



**Interview with
The Rev. Dr. Karen Bailey-Francois
Candidate for Call to be Minister of
Second Congregational Church**

Rev. Karen Bailey-Francois sat down for a phone conversation with parishioner Doug Thompson aimed at learning a bit more about her before she meets the congregation later this month. An abbreviated version follows.

Let's start with an easy one. What do you prefer to be called?

“Pastor Karen” is probably the most common thing I am called and I am comfortable with that. In less formal settings or one-on-one conversations, simply “Karen” is fine. If I am doing something more official, like providing a recommendation or something, I might throw in the “Doctor” but mostly it is “Karen.”

***So why the ministry and you? Was your calling more of a gradual thing or more like proverbial lightning strike?
How did you hopscotch to where you are today?***

I am a fourth generation professional woman in my family and grew up with a clear sense that I would go to college and have a career, most likely in business of some form, before retiring and going off to the Peace Corps or something comparable. I was happily on that path – finishing an MBA and doing compelling work in a job I loved with Green Mountain Power. At the same time, I found myself more and more captivated by my connections to and through the church. Increasingly, those relationships and my own relationship with God captured my heart and refocused my attention.

Firmly believing in research, I approached the pastor of the church I was attending and said I'd like to know more about what I was thinking about getting myself into. He promptly put me on every committee he could think of, including the administrative council and directing the children's choir. One thing led to another, culminating in a long and occasionally heated conversation with God in the church sanctuary. I can attest – God argues better than me. I started looking at seminaries the next day.

Having been raised in a teaching parish for Colgate Rochester Divinity School, I fully expected to go there for my M.Div. Friends



pushed me to also consider Andover Newton Theological School. My friends were right. ANTS fit -- in part because of a remarkable affiliation they had with Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries, a collaborative inter-faith social outreach program

serving those in need in Greater Boston. I applied and was accepted to ANTS and began what turned into nearly three years of formal and volunteer field work with CMM shortly thereafter.

I was delighted to find like-hearted opportunities with Center City Churches (later known as Hands On Hartford) when I accepted a call to serve the First Church of Christ in Hartford (Center Church) in 1995. Those experiences led me to develop ChEMYstry, the cooperative ecumenical youth ministry for which I earned a D.Min. from Hartford Seminary in 2005.



Your experiences sound fairly eclectic...

Yes, well, not everyone knows what to make of a minister with MBA. It might be easier if I fit neatly into one or two boxes but, for me, ministry can take a lot of forms.

I love working with my own congregation AND the wider church. And I have done a lot of things in addition to local church ministry, including community outreach, non-profit consulting and some time in the corporate world. I am grateful for the breadth of those experiences because they give me so much to draw on. I love learning new things. No learning is ever wasted... just reframed for the current need.

So why Cohasset and why now? What drew you this way?

Well, for one thing, I felt a strong connection to the search team from the very start of our conversations. As I continued through my own discernment process—there were other possible trajectories for me—it became clear that I am at my core a pastor. While I can

greatly enjoy doing other things, I find my nature is most fully realized when I am in worship and engaged in ministry, which can be anything from visiting people in nursing homes to sorting out the details of potluck suppers. As our collective discernment process unfolded, I found myself flat out falling in love with you all. I am grateful that SCC came as part of a package that would allow me, if called, to be the lead minister in a

congregation that clearly has a commitment to its own ministry and leadership.



If you were to choose two or three words or phrases to describe yourself, what comes to mind?

A challenging question.... How about “enthusiastic, compassionate and creative.” There’s more, of course, but I’d be happy to fall into those three boxes... recognizing that there will be some extra stuff hanging out.



Can you describe your theology—what you believe—in a nutshell?

I believe that God is in our lives – all of our lives – whether we are paying attention or not. When we do pay attention



(something that gets easier to do with practice), we can come to see “in the mirror dimly” a glimmer of our own piece of the big picture that is God’s vision for us and for our world. That’s why we need each other... and why God calls us into community. Each of us brings a piece of the perspective that, together, gives our limited view of the Divine depth, shape, contrast and dimension. Church gives us a place to sort that out. And (among other things) Jesus is our reality check – the incarnation of God in whose image we are made... lest we be tempted to try to re-make God in the image of US. That is, of course, a very small nutshell from which a whole lot of important stuff is hanging out...but we’ll have time to get to that. At least I very much hope that we will.

Is there anything you’d like to share with the congregation prior to it being able to meet you later this month?

I have been thinking about the upcoming Candidating Weekend. There are so many aspects to this process: vetting and selecting a candidate, bringing him or her before the congregation and inviting a



vote. It is a challenging process in its own right and, I think, particularly difficult for those who don’t have the more immediate perspective of the search term. There is such a short window in time for the congregation at large to make its own judgment about entering into what one intends to be a long-term relationship. It’s a bit like going on a blind date and then having to decide whether or not to get married the next

morning. My hope -- through both the sermon that I'm crafting and in the conversations that we have over the course of my Candidating Weekend -- is to acknowledge these challenges, to do what I can to help us all move through it and to begin to get to know each other.



Who inspires you?

I could go in a lot of directions with this but will say that I am deeply inspired by my family. My parents are incredible role models – as parents, as professionals and as human beings. My dad and I can (and will) talk about anything... and have been known to clear the room when our conversations get too technical or intense. My mom is a force of nature in a line of competent, capable and compelling women. There are some great stories to tell. I look forward to sharing them and to hearing those of others.



Tell us a little more about your family.

My son, age 20, is delighted at the prospect of my moving to Cohasset. He is a junior in the architecture program at Roger Williams University in Rhode Island and is already thinking about the possibility of architectural internships in the Boston area. He is thrilled about Cohasset's accessibility by train!

The rest of my family is also enthusiastic and excited for me. I am the oldest of five – with a full contingent of nephews and nieces. Expect visitors!

What do you like to do when you are not ministering?

Most anything outdoors!

I love to hike, bike and kayak. I also love camping and have already checked out the local campground!

Cooking is another passion of mine. Making food for others makes me happy.



Care to confess to a guilty pleasure?

OK, well, I love to read. If I am reading an engrossing book, I will rationalize why I should be able to finish it rather than do whatever else I am supposed to be doing. I also love to travel, to see new people and new places.

So let's imagine that the Congregation votes later this month to extend a call to you to become the 18th settled minister of the church and that you accept. What would you hope for things to look like, say, a year or a year and half from now?

Picture sitting at a table. As in any relationship, the congregation and I will spend a good bit of time over the coming months talking across that table – learning about one another and getting acquainted with each other's perspectives. I would consider that time well spent when a year and a half from now, having gone through a whole cycle of worship and annual celebrations, communal experience and personal connections, we find ourselves sitting on the same side of that table, looking out at our future together.



Karen Bailey-François

If we can be baptized with just a few drops, why would God need more than our most shallow attention to catch our eyes or flood our hearts?

Education

HARTFORD SEMINARY

Doctor of Ministry (D.Min. 2005)

ANDOVER NEWTON THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

Master of Divinity (M.Div. 1994)

UNIVERSITY OF VERMONT

Master of Business Administration (MBA 1990)

Bachelor of Science: Accounting & Finance (BS/BA 1983)

Experience

Ordained Minister, United Church of Christ (1995)

Ellington Congregational Church

(Sept. 2011 to Mar. 2018, Oct. 2007 to Feb. 2010)

Storrs Congregational Church (March 2010 to July 2011)

First Church of Christ in Hartford (Aug. 1995 to Feb. 2006)

Union Congregational Church in Rockville (Aug. 1994 to Aug. 1995)

Trustee, Hartford Seminary (2012-present)

Hands on Hartford, Inc. (formerly Center City Churches)

Interim Program Director, *Center for Youth*

(September 2006 to September 2008)

Board of Directors (2002-2006; Chair 2012-2018)

Green Mountain Power Corporation, South Burlington, VT

Integrated Resource Planning Team

(February 1984 to August 1990)