

## Meet Pastor Karen Garcia

The sermon that moved Karen Garcia to become a pastor is one she wrote herself. It was a first step in her “strange and wonderful journey” to becoming a licensed local pastor.

She now serves two churches: Mercer United Methodist Church, where she is coordinating pastor, and New Sharon United Methodist, where she serves quarter time. She also works full-time as a Practice Coordinator at Maine General Medical Center’s Alford Center for Health in Augusta, ME.

So what about that sermon?

Pastor Garcia served as a Lay Speaker and as a Lay Leader. During that time, she had an ongoing ministry at a nursing home. She said she was “preparing for a service, when an old service of mine started preaching to me.” The Scripture passage, [Romans 12](#), about spiritual gifts, had been following her,” she said. “I used the word ‘haunt’ for a long time.”



“I pulled out a service I had done a year before. I tend to be a writer, and I do a lot of editing every time I review something,” Pastor Garcia said. She was headed off for a weekend away and stuffed the sermon into her bag.

“When I started reviewing it, there was not one thing I would change – after a year. It started preaching to me, and I was blown away,” she said.

After praying and thinking about it, Pastor Garcia told her pastor she might be experiencing a call to ministry. Her pastor’s response: What took you so long?

When she attended Bangor Theological Seminary in Maine, Pastor Garcia thought she would pursue ordained ministry (she earned her M.Div.), but she felt called to serve a small, rural church; many of which do not have full-time pastors.

As she went further in her education, she realized: “My place really was with a smaller church, a more rural congregation,” she said. “I believed that God was calling me to ministry, but God was not calling me to full-time church ministry.”

So she continued full-time at the hospital, where she has worked for more than 25 years. Pastor Garcia said that being bi-vocational means her ministry and her job inform and influence each other.

“It’s an advantage to have a foot in both worlds – being a representative of the church and being in a secular work environment,” she said. “People discover I work for the church, and it’s a nice conversation starter. I like to have those conversations.”

She has an administrative job at the hospital, and that enhances her ministry.

“Being in business, I have real-life experience I bring back to my congregation,” said Pastor Garcia, who said she considers herself “a practical theologian.”

“My congregations have lifted that up as a gift,” she said. “What I say is relatable and something they can bring back to their lives.”

The biggest challenge, Pastor Garcia said, is time management.

“I live a very structured life,” she said. “I’ve worked hard to allocate the right amount of time to my different loves.”

One of those loves is her family, and her home life may have helped a bit in that regard as well. She has four grown children, including two daughters who are fraternal twins. Being the mother of twins has helped her minister to her two “unique and different” churches.

Like her twins, “they have different personalities, but they need the same care and attention,” she said.

The two churches are about seven miles apart, but she lives 30 miles away from them. She said both congregations are “very independent.”

Pastor Garcia said it is the laity that helps her balance her ministry to two churches and her secular work.

“(These) folks are pretty self-sufficient,” she said. “I’m here if they need me, but I don’t have to be consulted on everything. Very strong lay leadership makes it possible for me to do what I do.”