Dear Colleague,

First Unitarian Church of St. Louis has a long rich history in the great city of St. Louis. That one hundred and eighty-four year legacy has been achieved by the engagement of both the outstanding ministers who served the church and many industrious church members in the social and cultural life of the city. The church recently celebrated the 100th anniversary of its beautiful building located in the vibrant Central West End. The architectural facility is a treasure that will be an important asset in building a growing congregation and the new settled minister achieving a long thriving ministry.

Following the departure of its last long serving minister, Earl Holt, in 2001 after 27 years of ministry, along with the beloved Associate Minister and the Director of Religious Education, the church has struggled to find a settled minister to successfully lead the church. During the last eighteen years the church has engaged four interim ministers and two settled ministers. As a consequence of the protracted unhappiness the church has suffered a significant loss in membership and the erosion of its financial support. This reality has been compounded by the familiar challenges of an urban church in a city with a declining population, especially young families that are the seedbed of a growing congregation.

The congregation and church leadership will have engaged in three years of intensive self-study and many important steps are being taken to help assure the success of the next called minister. The church staff has been rebuilt with a new Church Administrator and a new Religious Education Coordinator working half-time. Weekly staff meetings have been reestablished and a much more rigorous administrative oversight has been implemented. I believe our new young Religious Education Coordinator will be helpful in revitalizing the Sunday school programs and the community of young families. The new settled minister will inherit a strong staff team.

The church has struggled to implement a strong leadership development model to complement the recently adopted governance structure. I have endeavored to establish a planning and assessment process to help facilitate leadership development grounded in clearly defined goals and a constructive assessment method. An Executive Committee or leadership team has been created which includes the Minister, the Church Administrator, the Policy Board President and Vice President and the Program Council Chair. The Executive Committee meets monthly. This will be important in carrying forward recent efforts to address leadership development. Nonetheless, there still remains much work to be done in effectively leading the church.

The church has elected to await the arrival of the new settled minister before undertaking a Vision – Mission process to be followed by a comprehensive long-range planning procedure. This has stalled the implementation of a Committee on Ministry which would have assumed the responsibility of addressing confusion and conflicts regarding roles and responsibilities of minister, staff and elected church leadership. In recent years the church has suffered from weak ministerial leadership. The impact on the staff has been effectively addressed, but a productive collaborative leadership team remains to be built. Collaborative leadership is poorly understood and poorly managed at this time.

The nominating process for the Policy Board and Program Council is neither well-understood nor well-implemented. It is a goal for this year to address this significant weakness. A new Leadership Development Team that would replace the lapsed Nominating Committee is on the drawing board.
St. Louis has been in the forefront of the Black Lives Matter movement since the death of Michael Brown in Ferguson four years ago. St. Louis is a racially divided city and racial justice is its most important challenge. The church is engaged in variety of social outreach programs addressing the needs of the homeless, especially in the African-American community. A number of church members are actively involved with organizations addressing racial justice and institutionalized white supremacy, although the numbers are small. This is in part a reflection of our aging congregation. The prophetic role of the church in addressing racism will be an important factor in the selection of the new minister.

The congregation is in need of a minister who can pastor to the needs of both the aging members of the congregation, which are largely identified with a more traditional approach to worship and a small but growing group of young adults who have pressed for a more alternative experimental style of worship and music. The church has a wonderful choir and accomplished music director, Joel Knapp, as well as a skilled organist, Earl Naylor and a beautiful church organ of which many members are proud and love to hear on a regular basis. There are many accomplished musicians and singers. Addressing and balancing the differing musical tastes and desires will require developing additional music & worship resources

Historically, the church has been a religious home for conservatives and liberals alike. That history, from the founding minister, William Greenleaf Eliot, to the present, has been an important part of the church’s identity and prophetic voice in the AUA to the UUA, defending the principle of freedom of conscience. The newly called minister will need to be able to embrace a diversity of political views, as well as those who religiously honor a rich Unitarian Universalist theological tradition and those who wish “god-talk” to be verboten in common worship. First Unitarian Church is a Welcoming Congregation and there is an active LGBTQ community which has in recent years initiated an enriching and at times provocative conversation addressing gender and sexual identity.

The many challenges of our diversity have been addressed with the implementation of the Sunday afternoon Fireside Chat, an open meeting in which the issues that have been the source of contention and conflict are addressed by the minister and/or appropriate church leadership with members of the congregation. This approach has been very effective in resolving conflicts and appreciated by all.

The congregation is entering a critical time period in which the older members of the congregation who are the primary source of its financial support are retiring and leaving the community or passing away. There will need to be a concerted all church effort to grow the church in both numbers and the level of financial giving. The church has a number of dedicated reserve funds totaling some hundreds of thousands of dollars. Some of these funds will need to be liberated to serve current needs as a priority over the designated fund.

The membership rolls have been freshly cleaned up and the 250-person membership level is accurate. The church is wrestling with how to best re-vision and restructure themselves in light of their present size.

St. Louis is a wonderful place to live. It possesses a charm that is uniquely its own. The people are friendly and greet the stranger with a welcoming, “Good morning!” The city is described as the most northern of southern cities, the most southern of northern cities, the most eastern of western cites and the most western of eastern cities. I find this description to be delightfully accurate. The architecture is stunning with many historic neighborhoods to explore. There is a growing “foodie culture” with many ethnic restaurants. Forest Park is a treasure and only a few blocks from the church with a renowned zoo, art museum and outdoor theatre. I particularly enjoy the many diverse music venues in St. Louis. The summer weather is a challenge, but the spring and fall are delightfully pleasant, inviting long walks on which to discover the endless treasures of neighborhood parks, pubs and restaurants.

Prestigious Washington University, founded by Rev. William Greenleaf Eliot, offers opportunities for the new settled minister to reestablish the church’s historic ties. The John C. Danforth Center for Religion
and Politics on Washington University campus would welcome the involvement of the minister of First Unitarian. There are many exciting opportunities to explore.

First Unitarian Church is an historic flagship church with a great legacy that is facing challenges today that call for a gifted minister who would assume the mantle of leadership and make First Unitarian Church of St. Louis a shining light in the city and beyond.

With Wishes of Great Success,

Gary James

Rev. Gary Scott James
Interim Minister
Dear Minister in Search,

Thank you for your interest in First Unitarian Church of St. Louis. We are excited to explore how you can help lead us toward our third century. We want that journey to be powerful and meaningful. Clearly, the church has to evolve for that to happen. Through several transitions and interim ministries, these areas have come into focus for us:

- First Unitarian has an incredible history in the development of the St. Louis community; we take great pride in that. Our members and friends generously support social justice and welfare in many ways, but we struggle to get energy behind something that will be central to our being. Many opportunities await a minister who can see the great things in our past and help us create our future.

- Church governance has evolved tremendously in the last 15+ years. Leadership’s deep study of this phenomenon in 2017-18 led to the conclusion that we have strong “bones” but need to build some muscle. The Policy Board and Church Council are actively engaged in that process, which has admittedly involved some hiccups. We believe that the best leadership structure for a church like ours involves a shared ministry, and we look forward to working together to shape that.

- We have experienced demographic shifts and still face challenges related to those. However, we have an incredibly strong multigenerational and diverse core of members, from the Young Adults to the RE community to the Women’s Alliance to our LGBTQ groups. Our people work hard to maintain the feeling of family, and everyone looks forward to engaging with a minister who recognizes the value of all--individually and together.

- Our church is fortunate to have a financial cushion, but like many others, we struggle to generate financial support and personal engagement. We need to develop fresh leadership resources, and we have established processes to do that. We know that only an engaged church community can accomplish our chosen mission in the world. We look forward to partnering with a minister who can work with us to generate excitement and energy to move along a future path.

Leadership looks forward to adding you to our team and working together to move First Unitarian into its next great phase!

Very best regards,

Kathy Wire

Kathy Wire
President, Policy Board
First Unitarian Church of St. Louis
Dear Ministerial Candidate,

First Unitarian Church of St. Louis has a long and proud history of supporting a strong and vibrant Religious Education program. I have been associated with the program professionally for 17 years and have always been impressed with the dedication that this congregation feels toward Religious Education.

Our Sunday School is one that:

- Expresses that life is a joyful experience,
- Promotes critical thinking,
- Teaches that every person is worthy of love,
- Educates that we have a responsibility to positively engage the world in order to promote justice and equity for all people,
- And recognizes that we are inextricably linked to the earth and all life upon it.

We strive to meet these goals in a variety of ways.

**Life is a Joyful Experience** – We have fun together! Class time is always a mix of learning, community, exploring inner feelings and enjoying one another. We have several special events throughout the year such as our Halloween Party, Nifty Gifty and Chili Cook-Off that are highly anticipated by the children and families.

**Promotes Critical Thinking** – Classroom experience always entails thinking about a particular topic and this starts with our youngest up through Youth Group. A major highlight of our program is our Coming of Age program in which 8th graders embark on a year-long investigation into UU history and theology and how this impacts what they believe about life and how they make decisions. This program culminates with each youth participant writing an Affirmation Statement that is presented to the congregation during a special Coming of Age Sunday Service.

**Teaches that Every Person is Worthy of Love** – Of course this fundamental value of Unitarian Universalism is woven into the fabric of all that we do, but it is often made very explicit in programming. One example is in the OWL curriculum which we offer at the junior high level. Often the February theme of monthly Children’s Chapel program is how we show and receive love in the world. This is also a cornerstone of the high school Youth Group where young people can find acceptance and care at a time in their lives when segregated groups can very much be their social norm.

**Responsibility to Positively Engage the World** – Promoting justice and equity is not an abstract concept for us, but an avenue of engagement through the learning opportunities we offer. From our youngest children participating in canned food and UNICEF collections to our young people engaging in a wide variety of social justice activities, there are always ways that we are actively engaging in justice work or educating ourselves for further understanding and self-awareness about certain topics. In the
area of Adult Education this has become one of our primary focuses with our anti-racism group Toward Justice offering a variety of learning opportunities each programming year.

**We are Inextricably Linked to the Earth** – Furthering this understanding and connection is one that we are always striving to enhance in our programs. Being in an urban setting it can at times be easy to lose sight of this value. Aside from it being a topic in a class or chapel session we do little things like have live plants in each classroom to enrich the environment. Our Religious Education gardens are the focal point of much of our Summer RE program and Children’s Chapel services in the spring. Our building is very close to Forest Park (a gem in St. Louis) that is often the site of youth group walks. Expressing our gratitude to the natural world and experiencing the awe and wonder of our world is integral to who we are as a religious people.

This is a short introduction to the fundamentals of our RE/Faith Development Program. It is one full of meaning and connections. The RE staff and volunteers are committed to ever deepening our program and looking for ways to strengthen the strong core that we have to in order to support our children, youth and adults on their ethical and spiritual journeys.

**Lynn Hunt**

Lynn Hunt, Credentialed Religious Educator
Administration and Programs
A letter from our Religious Education Coordinator, Ben Rosensweig

Dear Ministerial Candidate,

My name is Ben Rosensweig, and I am the Religious Education Coordinator at First Unitarian Church. I work closely with Lynn Hunt, our Administrator and RE Director. I’ve worked with children and young adults since 2003 and have been a part of the First Unitarian community since 2011. I see the minister as having a deep impact on the RE program and the church at large; when parents feel like they are welcome, wanted, and needed, with relevant and inspiring messaging during services, they want to stay. No matter how much their kids like their RE teachers or classes, the parents are the ones who make that decision, of course. At First Unitarian, we are currently struggling with low attendance in our younger classes, and lower RE enrollment overall in the past few years. I am hopeful that a new minister will help to draw families to our church and revitalize our RE programs. I would also love to see a minister who can speak to young adults -- if we can draw in families before they have children, they are more likely to seek us out once they do because they will see First Unitarian as a family-friendly community.

Besides continuing our fun, time-honored RE traditions like our Cornbread Communion, Hanging of the Greens, and Christmas Pageant, I am very interested in helping children and youth develop:

- An awareness and connection to their thoughts, emotions, body, and the Earth
- Basic social-emotional skills in a variety of settings
- How to think critically, talk about difficult subjects, and learn nonviolent communication
- A sense of responsibility toward service, social justice, and helping our fellow neighbors, including those who may look different from ourselves

Thank you for taking an interest in First Unitarian! I look forward to working with you soon.

Sincerely,

Ben Rosensweig

Ben Rosensweig
Religious Education Coordinator
Dear Prospective Minister,

Music has always been an important piece of the worship service at First Unitarian Church. Perhaps the best example is that while most congregations exit the sanctuary during the Postlude, our congregation usually sits down after the benediction and listens to the Postlude. The choir takes pride in the diversity of music it shares with our congregation. We sing a wide variety of styles including jazz, spirituals, gospel, music from the Buddhist and Jewish traditions, and classical. Having said that, we have strong roots in classical music. We enjoy presenting larger works on two “Music Sundays,” one in December and one in the spring. These presentations are enhanced by professional musicians -- a string quartet or a bass player and drummer. We have no paid section leaders which engenders a real sense of equality in responsibility and commitment.

Several special aspects regarding our choir are worth highlighting. Membership is open to anyone in the congregation who wishes to join. Also, we are one group that fosters friendship and fellowship across generations. (The minister is always invited to join us on a Wednesday night following rehearsal when we have wine and snacks at a close-by home of two of the choir members.)

On non-choir Sundays, talented members of the congregation are happy to share their musical abilities. Violin solos; marimba solos; trumpet solos; the MUUses (a women’s vocal ensemble); vocal solos -- all of these provide a variety of music much enjoyed in our worship services. When the budget permits, we have had a well-attended jazz Sunday and a blues Sunday, both of which feature professional players from the St. Louis area.

We are fortunate to have a wonderful mechanical-action organ built by Lynn Dobson and a talented musician, Earl Naylor, who knows how to choose the perfect music and stops for preludes and postludes and for congregational singing. (And this is a congregation who enjoys singing!) Earl is also an accomplished accompanist at the piano for both vocal and instrumental soloists.

First Unitarian is a place where good music and talented musicians are part of the heart of every worship service. We would most warmly welcome a minister who enjoys music!

Sincerely,

Joel Knapp

Joel Knapp
Music Director