

The Nominating Committee is pleased to report that the following ERUUF members have agreed to be placed on a ballot for elected positions of the Fellowship. Read more about the candidates below.

Candidates for Board of Trustees



Nicholas Yates

My wife Nicky and I moved to the area in 2006. After multiple unsuccessful searches to find our spiritual home, we came across ERUUF in 2017, and we have been attending ever since. As a family, we felt instantly welcomed and enjoyed all the opportunities to get involved in the fellowship. I started my service in this fellowship as a member of the Religious Education Team. Currently, I am the Co-Chair of the Membership Team and enjoy facilitating ERUUF's Inquirer's Classes and would be honored to serve as a member of the Board of Trustees. Our children have benefitted from the programs ERUUF has to offer. Violet (14) our oldest daughter and our youngest daughter Genevieve (10) have had the wonderful opportunity to participate in the ERUUF Our Whole Life's (OWL) class and have been regulars in Religious Education (RE) classes. Professionally I have been a licensed North Carolina attorney since 2003 and am currently the Senior Assistant Town Attorney for Cary. My legal career has primarily been in public service. Public service extends into my personal life. I've coached both my daughter's recreational soccer teams for years, served as the Treasurer for my daughter's elementary school PTA for two years, and am currently the Business Alliance Officer, and serve as President of my neighborhood's HOA. With such growth in the Triangle, I look forward to watching ERUUF's message reach a larger audience, and the excitement of the future members and families finding a HOME at ERUUF.



Trisha Lester

I came to ERUUF in 2018 looking for a spiritual home and became a member in the spring of 2019. I immediately got involved in a Chalice Circle in which I'm still active. I immersed myself in numerous racial justice offerings during 2020 that were transformational. For the last year, I've been part of the Generosity Sunday Committee and baked cookies for Urban Ministries' Community Café. I've also been active with the Refugee and Immigrant Action Group on behalf of a young family who resettled to Durham from Afghanistan last year.

I've lived in Chapel Hill for 30 years -- most of that time with my late husband Jerry Oster until he passed away in 2020. I was born in our nation's capital but grew up living abroad, mostly in Latin America because my father worked with the US Agency for International Development. It

was an extraordinary experience, and it gave me both an appreciation and respect for other cultures and a love of travel.

I graduated from the University of Maryland with a BA in modern dance and danced semi-professionally with the Roz Glatter Dance Company before moving to New York to study at the Erick Hawkins studio. I got my masters in Nonprofit Management from the New School and worked in a few different educational and arts nonprofits in NYC and NJ.

I had the good fortune of working for 26 years at the North Carolina Center for Nonprofits, a statewide nonprofit which works with board and staff members of 501(c)(3) nonprofits. I served as Acting President when our longtime founder and CEO retired and the board was hiring her successor. I left as Senior Vice President in 2018 because of chronic health issues. I am now retired and am enjoying being able to do different things and on the timeline of my choosing!



Mel Downey-Piper

Mel Downey-Piper is a lifelong UU from Milwaukee, WI who has been attending ERUUF for 13 years. She has been involved over the years with Rev. Brett's Student Ministry Lay Committee, teaching RE and adult OWL, singing in the Beloved Community Chorus, organizing Parent Group camping trips, and selecting organizations to fund through Generosity Committee.

Professionally, Mel is the Vice-President of Health Strategies in the American Heart Association's Triangle market. In this role, she works with community and corporate partners to address health priorities through an equity lens with a focus on policy, system, and environmental changes. Prior to this she was the Health Education Director at the Durham County Department of Public Health. Mel serves on the Board of Directors for TreesDurham and is passionate about the impact of policies, such as redlining, which have impacted tree coverage and ultimately health outcomes in Durham. She is also a certified True Colors facilitator and has received training in several facilitation methods including consensus workshops, focused conversations, and strategic planning.

Mel has two children, Logan (12) and Dylan (10) and a Basenji pooch, Mrs. Boozle. She loves being outdoors and is often stand-up paddle boarding with Mrs. Boozle, camping, hiking, running, cycling, disc golfing, and pickle balling. ERUUF is a spiritual home and has provided a place to reflect, connect and embody the values of being a UU through direct action.



Heather Ladd

I first found ERUUF in 2015. I had just moved here and was looking for a knitting group to join. I found Clicking for a Cause. I didn't know it at the time, but I also found my spiritual home. I became a member in 2017 after getting involved in multiple aspects of ERUUF's justice work.

I am currently involved in ERUUF's Justice Ministry on both the Steering Committee as the Planning Coordinator and as a member of the Durham CAN Action Team. Newer members may have met me through the Inquirers series. I regularly facilitate the Justice Ministry segment. I am still a member of Clicking for a Cause. I am currently serving in the final year of my term on the Nominating Committee as a co-chair.

Outside of ERUUF I have been a member of Durham CAN's Affordable Housing Team, serving as a co-chair for 2 years, and a member of Bike Durham.

I work as a Statistician doing health services research in my professional life. I enjoy walking with my dogs, Fido and Mack, spending time with my spouse, Steve, studying martial arts, gardening, and knitting or crocheting. I'm looking forward to serving ERUUF as a Board Member during this exciting time.

Candidates Healthy Congregations Committee



Ellen Fenster-Kuehl

Following my daughters, I moved to North Carolina from New Jersey in 2019, joining ERUUF that October with just enough pre-pandemic time to meet members, make a few friends, and join the Pastoral Care Team. My older daughter Rachel, a North Carolinian since college, is a reference librarian in Goldsboro. My younger daughter, Gwen, a biochemist with Pfizer, moved to Durham in 2017.

In NJ, I was a member of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Montclair, serving as Board trustee for three years during a robust two-year transition; a leader of our participation in Montclair's Emergency Services for the Homeless, a consortium of faith congregations providing evening meals; a facilitator of Harvest the Power, our leadership development program; a member of the Undoing Racism Committee, an occasional usher, and happy participant in auctions and other social activities. I believe in the transformational nature of our relationships within UU congregations, informed by our UU principles.

For eighteen years, I worked in various positions for the Social Security Administration, meeting people whose situations were very different from my own and learning the great value of pro-social government programs. I then returned to school and earned a PH.D. in clinical psychology, working for SUNY in New York City and the University of Medicine and Dentistry in Newark, NJ, and developing a private practice that included forensic work on behalf of learning-disabled children and their families. I retired in 2019.

I love to walk in the woods, am a compulsive reader of both fiction and non-fiction, and am using my pandemic time to regain some proficiency in French.

Candidates for Nominating Committee



Mary Evers

I first came to ERUUF late in 2018 and immediately knew that I had found a community and a spiritual home. I joined ERUUF in the Spring of 2019 as part of that remarkably large group of new members. Standing down front holding my rose and being welcomed by the congregation along with so many others who also had decided to make ERUUF their home was a truly memorable experience. Although COVID came just a year later and made it more difficult for all of us, ERUUF has remained a source of comfort for me. I am most grateful for everyone who made it possible for us to so quickly and constantly be able to have Zoom services and Zoom meetings. All of that made it possible for me to be involved at ERUUF as a Chalice Circle Co-leader, a member of PRIDE+, and a card writer for Care Ministries. I am thrilled to be nominated to serve on the Nominations Committee and to have the opportunity to be more involved.

On a more personal note, I have lived in Durham for 30+ years and have watched it grow into the amazing city that it is now. I am a Pediatric Psychologist and had a practice in Durham for 28 years. More recently I started working with more disadvantaged children, first at Lincoln Community Health Center on a part-time basis. I went on to work full-time with another Community Health Center and worked with disadvantaged children along the NC/VA border for 5 years. This experience taught me a great deal about poverty and systemic racism. I am back in private practice now, but I look forward to continuing my social justice work with ERUUF. When I am not busy with work, I can generally be found playing tennis or pickleball, enjoying time with my friends, or hanging out with my dog.



Page Potter

I am a North Carolina native who spent my early years mostly in Virginia, returning to NC in 1965 when my family moved to Winston-Salem. I studied music and German in Vienna, Austria eventually receiving a degree from the University of Vienna and returning to North Carolina for law school in 1978. I have lived in Durham since 1983. Happily, two of my three younger sisters and their husbands still live in North Carolina; my youngest sister, and all my six nieces and nephews, are scattered from New Hampshire to Texas.

I was raised in the Episcopal church, but like many, stopped attending services after my teens. In 2000 I found myself at a crossroads in my personal and professional life. I visited ERUUF at the invitation of friends and immediately felt I had found what I had not known I needed: a spiritual tradition and community that valued reason and eschewed dogma; that puts its faith in the individual and in the sacred promises we make to one another in our covenantal communities; that makes room for differences, for doubt, for wonder, and for mystery. Within months of attending my first service, I signed the book.

My roles at ERUUF include sermon transcriber (in the days before recordings were available online!), Greeter, adult RE participant, Music Committee and choir member, Café ERUUF attendee and performer. With other ERUUFians, I have attended HKONJ and Moral Monday marches and Black Lives Matter demonstrations. Covenant Groups and chalice circles have been an important part of my life at ERUUF since the beginning.

Most of my professional life has been in legal education. After law school and a brief stint in private law practice, I taught at both Wake and Durham Technical Community College and directed Meredith College's paralegal program for 13 years. I retired from full-time work in 2017 after 15 years as director of pro bono and public service programs at North Carolina Central University School of Law.

I enjoy spending time hiking, backpacking, bird watching, gardening with native plants; exercising at the YMCA; reading and attending classical and bluegrass music concerts. I am an active volunteer with groups focusing on climate, voter engagement, and the low-wealth community in Durham.



Laura Phoenix

A chance encounter and intuition brought me to ERUUF during a personal crisis in 2017. I wasn't looking for a spiritual community but was drawn by my sense of radical welcome and homecoming. A member since 2019, I've participated in various musical ensembles, the MCT, WAG, and Rev. Brett's Spiritual Practices group.

I am in this world to heal within and around me. Healing is radical work that includes dismantling oppression within and without, and it necessarily involves our human interconnectedness. Professionally, my business is Warrior Pose Yoga & Healing. I guide body-based practices--yoga, Somatic Experiencing, and bodywork--to help groups and individuals heal from trauma. I passionately love my work, running, learning, and nature. I share my life and a home with my partner Sean. I'm grateful for the opportunity to serve at ERUUF, the spiritual community I'm proud to have grown into.

Questions: nomcom@eruuf.org