

## The Rev. Anastassia Zinke

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# Experience & Preparation

**Preliminary Fellowship:** 2012

**Final Fellowship:** 2016

**Ordination:** 2013

**Seminary:** M.Div, Union Theological Seminary in NYC, 2011

## Congregational Ministries Served:

2013-Now   Senior Minister   All Souls Unitarian Church   Indianapolis, IN

## Other Ministries and Work Experience:

2012-2013	Religious Education Consultant	Goodloe Memorial UU Congregation	Bowie MD
2011-2012	Intern Minister	Unitarian Universalist Church of Annapolis	Annapolis, MD
2010-2011	Youth Director	First Parish	Concord, MA
2009-2010	Intern	Ecumenical Women of the U.N.	New York NY
2009-2010	Intern	National Council of Churches	New York NY
2010-2010	Summer Minister	All Souls Church, Unitarian	Washington DC

2008-  
2009

Youth Advisor

Community UU Congregation  
at White Plains

White  
Plains NY

### **Other Education:**

- AB, Bryn Mawr College, 2002
- Innovation Strategy Certificate, ecornell.com, in progress
- Diversity and Inclusion Certificate, ecornell.com, 2019
- Certificate in Indigenous Cultural Awareness; Parliament of World Religions, 2018
- Executive Certificate in Religious Fundraising, Lake Institute on Faith & Giving, IU Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2016
- Certificate in Congregation-Based Spiritual Direction; MidAmerica Region, 2015

### **Other noteworthy work experience outside of UU ministry:**

- Associate Director, Federal Relations, Healthcare Association of New York State, Washington, D.C.; 2006 – 2008
- Field Organizer, Grassroots Campaigns, Inc., Washington, D.C.; 2006
- Legislative and Press Intern, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy; Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee, Washington, D.C.; 2004 – 2005
- Assistant Language Instructor, Japan Exchange and Teaching Program, Takamatsu, Japan; 2003 – 2004
- Account Executive, Ruder Finn, New York City; 2002-2003

### **Denominational and Community Activities:**

- Facilitator of the UU Minister's Association's "Where Leads Our Call?" professional development program, 2016-2017, various locations.
- Planning Team member of the ministry days program of the 2019 Mid-America Regional Assembly in St. Louis.
- Former executive director of the All Souls Children's Defense Fund Freedom School® program, and founding board member of the Indianapolis Freedom School Partnership, 2015-2017.

- Co-minister to the Strategy Council of the Indianapolis Congregation Action Network, 2016-2017.
- Board member of the Center for Interfaith Cooperation, and former co-chair of their anti-hate crime legislative taskforce, 2014 - 2019, Indianapolis..
- Former field education supervisor to UU seminarians studying at Earlham School of Religion and Christian Theological Seminary, at All Souls, 2015-2017.
- Led the Chalice Lighting during the Sunday worship service at General Assembly in Phoenix, 2012.

## Background

### **Give a story that embodies your ministry:**

It was my second board meeting at All Souls, and the tenor of the conversation was getting tenser. We were talking about how my contract called for a committee on ministry instead of a ministerial advisory and performance appraisal (MAPA) committee. One of the board members, a widow of one of the congregation's founding families, spoke up, "The MAPA is meant to hold a big stick over the minister." The implicit threat and warning were not lost on me. She looked me in the eye as she said, "We have been hurt before, and we will not be hurt again."

Over the next eight weeks, I was shocked to learn from congregants and ministerial colleagues about my predecessors' ministerial misconduct - a continuous history of violation that stretched over 60 years, and which included a conviction for sexual acts with a minor. It did explain, however, the level of mistrust, fear, and isolation that I encountered. More, acknowledging this misconduct recontextualized the purpose of my ministry with All Souls: it was my work to re-earn the trust that I had not personally lost.

First, I focused on working as non-anxiously as possible, and on not letting this historic dynamic derail the energy the congregation was experiencing in calling a new minister. No matter what else was going on, worship, pastoral care, welcoming guests, attending to our membership, and running a successful pledge drive were still important.

I consulted an expert to help me understand the essential skills and awareness I needed as an "after" pastor (a minister who follows a misconducting minister). This guidance helped me realize that the members who were most reactive to me were also the ones who had tried to curb misconduct in the past, but to no avail. I met with this group and affirmed how natural and appropriate their vigilance was. I also shared that I was angry at how my predecessors acted in the past, anger that I would process, appropriately, outside of the congregation. In short, we talked and listened without defensiveness.

A couple of months later, board meetings were again getting heated, as the prospect of a new hire again triggered past trauma. I partnered with the board president to set up a process for transparent decision-making, and when push came to shove, we held to the process. The hire was approved by significant margins, but moreover we gained competency in having difficult conversations and exercising public leadership.

While the board dynamic improved, distrust clearly remained in the congregation at large. No matter the warmth I projected, congregants were clearly nervous about approaching me.

I did something I had never done: I left the pulpit to preach. I took a multi-day training on non-manuscript preaching. I reflected on how loved and connected I felt when my internship supervisor would come down to deliver his sermons. I wanted to offer our attendees the same authentic, unmitigated connection. Further, I recognized how all my predecessors owned their authority from the pulpit; I wanted to differentiate myself from their former ministers. I started memorizing my sermons and delivering them on what was literally equal footing. The effect was instantaneous. Congregants began hugging me after services. They wrote me notes and sent emails. They spoke about how they appreciated that I "talk to them" instead of "preached at them." I have maintained this preaching style throughout my tenure at All Souls.

Because of the subtle but powerful work we did together to transcend past wrongdoing, we have established a culture of partnership and purpose that allowed the congregation to be innovative and bold. I love the joyful times of ministry, but I'm prepared and trained to stay in relationship with the congregation and its leaders during the hard times as well.

**Why are you seeking ministry now?**

All Souls Indy is a great church with great people, but Indianapolis had few job opportunities for my husband, whose career has been focused on national public policy. When we acknowledged that Indianapolis was no longer viable, he looked and accepted a position in Alexandria, Virginia. Therefore, I am seeking another congregation I can serve well and love in the Washington, D.C. metro area. My preference is for a congregation that has both high levels of congregational ownership and a respect for ministers, and which shares my commitment for anti-racism work.

### **What ministry do you hope is ahead for you?**

What I have learned is that great ministry happens when there is a mutual synergy -- of trust and appreciation -- between the minister and the congregation. I come ready to love a congregation, and am excited to see where this mutual relationship will take us.

While each ministerial settlement presents its own purpose, these are some of the hallmarks of my ministry:

- SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP: Encouraging and modeling covenantal behavior; providing spiritual and theological reflection; supporting a cultural of leadership that engages big questions as well as pressing, inconvenient problems.
- DYNAMIC WORSHIP: With the worship team, I have diligently worked on the craft of worship design until services have become consistently excellent.
- LOVING OUR WAY INTO THE BELOVED COMMUNITY: Decades before I experienced a call to ordained ministry, I felt called to discover places of Beloved Community, and to foster them when I could not find them. I am most interested in serving congregations that are committed to this vision and learning process.
- SOCIAL JUSTICE: I have a personal commitment to show up: for those we are in relationship with, for our values, for our planet, and where my conscience calls me. It has called me to live with refugees, pastor to water protectors, protest in the streets, and more.
- TRANSPARENT, TRUSTWORTHY, and RELATIONAL MINISTRY: I will serve alongside you, doing the work we collectively believe is important.
- ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP: I know how to lead through systems and build-up high-performing teams; I particularly love identifying and nurturing the talents of lay leaders.

- PERSONAL DRIVE: I bring energy towards lifting up our vision, and bringing people along in this process.

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

My mother had schizoaffective disorder. Growing up alone with her was challenging. We were poor and buying basic necessities at times was impossible. She would come home late at night, bitter at judged and ostracized, and unable to process her feelings. It created a chaotic living environment. I became very good not only at caring for myself, but also in providing relief for her. We shared many late hours, with me holding her hand. Over the years, I listened to her thoughts and calmed her paranoia. I became a natural and competent pastoral care provider.

My coping abilities, however, were often tested. My mother's illness would cause her to turn on me unexpectedly and she would even kick me out of our house.

One such time in 10th grade had a profound, positive effect on my life. I was crying on my neighbor's steps, overwhelmed and hurt by my mother's cruel words and rejecting behavior, when my despair was answered by the kindness of a man I did not know. Sitting himself down next to me, he spoke four simple and impactful words, "I know your mother." It moved me incredibly to know that someone had even a glimmer of understanding of what life with my mother was like without my needing to provide explanation. The time he spent with me reassured me that there is support in this world, and I felt a divine presence throughout the exchange. He and the divine spirit that brought him into my life showed me that when things look bleak, other doors will open. Soon, my strength returned. He didn't change my life, but he helped me find the knowledge and hope so that I could get by.

I now look back on this experience as a spiritual awakening, one that continues to shape my theology and inform my preaching and pastoral ministry. It reinforced for me that we live in an interdependent reality, one in which we do not have to depend solely upon ourselves. I feel profound gratitude for this knowledge, and for a world that calls us into relationship with one another. We all have moments when we need to lean on another's shoulder. I attempt to make sure that all congregants feel that the church can provide such support.

To learn about other life events that have shaped my calling, I would direct you to the sermons on my accompanying website.

# Ministerial Roles & Functions

## **Share your ministerial presence and leadership style:**

I aim to channel the leadership style of jazz legend, Wynton Marsalis's. As a jazz trumpeter, he holds to tradition and he innovates. He excels at his craft, and he uses his renown to educate his audience about the depth of the jazz tradition and to introduce rising performers in his big band. He lets others in his ensemble lead, and visibly enjoys it when they shine. He embraced a mission - raising the level of artistic consciousness in our country - and so took on administrative responsibilities. Through his music he learned to listen, and to listen more empathetically to people when they talk. By remembering his example, I seek to do the same.

Members of my current congregation describe me as warm, engaged, thoughtful, intelligent, and driven. My staff say that I am supportive and that I have high standards. They all agree that I bring vision. My detractors note that while they may not agree with the direction I have taken the congregation nor the leadership's support of it, they affirm that I show a genuine interest in and affection for all of our members. I handle challenges with humility.

I utilize a legislative versus executive style of leadership, by which I mean I work to build common agreement before taking a course of action. I name areas of ambiguity when it comes to authority and responsibilities, and strive to have all of our leaders work with transparency. Once agreement is made, or within areas that are clearly part of my domain, I exercise my authority so that decisions get made and steps taken.

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

I have come to realize that so much of staff success comes down to casting and climate. I have worked with lay leaders to design the right positions, to recruit, and to hire great people. My preference is to work with excellent people whom I can support and with whom I can collaborate. We also were successful in establishing a well-functioning multi-minister team, with me as the senior minister. (Though there are added layers of complexity when second and/or third ministers are involved, I prefer team ministry to solo ministry.)

Towards setting a positive and inclusive work place climate, I helped All Souls develop an employer mission statement and engaged the Board in how they can support staff retention and performance. I also utilized resources from an

Inclusion and Diversity certificate program to develop team covenant, building understanding of differing personalities and work styles, and to foster openness and collaboration. I plan and lead staff retreats, center the congregation's vision and mission, involve staff in decision-making, and nurture a drive towards excellence.

I modify my approach to weekly staff supervision (directing, coaching, supporting/resourcing, or delegating) depending on the needs and performance of the individual staff members. I find that semi-annual performance reviews are very helpful for strategic alignment, as well as being a good practice.

Finally, it is an honor to publicly recognize great staff work.

**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?**

My job as a minister is to empower and steward, to accompany, to program, and to pastor. My most impactful efforts are around empowering the board and the congregation to be visionary, bold, and competent leaders who live out our Unitarian Universalist values. I accompany people through the stages of their lives, am there as they ask the big human questions, and am at their side as they stand for justice. I design learning opportunities (including worship) that help people integrate into the congregation, develop into spiritual maturity, gain ethical insight, and achieve interfaith and intercultural competency. My work is to be available for pastoral care, discernment, and spiritual guidance. I help bring our ministry outside of our walls as a spokesperson, pastor, and activist.

"Everything" is what I do in partnership with the congregation, but with distinct and clear lines of authority and responsibility and hopefully a whole lot of fun!

The work of the congregation is the most important. It is to hold tenaciously and generously to the vision of the community and world that we want to bring into being. It is to lift up our covenantal promises - and show up, be humble, real, forgiving and forbearing when those promises are broken and are re-formed. It is to be generous with one's time, talents, and treasures, and to not use one's financial gifts as bribes to induce the congregation to implement one's personal priorities. It is to show up in mind, body and spirit, so we can get to know you and you can get to know us. It is to be resilient and adaptable, especially when it comes to offering welcoming hospitality and relinquishing control for mutuality. It is to be the wisdom place for leadership to turn to when needed.



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

In the larger community, I seek to offer my authority as a clergy person, and my skills as an activist organizer. In these capacities, I have joined others to help shift the narrative and patterns of decision-making on a number of local and national issues, from defeating efforts to double incarceration in Indianapolis, to passing a tax referendum to expand local transit, to serving as a chaplain at Standing Rock, to being a witness to detained and separated children in Tornillo, TX.

I am not entirely sure how it happened, but I quickly developed a reputation in Indianapolis as someone to call on if one wanted a young, female, or progressive faith voice, particularly when it came to social, racial and reproductive justice. I have been invited to speak, respond, or serve as a panel moderator for public lecture series hosted by various local groups and universities. I have spoken at the Indiana Statehouse numerous times.

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

During my third year at All Souls, I began hearing about the micro-aggressions (as well as some blatantly rude comments) that were being directed at some of our guests and members of color. Many of those targeted decided to stop attending All Souls.

During one of my sermons, I directly named and addressed what was happening, and how, in love, we needed to do better. This prompted discussion, discernment, and determination among our congregants. I put together a matching grant to fund a "Year of Learning" around becoming more interculturally competent. The board agreed to provide the other half of the funds. We engaged a number of resources including: the intercultural developmental inventory, the Beloved Conversations program and bringing in guest musicians and speakers/presenters including Robin DiAngelo and Paula Cole Jones. We financially supported a group attending our UUA General Assembly if they pledged to do a "racial justice track." I established a Diversity and Inclusion Team to help with the above efforts.

This learning took place over 10 months, allowing the congregation to pace itself within this change process, while also never having much time go by without some attention being turned to this work. This work was personal, and I pastored to people of all ethnicities as they struggled with how racism had shaped their lives.

What was uplifting is that conversations began to shift, and even those who did not participate in our formal programs began to engage in critical, probing conversations about racism within their lived experiences. After this year of learning, All Souls became unstuck and voted to make "Building the Beloved Community" the heart of their mission.

**Describe how you handle being in a conflicted situation:**

I offer a detailed example of handling a conflict situation below (in the question about a mistake I have made). Generally, I am comfortable with conflict, and work to respond to church conflicts thoughtfully not personally. I apologize when I have made mistakes. I set a framework for covenantal discussion and discernment. I listen and name what I am hearing. I try to respond with openness instead of defensiveness, and to practice forbearance and forgiveness. These behaviors set a tone, and I have seen how they can help a congregation have difficult conversations well.

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

Four years ago, one of our regular visitors came to meet with me. She talked about how she had met her husband through Alcoholics Anonymous, and how the recovery experience gave her a language of faith. She shared how she loved his daughter from a previous marriage, but also how she wanted to birth a child. They had tried fertility treatments to no avail. She asked that we pray, so we lowered our heads, felt the warmth of the chalice candles on our faces, and said words to express the deep, human yearnings of her spirit. Then some months after, she accepted that she would never get pregnant.

As fate would have it, she did. Twins, a boy and a girl. Then, they discovered that the boy had a heart defect that only a handful of people had ever survived into adulthood with, and only because of painful, expensive, and risky interventions. The expectation was that the boy would not live a week.

The boy lived just over 300 days. We celebrated his entry into the world, grieved his passing, and gathered to celebrate his life. I provided spiritual counseling on good days and on hard days. I blessed his body with water and with my hands. When he almost left this world, we lifted up his name in our sanctuary. Our children, youth, and adults used paint to print copies of their hands and wrote words of hope on top of these. We strung those hands together, a rainbow collection of our prayers, and hung them all around his hospital room. When he passed, our 4th - 6th graders put aside their Sunday lesson and made space for

his older half sister to just be with them, her friends. At his service, we wrote prayers again, this time prayers for the dead, on angel wings and placed them around the teddy bear that had come to symbolize him in his family's eyes.

For me, this is the ministry that forms the core of religious community. The yearnings, discoveries, and despair of the human heart. It is about courageously showing up, even when there are no adequate words. It is about blessing, loving, and letting go. It is a willingness to hold even the hard, tender stories of real lives.

**Tell about a mistake you've made in ministry and what you've learned from it:**

It was the morning after President Trump was elected, and my worship chair started texting and emailing me before 8 a.m. She had a number of suggestions that she felt we ought to make to the coming Sunday's worship service - primarily that we should ditch our plan and have a grief and outrage-focused service with me preaching. I reflected on her suggestions, and made some appropriate adjustments that I felt meet the immediate spiritual and emotional needs of the vast majority in the congregation. I also planned two simple vesper-style service for that day, that allowed people to share safely and intimately. I appreciated her speaking up, and let her know it.

The two vesper-style services and the Sunday worship were overwhelmingly appreciated by many who attended, but our worship chair was not among them. Over the week, she sent a couple more emails and texts, including a last angry one on Sunday morning, saying that she would not attend because I was not expressing the same level of emotion that she was and she felt like her grief would not be welcomed.

A few weeks later, she accepted my invitation to lunch. I started out with an apology. I let her know that I had reflected on our exchange and what she had communicated to me. I said that I had made a mistake. When she was reaching out to me about changing the Sunday service, I thought that we were having a worship planning conversation, and I responded as such. Upon looking back, however, I realized that what she really needed was a pastoral response, and for me to put aside worship planning to create space for her to grieve, be angry, and find her own spiritual grounding. She got teary, and said that I was correct but she didn't realize it herself either until I just named that. I let her know that it wasn't on her; I am trained to recognize and pastorally respond to the needs below the surface. I had made a mistake and hadn't pastored to her as I had ought to. She graciously accepted my apology.

This mistake has been a life reminder to pay attention to the underlying pastoral needs even within a context of routine work.

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

I value having professional development time and funds. While I select professional development opportunities based on what the congregation needs me to learn, here are some trainings that I am interested in:

- Taking a Circle of Trust training on the "Spirituality of Aging" so that I can richly engage those in the last quarter of their lives.
- Using BoardSource to understand best practices of executives working with non-profit boards.
- Developing spiritual writing for publication.

**Describe briefly your ministerial approach to the following:**

- **Worship and preaching:** I love dynamic and meaningful worship; for me that means it is insightful and moving in ways that are effective towards its message and relevant to its audience. I approach worship planning with joy, as a pastor, and as a spiritual leader who wants our community to be of service to others and to worthy causes. With the worship team, I work to develop services or worship series that regularly feature sermons that inspire, excellent music, participatory ritual, and reflection, and sometimes include enacted dramatic moments.

I design worship services that are the best way to do that service, which means that I have introduced and lead innovative approaches and elements. This has been a learning process, and I know that congregations can develop good worship muscles that can engage a range of worship styles and formats. I also work closely with lay members to have their participation be effective and integrated. I am fully committed to continuing such excellence.

- **Pastoral Care / spiritual guidance / counseling / home and hospital visitation:** I went into ministry specifically because I realized that I wanted to listen to people with a lens towards the wholeness of their lives and to accompany them as they face significant life transitions. I have accompanied a woman, helping her to understand how to live her wedding vows as her spouse approached death. I have sacramentally blessed a child who lived 300

days in the ICU. I have held a dying man's hand, telling him all the ways that through his life he had manifested our congregation's covenant. I have held a shaking mother, grounding her as she lost herself in grief over the murder of her only child. I have helped children process the suicide of their mother. I have kissed the forehead of a babe and rubbed dirt on her feet to let her know that she had a promised place of belonging. I have prayed for way opening and way closing. I have offered spiritual direction and clearness committees to help people discern career, relationship, or life choices. I have been consistently present to trans young adults who contemplated surgery and who struggled with a lack of familial acceptance. I witnessed and pastored to individuals who were targets of hate crimes, and whose families were impacted by racism.

With the demands of a mid-sized congregation, I show up with and for people when it matters and when they ask. I rarely just go on visits; instead I train pastoral associates to be present regularly with those who are homebound or in precarious health. I often conduct more routine pastoral care check-ins through email or phone. Recently, at All Souls we have been working to embed member-to member pastoral care within our small groups and committees

- **Children's religious education:** My personal seeds of commitment to Unitarian Universalism were planted by the UU Sunday school that I attended for 18-months as a child. In specific, I experienced three promises that drew me back to UUism as a young adult: 1) that our congregations are a place where we could come to be known and to know others in return. 2) That we are a justice-making people. 3) That Unitarian Universalism draws its theological circle wide enough that I wouldn't have to leave my community simply because my faith beliefs evolve. These were and are powerful promises that I like to promise forward to all, including our children. Of course, there is more to children's faith formation than that! But as a minister, I would be focused on getting the culture of our program right, not getting involved in the week-to-week decisions.

I enjoy giving the "Time for All Ages" and connecting with our children during their class times, coffee hour, and during other community events. It has been especially meaningful to me to minister to our children and youth through officiating their rites of passage. To see children I dedicated as babes go to Kindergarten. To celebrate, challenge, and affirm them as they wrestle to

articulate their beliefs during the Age of Reason and Coming of Age programs. To bless them as I bridge them into adulthood.

- **Youth work:** In my two years as a youth director, I found it important to support, mentor, and coach youth using an anti-oppression pedagogy. To me this means: 1) Sharing knowledge about the world and how it works. 2) Helping them develop skills. I have coached youth to serve as worship associates, on hiring committees, and as workshop leaders. 3) Recognizing the competencies they already have - as experts on Harry Potter (SO helpful for our Harry Potter worship series!), as musicians, as activists, and as denominational advocates, etc. Like all people, youth appreciate people who show up for them - whether it is to enjoy their haunted house, for a real conversation, or to watch and discuss a current movie - so I make time to ensure I show up for them.
- **Adult religious education:** Classes and small group ministry programs are essential for connection and faith maturation. I love it when I hear someone share, "Now I really feel like I belong," or "Because of our class last week, I had an important conversation with my family." I lead a few classes every year, help bring in some great outside presenters / facilitators, and help the relevant staff person consider the learning needs of the congregation.
- **Incorporating music, the arts, and creativity into congregational life:** Yes!!!! Where there is beauty, there is more capacity for joy, discovery, meaning, and change. It makes a real difference. Personally, I have focused on bringing the arts into our worship life, and love it when congregants bring it into other parts of congregational life.
- **Community building / facilitation skills / coffee hour and social times:** While I rely on congregants to do much of this work, I have found that the minister helps set the tone. I recognized this shortly after my arrival. My predecessor was an introvert who was uncomfortable in large social situations like coffee hour. I like to be with my congregants, and to have informal time to touch base. Turns out my personality and approach set a new culture, and coffee hour changed from dreary to boisterous. One long-time member early on shared with me, "Your sermons don't work for me, but social hour is great now. People hug each other. HUG EACH OTHER. I will take that over the old sermons any day." Social times, retreats, dances, and meals together are important - they provide goodwill that helps us tough out our differences.

During one tense moment - when a committee had changed the congregation's tagline on our road sign to the outrage of some - I facilitated a conversation, reminding them of our covenant, and the importance of listening for what mattered to each other, as well as to ourselves. This helped them speak about their values, and to value each other's experiences and perspectives. It was truly a moment when we saw that we did not need to think alike, to love alike, and certainly we did not need to think alike to love one another.

- **Committee / Task force work:** For most committees and task force work, I focus on those in leadership and on providing ministerial input where warranted and/or welcome.

I have a knack for helping put the right people in the right seats on the bus - meaning I can intuit what people's gifts are and what roles would suit them. This has been especially useful at All Souls in moving newer members into leadership positions. For key committees or teams, I work with the leader, orienting them, coaching, supporting or resourcing them as needed. There is often a really important level of coordination that needs to happen around vision and messaging. I am so grateful for competent and dedicated lay leaders, and when possible try to stay out of their way and focus on cheerleading their successes.

- **Leadership development:** One reason why I have committed my life to Unitarian Universalism is because of the value-based leadership style I saw exhibited by the senior minister and the board members of All Souls (DC) when I was a young adult board officer. They demonstrated humility, deep listening, a shared commitment to mission, and empathy, respect, and appreciation across difference. These are the values I want Unitarian Universalists to embody in all aspects of their lives, and which I hope our congregations model and instill.

Last year I started a "tall trees" leadership development program at All Souls. Though I had been developing leaders informally by working with them, this was an important breakthrough. Our monthly training sessions help ensure that a solid percentage of our active membership understands how to be in covenant, how to engage in systems thinking, how to connect their work with our mission and vision, how to work with their own anxiety and the emotions of

their team members, who holds what authority and what responsibilities, and other key pieces of being an effective leader. This training is about culture setting, and ensuring that our tall trees provide the right congregational environment.

- **Long range planning / mission / vision / covenant:** Though I have engaged in the development of all such plans, in these areas I prioritize and partner with lay leadership. What I do well is to help lay leaders understand the purpose of these structures and tools, and how to engage in setting them. One All Souls board member, at a celebration of my return from sabbatical, shared that she appreciated how I had taken All Souls from being a social club to a congregation with a true mission. Once established, I work to extend and offer our mission, vision, and covenant. At All Souls, I have been centrally involved in a re-imagining of our mission and vision statements, long-range planning, a successful \$1 million capital campaign, and a recent rebranding effort.
- **Membership and membership growth:** At the deepest core of our being, each person needs to experience belonging. When we live out Unitarian Universalism's vision of Beloved Community, engage in anti-oppressive and anti-racist practices, and offer genuine hospitality, we are able to offer belonging to many.

I take an active interest in our members and guests. I sit down to get to know them, lead membership classes, and research best practices for growth. I work to hold the stories of their lives, as best as I can serving a congregation of 300.

During my first five years at All Souls, we brought in 160 new members. For a variety of reasons, we had trouble retaining members. Together, we addressed this by: 1) adding a membership professional, 2) developing and offering programs that helped newer members establish roots, 3) and helping our members understand the relationship between size and social cohesion, and our motivation to grow. Together, we established a growth team to research, assess, and make recommendations which ranged from shifting ministerial functioning, to democratizing pastoral care, to clarifying and aligning overall governance, mission and strategies.

I have seen that it takes high levels of motivation and adaption for a



congregation to grow from a mid-sized to a large congregation, but that healthy and engaged congregants can make this happen.

- **Anti-oppression work:** I approach anti-oppression work as a personal calling and as the great promise of our faith. A couple of years ago, I was speaking to my childhood best friend, who beyond being a skeptic, is someone who has a very negative view of religious institutions. She said that every religion centers its own people and beliefs at the exclusion of others. I thought about ways that this is true about Unitarian Universalism; yet I also knew that no other institution has called me to draw my circle wide as has my faith. Without this faith, I don't know that I would have been in relationship with so many trans individuals, with as many activists, artists, or people of diverse ethnicity and incomes. I doubt I would have gone to as many gay weddings (and they can be the most fun, honestly). These relationships call me to create a world where we can move further toward honest, mutual, equitable, real interdependence.

Because this work is central to our faith, I insist that the staff and I each set quarterly anti-oppression learning goals. I work with a coach on this work specifically, and have established a culture where we promote internal and external learning and action opportunities to the wider congregation.

In addition to the important work of reforming our own internal culture, practices, and structures, All Souls offers one signature anti-oppression program, the All Souls' Children's Defense Fund Freedom School Program, which was founded during my tenure. This six-week, evidence-based summer enrichment program focuses on inter-generational leadership development, literacy, and civic engagement within a context of African American culture and history. We resource and support, not control or dictate, this transformational program that is of, by, and for our surrounding community. To extend the capacity of this program, three years ago we led the effort to incorporate and get 501(c)(3) status for a separate non-profit, the Indianapolis Freedom School Partnership. I serve on its board, but otherwise it is now a fully separate and operating organization.

- **Social justice / social action:** Social justice is central to my identity. I am particularly invested in addressing racism, our climate crisis, and the treatment of women and children. I experienced the call of the Beloved Community decades before I heard the call to ordained ministry. I recognize that this earth

is our home now and to the Beloved Community we envision, so we must we re-establish right relationship with our planet. Finally, it is time for women to receive equitable treatment, security, and leadership opportunities. Children too are especially vulnerable, to poverty, power, violence, and exploitation. I feel called to create a society in which all of our children can succeed in life.

I use a learning-praxis-reflection approach to this work. Every year I pursue some form of training to test my assumptions, gain new skills and wisdom, and bring them back to my community. Human beings learn so we can act; as I talk about in the question on how I serve the wider community, I regularly engage in social justice actions. Finally, with others, I engage in reflection to discern what we learned, what is at stake, what values we are trying to live out, and what, if anything, our next step should be.

- **Interfaith / community work:** Interfaith spaces are really intersectional spaces where we create connection across difference. I have found "my people" while serving on the board of the Center for Interfaith Cooperation (CIC). With them, I have taken the lead in their community engagement work - helping houses of faith to explore whether and learn how to be a sanctuary congregation; and helping CIC and its wider constituency play a role in working to pass statewide hate crimes legislation.
- **Denominational activities:** Though I greatly value our regional and national association, follow their work, and normally attend our annual general assembly, I prioritize serving my congregation and local community. I do work to connect the congregation with denominational resources and encourage attendance at our larger gatherings. In the past couple of years in particular, engagement in our larger association and learning from its failures and insights has provided new ways to develop anti-racist competencies.
- **Stewardship:** While members are the ultimate stewards of the congregation, it is valuable for the minister, board, and the generosity stewards (pledge, capital campaign, endowment, and fundraising teams) to work together to ensure that the congregation is living into a culture of generosity and abundance, and is raising the needed funds for its ministry. Within my first two years as minister, All Souls increased its operating budget by over 25%, and has matched or exceeded that level for the past four years.

I elevated our generosity moment during service to better connect with

worship, our values and our mission. I also instituted a regular practice of sharing the plate with other community-serving organizations and partners, which in one year meant we went from receiving \$4-6,000 (with no split) to \$30-40,000 (total before split). Two years ago, I worked with lay leadership to develop the vision and messaging for a successful \$1 million capital campaign that extended beyond making repairs and renovations to our building to a vision of growing our congregation.

In part because Indianapolis is home to the Lilly Endowment philanthropy, All Souls has been successful in gaining a number of grants over the past few years. I was the primary author of nearly \$158,000 in grant money over the last five years, including a nearly \$50,000 grant to support my three-month summer sabbatical (I was the first UU in 16 years nationally to receive this award). Other All Souls members were the primary leads in generating an additional \$40,000. This was new to All Souls, and really helped All Souls go big when it came to pursuing an identified focus or growth areas. For instance, All Souls is currently engaged in two grant initiatives. We were selected among a competitive pool of congregations to explore, pilot, and implement ministries to attract and serve those between the ages of 18-35, which came with \$30,000 in direct and matching funds. The other is to develop our capacity to lead and manage a growing and changing congregation.

In addition, each year we raised roughly \$25-30,000 in cash to support our All Souls Children's Defense Fund Freedom School. This included a cumulative sum of \$28,000 in grants, as well as running successful crowd-funding campaigns, and pursuing individual, institutional, and corporate gifts.

Finally, with my husband, I offer a significant annual pledge to All Souls to model generosity.

- **Finances:** I am competent at understanding common financial practices, and at budgeting. For me as a minister, financial management is part of being trustworthy. I fulfill that trust by being a steward not only of the financial gifts given, but also of the vision that those gifts were called to fund. I encourage all congregations to work to ensure appropriate fiscal policies are in place and that they have hired skilled and trustworthy administrative staff.
- **Other areas not covered above:** Governance: When we know how to work together, we can get a lot done. When we don't, a lot of important things don't

get done or done well. Good church governance creates a safe and focused environment that promotes lay participation, effective leadership, and congregational health. It is important for members and staff alike to understand what the driving goals of a congregation are and how they can work towards achieving them.

As both a lay person and as ministerial staff, I have helped congregations develop board policies and congregational by-laws, established committee structures, and evaluated performance. I am familiar with policy governance, and with the fact that it manifests differently in each congregation.

The most important thing that I probably do - in addition to following our policies - is to continuously work with our lay leaders and staff to clarify the "who and how," so that everyone knows who has authority to act, who owns responsibility for what work, who needs to be consulted, and that the right people are able to provide input.

### **How do you build trust with a congregation and individuals?**

I build trust with the congregation through relationship building and through transparency. One of the best decisions I made was to set an aspirational goal to meet with "all" of All Souls members one-on-one during my first year. I met with 200 individuals or couples. This was my time to really get to know them as people and to understand their relationship to the congregation. I plan to do this coming into my next congregation (with a focus on core leadership for larger congregations).

The second thing I do is to hold congregational conversations on "alive" questions in the congregation. These are spaces of open conversation, where people can share their perspective, offer feedback, get more information, and raise their level of curiosity and understanding of complex, often culturally-determined tension points. It is a listening, not a decision-making space, yet I often find those conversations help us move forward together.

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

My theology might best be described as panentheist – I see the holy within everything, in the connections between everything, and as the eternal animating force behind all existence. To simplify, I have an open theology that sees the

sacred in many places. I sometimes joke that I am a “Trinitarian” Unitarian – I feel awe at creation and ever-evolving life; I honor the sacred spirit of life that dwells within us; and I am uplifted by our conscience, the spirit that moves us to work for justice, the driving force behind our social movements.

Unitarians and Universalists have for centuries grounded their faith in religious tolerance; one of my roles as minister is to ensure that we continue this practice. More, it is to foster interfaith competency - the ability to navigate comfortably and competently in religiously diverse settings. This is a growing edge for the majority of Unitarian Universalists because it requires knowing one's own theology, other theologies, and understanding an ethical framework for engagement and dialogue.

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

What about our congregation makes it worthy of people's time, talent and treasures? Does our congregation exist for itself alone? If not, who or what purpose does it exist for? Are we a congregation that is capable of loving any minister? Of loving only one minister? Of loving multiple ministers? What issues/discussions continue to resurface within our congregation? Any minister you bring in will lead to change. What change is your congregation hungering for? What fears might surface with change?

### **How do you give and receive feedback?**

Giving feedback is an art. When I give feedback I consider the person, our relationship and the larger context. What I work to foster is a culture where feedback is regular, transparent, observational, non-punitive (either towards the one receiving or offering feedback), and learning-focused. Positive feedback is motivating and helps me know I am on the right course. Critical feedback helps me know what to pay more attention to or what unmet needs there are.

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

I believe an evaluation or assessment of the congregation as a whole, and its minister as a key part of that whole, should be done annually. I suggest there be a variety of instruments, one of which is selected annually in a cycle of rotation. These could include a 360-degree assessment, a quantitative and/or qualitative survey completed by a significant portion of the congregation, and an evaluation completed by the board and/or a selection of lay leaders. Attention should be given to how we are working towards agreed upon goals, our systems'

capabilities, as well as individual functioning. I encourage more regular feedback by the board so that I can be cognizant of both its confidence levels and any concerns.

### **What do you hope for the future of Unitarian Universalism?**

I hope that we reclaim wider theological relevancy, that our congregations have a purpose that includes but that extends beyond religious community, and that we shift from a dominant cultural model that centers whiteness to one that is multicultural and anti-racist. Also that we help save our planet from the looming climate crisis. (Hey, at heart we are a hopeful faith!)

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

I am not scared of or judgmental about congregations with histories of ministerial misconduct, abuse of power, or poor boundaries. Many of our congregations have these to one degree or another. In such a context, I am non-polarizing, re-earn many people's trust, and help the congregation engage in restorative practices.

I love learning to do new things, and helping the congregation to do new things too. By my second year of ministry, and since that time, All Souls was recognized as one of the 10 congregations in Indiana most able to learn to do new things. I would be excited to take this posture of discovery with your congregation.

## **Personal**

### **What should a congregation know about your family situation?**

I have a wonderful family, whom I love and appropriately prioritize.

My husband, Kent, and I met in 2004 while working for Senator Edward Kennedy. We share a commitment to progressive causes, international travel, and community service, but most of all we enjoy being with each other, mutually embracing the adventure of life and raising our two children. Kent's career has been focused on public policy, innovation, and strategy. He currently works for the National Head Start Association, headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia. He is a generous, wise, and caring person who also likes to kick back, relax, and listen to live music. I am proud to have him co-parent with me.

We have two delightful children, to whom we give much of our time. Sadie is almost seven, and is a fierce, creative, math-oriented introvert who wants to be (and is) an artist. Benjamin, who just turned two, is a sweet, playful, athletic, animal-loving extrovert.

We like being a church family, and participating in congregational life, celebrations and programs. Kent intentionally does not participate in leadership conversations or decisions, as that would create ambiguous boundaries and power dynamics. He enjoys volunteering in RE classes, participating in worship and engaging and support social justice work. It would be a deal breaker for me to serve a congregation that attempted to triangulate or pressure my family about a congregational issue.

### **What should a congregation know about your health?**

I don't have any health concerns, but I would like to note that I know excellent ministers who have served well with chronic health issues and through and after acute periods of sickness. I hope if a congregation is considering this as a deciding factor versus as an accommodation consideration, to question why it is doing so, and whether such narratives are unnecessarily limiting.

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

Here is what I know: I do my best work when I am working from a place of joy and in the spirit of mirthful collaboration. Here is what I do so that I regularly can work with joy:

- I pay attention to my own energy, preoccupations, and behavior so that I know when to step back or name upfront a piece of context.
- I meditate, exercise, and try to live healthfully.
- I take vacations and stay in close contact with long-time friends.
- I draw from my creative depths so that I don't burn out.
- I help foster a congregational culture that is driven but not punitive.
- I remember that when I just go out and have fun, I normally discover something valuable to both me and my ministry.

All of this said, I think all of the above will seem a lot more spacious when my two young children get older!

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

Though I hope to be in my next settlement for 10 years or more, I believe it is better to conceive of ministry in terms of serving a purpose, instead of serving for a period.

## Additional Information

In addition to my website, documents of my work can be accessed via Dropbox thru this link: <https://www.dropbox.com/sh/gwxsxaoosbscad/AAC6IL-3nBZ3cPH6S5SNfj2ea?dl=0>.

Thank you for your work and consideration!