

Meet Our New Senior Minister: Rev. Dr. Michael Woolf

Union Church of Hinsdale is delighted to welcome the Reverend Dr. Michael Woolf as our next Senior Minister. Michael comes to us as a seasoned pastor, a scholar, and a minister who believes that faith grows best through honest questions asked together. Those who have met him during the search process describe a warm, curious, and grounded presence.

Roots and Formation

Michael was born and raised in rural Alabama. He earned his Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies at the University of Tennessee, where his interest in how people across traditions search for meaning first took root.

He went on to Harvard Divinity School, completing both a Master of Divinity and a Doctor of Theology. While in seminary, he served as a seminarian organizer with Interfaith Worker Justice in Boston, learning how to connect congregations with the real needs of working people in their communities.

Michael is ordained in the American Baptist Churches USA and the Alliance of Baptists, two traditions that share the UCC's commitment to freedom of conscience, open inquiry, and a welcoming church.

A Life in Ministry

Michael began his pastoral work in rural and suburban churches in Massachusetts, gaining a firsthand understanding of congregations of many sizes and settings. For the past seven years he has served as Senior Minister of Lake Street Church of Evanston, where he has led the community through a season of renewal and growth.

His voice reaches well beyond his own congregation. Michael serves as co-chair of the Illinois Conference of Churches, helping bring together Christian communities across the state. He is a columnist for *The Christian Century* and *Sojourners*, and he is the author of three books. His writing, like his preaching, brings scripture into conversation with the questions people are asking today.

Ministry Gifts

Preaching. Michael's sermons are rooted in scripture and attentive to the issues of our day. He often places the Bible in conversation with texts from other faith traditions, exploring where their questions and images meet or part ways. Rather than handing down answers, he invites listeners into their own search for meaning. As he puts it, his faith is sustained by questions more than answers.

Pastoral care. Michael considers it a privilege to walk alongside people in life's great transitions: birth, death, marriage, divorce, and every moment of discernment in between. He offers a listening ear, connects people with spiritual resources, and helps people find practical support when they need it.

Justice and community. Michael cares deeply about immigration justice, gun violence prevention, pluralism, racial justice, and LGBTQ+ equality. When he leads on these issues, he brings the congregation along with him, inviting members to reflect together on what faith asks of us in difficult times.

Peacemaking. Believing that conflict is a natural part of community life, Michael earned a certificate in mediation from the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center. He has helped resolve disputes that might

otherwise have hindered a congregation's ministry, and he counts the relationships restored through that work among his proudest accomplishments.

Stewardship. Michael sees generosity as a spiritual practice. After earning a certificate in religious fundraising from the Lake Institute on Faith and Giving, he helped Lake Street Church strengthen its financial footing, increasing giving by 20 percent.



Formation and vocation. Michael loves helping people discover their sense of calling. With a Palmer Grant from the American Baptist Churches USA, he created The Passion Project, a series of conversations with philosophers, artists, musicians, and social justice advocates about what drives their work. He says that helping others find their vocation continually renews his own.

Family and Life Beyond the Pulpit

Michael shares his life with his wife, Anna, who is also an ordained minister, and their eight-year-old daughter, Zofia. Away from church, you are likely to find him in the garden or picking out a tune on his banjo, which he plays in the Scruggs style. A proud graduate of the University of Tennessee, he remains an avid fan of the Volunteers.

Welcome, Michael!

We are grateful for the gifts, warmth, and curiosity Michael brings, and we look forward to the questions we will explore and the work we will do together. Please join us in giving Michael, Anna, and Zofia a heartfelt welcome to Union Church!