



## *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:** Carmen    **M.I.:** M    **Last name:** Emerson

### **Mailing address:**

742 Chestnut Street

**City:** Meadville

**State/Prov:** PA    **Code:** 16335

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**Website address:** www.revcme.com (in process)

**Phone (home):** 814-807-0780

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**Present position:** Parish Minister    **Since (mm/dd/yy):** 8/1/2010

**Date of preliminary UU fellowship (mm/dd/yy):** 12/4/2009

**Ordination (ordaining body, place, date):** First Unitarian Church, Albuquerque, New Mexico

### **Why are you seeking a ministry now?**

I believe that there is wisdom in honoring the seasons and timing of one's life, and it is time for a new season of ministry in mine. I currently serve as the 64th called and settled minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Meadville, Pennsylvania ("UUCM"), an historic congregation (est. 1825) located in a rural, conservative community in the snow and rust belt of northwestern Pennsylvania. Founders of UUCM also founded Meadville Theological School (est. 1844), and their historical commitment to welcoming, teaching, and supporting new ministers continues to be an important part of their congregational culture and identity. We anticipated a five-year season of ministry together, and that season is drawing to a close. The Meadville congregation has been a wonderful first congregation: encouraging and challenging, tender and stoic, vulnerable and determined. I have learned so much about ministry with them and from them. It has been my pleasure to serve them, it is my privilege to love them, and now I eagerly anticipate a new and long season of ministry with a congregation in a larger and more diverse city.

### **Describe the new ministry you hope for:**

I hope for a joyful ministry with a serious congregation willing to be thoughtful and bold as we engage our heads and our hearts, as well as our hands and our feet, in the holy and transformative work of “loving the hell out of the world.” I hope to go deep and wide in love, with love, engaging in meaningful shared ministries with congregants of all ages, life experiences, and theologies.

The ministry I hope for encompasses (a) the role of preacher and teacher, leading in faith formation and living our values with integrity as we encounter the tensions between our First and Seventh Principles (independence and interdependence); (b) the role of pastor and priest, reverently attending the sacred moments of our ordinary lives; and (c) the role of prophet, challenging us to show up because we understand that our presence matters, that it changes things – changes us – and that it is the most faithful response we can have to the call of life.

As preacher and teacher I long to cast my lot with others who are unapologetically and diversely Unitarian Universalist, people committed to examining and willing to respond – individually and communally – to the religious, spiritual and ethical demands to which we are called by our faith and values.

As pastor and priest I am intentional about building loving, trusting relationships so that we may risk being vulnerable with one another, moving reverently and purposefully together through our “wild and precious” lives.

As a prophet I am willing to be discomforted – and willing to respectfully discomfort others – in service to love, justice, and peace. I yearn to serve a faith community whose care and compassion are so strong, whose commitment to love and justice is so powerful, that the larger community in which we dwell learns it can count on us to show up when it matters – especially for the most vulnerable among us – and for the ideals of freedom and beloved community.

During my five years of parish ministry I’ve learned that each of these ministerial roles informs and expands the others, helping me to be an effective, connected, and accessible minister.

<b>Education and certification:</b>			<i><b>Add a School or Degree</b></i>
<b>Degree</b>	<b>College/University/Seminary</b>	<b>Area of Concentration</b>	<b>Date (mm/yy)</b>
<b>M.Div. (with honors)</b>	<b>ANDOVER NEWTON THEOLOGICAL</b>		<b>May 2009</b>

	<b>SCHOOL</b>		
<b>Bachelor of Arts</b>	<b>LESLEY UNIVERSITY</b>	<b>Dying/ Death</b>	<b>May 2004</b>

**Awards, honors, and published writings:**

During my tenure with the UU Church of Meadville I've written a number of editorials and opinion letters that have been published in the Meadville Tribune. A sample copy will be available on my website.

**AWARDS/HONORS:**

2013 – Keynote Graduation Speaker, Albion Prison (Men's Prison) and Cambridge Springs (Women's Prison)

2009 - H. Otheman Smith Community Congregational Preaching Award, Andover Newton Theological School

2008 - Ted Jones Memorial Scholarship, First Parish of Waltham, Massachusetts

2004 - Student Speaker at the Graduation Ceremonies for Lesley University Adult Baccalaureate College

**PUBLISHED WRITINGS:**

"Blessing the Peacemakers" - a covenant group series for religious education teachers, published by the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC)

"On Voices and Choices" - 2008 UUSC Social Justice Sunday Sermon

"A Letter to Reverend Emerson" - The Community Reader: Works in Progress, Lesley University Adult Baccalaureate College

"Starfish Lessons" - Exempli Gratia, Volume VI-Number 1, Valencia Community College

**Personal and family situation:**

I have been married to Jim Emerson for the past 28 years. In 2005, when I shared with him that I wanted to leave my well-paying job as a paralegal and law firm administrator to answer my call to ministry, his response was an enthusiastic "Finally!" I rely upon his wisdom and wit, as well as his honest encouragement and practical support. He is minister to the minister, flexible and adventurous, enjoying life and reminding me to enjoy life, too, when I linger too long in solemnity or worry. We share our home with two cats and one rescue dog, a "bassador" (basset/lab mix) named Grace. Jim is a recently retired scenic carpenter who constructed television and theatrical sets, as well as museum exhibits.

**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:**

I GREW UP in rural Arkansas, in a small town on the Mississippi River, about 60 miles south of Memphis, Tennessee. Even as a child I was troubled by the systemic oppressions of racism, classism, and sexism so prevalent in our community, although I certainly lacked the language then to articulate my concerns. As a teenager I asked a lot of questions about the

religiously sanctioned hypocrisies I witnessed: saying one thing on Sunday morning, living another Monday through Saturday – especially in the treatment of “Other.” My questions about this made my Sunday school teachers very nervous.

I WAS MARRIED very young, and from 1980-85 lived in Tennessee, Iowa, Oklahoma, and Louisiana; my ex-husband’s alcoholism made steady employment elusive and necessitated frequent moves. After divorcing him in 1985 I moved to Florida, lived alone for the first time in my life, and loved it! It was a rich time of personal development for me. I met and married Jim in 1986. He is an amazing life partner and minister’s spouse.

FROM 1986 THROUGH 1993 I worked as a legal secretary and real estate paralegal, slowly (uninspired and unhurried) pursuing my undergraduate degree. In 1993 I answered a phone call that changed my life, when Haitian attorney, Jéan E. Wilson, asked for my help to start a law practice specializing in public finance.

MY INTUITIVE “YES” to Jéan's unexpected request was one of the best decisions I’ve ever made. An inner wisdom gave me the courage to say “Yes!” to an offer lean on detail, rich with possibility. Jéan and I talked frankly about our experiences at the corporate law firms we were leaving, rejecting their expectations for conformity and assimilation as prelude to acceptance and success. In rejecting the notion that self-betrayal and living less than one's full self were essential to success, we rejected the traditions, conventions, and systemic oppressions of those same firms.

WE IMAGINED A DIFFERENT KIND OF SUCCESS, envisioned a different kind of working environment – one in which members of our team would be recognized and valued for the unique gifts and experiences that each brought to our collective efforts. We believed it was possible to encourage each other in professional AND personal growth. In our firm, we would do our best to give everyone a chance for their voice to be heard. "It will never work" we were told time and again by the cynics from our former firms, colleagues who held low expectations for our "social experiment." We ignored the cynics and critics and, guided by our vision, I began recruiting and training people who were willing to commit to such a vision, investing themselves in the possibilities. There were definitely some challenging and "organic" moments along the way, but we eventually assembled a multicultural team of 6 amazing women (no men applied) who not only understood our original vision, but helped guide and inspire all of us beyond it. (Two years into our “experiment” our critics were calling to ask for jobs.)

NONE OF THESE women would ever have fit the common profile of the people we worked with for years. Among our team were immigrants, women of color, and a woman with a disability. All but one were from very poor backgrounds (this resonated with both Jéan and me), and only two had earned college degrees (at the time I still had not earned one). As women of color and disability they came without experiences of power or privilege, and they were hungry for the chance to live beyond the pejorative labels and low expectations the world had always placed upon them. They were surprised to discover that we wanted them to come with expectations about who they wanted to become, and how they could contribute to the team. As one of the women once said to me, "Most people see us only as minorities, or disabled, or as just another single-mother statistic. But not here. Not you, and not Jéan. You

see us as who we yet may be, and have given us the courage to risk that vision of ourselves." It was a profound moment for me, and one that led me to ministry.

BY EXAMPLE these women taught me much about life, resilience, love, grace, forgiveness, authenticity, and determination. In *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Howard Thurman writes about Jesus' conversation with the "adulterous woman" of John 8:4-11: "He met the woman where she was," writes Thurman, "and treated her as if she were already where she now willed to be. In dealing with her he 'believed' her into the fulfillment of her possibilities." With intention and purpose, Jean and I had envisioned a workplace wherein we each could help believe one another into the fulfillment of our possibilities.

CREATING OUR FIRM was and remains a profound, transformational experience, not only because of what we each became, but because of what we became, together: a true beloved community. It was hard to leave them, but it would have been harder to stay. My call to ministry happened within the context of that beloved community, and answering my call to ministry was a matter of integrity within that beloved community: if anything I said was to have authentic meaning, if the hours of exploration and conversation and soul bearing and believing one another into fulfillment were to be trusted, then it was time for me to answer my call to ministry, to recognize and fulfill within myself the possibilities that I and they believed for me. (If we move forward in our conversations about ministry, I hope you will ask me about Jean and the team; the unfolding story continues to inspire my ministry.)

IN 2004 I APPLIED to and was accepted into the Master of Divinity programs at three seminaries: Andover Newton Theological School (ANTS), Harvard Divinity School (HDS), and Vanderbilt Divinity School (VDS). Being accepted into all three seminaries was a welcome affirmation of my gifts for ministry, and required discernment about the academic component of ministerial preparation. Following on-site visits at ANTS and HDS, and conversations with the VDS admissions person, a great internal debate began: my practical self lobbied for Vanderbilt, which offered a generous scholarship; my ego lobbied for Harvard, affirmation of a long journey from my humble beginnings to service as a UU minister; my wiser self lobbied for ANTS, for it was there that I felt I could give necessary attention to both head and heart during ministerial preparation and formation.

I ATTENDED ANTS from 2005-2009, and during that time served as the ministerial intern at the UU Service Committee (2007-08) and as intern chaplain at St. Elizabeth's Medical Center and Franciscan Children's Hospital (2008-09).

IN MAY 2009 we moved from Boston to Albuquerque, New Mexico, where I first served as the ministerial intern at the First Unitarian Church under the supervision of The Rev. Christine Robinson, and then as interim Assistant Minister during her summer vacation. With nearly 700 members, another 120 enrolled in religious education, three satellite locations (Edgewood, Carlsbad, and Socorro), and four on-site worship services every Sunday, we were a busy ministerial team – I loved our collaboration! I will always be grateful for my ministry experiences with Christine and the Albuquerque congregation, and chose to be ordained by them in June 2010.

IN WINTER 2009 I saw the Ministerial Fellowship Committee and after receiving a "1" entered the search process. I pre-candidated with three congregations and was invited by each to be their ministerial candidate. It was a blessing and a hard decision; the truth is that I fell a little in

love with each Congregation, and the possibilities for ministry in each place were very exciting. In May 2010 I accepted the candidating offer from the UU Church of Meadville and was called as their 64th settled minister in 2010.

I BELIEVE there are many gifts, skills, and experiences that translate well from my career as a paralegal and law firm administrator into my career as a minister: I am extremely well organized and efficient. I have a knack for developing systems and policies, and project management. I have strong and healthy communication skills, embracing transparency and confidentiality. I know that it is critical to be clear about expectations, and to be consistent in matters of accountability. I have real life experience in hiring, supervising, developing, mentoring, and, when necessary, terminating professional staff (this staff management experience has served me well during my first five years of parish ministry).

MOST IMPORTANTLY, my leadership is informed by the life-giving, life-changing, life-affirming energies that emerge from deep, trusting, collaborative engagement with others in a diverse community; this is not theoretical for me, but actual experience that makes me hopeful and determined. The experiences of my previous career and my five years of experience in parish ministry will continue to guide me as a Unitarian Universalist minister eager to grow, grow with, love, and lead the Congregation I am next called to serve.

**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:**

**VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES (NON-UU RELATED):**

- Community Member, Institutional Review Board of Edinboro University, Edinboro, PA (2013 – 2015)
- President, Meadville Area Ministers Association, Meadville, PA (2013-2015)
- Board Member, Women's Services Inc., a local social service agency providing support and programs to counter domestic violence against women and children (2013-2014)
- ANTS Community Days (Boston Food Bank & Afterschool Programs) - Newton Centre, MA (2005-2009)
- Perkins School for the Blind - Elder Outreach Volunteer - Watertown, MA (2006)
- Hospice of the Comforter - Patient Visitations and Lifetime Legacy Project - Altamonte Springs, FL (2003-2005)
- Columbia Hospital - PASS Program Training (resume and interview coaching) - Sanford, FL (1998-2000)
- Central Florida Women's Resource Center - Clothing Chair (a parallel "Dress for Success" program) - Orlando, FL (1998-1999)
- Adult Literacy Tutor - Orlando, FL (1992-1993)
- "Pink Lady" Hospital Volunteer - Helena, AR (1973-1978)

**VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES: UU RELATED**

- Board Member, Ohio-Meadville District Board of Trustees (2013-Present)
- President, UU Ministers Association in the Ohio-Meadville District (2013-Present)
- General Assembly and District Assembly Delegate (2010-2014)
- Coming of Age Co-Leader - First Parish, Watertown, MA (2008-2009)

•Treasurer, UU Community of Andover Newton Students - Newton Centre, MA (2008-2009)  
VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCES (UU RELATED, ALL AT FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF ORLANDO, FLORIDA):

- President, Board of Trustees (2004 – 2005)
- Ex-Officio Member, Canvass Team (2004 – 2005)
- Member, Financial Stewards Team (2004 – 2005)
- Committee on Ministry (2002 – 2004)
- Member, Teaching Church Committee (2002 – 2003)
- Trustee, Board of Trustees (2001 – 2002)
- Covenant Group Anchor (2000 – 2002)
- Delegate – UUA General Assembly (2000)
- Delegate – Florida District UUA Leadership School (1999)
- VP Programming, Board of Trustees (1999 – 2001)
- Worship Associate (1998 – 1999)
- Facilitator, Simplicity Circle (1997 – 2002)
- Member, Personnel Committee (1997 – 1999)
- Corresponding Secretary, Board of Trustees (1997 – 1998)
- Member, Nominating Committee (1994 – 1995)
- Co-Chair, Membership Committee (1992 – 1994)

I also worked (part-time) as the office administrator of the Florida District UUA from 1999-2002.

**Non-professional interests:**

I very much enjoy creative and performing arts of all kinds. I consider creativity to be a deep spiritual practice, and dabble in a variety of creative efforts. I recently unearthed my old guitar and I'm surprised at the number of chords my fingers remember.

It is also very important to me to spend time in nature – especially walking with Grace. After a lifelong love of cats, I've been amazed at how much joy this odd little dog brings to our daily lives.

I most enjoy deep conversations with Jim and our friends, relaxing and laughing together as we ponder the mysteries, wonders, joys and absurdities of life.

**Ministerial development:**

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

I ONCE shared with a seasoned ministerial colleague my concerns about saying "I don't yet know" to a congregation. She encouraged me to stop worrying about this, reminding me of the simple fact that my congregation, as individuals and as a collective, would always know more than I would know or could know. "Your job," she advised, "is to become an expert in depth." I was flooded with relief, because it is depth that I love!

IN TERMS OF ministerial development, I want to continue to go deep with the congregation I serve; this requires trust, and trust requires time. The convergence of life experience, career experience, academic preparation, ministerial formation and five years of parish ministry – all of this has brought me to this place, this time, this conversation with you; I am eager to spend a long time with a congregation willing to live our covenantal tradition deeply and well. I am

eager to serve a congregation of people who embrace the transformational good news of our Unitarian Universalist faith, and want to live our faith in service to one another and in service to the larger community in which we dwell. How we decide to do this together will be a rich and exciting part of my ministerial development; I can't wait to discover our shared ministry with you!

I ALSO NEED HELP WITH BALANCE – it is an important part of healthy ministry for both congregation and minister, and I struggle with this. I love being a minister, I love to work, and I am known to keep long hours...I work a lot and can sometimes over function, although usually with good cheer and self-awareness. I hope to be in loving relationship with a congregation who wants to run with me, walk with me, dance with me, rest with me, stumble with me, soar with me – and be a strong and healthy partner through all of these movements.

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

TRIGGER WARNING – I speak about sexual assault in my response.

Several years ago our UUMA (UU Ministers Association) chapter visited a mountaintop mining removal site in West Virginia, and attended lectures about the history of coal mining and its impact on the local communities. We also visited a “Company Store” museum and learned about the horrors of “owing your soul to the company store.”

One of the worst horrors was the “Esau scrip” (a reference to the Old Testament story of Jacob stealing Esau's birthright, scrip the “money” paid by coal companies to its workers and required tender at the company stores). If a coal miner was unable to work due to injury or illness, the company store would extend credit to his family for a certain period of time. If the coal miner was unable to return to work when the coal company expected him to, the credit was immediately called due. If the family could not pay its debt with company scrip, Pinkerton security guards were sent to collect the coal miner's wife; she would be taken to a secret and soundproof room in the company store and sexually assaulted, a forced “settlement” of the debt (we stood in the room where this happened).

When I preached about this experience (in a sermon about the long-term community and environmental damage done when we are careless about our natural resources), I was filled with anger and despair as I thought of the violence done to bodies, spirits, and land by the mine owners. My anger and despair were evident in the pulpit, especially during the part of my sermon where I shared the “Esau scrip” story as an example of the extremes to which energy companies will go in their exploitation of people and resources; the story was too raw, as were my anger and despair, and I had offered no trigger warning to the Congregation.

I made a mistake in not offering a trigger warning to my Congregation, and in not finding a way out of my anger and despair in the pulpit during that particular sermon. It shook some members of the Congregation and fortunately two of them (brave souls!) came to speak with me about how my unresolved anger had impacted them.

Preaching hard truths is a necessary and responsible part of ministry – we are not, cannot afford to be the denomination of sunshine, daisies, and unicorns – and I am willing to be REAL in the pulpit. Our faith calls us to examine hard issues, and as a minister I know that we have an extraordinary opportunity to do that in the safe and sacred space we create and hold together during worship services. What I learned from this mistake is that I must always try to model a way forward – must “equip” my Congregation – not necessarily with answers, but

with questions, with hope, and with possibilities that help us to make meaning, and even changes, about those things that most trouble and challenge us as people living the values of our Unitarian Universalist faith.

**Ministerial roles and functions:**

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

As further detailed in my response to "Theological Orientation" below, I am grounded in a relational theology that informs my ministry and my leadership style. I am a collaborative leader who knows that it takes ALL of us, minister and laity together, to keep our arms and hearts around the mission and vision, and our hands and heads engaged in all the little details that make the big things possible. I love contributing to leadership development and succession within a congregation, and I know that to be effective in this work there must be trust between minister and lay leaders. Trust is the coin of the realm. I enter the role of minister with eyes and heart wide open, recognizing the delicate balance of ministerial leadership, ministerial authority, and ministerial/pastoral presence. I look to the covenant between and among us as guiding North Star.

My professional experience also greatly informs my leadership style. In the law firm previously referenced, I served in dual roles as a member of the management team and as a member of support staff. I humbly share this quote from Jéan's letter to the MFC: "Carmen brings a high degree of creativity, resourcefulness and flexibility, and possesses an incredible ability to lead, motivate, and bring people together to act collaboratively to achieve a common goal. In her dual role as Office Manager and Legal Assistant, she had the unenviable task of straddling the line between her role as a staff member and a member of the management team. Carmen not only deftly balanced her staff and management responsibilities but managed to gain and retain the trust and confidence of both the lawyers as well as a very diverse group of staff members. She helped bring true meaning to the 'team' concept and worked tirelessly to insure that each staff member bought into each of the policies and procedures of the office and felt as vested in the goals and objectives of the firm as the shareholders. Because of her professional and personal commitment to the team, her unwavering sense of fair play, and her impeccable integrity, Carmen was respected and revered by not only our lawyers and staff but by all counsel and colleagues from other firms who had the opportunity to deal with her."

I would bring this same collaborative leadership style to my work with other ministers and with lay leadership in the congregation.

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

I would wish to work with paid church staff in the same collaborative style noted above, with programming and policies that keep the congregation safe, healthy, and vibrant.

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

I am happiest in collaboration with others, inspired when working with a team of people who each bring their gifts and skills, vulnerabilities and strengths to the whole of who we are together, in covenant, and in service to the mission, vision and health of the congregation. In my current settlement I am blessed to work with a great part-time staff, including the office administrator, DRE, music director, and custodian; I am grateful for this team!

I absolutely loved being a part of the ministry team at First Unitarian Church of Albuquerque, where I worked with The Rev. Christine Robinson, Senior Minister and The Rev. Ron Hersom, Assistant Minister. I was directly supervised by Rev. Robinson, who is primarily responsible for worship, programming, vision, pastoral care, and leadership. Rev. Hersom (who is no longer there) was primarily responsible for administrative matters and religious education. We each had clearly defined responsibilities for worship, for pastoral care, and for religious education, yet each of us were involved in all these areas of ministry. Given the size of the Congregation it was helpful for the ministry team to meet regularly with our DRE, music director, support staff, and key leaders of shared ministry teams - and I continue that practice, even while serving a much smaller congregation. This will be a good practice, too, in support of a growing congregation.

Presently I enjoy ministerial collaboration now with my colleagues on the executive team leading the Ohio Meadville District (OMD) UU Ministers Association (for which I currently serve as president); my colleagues on the OMD Board (for which I currently serve as an at-large trustee); and with my ecumenical colleagues in the Meadville Area Ministers Association (for which I currently serve as president).

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

We have a life-affirming, life-transforming, life-saving message, and involvement in the community – beyond the walls of sanctuary and parish house – is essential to sharing our good news. Our communities need our good news – not our exceptionalism – and I take seriously my ministerial responsibility to discover common, holy ground with others in our communities in the demanding work of justice and peace-making.

My first year with the Meadville Area Ministers Association (“MAMA”), our ecumenical ministerium, was terribly hard. This is a very small community (12-13,000) and people take their denominational associations very seriously. It is the kind of community where residents ask newcomers, “Where do you go to church?” and being a small, rural, conservative place, Unitarian Universalism is a suspicious answer, even among the ministers here; we are known as “the cult church.” Some of the more fundamentalist ministers here have refused to work with me (a non-Christian minister), and some who remained at the MAMA table were dismissive of UUism and me (and sometimes arrogant about it, which is my least favorite human trait).

It took discipline to stay at the table but I did, and for the past 1.5 years I have been the president of MAMA. Rather than debate whose theology is “biggest, rightest, or true,” under my leadership we have turned our efforts toward identifying the common causes we can support and which our respective congregations can support, as well. We are currently exploring a rotating “cold night” program for the homeless in Meadville (overflow in churches when our homeless shelters are full); we have held our city government accountable for the condition of low-income housing in Meadville and changes have begun to happen with local ordinances; and, we have led a community-wide effort to support a comprehensive non-discrimination ordinance adding LGBTQ to the protected classes here. I also have good working relationships with the directors of CHAPS and WSI (the mental health housing center and women’s domestic violence shelter, respectively). I worked closely with my ministerial

colleague from the Methodist Church across the street from us to launch a PFLAG chapter in our community (this is a big deal for our rural, conservative, fundamentalist area).

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

I have experienced leading organizational change in a multicultural professional setting, and in a multicultural congregational setting:

**PROFESSIONAL CONTEXT:** The law office I helped to establish was all about organizational change in a multicultural setting. Having been immersed for years in cultures that valued conformity and assimilation over diversity, organizational change meant disrupting the status quo within as we sought to create and value a multicultural environment. As noted in my earlier responses, Jéan and I, with intention and purpose, envisioned a workplace wherein we each could believe one another into the fulfillment of our possibilities. This is a powerful place to begin organizational change! Ultimately our support staff was comprised of an Asian woman from Suriname; a young woman from Cuba; three women from Puerto Rico; and a woman with a severe physical disability. From inside the walls of our firm we were dismantling systemic oppressions, and were at times heady with our successes. However, our firm, as a business, still had to work within systemic oppressions beyond our walls and beyond our control. This served to strengthen our resolve for the internal work of change, and as our attorney/paralegal teams traveled to bond closings throughout the state, people noticed that we worked differently. There was a trust among all of our team members that held us as we navigated the "real" world. What happened at "home" would not have held much meaning if it did not prepare us for authentic engagement with the broader communities of which we were a part.

**CONGREGATIONAL CONTEXT:** The UU Church of Meadville has prided itself on being "the intellectual church" in Meadville; many of our congregants are professors from the local liberal arts college. Unfortunately, it has also had the reputation of being an "elite" congregation, with all of the classism issues inherent thereto. I hear from longtime members that our Congregation is more socio-economically diverse than it has ever been, and I am proud to have been the minister who brought such diversity to our Congregation. This happened, in great part, because of a commitment I asked UUCM to make to "Creating Landscapes for Families" (CLF), an after-school tutoring program hosted in our Parish House.

The CLF program serves the poorest neighborhood school in Meadville; Second District is comprised of African-American and poor white students whose families live in subsidized housing near the school. The CLF families themselves are involved in the program: while the children are tutored in our Parish House by volunteer students from Allegheny College, the mothers and grandmothers of CLF work together in our kitchen to make a family-style meal (often with food harvested from their community garden, the summer component of the program). There is usually an after-dinner learning component for children and adults, and I've begun an informal women's group with the mothers and grandmothers of CLF. UUCM also supported the CLF families in establishing their community garden, appearing at City Council meetings to support a variance on the ordinance prohibiting gardening in vacant lots. Truthfully there is still more "hosting" than "engagement" with the CLF students and their families by most of our Congregation; as one Congregant admitted to me, "they don't make it

easy for us, you know.” Yes, I know. Much work to be done, still, but the process has started, progress has happened, and the relationships I have with the CLF families invite a meaningful multicultural ministry.

We have also become known as the congregation where families from the LGBTQ community feel welcomed in worship and in all aspects of Congregational life. To the dismay of our church matriarch I asked that we hang our Standing on the Side of Love banner and our rainbow flag on the OUTSIDE of our historic sanctuary; it was hard (but necessary) to be firm in this. Both banner and flag have brought people through the doors. As one person told me, “I grew up in Meadville, never knew this was a church, always thought it was a bank. When I saw the rainbow flag I investigated, and was surprised to learn that there is a church where someone like me and my entire family – (her partner and their 3 children) – would be welcomed, as we are, no one trying to change us.”

There is so much opportunity for multicultural ministry; we must be brave enough to get out of our own way about it – be vulnerable together in making mistakes, asking for forgiveness, and learning how to do and be better in this work.

**Ministerial skills and current special interests:**

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

<b>Skl: 4</b>	<b>Int:3</b>	<b>Administration</b>	<b>Skl: 4</b>	<b>Int:4</b>	<b>Personal counseling</b>
<b>Skl: 3</b>	<b>Int: 4</b>	<b>Adult religious education</b>	<b>Skl: 3</b>	<b>Int: 4</b>	<b>Preaching</b>
<b>Skl: 3</b>	<b>Int: 4</b>	<b>Children's religious education</b>	<b>Skl: 3</b>	<b>Int: 4</b>	<b>Scholarship</b>

<b>Skl:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>2</b>	<b>Committee work</b>	<b>Skl:</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Social action</b>
<b>Skl:</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Community building</b>	<b>Skl:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Spiritual guidance</b>
<b>Skl:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Staff relations</b>	<b>Skl:</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Denominational activities</b>
<b>Skl:</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Facilitation</b>	<b>Skl:</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Worship</b>
<b>Skl:</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Fund-raising</b>	<b>Skl:</b> <b>2</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Youth work</b>
<b>Skl:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Home visitation</b>	<b>Skl:</b> <b>1</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>1</b>	<b>cooking for church potlucks (thank goodness for Jim!)</b>
<b>Skl:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Hospital calling</b>	<b>Skl:</b> <b>2</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>developing meaningful ritual</b>
<b>Skl:</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Leadership development</b>	<b>Skl:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>interpersonal skills, pastoral care</b>
<b>Skl:</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Membership growth</b>	<b>Skl:</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>mission-focused shared ministries</b>
<b>Skl:</b> <b>3</b>	<b>Int:</b> <b>4</b>	<b>Music and liturgical arts</b>			

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

Religious education of our children and youth is about nurturing curiosity and wonder; religious education of our adults is about integrity and vulnerability; religious education for all ages teaches and reinforces the art of critical thinking, something that is desperately needed in our local and global neighborhoods.

CHILDREN & YOUTH: I am not a parent, and when I first entered ministry I was worried about my capacity to minister to the children and youth in the congregations I would serve...how would I connect? Turns out I just had to get out of my own way, and be real with our children and youth. This has become one of the most joyful parts of ministry for me; parents in my Congregation tell me that for the first time in their history with the church they feel like their children are welcome and cared for beyond the RE department. I have introduced a joys and concerns time with our children, immediately following the Time for All Ages in the worship service; some of our elders grumble about this, but it is teaching our children that we care about their lives, that their stories are important to us, and that they have a whole community of people who are committed to them. (I hope that if we have a chance for

a telephone interview you'll ask me two questions – one about Lila Rose's concern during a Sunday morning, and one about working in the garden with Lillian and Mia on our flower communion Sunday.) Religious education is happening ALL of the time, and at our peril we forget that our children and youth are learning from us with every encounter; we need to make our time with them count.

ADULTS: I must confess favoritism for our Fourth Principle, a commitment to engage in a free and responsible search for truth and meaning. To me, that's what religious education is all about! We engage in an examination of the values that shape our actions; we commit to a journey of discovery and choice. It is serious and profound work, and I love it.

We are, at all times, learning from and with one another what to means to BE a Unitarian Universalist person of faith. Given our plural theologies, the difficulty that even experienced UUs have in articulating our faith, the busyness of our children and youth, and the interesting and relaxed "alternatives" to church (e.g. TED Talks, online communities, and the growing trend to be "spiritual but not religious" – just to name a few), I believe that ministers must be nimble in mind and heart when faced with any opportunity for faith formation, and must intentionally address religious education in worship, in religious education classes, in covenant groups, and in 1:1 "casual" conversations (in Meadville that has been in the waiting room of the doctor's office, in the grocery store, in the pharmacy, in the hardware store, and in the pub – the same places where pastoral care has happened, as well).

I am a Unitarian Universalist because through my faith, and through fellowship and covenant with others who share my UU faith, we engage in a sacrament of seeking and a communion of questioning. I love that our faith tradition does not presume to offer one-size-fits-all answers, but instead urges us to question, to seek, to search, and to take seriously – as I do – our covenantal responsibility to walk with others during their questioning, their seeking, and their searching. Sharing our journeys and stories of discernment reflects our deep commitment to inherent worth and dignity and to interdependence, and it is critical for us – especially those of us who may have discovered Unitarian Universalism in our adult lives – to remember that such life-long valuing of discovery and discernment begins with the religious education of our children and youth. This is not merely an esoteric or academic exercise; it is a matter of redemption, transformation, and liberation.

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

I consider our human capacity for creative expression to be one of our divine gifts. Creative expression is a communion of spirit – a way that we take something from deep within ourselves and offer its essence to those with whom we are in human community. Music and the arts are beautiful and essential to communal worship – so often touching us at our deepest core, where the words we so dearly love become inadequate to the task of surrendering ourselves to moments of profound connection and insight. A wise minister will try to tend all of the senses during worship, so that our "longing and thirsty" souls are nourished and sustained.

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

I have a broad understanding of stewardship: I believe that it encompasses not only our fiscal health, but also the vitality of our intangible assets – specifically the people and the systems that make possible our fulfillment of the mission and vision of the Congregation.

Visionary ministerial leadership requires transparency in leadership, and in my mind and experience this includes "norming" our conversations around money. The simple truth is that operating a church takes resources of money, time, and commitment, and it is not helpful for a minister to distance herself from this reality. As in all matters of congregational life, I work collaboratively and closely with congregational leadership in the budgeting process.

I have been most engaged in stewardship matters at the UU Church of Meadville by distinguishing between maintenance and mission; this has been an important cultural shift. I've raised awareness that we can continue to be a "maintenance-focused" congregation, pledging the same amounts that have been pledged for years as we rely upon the endowment to balance our budget (and watch our endowment steadily decline) – OR, we can become a "mission-focused" congregation, tying our annual pledge and budget to the mission and vision of our Congregation, beyond maintenance of our historic buildings. Our most recent stewardship campaign brought forth record pledge amounts.

**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?**

My core theology is this: we need each other, and it matters how we are in relationship with one another and with the larger world of which we are a part. As Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote, "Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy."

Therefore, I would describe myself either as a panentheistic/process theologian with religious humanist naturalist leanings, or as a religious humanist naturalist with panentheistic leanings. I am quite comfortable using a broad spectrum of reverent language, and I am also quite comfortable using a variety of wisdom sources as inspiration for worship.

The panentheistic process theologian in me believes in our mutual call and response with the creative force of love that I most comfortably call the Spirit of Life dwelling within, among, and beyond us. My work as a minister is to help us make meaning of this mutual process of call and response even as we acknowledge that there are mysteries that lie beyond our current knowledge and understanding.

The religious humanist naturalist within me trusts in the natural universe, and understands the unfolding processes of the natural universe as the ultimate, never-ending story. My work as a minister is to help us make meaning of our parts of this never-ending story; to bear witness to those places where our own narratives and the larger, sacred narrative intersect; and to live in awe and wonder of our relationships with one another and with the natural world of which we are a part.

To my mind and heart, our theological diversity is the fertile ground of possibility, and our practice of theological hospitality a sacrament of our living faith tradition. We must be ever mindful that our visitors will know by the way navigate our theological pluralism whether or not we are really as welcoming and diverse as we represent ourselves to be!

To date I have not discovered a UU theology with which I cannot be in sympathy. What I cannot be in sympathy with are (1) the rather lazy viewpoint that we are an "anything goes" faith tradition, or (2) misinterpretations of our Principles (especially the First!) that fund

entitlements or shaming within our congregations, or that reduce us to distracting, dualistic, hurtful conversations of "right or wrong", "head or heart", "intellectual or spiritual." The beauty of our faith is that it invites us into a "both/and" way of being with one another! I am a minister who believes in and trusts the transforming ways of covenantal engagement; discovery and revelation (especially in the tensions); and choices that reflect our deepest values (walking our talk).

As a UU minister, it is my deepest privilege to tend our shared journeys of engagement, revelation, and choice as we engage our heads, our hearts, and our hands in living our faith. It is my profound responsibility to hold safe, healthy, and sacred space for these transforming journeys; to help congregants find a spiritual practice that sustains them for the journey; and to maintain my own spiritual practices that I may be a healthy and effective ministerial leader. And, it is one of my greatest (and most fun) challenges to help UUs learn to articulate their faith in personally meaningful ways.

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

I love being a 52-year old minister! I love the perspectives that this gives me about life: I'm old enough to know a few things, including the fact that I'll never know all that I want to know, and I'm young enough that my hope still outpaces my cynicism – true, there are days... I'm old enough to avoid foolish choices (mostly), and young enough to seek adventure... I'm old enough to have plenty of doubts, and young enough to have plenty of certainties... I'm old enough to understand the truth of "this, too, will pass" and "all will be well", and young enough to still have my heart broken with disappointment at times, then healed as I work to have more faith than fear... I'm old enough to appreciate the seasons that have passed, and young enough to welcome the many vibrant seasons that lie ahead.

I love being a Unitarian Universalist minister – I love connecting with the people I serve – and I don't take your trust for granted. I am humbled and overjoyed when I am told that I am "...made for this work."

If I have "clicked" on your Congregation, please know that it was a thoughtful and intentional click because, after reading your Congregational Record (and your website, newsletters, and Facebook pages, and talking with interim ministers) I was inspired and hopeful about the possibilities for a long season of shared and loving ministry with your Congregation.

And if we never make it beyond this exchange of records, please hear my sincere "thank you" for the careful and intentional work you are doing on behalf of your Congregation in particular, and for our religious tradition in general, as we strive to engage in healthy ministries that change us, and our world, for the better.

Love, Carmen

P.S. I know I've given you thorough responses; thanks for taking time to read them.