Meet the First Unitarian Ministerial Search Committee

Cindy Cohen (cindyc@firstuuwilm.org) found Unitarian Universalism at First U in 1991 as a wonderful fit with her humanist leanings and need to help others. Since that time her spiritual journey has grown and matured—from humanism to atheism, to agnosticism, to her current passion of energy and the metaphysical—all while continuing to embrace the unity found throughout all religion cultures.

As a professional church singer and section leader throughout the area in the 1980s and 1990s, Cindy had the opportunity to experience worship across many denominations, which helped form her beliefs and religious foundations. She has long been involved in social justice activities, from co-leading the church's Warehouse Project (where she met her husband, Steve) to helping revive the church's long-standing Emmanuel Dining Room project.

She co-led metaphysical spirituality groups here at First U in the early 2010s, and currently leads the monthly Vespers team, which offers a different worship style to our service offerings.

As a past member and president of the board of trustees, Cindy has been involved in church leadership during tumultuous times, which provided opportunities to see the inner workings of church ministry, and to work directly with the (then) Joseph Priestly District and the UUA. These were huge learning opportunities, spiritually and professionally.

When asked to join the search committee, Cindy agreed because of these experiences, and hopes to apply her learnings as the church calls new ministry to propel our church and denomination into the future: "We have an important message for the Wilmington community and the world—that Unitarian Universalism is a place of acceptance where you can learn to take charge of your own destiny and help heal the world at the same time."

First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, Delaware
Ministerial Search Committee, 2018–2019

Edris Harrell (edrish@firstuuwilm.org) and her husband David have been members of First Unitarian Church for about 13 years. Edris has taught children and youth religious exploration (CYRE), including OWL, chairing the CYRE connections team and later the leadership team

She has also served on the nominating committee, the worship associates team, the communications team, and the outreach team. In 2017, she organized the youth group service trip to West Virginia.

Because Edris has two teenagers at home and works full-time as a school psychologist, she will be giving up all of her various volunteer roles at the church to focus on serving the search committee. She sees this as is an important opportunity to be a part of the church's next big step into the future, and she hopes this future "will be a church that continues to be a persistent voice for social justice with a dynamic spiritual energy." Edris brings organizational and listening skills, and an eye for details, to the search process.

Jeff Lott (jeffl@firstuuwilm.org) is a writer, editor, graphic artist, and activist. He finds inspiration for his social justice work in many sources, particularly in the rational and compassionate principles of Unitarian Universalism.

Jeff served on the board of trustees from 2008 to 2014, including a term as president during a time of ministerial transition. As a board member, he led the yearlong "Mission Possible" process in 2011–12, which wrote the church's current values, mission, and ends statements.

In 2014, he worked with former Assistant Minister Rev. Michelle Collins to lead a day-long Social Justice Action Summit for church members, with the aim of re-energizing First U's justice work. Also in 2014, Jeff launched the FirstU Social Justice Connector, a blog about justice work at the church and in community. More recently, he was instrumental in establishing new social justice task forces within the church.

Jeff has been a leader of Delaware's Movement for a Culture of Peace and is co-founder of Peace Week Delaware, a statewide effort for peace and justice. Jeff has also traveled throughout Southeast Asia, including six stints as a volunteer house builder in rural Cambodia.

Note: Unless the matter is urgent, search committee members generally prefer to be contacted by email through their firstuuwilm.org addresses.

Jeff says he agreed to serve on the search committee because he sees First Unitarian on the cusp of a new era of spiritual discovery and community engagement: “I encourage and embrace change as a necessary step in fulfilling our mission as a congregation. We are seeking new ministry to accompany us on this path.”

Barry Marrs (barrym@firstuuwilm.org) has been a UU for 45 years, 21 of those at First Unitarian. He is passionate about about the intersection of science and moral behavior. For ten years, Barry chaired a committee that brought lecturers at that intersection to First U. He has served on the Board and on the nominating committee twice.

Barry led the creation of a proper memorial for the late Rev. Dr. Bob Doss. He served together with his wife Barbara as head usher for about ten years. They were also active in the church auction and fall festival for many years. Barry been active in small group ministry, and currently helps facilitate the short story connection circle.

Barry says he joined the search committee because the selection of a new settled minister is very important for the future of First Unitarian: “I want to be part of that process. I want to see First U continue to be a spiritual home for humanists and free-thinkers from a wide diversity of backgrounds.”

Barry’s work style reflects his own work experience: 11 years as a professor, 11 years in middle management, and 11 years a CEO or executive director. “I can lead, and I can follow,” he says, “and I will work for the good of the group.”

Paul Pinson (chair) (paulp@firstuuwilm.org) has been a member of First Unitarian since 1972 and has served the congregation as youth leader, RE chair, staff relations chair, board member, president, treasurer and finance chair, and as a member of the strategic planning committee. He has been a facilitator for small groups and “Building Your Own Theology,” an OWL instructor, and convener of the Channing Society, a men’s social group.

Paul values lifelong religious education and member engagement. He joined the search committee to help emphasize considerations that have made a positive impact on our church, such as involving the congregation in all aspects of congregational life and

sharing responsibilities among staff and volunteers. His dream for the church is that "everyone feels they have a place here, a role to play, and ownership for the success of our mission."

For the denomination, Paul served as a board member and treasurer for the Joseph Priestley District, worked on a team to establish the Central East Region, and assists the UU Service Committee with planning.

Paul can contribute skills in planning, organization, technology use, and problem resolution. Paul deals with some eyesight and balance issues and will be paying special attention to maintaining the collaborative nature of our team. Paul retired from a career in computers and telecommunications to focus on UU activities, travel, coffee, and crossword puzzles.

Linda Sanders (lindas@firstuuwilm.org) came to Unitarian Universalism through a friend who introduced her to a Women's Circle at the Unitarian Fellowship of Newark about 25 years ago. She joined the fellowship and began participating in UUA events such as Womenspirit and SUUSI. She has attended Womenspirit for 25 years.

Linda joined First Unitarian in 2010, following retirement from the DuPont Company and a move to North Wilmington. She says she's grown spiritually as a worship associate, deepening her personal faith while crafting and leading worship. She describes herself as a mystical pagan witch with Buddhist undertones and appreciates being able to express her faith traditions at FirstU. She has also developed a passion for improving racial justice in Delaware and the nation through participating in programs offered by FirstU's Human Rights Task Force, such as the four-part workshop, "Being White in the Black Lives Matter Movement." Linda sincerely hopes our congregation and our faith remain committed to fighting for racial justice and supporting the Black Lives Matter movement and BLUU organization.

As a lay leader, Linda has served on the board of trustees, most recently as president. She wanted to be part of the search committee "to continue to grow as a leader and to help discern, with the congregation, what qualities we should be looking for in our next settled minister. I think I can use my people skills to help facilitate the discernment process and to conduct the interviews that will identify good candidates. I dream of our congregation continuing to grow as a beloved community that nourishes minds and spirits, fights injustice, and transforms the world through loving action!"

Ed Scott (eds@firstuuwilm.org) and his wife Darlene moved to Wilmington following retirement in 2014,. Seeking a new and urban experience, they chose to make a downtown row house their home. It was in Wilmington that Ed discovered Unitarian Universalism and First Unitarian—which, he says "was like spiritually coming home." The church's core values resonate with Ed's passion for equality and dignity for all individuals, and respecting each other's journey.

Ed has been active in the social justice and human rights areas, participating in many of the programs at First U addressing racism. In addition, Ed has been a worship associate. As worship associate, Ed has gained a new level of appreciation for the group worship experience.

Ed is a member of the Coalition to Dismantle the New Jim Crow and works to support initiatives that advocate for marginalized individuals. As a volunteer with the Delaware Center for Justice program, Read In/Read Out, Ed works with inmates at Howard R. Young Correctional Facility.

Ed became a member of the search committee because he believes that as a relatively new member who is also new to UU, he has a unique perspective. Ed wants our church to maintain its commitment to a shared ministry. He envisions us continuing our work as a welcoming and inclusive community, one that provides and supports opportunities for all to be engaged side by side with the professional ministry and staff as we live out our values.

Ed brings experience in project management and working with diverse groups to this process. His interest in connecting with others and exploring new ideas, coupled with a touch of humor, are some of the attributes he brings to this search. When not searching, Ed enjoys reading, bread baking, and travel.