

Congregational Update & Welcome
Cheryl Bartholomew
Friday, September 20, 2019

I would like to welcome everyone to the new church year. I hope that wherever your summer travels took you, whether you stayed close to home or wandered farther afield, you had the opportunity to relax, recharge, and reflect.

We look forward to a lively and productive year. I contacted members of committees and groups active in the church and asked them to share some of their plans for the coming year, so that I might share them with all of you. What follows is an update from a variety of groups and committees that responded to my request.

The PruComm is pleased to report that due to the generosity of the congregation and to the passing of a motion at the 2019 Annual Meeting, we have been able to fund the following additional projects and activities for our committees and groups to expand their work on behalf of the congregation, as well as provide our staff with a UUA Fair Wage Salary increase.

The following motion was passed at the 2019 Annual Meeting:

“To allow any surplus money from the budget income in fiscal years 2019, 2020, 2021 to be used by the Prudential Committee to fund mission critical projects, programs or staffing requests that occur during the church year and could not be funded due to current budget income limits, and to resume funding of building and grounds with surplus money from current year’s budget income with fiscal year 2022.”

Surplus monies have been used to fund:

- Envision the Future Congregational Conversations
- An additional day per month for the Mobile Loaves and Fishes truck
- Black Lives Matter speaker fees, Pride Parade participation, and Nonviolence Training
- Transportation, signage and promotion for setting the First U Legislative Committee Action agenda
- Recycling bins for the church as part of the next step in Green Sanctuary certification
- Facilitator/Educator/Speaker fees around racial justice and the development of partnerships with groups led by people of color within the community
- Lay Pastoral Training Materials
- Strategic Planning and Mission/Vision work
- Recruitment & Informational events and pamphlet printing for the Benevolent Society
- And support of the David Smith Music Weekend in October

The Prudential Committee would like to offer a heartfelt thank you to the congregation for making this possible.

The PruComm also wants to invite you to participate in the church's *Imagine the Future* workshops. These workshops will discuss topics that matter in our church today. Your participation in these workshops is important to us. Topics will include understanding our future as a growing church, worship and the Meeting House, and the role of social justice in our congregation.

These two hour workshops will allow for an open discussion of ideas in a non-judgemental setting, in both large and small groups. These workshops will be led by Unitarian Universalist facilitators from the UUA. Childcare and food will be provided.

Workshops will be available on three different dates. Please choose one.

- Saturday, Oct. 12: 9:00 - 11:00
- Thursday, Oct. 24: 6:30 - 8:30
- Sunday, Oct. 27: 12:00 - 2:00

Please register for your preferred date a week in advance. You can register online. Contact Caroline Mailloux for more information.

The Technology and Communications committees have been very busy over the summer. They launched our new Weekly First U Times back in early July. We hope you have been enjoying the weekly updates about what is happening in and around our community. First U Times is sent out each week to a mailing list of 900 email addresses. We are happy to report that data shows us that it is being opened and viewed by many. We are now offering online sign-ups for Parish Pot Lucks, Imagine the Future, and other programs. We continue to livestream our Sunday Service, and have a presence on Facebook and Instagram. Bill Koteff, Derek Smith, and Jaime spent a busy summer installing wiring to update our wifi infrastructure. We now have fast wifi throughout the campus. We also upgraded our phone system. The next big project for technology is to work on the church's data management system. Our old system is being retired in about 24 months so we are now thinking about our needs going forward and looking toward a cloud based system. Contact Bill Koteff for more information regarding Technology and Bev Koteff for more information regarding Communication.

The Girl Effect Task Force wishes to report that they raised \$4,400 for girls' education in less developed countries during the last church year. They made donations to:

- The San Lucas Toliman Scholars for girls in Guatemala
- The Kibera Girls Soccer Academy in the Kibera Slums, Nairobi, Kenya
- The Malala Foundation Gulmaki Network for Teacher Training
- The RefuSHE Girls Empowerment Project in Kenya
- Save the Children for educating girls in Afghanistan

They are always looking for new volunteers and fundraising ideas. Contact Polly Walker for more information.

The History Committee is very excited to be working with the 300th Anniversary Committee preparing for a year full of events beginning in January 2020 with a Parish House Pot Luck and program in the auditorium and culminating in October 2020 with a grand celebration marking our 300th year! The history committee has been working on creating a document highlighting some of the most important dates in our 300 years as a congregation in order to create a 300th Anniversary banner. Contact Janet Downing Taylor for more information on the History Committee.

The 300th Anniversary Committee will be meeting after church on the first Sunday of each month. Please help us grow this important committee. Your participation is needed to create a meaningful and thoughtful celebration. Some ideas that have been put forth so far are commemorative hats, t-shirts, pins, scarves, pens, sun catchers made from pieces of our former stained glass windows, History minutes in the First U Times, several sermons focusing on church history, perhaps a big celebratory dinner, and possibly commissioning a piece of music. How do you think we should celebrate this milestone? Don't be left out of this exciting opportunity! Contact Meghan Smith for more information on the 300th Anniversary Committee.

The Women's Alliance is recruiting new members this month and is back in the Atrium selling bags of coffee during Coffee Hour. A new flyer on upcoming Alliance programs will soon be available. Contact Gail Bruele for more information.

Worship Committee wants you to know that they have scheduled a varied group of guests in our pulpit for this year. A few highlights:

- On October 27, the Director of the UUA's United Nations office, Bruce Knotts, will be here from Saturday afternoon through the Sunday service which he will lead. There will be an opportunity to meet with him on Saturday afternoon, probably around 3:30, with details to be announced later.
- On November 17, Barnaby Evans, the creator of WaterFire, will be in our pulpit. Last year, we had a wonderful service led by RI Poet Laureate Tina Cane, showing us that artists have much to teach us about our spiritual paths, and the invitation to Barnaby is in that spirit.
- On January 12, we will have the President of the UUA, Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, preaching from our pulpit.

Contact Neil Bartholomew for more information about the Worship Committee.

This will be a busy year for the Transylvania Partner Church Committee. They will be working on the following projects:

- On October 20th after the service, a slide show presentation on the latest visit to our partner church in Szentegyhaza will be held in the auditorium and will include a light lunch.
- Tickets for two Hungarian folk dance shows will be available for sale in October. The shows will be in Concord, MA on October 26 and in Belmont, MA on November 2. Those of us who went to Transylvania this summer saw part of this show.

- Partner Church Sunday in 2020 will be on Feb. 9. After the service there will be a program and food.
- Our partner church minister, his wife, and the president of their congregation will visit our church in June of 2020 as part of our 300th anniversary celebration and to visit General Assembly which will be held in Providence. Contact Tom Getz for more information.

I would also like to mention that Tom Getz has been selected by the Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council Board of Directors to receive the 2019 Steward of Partnership award. This award recognizes individuals in the United States and Canada who have provided exceptional care to their congregation's partnerships. He will receive this award at GA this June in Providence. Congratulations, Tom!

The Finance and Investment Committee oversees the investment of First U's endowment funds. They meet regularly with the manager of our endowment funds to see that funds are invested to support both our long (fund growth) and short-term goals (operating budget). They also recently formed the Benevolent Society as a way to educate and motivate church members to include the church as a beneficiary in their estate planning. Contact Tony Allen for more information.

Small Group Ministries is expanding. In addition to our Chalice Circles, we now offer Soul Circles. Last spring, we conducted a survey of the congregation regarding the types of small group experiences that they are interested in having to deepen their connections and practice their spirituality. From the survey results, we invited members of the congregation to serve as facilitators for the Soul Circle program, which will add to the small group ministry offerings of our successful Chalice Circle program. During Homecoming weekend, 18 facilitators participated in a 1.5 day workshop led by Thandeka to enable them to offer meaningful experience of what she calls the Wordless Presence in Human Experience. As many of the wishes that were written on our Homecoming Sunday blue boats included a strong desire for connection, friendship, and love, we are very excited to be offering additional opportunities for making those wishes a part of our beloved community's reality. Both programs will be recruiting members and a "Sampler" will be held this Sunday, September 22, in the auditorium after Sunday service. Contact Janet Downing Taylor or Cynthia Rosengard for more information.

The Green Team as I said earlier, will be purchasing recycling bins for the church as the next step in receiving Green Sanctuary certification. Contact Kristin Ivy Moses for more information about the Green Team.

The newly reformed Building & Grounds Committee has been working on implementing the landscaping plans for the front of the church. I believe they are also seeking members to join the committee. Contact Max Pounder for more information about Buildings & Grounds.

As Liz mentioned on Sunday, the David Smith Music Weekend will begin on Thursday October 17 and run through Sunday October 20. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to participate.

The Sanctuary Committee reports that since the Benitez Family left our Sanctuary in December, there have been a few inquiries about our Sanctuary room, but no takers. The current political climate around immigration may have caused those people who need sanctuary to find ways of becoming invisible for the time being. The Sanctuary Committee has shifted its focus to the current immigrant group in need of help, which is asylum seekers. Starting in the spring and throughout the summer, this group has met with representatives from other faith and community organizations to form a resource and support network for people interested in housing an asylum seeker or family of asylum seekers until they can get settled. There is currently one family in Barrington housing a mother and her three children with the help of a community network there. The Sanctuary Coalition is assisting in finding a good match for a family in Cumberland who is offering to share their home with an asylum seeker. It is the goal of the group to find someone from each faith community who can house someone seeking asylum. If you would be interested, please contact Katherine Ahlquist or Judy Ortman through firstusanctuary@gmail.com. Watch the First U Times for dates for upcoming info sessions.

An Update on a member of our Sanctuary Family, Daisy Benitez

Daisy returned to RI in early August, hoping to start studying at Roger Williams University. She had been accepted there before her family was torn apart by ICE in August 2018. With the help of Keith Brown, our former Church President, Daisy was able to get registered and start the academic year on time. Unfortunately, after attending for only a few weeks, it became clear to Daisy that her family was having difficulty being so far away from her. After heartbreaking calls from her little sister Vikki, fearful that something terrible had happened to Daisy and that she would never see her again, Daisy has decided to return to Mexico to be with her family. She wants everyone to know that she is not giving up on her education, but after a year of trauma, which included the loss of two uncles this past spring, being so far away from her family didn't feel like the right thing to do. She plans on coming back in a year or two to start over again. She is so grateful and appreciative for all of the support and encouragement her friends at First U were so quick to offer. She sends her love to everyone.

The Community Food Share continues to serve clients on the third Monday of each month. Last year they fed 3,895 people. They are hoping to create a video for both potential volunteers and potential guests about how the Food Share works. They will post the video through the church's website. If you are interested in volunteering at the Food Share, contact Amy Grant for more information.

Side with Love will be meeting next Wednesday, September 25 for the first time this church year. During this meeting, they will be assessing whether or not there is sufficient interest for this group to carry on as a separate entity from the Sanctuary Coalition group. Although there are several topics that could be focused on, such as work toward renewing First U's Welcoming Congregation status and continuing our work on Black Lives Matter, the current leadership is finding it difficult to devote sufficient time towards these important initiatives and the very time intensive work the Sanctuary Coalition requires at this time. If there are any individuals out there who would be interested in taking leadership for this group, please attend the meeting on Wednesday, or contact Katherine Ahlquist.

First U Knitters continue to meet on Tuesday nights to knit for the First U mitten tree, or to work on projects of their own. Anyone interested in knitting, learning to knit, or who would like to hang

out and talk on Tuesday nights are welcome to come. They meet from 7 to 9 just about every week, and have knitting supplies to share.

The Spiritual Pathway's program would like you to know that this year's programs are focused on serving families with relevant, accessible, meaningful UU faith development programming for children, youth and adults that is curated from theme based, current curricula. **Nourishing healthy relationships and spiritual practices is at the core.**

Membership looks forward to greeting and welcoming newcomers. We have had quite a few this summer and during this new church year.

We have three Path to membership classes scheduled with the first one starting on October 2, If interested please speak with membership coordinator Jennifer Nardone.

Just a little reminder to always be welcoming and say hello to somebody new to you!

As you can see First U is a very busy place. I would like to thank everyone for all their work on behalf of this congregation. I would also encourage you to become involved, if you aren't already, in some of these amazing opportunities to grow and nurture community here at First U.