

First Unitarian Church of Providence

Prudential Committee Meeting Notes

September 14, 2022

ATTENDING:

Prudential Committee

Joan Richards, President

Odile Mattiauda, Past-President

Hilary Salmons, President-elect

John Dooley, Treasurer – *via zoom for part of meeting*

Rick Richards, Assistant Treasurer

Claire Rosenbaum, Clerk

Dana Borelli-Murray, Personnel Liaison

Peter Laarman, Strategic Planning

Louise Sloan, Community Life Liaison

Lisa Voutes, Social Justice Liaison

Alison Green, Spiritual Development Liaison

Andy Wilby, Stewardship Liaison

Ex officio – Rev. Roger Peltier, Acting Senior Minister

Church Staff Attending

Nancy Forsstrom, Director of Operations

Mandy Neff, Interim DRE

Guests Attending

6:48 PM – Gathering

Covenant Reading -

Call to Order – 6:51 PM

Action over the summer via email:

Motion: To approve hire of Richard Spicer as accompanist to support Interim Music Director Beth Armstrong in a contracted position at \$250 / service. Funds are in the budget to support this. Motion approved – 11 yes, 1 not responding.

Motion: To approve the recommendation of the COVID Response Team to lift all Covid restrictions for the upcoming church year; this means we will allow people to sit in any pew, will allow the choir to sing freely, and will not require mask-wearing for the congregation. Adopting this policy will shift the responsibility to each of us to make our own decisions about what level of risk we are comfortable taking when we come to church. This policy will also apply to RE. (Dana / Joan) – 10 yes, 2 not responding.

Consent Agenda:

- June 8, 2022 minutes
- **Motion: To accept Music One RI as a special collection** (Odile / Alison – tabled at June meeting – see proposal and other materials from Music Committee)
- Proposal from Neil Bartholomew on behalf of nominating committee to create task force to consider the place of the Deacons.
- **Motion: In keeping with previous policy, move to authorize Director of Operations, Nancy Forsstrom, to request the issuance of a credit card for Interim DRE, Mandy Neff, with a credit limit of \$2000.**

Motion to approve consent agenda (Joan / Peter) – approved unanimously.

DRE Report (Mandy) – PruComm members introduced themselves to Mandy. It was noted that Carson Cole has graduated from RE and we will have a new youth representative to the PruComm.

Mandy reminded PruComm that she has been hired as an interim DRE for Two years until summer of 2024. Her role will be to help assess programs, policies, culture and systems; help with decisions as to what to maintain and where to make changes; and to otherwise facilitate a farewell and transition to a new permanent DRE. She warned that in this role, she will likely be raising a few uncomfortable issues. She hopes to use this Fall to look back and with Spiritual Pathways gather a timeline and understanding of past history of the RE program. The bulk of her time with us will be devoted to assessing the present culture and systems. She will also assist in forming a vision for moving forward.

In her short time with us so far, Mandy wanted to note two patterns. First: A common concern she hears from congregants is that “There is not enough spirituality.” She suggests the congregation grapple with the question “What is Spirituality?” Second: There is a desire for more integration and alignment of worship and programming for adults and children and youth.

She noted that she unexpectedly arrived to staffing challenges. There are two vacant positions: youth music director and assistant DRE. Work has begun to fill those positions. We need an Equal Opportunity Employer statement. Alison and Dana will assist in locating that language. It has been used in recent job postings.

Mandy shared a draft “Spiritual Pathways Program Policies and Practices for Academic Year 2022-23” document – to address COVID response and safety. This document was amended by removing the fourth paragraph and beginning the fifth paragraph with the single sentence, “Vaccines are now available for people of all ages.” Also, the second paragraph first sentence should read, “We have learned about what works with children and volunteers.” **Motion: to**

accept the “Policies and Practices” document as amended. (Alison / Rick). Accepted unanimously.

The youngest children will start RE on 9/25. K through 5th grade will follow a small group ministry format. Grades 6-7 will use “Crossing Paths” comparative religions curriculum. 8th grade will do Our Whole Lives (OWL) and Coming of Age. Senior High will engage with Youth Group. There are 2-3 volunteers for each age group already identified. We will need more volunteers for teams of 4 as year goes on.

Electronics records will need to be stronger for next DRE. We are migrating registration onto REALM instead of Google Forms. 12 children were registered on Sunday. (50 were enrolled last year). Outreach to families is underway to offer online registration. We expect more next Sunday and through online efforts.

Mandy brought up a sensitive topic. At last Sunday’s service, her introduction to the congregation, in the receiving line, she received several comments that reflected gender bias toward her. These comments have been referred to the Right Relations Committee for deliberation and action, but are not unlike similar comments received by female congregants in the recent past. She brings this to the PruComm as an observation of congregational culture and to raise the question of what we might want to do to prepare for receiving new and permanent staff in two important positions – DRE and Music Director. Discussion brought to light that the congregation needs some education on the role Mandy is filling as an expert professional consultant, leading the congregation in assessment of present programs, culture, policies and systems, and vision for the future of RE at First U.

Director of Operation Report (Nancy) – (See written report).

Acting Senior Minister Report (Rev. Roger) (See written report).

DISCUSSION

Priorities – The group was directed to the list of priorities developed at the summer retreat. Initially, the plan was to identify the five top priorities to bring to an October “Congregational Conversation” for discussion and feedback. It was noted that some of the items were more operational and others more programmatic. Some of the items requiring funds would be capital campaign items, others more part of an operational budget. Many items have been discussed for several years, but we need to determine a clear implementation strategy. It was decided that we likely did not have enough clarity at this point to prepare for an October congregational conversation, but that communication with the congregation about priorities is important.

It was noted that there should not be a PruComm-driven large shift in direction while Rev. Liz is on sabbatical, but that most of the items on the list for consideration are in alignment with Rev. Liz’s goals from last year and/or other areas that she has discussed and on board with.

Furthermore, it will be necessary to set priorities for the implementation of a successful commitment drive in alignment with those priorities.

Peter proposed considering Six “clusters” for the various items on the list:

1. Welcome, Diversity, Inclusion, Youth
2. Public Witness – relation to the city / state
3. Belonging / Spirituality / Worship Excellence
4. Communications – Newsletter, website, social media, etc.
5. Building / Financial Stability
6. Develop a Strategic Plan by the end of the year.

Motion: to adopt Peter’s proposed clusters for areas to develop a priorities chart. (Rick / Odile). Motion accepted unanimously. Dana will set up a channel on the PruComm “Slack” for each of these cluster areas. All PruComm members will be invited to join all channels, but feel free to focus on cluster(s) that interests you the most. The hope is that by next month’s meeting we will have a more organized list of priorities. It was pointed out that ideally we would be working with a five – ten year strategic plan that would outline large goals, objectives and action steps to achieve those goals with timelines. A long-term strategic plan is sometimes difficult to maintain with three-year terms for PruComm members. Planning structures that might have been in place at one time can get lost as leadership turns over. Newer members are not aware of some work that was done three to five years ago, or even last year. We hope to get a strategic plan structure in place by end of the church year.

Chalice Extinguishing

Adjourn – Motion to adjourn (Rick / Claire) approved unanimously 9:03 PM

Respectfully Submitted,
Claire Rosenbaum, Clerk