Minister’s Board Report

June 2021

Dear UUCF Board,

This month marks the end of another church year, with the summer ahead, and then a new year beginning—a year that will be very different. One where we are back together physically in our new downtown location.

Oddly enough, we are very much on track with the video report I made back in December. As predicted, despite solid efforts from many, our online engagement has decreased during the past few months. This can be attributed to both “Zoom fatigue” and the ever increasing options the congregation has to do other in-person activities. Nonetheless, our worship services are still getting between 300-500 views within a week or so of their original broadcast. One thing we will never fully know is how this time online has affected the lives of people who have connected with us—who otherwise wouldn’t have.

Likewise, as predicted, it looks like we will be back together in person in late summer, with the first Sunday in September scheduled (if all goes well) as the “big” Sunday back. We have some challenges ahead: the new space will require much planning and flexibility as we figure things out—and find our way respectfully alongside the other communities that share the space. Likewise, the congregation will need to be thoroughly educated as to parking options, the new Sunday service time of 11:15, etc. Much will be new, which will create some understandable anxiety. Most importantly, we have a new relationship with the congregation we are sharing space with. I speak from experience in saying that I’m still not used to having the ability to check in easily with First Christian about issues of concern; despite our best efforts, we rarely received much communication from our previous location, and it didn’t seem that questions or conversations were welcome. Now we are in a position to have frequent and welcome communication. What a difference! Nonetheless, having a close, collaborative relationship with our landlords/friends is a new skill to learn. It will ultimately serve us well, but it will take time to develop that skill—and if my own benign fumbles are any indication, it will require our lay leaders to think differently about how they engage with both the space and planning events and activities.

I am concerned about the loss of our Office Administrator, Rita Salama, in July. She has kindly agreed to be available online as needed for a time of transition, but I am hoping that we are able to hire someone soon. I am working with the Personnel Committee and am hoping the job is posted this week so it is accessible to people of diverse identities, races, etc. Because I am on study leave (June 15-20, June 29-July 12) during some of this time, it will be a bit challenging to interview and hire someone unless we make it a priority to meet this deadline. Rita will be sorely missed—more than words can say—and I grieve her loss. She has contributed substantially not just to the administration of this congregation, but to the spirit of it. Her energy and belief in our mission has infused her work at all times—at great benefit to UUCF. At the same time, my practical self is aware of how important it will be to have a replacement to follow her in a timely way.

There are a lot of details to be ironed out in the coming weeks. And I will admit to some anxiety with all that is ahead. Nonetheless, I feel certain that we have made good, healthy decisions for this congregation all along the way. This Board has had some of the hardest work to do that any Board will have—and you have done it with compassion and efficiency. At this time, I have to take a moment to honor the work of Linda Duarte-Wolf, Jim Sutherland, and Mark Umbriaco as they step off the Board during this summer. All three of you—no matter how tough this past year has been—have shown remarkable grace, leadership, and even humor. I know I speak for more than myself when I tell you how grateful we are for what you have given to this community. Mark has served effectively as our dedicated President, going above and beyond the call of duty more than once. I hope all three of you know that the gifts you have brought to this Board are unique and deeply appreciated. Words simply can’t convey the gratitude we all feel.

I hope all the rest of you have that same awareness for what you have brought to UUCF during this time. It is truly appreciated.

In gratitude,

Rev. Jason Cook