



MNIPL
2104 Stevens Ave. S
Minneapolis, MN 55404

MNIPL Staff

Julia Frost Nerbonne, Executive Director & Board Member

Julia brings her skills as an organizer and academic to build a vibrant movement for climate justice. She has an undergraduate degree in Religion and her Ph.D. in Conservation Biology. She also serves as an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Conservation Biology Graduate Program at the University of Minnesota. Her research focuses on how to create powerful social movements. Between 2011 and 2014, she was the founding Director of MN350. She has also spent over 18 years teaching ethics and sustainability studies to college students at the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs and at the University of Minnesota. She is a member of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in St. Paul. When she is not working, Julia enjoys playing the fiddle and reading about history. She doesn't always enjoy large crowds, but when there is a message to deliver, you'll probably find her out on the streets with her kids in tow. You can reach Julia at julia@mnipl.org.

Erin Pratt, Program Director

Erin Pratt, LPC is the program director at MNIPL where she designs, coordinates, and facilitates programming for MNIPL and individual faith communities. Erin's training is as a therapist working with children, youth, and families in crisis. In both academic and clinical settings, Erin has conducted evaluations and research on family health and the efficacy of clinical practices. Erin was a psychology fellow at the Healthy Youth Development Prevention Research Center at the University of Minnesota where she practiced advocacy, offered leadership training, and conducted research on the gap between treatment need and receipt for Minnesota's youth. Over the last 14 years, Erin has also applied her advocacy skills in service of human rights, U.S. policy change, and environmental conservation here in the U.S. as well as abroad. You can reach Erin at erin@mnipl.org.

Claire Curran, Communications & Outreach Manager

Claire Curran leads all things communications to powerfully tell the stories of the interfaith climate movement. She also supports MNIPL's River Prairie Regional Network and organizes many of the MNIPL network's movement building moments, including the People's Climate March, Tar Sands March, and more. Claire completed her Bachelor's degree in Religion and Peace Studies at Gustavus Adolphus College. Claire has a strong background in organizing, having coordinated the Lutheran Advocacy MN's Clean Energy

Campaign and directing Environment California's campaign office in Los Angeles. Claire brings a sincere belief in the power of faith communities to create positive social change and is also pursuing her MDiv concentrating in Social Transformation at United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities. While not organizing for climate justice, or studying theology, you can find Claire dancing with the St Paul based One Dance Company. You can reach Claire at claire@mnipl.org

Muhammad Jiwa, Muslim Outreach Coordinator

Muhammad works with MNIPL as an organizer in the Muslim community. He is a graduate of the University of Minnesota with his Bachelor's degree in Wildlife, Whole System Healing, and Sustainability Studies. Muhammad is active in his community working to end discrimination against Muslims all over the world. When not at MNIPL, Muhammad works for Greater Midwest Realty as an Eco-Real Estate Agent. He hopes to continue his work helping mosques in Minnesota become some of the greenest in the nation. You can reach Muhammad at muhammad@mnipl.org.

Brett Benson, Operations Director

Brett helps MNIPL translate vision and strategy into effective and sustainable operational practices, ensuring maximum organizational impact from limited resources. He focuses on MNIPL's Just Solar and Movement Builder programs. He also relies on experience in marketing and communication to shape MNIPL's tactics in those areas. Outside of MNIPL, he provides coaching to servant leaders, creatives and spiritual travelers on increasing their influence and effectiveness by deepening their connection to joy, expanding their authentic presence, and embracing discipline as an ally. Brett has bachelor's and master's degrees in journalism and has worked in leadership roles in journalism, graphic design, marketing, and customer service. He also has been a longtime volunteer with the ManKind Project, an international organization devoted to helping men develop emotional literacy and find deep purpose in their lives. He's a member of Gloria Dei Lutheran Church in St. Paul. He can be reached at brettbenson@mnipl.org.

Brent Murcia, Solar Outreach Coordinator

Brent recently graduated from Carleton College with a B.A. in Environmental Studies Major with an Environmental Justice focus. He brings experience in grassroots organizing for a variety of issues and campaigns, as well as legislative work. He has organized with both Water Legacy and We Are Impact to protect water quality and fight extractive industries in Minnesota. Brent is also passionate about local and sustainable agriculture, and spent time managing the 1.5 acre Carleton Student Organic Farm during college. You can reach Brent at brentmurcia@mnipl.org.

Robert Blake, Solar Outreach Coordinator

Robert is an enrolled tribal member of the Red Lake Band of Ojibwe. He believes in his cultural values to protect Mother Earth. Robert is currently a graduate student at Metropolitan State University and is a lifelong member of the Cathedral in St. Paul Minnesota. He is working to create a Native Owned solar company, Solar Bear. Previous to coming to MNIPL you might have caught a glimpse of Bob as he served as Prince's body

guard. Ask him about what it is like to explore the world flying first class. You can reach Bob at robertblake@mnipl.org

Bret Pence, Arrowhead Network Regional Coordinator

Bret's work focuses on supporting the lively volunteer network in MNIPL's Arrowhead Region, of which he has been a member since it's inception in 2014. He is a resource for energy efficiency and solar project consultation, as also works for the nonprofit Ecolibrium3 in the field of community energy. Bret obtained a Master of Art in Management (MAM), with a focus on sustainability and organizational development, from the College of St. Scholastica in 2010, and a BA from Colorado State University before there was a public internet (it's true!). In between, he was a guide in the Rocky Mountain West and worked for REI. When he is not tinkering with solar panels and trying to figure out how to pinch another watt or two, he tries to get outside as much as possible, and has been compared to Sasquatch a few times in his life, hopefully only because of his love of the outdoors. Bret lives in beautiful neighborhood in Duluth with his wife, Laura, two sons Colin and Davey, and a rather largish cat named Goliath that is sometimes mistaken for a woodchuck. You can reach Bret at bretpence@mnipl.org

Trevor Leuzinger, Database Manager

After a year working at MNIPL through Lutheran Volunteer Corps, a year-long service program, Trevor remains with MNIPL to work for the solar and energy efficiency teams to engage faith communities and help them to achieve their goals for environmental justice. He graduated with a degree in Political Science from Washington University in St. Louis, where he first began to organize for the environmental movement. He has a passion for fighting intersectional and systemic issues and helping people become changemakers because concerned individuals working together is the only way to solve these issues. You can reach Trevor at trevor@mnipl.org.

Naveena Sekaran, Communications Intern

Naveena is the newest intern for MNIPL, and is passionate about using effective storytelling to communicate powerful messages about environmental justice. She is a junior at the University of Minnesota studying Sustainability, Food Systems, and Communications and is excited to help in MNIPL's journey to healing the world through all things communications related. You can reach Naveena at naveena@mnipl.org

MNIPL Board of Directors

Julia Frost Nerbonne, Executive Director (Start Date March 2012)

Julia has an undergraduate degree in Religion and Ph.D in Conservation Biology and serves as an Adjunct Assistant Professor in the Conservation Biology Graduate Program at the University of Minnesota. Her research focuses on citizen empowerment and social movements. She comes to the climate movement after 15 years of teaching ethics and

sustainability studies to college students at the Higher Education Consortium for Urban Affairs and the University of Minnesota. She is a member of St. Mary's Episcopal Church in St. Paul. When she is not working, Julia enjoys teaching her children how to paint large banners. She is also nuts about history! You can reach Julia at julia@mnipl.org.

Narayan Dhakal (Start date: April 2017)

Narayan is a conservation scientist trained in the complexity of ecological processes involving human communities with the perspective on human dimensions of nature conservation. He has been involved in conservation work since 1992. Narayan previously managed the Terai Ecology Project / Chitwan National Park, Nepal in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institute, USAID, US - National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, US-Fish and Wildlife Service and WWF. He's also developed a community based conservation model by harnessing economic benefits from biodiversity conservation. Between 2004 to 2013, Narayan worked in academia in the U.S. with a focus on human dimensions of natural resources management. His capacity for environmental advocacy is to bring knowledge and communication for changing human behavior. Narayan believes once people understand the value of nature and natural resources, only then we can live in harmony with nature. Over the last four years, his interest has been in the information technology field and through his work within software development as a System Quality Analyst. He aims to make the best use of technology in understanding and utilizing environmental databases, social & professional networking.

John Dunlop (Start date: October 2014)

John is a renewable energy policy consultant based in Minneapolis. As a professional engineer, he managed renewable energy programs for the Minnesota state energy office for 15 years. Following that work, he focused on national wind energy development for the DC-based non-profit trade association for wind power, the American Wind Energy Association, for another 21 years. John is a member of Hennepin Ave. United Methodist Church in Minneapolis, where he helped lead the social justice team to promote climate action. He is also spearheading a movement to install a large solar panel system on the church building in an effort to become carbon neutral. He served as Board Chair of the Minnesota clean energy advocacy group Fresh Energy and co-founded and chaired both the national Interstate Renewable Energy Council and Solar Rating and Certification Corporation. John is passionate about making our planet inhabitable for the rest of his very young grandchildren's - and their grandchildren's - lifetimes.

Bill Forsyth, Treasurer (Start date: March 2014)

Bill is a member of Judson Memorial Baptist Church in Minneapolis and is an attorney at Henson Efron. His practice focuses on family law and Alternative Dispute Resolution. He is a recent grandfather and has enjoyed slowly shifting from days at the office to days as a caregiver.

Terry Hokenson (Start date: January 2014)

Terry has an M. Div. with a focus on social and political ethics. He is a recovering domestic relations attorney and semi-retired carpenter. He has been paying attention to peace, racial, and labor justice issues since the late 1960's. In 1979, he founded Northern Sun

News to oppose nuclear, fossil fuels, and centralized energy systems and to promote energy conservation and renewables. He grew up Lutheran in rural areas and small towns in Texas and Minnesota and has been a Quaker for the last twenty years. He has been exploring the BWCA for 50 years and loves winter camping. He is the author of two young adult novels, *The Winter Road* (Front Street) and *Leif's Journey* (Namelos).

Ruhel Islam (Start date: April 2015)

Ruhel is the owner and Executive Chef of Gandhi Mahal, an award-winning Bangladeshi/Indian restaurant dedicated to embodying environmental sustainability and the peaceful principles of Gandhi. Ruhel also serves on the board of the Lake Street Council. Ruhel was recently selected to participate in the Small Business Administration's 'Emerging 200 Initiative,' a program to support up-and-coming entrepreneurs with skills and tools to build their businesses. He travels frequently to Bangladesh and continuously supports charities and social justice causes through his work at Gandhi Mahal. You can read more about Ruhel's work [here](#) and his recent trip to Bangladesh [here](#).

Noy Koumalasy (Start date: January 2017)

Noy previously spent 10 years working in accounting. More recently, she and her partner, Keith Dent, founded Just B Solar and are putting on their second series of summer camps to get kids excited about solar energy. She spends her time working as the Camp Director and developing community relationships. Noy is also a busy mother of three children and loves spending time with her family.

Zam Zam (Start date: January 2017)

Zam Zam works as an advisor to our Muslim Outreach Team works to recruit young Muslims to participate in the emerging Solar field. She serves also on the board of our partner Cooperative Energy Futures. Before moving to Minnesota Zam Zam worked with the California Public Utilities Commission. She is also a busy mom!

Zoe Nicholie (Start date: April 2014)

Zoe is a member of Shir Tikvah Congregation in Minneapolis. She is active in social justice work at Shir Tikva and helped to start an environmental justice team at Jewish Community Action. She is passionate about tar sands and divestment work.

Teddie Potter (Start date: January 2014)

Teddie is Clinical Associate Professor in the School of Nursing at the University of Minnesota. She is the Coordinator of the Doctor of Nursing Practice in Health Innovation and Leadership and the Director of Inclusivity and Diversity. Recently she co-authored a book with Riane Eisler called *Transforming Interprofessional Partnerships: A New Framework for Nursing and Partnership-Based Health Care*. A passion for healing, traditional wisdom, and her own lifelong love of nature led Teddie to have a very early recognition of shifts in natural rhythms related to climate change. She was instrumental in forming "The Earthwise Group" at Mayflower United Church of Christ and was able to promote an Earthwise Resolution and the Resolution for Carbon Neutral Church Buildings, which passed at both the state and national levels. The Earthwise ministry also spearheaded a successful capital

funds campaign, so the church was able to recently install 204 solar panels on the roof of Mayflower.

Rev. Gwin Pratt (Start date: June 2013)

Gwin recently retired as the senior pastor at St. Luke Presbyterian Church in Minnetonka. After 25 years of parish ministry, Gwin describes his spiritual journey as one in which he sees the unity of all things in this great gift of the living earth. The mark of God's holy message comes to us in Jesus' prayer that the Kin-dom may come on earth, this wondrous place of God's manifestation. Gwin comes to MNIPL after more than a decade working with the climate movement, including working with MN350. Click [here](#) to hear one of our favorite climate change sermons that Gwin delivered in 2012.

Cathy Velasquez Eberhart (Start date: January 2014)

Cathy is a member of Prospect Park United Methodist Church where she helped initiate congregational sustainability conversations, including most recently a seven-part series on climate change. She and her husband Guillermo run Velasquez Family Coffee, selling the shade-grown coffee grown by their family in Honduras. Previously, she served as the Membership Coordinator for Land Stewardship Project. She is also a PK squared (the preacher's kid of 2 retired UMC pastors who served in the South Dakota conference). Click [here](#) to read a recent article Cathy wrote on finding hope.

Dwight Wagenius, Chair (Start date: June 2014) Since Dwight took his M. Div. from United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities in 2009, he developed a social justice ministry, primarily while serving on the Justice and Witness Ministry team of the Minnesota Conference UCC. Dwight served as a Minnesota Assistant Attorney General for 30 years prior to his call to ministry, specializing in environmental law. Dwight is a vegetarian for environmental reasons; he and his family have a couple huge organic gardens on their farm near where he grew up in west central Minnesota. Dwight lives in Minneapolis and is a member of Mayflower UCC. Dwight sees the relation between God and creation as panentheistic. Dwight was recently ordained as the Community Minister of Mayflower Congregational United Church of Christ! [Check out pictures from his ordination service, here.](#)