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Northampton Unitarians pick leader

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NORTHAMPTON - The Unitarian Society of Northampton and Florence voted Rev. Janet C. Bush as its new settled minister on Sunday after a year-long search which considered nearly two dozen Unitarian Universalist ministers from across the country.

All members of a seven-person search committee recommended Bush out of the three finalists for the position, and the congregation selected her in a nearly unanimous vote.

"I was very happy," Bush, 55, said of being voted to her first minister's position. "I'm thrilled that I'll be going to Northampton."

Bush will begin at the Society on Aug. 15 replacing Rev. Stephen Cook, who has served for two years as interim minister after the previous settled minister of four years, Rev. Jay Deacon, resigned in 2006.

She said her initial plans are to get to know the 300-person congregation and the local community. Bush was able to spend time and meet with the congregation during "Candidate Week" prior to being voted in as minister.

"The congregation liked her very much," said Julie Kurose, president of the congregation. "She's a warm, talented woman, and congregation overwhelmingly accepted her as our minister."

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THE REV. JANET BUSH

Kurose said she hopes Bush will be able to help the congregation to grow, bring back a greater sense of commitment to current members and have a stronger presence in the local community.

A Wellesley native, Bush was ordained to the Unitarian Universalist ministry in April and has served as a ministerial intern at the first Parish Church in Dorchester for two years. She graduated from Andover Newton Theological seminary in May 2008 and has trained as a student chaplain at VNACare Hospice of Needham and at Caritas St. Elizabeth's Hospital in Brighton.

In a statement written to the congregation before being elected, Bush wrote, "In becoming a minister I feel I have come into my own. I am blessed to have found in ministry a vocation that uses my experience and is served by my passions."

Bush also has experience in business, including stints as chief financial officer of two Cambridge-based biotech companies, Millennium Pharmaceuticals and ImmuLogic Pharmaceuticals.

She holds three master's degrees - in divinity from the Andover Newton seminary, in management from Yale and in education from Harvard - and a bachelor's degree in French from Yale.

Married to Booker Bush, a primary care physician at Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital in Boston, and a mother of two sons - 21-year-old Dan and 18-year-old Eliot - Bush and her family are preparing to relocate to Northampton.

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