

## Search Committee Candidates

### Wendy Erisman

Wendy Erisman (she/her) has attended FUUCA since 2010 and prior to that was a member of River Road UU in Bethesda, MD. Since joining FUUCA, Wendy has served as Social Action Chair, coordinated three Spring into Action churchwide social action events, co-taught an adult RE class on UU history, and was a founding member and chair of the Transformation Connection Service ministry. She has also been an active participant in the Texas UU Justice Ministry, including serving on its board. Wendy has a bachelor's degree in sociology from Rice University and a PhD in cultural anthropology from UT Austin. Her consulting practice, Strix Research LLC, provides customized research, program evaluation, and strategic learning support to organizations working to increase college access and success for underserved students. She spends her free time reading, working on genealogy, and spoiling her cats, Tomten and Kobold.



### Ruth Friede-Cornell



Ruth (she/her) hates writing about herself in the third person—and generally is not a fan of formality when a more personal approach would do.

I've been attending FUUCA since 2018 when I fell in love with Vic (FUUCA Board President-Elect). Both our kids (Shanti, 22 & Liam, 14) attend(ed) RE and OWL here. Prior to joining FUUCA I was a member of several area Jewish Congregations. I haven't served on any committees or boards at FUUCA yet because I've mostly felt like a little bit of an outsider but I'm trying to take ownership

and serve where needed. Selecting a minister is something I think I'm qualified for.

I've taught Communication Studies at ACC for the past 15 years with a focus on Relational Communication. I also do communication coaching with couples/families/individuals in private practice and I've taught Emotional Intelligence, Conflict Resolution, and other relationship skills seminars to local businesses. I love interviewing and believe it would be rewarding to talk with members about your dreams/fears for FUUCA leadership—and to try to help us find a good ministerial "fit." I've also spent countless hours teaching public speaking and LOVE a good sermon so I both care deeply about and feel qualified to comment on, candidates' sermons.

### **Carolyn Gremminger**



Carolyn Gremminger (she/her) has been a member of First UU since 2002.

She enjoys the fellowship of this community that has become her spiritual home. She found First UU when she needed it most, and stays because she continues to find meaning, joy, and purpose here. She aspires to live our Church mission every day.

Throughout her years of membership at First UU, Carolyn has been involved in various committees and service efforts. These include being on the Board of Trustees and serving as Board President, lay leading services, cochairing the Public Affairs Forum committee, serving on the Transformation, Connection Service, Gallery and Stewardship committees.

Carolyn is originally from Weatherford Texas and has resided in Austin since 1981. She graduated from the University of Texas at Austin's School of Social Work. She recently retired from the Travis County Adult Probation Department after 25 years of service as an Adult Probation officer. Her spiritual practices include mediation, Yoga and Enneagram study.

### **Tomas Medina**

Tomas Medina (he/him) joined First UU Austin when he moved to Austin from NYC in January 2014. In the 9 years that Tomas has been a First UU member he has had many roles including ushering, being a lay leader, facilitating chalice circles, facilitating the LGBTQIA group, and serving as president of the board of trustees. Tomas has also participated in the BIPOC group and Wellspring, and did some legal work for our guests in sanctuary. Tomas has a BA in economics from Cal State University, Sacramento, a JD from the University of California at Berkeley, and a MFA in theater management from Columbia University in New



York. He works remotely as a business analyst for the legal IT department for a California based tech company. Outside of his day job, Tomas volunteers with American Gateways, providing free legal services to immigrants. His proudest achievement is helping a lesbian couple from Guatemala gain asylum in the United States. In his free time, Tomas loves walking the trails of Austin with his pup, Neko, and visiting with friends, many of whom he met at First UU. Tomas has found the interim period at First UU to be an exciting and invigorating time and would be honored to serve the church in helping it move to its next phase.

### **Peggy Morton**



Peggy (she/her), and husband Fred Higgins, have attended First UU since 1996. She grew up Catholic in Pasadena, TX, left that faith and explored others including Sufism until she found Unitarian Universalism. She retired as a public school journalism and ESL teacher in 2009, started coordinating the FUUCA Freeze Night Shelter and became Social Action Chair from 2012-2015. At Justice GA in 2012, she met activists and coordinated First UU congregants to house and feed riders on the “Undocumented and Unafraid” bus for three nights. She served as a founding Texas UU Justice Ministry board member from 2012-17. Peggy connected First UU congregants to immigrant rights groups with volunteer service and political advocacy opportunities, which led Sulma Franco to ask for sanctuary at First UU. When Alirio Gamez took sanctuary in 2017, Peggy left the TXUJMJ board and helped found The

Austin Sanctuary Network, a multi-faith group of faithful congregations and independent activists. She’s also served as an usher, on stewardship and in the kitchen and will appreciate your vote.

### **Celeste Padilla**



Celeste Padilla (she/her) and her husband, Andrew Pyle, began attending FUUCA in 2017. Celeste got involved by becoming an usher, making lunches for the working homeless, and helping Alirio with groceries. For the last three years, Celeste has chaired the Fellowship Committee and helped plan events such as a Volunteer Appreciation Dinner, a virtual Variety Show, various holiday celebrations, Kiya’s ordination reception, and Meg’s retirement soiree. After participating in two Chalice Circles, Celeste was asked to facilitate one and has found each experience deeply rewarding.

Celeste, a Mexican American, has a bachelor’s degree in Communication Studies from NMSU and a master’s degree in Higher Education Administration from UT-Austin. She spent 29 years working at UT and in Texas state government. She is well-versed in the work of a selection committee. After retiring in 2019, Celeste became a volunteer ambassador for the Central Texas Food Bank and began substitute teaching for AISD in 2021.

## **Gillian Redfearn**

Gillian Redfearn (she/her) is a life-long Unitarian and has been attending FUUCA since 1989. Gillian's early involvement at FUUCA was in religious education, where she was a regular teacher, a youth group leader, a party planner and chair of a RE search committee. She took one group of teens to Boston for a UU history trip and has always wanted to replicate that trip with people her own age. It was actually years before Gillian could be regularly found in the sanctuary for Sunday services. But since then, she has largely been involved in coordinating celebratory events like the silent auction and celebration Sunday parties. Gillian also served on, at least, one interim minister search committee along with a host of other committees that no longer exist.



Gillian graduated from the Grady College of Journalism at the University of Georgia and has had a long career working in trade publishing and is one of the founding members of Austin's virtually based fitness company, Moxie Fit. Most dear to her is her son, Nathan, who will graduate from Austin College this spring with a major in finance and minor in philosophy. Gillian lives with her better half, Lyman, along with an old cat and an old dog.

## **Tom Shindell**



Tom Shindell (he/him), and his husband Art Carter, are new members of FUUCA who "signed the book" on February 18, 2023, after they first began attending FUUCA in August of 2022. Tom was previously a member of Unity Church of the Hills where he was a Prayer Chaplain. Prior to attending Unity, Tom was a member of the faith community of St. Ignatius Martyr Catholic Church for 32 years. During that time, he served in a variety of leadership roles including chair of the pastoral council, member of the school board, Stephen Minister, and many roles in the Knights of Columbus. Tom is the Director of Human Resources for the Magellan International School. Between them, Art and Tom have four children, three grandchildren, and one dog.

### **Bis Thornton**



Bis Thornton (he/him;she/her) began attending FUUCA in 2018 along with his spouse, Evan Mahony (they/them). She is currently in her final semester at Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary as part of her path towards fellowshipping and ordination as a UU minister. As a volunteer and organizer with Gender Unbound, he has helped create local art events for transgender and intersex people in Austin since 2016. At FUUCA, she has served as an usher, a lay worship leader, and a facilitator for young adult worship services, and she is currently part of the Vespers team.

### **Susan Thomson**

Susan Thomson (she/her) and her husband Tom began attending First UU of Austin in 1996 when they moved here from Lubbock where they had been active at First UU of Lubbock for many years, a church they hold dear because that is where they met. Since that time Susan has taught children's RE and chaired the Adult RE committee. She chaired the Paradox Players Leadership Team. As a Board trustee, Susan served on the taskforce that planned the transition to Policy Based Governance. She was also Board President. Susan served on a ministerial internship committee and chaired a ministerial fellowshipping committee. She attended the UUA Leadership School in both the former Mountain Desert and Southwest Districts. Susan participated in and co-facilitated Wellspring and is currently facilitating a Chalice Circle. She is also currently a member of the Transition Connections Service Team. She co-chairs First UU Cares our caring ministries through which we reach out to each other in times of need. Susan tries to focus her service at our church around helping us live our mission. In so doing, she tries to "show up" at social justice events and rallies whenever possible. Susan has a master of science degree in social work. She spent most of her career at what is now the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services overseeing regional protective services programs. As Adult Protective Services Director of Field, her final job with DFPS, she directed all Texas investigations of elder abuse, neglect and exploitation as well as services to victims. Susan and Tom have an adult daughter and grandson.

