

Statement of the Board of Directors, First Universalist Church
June 23, 2023

On Sunday, June 18 the First Universalist Church Board of Directors learned from Greg Whitney that the Pleasant Street Drop-in Center had been successful in becoming a 501(c)(3) public benefit corporation with its own Board of Directors. The PSDIC submitted the necessary paperwork to obtain this status on February 27, 2023 and on March 8, 2023. The new corporation will be known as the Drop-in Center. In light of this information, the Church Board voted at its June 21, 2023 meeting to dissolve the Steering Committee of the Pleasant Street Drop-in Center as a committee of the church.

The Board did not take this step lightly; since receiving Board approval in January 2022 the Steering Committee has been responsible for the Pleasant Street Drop-in Center's remarkable work with the unhoused and the vulnerable in the Lewiston-Auburn area. Indeed, the Steering Committee's decision to turn the Drop-in Center into an independent legal entity and to refine their outward facing presence featuring a new website and Facebook page and a GoFundMe campaign is testimony to their ambitions and goals in addressing the needs of the unhoused and the vulnerable.

However, having received advice from legal counsel and from our congregational representative at the UUA and having consulted with Church Mutual (our insurance carrier) and the chair of the Finance Committee, the Board decided that it was in the best interests of the First Universalist Church to take the step of dissolving the Steering Committee as a committee of the church.

Working with the Drop-in Center Corporation will allow the Board to address in a systematic and formal manner a relationship that has changed significantly since its inception in January 2022. In particular, the dramatically increased scope of the Pleasant Street Drop-in Center's activities has raised questions about finances and insurance.

Over the past 8 months, the Board, the Steering Committee, and the Finance Committee have been struggling with how to measure the Pleasant Street Drop-in Center's impact on church finances and how much the Center could contribute to the church budget. The fact that the Steering Committee was a committee of the church greatly complicated this conversation. Now the Board and the Drop-in Center Corporation will be able to create a rental agreement between two separate legal entities, similar to that between Trinity Church and the Jubilee Center. A formal rental agreement means that there will be clarity around the financial and operational responsibilities of both the church and the Drop-in Center Corporation.

Since January 2022 there has been lack of clarity around how the church's insurance policy covers the Drop-in Center's activities. Once again, the fact that the Steering Committee was a committee of the church created uncertainty. As a separate legal entity, the Drop-in Center Corporation does have mandated insurance requirements that will provide clarity as to its own legal exposure as well as that of the First Universalist Church. Both entities will be assured that they have adequate insurance coverage.

Over the past 18 months, under the auspices of the Steering Committee of the Pleasant Street Drop-in Center, Church members and community volunteers have played a significant role in highlighting and addressing the needs of the unhoused and the vulnerable in the Lewiston-Auburn area. The Board trusts that a formal relationship with the newly incorporated Drop-in Center will provide firmer ground upon which those activities can continue and develop.