradition as diverse as ours, this is a positive. A minister must 'do ministry' out of a theologically authentic place, but must also engage and heartfully respond to – and evoke responses in – the various spiritual spaces of others...Shari

has walked that line about as well as it can be walked." (~Rev. Dennis McCarty)

The team of lay people who worked closely with me in that setting put it this way: "Her theology and spirituality are wide enough to embrace everyone in our congregation; all feel accepted and included... She was honest and open about her spiritual journey in a way that connected us all to a sense of awe and wonder about our own spiritual seeking... you must know that our congregation includes atheists, agnostics, humanists, Buddhists, Christians, Sufis, pagans ... Her spiritual grounding leads her to write sermons that deepen the listeners' understanding of their own theology... We are inspired by Shari's ministry to become our best as individuals and as a congregation."

What questions do you hope our congregations are asking themselves and discussing?

What are our core values? Who do we want to be in the world? What difference do we want to make in the community?

What gifts do I personally (each congregant) possess, and how do I want to share that through my church?

What questions and longings are most present to me in my spiritual journey at this time? What people and practices can support me?

How do we cope with the climate crisis and the cascading losses – and how can we respond in ways rooted in our UU values?

How do we build our skills and our resilience for the work of de-centering white culture and building Beloved Community – starting inside ourselves and our congregation, but in the wider community too?

How do you give and receive feedback?

I try to show appreciation for people's contributions at least as often as I offer constructive feedback. I share both with staff in regular supervisory conversations, and with volunteers if needed in 1:1 conversations, or in small groups intended for mutual support (such as periodic meetings of small group facilitators or Worship Associates).

I seek to give and receive feedback with the board through my monthly reports to them – celebrating what is going well in the life of the church, sharing observations about areas where we might be stuck or need to give more attention, and inviting their input on the goals I have set for my own position and my work toward those.

How do you suggest your ministry with the congregation is evaluated?

It's best to clarify goals and priorities in advance; then you don't end up doing evaluation in a vacuum of expectations later. I believe feedback is also best built in on an ongoing basis – issues need not wait to the end of the year to be addressed. For example, I listen for the Worship Team's feedback on services I led every month when we meet. And my monthly connection with the board is a time to note successes, share challenges, and get feedback.

Now that I have reached Full Fellowship and no longer have the fellowship renewal process as a built-in evaluation cycle, I am considering the question of what kind of formal process over larger arcs of time might be beneficial. Tools such as Fulfilling the Call may be helpful.

What do you hope for the future of Unitarian Universalism?

To live into the promise of unity in diversity and universalism... in terms of race-ethnicity culture, theology, and generations (as a Gen-Xer, I am a natural bridge-builder).

For most people with privileged identities to come through this time of transformation in our faith understanding – and FEELING in their hearts and bones – that to be de-centered is not to be de-valued. We can learn, we can grow. We will make mistakes but we are not mistakes. Everyone is valued – yes, you too.

To be part of constructive action for the climate crisis... for today's and tomorrow's children to know that we did not stick our heads in the sand but faced it and coped and acted.

For UUs to have within our congregations avenues to theological depth, spiritual practice, and authentic connection – helping this faith be meaningful and relevant to our daily lives as well as our existential questions.

What else would you like to say about your ministry and ministry skills?

You can find pictures and more about my ministry at my web site, www.shariwoodbury.com.

Personal

What should a congregation know about your family situation?

Husband William and daughter Avonelle support me in all that I do, including ministry. www.shariwoodbury.com/family.html

My professional interest in serving a congregation which wishes to be multicultural is reinforced by my personal situation; I am white, my husband is black, and our 10-year-old is bi-racial. Ideally, we will land in a place not only where the broader community is reasonably diverse, but where the congregation I serve is equipped to support our child's growing identity as both a UU and a person of color. It is my hope that my family will experience Unitarian Universalism's rich heritage as well as its multicultural present and future.

What should a congregation know about your health?

I appreciate an ergonomic workspace, which reduces body strain and helps me feel good and be more effective. That's all that comes to mind.

How do you take care of yourself so that the congregation does not have to?

Time in nature is important for me. My exercise regimen involves aerobic activity (usually hiking or speedwalking outdoors), weight-lifting, and sometimes yoga or qigong. I meditate regularly and periodically journal or do art. I also get massages occasionally and have worked with a spiritual director at times.

I take the full amount of vacation and study leave time allotted, my weekly Day Off and monthly Sunday Off. This is an investment not only in my health and well-being, but in the longevity and quality of my

ministry. I spend time with my family and maintain friendships both with colleagues and with friends who are not in ministry; these relationships help to balance and support me.

How long do you hope your next ministry lasts? What's the minimum commitment you would make?

My first settled ministry has confirmed that settled ministry is an excellent fit for me (although the Texas heat is not). I see 4-5 years as a minimum, to make the transition process worth the effort for all involved.

If/when I accept a new call, my hope would be for my family to land in a place where both the church and the community/geography are a strong fit, and we stay at least until our child graduates high school (2028); perhaps longer.

Additional Information

I look forward to getting to know YOU. If you'd like further insight on me via personality systems, you can read more here: <https://www.shariwoodbury.com/personality.html>

By the way, if you Google me you may get a few hits that are related to another Shari Woodbury (exact same spelling) who also lived in Texas at one time. She has a blog about camping kiddos. I also like camping and kids. But any such articles you may run across are not mine. The sociology and non-profit stuff *are* me.