

Letter to the Congregation - PruComm Update - Mon, Feb 4, 2019

First Unitarian Communications <communications@firstunitarianprov.org>
Reply-To: First Unitarian Communications <communications@firstunitarianprov.org>

Hello First Unitarian members and friends:

A warm greeting to you. I want to take this opportunity to provide a Prudential Committee (PruComm) progress report; the PruComm is the governing body of the church. During last June's annual meeting, I highlighted a list of goals we hoped to accomplish this church year. In this progress report I'll provide our successes, some things that are in progress, and discussions we are having around strategic decisions that will impact the future of the church. I'll start with our successes.

- The completion of the church exterior renovation at the start of the church year ended a successful capital campaign and was made possible through your generous contributions.
- We completed a successful Partner Church Refresh weekend that started our planning for a Transylvania visit this coming June 2019. The careful process we used to address our concerns when the Hungarian Unitarian Church supported only traditional marriages will be offered by the Partner Church Council as a model for other UU congregations.
- Through our partnership with the Providence Athenaeum, we hosted a record crowd for their Salon event with Oskar Eustis. We have two more events scheduled in March and September. This is all part of our goal to increase community partnerships.
- The first phase of the parking lot repaving is complete. The final phase will start in the spring.
- Newer and brighter lights were installed to improve parking lot safety and security. Additional lighting and handrails will be installed in the spring.
- We have improved security by installing a new video system, fortifying external doors, and placing panic buttons to alert Providence police in case of emergencies.
- We hosted our first family seeking sanctuary. Our guest family felt cared for and supported through the generous gifts of time, talent, and funding from church members, friends, and community partners.

- We have successfully re-envisioned and rebranded our monthly Friday suppers.
- We now have a new parish care intake process to quickly assist members and friends in need of care or assistance.
- A variety of groups representing the staff, committees, governance, lay leaders, and worship worked with Rev. Thandeka and her Love Beyond Belief™ program. We brought in Rev. Thandeka so that she could observe our worship services, interact with our staff and church leaders, and provide us with tools to revitalize congregation life and create opportunities for us to achieve our strategic goals. Meetings and workshops with her showed that many people in our church are hoping that our further development as a congregation will include more chances for deeper connection with each other and programs to support spiritual exploration and experience.

Attendance and giving levels are increasing, and our church is growing. With over 500 members, we are now officially a “large” church within our denomination. We want to take stock of where we are and what we need to bear in mind in order to chart a course forward that allows us to keep building on our strengths while we also work to improve some other areas of church life. Our continued growth is resulting in challenges, opportunities, and decisions that will need to be made over the next several years. The PruComm is beginning to discuss, deliberate, and discern our strategy for addressing each challenge.

- Our growth can make it harder for newer members to feel connected. Some members and friends may find it difficult to engage, to feel engaged, or to find their place in our community. Some volunteers may feel overwhelmed from requests to serve on committees or to meet program needs of the church. We consulted with Rev. Thandeka on one of her recommendations – reframing our Chalice Circle program to increase member interactions and volunteer participation. Our goal is to initiate this expanded program before the church year ends.
- We engaged a UUA regional consultant to do a staffing assessment. It was completed in December and reviewed with the PruComm in January. The recommendations include staff reconfigurations, staff additions, compensation changes, and long overdue technology improvements. The PruComm is deliberating the impacts of these recommendations and assessing our options and commitment for moving forward.
- Our pastoral care needs far exceed our ability to service those needs, and we expect those needs to increase. While Rev. Liz is always available for

pastoral care, she needs additional help. We were fortunate last fall to engage Ministerial Intern for Pastoral Care Kevin Carson. He is assisting with our pastoral care needs through the end of the church year and working with Rev. Liz on a plan to address our growing pastoral care needs.

- The Sound System team is working with a sound engineer on designs for improving sound audibility within the sanctuary. We've had some preliminary figures and will soon receive the final design and costs. We will need to determine funding and an installation timeframe.
- We will need to do a giving assessment to determine our congregational commitment and ability to meet our future funding challenges.
- During our PruComm winter retreat, we had some preliminary conversations about our mission and vision statements. We all agreed that our current mission does not reflect our new direction and purpose. The time is right for us to revisit our mission and vision and to discern who and what we want to be as a church. Within the next 1-2 years, we will need to work with the congregation to create a strategic plan to implement updated mission and vision statements.

While we are deliberating, we will need your input on some important questions. For example: What are the implications, opportunities, and challenges of growing? Do we want to be more diverse? What does being more diverse mean? Are we doing too much social action? How can we strengthen the relationships and understandings that connect us across the generations that comprise our congregation? How should we manage the challenges and opportunities afforded by our large and historic buildings? And there are many more. I am working with both the UUA and UUA Regional on the best way to have these facilitated conversations. We hope to start these in the spring and continue through next year.

We are growing. We are changing. We are transitioning. Our growth is challenging First Unitarian to be a leader and beacon for liberal religion. Our growth will require both your input and your patience as we deliberate and discern.

I encourage you to find out more about what the PruComm is doing and the issues we are deliberating. Stop by our bulletin board in the Parish House to review the agenda for an upcoming meeting and meeting minutes of our past meeting. You can also review agendas and meeting minutes on our church website under the Members section. Or stop by the "Ask the PruComm" table once monthly after the worship service. The PruComm meets the second

Wednesday of each month (except during the summer) at 6:45pm in the Haynes Room. Meetings are open to all, and I encourage you to attend.

Thank you in advance as we chart a course to keep us vital, relevant, spirited, and strong.