

June 4, 2021

Beloveds,

Change is hard and Wow, have we had change this year! We are coming to you today to acknowledge our missteps. As a Board, we have worked hard to shepherd our community through the ever-changing landscape of this pandemic. And we have also been attempting to plan for an uncertain future.

We humbly apologize that we did not fully communicate our thinking, planning or decisions with regard to our plans for religious education. We are actively looking at ways we can better communicate with you going forward and for now would like to share our thoughts and plans for the summer and the fall, with respect to our Religious Education staff: RE Director Liz Davis-Chaffin and Youth and Young Adult Program Coordinator Marisa Benson.

As most of you already know, Liz relocated to Virginia in August 2020. With all the other transitions, and the virtual nature of our congregational activities, she agreed to stay on through this year, providing continuity during this difficult time. In a typical year, we would have created a search team, and perhaps even have hired an interim RE director for the fall.

Instead, we have requested that Liz continue as RE director in a transitional capacity. We are actively seeking a local part-time RE coordinator who will work directly with Liz and be our “on the ground” presence as we move back to in-person religious education. This is an experiment, and we will re-evaluate how things are going in December, make adjustments and decide about our next steps at that time.

Marisa was re-hired in September 2020, to help Liz with the RE program when we were having difficulty keeping youth and young adults connected to the congregation and realized they were having an especially hard time during the pandemic. As you all know, Marisa brings many gifts. Because it was of interest to Marisa, she offered her gifts in other areas, such as worship, the Tuesday Workshops and Sunday morning worship services. These activities were a blessing to us and yet not within the original scope of her position.

As we move into the new church year, our priorities as a congregation need to be aligned towards the future. Some parts of our congregational community have remained strong and resilient, but others need more tending and rebuilding – one of the biggest of these is RE and reconnecting with families. Therefore, we made the decision not to renew Marisa’s contract for the new church year to ensure that our focus is on the future needs. Marisa’s contributions in worship have been invaluable and we are deeply grateful. With the hiring of Li Kynvi as our intern minister as well as our ability to involve more members of the congregation, the staff need for worship arts has diminished, and the true need for the congregation is an in-person presence for family, children and youth.

We know we didn’t adequately communicate about all of these changes and give people time to absorb them. Therefore, we have asked Marisa to stay on through the summer in order to allow everyone to say goodbye and for us all to have a better transition. Her official last day will be August 31.

While the future is uncertain, it is also one that we will create together. We hope you are as excited as we are to begin this new chapter in the life of FPCoG.

In gratitude and humility, Board of Trustees