

Thursday, January 19, 2023

Dear Congregational United Church of Christ Members and Friends,

Per Julie and Paul's email dated Wednesday, January 18, we are following up to share our thoughts and additional information we have at this time.

As we begin 2023, Congregational is vibrant, healthy, and strong. We have the challenges all faith communities are facing in these not-quite-post-pandemic days. All the same, our members are active, giving is strong, and we are receiving visitors and new members. We are continuing with a range of substantive programming and continue to be known in the community for our progressive witness. It is gratifying to reflect on how we have pulled together and remained connected through it all.

Since the time Julie and Paul shared their retirement announcement with us, we have experienced wide ranging emotions -feeling distraught they are leaving, discomfort with the unknown, resolute that God will guide us through this transition, and joyful for Julie and Paul's opportunity to spend more time with their grandchildren.

We are grateful for the leadership and, frankly, the grit our Pastors have displayed in recent years, and over the course of their tenure. In the years that Julie and Paul have served our congregation, they have honored the history of this church. That is, "we" have done things our own way to push past norms. We had women deacons in the 1950's, multiracial meetings in the 50's and 60's, and a female pastor! We recognized gay unions before there was legal marriage. We participated in launching community ministries and interfaith collaborations. We designed our own Open and Affirming process and became a sanctuary congregation. **This call process is no different ... we will make our own way in calling new ministerial leadership to ensure stability and continuity.**

In the months since our first conversation with Julie and Paul, we have worked to develop a framework for the call process. It is a rough timeline of the work that will need to be done to allow Julie and Paul to transition to part time in the late Summer/early Fall timeframe. It also allows for Julie and Paul to share their experience and knowledge in support of the new minister prior to full retirement. **We anticipate the call process taking 8-10 months.**

In the weeks ahead, the Church Council will appoint the members of the Call Committee. If you have suggestions, please contact one of the Officers by January 31. It is essential the Committee members reflect the diversity of our congregation. We are committed to keeping members and friends well informed. If we fall short, let us know.

There are many details to be discussed as the process is unfolding. There will be plenty of time for asking questions and productive discussions. **We will have our first conversation after worship on Sunday, January 22nd. Please hold your questions for that meeting or email them to Robin Long at robinrlong06@gmail.com.** Your questions will be shared with us and with Julie and Paul prior to the meeting. We will do our best to respond keeping in mind we do not have all the answers yet.

This new year will be a year of transition for our church, and we are confident our ability to work together, discern together, listen to one another, and stay connected will hold us steady as we build toward the future.

What can each of us do in the coming weeks and months? We can abide by our core values as a congregation: trust God and one another, practice hospitality to all, speak and act with integrity and transparency, create and maintain safe spaces where all voices can be heard, honor the faith practices of grace, forgiveness, and peace with justice.

We are grateful for this congregation and how we value and embrace making our own way. In every endeavor, every risk we have taken, there have been unforeseen benefits. No doubt this will be a formidable labor of love. Our history proves we are up to the task and as Julie and Paul shared with us, "our fervent hope is we leave our church strong, looking forward to an exciting future."

If you would like to speak with someone regarding this announcement, please contact one of us.

In God's service,

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Bill Guill, Clerk (bill@billguill.com)

Sankey Moore-Painter, Financial Secretary (sankeymp@gmail.com)

Robin Long, Treasurer (robinrlong06@gmail.com)