

LIVING WATER ASSOCIATION OHIO NORTHEAST, UCC

Biographical Information for 2023 Nominees

Rebekah (Beka) Choate (she/her) currently serves as the Minister for Global Advocacy and Education with Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ. She is currently a member at Archwood UCC in Cleveland, but she was born and raised in Maine. She loves being outdoors - hiking, camping, kayaking - and takes advantage of the Cleveland Metroparks system as often as she can.

Rev. Dennis Landaw (he/him) has been an active member of the United Church of Christ all his life, serving on numerous Association committees. He is currently volunteering on the Heartland Disaster Response Network steering committee. Dennis began serving at Saint Paul UCC, Navarre on July 1, 2022 and was Ordained May 7, 2023. He has been married to his wife, Nadine, for 43 years and are now living in Navarre.

Rev. Susi Kowalics (she/her) retired from Federated Church in Chagrin Falls in December 2019 after serving as their Associate Pastor. She now works as an Administrative Assistant for the Community of St. Peter, does bookkeeping and office work for a variety of companies, and preaches occasionally. She is also a certified labyrinth facilitator and an active member of Federated Church Social Justice Advocacy Ministry Team. She has lived her whole life in the Cleveland area, and has been married to her husband Rich, another native Clevelander, for 39 years. They have two daughters, Kailey and Kiran, whom they love to visit in upstate New York.

Rev. Roberto Ochoa (el/he/him) is the Minister for Ethnic Inclusion and Congregational Support for Rural and Small Churches for Faith Education, Innovation and Formation (Faith INFO) in the National Setting of the UCC and a member of Mt. Zion Congregational UCC in Cleveland. He serves congregations and provides UCC and ecumenical resources for congregational assessment, support, and advancement, especially for rural, ethnic identified and congregations of Color. He also works with the UCC Manual on Church working team. Roberto has served in a variety of settings advocating for and supporting ministries of Latinx communities. He earned his Master of Divinity from Andover Newton Theological School in 2017. He did his undergraduate work in Macalester College and Becker College, and is currently working towards his DMin in Prophetic Leadership with Iliff School of Theology.

Rev. Jess Peacock (they/them) is a UCC clergy person, professor, and author of the book *Such a Dark Thing: Theology of The Vampire Narrative in Popular Culture*. They are the former editor-in-chief of *Street Speech*, a social justice publication produced by the Columbus Coalition for the Homeless in Ohio, and previously served as UCC clergy in the Pacific Northwest. Their academic distinctions include receiving the Methodist Theological School in Ohio's Ronald L. Williams Book Prize in Theology and Ethics, the Matey Janata Freedwomen Award for their research and work in women's issues, and was an Obenhaus Lecturer at Chicago Theological Seminary where they are currently a PhD candidate. Passionate about social justice issues, Jess is actively involved in various movements around racial justice, LGBTQ+ issues, and abortion rights. A vegan for over fifteen years, they are also focused on animal welfare issues, as well as the connection between industrial agriculture and its detrimental effects on the climate. Jess is an avid biker, horror movie nerd, and wants nothing more than to start a commune of like-minded nerds.

Rev. Rebekah Rathman-Wingrove (she/her) is the pastor of Emmanuel United Church of Christ in Valley City. She began serving that congregation on August 14, 2022. This is Rebekah's third call since being ordained in 2016. She has served congregations in the Illinois South Conference and the Michigan Conference. Pastoring, teaching, and singing are Rebekah's passions. Rebekah is very excited about the potential for ministry in the Valley City community, and she looks forward to serving in the Living Water Association.

Rev. Melody Ward (she/her) was a Professor of Dance for two decades. In 2015 she completed her Master of Divinity at Andover Newton Graduate Theological School with a focus in Pastoral Care and Pastoral Counseling. Melody is a Chaplain and works as the Director of Spiritual Care at IBH Addiction Recovery Center in Akron, Ohio. As a choreographer and theologian, she seeks spaces to bring movement as a way of integrative healing that nourishes the gifts that we each bring as we live out daily the gospel of Jesus Christ. Melody is a member of Emmanuel United Church of Christ where her most favorite activity was her Senior Adult Bible Study Group! She and her husband Frank are the proud parents of 2 daughters, who live respectively on the East and West Coasts. A graduate of Spelman College and the University of Michigan she curates' spaces where individuals can partner in conversations that cross disciplines and connect to more wholehearted living.