

## **First Unitarian Church of Providence**

Prudential Committee Meeting Notes

October 13, 2021

### **ATTENDING:**

#### **Prudential Committee**

Odile Mattiauda, President

Michael Cappelli, Past-President

Joan Richards, President-elect

John Dooley, Treasurer

Rick Richrds, Assistant Treasurer

Claire Rosenbaum, Clerk

Edie Warren, Personnel Liaison

Beth Armstrong, Strategic Planning

Louise Sloan, Community Life Liaison

Greg Kniseley, Social Justice Liaison

Alison Green, Spiritual Development Liaison

Kate Niles, Stewardship Liaison

Ex-officio - Liz Lerner Maclay, Minister

#### **Church Staff Attending**

Cathy Seggel, Director of Religious Education

Nancy Forsstrom, Church Administrator

**Meeting was held remotely via zoom due to COVID-19 Emergency.**

**6:45 PM - Gathering**

**Opening Words – Kate Niles original poem “The Alpaca Lips”**

**Covenant Reading**

**Call to Order – 6:52 PM**

**September Minutes** - Motion to accept minutes of September 8 meeting ( Odile/Edie ). Minutes approved unanimously.

### **REPORTS**

**Human Resources (Edie)** – Staff feel maxed out. They are working very hard. Logistics for service change each week. Nothing is routine. Each Sunday’s service takes hours and hours of planning. **Motion: That we offer to our program staff plus administrator a mental health holiday 1/2 - 1/8, 2022. This is a special circumstance due to COVID and will not be offered in the future, but is in recognition of the extraordinary work staff has put in this year. (Edie / John).** A letter will need to be sent to the congregation to alert them of this and

explain reasoning. Jaime, Walter, Pedro and front desk volunteers would keep office open, possibly at reduced hours. At next month's month meeting we will discuss whether to offer a bonus or some time off for support staff as well.

**Treasurer's Report – (John) - See report** – We are doing very well. Income is up from last year this time. A lot of new people are showing up. Expenses are down. PPP loan was forgiven. Regarding staff, perhaps could do a time and energy audit to avoid burnout. May need more staff or some part time staff working more hours. We have funding in the budget for a tech position. Nancy is working on job description for that. We may need communications person. Those positions who could use more time are working on proposals. HR committee will work on an HR strategic plan. We need mission statement finalized to see everything fits into the mission.

**Church Administrator Report (Nancy)** – See google drive for estimate on elevator. The elevator is not broken. Otis (the company that makes and services the elevator) has notified us that part of the hydraulic mechanism that opens and closes the door is obsolete and will no longer will be able to be serviced. Should doors not open, the part will need to be replaced (not repaired). That replacement will cost \$29,800. We need more information about the likely life expectancy of that part. Inspection will happen in a few months. Perhaps an evaluation in the next six months. Nancy spoke with John about the budget. Mary Jo, our accountant, is coming next week to do first quarter review with Walter. This will show how much we have from last year and how that balances out with PPP loan being forgiven. (some expenditures have been made against the PPP loan and surplus already). We have many line items where we are underspent. By next month we will have a good idea of what might be available. Nancy is going on vacation 10/19 – 10/29). We have a full front desk crew. Other staff will be around to cover as well. BLM and other “In this congregation we believe...” signs have been stolen. Louise and Greg will write up something for the First U Times to explain this to the congregation and get to Nancy.

**Mission Statement (Beth)** – Met with the Task Force. Some members are no longer available. Cynthia Rosengard has joined the group. They have printed the latest version of the mission statement on card stock and mailed to key leaders and asked for them to put topic of mission statement on next agenda for their committees or groups to talk about this. How does mission statement reflect what your group believes and is doing? How does it dovetail with your goals and purposes? Responses to occur in October and November. This will allow for a more thorough discussion of the mission statement than was able to happen last spring. Ideally a congregational vote will happen in January. Please email three or four words or phrases that describe to you our church's core values to Beth. Cathy has a slide show that was used to introduce mission statement to the children and youth. She could make available to anyone interested.

**DRE (Cathy) – See Report Part I and II** – Cath has worked on the abbreviated Resource Book. Spiritual Pathways has been meeting regularly about what’s happening for younger groups online and Coming of Age, Senior High and Campus Group in-person. Coming of Age is using a new curriculum called “Taking Flight” – hybrid version of OWL – combined with mentoring. Need to go slowly to allow people to form relationships. Everything is different. Many are exhausted. Once younger children have vaccines, we hope to move to more in-person sessions. Met with Mosaic Steering Team members. Anti-Racism is woven into all curricula. Mosaic Team members plan to meet with Sr. High and possibly Coming of Age groups. Worship is happening online. Numbers are low, but there is more interaction and participation.

Sabbatical Calendar and coverage. Cathy’s sabbatical plan is to take one week at a time approximately one per month. Coverage will happen with a combination of people – Gabrielle Farrell is professional consultant available should professional consultation be needed, Anna Van Ness, assistant RE, also Spiritual Pathways team as point people and on call. Cost will be around \$2000. Last three months of sabbatical (June – August) hope is to have interim or transition RE Director in place. **Motion: To accept Cathy’s sabbatical plan as presented tonight. (Beth / Rick) Motion passed unanimously.**

**Minister (Liz) – See Report** – Highlights – We are back to in-person worship with live streaming for those unable to attend in person. Numbers are down from pre COVID, but are decent. We are seeing some issues with COVID safety compliance. Who is responsible to enforce this? Pastoral care is happening. Rev. Roger will be merging Soul and Chalice circles into one Small Group Ministry program. All groups will perform social service or social justice project. Bethel AME group is having trouble finding time to reconvene. Staff team has good camaraderie, strong team work. Liz leading UU Minister’s Group . David Smith weekend planned for weekend of 4/28 – 5/1. Scotland trip – West highland Way Pilgrimage – is on. 20 participants confirmed. Faith and Science Initiative is working on a website and vaccination sites for BIPOC Rhode Islanders. Self-Care – Starting to walk in preparation for Scotland trip.

**Spiritual Development (Alison)** – Worship Committee is starting to plan for Liz’s sabbatical. Music Committee has been interviewing members of congregation on discernment process for music program moving forward. Checked in with Nori Duncan and Deacons. They are meeting tonight.

**Social Justice (Greg)** – All is going well. Asked that each of the fifteen groups set some goals. Shared information about fund-raising protocols. Six programs are active in beginning of this year. Social Justice list needs updating. Greg will send updates to Odile and Nancy.

**Mosaic – (Kate, Louise, Claire)** – See report. Janet Bralove has joined the Steering Team. Mosaic Team and its anti-racism goals have been promoted through the Order of Service inserts as well as notices in the First U Times. Team members have met with Cathy and Spiritual

Pathways leaders, the First U staff, Music Committee, Men's Group, Deacons, Worship, Chalice Circle Leaders, etc. Mosaic Team is planning a Service with Liz to introduce Mosaic Team and highlight the spiritual aspects of anti-racism work scheduled for November 14. The first installment for the Wayside trainings has been paid. Dates are set for February 5, March 12, April 9. As recommended by the PruComm at the Retreat, the Team is planning to announce the training series with Wayside Equity to the congregation in a USPS mailing immediately after the Service – also in an email announcement. The Team will need approval for expenditures (e.g., the mailing would cost about \$250) beyond the first installment for trainings that has already been approved. Mosaic Team will bring budget with all anticipated Mosaic Team costs for the year to next PruComm meeting for approval. It was noted that in general we need clear policy around mailing costs. Which mailings are part of committee budgets, which mailings are paid from the general postage line item.

**Stewardship (Kate)** – Kate introduced herself to various Finance groups, Benevolent Society, etc. She will need help to pull together a Commitment Drive committee. Need to develop better communication with Finance committee and PruComm. Liz offered to meet with Kate and Nancy regarding Stewardship as this has not had a lot of attention since COVID. Mark Ewert has offered to assist. We need to get a plan in place.

**Community Life (Louise)** – Potlucks in the past. People want to have interactive fun. Would be great to organize a hike or hot cocoa on the beach. Need for Fellowship.

## **DISCUSSION:**

**"How are you feeling?" service feedback analysis (Joan and all)** – See Joan's summary – Things that seemed to carry the most weight:

- Overwhelming positive response about the zoom coffee hours. There seems to be a yearning for small group interaction. Is there a way to have opportunities for small group discussion after Sunday service.
- People wanting to find ways to do good, offer service, e.g., Tech teams for elders, "wish walls" – ways to connect people who need help with those ready to offer.
- The need to plan for in-person RE as soon as possible.

All should take a good look at Joan's summary and send her feedback.

**Thoughts about rethinking the Bridging Task Force** – Send Odile thoughts on how to reorganize and streamline the work of the Bridging Team -- medical and safety, technological and communication aspects of planning for fuller return.

**Next meeting – November 10**

**December PruComm meeting at Joan's House**

**Closing Words – Kate Niles original poem "Algebra at the TajMahal"**

**9:35 PM – Adjournment**

Respectfully submitted, Claire Rosenbaum, Clerk

## Feeling the Pulse of First U – October 10, 2021

I used Claire's notes about what was said in Church as the jumping off place for this summary of responses.

What is First U doing now that is important to you and/or your family.

- RE programs for youth - Here in meeting house. OWL
- Music – preserve and enhance community – online and in person.
- Adults meeting in person.
- LOVE being back in-person.
- Outreach packet to families. Keep it up!
- Pastoral care.
- Appreciated communication with congregation, the personal family photos at home, the coming of Age service, the Care packages, mail and postcards. Live music. Deacons sending postcards. Virtual church – zoom, small groups, virtual tea parties. Chalice groups for spiritual development. Membership committee – good job! (Jenn)
- Relationship with Bethel AME – vaccination programs. COVID protocols. Small group outreach. New book group. NEW ORGANIST!! Great to be back in church.
- Having help for personal crises, pastoral care. Opportunity to give back – food pantry. Chalice and small groups. Gratitude.
- **Zoom Coffee hour: great success because people meet each other in deeper ways. Also Afternoon Teas.**
- Small groups – virtual and in-person.
- Important – pause and appreciation. Tech and snail mail. Social justice continuing. Food Share, Mobile Loaves and Fishes, Bethel AME, Arts – would like even more.
- Thanks to church leadership on allowing Food Pantry to continue during pandemic. Also great to have volunteers still committed to this ministry. Also happy that the Sandwich Brigade was allowed to start up last week
- Grounding in values and shared community – new members.
- I forgot to mention the six foot apart chorus which has provided joy for both the singers and the birthday person being sung to. Can we give Mary Frappier a special award?
- I'd like to join because I love the church, feel at home and Liz is an amazing Minister. I love the music. I want to join the choir. BUT I feel like the

church has become too political. I would like more spirituality and music and less politics.

- Thanks to Bridging team.
- Thanks for zoom services—broadcast has gotten much better so I can use it when traveling
- Shout-out to Nancy for keeping things moving throughout COVID
- Providing community, giving support for service, food pantry
- Personal outreach, like help coming home from emergency room (Roger, John) MUCH appreciated.
- **To end on an extended positive note:** We moved to Rhode Island in August 2020 knowing no one other than an old college friend. Having been UUs for 25 years, however, we were anxious to make contact with the church and become involved. In almost every respect, First U has been our port in the storm over the last year.

We began attending services virtually as soon as we arrived and soon met Jenn Nardone, who encouraged us to participate in the afternoon teas and later the Path to Membership class. Both she and Reverend Roger were very welcoming and helpful, as were all of the other members whom we met online. We now attend services in person on most Sundays.

Over time our circle of acquaintances at First U has grown much larger, particularly with Karen's participation in a Chalice Circle, the Women's Alliance, and a book club, as well as volunteering for the Food Pantry. The people whom we've met at church have also been instrumental in pointing us to resources and activities in the larger community.

All in all, our lives here have been greatly enriched by our association with First U during this stressful time. As far as First U's openness to newcomers, there probably isn't anything that the church could do better.

Rob & Karen Nicholson

**What can First U do moving forward that would be important to you and/or your family.**

- **Sunday Mornings**

1. Spirituality in being in the meetinghouse but because of musical limits, need more movement during service. (See suggestions under music below)
2. Want to come back and feel the energy—strong nurturing energy that is outward looking
3. Keep meetings on zoom, but also in person.
4. Preserving community ways to connect--online is OK, but in-person whenever possible.
5. We need to keep working on hearing issues—services, whether on Zoom or in person, are not audible to all. For in-person services we need more hearing apparatus; four is not enough.
6. Also, in my Zoom group, the idea was brought up for a one-time or occasional gathering (possibly on Zoom) to share "candles of joy."
7. In closing, I just want to say that personally I am still more comfortable viewing the services from home. I still work full-time and spend 6 days a week out in the public. Sunday has now become a 'grounded' day for me, church in the morning, football in the afternoon and maybe some house cleaning and laundry. I do hope that we will continue to offer YouTube viewing for as long as possible.
8. A suggestion though is that after the service, people keep their masks on until at least six feet from others even outdoors. After at least one of the services, many people were closely gathered and talking outdoors without their masks. I think when closely gathered even outdoors masks should be worn.
9. Appreciate intergenerational services—how to get that back?
10. Open up “standing part of service”—why just mourning those we’ve lost? Perhaps other recognitions?
11. More definitive end to Sunday Service—stronger ritual
12. “Love beyond belief”—it’s become a mantra but there wasn’t enough of a process before it was adopted. Wants to revisit.

- **SMALL GROUP MEETINGS**

- 1) COFFEE HOUR—the desire to continue the small group meetings of the online coffee hour was completely overwhelming  
Ideas for continuing this include later Zoom coffee hour, small group meetings during (instead of?) regular coffee hour
- 2) Chalice Circles and other spiritual groups much appreciated
- 3) Book groups
- 4) Dinners for eight
- 5) Cook together in small groups or on line (compare outcomes?)

- **MUSIC**

1. want to feel part of the music – participatory, however possible.  
Hymn and choral singing.
2. Are there other ways for all the congregation to participate in shared music without singing? clapping, rhythm instruments like in kindergarten, moving together—swaying, dancing, or...?
3. Organ needs maintenance. (\$\$\$\$)
4. Concerts to raise money (?).
5. Constantly re-evaluate music in the MH—vocal music is needed.
6. Screen in MH to project music
7. Christmas Carols outside (as a special service?)

- **RE PROGRAM—**

- 1) 7<sup>th</sup> graders are still restricted, although some are vaccinated. Need to get them into in-person possibilities.
- 2) Back in person for 5-12 year-olds ASAP
- 3) We will not be able to attend church in person until childcare resumes. We are also unable to attend Zoom services due to lack of childcare as Westley will not do any Zoom services. Cathy is aware of these issues.
- 4) My biggest, loudest, and strongest ask is for more investment in RE in the coming year. Cathy has done a tremendous job over the past decades. We are



blessed by her work. In this upcoming new year, we have an opportunity to try new things and stretch ourselves in new ways. I'd like the PruComm to focus the search for the next DRE on someone who can prioritize young families (they are the future of our congregation's sustainability) and high school students (there is little strength on the bench there and the program is languishing).

5) Keep the OWL going in person

5) Community forum with doctors to help understand the decisions being made around RE.

- **LEADERSHIP**

1) Diversifying leadership voices – types of families / ages, etc.

2) Leadership – more involvement from others.

3) More communication – ongoing business, mission statement, social justice.

4) Community forum to better understand decision-making.

5) Communicate about the church's financial status. How to increase giving

6) Regarding increased/clearer communications from the church about some of the big things currently in the works, I wonder if a new monthly email about only high-level updates (relating to staff transitions, the mission statement, congregation-wide efforts) might be a good way to offer folks more information without overwhelming people with emails each week?

7) Long term planning in case COVID is here to stay.

- **SERVICE**

1. Retirees want to find ways to participate more.

2) How to mobilize congregants – internal talent, creative solutions among congregants.

- 3) Create a list of volunteers and of need for volunteers – lay needs. Flexibility for youth and college folks.
- 4) Wish Wall—we need to create space for congregants to lean in. MOBILIZE YOUR CONGREGANTS!
- 5) Skill and relationship exchanges. e.g. senior and teen tech help.
- 6) Think about new membership groups as cohorts—connect them.
- 7) Deacon’s calls are important—keep them up!

- **FUN RAISING—COMMUNITY BUILDING**

- 1) Fun things – outdoors, film discussion.
- 2) Book exchange. Little libraries.
- 3) Garden committee. Partnership with small churches. Day Care center.
- 4) Painting collaborative
- 5) Outdoor wintertime Christmas Carol sing.
- 6) Yoga
- 7) Book club
- 8) Yoga
- 9) Walking club
- 10) Deacons’ calls are missed – maybe every few months.
- 11) Meaningful collaborative to do portraits to show diversity of our church and its history. In-person connections.
- 12) Connections with Bethel AME and other congregations to do projects together.

13) I think it would be wonderful, and very supportive of strong community, to introduce everybody to some of the longer-term members in the same format we use for new members. It could be a regular part of the newsletter, with just a couple of members at a time, or a growing presence on the web site, or even make a space for the little bios on the new Realm data base. I know it would mean more work for somebody, but along with the push to get people signed up in the new directory format, you might be able to tap into some help from Deacons to gather pics and bios. This idea was also partly inspired by a few new, surprising things I learned about Irene Allen at her memorial service. Getting to know more about each other, mini histories, hobbies, etc. can only bring us all closer together. It would be a shame to find out how interesting people are only as a part of their eulogy.

- **SOCIAL JUSTICE**

- 1) Future – protests and involvement in outside activities. Get church stronger, more diverse.

- 2) Mosaic team. Use to spearhead new directions for the church

- 3) Voting rights, lay ministry, gay pride.

- 4) What has helped me the most is the fact that the NSJC was able to continue to serve the homeless community throughout the past year and half. Many changes had to be made but our committee has stayed steady in its mission. The committee just recently pivoted its mission away from Emmanuel House to serving those directly on the streets of Providence. This work has kept me very spiritually connected and I am so thankful for all the support the PruCom lends to the NSJC and the Loaves and Fishes Mission.

- 5) More connections with Bethel AME Church and other community congregations with mutual projects.

### **COMMENTS AT PRUCOMM RETREAT –**

Elderly who have tech challenges – inability to access online services / email / etc. Forget what they are shown or taught – or can get along until things crash. Need mentors – young people, other seniors, whoever can – to assist with computer / tech issues. Better access for those without. Could also read info from newsletter over the phone if cannot access internet. Sr. High / Small Group Ministry groups, etc.

Snail mail letters as communication. PruComm - > Congregation communication. Communication Task Force?

Central role of Membership Coordinator?

Mission Statement – what happened to it? DRE Search? Minister for Liz sabbatical? Trip to Scotland? Bethel AME partnership?

Importance of community and **values**. Living into values.

Deeper connection – **zoom coffee hour connection**. Small group dinners? Virtual? -- common recipe; common movie, etc.

**Small group in person connections. After service small group discussions?**

“Retreat” for ministries (Committee chairs)? Lunch / icebreakers / discussion of core values after Mission Statement approved.

**Fun events**, laughing, etc. walking field trips.

Zoom allows for people to participate without travelling. Afternoon teas. Watch how to do this without overburdening staff.

**RE for young children (5-12)** – parents can’t participate without RE for kids.