

September 7, 2023

Dear Teachers and Advisors,

This will be a season of change for our Learning Community. We recently received a letter of resignation from Cassandra Scheffman, our Director of Family Ministries, and then from Nicole Bowmer, in a combined role of Associate Director of Family Ministries with Youth and Learning Community Assistant.

Cassandra and Nicole will be working with us both to open our programming for the fall and towards a positive transition for this vital ministry. Cassandra will be here through the end of October and Nicole will be here through the end of September to allow for time for the transition to happen.

While change can be challenging, our community has had experience with transitioning our Learning Community over time. We even have very active members in our congregation who are former Directors of the Learning Community to help counsel us as to what we want to be sure to remember to do before Cassandra's and Nicole's respective departure dates. Our new Membership Engagement Coordinator, Jennifer Thomas, who just started this week also happens to have served as a religious educator for seven years and will be another resource on the staff alongside of Cassandra and Nicole to ensure we don't miss steps.

We now enter a season of gratitude for all the ways that Cassandra's and Nicole's ministries have touched the lives of our children, youth, families, teachers, and advisors. We will be offering opportunities that are meaningful to Cassandra and Nicole respectively for you to be able to say thank you for all the gifts they have shared. Please read Cassandra's note below this one, which offers a summary of a number of the accomplishments we have to celebrate from their tenures here.

As far as transitioning to whom, we are already reaching out to the UUA and to the interim religious educator networks to explore the possibilities of who and where we might find our next religious educator. This will likely be an acting/interim religious educator and will allow us to explore and imagine the ways that our Learning Community Program can serve children and families into the future. It was already clear through the Community Conversations last May and June that parents would like to see such conversations happen this year.

Please know that you can reach out now or at any point in the future to me or to Rev. Tom Disrud, our Associate Minister, with any questions, concerns, or hopes you have for the Learning Community. You can make an in-person, Zoom, or phone appointment directly on my calendar here: <https://calendly.com/alisonmiller/volunteer-or-staff-support>

I look forward to seeing you at parts of the Teacher Orientation and Social Justice Retreat both happening this Saturday at our congregation. May it be a day of giving thanks and getting ready to receive our children in their classes and in youth group in just a couple of Sundays.

With gratitude for all the staff and volunteers who make our Learning Community thrive,

Rev. Alison

Cassandra's letter next page:

Dear Beloved Congregation of First Unitarian Portland,

I have been on staff with First Unitarian for ten years, half of that as Director of Family Ministries, and it has been a great honor and privilege to serve this community. I am deeply saddened to share the news that I've made the very difficult decision that it is time for me to move on. I've submitted my resignation to the executive team with a plan to end my employment on October 30th.

I am proud of what we have accomplished and overcome together during my tenure. We have updated curriculum and programming for all our children and youth to better support today's families and a commitment to the 8th Principle. We are building a classroom culture that is inclusive and celebrates diversity. Added flexibility and support has made the Learning Community more accessible to volunteers. Family Ministries and the Social Justice Ministries have had many successes working collaboratively, building multigenerational community through a commitment to the issues that draw so many of our families. I have been part of a worship team that has made a concerted effort toward creating and adding multigenerational worship services. The years of the pandemic brought about a major disruption to the life of the church, quite significantly for our families with children and youth. Though I wish it were under better circumstances, I appreciated the opportunity to lead the creation of a new virtual family worship service to help our families stay connected during that time, among other innovative efforts that volunteers and staff worked on together. Although we are still rebuilding and reconnecting post-pandemic, the Learning Community has been on a positive growth trajectory, with new and returning families, since the time we reopened our in person programming. This has proved to be a great time to explore new opportunities for engagement as we continue to learn about how to best support our families in these times.

I care deeply about this congregation and intend to do all I can to support a positive transition for whoever follows me in this role. I have faith in the continued success and development of Family Ministries at First Unitarian, that First Unitarian will continue to be a place for families to find hope and a path to lifelong learning, to act together for social justice, and build beloved, multigenerational community.

I want to share with you all the deep gratitude I have for you and the privilege I've had to serve this congregation. I have learned so much from you.

With love and thanks,

Cassandra