

First Unitarian Church of Providence
Prudential Committee meeting
October 12, 2022

The meeting was called to order by President Joan Richards. Present were: Joan Richards, Odile Mattiauda, Rick Richards, Alison Green, John Dooley, Peter Laarman, Hillary Salmons, Andy Wilby, Louise Sloan, Dana Borrelli-Murray, Rev. Roger Peltier (assistant minister), Nancy Forsstrom (director of operations). Claire Rosenbaum and Lisa Voutes were excused.

September Minutes – Minutes of the September 14 meeting were approved unanimously.

Point of clarification: about Sabbaticals

- Odile reviewed the process which had taken place in preparation for Rev. Liz's sabbatical. Many new members of the PruComm were not aware, and it was agreed that the documents would be re-installed into the Google drive to prevent any misunderstandings.
- It was asked how the scheduling for sabbaticals happens. According to the sabbatical policy adopted in January 2022, sabbaticals can be taken after 5 years of continuous service AND before 7 years. After a sabbatical, the measurement of time until the next sabbatical begins when the staff person returns from a sabbatical to active service.
- It was reiterated that the PruComm had agreed not to make any radical, undermining changes. As an example, we would not change the structure of the worship service, or job descriptions for any staff. However, clarifying the workings of the Finance committee is something we've talked about with Rev. Liz, and she is fully aware and in support of.

Reports

Joan said that the work of liaisons is especially important, and she wants to make sure all are aware of things that are happening.

Social Justice. Lisa had sent a report to Joan that things are going well. There was a brief discussion about Pride events and how to make sure our congregation is aware of them, and also about the Welcoming Congregation process. There are several members of the Living LGBTQ+ Soul Circle who are willing to take on these projects if asked.

It was moved and seconded (Rick/John) to create a Welcoming Congregation Committee and to proceed with a plan to review the requirements outlined by the UUA. Motion carried. It was agreed to ask John Hickey and Holly Dobbs to 'officially' take on this task.

Community Life. Louise is hoping to arrange for a potluck with a speaker and asked if Friday or Saturday were best for most people; many prefer Saturday. She asked about how to arrange childcare, since we included it in the budget to make it accessible to more people when organizing events. Joan referred her to Mandy.

Louise asked about the Caring Network, which Rev. Roger explained. It was asked if programs that are overseen by staff also need liaisons, and the consensus was that they do.

Louise reported briefly on the History and Partner Church committees, Art in the Atrium, the Community Band, and the bookstore.

Stewardship. Andy reported that Finance is meeting October 26th for its quarterly review of investments, and the Commitment Drive team is meeting October 28th. Andy is meeting Friday (the 14th) with Nancy and John to discuss how to enhance the stewardship processes, including Buildings and Grounds.

Spiritual Development. Alison referred everyone to Mandy's very thorough report. The Music Committee is working on a process for reviewing the possibility of hiring a full-time music director when Beth Armstrong's 2-year interim is complete. They are obtaining information from similar congregations about their music programs.

Rev. Roger added that he has first-hand knowledge that a well-articulated music program and a full-time director does indeed help churches grow. It was also iterated that we need to keep in mind our desire for a variety of musical styles when thinking about whether to hire an organist or put together a structure which can allow for a music director and different musicians.

Rev. Roger added some information about the upcoming Threshold Conversations, in which First U has been asked to take part. In 2001, the Essex Conversations helped set the direction of religious education in the UUA for the next 20 years. It is time to decide what's next, especially in light of all the changes around us. There will be a 'Time for all Ages' in an upcoming worship service, during which the congregation will be asked specific questions about how to move forward in religious ed.

Personnel. Dana let us know that the job descriptions for PreK assistant, DRE assistant, and Youth Music assistant are being disseminated. We need candidates; Mandy needs to be able to focus on interim work.

Priorities

There was a long discussion as a follow-up to the priorities the PruComm began working on at the July retreat, and which were discussed at the September meeting. Joan reminded us that we need priorities because we will need to be able to judge whether new initiatives can move forward based on their fit with priorities.

As the Strategic Planning person, Peter said that he felt it was important to set priorities so that we could then make a plan which would lead to a mission statement.

It was moved and seconded (Peter/John) to accept Peter's 'clusters' from the September meeting as our priorities.

The discussion centered around why we need priorities, how to agree on a focus, where spirituality fits in, the role of a board, how our priorities align with the 7 principles, how our work fits our mission, and how worship is related to inspiring the congregation to do the work.

It was pointed out that the ideas from the retreat were concrete ('let's fix the kitchen') but our discussions have become more abstract. Rick said that we need solid answers so that the Commitment Drive team can create a focus around the things we want to do.

Peter suggested that a couple people can take all this information and suggest a structure for how this can play out in the real world of the church. The motion was tabled.

Emeritus policy discussion

Joan invited in Greg Kniseley, who had organized the group which proposed the emeritus policy, to explain the process the group followed and to answer questions.

It was moved and seconded (Rick/Louise) to accept the emeritus policy as it had been proposed.

There was a long discussion about the history of emeritus status, especially in academia vs. the church world, professional covenants, rights and privileges, minimum longevity, the nomination process, precedents (nationally and within First U), the danger of someone hanging on too long (this is highly discouraged in other non-profit boards), credentialing, and benefits.

The question was called; the motion did not carry.

Closing words by Albert Camus were offered by Odile and the meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy Forsstrom, DoO