

Ministerial Search Committee Announcement

What is the Ministerial Search Committee and what do they do?

The Ministerial Search Committee (MSC) is a committee of seven UU Asheville members charged with learning from our congregation what qualities our next called minister should have, and then finding the best possible candidate for that job. To do this, they will first work with Rev. Cathy and the Transition Team to learn from you, the congregant, what UU Asheville is now and what you'd like to see it become in the future. Then in early January, they essentially sequester themselves from the rest of us while they interface with the UUA Transitions Office and their process for connecting potential ministerial candidates with churches in search. During this time, ministers in search and churches in search go through a rather involved process to evaluate each other. The process culminates in late April, with the MSC bringing us their final candidate, on which we vote to call, up or down. (Note that the bylaw change at this year's Annual Meeting has to do with the majority needed for this call.)

Who is on the MSC?

The MSC has now been selected! Members of this committee are: **Ruth Christie, Joanne Fox, Shawn Gibson, Joyce Hooley-Gingrich, Charlie Marks, Gina Phairas, and Dale Wachowiak.**



Ruth Christie, UU Asheville member since 1999

I grew up Boston. I graduated Tufts University. The day after graduating Tufts, I married my college sweetheart. We moved to the Buffalo, NY area where I taught 2nd grade for four months till I left to give birth to my first son. We had three other sons within the next four years. We found a small UU church/fellowship in East Aurora, NY which reflected our values and became the source of long-term friendships.

For the next 15 years, I raised our sons and engaged in several community activities including a five-year term on the school board. I would have enjoyed making the School Board my career. However, divorce necessitated I find a paying job. I retrained to become a paralegal.

In 2001, I married my 2nd husband, David Christie. I also found a job as an intake paralegal in the Family Unit of Neighborhood Legal Services which was very satisfying: working to empower victims of domestic violence, etc.

In January 1999, Dave declared he couldn't take another Buffalo winter and asked me to move south. I was so happy to find that Asheville had a thriving UU church. I immediately found a warm welcome at UU Asheville, joined the Women's breakfast group and the social action committee. Rather than seeking a new job, I decided to return to volunteering in a wide range of activities at UU Asheville and around the greater community.

I am motivated to be on the Ministerial Search Committee because UU Asheville has been central to my life for the past 24 years. I want to help it to become a truly inclusive congregation.



Joanne Fox. I may be new to UU Asheville, but not to Unitarian Universalism. Over the last 20 years I have been a member of a small congregation in Vancouver, WA (225 members), a medium sized church in Charlotte, NC (625 members), and also a very large church in Portland, OR (1500 members)! I have been a religious education volunteer at all those churches where I taught Our Whole Lives and Coming of Age programs. I have attended General Assembly twice in Portland and once in Charlotte.

I am really pleased to be serving on the Ministerial Search Committee because I am someone who enjoys change and new starts. Last year I relocated to Asheville from Portland, Oregon and I am thrilled to be living here and getting involved in my new church home. I am serving on the auction Committee as well and have been trained by the UUA on community organizing and "UU the Vote." I am looking forward to the MSC process and doing this important work.



Shawn Gibson (he/him) has been a member of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Asheville since 2018. Shawn is a native of Hendersonville, NC, who lived in Johnson City, TN, for ten years. Shawn returned to Western North Carolina in 2017, where he later met his husband, Corey Gibson.

Shawn works in the mental health field and has recently embraced the call to Unitarian Universalist ministry. Shawn will begin the Master of Divinity (M.Div) program at Meadville-Lombard in the Fall of 2022. Shawn is involved with UU Asheville as a religious educator volunteer and a Certified Our Whole Lives (OWL) facilitator. Shawn recently had the honor of mentoring a young adult in the Coming of Age program and has been given a renewed enthusiasm for encouraging the responsible search for truth and meaning.

"What is your motivation for being on the MSC?" I see this as a time of potential growth for UU Asheville as well as Unitarian Universalism. After being separated from the UU Asheville community during the pandemic, I came to see how much I value being part of a faith tradition that allows me to bring my whole self to spiritual community. I want to be a part of ensuring that UU Asheville continues to send out bright people into the world who are prepared to affect change and work toward the vision of beloved community.



Joyce Hooley-Gingrich has been a member of the UU Asheville since 2009. She was born into a Mennonite community in rural Ohio, and came to Unitarian Universalism after a sojourn with the Quakers during her medical school and pediatric residency years. She is a lover of music, joined the choir when Lenora Thom was the director, and has sung under two music directors since then. She worked overseas off and on between the years 2011-2020, and may have been unknown to many in the congregation during those years, but is now retired, glad to be back at home in Waynesville and involved with UU Asheville once again. As much as she loves gathering for worship together

in the sanctuary, and meeting in person with other members of our congregation, she found that during the pandemic, the necessity of online Zoom meetings for "social distancing" contained a silver lining, actually allowing her to participate in more ways than she had previously, and enabling her to learn to know many new members. Over the past two years, she has been part of a covenant group, a UU Asheville book group, the Wednesday night Vespers and the Adult

Faith Development planning team, and is currently serving as a Worship Associate, as well as singing in the choir. In her leisure time, she is a writer, an avid reader, a gardener, a hiker, and a naturalist.

In answer to the question, “Why are you motivated to be on the Ministerial Search team?” Joyce writes, “I am willing to serve on this team because several members approached me and asked me to do so, and I took that as a kind of ‘call.’ While I was in Moldova, I very much enjoyed working as a volunteer with the Cultural Affairs Department at the US Embassy in Chisinau on the team that interviewed and chose among candidates for Fulbright and Humphrey Scholarships, and expect that I will enjoy meeting and interviewing our candidates for lead minister. While I believe that the vigor of our congregation is dependent on the members’ involvement themselves, I also very much understand the important role of a lead minister in motivating and inspiring us to rise to our best selves, in facilitating the capacity, vision, and spirit of our whole leadership team, and in representing us to the community, thus I care greatly about who we choose to lead us for through our next era. As for my own preferences, I believe the families in our congregation give it much of its vitality and would thus favor a minister who is enthusiastic about supporting our children, families, and Religious Exploration programs; I support our commitment to becoming an” anti-racist” congregation and would thus favor someone who has some experience with this work, a sophisticated understanding of the complexities involved, and spiritual grounding for a humble, peaceful, respectful, and inclusive approach; I want to be stimulated intellectually as well as nurtured spiritually, and would thus also favor someone who is well-read and an articulate speaker; and, I value music and the arts in our life together and hope to call a minister that supports these. Most importantly for this task, I hope to be a good listener, to understand your preferences and your vision, and to be an effective articulator of our joint vision for life and ministry together.



Hi, I’m **Charlie Marks**. Many of you may know me as the Worship Associate who, over the years, has read poetry and recounted my flying adventures from the pulpit on Sunday mornings. While poetry has been a life-long interest, flying airplanes all over the world was my career!

I have been an active UU for more than twenty years, first in Springfield, Massachusetts, where I was a member of their Governing Board. Then, here in Asheville since 2013 where I’ve been on several committees, most recently the Interim Ministerial Search Committee.

The Ministerial Search Committee has a very important task before it. Not only do we need our congregation to thrive, Asheville needs us, too. I’m honored to have been asked to serve.



Gina Phairas

You could say my kids have grown up here at UU Asheville (Nick 18, Mia 11), but I would argue I have spiritually grown up here, too. I’ve spent a few years learning in religious education. I started volunteering in Spirit Play, graduated to teaching Neighboring Faiths, and then served as a Coming of Age facilitator. In between classes, they even let me serve on the RE Council.

I’ve also had the opportunity to deepen my understanding of stewardship and the financial needs of the congregation by serving as co-chair of the Annual Giving Drive in 2018 and 2019. I theoretically left the AGD team in 2021, but I’ve been told that’s a committee you never really leave.

Professionally, I'm the co-founder of dogbiz, the nation's leading business consultancy for the dog training industry. And yes, I do get to spend part of my day talking about dogs, but most of my time is spent helping dog professionals start, run, and grow their businesses, so conversations tend to center around topics like marketing, budgeting, and team development.

I'm excited to be a part of the Ministerial Search Committee because I enjoy walking people through the opportunities and challenges that change presents. I care deeply about my UU Asheville family and see serving on the MSC as an opportunity to be involved in its future.



Dale Wachowiak

I am a retired psychologist, having worked in college counseling centers and as a psychology department professor. My wife, Melissa Himelein, and I have been members of UU Asheville since 2004. Our twin daughters, Kenzie and Emma, were involved in RE from first grade through the end of high school. I helped establish and then coordinated the congregation's first family-focused covenant group.

Over that span of years and beyond, I have served on a variety of committees and task forces, including a three-year term on the Board of Trustees. I am currently a member of the congregation's Pastoral Visitor team. These experiences have allowed me many opportunities to work side-by-side with the Lead Minister, which left me with a greater appreciation for the complexity of roles as well as the challenges that face anyone wearing that mantle.

I have a strong commitment to the long-term well-being of UU Asheville. I recognize the diversity of needs that our members seek to fill as well as the diversity of talents they have to offer. I look forward to contributing to a search process that seeks to discern the hopes and aspirations of our unique congregation at this point in time. I would contribute what I can to a fair and comprehensive search process.

Weren't we supposed to vote for our preferences for MSC members at this meeting? What happened?

Yes, we *were* planning to vote our preferences. Here's what happened. Under our bylaws, the Board is charged with finding a search committee. Those bylaws also hint that we might want to use the process recommended by the UUA for selecting the MSC. The Board thought that was a good idea, and we proceeded apace. The first step in that process was for the Board, Transition Team, and LDC to call *all* member households – 320 calls! – asking for suggestions for who would work well on that committee. In the next step, the Board was then to look at the number of times each potential candidate was mentioned, and then call those receiving the most mentions, asking them if they would be a candidate for the MSC. The Board was then to present a collection of candidates – something like 11 to 13 of them – to the Annual Meeting for a preference vote. And the final step was for the Board to tally that vote and put the top “few” candidates – three or more, with that number decided by the Board – on the committee, and then fill out a seven-member committee with other candidates that would help diversify and balance it. The time commitment for search committee members is a significant undertaking which can be challenging for many in our congregation. After interviewing the candidates, we are excited to present to you the seven candidates who chose to commit to this important charge in the life of our congregation. We thank them profusely for their willingness to serve in this very important role.