

Ken Clein



To be able to hold the care of the entire congregation in your heart.

These were the words our former transitional minister, David Keys shared with the Leadership Development Team, when asked about the qualifications for Board of Trustees candidates. I believe this qualification - to try and discern what is best for the Congregation, rather than a particular group or constituency - is vitally important to a successful search committee.

Everything we do is Ministry.

This was the lesson I was privileged to learn from our former senior minister the Rev. Gail Geisenhainer. The way we treat each other is a form of ministry and embodies our covenant with each other.

Current Service: Rev. Lindasusan's Ministerial Advisory and Support Team * Bass singer in the Chalice Singers * Designing Men's Retreat t-shirt

Past Service: Board of Trustees President & Vice President * Food Gatherer's Farm Project Volunteer * Annual Budget Campaign Canvasser * Leadership Development Team (LDT) Co-leader * Small Group Ministry (Chalice Circles) Pilot Team * Religious Education (SGD) Wing Architectural Design Committee * SGD Teacher: Grades 1-6 * Member since 1998

I'm honored to be considered for the ministerial search committee and look forward to serving with the other candidates, if selected.

Mike Halerz



I've attended UUAA for about 15 years - it was, admittedly, a somewhat reluctant re-introduction to religion for me but I was initially drawn in by the services, the youth, the people, and that fact that my wife, Allison, dragged me here. I got involved in the 20s/30s group, started establishing deep friendships, and enjoyed attending as frequently as my schedule allowed. Our senior minister retired, there were several years of interim, and we called a new senior minister.

Then for me, things really started to change. Allison was hired as the pianist-in-residence, I recorded the Chalice Singers' first CD, I started doing more things behind-the-scenes, I helped with an upgrade to the audio system and running sound on Sundays. I occasionally had weeks where I was at church more days than Allison. We had a child.

Along the way, my reluctance has transformed into outright celebration for what we have and what we can be as a congregation. With our recent 150th anniversary, I was struck by what those that came before us have built. And that we are now the ones that shape the next 150 years of this congregation. For ourselves, for my child, for his grandchildren, and for yours.

A dear friend that was on our last search committee told me that if I was ever presented with this opportunity, I should jump at the chance. So, I hope that my ability to listen deeply to others, to consider the needs and perspectives of those who are both like and unlike me, and my complete lack of ability to do anything halfway will serve us well if I am chosen.

Kate Hutchens



Up front, I want to express a deep respect and abiding love for Rev. Gail. I believe that her presence in our pulpit and among our leadership significantly shaped not just my experience of church, but how I live in the world every day. I share this both to own the bias and admit it's not a universally held opinion, and also to assert my sense of the weight and potential lasting impacts of the work this search committee will undertake.

I also have a deep respect and abiding love for this congregation, clergy entirely aside. I was actually drawn in to UUAA during the previous interim period, and not by any particular voice, but by encounters with you good folks endeavoring to live in service of love and asking me to dig in with you.

Since joining in 2008, my UUAA resume includes: usher, Chalice Singer, handbell player, Library Team leader (~5 years), Alpha House regular volunteer, summer SGD teacher, 7th grade teacher, Coming-of-Age mentor, YRUU advisor (3.5 years), SGD parent (does that count?), and Climate Action group leader.

I am a committed "process person," listener, and synthesizer, and I am confident in my ability to hear and advocate for the needs of the community. I take seriously the task of reckoning our opportunities and challenges so we can honestly and proudly represent our congregation to candidates. I am grateful to be considered for this role, and would be humbly honored to serve with all of the dedicated badassess on this slate.

Vilma Mesa



I joined the congregation in 2001. I grew up in Bogotá Colombia. I am married to Pat Herbst and we have two children, Ana Sofia and Bruno. I have been involved in one thing or another since we started coming: In the nursery (when it was in what is the kitchen now), with all the pre-school to 5th grade classes, the Visitors' Welcome, the nominating committee, the leadership development team, and the "celebration Sundays." Currently I serve in Rev. Cassandra Hartley's Ministerial Advisory and Support Team, as a Soprano 2 in the Chalice Singers and as the liaison between parents, teachers, and mentors for the

Coming of Age program.

I grew up Catholic in Bogotá Colombia and, even though I was quite active volunteering in orphanages, hospices, and under-resourced neighborhoods, I was not religious, and slowly drifted from Catholicism. The wakeup call came in the form of a mother's friend who had become a bit fanatic. We realized we needed a place where we could be, my husband a 'recovering agnostic, discovering his Jewish background, me disenchanted with Catholicism as lived in the US, and my children without any religious teaching. In Unitarian Universalism as lived here in this Ann Arbor congregation we found the space to explore, question, and grow our values and our sense of belonging to a cause that goes beyond ourselves. I see myself as a Unitarian Universalist with humanist-Judeo-pagan-with-a little bit of-Christian hues.

It was with awe and humbleness that I received the invitation to serve in the ministerial search for our next growth phase and I agreed to be on the slate with a tremendous sense of responsibility and excitement about what lies ahead. I pledge to listen, ask questions, seek to discern and understand the options that we will have, and to represent our hopes for the future, and to do what I am asked to do. Thank you so much for this opportunity. Just being on the slate along these wonderful congregants fills me with gratitude and joy.

Ginny Preuss



I have been a member of UUAA for 22 years, and it has had a significant impact on my life. I have become a better person through the sermons, engagement in church programs, and through the relationships I have built. I was changed by the leadership and sermons of Ken Phifer, and then in a very different way by Gail Geisenhainer. In addition to supporting me

personally, the UUAA strengthened my family and helped my children become thoughtful and caring adults.

I started attending UUAA in 1994, when my oldest child was about 1 year old. I was seeking a religious community for my family, which aligned with my values. During my first 8 years with the congregation, I volunteered in the RE program. It was a great way to learn about Unitarian Universalism, contribute to the community, and spend more time with my children on the weekends. We lived abroad for a couple years after that, and were a part of a very small Unitarian Church in England during that time.

When I returned and my children were entering middle school, I shifted my service from RE, to other programs. In 2008, I joined the UUAA Board of Trustees, as board secretary, and served for 4 years. These were also the first years of Gail Geisenhainer's ministry. This was an incredible time of learning for me, as Gail and the board worked through many changes in our congregation. I learned how a large church operates, the challenges we face, and how to work through them in a way that strengthens the religious community.

Following my time on the board, I joined the Chalice Circle Steering team as co-chair. That year I also became a facilitator and started a Chalice Circle in Plymouth. I have been on the Chalice Circle steering team ever since, contributing in many roles. The skills I learned in Chalice Circles have helped me in many areas of my life, and I see the program as a gift I like to share with others.

Over the years I have also participated and contributed in other ways such as a Coming of Age mentor, social justice programs, adult learning, YRUU support, reflective conversations committee and facilitator, and led the 2015 operating campaign. In all of these endeavors, I have found that by serving, I help the congregation deliver its mission, while building relationships and growing personally.

I believe that through my experiences at UUAA, I have a good understanding of how to work with our community to identify what is important to us now in a senior minister. In addition to my experiences at church, I have worked full time in a large organization, where I have had to rely on leadership qualities of listening, patience, strategy development, planning and organizing, in order to be successful. I understand personally the impact a senior minister can have on the congregation and individuals in it. I would love to be a part of the committee that finds the right person to lead us through the next phase of our journey as a congregation.

Tom Reischl



I have been an active member of the UUAA since 2002. Over the past 15 years, I served on the Annual Stewardship Committee for 3 years (2006-08), the Board of Trustees for nearly 4 years (2010-13), the Men's Fellowship Council for 5 years (2011-13; 2016-17), and the Leadership Development

Team for 2 years (2015-2017). I have also participated in Adult SGD classes and served as a Coming-of-Age program mentor. Since joining the congregation, my most consistent involvement has been in the Men's Fellowship activities, including Men's Circles, retreats, dinners, and service projects.

Members of my family have also been active in various UUAA activities. My wife (Cathy Reischl) and I attend Sunday services regularly. She is active in a Women's Circle and served on the Renewable Energy Committee that raised funds and installed our solar panels and wind turbine. Our children (Hannah & Charlie) attended SGD classes, completed the Coming-of-Age program, and participated in YRUU. Through our involvement in these activities, I have had many opportunities to build stronger connections with other congregants, to learn about my own and others' spiritual journeys, and to deliberate on the core values and the developing capacity of our congregation.

My personal spiritual journey has taken a few interesting turns. I was raised and confirmed as a Catholic, attended a small Lutheran liberal arts college, and, as an adult, joined two Protestant churches (Presbyterian, United Church of Christ) before coming to the UUAA. My beliefs have been influenced by studying philosophy, theology, psychology and other social sciences in college and in graduate school. My career as a college professor and social scientist has shaped my appreciation of the diversity of human experience and my perspectives on political and social justice issues. The UUAA has been both a comforting and challenging spiritual space for me, but I believe that's a good thing. I expect there are more interesting turns ahead for me.

I have never served on a minister search committee before. So I am both excited and a little intimidated by the task. I anticipate this committee will need to bring their best listening skills to bear and to learn how to discern and decide together. I believe the committee members will need to trust each other and the available supportive resources from the UUA and our congregation. If I am selected to serve, I would pledge my best effort to help the committee build that trust and mobilize that support to conduct a successful search.

Leigh Robertson



I am Leigh Robertson and I've been a Unitarian Universalist since 1999. I joined the UUAA congregation in 2005, right after Reverend Ken Phifer retired. It was an adjustment coming into a larger church community but I found a spiritual home. During my 12 years here, I have been actively involved in Interweave, Sharing Collections, the Strategic Planning

committee, Coming of Age, YRUU, Congregation retreats, and most recently, the Newcomers Welcome.

I bring experience to this role, because I was on the ministerial search committee in my UU congregation in Kalamazoo. I think my experience helps me understand the unique UU search process in this specific job description. We called our first settled minister and it felt similarly to my feelings when Rev Gail was called here: JOY. Now that I have been a part of this congregation for 12 years, I know “us” fairly well. I will work democratically, looking through a social justice lens, to search for a minister who is a good fit for our congregation. It would be an honor and a privilege to serve on the search committee alongside any of the candidates.

Sandy Simon



I am very honored to be included alongside some incredibly awesome UUAA members nominated to serve on the Senior Minister Search Committee. The Superpower I feel I could bring to that committee is the ability to Listen well. For most of my professional life I worked as a software engineering analyst, which meant spending a lot of time listening to software customers and software managers, then translating their visions into specific requirements for new products. During my 35 years as a member of UUAA I have taken part in a wide range of activities, from teaching R.E. (as it was called then) to working with Habitat for Humanity, to serving twice on the Board. Over the years, I have been fortunate to have some very rich experiences on projects that required a lot of Listening and learning. I chaired the 2005-06 Appreciative Inquiry “Sankofa Squad” that interviewed almost everyone in the congregation about their proud moments with and hopeful visions for the Congregation. That work was used in many good ways and led to the creation of the UUAA Core Values. I served on both the 2011 and 2016 UUAA strategic planning teams, gathering vision from UUAA leaders to distill into strategic goals. In co-chairing the 150th Anniversary celebrations in 2014-15, I listened to a lot of this congregation’s history and gained a much deeper appreciation for the hopes this congregation held through the different periods of its history, and the ways UUAA has made a difference. While I can offer the search committee some helpful organizational and techy skills, I feel that Listening skills are key -- hearing the congregation’s wishes and translating them into a successful calling of our 13th settled Senior Minister. I would find the experience an honor, a challenge and yet another great opportunity to work with and learn from good people.

Rick Witten



Being an Ann Arbor “townie”, my earliest experience with First UU of A2 was in 1984 when my friends were married by a young Reverend Phifer. Flashing forward 15 years, my wife, Bobbi Coluni, and I began attending in 1998, and we were married by Ken in the new church in July of 1999. (It’s a matter of some pride that we were the first couple married in our new sanctuary!)

In the years since I have been involved with UUAA in three primary ways: teaching and facilitating youth programs, participating in the men’s activities, and our choirs.

My first volunteer role was as a 7th-8th grade teacher — in the old portables. The following year Bobbi and I received OWL training and have taught OWL several times over the years. I was a teacher for the Neighboring Faiths curriculum when my daughter, Ellie, was in 6th grade. I served two terms on what was then the RE Committee, including a year as Chairman, during the transition period after Reverend Phifer’s retirement. I’ve served as a mentor in the Coming of Age program 7 times, counting this year, and was a facilitator for two years when CoA transitioned from an 8th grade add-on program to the 9th grade curriculum.

I attended the first Men’s Retreat in 1999 and have attended every year since. I’ve served on the retreat planning committee several times, including this year, in addition to various roles at the retreats. I’ve enjoyed attending the Men’s dinners and hope to serve on the Men’s Council in the near future. Our Men’s programs are a vibrant part of our congregation and serve as a model for other UU churches around the country.

This is my fifth year as a member of the Chalice Singers. I feel fortunate to be involved in a choir that strives for excellence, and often achieves it. This year I am stepping down from the role of Coordinator of the Chalice Sparks program after a five year run. I’m proud to have played a part in restarting and growing our Chalice Sparks program, with my greatest contribution being recruiting Brianne Boyd to be their Director.

This sounds like a list of ways I’ve contributed to our congregation, but in reality it’s an overview of experiences that have helped me to grow, ways I’ve formed connections within our community, and memories that I will always cherish. Joining UUAA has added depth to my life and pushed my boundaries in ways I could not have anticipated, and for that I’m deeply grateful.

It is humbling to be on the slate with people I hold in such high regard. If I’m so honored as to be selected for the search committee I will approach the role with seriousness and humility. I will reach out to the congregation to hear your hopes and concerns, and use that knowledge in every step of the search process. The next called minister will shape our congregational experience for a decade or more. By drawing on my experiences and history here, I feel I can contribute to making a selection that will lead us forward.

