

**MINISTERIAL FELLOWSHIP COMMITTEE**  
**UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION**  
24 Farnsworth St., Boston, Massachusetts 02210

**LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION**

Name of candidate  
Lynda Sutherland

I am happy to write on behalf of Lynda Sutherland. I have been Lynda's advisor since she began work at Meadville Lombard, and have been honored to be part of her growth as a minister.

As you know, one of the goals of the Meadville Lombard educational model is to train students in the artistry of multiracial, crosscultural ministry. To that end, we immerse students in experiences that allow them to experience the gift and power of multiracial, crosscultural community partnerships, and support them as they seek to share that experience with the congregations that they serve. Lynda met that goal with the utmost creativity and integrity! In their two years of congregational service, students design a project, what we call a focused initiative, that enables the congregation to grow in ways that enhance their ability to live out crosscultural, multiracial ministries. The focused initiative that Lynda led for her Teaching Congregation, "Crossing Boundaries Passport: a Journey of Discovery" is truly exemplary. The Leadership Studies teaching faculty has seen its power, and it has already been taken up by leading UU ministers and lay leaders of color. Two of our ministers who are most skilled in leading multiracial, crosscultural congregations have asked to use it in their congregations, as has Dr. Stephanie Mitchem, a leading womanist ethicist and scholar. While many students have embraced this project with enthusiasm, none has produced an initiative that is so compelling, not just for one congregation, but for UU congregations in many contexts. I will describe the project in some detail, as well as highlight the strengths that have enabled Lynda to produce such significant work at this stage in her ministerial career.

First, Lynda's strengths. Lynda has a clear theological grounding for her work as a minister, and a solid focus on the joy of enabling other people to live with more integrity and creativity. As she states, she has found in Unitarian Universalism a religion that satisfies both 'head and heart,' a religion that does "three things: make sense, nurture my spirit, and make a difference in the world." Lynda's deep grounding in what nurtures her spirit, and what sustains her in making a difference in the world, enables her to offer that same grounding to others as a genuine gift, and not as an external demand. She is a skilled teacher, one who is deeply attuned to where people are, and from that awareness, is able to help them live in ways that do make a difference in the world, as well as make a difference in the individuals with whom she works. In her class work at Meadville, Lynda was open to new ideas, learning as much from her fellow students and her site work, as from our formal classes. This openness to new ideas, this commitment to social justice and ecological sustainability, is given truly exceptional expression in the project that she created for her teaching congregation.

Lynda designed a process, a 'passport to discovery' that enabled people to see the ways in which boundary crossing is already a part of their lives, and the ways in which it can become more so. Lynda clearly, and in a matter of fact way, also helped people see the ways in which such crossings are both joyous and challenging. It is so significant that she normalized the fact that boundary crossing requires preparation. She normalized as well that such crossings can be difficult. What is so often fraught with anxiety and trepidation became, under Lynda's leadership, a joyous and shared congregational adventure. She did not downplay the challenges, but faced them head on, calmly, clearly, and with grace. I was highly impressed by the way she invited people into deep work through clear questions. For example, these initial questions are profound in their complexity, affirming both that boundary crossing is something that we want to do, and acknowledging, without judgment or critique, that we at times do hold back: *"Which Boundaries do I already cross regularly? Which ones do I shy away from? What new territory will I challenge myself to enter? How may I grow in my spiritual understanding of the world by stretching myself to leave my comfort zone?"*

For each of the boundaries that people were invited to explore (race, gender, class, etc) , she provided a wide array of options, normalizing that there are new areas for most of us and that entering each new area does require careful preparation. The questions that she asked people to explore afterwards also both acknowledged the difficulty of such work, and diffused the shame and anxiety that often attends our imperfect attempts to live justly. The questions that she asked people to explore after each exercise are profound and provide guidance for this energizing, life-giving work. *" I am glad I did this because.....One hard thing was..... I learned....."*

For congregants whose ability to experience the joy and gift of multiracial and crosscultural community may be limited by fears of mistakes, of things being hard, Lynda has created a learning experience that provides just the balm and invitation to become the resilient community that grows through honest risk and engagement. This project was successful in Lynda's congregation. People came to see the idea of Boundary Crossing as a joyous, challenging part of life, sharing their experiences and reflections not only in formal occasions for reflection but in ongoing interactions in social hours and during joys and sorrows.

Lynda's powerful focused initiative is the fruit of the open mind and heart that she has brought to the process of theological education. She has been consistently open to change, to growth, to deeper understandings of theology, history, and ethics. She has embraced the challenges of growth with an open mind and curiosity, and is unafraid of the inevitable mistakes and glitches that accompany such growth. We are indeed blessed to have a leader with her patience, skill and compassion in our movement, and I recommend her with the utmost enthusiasm.

***Please circle one:*** *Contents of this letter have been shared with the candidate.*

I understand that this letter will be taken into consideration only if the contents may be shared with the candidate.

Signature Sharon Welch Date July 27, 2015

Name/Title Sharon Welch Provost and Professor of Religion and Society

Address 610 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL 60605

Phone 773-256-3000 E-mail

address swelch@meadville.edu