

February 7, 2019

Dear Members and Friends,

In my months here, I have been impressed with so many things about FUUSB: the energy of the people, the meaningful work you do to represent our values in the world and to contribute to greater justice; your determination to live your mission. I have loved working with your fine staff and have come to respect your lay leaders, like the members of the Board and leaders of your ministry areas, very much. You can be rightly proud of this congregation.

FUUSB does face some challenges. The congregation needs a firmer base of financial resources for its ministries and staff and programs. It needs a more robust participation by a wider portion of the congregation and an increase in lay structures to support all the ministries people want to do. That's especially true given that financial realities will mean operating with one professional minister starting next year and likely for a time to come.

After a few months of learning about this congregation, listening to people, working on options for staffing next year, I have recommended to your Board that it consider beginning a Developmental Ministry (DM) in the fall of 2019 rather than going into search for a settled minister. DM is a ministry track that UUA has created in the past decade or more to allow a congregation to work for three to five years with a minister on certain clearly identified goals. And it's important to understand this: developmental ministers are fully trained, ordained, fellowshipped UU ministers. They are preachers, pastors, and teachers as well as organizational developers. A developmental minister would love you, celebrate and mourn with you, and help you try to live your mission while focusing on goals important to your future.

The heart of it is this: your senior staff and the lay leaders carrying the most responsibility have been too stressed in recent years. I have seen it, heard it, and know it. At times it has been intense. None of this means our congregation is broken; FUUSB can continue doing great things while also making adjustments and developing areas that will create the most fertile ground for a new settled ministry to be effective for many years.

I have reluctantly also concluded that I cannot personally do the single ministry needed here next year and maintain my health. I realize that means even if interim ministry is continued, your transition at the end of this year will be a bit greater than expected. I wish that were not so, but I also have faith that this is the kind of congregation that pulls together. Your board has not made any final decision, and its members are listening carefully to feedback. Whatever route is taken, I have confidence the good people of FUUSB will be ministered to and perhaps, most importantly minister to one another and become an even greater, stronger congregation.

In the faith,

Rev. Susan Milnor, Interim Senior Minister
First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington