

2021 Governing Board Candidate Bios



Valerie Benjamin, Chair

How long have you been a member of Asbury First?

My family and I joined Asbury in 2007, when we moved to Rochester from Pittsburgh. We were very apprehensive about leaving our previous church family (First United Methodist Church of Pittsburgh) and were so blessed to have found this wonderful place.

What have you been involved in as a member of Asbury First?

The great thing about Asbury is that there is so much to get involved in! I've participated on Church Council, in SPRC and the Lay Personnel Committee, Parables of Parenting, am a greeter and volunteer at the welcome desk. The kids and I have volunteered on Sunday lunch at the Dining and Caring Center once per quarter, I organized a Pie for Pi bake sale one year, and my husband and I helped chaperone on the Youth trip to Cuba (which was wild). I have done several bible education classes over time, and most recently co-chaired the Governance Task Force and worked with some very talented ladies to develop and kick off a new women's speakers series, "Courage to Become" with the inspiration and leadership of Susan Shafer. I even pinch hit as an acolyte from time to time, despite my advancing age! My ambition is to sing in the choir, but I've not yet managed to get my act together to make that work. Someday!

Why do you want to be on the Governing Board?

This church has given my family and the community so much, I'm honored and excited to be able to give back in this new way.

What is something that you want people to know about you?

I absolutely love boating in any type of craft – being out on the water is freedom for me.

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Angie Burch

How long have you been a member of Asbury First?

Close to 50 years. My mom joined Asbury when I was a kindergartener.

What have you been involved in as a member of Asbury First?

Altar Guild as President, Treasurer and Secretary, Sanctuary Choir, Asbury Singers, Asbury Ringers, Great Week of Service, UR Well Clinic as Clinic Coordinator, Dining & Caring Center Board member and Sunday Dinner Team, Hosted for Dining In for Outreach, Maundy Thursday Tenebrae Service Coordinator.

Why do you want to be on the Governing Board?

I am excited for the opportunity to serve at Asbury in a new role that will help us continue to grow as a congregation and further our shared mission in our local community.

What is something that you want people to know about you?

I have worked at a private school for the past 4 1/2 years currently as the Business Office Manager where I have the opportunity to be a jack-of-all trades. Before that I worked at the Rochester Housing Authority for 10 years in various roles including Field Auditor, Housing Specialist and Senior Accounting Clerk. Throughout my work career I have strived to support the direct service staff and the organization for which I worked in fulfilling their mission to its constituents and the Rochester community.

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Chuck Hanrahan

How long have you been a member of Asbury First?

24 years.

What have you been involved in as a member of Asbury First?

Served as/on: Lay Leader, Church Directions (Chair, Vice Chair), SPR, Finance, Administrative Cabinet, Trustees, Building Committee (Chair), Ministry and Space, Committee (Chair), Welcoming Committee (Chair), Youth Counselor, (including five Youth Mission Trips), Youth Musical Lighting Director, Governance Task Force, General Volunteer

Why do you want to be on the Governing Board?

I love this church and I want to help bring this new model to life. Change is hard, but it is vital to continuing our mission. In my professional life, I have developed the ability to integrate strategy development and tactical implementation. I believe I can help implement the new model in a way that helps our church thrive into the future.

What is something that you want people to know about you?

Many at Asbury First know me from the Building Committee or general volunteering. In my professional career I have led multiple global strategic planning teams and written multiple business plans.

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Ike Jordan

How long have you been a member of Asbury First?

I have been a member of Asbury First for 8 years.

What have you been involved in as a member of Asbury First?

I have served in an array of areas which include The Vision Committee, Men's Chorus, and most recently, the Asbury First Committee on Racial Equality/Steering Committee. I credit much of my spiritual nourishment, growth and contentment to the Ministry, the people, and fellowship experienced at Asbury First.

Why do you want to be on the Governing Board?

I believe serving on the Governing Board further extends my commitment and desire to extend the mission of Asbury First and support a proactive, flexible and transparent lifeblood of the Church — now, and moving forward in the coming years.

What is something that you want people to know about you?

I am a native Rochesterian and have worked in Healthcare Sales and Marketing for over 20 years where I have lived and worked throughout the US, Europe, and Latin America. I have two adult sons and a delightful 8-month-old granddaughter.

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Beth Rice

How long have you been a member of Asbury First?

I have been a member at Asbury First for 35 years. My husband, Dave, and I joined the church in December of 1985. We have three grown children that were baptized, confirmed and raised at Asbury First. Stephen performed the wedding for our son and daughter-in-law in August of 2018.

What have you been involved in as a member of Asbury First?

Over my 35 years of membership, I have been involved in most aspects in the life of the church. When my children were young, I worked in children and youth education programs such as Sunday morning childcare, teaching Sunday School classes, as a UMYF counselor and helping with costumes for Youth Musicals. I have a heart for outreach and have volunteered at the Dining and Caring Center, Storehouse, UR Well Clinic, Older Adult Council, chaperoned 6 youth mission trips and participated in an adult mission trip to Chacocente, Nicaragua in early 2020. I also love to be part of our worship service experience by serving as an usher, on the Altar Guild (chairing the Wedding Committee and scheduling acolytes and crucifers) and as part of Sunday morning hospitality and counting teams. In the last 6 years, I have been involved in governing committees such as the Dream Team (discerning mission, vision and Dreamscape strategic goals), SPRC, Church Council Chair and the Governance Task Force. I have been part of small social and study groups over the years as well.

Why do you want to be on the Governing Board?

I love this church and I am very excited to be a member of this inaugural Governance Board. I am committed to using my heart and mind to uphold the mission, vision and strategic goals of Asbury First by working in concert with the Senior Minister, staff, and congregation. I want to be an active part of the next 200 years at Asbury First. Thank you for this opportunity and for trusting in me.

What is something that you want people to know about you?

In 2020, I rode my bike the entire length of the Erie Canal from Buffalo to Albany. I am now a Canalway Challenge End to Ender (360 miles). I rode with my husband, Dave, and our dear neighbors, Cheryl and Ron Fisher. I am a results-oriented person, so I loved planning and completing the ride with my 'team'. We tracked miles, traced history and experienced God's beautiful and perfect creation.

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Joe Stankaitis

How long have you been a member of Asbury First?

5 years as a formal member

What have you been involved in as a member of Asbury First?

Member, Staff Parish Relations Committee

Member, Stewardship Committee

Member, Safety Response Team

Equalization Member to Upper New York Annual Conference

Why do you want to be on the Governing Board?

Especially now during these most challenging and turbulent times, Asbury First UMC remains a safe harbor for all of us as we go through our personal faith journeys. Our Mission Statement says it all where we aspire to “Love God and Neighbor,” “Live Fully,” “Serve All,” and “Repeat.” I would feel honored to be able to use the gifts and talents that God has bestowed on me to help our congregation fulfill this mission.

What is something that you want people to know about you?

I have had the special opportunity to support my spouse, Vickie, in raising five daughters who are now wonderful and special young women.

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Beth Wilkens

How long have you been a member of Asbury First?

I have been a member for 20 some years, having joined shortly after visiting one Sunday, hearing Rev. Dr. Bob Hill preach, and deciding AFUMC was the place for me.

What have you been involved in as a member of Asbury First?

My initial involvement was as a member of the Finance Committee. I then joined the Trustees, and was privileged to be President when the Board's recommendation to approve A Time To Build was voted on by the congregation and during the Gathering Center construction. I am a member of the Investment Committee, have volunteered Tuesday nights in the Storehouse, am part of the Community Garden team, and have helped with a number of special projects involving my experience in finance and as a lawyer.

Why do you want to be on the Governing Board?

This is a challenging time in the life of the Church, but challenges bring opportunity. The new governance structure has the potential to help us better focus our collective efforts in maximizing our extraordinary resources (including our asset base, amazing and committed congregation and talented pastoral staff) toward expanding the reach of the Church in the lives of our members as well as our community and world. I hope to be part of a board that is a good steward of resources, listens carefully and respectfully, communicates transparently and is flexible as its role is framed by circumstances – but a board that is not afraid to embrace challenging opportunities. I also hope the lessons I learned in governance during “interesting” times, both as a lawyer counseling business boards and as a volunteer member of a number of community boards, will be helpful to this new Board.

What is something that you want people to know about you?

I find great comfort in a devotion my grandmother shared with me during a difficult time: “Fear is the negation of the Christ within us.”