

## The Rev. Rali Weaver



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**Last Updated:** May 1, 2025

# Experience & Preparation

**Preliminary Fellowship:** 2004      **Full Fellowship:** 2008

**Ordination:** 2006

**Seminary:** 2000- 2003: Master of Divinity, Bangor  
Theological Seminary,

## Congregational Ministries Served:

2024- Now	Contract Minister	UU Fellowship of Falmouth	East Falmouth, MA
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2007- 2025	Minister	First Church and Parish in Dedham	Dedham, MA
2005- 2007	Assistant Minister	The King's Chapel	Boston, MA
2003- 2004	Director of Religious Education	First Unitarian Universalist Society of San Francisco	San Francisco, CA

### **Other Ministries and Work Experience:**

1989- 2000	Special Education Teacher	Sweetser Children's Services, Public Schools in Henderson, Durham and Raleigh NC	Portland, Maine and North Carolina
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### **Other Education:**

2024 Internal Family Systems Therapy ISF Level One  
Training

2014-2017: (ABD) All But Dissertation, P.H.D.  
Transformative Studies Department, California  
Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco, California.

1983-1987: Bachelor of Science in Special  
Education: Emotional Disturbance Univ. of Maine,  
Farmington, Farmington, Maine

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

2019-2020: Denominational Counselor, Harvard  
Divinity School, Cambridge, MA.

2019 Summer: Sabbatical Minister at King's Chapel,  
Boston, MA

**Denominational and Community Activities:**

2019-2025: Interfaith Coalition for Refugee  
Resettlement Dedham, Ma

2018- 2024: Interfaith Committee for the Louis D.  
Brown Institute, Boston, Ma

2018-2023: Trustee at the Dedham Food Pantry,  
Dedham, Ma

2016- 2024 Member of the Boston Minister's Club  
Member

2010- 2022 Treasurer, UU History and Heritage  
Society, Dedham, Ma (Soon to be UU Studies  
Network)

2009-2021 Leadership Team of the Mass Bay District  
Minister's Association (Hospitality, President)

2009-2018 Dedham Square Artist Guild Member,  
Dedham, Ma

2009-2024: Director of the Chickering Foundation,  
Dedham, Ma

2007- Present Clerk, Director, Mass Convention of  
Congregationalist Ministers

## Background

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

A story embodying my ministry has to do with adaptation. Just out of seminary, I found myself working in several churches that had a great deal of anxiety as a result of unexpected change. Dedham was no different. After my first two years in Dedham, I worried that I would be nothing more than a conflict resolution minister, so I worked with my Ministry Committee to develop new goals each year. In my third year, for example, I added the goal of professionalizing our parish. I worked with a newly formed Publicity Committee to create a new logo, build the website, reformat the newsletter published through the office, and start a weekly email to the congregation.

My fourth-year goal was to become better known in the community. Over that year, I became involved in many efforts to spread UU values and encouraged parishioners to be involved. The worship committee helped me plan a worship service that recognized all parishioners' various interests and efforts to make the world a better place.

In my fifth and sixth years, we worked for more collaboration with other groups in town. I encouraged groups in the church to partner with the Dedham Food Pantry to offer a reception complete with music and good food to clients while they waited for their Thanksgiving and Christmas Dinner giveaways. In the years that followed, we have worked with groups planning vigils for black lives matter, played a role in starting a Human Rights Committee in Dedham, and joined nonviolent efforts to try to stop the building of a high-speed natural gas pipeline running past a highly residential neighborhood in Dedham and West Roxbury.

Along with these goals, my years in ministry have been filled with counseling parishioners and friends of the parish through difficulties and celebrating their highlights, sitting with parishioners while dying, helping the poor and immigrants find housing and furniture, giving coats to those without, leading the youth group, teaching Adult RE classes on a plethora of topics, walking with those affected by poverty and racism, standing up against the increased use of fossil fuels, and, once or twice, being arrested for nonviolent resistance.

I could keep going, but this gets to my point: My ministry adapts to the needs and issues that arise within the community. We are emerging after the long pandemic, and one shared challenge for most church communities will be how to bring people back together in their church families. I don't know how to do this or where it will take me. All I know is that I will need to adapt to the change in front of me and work with the leadership of the church for us to make the change we wish to see in the world.

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

Our daughters were both in college, and I finished my 17th year of Ministry in Dedham in June 2024. Now is a good time to stretch my wings and bring my skills and experiences to a new location and new people. My wife Jenny has been an educator for over 30 years and is also looking for a change.

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

I would be excited to serve another historic church and be open to a more socially active church than the one I currently serve. I am excited to be in a place where I can learn and teach and where I can grow and change with the community over time. I am excited to

bring new energy to a new place, yet I also want to learn what my new congregation has to teach me. I believe that as UU's, we are poised to support religious freedom, ready to build the beloved community we wish to see in the world, and can non-violently resist oppression where we see it.

I look forward to strengthening a new community for all we are facing in the world and helping them grow into the beloved multicultural community we hope to see.

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

I was a special education teacher before I entered the ministry. For most of my teaching career, I worked at Sweetser Children's Services in Saco, Maine, and lived in Portland, Maine. I felt a call to do something more in my 15th year of teaching. I was enrolled in a Masters Program in Educational Leadership at the University of Southern Maine when I wanted to get out of the learning institution and find a more collaborative line of work. I had been a UU for many years, and The Rev. Fred Lipp (the minister at First Parish, Portland, at the time) inspired me to follow my heart's yearning by pursuing my Master of Divinity. I

attended Bangor Theological Seminary and completed my Clinical Pastoral Education at Maine Medical while doing my Field Study at First Parish Portland, Maine. While in Seminary, I was actively involved in Maine Interfaith Power and Light and The Center for Grieving Children. When I met with the Regional Sub Committee on Candidacy for Ministry, I was told to leave the state of Maine for my Internship to broaden my experience. I was invited to San Francisco for my Internship. I stayed there for two years, the first as the Intern Minister and the second as the Interim Director of Religious Education. I wanted to return to the East Coast to be near family and hoped to return to Maine. My then supervisor, The Rev. John Robinson, suggested I apply for the Assistant Minister position at King's Chapel; I did, and that is where I was ordained. After my second year at King's Chapel, I went in search of a full-time parish ministry position, and I have been in Dedham ever since.

## Ministerial Roles &

# Functions

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

As a UU Minister in a congregational system, I believe it is my job to walk with my congregation. To that end, I would describe my ministerial presence as authentic and my leadership style as servant-leader. I seek to walk with others to create the change we need in the world. I strive to do this by sharing leadership with committees and church leaders and encouraging the measurement of success through our collective growth and development.

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

To borrow a phrase from Good to Great by Jim Collins, once we work together to "get all the right people on the bus," I feel it is best to work collaboratively with committees and employees, outlining clear expectations and fostering staff autonomy with reliable evaluations and feedback. As a congregationalist, I believe most aspects of church life should be a collaboration. With that said, regarding staff relations, it is the minister's responsibility to build

and encourage staff to meet the parish's needs. I have found it helpful in Dedham to work with a personnel committee to give multiple layers of transparent accountability and then work collaboratively with the staff to accomplish the church's 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?**

I believe that everything in the UU church is a shared ministry partnership. With that said, in every partnership, there are times when the congregation is tired and needs the minister to step up, and there are times when the minister is tired and needs the congregation to step up. My responsibility as a minister is to help balance the needs of the leadership and the needs of the congregation while serving and keeping my finger on the pulse of the wider community.

I find that every partnership works best when roles and responsibilities are clearly outlined; this is generally one of the essential functions of Church

bylaws. Every church is different in this way, so I would want to work with any new church to clarify the minister's roles.

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

In these troubled times, a minister needs to be a public minister. I mean by this to keep a finger on the community, be ready to write a letter to the editor when required, and offer open classes from time to time, encouraging new seekers to find Unitarian Universalism. It isn't easy to describe a pluralist community. Still, I believe that the more a minister is involved in the activities of the wider community, the more people will learn about and want to get involved with the activities of that minister's church community.

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

I believe most transformation happens through relationships, and small gestures can create significant change. As a minister, for example, I have witnessed the power of greeting people at the door with a smile and saying goodbye to them when they leave. Simple hospitality breeds more hospitality. Similarly, bigger, bolder gestures can require a congregation to reflect, assess, and recalibrate. Many of the bridge-building community work I have done over the years has had this effect. Finally, my role in congregational change in the community is to be an ethical love, bringing a compass, encouraging kind and respectful behavior, and holding up the inherent worth and dignity of all.

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

I wish I could say I handle every conflict with compassion, curiosity, and care. Unfortunately, I know I have always had a perfectionist streak (the curse of a white woman). I have gotten defensive and even lost my cool on occasion. I always work hard to recognize my missteps, apologize, learn, and work to redress my errors. In addition, I engage in a daily practice of

meditation designed to deepen my understanding of my triggers and reactions so that I can authentically respond with care and compassion.

In my 18 years in Dedham, I occasionally had parishioners in leadership positions who I felt disrespected my role as the minister. Examples of the type of disrespect I am talking about include yelling at me inches from my face, handing me a changed letter of agreement without discussing it with me or the ministry committee first, interrupting me when I am leading worship, disparaging me to the staff I supervise, speaking in an aggressive accusatory way to me. In situations like these, I tend to be direct and use the systems set up by the Ministry Committee and Parish Committee to resolve any conflict and come to a better understanding.

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

Several times, I have had parishioners who have forgotten that I had visited their spouses when they were dying and told other parishioners that I was remiss in not attending to their needs. This experience has taught me that sometimes people forget what you have done for them because the memory is too

painful. I do, however, think that witnessing the life cycle with my parish, witnessing an individual or family from birth to death, and everything in between is my most profound honor as a minister.

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

When I started in Dedham, there was a big conflict, caused in part by the presence of a few aggressive parishioners and a great number of passive parishioners without an idea of how to confront bullying. I worked to teach the more passive parishioners assertiveness skills, but I did little to engage the more aggressive parishioners. I sidelined them as bullies in my mind and with my interactions until their behaviors became so egregious they could not be ignored (ex: calling a student from the school that rents from us an 'asshole' because the child was in their way.) I think this was a disservice to the more aggressive communicators. Instead of teaching them the skills required to be more empathetic and to treat others by the guidelines of our first principle, I sidelined them, which was not treating the bully himself as a person with inherent worth and dignity. Thankfully, I have been in Dedham long enough to push past some of these missteps! With time and

intention, I am now more direct in addressing small-change behaviors and thus rarely find myself sidelining any bad behavior; I have learned to be more direct and caring in response to negative behavior.

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

My most significant need is and has always been time management. I am a woman who does too much and over-commits. I like to get involved in things, but I need to step back from time to time to reflect, relax, and rejuvenate. A congregation can help me by encouraging and honoring my days off and regular vacation time. I would also appreciate it if congregants were willing to utilize calendaring tools like Gcal and YouCanBookMe and forgiving when even those efforts fail to thwart my occasional overbooking.

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

- **Worship and preaching:**

Preaching is ancient and strange, but I feel called to do it. In my more than 20 years of ministry, I understand my job is to lift listeners' spirits and

open their minds. I try to offer questions and ideas and leave room for interpretation. I rarely preach a sermon that I do not need to hear myself. I have also been called down to earth and authentic in my style. I hope this is true. I also love to read, so I depend on my reading to inspire and inform my preaching. I believe in the free pulpit - and I equally and oppositely believe in the free pew, meaning that I want my good conscience to encourage me to share, and those listening can take what works and leave what does not. I love to participate in conversations after my sermon because I write them in a vacuum, and only in a community do I learn how they are received.

- **Pastoral Care / spiritual guidance / counseling / home and hospital visitation:**

I love hearing people's stories and witnessing their lives through life's ups and downs. However, over time, I have found that it is nearly impossible for a minister to offer enough pastoral care to a congregation. I need a network of caring people to help. Pastoral care is best when the whole

congregation is engaged as a caring community, and it is far better when pastoral care is not minister-centric.

Compassion and caring are cornerstones of a Unitarian Universalist (UU) congregation, fostering an environment of support and connection. It nurtures individuals' emotional and spiritual well-being, helping them navigate life's challenges while providing a safe space for reflection and healing. In a UU community, pastoral care goes beyond individual support—it involves a collective responsibility to care for one another, extending the circle of concern to include not only members but also the larger community and the world. By collaborating with parishioners, I can ensure that the circle of care grows, inviting everyone to actively nurture each other's growth and well-being. A collaborative approach to caregiving strengthens the congregation's bonds, creating a compassionate, inclusive environment that reflects the UU values of justice, equity, and compassion in action.

I look forward to working with a congregation to build a strong caregiving network beyond anything that surpasses any pastoral care I can offer as a minister.

## My Experience

In addition to my pastoral training, I have an undergraduate degree in Special Education with a concentration in Emotional Disturbance.

I was a teacher before I was a minister, working with children struggling with emotional and neuro divergence. I have also recently finished my first level of training in Internal Family Systems Therapy. A parts approach to dealing with emotions is helpful when approaching conflicts and crises. As a minister, I have had the typical experiences at the bedside of those born and those dying. I have counseled those getting married and those grieving. I have also helped people struggling with personal issues which are too diverse to list. There is a limit to how much care and compassion one minister can offer. Hence, my pastoral caregiving is

best when paired with caring, trained individuals who intentionally work together to meet the congregation's needs.

- **Children's religious education:**

So often, in our world, we try to instill our values and beliefs without thinking about what children need. I believe the most important thing we can do as congregations is to follow the child, much in the spirit of Maria Montessori. Making the church a welcoming place for children is the most essential job of churches. Helping children feel valued and at home is vital for their well-being. Keeping them safe by carefully checking those who work with children, giving them meaningful work, and enabling them to participate in church life will encourage children to be lifelong UUs.

I am trained in O.W.L. (Our Whole Lives) K- Adult.

- **Youth work:**

So much of the change in our denomination has begun with the youth. Giving youth a vote, allowing youth to express their ideas and concerns, and

giving them a voice at the table is essential to our growth as a denomination and a movement.

I have run youth groups in every church I have gone to and served.

- **Adult religious education:**

I am happy to participate in all aspects of Adult religious education as a teacher and learner. Adult RE works best when it is a collaborative effort fully integrated into the parish's life.

- **Incorporating music, the arts, and creativity into congregational life:**

All art and music forms are central to UU religious expression. I welcome collaborative efforts to integrate the arts into worship. I am a painter and a craftsperson, and I love sharing my art with the congregations I serve and experiencing their art.

- **Community building / facilitation skills / coffee hour and social times:**

My active participation in congregational life fosters a sense of belonging and shared purpose among members. These gatherings are social events and sacred spaces where we nurture our spiritual growth and deepen our relationships.

I am very good at facilitating meetings and keeping people on task. I have often asked to lead when there is conflict within a group because I am good at calling people back into the right relationship.

Creating systems, writing job descriptions, and breaking all parish jobs into measurable parts are essential to making them sustainable and manageable for busy congregations.

Our congregational polity calls us to walk together in all aspects of church life, and I believe a healthy church must collaborate with other like-minded groups, live our values fully, and grow our congregations.

Long-range planning can help a congregation chart its course, but it is only as good as its followers.

- **Committee / Task force work:**

Participating in congregational activities allows me to discern the community's needs and mission, offering a platform to hear every voice respectfully. As a UU minister, my presence and involvement in these activities demonstrate my interest and dedication to maintaining a vibrant worshiping community where all members can thrive. In addition to the internal life of our congregation, it is imperative to be a visible and vocal advocate within the larger community. This visibility is essential for living our values and principles of equity, compassion, and respect for the dignity of all individuals.

Sometimes, as the minister, I need to step up to help get important jobs done. Other times, I need to step back to allow the congregation to do their own work in their own way without my input.

- **Leadership development:**

The UU Minister plays a crucial role in leadership development by guiding individuals and congregations toward greater self-awareness, spiritual growth, and community engagement. Within a congregation, the minister fosters an environment where transformation is not only encouraged but actively nurtured. Through preaching, pastoral care, and educational programming, the minister helps individuals uncover their potential for personal and collective growth. Congregations, under their guidance, become places where people can reflect on their values, deepen their faith, and develop leadership skills that empower them to serve both within the congregation and the wider community. In this way, the UU Minister's work transcends mere spiritual guidance, creating spaces where people can evolve, learn to lead, and contribute to meaningful change.

- **Long range planning / mission / vision / covenant:**

In a UU context, mission building and long-range planning are essential to a minister's leadership, ensuring the congregation's growth, relevance, and

sustainability. The UU minister is key in guiding the congregation through defining and refining its mission, ensuring it reflects core values such as justice, inclusion, and compassion. By focusing on mission-building, the minister helps the community stay connected to its purpose and vision, creating a foundation for individual and collective action. Long-range planning ensures the congregation is prepared for future challenges and opportunities, while thoughtful follow-through brings these plans to life. The minister's leadership in this area ensures that the congregation doesn't just respond to immediate needs but moves forward with intention, creating a legacy of vibrant, transformative, and adaptive ministry that can sustain and inspire future generations.

- **Membership and membership growth:**

Membership growth happens when congregations are healthy, caring, active communities. As a minister, I can assist in this process by fostering a healthy, loving community, encouraging systems of keeping track of visitors, and inviting new families and individuals in. Still, membership growth takes a

whole community where a community lives shared values, treats each other with mutual respect and caring, and does good in the world.

- **Anti-oppression work:**

Much anti-oppression work begins with dismantling our sense of privilege and acknowledging our place in the world. This starts with education and continues when we find new ways to walk with other groups and listen. I have also used sermon series to explore black history, film series to explore different perspectives, and collaborative ventures to deal with issues ranging from hunting to LGBTQ+ rights, immigration, and gun violence. The work of anti-oppression is ongoing and will never be complete.

- **Social justice / social action:**

Social action is a vital aspect of the Unitarian Universalist (UU) ministry, embodying the principles of Justice, compassion, and community engagement. Living these values means actively working toward equity and peace in the world. I love walking with a congregation toward their goals

of racial Justice. In my 18 years in Dedham, I have been actively involved in the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute, which uplifts families impacted by violence, the Dedham Food Pantry, which addresses food insecurity, and helped to facilitate the launch of the Dedham Human Rights Commission to advocate for inclusion and dignity for all. Through these efforts, I have walked with my congregation toward a more just and equitable world. While we still have a long way to go, every step is one step closer to a better world.

- **Interfaith / community work:**

I have always enjoyed working with interfaith and like-minded non-profit groups to accomplish collective goals. The days of religious isolation should be over. We need progressive-minded, collaborative, caring communities to improve the weary world.

- **Denominational activities:**

Being involved in UUA activities is crucial for both personal growth and the advancement of our denomination. For nearly a decade, I had the

privilege of serving as the hospitality coordinator for the Mass Bay District Ministers Association. This experience deeply enriched my sense of connection with the larger community. Engaging in district activities provides opportunities to connect with fellow congregants and leaders and offers a grounding force that helps us navigate the challenges we face. Moreover, these activities foster valuable collaborations that can propel the future progress of the UUA, ensuring our collective vision continues to evolve and thrive.

- **Stewardship:**

As a UU minister, Stewardship is a vital responsibility that extends beyond financial matters to encompass the well-being and growth of the congregation. Stewardship is about nurturing a sense of care, commitment, and community, and it's an integral part of fostering a healthy and thriving congregation. I have actively engaged in Stewardship throughout my ministry, taking on various roles to support the congregation's needs. Participation in Stewardship has sometimes meant stepping back, allowing the community to lead as needed, and stepping forward when the leadership

required my guidance or involvement. By remaining flexible and responsive to the evolving needs of the congregation, I've helped nurture a more profound sense of ownership and commitment among its members.

- **Finances:**

As a UU minister, I hold a critical responsibility to not only follow the church budget but also keep a close eye on the long-term financial health of the congregation. While overseeing day-to-day financial decisions, the minister must ensure that spending aligns with the congregation's mission and values, fostering transparency and accountability. Beyond short-term financial stewardship, it's essential to consider the long-term economic sustainability of the congregation, planning for future growth, maintenance, and ministry needs. By working closely with the board and finance committees, the minister helps guide the congregation in making thoughtful, strategic decisions to secure a stable and thriving future for the community.

- **Other areas not covered above:**

I love finding creative ways to bring ideas to life, whether through drawing cartoons that capture a moment with humor, crafting rag dolls from old sweaters and socks, or shaping my thoughts into letters to the editor and poems. I also enjoy the hands-on process of papier-mâché, especially when making candy-filled Easter eggs to add a touch of joy and surprise to my congregation's celebrations. Creativity, for me, is about transforming the ordinary into something meaningful, playful, and thought-provoking.

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

Relationships form slowly. It is best to form relationships by showing up and helping out, sharing my truth, and listening well. Building trust with people and congregations isn't rocket science; it takes time and intentionality. It requires my vulnerability and reliability.

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

As a UU minister, I am responsible for building a community where diversity of perspectives and ideas is recognized as a strength. Diversity is needed as much in our theologies as it is for our political leanings or taste in music. I strive to bring ideas and questions to worship that can enhance theists, non-theists, and atheists alike. I work to encourage spiritual practice in the broadest sense and to encourage social responsibility as a spiritual practice. I hope to leave room for interpretation and self-reflection in worship. Conversations after worship remind me how diverse perspectives hold us together.

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

I imagine we are all engaged in rebuilding a vital community right now. In that, I hope we all are asking ourselves what is essential to the work we do as a church. What do we want our beloved community to be? How do we live our values in this world?

Separate from the COVID obstacle we are all faced with, I believe our churches are confronted with the important question of how to courageously engage in

the world in the face of increasing right-wing pressure to silence and restrict a progressive voice in America today.

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

I prefer to both give and receive direct, open feedback. I think it is the only way to grow. I like transparent ways to provide feedback to the minister and staff (i.e., worship and Adult RE evaluation forms). Discussions that include all of our deep listening need to be at the forefront of feedback in our predominantly white congregations, where we strive to dismantle white supremacy. I prefer giving and receiving feedback with compassion, curiosity, and caring.

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

In Dedham, my Ministry Committee and I created an Appreciative Inquiry Ministry Evaluation that we have found to be very helpful in eliciting holistic feedback about my ministry and the health of the congregation. We complete this every five years, and the feedback received from the conversation sessions is shared with the long-range planning committee, which also runs on a five-year cycle.

We also have ongoing worship evaluation forms and Adult Religious Education feedback forms. I believe that transparent ways to give ongoing feedback are essential to the health and well-being of the church and parish.

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

I hope that UUs can get better at collaborating and interacting in the world so that we can learn from others and get out of our bubbles. I hope that Unitarian Universalism will become an active progressive voice in our communities, promoting religious freedom and all the values of the U.S. First Amendment. I hope our UU congregations will become more diverse in all ways by examining our whiteness, adopting the eighth principle, and walking our talk.

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

I am a creative, collaborative, strong, experienced minister with a great deal of energy and enthusiasm to bring to a new parish.

# Personal

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

I am married to Jenny Carlson-Pietraszek. We have two daughters ( both in college) and a dog.

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

I am in good health if a bit overweight, a condition I have had most of my life.

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

I exercise, meditate daily, drink water, eat healthy-ish, see an Internal Family Systems therapist, get acupuncture and chiropractic care on occasion, and meet with colleagues regularly.

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

I have enjoyed a long ministry here in Dedham and I would like to offer my next congregation at least a decade, which is why I am thinking of making this

move now.