

ELT Candidate Bios

The Executive Leadership Team consists of the bishop plus 12 other persons—six clergy, six laity.

Eight of those persons are elected by the National Conference, four of them every two years to four-year terms. The other four are appointed by the new ELT to two-year terms.

The East District layperson was elected in 2019 to a four-year term.

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DISCIPLES*

East District, Clergy

Marc Stephenson

Senior Pastor, First UB Church, New Castle, Pa.

Describe your conversion experience and journey of faith.

I prayed to receive Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior during a Ralph Bell Crusade in the front of my high school auditorium. As I reflect back on the night, I know it was accepting Jesus because I wanted “fire insurance.” I knew enough that hell sounded like a bad place and heaven sounded good, but didn’t want to stop living the way I was and didn’t want to get to know God. It wasn’t until Memorial Day weekend in 1994, at Seneca Hills Bible camp. It was then that I truly surrendered my life and my future to the Lord. This time it wasn’t fire insurance, but God did set my heart on fire for him, his Kingdom, and his Church.

What drew or encouraged you to continue to serve in the UB?

I love the UB Confession of Faith, family and social standards, along with its roots in revival, prayer, and holiness.

“The Bible gives clear instruction on many issues, but on other issues, it leaves room for Christians of equal spiritual commitment and insight to disagree. The church’s historic position has been to stand firm on biblical absolutes, allow freedom where the Bible allows freedom, and maintain unity when disagreements arise” (UB Discipline, ¶101).

Those wonderful distinctives are what will prayerfully continue to be the strength of the United Brethren in Christ Church.

Why are you interested in serving on the ELT?

There is a “holy discontent” that continues stirring in my heart to be part of a UB leadership team that will keep guiding and directing the churches back to our three enduring commitments: Spiritually Alive, Relationally Connected, and Missionally Engaged. I honestly get excited thinking of the potential.

D. L. Moody said, “The world has yet to see what God will do with a man fully consecrated to him.” I believe the same thing can be said of the United Brethren. This world has yet to see what God will do with a denomination that is fully alive living out its full potential in Christ. I believe that is the responsibility of the ELT. And that is why I am interested in serving on the ELT. To humbly help guide, direct, and empower pastors, lay people, and churches to serve God beyond their current potential via living out the Confession of Faith and the three enduring commitments; to help the above navigate questions and uncertainties that stem from an ever-changing culture that buffets against the UB Discipline.

General Biography

Wife. Sue and I were married in 1999.

Education. BS in Music Education in 1997, Master of Divinity in 2005. I was ordained in 2007.

Churches Served

- South Mountain UB Church (Dillsburg, Pa.)
- Cochranon Community Church (Cochranon, Pa.)
- Mount Olivet UB Church (Chambersburg, Pa.)
- Currently at First UB (New Castle, Pa.)



Derek Thrush

Senior pastor, Devonshire Church (Harrisburg, Pa.).

Describe your conversion experience and journey of faith.

At a young age, I trusted in Christ as my Lord and Savior and began what has become a life-long journey of growing in what it means to follow and trust him. While there have been many challenges along the way, I have found through the years that there is no one and nothing other than Jesus that satisfies the longings of my soul. He alone is all that I need and can trust.

What drew or encouraged you to continue to serve in the UB?

A major influence in my life that connected me with serving in the UB, is the connection that I had with my father's years of ministry serving as a UB pastor. He was raised at King Street UB (Chambersburg, Pa.), graduated from Huntington University, and served many years as a UB pastor in Pennsylvania.

Why are you interested in serving on the ELT?

I was asked to consider it, and I am willing to serve on the ELT at this time if needed and it is of benefit to our denomination.

General Biography:

Spouse. Kristen Thrush, married in 1997.

Year of Ordination: 2002.

Churches Served: Devonshire Church (1997-present).

Central District, Lay

Ruth Nietz

Mainstreet UB church (Walbridge, Ohio)

Describe your conversion experience and journey of faith.

I was raised in a Christian home. We read the Bible together as a family after the supper meal almost nightly without fail and prayed together. Church attendance was part of our routine and was a priority for our family. While my parents were not perfect, they had very clear desires for all five of us kids. The first was that we know Jesus as our Lord and Savior. My parents were always involved in our church and pursued opportunities to serve until not able. I also have clear memories of my parents often inviting people into our home for meals. Some were friends and missionaries, but often at holidays we had people who didn't have family and would be alone.

I was four years old when I asked Jesus to come into my heart during a series of children's meetings at our church. I was very happy to tell others about Jesus and was always inviting our neighborhood friends to come to church with us. At age 11, I was baptized. Then in the 8th grade our denomination, Evangelical Free, had a "confirmation class." We learned about a lot of basic tenets of our faith in Christ. These steps helped me to understand more of the faith that had taken root.

My Christian life has had some ripples in the road particularly in my teen years. I made many self-centered decisions. I felt badly when I hurt others along the way, and to my knowledge, I have asked forgiveness from friends and acquaintances that I treated badly. I am so thankful for all that Jesus has done for me. I have done nothing to deserve all the blessings I have received in Christ.

My journey of growth as a believer definitely comes from the Holy Spirit at work within as I yield myself to his power and control in my life. Daily time in prayer and God's Word are essential, but also meeting with others in groups and being involved in our church have been transformational for me. My husband is a gift from God. The Lord uses him often to help me see things differently and from more of an eternal perspective.

The Central District clergy was elected in 2019 to a four-year term.



What drew or encouraged you to continue to serve in the UB?

Initially I was drawn to attend Mainstreet UB because this was the church where my husband Denis's family was involved. It wasn't long before Mainstreet became our church of choice. One reason we have remained at Mainstreet UB Church is because it believes that "ALL scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the servant of God will be thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Mainstreet embraces the Gospel as the only way for one to be saved.

Over the 43-plus years we have been married, we have made wonderful friendships, raised our children in this church, and found opportunities to grow our faith and serve the Lord.

Why are you interested in serving on the ELT?

To be honest, even being considered at all for the Executive Leadership Team was not on my radar. This is a humbling experience whether or not my name even makes it to the ballot. I am not an executive nor am I a natural leader. However, it has been my prayer specifically as I transitioned from the working world to retirement that the Lord would direct my steps in all areas of my life so that I could be more effective in my service to him. God has answered and keeps answering that prayer which is ongoing. So, if not chosen, I am trusting him as I step out of my comfort level that I am going through this process for a reason and this is not a waste of time. If the doors open, I am believing that the Lord will provide me with what is needed in order to represent him well and to be a good team player.

General Biography

Husband. Denis Nietz

Occupation. Retired social worker.

Church involvement. My husband and I host a small group in our home. Denis is the main leader. A Micro Discipleship Ladies Group meets in our home. We are part of a team that provides meals to our former pastor and his wife. Over the years, Denis and I have worked with youth; were involved in financial campaigns to raise money to expand our church with a goal of eventually relocating; and were involved for 25 years with music ministry, Women's Ministry Team, Bible studies, and discipleship studies in a one-to-one setting.

Roger Thorn

Mount Zion UB church (Wayne, Ohio).

Describe your conversion experience and journey of faith.

I accepted Christ as a teenager at church summer camp. I was baptized when I was 17. At age 31, my daughter was born. That event began a reaffirming of my faith and Christ began a transforming work in me.

What drew or encouraged you to continue to serve in the UB?

One of my spiritual gifts is serving. That service is not about me, it is about Jesus.

Why are you interested in serving on the ELT?

I see serving on the ELT as another opportunity to exercise my spiritual gift to Christ's glory.

General Biography

Spouse. Gayle and I have been married for 40 years.

Occupation. I am a service technician and have been employed at an equipment dealership/rental shop for the past 32 years.

Church involvement. For the past 11 years, I have been the treasurer at Mt. Zion UB. I have also served several terms on Mt. Zion's leadership board. I have taught in a small group, served as a Vacation Bible School volunteer (assistant teacher), served as an assistant Sunday school teacher, served as a youth leader, and serve on our Sunday morning worship team.



The North District clergy was elected in 2019 to a four-year term.

North District, Lay

Matt McConnell

Banner of Christ Church (Byron Center, Mich.)

Describe your conversion experience and journey of faith.

I came to know the Lord as a young boy and have been on a wonderful journey of life with Jesus by my side through all the ups, downs, challenges, failures, and victories. My life's desire is to know and love him more and more each day and to let that relationship determine every attitude, desire, and how I interact and love in all my other relationships.

What drew or encouraged you to continue to serve in the UB?

It has been an honor to serve on the ELT with a great group of men and women who love the Lord and want to be effective servants on mission with Jesus to build his Kingdom together.

Why are you interested in serving on the ELT?

Just want to be available to serve in any way the Lord wants to use me.

General Biography

Spouse. Kristi and I have been married for 31 years. We have been blessed with our daughter Britley, son-in-law Jason and grandsons (Carson 6, Zeke 5, and Peyton 4), along with our son Luke, daughter-in-law Lydia, and grandson (Lincoln 1).

Occupation. I work at Concrete Central, a distributor of concrete construction materials in Michigan.

Church involvement. I have served in various capacities in the church: UB ELT member, elder, small group/Sunday school co-teacher with Kristi, Bible quiz team ringleader of fun.

Bob Tobey

Colwood UB church (Caro, Mich.).

Describe your conversion experience and journey of faith.

After a Sunday night service as a elementary student, I asked Mom if I could ask Jesus into my heart. She led me in the prayer beside her bed. As a junior in high school at a church youth event, I rededicated my life to truly live for Christ.

What drew or encouraged you to continue to serve in the UB?

After graduating from Huntington University in 1980, my wife Jolene and I settled in her hometown of Caro and faithfully attended and served our local congregation at Colwood. It has been a great place to raise our daughters.

Why are you interested in serving on the ELT?

I enjoyed my first tenure on the ELT, and as a retired school teacher, I have more time available to serve the denomination.

General Biography:

Spouse. Jolene, wife of 40 years.

Occupation. Retired high school math teacher, still varsity volleyball coach of 34 years

Church involvement. At Colwood: personnel team, Lead Team, Bible quiz coach, elder, financial secretary. Denominationally: Bible quiz director, ELT member, organizer of UB golf outings at National Conference.



The West
District layperson
was elected
in 2019 to a
four-year term.

West District, Clergy

Jason Holliday

Senior pastor, Living Grace Community Church (Fort Wayne, Ind.).

Describe your conversion experience and journey of faith.

I was a young child when I made a decision for Jesus. Because I was so young, I obviously didn't fully grasp the significance of that decision. But it was then that a childlike faith took root and my relationship with God began to grow. It was my junior year in high school when I felt God's call to fulltime ministry. Through the years, I have been following Jesus through the ups and downs of life and ministry. It is my continual desire to know him, love him, and serve him more and more for the glory of God.

What drew or encouraged you to continue to serve in the UB?

I grew up in the UB church, have served in the UB church for almost 17 years, and want to see it thrive in order to point more people to Jesus.

Why are you interested in serving on the ELT?

- I want to be used by God to advance his Kingdom. Whether that be through our local body, the denomination, or beyond, I want to be more available and open.
- I want to hone my leadership skills by putting them to use in a variety of settings.
- I want to serve in ways that might not necessarily benefit myself or my church directly.

General Biography

Spouse. Christy and I have been married for 21 years. We have two children: Max (16), Macy (14).

Education. Graduated from Huntington College in 1996 with a BS in Educational Ministries. Graduated from Bethel College in 2012 with a Master of Ministry in Bible & Theology. Ordained in the UB church in 2013.

Pastoral ministry. On staff at Emmanuel Community Church in Fort Wayne, Ind., from 2004-2018 (Children, Family, Worship). Currently lead pastor at Living Grace Community Church in Fort Wayne, Ind., from 2018 to present

Brian Kramer

Pastor of Middle School Ministries, Emmanuel Community Church (Fort Wayne, Ind.).

Describe your conversion experience and journey of faith.

During my early adolescence, I broke my leg skateboarding in the parking lot of Devonshire UB church in Harrisburg, Pa. The youth group visited me in my home shortly after the accident. It struck me as an unusually kind gesture. A few weeks later, someone from the church invited my family to attend the theater showing of the "Jesus" movie. I was attracted to Jesus, as portrayed in the movie, as someone who cared for broken people (me), who people enjoyed being with, and whose resurrection was of consequence, though I wouldn't have used those words at the time.

I followed through by becoming involved in the church's youth ministry and attending worship services at the church with my Mom. I grew into ministry opportunities among my peers, both in the church youth ministry, my high school, and at Rhodes Grove Camp in the summers. This helped me discern a call into ministry with adolescents.

I think the greatest time of growth and intimacy I've experienced with Jesus has been through a prolonged bout with anxiety disorder that I first recognized in the early 2000s, but which had been present with me since college in the late 1980s. God has used that to grow compassion within me, and to help me pay attention to his real presence. I'd say my current journey is learning to respond with immediate obedience to the promptings of his presence.

**What drew or encouraged you to continue to serve in the UB?**

We are the portion of the Church that God has used to extend his Good News to me. I have a joyful obligation to return that contribution.

Why are you interested in serving on the ELT?

Because I was asked. It's not something that had occurred to me outside of being approached by a member of the Nominating Committee.

General Biography

Spouse. Amy (Au) Kramer and I have been married for 26 years. She is the daughter of retired UB minister Jerry Au. We have two girls, Autumn (22) and Ruby (17).

Education. I graduated from Messiah College in 1990, and received a Master of Ministry degree from Bethel University in 2014. I was ordained at National Conference in 2015.

Pastoral experience. I served as youth pastor in three UB churches: Devonshire (Harrisburg, Pa.) from 1990-1995, at King Street (Chambersburg, Pa.) from 1995-2012 (with 5 months as Interim Lead Pastor in 2005), and currently at Emmanuel Community (Fort Wayne, Ind.) beginning in 2012.

I served on the Denominational Youth Ministry leadership team from approximately 1994-2005, chairing the team for the last four years. I was also involved in leading the Mid-Atlantic youth ministry team, as well as starting the MidWest UB Youth Pastor cluster.