



Saint Timothy's Episcopal Church

September 18, 2020
The Rev. Susan Geissler-O'Neil
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To the Panel at UCAP

Darita Seth is the Director of Music at Saint Timothy's Episcopal Church, Danville CA where I am the Associate Rector. Darita was hired during a search for a new Rector before I was hired and I served with him for almost 6 months prior to a new Rector coming to Saint Timothy's. I have now known him for almost 4 years. He transitioned from the interim time to a new Rector, adapting to the new administration's expectations. Darita is responsible for picking music for church and choir for our regular weekly services as well as special events like funerals. He has taken initiative to adapt worship and music for a new evening service for the church, held regular choir rehearsals, planned special choir events, worked on music for print & and projected bulletins, created new programs, and learned new skills to help navigate this strange pandemic time.

Darita works collegially. He follows up with his liturgical and musical expertise when we are planning a special event or theme. He works with the choir and his voice students to present special, fun programs that promote community and education in the parish, offers opportunities for volunteer choir member of different ages, and organizes the logistical details for putting on programs that involve all kinds of volunteers for a parish event. He has helped to bring several intergenerational experiences to the community, creative opportunities for worship, and faithful educational offerings for our church, the community, and beyond.

Darita initiated a Christmas festival four years ago that brought together the choirs of four local High Schools and their directors for what has become an annual concert for the community, our church members and the families of the youth. He managed the large numbers of youth on our campus, involved people in the parish as they helped to facilitate the event, and planned the educational aspect for the students. Darita managed volunteers from the parish, members of the choir who helped, paid teens who worked on the event, worked with the volunteer facilities manager, and coordinated not only the delivery of tiers for the choir, but the set up of chairs, and separate spaces for each of the different school choirs. He worked with teachers/directors of the schools and the volunteer parents from the school choirs. The logistics of this community event, which have improved each year, have included publicity in the church, community and schools, with posters and social media, ticket sales, programs and memorabilia, decorating, and working

with our altar guild volunteer to get special candles for this amazing Christmas event. It has become a favorite event for the parish and the community.

When I planned a special afternoon multi-station Christmas event for children ranging in age from pre-school to teens, Darita designed a flexible song and music component, and with grace and humor managed all the real time changes that happened because it began to rain—culminating in a memorable intergenerational candlelight service. Darita has also brought to our faith community suggestions for programs that spoke to refugee experience, programs about Saints, and compline events working with a variety of volunteers from the parish, professional musicians and the clergy.

The pandemic brought many challenges as we stopped meeting in the church for services and halted all activities in the church and on the campus. Learning new skills, Darita enabled older members of our choir to sing by pre-recording them, younger singers and students to sing during taping, and also brought together a virtual choir, which helped bring a tremendous sense of community, and a sense of a little normalcy to the parish. All this had to be done in advance of the actual time the service premiered. Using new technology for the church he helped remind the faith community of connections we could not experience in person, but could experience through music. One member of the choir, who is also part of the chorus where Darita leads a program in the senior living community, has deeply appreciated the way he has been able to bring education, singing and the elders' own experience of music together even during this pandemic. Darita worked with the digital technology chosen by The Rev. Todd Bryant, and Darita demonstrated new skills for his work as we learned how to better use Facebook, YouTube and live streaming opportunities while working with the team of volunteers who videoed musicians, instrumentalists, worship leaders and clergy.

I am grateful to be working with Darita.

Sincerely,

Susan Geissler-O'Neil

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