

2022 Board of Trustee Nominees

Vonna Heaton



River Road UU Congregation, Bethesda, MD
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Vonna Heaton is a passionate and lifelong student and practitioner of Unitarian Universalist principles. She became a Unitarian Universalist and joined RRUUC in 2013 and proceeded to put her energy and passion to use by serving with several groups, including the Racial Justice Task Force, Action in Montgomery core team, Welcome Team and Social Justice Review and Ministry Teams. She has also been nurtured by many small group fellowships, among them Beloved Conversations, Spirit Journey, Inquirers, and her Women's Groups, and then, of course there is the magical burst of energy and grace exerted in the community towards the Annual Bazaar.

Prior to joining the ranks of the fully joyfully retired persons, Vonna's first career was as a math teacher and then 34 years as a federal employee where she earned many distinctions, including the National Intelligence Superior Service Medal and the Presidential Meritorious Rank Award. She is most proud of her Agency-level employee nominated Mentor of the Year and Supervisor of the Year Awards. Vonna and her husband Ed live just west of Rockville, Md. Her life has been graced by the love of family, including her identical twin sister Valri, and is the proud aunt to four nieces (daughters of that twin sister) whose lives she engages in on a regular and symbiotically supportive basis. She and Ed are also parents to Ed's daughter Sarah and son Tony and Tony's daughter, Autumn Moon.

Meleah Houseknecht



First Universalist Church of Minneapolis, MN
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Meleah Houseknecht (she/her/hers) is the founder and owner of Emergence Consulting, which provides added capacity to nonprofit clients through organizational development, project strategy and management, meeting and event design, facilitation, and coaching on inclusive stakeholder engagement to advance more just and resilient environmental policy, planning, and decision-making. Most recently, she served as the director of policy and systems change for Environmental Initiative, where for nine years she lead the

organization's work to engage diverse stakeholder perspectives on behalf of state and local government and to build capacity in the environmental field to collaboratively address systemic and complex environmental problems through the lens of racial, cultural, and social equity.

Meleah holds a master's degree in environmental management from the Yale School of the Environmental and has nearly 20 years of experience engaging stakeholders in environmental policy development and implementation. In 2021 she also began the journey of following her call to Unitarian Universalist ministry and is currently a student at United Theological Seminary in Unitarian Universalist studies and social transformation. She originally hails from West Virginia but has happily settled in South Minneapolis where she enjoys walking and biking to local restaurants, coffee shops, and extraordinary parks, sometimes with her spouse and two young children and sometimes blissfully alone. When not consulting, reading radical theology, or parenting, Meleah looks for ways to support neighbors and members of her own congregation in expressing their values through social justice action as co-chair of the Faithful Action Council at First Universalist Church of Minneapolis.

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Rev. Kristin Schmidt



UU Church of Silver Spring, MD
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I grew up in Silver Spring, Maryland, and attended Cedar Lane UU Church with my parents where I sang in the choir. I earned my Bachelor of Arts in music from McDaniel College in Westminster, Maryland in 2004 after which I spent 6 months working in England where I heard the call to ministry. I then served Cedar Lane as Membership Coordinator while I earned my Master of Divinity from Wesley Theological Seminary, graduating in 2010. I met my husband while doing my internship at the Bay Area UU Church in Houston, Texas. Since we married I've served congregations in Massachusetts, New Jersey, California, and now the UU Church of Silver Spring back in Maryland. I live with my husband, four boys, dog, and cat in Olney, Maryland. In addition to ministry, I enjoy baking, singing, reading, hiking, and all things Star Trek.

Leon D. Winston



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I retired in 2020 from my role as Chief Operating Officer and Housing Director of Swords to Plowshares in San Francisco, CA where I worked on the housing, treatment, and income support needs of homeless and at-risk veterans for 25 years. Referred there by the SF VA Medical Center, I came to Swords as a homeless client in 1993 and graduated from its transitional housing program prior to coming to work for the organization in 1995. During my tenure, the agency grew in size from two dozen employees and a budget of about \$2MM in 1995 to over well over 200 employees and a budget in excess of \$30MM by the time that I retired.

While with Swords to Plowshares, I became involved as agency lead in the creation of multiple permanent supportive and deeply affordable housing projects, including specialized projects for homeless and disabled senior veterans and the chronically homeless, totaling nearly 600 units. I have been appointed to or otherwise served on multiple policy and advisory boards or committees: as co-chair of San Francisco's Continuum of Care board; upon multiple local and state policy academies dealing with homelessness; the SF Alcoholism and Drug Abuse advisory boards, and national bodies such as the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans and the VA Secretary's Advisory Committee on Homeless Veterans. I possess Master of Nonprofit Administration / Organizational Development and Bachelor of Public Administration degrees from the University of San Francisco, and certification in Alcohol and Drug Abuse Studies from the University of California at Berkeley. My husband Michael Morford, MD, and I moved to Santa Fe NM following our retirement in mid-2020, where we are in the last phases of building our home and are active members of the local UU congregation.