July 2019 Executive Report

Ends Statements 2016 – 2021:

1. [Within] The people of First Unitarian Church, of all ages and backgrounds, connect in a transformative, authentic, liberal religious experience. We:

- **Grow spiritually, emotionally, socially and ethically.**
  - Tracy Beck is planning for all Faith Formation classes and programs for the 2019-20 year. This includes: Sunday morning programming for children and youth, Wednesday evening programming for children and youth, Our Whole Lives for grades K-1, 5-6 and 7, Coming of Age, and High School Youth Group. Adult programming will include Soul Matters, Wellspring as well as other offerings. Approximately 100 facilitators and mentors need to be recruited and trained to meet the program needs.

- **Explore and experience what it means to be human.**
  - Tracy Beck will present the workshop from the Iowa Coalition Against Sexual Assault, "Think About Your Son: Sexual Assault Prevention for Parents” on July 25 and August 1. The training offers a parent-education approach for parents of sons ages 5-21. The workshop will be offered again in the fall.
  - Tracy Beck met with the Our Whole Lives Grade 7 facilitator team to celebrate the year, as well as discuss ways to enhance programming for the 2019-20 year. Much gratitude is given to facilitators Norio Umezu Hall, Ben Spadt, Harvey Harrison and Susan Jellinger. Harvey and Susan will retire and will consider leading a parent group for OWL age youth. Norio is moving to California and will be deeply missed! Ben Spadt will facilitate during the 2019-20 program year. 2 more Our Whole Lives facilitators need to be recruited and trained.

- **Cultivate compassion toward ourselves and others.**
  - Learning about nonviolent communication, sometimes called compassionate communication, is one of the ways we can cultivate and practice compassion. The June 18 workshop on Nonviolent Communication was the beginning of larger plan to encourage our members to communicate more compassionately. See more under “Respectfully Connect Across Differences,” below.

- **Foster personal connections to life, nature and/or the divine.**
  - In furtherance of this End, our Membership Ministry Leadership Team planned to hold a ramble through our woods in conjunction with the church-wide pot luck on June 23, but the weather did not cooperate. The beautiful grounds invite us all into nature to experience wonder and celebrate life; we’ll look for another opportunity.

- **Seek, embrace and share experiences of wonder.**
  - A REACH grant of $2,000 was granted for the Children’s Music Program. Tracy Beck has been in communication with Steve Dressel about continuing the work he started this past spring with children’s music on Wednesday evenings. The Children’s Music
program adds a significant element to Wednesday night programming as well as a time of joyfulness.

- Develop our Unitarian Universalist identities.
  - At the July 7, 2009 Sunday service, youth Theo Chungath, Max Jensen, Gavin Houchins-McCallum, and Madeline Echternacht participated. Madeline sang her original composition, “Breathe” (about saying farewell); Emma Bailey read the story for all ages; and the other three youth served as Celebrants along with Meg Notch. Inviting youth to take on a key role in a worship service is one way that the congregation helps them develop their UU identities—and witnessing their participation helps our adult members develop their own sense of Unitarian Universalists identity as people who encourage and nurture the development of our children.
  - Also at the July 7 service, the child dedication of Olin Michael Greiner reinforced the UU identity of Olin’s parents, Danielle and David Greiner, and of the members of the congregation who affirmed their willingness to support child and parents—acknowledging their role as UUs in the developing life of the family.
  - Tracy Beck met with the Coming of Age facilitator team to discuss the celebrations and challenges this past year. The team will look forward to Coming of Age 2019-20 as they begin planning this summer. Facilitators Tim Glaza and Scott Emison Clair will step down, as Tim has moved to Montana and Scott’s daughter will be participating in the program. We’ll need to recruit and train two new facilitators.
  - Rev. Erin Gingrich participated in the UU Ministers’ Association Ministry Days via online streaming.

2. [Among] The people of First Unitarian Church connect in community to support one another and honor the web of life. We:

- Ask for and receive loving presence from one another, especially in times of joy, sorrow and transition.
  - The Pastoral Team continues to support our members who need a deeper presence from their church. Rev. Erin Gingrich, who has been taking on an increasingly larger role in pastoral care, and Debra Rodgers, Acting Leader of the Pastoral Team, are coordinating pastoral care during July. The ministers and the team members are grateful for the leadership of Barb Glass, who has just stepped down after a year in the Team Leader role. Barb will continue as a member of the team.
  - In memorial services during the last month, we celebrated the lives of Terry Swanson and Larry Link in services that Rev. Erin Gingrich planned and led.
  - Members of the Caring Ministry Team offered support through rides and meals to five members who had not received support previously and also assisted with the continuing needs of others. For members who are unable to drive, Caring Ministry now arranges rides to church on a continuous basis, ensuring that those who have hung up their keys can remain actively engaged in Sunday services.
During the last month, the Caring Card Ministry, part of the Caring Ministry Team, sent cards to eight members, all those identified through our Joys & Concerns pipeline. People seem to appreciate the cards signed by multiple congregants, as well as cards sent by individuals on the Card Ministry Team. The responses we hear from people who receive cards is an indication of the importance of the Card Ministry in helping members feel connected to their church during times of joy, sorrow, or challenge.

- Respectfully connect across differences for understanding.
  - Rev. Erin Gingrich taught a class on Nonviolent Communication with five participants on June 18. She has preached on this topic twice recently and again in Ames on June 30. She has purchased a facilitator handbook and on her study leave will prepare to lead a practice group this fall.

- Intentionally invite and engage others to grow in community with us.
  - The May/June Newcomer Circle, facilitated by Jill Philby, wrapped up in June with an average of six participants, not including the facilitator.
  - The mentor program, under the leadership of member Ellen Taylor, got a re-boot in June with a focus on outreach calls to recent visitors by a team of current member ambassadors. Ellen and Laura Berardi (membership) are trying this new model to see if more people with participate.
  - On June 23 we had our first Sunday Potluck of the summer, with an estimated 90 people staying after the service to enjoy food and fellowship together. Although the rainy weather prevented the planned “ramble through our woods,” members and most of our visitors that morning stayed to enjoy the brunch potluck and chat. This was the first of the monthly potlucks planned for the summer.

- Generously share our time, talent, and treasure.
  - Rev. Erin Gingrich preached at the UU Fellowship in Ames on June 30 to support the fellowship while their minister is on sabbatical; Rev. Jennifer Brooks was a guest speaker there in May.
  - The Stewardship Ministry Team has determined that members in the lower two giving quartiles who participated in the Passport to Our Future event in March increased their pledges significantly over those who did not. This correlation is not likely cause-and-effect; instead, the Team believes, it is member engagement translates to increased giving. The Stewardship Team and the Membership Team plan to collaborate on how to engage more members more often in satisfying, meaningful ways (without reference to pledging).

- Maintain a facility and grounds appropriate for our needs and aligned with our values.
  - A new “Accessibility and Inclusion” webpage has been added to the church’s website (under the “About” tab), which outlines accessibility accommodations currently in place, and provides a form for notifying the Accessibility Team of other accommodations that would enhance someone’s participation in our community. The webpage can be found at https://www.ucdsm.org/accessibility-and-inclusion/.
With the help of member Pat Headley, we reached out to Bryan Doty with the Iowa State Theatre Co., a successor of the Drama Workshop. The Drama Workshop has a number of items in the archives room at the church, even though they no longer regularly use this building for their productions. We asked Bryan if the theatre community would like their items back in their possession – which will also open up room in archives for church materials. Bryan has visited the archives and is making arrangements to have the drama materials moved out this summer.

The Grounds Council and our groundskeeper did an amazing job of cleaning up the trails and preparing our outdoor spaces in advance of the June 23 ramble through the woods. Alas, rain prevented the rambling, but the grounds look great.

3. [Beyond] The people of First Unitarian Church nurture justice in the world. We:

- Build authentic partnerships, responding to needs our partners articulate.

- The Iowa Sanctuary Movement has suggested that there is less need at the moment for potential sanctuary locations and an immediate need for sponsors for asylum-seekers. The Immigration Justice & Sanctuary Team has held two meetings to explain to interested members what it takes to sponsor an asylum-seeker, sharing knowledge from various sources including the experience of members Karen and Michael Lauer. The Team hopes to develop a proposal that would allow the First Unitarian to sponsor an asylum-seeker, with the idea that sponsorship would in no way diminish the congregation’s readiness to shelter within our walls someone in need of sanctuary (as authorized by the 2017 congregational resolution). The proposal in development would add to our support for the Iowa Sanctuary Movement and the migrants that group supports.

- For the past two months we partnered with the Young Woman’s Resource Center, whose mission is to embrace and inspire young women to become strong, self-confident and successful. Thank you to Judy Davis and Gene McCracken for organizing these efforts in our church. Ten people volunteered from our church offering more than 20 hours of service and more than 15 members made contributions of food and supplies. And we raised $2,839.50.

- This month we begin a new partnership with the Urban Bicycle Food Ministry. Each week, people ride their bikes to deliver radical hospitality—one burrito at a time—to the homeless and hungry in Des Moines. If you’d like to join this unique bicycle ministry, there’s more information in the Intercom.

- Show up with passion and enthusiasm to grow our values in the world.

- Many members of the congregation showed up on Friday, July 12 for our local Light of Liberty vigil in front of the Polk County Jail. The vigils, which are nationwide, ask for the detention camps to be shut down and for migrant children to be returned to their families.

- On June 9th, Welcoming Congregations member Birch Spick and Rev. Erin co-led a Pride Weekend service honoring 50 years since the Stonewall Uprising, and the activists and ancestors present who shaped queer and trans liberation movements. Birch crafted the format, focus and wrote the majority of the service. Rev. Erin heard much praise
about the service and is grateful for their leadership and shared ministry with our congregation.

- Members of Welcoming Congregations, Trans Action Group, and the wider congregation marched in the 41st Capital City Pride parade. Around 50 congregants of all ages joined us in marching.

- **Share our talent and resources to support groups with whom we share values.**
  - Members Gene McCracken and Bob Glass and Membership Coordinator Laura Berardi attended a follow-up meeting on June 26 regarding establishing a Trauma-Informed Congregation Network in our area. The work is being organized by Iowa ACEs and the meeting was hosted at our building. There is interest in beginning with some educational film screenings and coordinating those screenings at congregations around the Des Moines metro.

- **Provide leadership and space for civil discourse.**
  - There is a controversy that began during UUA General Assembly and that has since spread to UU congregations, including ours, regarding the book *The Gadfly Papers* by Todd Ecklof, minister of the UU Congregation of Spokane, Washington. The controversy invites creative interchange between people who share Rev. Ecklof’s views, people who dispute his assertions of fact, people who find his terminology hurtful, and people who hold either a combination of those perspectives or other points of view. Our church Facebook group page has numerous comments.
    - At the request of the Spokane, Washington UU congregation’s leaders and the Pacific Northwest UUA Regional Lead, Rev. Jennifer Brooks, along with Rev. Aaron Payson, traveled to Spokane June 29-30 in Spokane, Washington to launch the Spokane congregation’s exploration of their membership’s perspectives on the book and the manner in which it was released. Travel was at UUA expense.
    - As this controversy has evolved, many thoughtful commenters have observed that people who are marginalized in our society (especially people who are trans, gender nonbinary, disabled, or people of color/indigenous) have experienced repeated micro (and not so micro) aggressions during their lifetimes, and thus often are reluctant to engage in a conversation with someone who starts from the position of dismissing their experiences and their account of the ways our society’s structural bias has harmed them. People who are not similarly marginalized, but who nonetheless are able to understand the perspective of someone who is, may be better situated to engage with people who are strongly in agreement with *The Gadfly Papers*.
    - Rev. Jennifer says, “I have never encountered so extreme a gap in perspectives. It’s a gap that seems to me to be based on a different set of experiences shaping different worldviews. I'm a person with multiple kinds of privilege. This controversy has reminded me that the moment I hear a statement that startles or confounds me, I need to listen carefully and be willing to receive someone else’s experiences as authentic and true. As a person who believes in ‘justice, equity, and compassion in human relations’ (the second of our UU 7 Principles), the fact that something I say hurts...
someone is important information. My reaction shouldn’t be to deny it; my reaction should be to learn more. The use of reason requires that I take into account how my words and actions affect others.”

- Welcome and accept transformation that comes through authentic relationships within and beyond our church.
  
  o On Sunday, July 21, we have a unique opportunity to welcome guest speaker Rev. Linda McCrae from Central Christian Church in Indianapolis. Her uncle is UU minister Eugene Pickett, one of the many interfaith influences in her life. She’s visiting Des Moines as part of the annual meeting of the Disciples of Christ and will be preaching on the commonalities between our faith traditions.

**UPDATES**

**Membership Numbers Summary:**

- Number of new members in June = 0
- Deceased = 0
- Moved = 1
- Withdrew membership = 0
- Number of registered adult visitors = 5

**Ministerial Transition.** The five focus areas of the interim period are—Vision & Mission; History & Heritage; Wider Connections; Stewardship; Clarifying Leadership Roles & Navigating Changes in Leadership.

- Rev. Jennifer Brooks bids farewell to First Unitarian and especially to the Board, with gratitude for the concentration, hard work, and collaboration the Board members brought to the challenges and opportunities of the interim period.

**Operations.** Important information about current operations—

- **Revised Interpretations of Executive Limitations.** Attached to this report is a revised draft of interpretations of Governing Policies Article II, Executive Limitations. This draft reflects the amendments the Board made to the Executive Limitations in May (II.A.5 added; II.B.4 revised; II.F adopted) and June (II.H.7 adopted). The new interpretations in particular reflect the language of II.H.7 as adopted (the prior draft interpretation was of the language as proposed). This is the version of the Interpretations the Board should consider in deciding whether to accept the Executive Team’s interpretations of Article II.

- **Need for Revision of Governing Policies as Published.** Now that the Board has made changes in Article II of the Governing Policies, the Board’s secretary is responsible for creating a new official version of the Governing Policies that reflects the May and June amendments to Article II. Once the new official version is ready, the Executive Team will post it on the church website. We hope that the Revised Interpretations of Executive Limitations attached to this report (noting the changes on the cover page and in footnotes) will make this task easier.
• **Board Policy on Inspection of Church Records.** In connection with this Board Policy, which is not included in the Governing Policies, attached to this report are three items: (1) a copy of the current Board Policy on Inspection of Church Records; (2) the corresponding Operating Policy; and (3) the relevant portion of Iowa statute 504.1602. There are a number of issues around this policy that need to be addressed.

  o First, this should not be a separate Board Policy but should be incorporated into the Executive Limitations.

  o Second, both the Board Policy and Operating Policy should be updated to include the provision of Iowa 504.1602.3.b – the purpose for the information requested should be included in the request. Finally, we wish to highlight that Iowa 504.1602.2.b mentions simply the “accounting records of the corporation.” This very broad term includes pledge information, meaning that any member of the congregation could request full pledge information (including names) for everyone else in the congregation. I would strongly urge the Board to consider a bylaw amendment as permitted in Iowa 504.1602.5 to restrict what financial information is accessible by request.

  o Third, at a minimum and perhaps as a stopgap, Executive Limitation J should be amended to mandate the existence of an Inspection of Church Records Operating Policy; our recommendation, however, is that the existing Board Policy be adapted into a new Executive Limitation so that the original intent is maintained.