

Mt. Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church
Biographies of nominees for election at the Congregational Meeting,
Sunday, June 21, 2020

Submitted by the Nominating Committee: Diamera Bach, Leslie Baxter (co-chair), Mary Helen Binger, Carol Fidler, Peggy Kroll, David Platt (co-chair), Wayne Reznick and Kristen Taylor

Nomination for Treasurer (One vacancy, 1-year term)

Christopher Carter. My husband Peter and I have been UUs since joining a Sacramento congregation in 1991. Highlights from my involvement in that church include serving as treasurer and chairing a ministerial search committee. We moved to Walnut Creek in late 2014 and signed the MDUUC membership book in 2015. At MDUUC, in addition to serving as treasurer, I have been a member of the Finance Committee, where I have coordinated the development of the church budget for several years. Until the pandemic, Peter and I served as greeters. I recently retired from the University of California, where I was a campus budget director at UC Davis and, most recently, served as director of the University's student financial aid program from the Oakland system wide office. Retirement has brought many opportunities, and most notably, the chance to spend consistent time with our three-year-old grandson. **(This will be his second term)**

Nominations for Board of Trustees (Five vacancies: 3 three-year terms and 2 one-year terms)

Linda Russell. When I arrived in 2008, I was attracted to many things at MDUUC - fed by the message in the pulpit, reading the UU principles, the presence of people of color, including the minister, and those from different faiths, in one place, forming community. I have witnessed courage at the border and in the streets, conviction, celebrations of life and respect for the many ways we love ourselves and others. On my UU spiritual journey, serving this community, this whole community, has been very important to me: Worship Associate and Chair, summer sermons, Winter Nights, Beloved Conversations Retreat Leader and MDUUC facilitator, Chair of the Beloved Commitments Task Force, Restorative Practices - Conversations on Death, and semi-annual co-host to a Halloween fundraiser(!) As a member of your Board, my commitment will continue – to highlight the multiple perspectives that make us UUs. I have also been incredibly impressed by the support to and within our church community during this whole era of COVID-19. I am truly aware that I am in the right place. **(This will be her second term)**

Ron Ahnen. I began attending MDUUC around 2003 when we moved here from Ohio, and our family became members in May of 2006. Since then, I have been involved at MDUUC in the religious education program teaching at several different levels, and on the racial justice committee before joining the Board of Trustees in January of 2017. I teach in the Politics Department at Saint Mary's College where I love teaching courses like the Politics of Imprisonment and Just and Unjust Wars (Just War Theory). I worked for seven years with California Prison Focus, and continue to support prison rights and

activist work. I live with my wife, Angela Canestraro, and two high school aged children (Sofia and Lucas), while another daughter (Ana) is already living on her own in Oakland. **(This will be his second term)**

Michelle Paquette. Michelle Paquette started attending services at Mt. Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church in November 2016, right after the elections that year. MDUUC immediately felt like the spiritual home she was looking for, and she became a member in January 2017. She immediately joined the Coffee Committee, and has worked on kitchen related projects, a bulletin board update, the LGBTQ and Friends Committee, and most recently has served as a Worship Associate and chaired the Worship Associate Committee. She has conducted and participated in several training sessions around LGBTQ identities and gender. Michelle has lived in the San Francisco Bay Area most of her life. She has worked in fields from nuclear power plant operations to systems software and software engineering, as both an engineer and an instructor. She holds 19 patents for inventions used by hundreds of millions of people every day. She is currently engaged in teaching and public speaking on both technical topics and social issues, particularly on topics related to gender and rights. She is a member of the Voices for Trans Equality network and a GLAAD Media Institute Alumnus. **(This will be her first term)**

Neysa Matt. My name is Neysa Matt and my pronouns are she, her, and hers. I am a Montessori teacher for grades 1-3 at the school I attended as a child. I enjoy reading books, singing songs in my car, and snuggling my beloved cat, Sheba. I have been a member of MDUUC since February of 2018. Within that time, I have been an active member of the Young Adult Group and have sung with the House Band. I was a delegate for MDUUC at General Assembly in 2019 and have recently begun serving on the Beloved Commitments Task Force. I am looking forward to joining the Board and continuing to serve the MDUUC community. **(This will be her first term for one year, serving the remainder of a three-year term held by Kathé Cairns/Aki Rasmussen)**

Davina Smith. Davina has been a member of MDUUC since December 2018. She was a delegate to the 2019 General Assembly. Davina is very active in the young adults group and has been teaching the MDUUC pre-kindergarten class for the past year. She is currently working as a chemical engineer. **(This will be her first term for one year, serving the remainder of a three-year term held by Kathy Teplitz)**

Nominations for Legacy Committee (Two vacancies: 2 three-year terms)

Suzanne Lofquist. I grew up and was active in the Episcopal faith - my church in Pasadena was very "forward" looking in outreach and serving the community. I worked with the Salvadorena community and the homeless needs. But I needed a change from the doctrine and services. After moving north I married Derek, who collected Tibetan and Asian artifacts. My interest in Buddhism led to a homestay at a Buddhist temple in Japan and a pilgrimage walk. Later this led me to the early Sunday AM Meditation group at MDUUC. I officially joined in 2015. I have participated in Community Circles,

Winter Nights, Beloved Conversations, the Women's Group, Awakening Joy, and the Book Group. Currently I chair the Spiritual Practices Committee and have led Haiku and Meditation, Living By Heart, and introduced Forest Bathing. I am part of the Adult Ed and Worship Council Committees and bi-monthly arrange altar flowers.

Professionally, I have my MS in Psychology and worked as a School Psychologist, Counselor, Teacher, and Resource Specialist. I wrote curriculum, grants and did the Accreditation Study. My passions are gardens, sailing anywhere in the world, and travel. I have a very large and very diverse family, and soon I will be a great-grandmother. I live in gratitude and seek peace - and I love to laugh. **(This will be her first term)**

Catherine Der. I have been on a journey of self-growth. Born and raised in Oakland, I am a retired special education teacher, living in Walnut Creek with my tabby, Moy Moy. I found MDUUC online and was intrigued by the sermons and presence of an Asian minister. Drawn to the spirituality of the community, I joined in 2015. I have participated in Awakening Joy, Community Circles, Beloved Conversations (currently serving on the Beloved Commitments Task Force), BC movie nights, and monthly POC gatherings. I was part of the Planning Committee for Rev. Ranwa Hammamy's ordination in 2016 and volunteer at Trinity Center and Winter Nights. Away from church, I enjoy baking, drawing pastel landscapes, and playing mahjong. **(This will be her second term after fulfilling one year of her first term*)**

Nominations for Nominating Committee (Five vacancies, 4 two-year terms and 1 one year term)

Leslie Baxter. I joined MDUUC in 1998, coming new to Unitarian Universalism from an unchurched background. I served two terms on the Board of Trustees, including two years as President and one year as Vice President. While on the Board, I served as liaison to the Personnel Committee and the LEAP Council. Prior to my Board service, I served on the Legacy Committee (2008-2012), and the Vision in Action Committee (2010), the precursor to Make it So! 2020. I live in Concord and am a real estate and business attorney, practicing in Walnut Creek. **(This will be her second term.)**

Wayne Reznick. Helen & I have been long-time members of UU congregations in the Washington, DC area. We gladly joined MDUUC in 2013 when we relocated here. I have served on MDUUC's Adult RE, Ministry and Nominating committees. Some relevant career facets: Served on boards of professional organizations, a healthcare system, and adjudication and advisory panels. Conducted policy research and consultation on cross-cultural experience, healthcare, resistance to change, discrimination in employment, and national security. Provided training and consultation on countering sexual harassment, management of problem and troubled employees, and promoting adjustment of laid-off staff. Directed psychiatric day hospital and outpatient services. Provided clinical training, supervision and consultation for clinicians, a Women's Center and rape crisis program. Designed and conducted wellness programs for government, corporations, unions and community organizations. Founded a multi-disciplinary, multi-service group practice. Obtained additional training in

management, group dynamics and organizational behavior. **(This will be his second term.)**

Mark Chase. I found MDUUC after searching for a church that was active in the community and in social justice. (I was raised Roman Catholic, but had not been practicing for the past two decades.) I felt very at home here, so I became a member in November 2017. I embarked on a UUBorders trip to Tijuana in early 2018 and this ignited a passion in me for immigration justice work. I have returned to Tijuana several times, participating and co-leading subsequent border trips to Mexico with the UU Justice Ministry of California. I have previously served on the Intern Committee. I am currently privileged to serve on the Committee on Ministry and as a Worship Associate. I work for a Bay Area city, managing our 9-1-1 Dispatch Center. I live in Oakland (shout out to 510 Nation!) with my husband Paco and a grumpy cat named Alaska. **(This will be his first term)**

Kate Newkirk. I have lived in the Bay Area for 20 years and been a member of MDUUC for nearly a decade. After retiring from public service, I obtained a Master's Degree in Organizational Development from USF. I have served on the Board of MDUUC as well as my daughter's school as it transitioned to a homeschool enrichment program. At MDUUC, I have been active over the years in the areas of Religious Education and Social Justice. As my daughter Kiona is entering high school, I have more time to devote to volunteering and look forward to being on the Nominating Committee. **(This will be her first term)**

John Dark. I began attending MDUUC with my children in 2005, became active in Religious Education, and finally signed the membership book in 2013. I began teaching Our Whole Lives in 2007 and served as the Chair of the OWL oversight committee until 2017. I have also served on the DRE Search Committee and Religious Education Development Committee. I live in Walnut Creek and work from home handling sales and marketing for a satellite communications company and a boutique record label. **(This will be his first term)**

*Note: Per the MDUUC Bylaws and at the request of the Legacy committee, the nomination schedule for the Legacy has been updated so that two nominations occur every year. In order to accommodate this change, Catherine Der, who has already served one year of a three year term, will be starting her second term. At the end of her second term in all, she will have served four years. By making this adjustment, the Legacy Committee will now have only two positions each year that will need to be filled. Please review the MDUUC Bylaws for more details.