

# **SECTION I**

## **NOMINATIONS**

BALLOT

1-5 BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF NOMINEES

**BALLOT**  
**60<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting**  
Northwest Ohio Association, UCC  
April 29, 2023

**Cabinet/Executive Position**

NWOA Moderator

(1 to be elected – 2 year term)

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. James Brehler 25

NWOA Treasurer

(1 to be elected – 2 year term)

\_\_\_\_\_ Dian Ewald 25

NWOA V. Moderator

(1 to be elected – 2 year term)

\_\_\_\_\_ Peggy George 25

**Church and Ministry Team**

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. David Plant - AV 24

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. Diane Christopherson - L 26

\_\_\_\_\_ David Weininger – SV 26

\_\_\_\_\_ Vicki Ohl – SV 26

\_\_\_\_\_ Nanette Warnecke-Flood – SV 26

**Witness and Proclamation Team**

\_\_\_\_\_ Open Position - L 26

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. Hafidha Saadiqah - SV 26

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. Karsten Snitker – SV 26

**Faith Formation Team**

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. Janice Bechtel – AV 25

\_\_\_\_\_ Tamara (Tammy) Vajen – AV 26

\_\_\_\_\_ Anthony Brookhart – AV 26

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. Mary Meadows – L 26

\_\_\_\_\_ Pastor Elyse Cramer - SV 26

**Nominating Committee**

\_\_\_\_\_ Mary Ann Ewing – AV 26

\_\_\_\_\_ Mary Powell – SV 26

**Stewardship and Caring Team**

\_\_\_\_\_ Mike Fonner - AV 26

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. Vern Swett - L 26

\_\_\_\_\_ Rev. Audra Ferguson - SV 26

Note: AV- Auglaize Valley Region, L – Lakeshore Region, SV – Sandusky Valley Region

# **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF 2023 NOMINEES**

## **NORTHWEST OHIO ASSOCIATION**

### **NWOA CABINET**

#### **NWOA MODERATOR**

**Rev. James Brehler** is the Pastor of St. John United Church of Christ in Defiance. Jim was active in multiple roles in the former WRA/EOA, including Vice-moderator, while serving First Congregational United Church of Christ in Jefferson, Ohio for five years before being called to St. John UCC in Defiance in 2015. Jim also has more than 26 years of experience working in the defense and automotive industries and served as a lay person on various committees in the Michigan Conference during that time. Jim served on the NWOA Church and Ministry Committee for six years and was Chair of the Discernment Working Group for two of those years. He has also served as Vice-moderator of the NWOA for the last two years. In addition to his church-related duties, Jim served seven years on the United Way of Defiance County Board having also served as President for three years, is serving as Membership Chair of the Defiance Lions Club, and is an On-Call Chaplain for Mercy Hospital-Defiance. He facilitates the Defiance Area Anti-Racism Network, serves on the Anti-Racism Committee at Defiance College, and participates in the Heartland Conference Anti-Racism Network. He is serving as the Vice-president of the Defiance Equality Foundation for Inclusion (DEFI), a soon to be stand-alone non-profit supporting the LGBTQA+ community and Allies in Defiance County. He has been married to his wife Laurel for 37 years and recently became a grandpa!

#### **NWOA VICE MODERATOR**

**Peggy George** is a member of Bloomville UCC. Peggy retired in 2020 from Heidelberg University after working 40 years for the Dean of Students. She moved from Bloomville to Otterbein St. Mary's Senior Living Community in July 2021. Her husband of 43 years passed away in 2018. She has three children – Eric lives in St. Mary's; Libby lives in Mokena IL; Jenney lives in Kenosha WI. Seven grandchildren complete the family. She shares her home with her cat, Cali. If you love the water, come visit and sit with her on her patio to enjoy the lake views. Peggy completed her undergraduate studies at Davis College with an Executive Secretarial degree, and at Heidelberg University with a BA in psychology and English literature. She has also completed classes in Old and New Testament studies in the Lay School of the Northwest Ohio Association. She has been involved with the Northwest Ohio Association for the last several years. Peggy volunteers as a shuttle driver on Otterbein St. Mary's campus and currently serves as Secretary on their Resident Council.

#### **NWOA TREASURER**

**Dian Ewald** - I am a member of Trinity United Church of Christ in Tiffin, Ohio. My faith journey with Trinity UCC began 49 years ago when I married my husband and joined Trinity UCC. He is third-generation member and was baptized and confirmed in Trinity UCC. We are blessed with four children who were all confirmed at Trinity UCC (two of whom were later married in Trinity UCC). We have seven grandchildren. I am retired with a background in banking where I held several positions from Teller to

Loan Assistant to Loan Operations as well as assuming executive responsibilities as needed along the way. In our church I have served on many committees to include, Altar Guild, Church and Ministry, Search Committee, Shepherd's Committee, Stewardship, Church Council and co-chaired Trinity UCC's Heritage Festival weekend of Craft, Café and Bake Sale. If there is one thing taking an active interest in these opportunities has taught me, it is this. "You gain a better understanding and develop more respect for your church (or career) by having taken interest in and by serving on committees to achieve a healthier awareness of how 'things need to work'."

## **CHURCH AND MINISTRY TEAM**

**Rev. David Plant** is recently retired from called ministry and is looking to be a part of his home church, St. John UCC in Defiance, along with his wife, Rev. Dr. Marian Plant. He is the current "past moderator" of the Conference for another few months, having completed the work of Vice Moderator and Moderator. Currently he is chairing the task force for rewriting the Conference Constitution and well as chairing the Human Resource committee of the Conference as it reorganizes. Rev. Plant has been the chair of the Stewardship and Generosity Committee of the Association as well as a past Cabinet President, having served in various roles in the Association after he and his wife, Rev. Dr. Marian Plant returned to Ohio in 2002. David will, in retirement, become an Annuitant Visitor for the UCC starting this fall, which means keeping in touch with both retired clergy and/or spouses/partners. With over half of all clergy in the UCC now being retired clergy there will be a continuing need for several Visitors in each Association to aid in "keeping in touch". He will be filling a remainder of a vacated term on Church and Ministry that will go through the Annual Meeting in 2024.

**Rev. Diane Christopherson** was ordained in 1999 by the Eastern Association of the Minnesota Conference UCC. She earned her Doctor of Ministry degree through United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in 2001 and has been a Board Certified Chaplain with the Association of Professional Chaplains since 2012. Diane has served as a campus minister at the University of MI, Ann Arbor, and Bowling Green State University and has taught courses on racial and cultural minorities at Eastern MI University. After engaging in training through the Interim Ministry Network in 2004/2005, she served as an interim minister in congregations in VT, NY, RI, TX, CA and OH. In addition, she has worked in hospital, hospice, and long-term care facilities as a chaplain. Diane served for six years on the Wider Church Ministries Board, on the Executive Council, on a Governance Team focused on restructuring in the national setting of the UCC, and as a Global Ministries Pilgrimage leader of mission/service trips, especially for youth and young adults, in other countries. Diane has attended the World Council of Churches Assemblies since 1998 and Parliament of the World's Religions gatherings since 2015. She currently serves on the Fitness Review/Response Team with the Heartland Conference UCC and on the diaconate and health ministries board of Sylvania UCC where she holds church membership.

**David Weininger** is a member of Trinity United Church of Christ in McCutchenville. He was baptized in the Evangelical and Reformed Church of McCutchenville which became part of the United Church of Christ in 1957. He is an elder of Trinity, McCutchenville and is currently President of the Congregation. He served previously as a member of the Church and Ministry Committee when Rev. Dr. Roger Perl was the Northwest Ohio Association Minister, and most recently he is filling a vacated, unexpired term on the Church and Ministry Committee. As a member of the Church and Ministry Committee, he also

serves on the Discernment Committee. He was privileged to have attended the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> General Synods in Norfolk, Virginia and St. Louis, Missouri as a delegate of the Ohio Conference. He spent his professional career as an educator. He retired from Heidelberg University in 2015 after 30 years of service to that institution with the rank of Emeritus Provost and Professor of Mathematics. He and his wife, Lynda, celebrated their 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary in October 2022

**Vicki Ohl** spent her career at Heidelberg University, where she taught piano and music theory for 35 years before moving to college administration. She retired as Assoc. Vice Pres. for Academic Affairs in 2019. She now serves as chair of Berg Bravo: Friends of Heidelberg Music and Theatre; plays in a quartet with three other pianists; and directs the church choir at Trinity UCC in Tiffin.

**Nanette Warnecke-Flood** is a member of Sycamore U.C.C. where she has served on consistory, led VBS, and been part the Mission and Search Committees, as well as involved in a number of other committees and volunteer projects. She holds a Bachelor's Degree of Social Work and a Master of Public Administration Degree from Bowling Green State University, as well as a Master of Arts Degree in Counseling from Heidelberg University. She recently retired from state service with Opportunity for Ohioans with Disabilities where she worked for 18 years as a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and 19 years as a Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor. Nanette lives in Sycamore with her husband, Sam. She has a daughter, Rachael and two stepchildren, Tony and Angie.

## **FAITH FORMATION TEAM**

**Rev. Janice Bechtel** served as Chaplain and Director of Church Relations at Defiance College for 30 years until 2016, when she retired and was named Chaplain Emerita. Currently, she is Curator of Exhibits at the Andrew L. Tuttle Memorial Museum, a local history museum in Defiance. She has served on several teams in NWOA, and is finishing another term as General Synod delegate. She is a member of St. John UCC in Defiance.

**Tamara (Tammy) Vajen** - The roots of my family run deep at St. John's UCC in Holgate, back to its origins in the late 1800's. Born and baptized at St John's and except for my childhood years away, I returned and rejoined the church the week after my marriage to Kevin, my husband of 40 years. Together we have three adult children and four grandchildren. During those years my husband and I owned and managed apartments, storage facilities, vacation rentals, did construction, remodeling, and farming three of our family's homesteads, which has been a privilege and honor. With that experience we have been able to be a part of the hands and feet of many physical projects at St. John's. Recently retired from most of those ventures, I currently work as an administrative assistant and gal about the farm for New Vision Farms, so I still have that connection with the earth. I have been able to serve our church in many capacities through the years, such as Sunday School teacher, Youth advisor, VBS Coordinator, Music and Worship Team, Deacon, Elder, and soon to be graduate of the Lay School of Religion.

**Anthony Brookhart** Greetings & God's richest blessings to you! I am Anthony Brookhart. I live with Tyler, my Husband of three years, in Wapakoneta Ohio; where I am also a second generation bakery owner. We have a one cat, one dog, and are in the process of growing our family and becoming foster parents. We are proud members of St. Paul UCC here in Wapakoneta where we were married three years ago. I am a current member of church council. I was excited to be chosen as a delegate for the General Synod in Baltimore. Recently, I've played a role as one of the creators of our churches new AV department. Through Covid, I have been the one to record, edit, and post the prerecorded Sunday worship services for St. Paul Wapak, and Buckland UCC. That has now evolved into purchasing new equipment so that St. Paul can now, as we return to in person services, livestream our services to those still at home. During the heat of Covid's stay-at-home orders, I was blessed to oversee a weekly meal that went out to our home bound members as well as anyone who needed it, serving over 80 hot chef prepared meals every Tuesday night March-May. I am involved in many things in our community. Including: The Wapakoneta Sister Cities Association, the Wapakoneta Downtown Partnership, and the Alzheimer's Association where I am a national ambassador for our congressional district, and chairman for our annual event, "The Longest Day in Wapakoneta". I look forward to further involvement with the UCC locally, as well as state and nationwide as I discern a call to ordained ministry, after having found such a loving, welcoming, and affirming home with the United Church of Christ.

**Rev. Mary Meadows** serves as the Minister of Faith Formation at Sylvania United Church of Christ. She has experience with faith formation at all stages of development, from toddlers to adults. She has served this past year on the Faith Formation Ministry Team of the Association, and currently serves on the Faith Formation Working Group of the Heartland Conference. She lives in Toledo, OH, is a graduate of Duke Divinity School, and is an ordained American Baptist Minister.

**Pastor Elyse Cramer** is a Member in Discernment with the NWOA and serves as Pastor at Trinity United Church of Christ, McCutchenville.

## **STEWARDSHIP AND CARING MINISTRY TEAM**

**Mike Fonner** I am a member of Buckland UCC. I retired after many years in the IT industry. I have two children and five grandchildren. While attending Buckland I have served many positions. Currently I serve as Moderator, Elder, co-Choir Director and Sunday school teacher. I also serve the NWOA on the Stewardship and Generosity Ministry Team. Of all the positions I have held, I've found all fulfilling and a blessing, but music I am most excited by. I am looking forward to getting back in a go kart and racing with my son and two grandsons.

**Rev. Dr. Vern Swett** is senior pastor at Sylvania United Church of Christ. He was called to Sylvania in 2020, right at the beginning of the Covid pandemic! Vern comes to Northwest Ohio after serving churches in Massachusetts, Florida, and Connecticut. He grew up active in the Connecticut Conference, UCC, Youth Fellowship, which is where he experienced the call to ministry. A third generation PK, he likes to say, "My grandfather was Southern Baptist, I went to a Catholic high school and my wife is Jewish...the United Church of Christ is the denomination for me!" Vern earned his M.Div at Harvard Divinity School and his D.Min in Preaching at Chicago Theological Seminary. May 8<sup>th</sup> is the 35th anniversary of his ordination.

**Rev. Audra Ferguson** - Originally from Pennsylvania, I've been a pastor for 12 years and St. John's of Tiffin is my third call. I enjoy brainstorming with my Mission & Outreach team on new ways to raise money to benefit various efforts and community projects. I look forward to working with Stewardship and Generosity Ministry Team.

## **WITNESS AND PROCLAMATION TEAM**

**Rev. Hafidha Saadiqah** currently the Pastor of First UCC - Marion, in Marion, Ohio. A native Ohioan, she was born and raised in Cleveland. She is a graduate of Capital University (Columbus) and Princeton Theological Seminary (New Jersey). Pastor Hafidha began her ministry in the Presbyterian Church (USA) and served congregations in Ohio and Missouri. She remains affiliated with the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, having served congregations in Oberlin, OH and Troy, Michigan. Pastor Hafidha has served on the board of several organizations, including Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice (in Ohio and Missouri). She also is a regular volunteer at women's homelessness shelters. Her hobbies include fountain pen repair, origami, and storytelling. Pastor Hafidha is married to Pastor Edwin Heilman of Park Church United Church of Christ in Toledo. Together they have 5 adult children, and two cats.

**Rev. Karsten Snitker** has served Trinity UCC in Tiffin, Ohio since May 2022. He is passionate about Creation Justice, how the arts can support the ministry of the church, and how the church can be a helpful influence on wider community life. He is a musician, enjoys gardening, and is a budding potter. He lives in Tiffin with his spouse Katie Snitker.

## **NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

**Mary Ann Ewing** I am a life-time member of Buckland UCC. I am happily married to Lynn for 54 years. We have 2 grown sons, 4 grandsons, and a brand new great-grandson. I have just completed 6 years on the Church and Ministry Team for NWOA, and I am on the Disaster Response Team for Heartland Conference. I am in the church choir, Co-Chair of the Women's Fellowship and a Church Elder.

**Mary Powell** - I live in Republic, Ohio and I am a member of St. John's UCC, Tiffin. I am currently the church treasurer, I also serve on the Mission and Outreach team, teach Sunday School and I chair the Bereavement Committee. I am a past Moderator and Treasurer of the Northwest Ohio Association, and also was the bookkeeper there for 10 years. I have two daughters Nicci Avalon (Tom), Medina, OH and Natalie (Rob), Dublin, OH. Two grandsons and two granddaughters and 4 grand-dogs.