

September 17, 2020

Dear Restoration Members and Friends,

We are writing to share the status of our name change process at this point in time.

As you are probably aware, our Name Change Committee (Linda Hansell, Jim Cohen, Len Rieser, Brenda Ridley, Bridget McQuate, Suzanne Weltman, and Eithne Ross) has been working for years to explore the possibility of changing our current name, the Unitarian Universalist Church of the Restoration.

We owe a huge debt to this committee for their very thorough and careful process. They have solicited our input with two extensive surveys, as well as Town Hall meetings and other conversations, and many hours processing that input to come up with a recommendation. As you saw in their recent letter, based on all of that input, their final recommendation was to change our name to “Mt. Airy Unitarian Universalist Community” with the added tagline “Open to Everyone. Committed to Justice.”.

In August, during three different Social Hours after our Sunday Service, dozens of us participated in Breakout Room conversations in response to this proposed name, each of which had members of the Name Change Committee as well as Board members present. The 8<sup>th</sup> Principle Team recommended that we also contact members and friends who did not participate in these sessions, or whose opinions were not clear from them, and so the Board did that in the last couple of weeks. We wanted to make sure that our process is as inclusive as possible.

The Board then met to decide what our next steps in this process should be. It was clear from the feedback that the community has not yet reached consensus. We have a good number of members and friends, many who have been cherished parts of our congregation for decades, who have always been uncomfortable with our name, especially the Christian and theological connotations of “Church” and “the Restoration”, even to the extent of not becoming members because of them. These include folks from Jewish backgrounds and with LGBTQ identities, two groups that mainstream Christianity has historically oppressed, up to and including the present day. At the same time, we have a good number of members and friends who are very happy with our current name, who had positive associations with church communities such as black churches, and who like the spiritual connotations of Restoration, not to mention pride in our racial justice history which the rest of the UU world associates with “Restoration”. Portia and others have suggested that if we want to attract people from the neighborhood, especially black folks, it would be good to have something in the name that suggests we are a *spiritual* community (as opposed to just a neighborhood community group). At first glance, these two perspectives do not seem easy to bridge.

As we discussed the situation, Rev. McKinley mentioned that in fact the Name Change Committee was not charged with coming up with a tag line, which is basically a kind of mission or vision statement. Other Board members agreed, and we decided that if we as a community want to work on a vision or mission statement, we should start on an intentional process to do that. We do have the phrase “Embracing all souls and restoring wholeness” that the congregation came up with in a process led by Rev. Kathy Ellis a number of years ago, which Rev. McKinley considers and uses as our current default mission statement.

In the process of our conversations in the last month, one thought was that changing the word “Community” to “Congregation” in the proposed name might serve as a way to at least partially recognize the needs of the folks who want our name to show that we are a spiritual community. In some preliminary conversations, some of them have indicated they would feel much more comfortable with that change, but not everyone has had a chance to weigh in about that yet.

Thus, the Board has come to the conclusion that what we need to do at this point is to have a community conversation about these issues, to listen to each other deeply, and to use all of our creativity to find a resolution that takes advantage of all the hard work of the Name Change Committee, but with a final result that as many people and perspectives as possible feel represents them. We now need to go beyond the point of advocating only for our own personal preferences, and need to think of what will be best and most inspiring for us as an entire community, to hear and speak up for each other, to make sure that everyone feels represented by the name we choose, in a way that helps us move in the direction we want to go as a faith community.

The Board has decided that the first step in this process will be to have a congregational conversation after our Budget vote at the Congregational Meeting on September 27 (after the worship service). Like we did for our Annual Meeting in June, we will encourage those not comfortable with Zoom to call someone they do feel comfortable with, to be able to hear and participate in the conversation. One goal will be to get a sense of whether replacing “Community” with “Congregation” would be a meeting ground that feels inclusive and not explicitly Christian enough to honor marginalized groups while making it clear we are a faith-rooted community, and not a secular community association. We can also discuss other possibilities to address the concerns of those least enthusiastic about the proposed name and to distill all of our discussions. The Board will take the gist of this conversation to decide at their October 4 meeting what will come next. Some have indicated that they would prefer not to make a final decision until we can all be physically together in the same room. We will continue to do our best to discern what is best for all of us as a whole as we proceed.

Please join us on September 27 so that your voice can be heard, and so that you can hear diverse other perspectives. It is commonly said that UUs, and white culture in general, tends to try to avoid conflict (by “being nice”). As part of our 8<sup>th</sup> Principle commitment to dismantle racism within our congregation, let’s see this as an opportunity to face a difficult subject that we have different feelings about, and work our way through it with humility, love, and a sense of humor. A group’s name is about identity, and so runs very deep; it’s a chance to let everyone know who we are and what we are for, and not just who we aren’t! Let’s navigate those depths together!

The Board