

*The Unitarian Church in Westport*  
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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**The Unitarian Church in Westport**

10 Lyons Plains Road | [www.UUwestport.org](http://www.UUwestport.org)

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# **Hundreds to Participate in Pageantry & Ceremony at 4 p.m. Sunday Installation** ***New Minister at The Unitarian Church in Westport*** ***Proposes Congregation Share Ministry With Him***

WESTPORT, Conn. — The new minister of southwestern Connecticut's largest Unitarian Universalist congregation has a vision: He seeks to create a religious congregation that is "ministry centered" but not "minister centered."

The Rev. Dr. John T. Morehouse will be installed at 4 p.m. on Sunday as fifth settled senior minister of the Unitarian Church in Westport during a ceremony involving pageantry and participation of hundreds of people from across the country.

As the new minister of a Fairfield County center for liberal religion, he seeks to design a congregation in which congregants offer ministry to each other and the wider community.

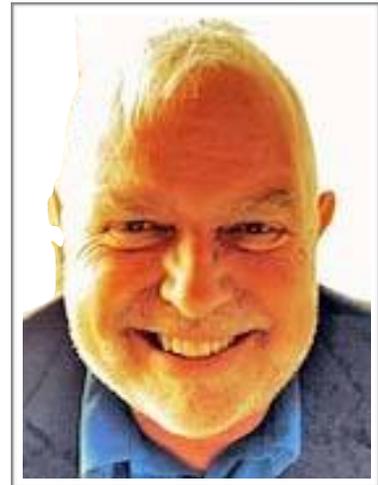
"We seek to be a center for learning and liberation," said Morehouse. "My ministry will be about creating a Unitarian Church in Westport that offers lifelong learning in matters of religious and spiritual understanding as well as practice.

"My ministry within the community will be to work with others in the region to liberate people from poverty, racism and oppression."

With 500 members, the 66-year-old Fairfield County church is one of Connecticut's two largest Unitarian Universalist congregations. In all, 18 congregations in Connecticut are members of the Boston-based Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.

Closely associated with New England history back to the Pilgrims as well as to the American Revolution, the Unitarian Universalist Association today is a national denomination espousing liberal religion, personal search for truth, human equality, continual revelation and democratic governance led by congregations rather than by denominational authority.

Morehouse, a Hudson Valley native, was called by a vote of the Fairfield County church. At the time, Morehouse was completing a decade of ministry to a Los Angeles-area Unitarian Universalist congregation, the Pacific Unitarian Church of Rancho Palos Verdes, Calif.



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A fifth-generation Unitarian and great-grandson of a Unitarian minister, Morehouse graduated from Grinnell College and Meadville Lombard Theological School, a Unitarian Universalist seminary in Chicago at which he is also an adjunct professor and a teaching pastor.

The new Connecticut minister earned both a master of divinity and a doctorate in ministry from Meadville Lombard. His doctoral dissertation for the degree awarded in May is titled, "Creating Theology Together: A Curriculum for Spiritual Leadership." The dissertation focused on helping church leaders develop a shared theology.

Morehouse's predecessor in the Fairfield County pulpit, the Rev. Frank Hall, retired in 2013 following a 29-year ministry in Westport and an earlier ministry in Massachusetts. Hall holds the honorary title of "minister emeritus" from the Westport church.

### **Installation of the Rev. Dr. John T. Morehouse As Fifth Settled Senior Minister The Unitarian Church in Westport**

- **WHEN:** 4 p.m. on Sunday, November 22nd. The ceremony will last between 60 and 90 minutes.
- **WHERE:** The Unitarian Church in Westport, 10 Lyons Plains Road in the Coleytown section of Westport near the Weston line. Access from Exit 42 of the Merritt Parkway to Weston Road. North on Weston Road to the traffic light at Ford Road (to the left) and Lyons Plains Road (to the right). Turn right onto Lyons Plains. A block later, at the fork between Lyons Plains and Coleytown roads, make a hard right into the church parking lot. The main parking area is at the far end of the lot.
- **WHO:** The Rev. John T. Morehouse becomes the fifth settled minister of The Unitarian Church in Westport, one of southwestern Connecticut's bastions of liberal religion, thought and social activism.

The pageantry includes a procession of local and national ministers as well as local leaders to escort the new minister into the church's soaring "ship" sanctuary, with its glass walls overlooking the wooded hillside on which the church is built.

- **WHAT:** As a democratic denomination practicing congregational authority, only a congregation can call and install a minister. The "act of installation" on Sunday will culminate the congregation's two-year search for a new senior minister. The congregation in unison will install the new minister.
- **WHY:** The Unitarian Church in Westport is the worship center for religious liberals in a 25-mile-long swath of Fairfield County stretching along the shore from Stamford to Stratford as well as the inland towns north of the Merritt Parkway from New Canaan and Wilton to Easton, Trumbull, and Shelton. The church has a strong focus on social justice work in the low-income areas of Norwalk and Bridgeport. A large number of Unitarian Church members live in each of those large Fairfield County cities.



## ***Q&A With The Rev. Dr. John T. Morehouse***

*The new minister of The Unitarian Church in Westport answers some questions about his view of Fairfield County and Connecticut, as well as his vision for liberal religious ministry.*

### ***What is the message of your new ministry for Fairfield County?***

We seek to be a center for learning and liberation. My ministry will be about creating a Unitarian Church in Westport that offers lifelong learning in matters of religious and spiritual understanding as well as practice. My ministry within the community will be to work with others in the region to liberate people from poverty, racism and oppression.

### ***You grew up next door in Westchester County. What are your lifelong beliefs about Fairfield County, if any?***

I had no beliefs about Fairfield County except that it was a well-heeled suburb of New York City.

### ***What about your lifelong beliefs, if any, about Connecticut?***

I have actually been fascinated by Connecticut in general as a sort of middle land between metro New York and New England.

Like all borderlands, it tends to attract big personalities who have fascinated me: P.T. Barnum, Jonathan Edwards, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Adam Clayton Powell, Meg Ryan (my favorite actress) and a distant relative, Noah Webster. My family on both sides, the Websters and the Morehouses, have roots here.

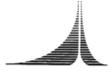
I also know that Connecticut is one of the most racially segregated states in the union.

### ***As you began to consider a move to Fairfield County, what were your beliefs about compassionate work and social change in Fairfield County? What about the role of religion?***

I was pretty sure that religion played a more significant role in Fairfield County than it did in Los Angeles, where religion is seen as another form of entertainment.

I was more concerned about social change in Fairfield County. How could one of the wealthiest counties in the country be convinced to engage in lasting social change?

I must say I have been pleasantly surprised by the work of The Unitarian Church in Westport especially around its change projects: the Beardsley School and the Mercy Learning Center, both in Bridgeport. I will look for more of those projects so that we can leverage our wealth to help those in need.



***As you settle in here and anticipate becoming installed into your new pulpit, how are your beliefs about the work needed in the wider community changing?***

As I said, I was surprised to see how involved the church already is with work needed in the wider community. I see my work here as expanding our reach in coalition with other organizations already doing this good work.

***What beliefs have been dashed with your move to Fairfield County? What beliefs are taking their place?***

Per capita, this is one of the wealthiest congregations in the Unitarian Universalist Association. I see my work within the congregation as nurturing a culture of abundance and generosity as well as lifting our spirits, our building and our work to a new level. Francis and I have consistently given away over ten percent of our income to creating justice and building community. I would like that to be our standard as a church.

***What have you discovered about the role for religion in Fairfield County?***

I have discovered that religion is more important and much more rooted in family life in Fairfield County. I have been impressed with the collegiality among different faiths towards creating a just world for our community.