

**From:** Bill Sinkford  
**Sent:** Saturday, February 07, 2015 2:54 PM  
**To:** [Office\\_Staff@firstunitarianportland.org](mailto:Office_Staff@firstunitarianportland.org)  
**Subject:** To Our Employees

Feb. 7, 2015

To our employees,

This has been a very difficult last few months as we've all struggled with deep disagreement over administrative and sexton staff unionization, and what that would mean for us as a religious institution that places high value on covenantal relationships. It has also become clear to us that the potential for further conflict—and division in the congregation—has grown dramatically.

There is a good deal of real agreement between us on the goals we strive for: we too want higher compensation, especially for our lowest-paid employees; and we also want employees of the church to feel empowered in their work. We also recognize that the power imbalance in our respective roles is real.

Since some of you presented us with your intent to unionize, there has been a great deal of tension and hurt feelings on all sides. We're sure that none of us want to continue in this manner. The "us vs. them" dynamic in the church setting just won't work. It would make it more difficult if not impossible for the church to live out its mission with that dynamic present. When we talk about covenant we take it very seriously.

The Executive Team has weighed the social justice issues and our faith's long-held support of people's right to organize, with how it would affect our ability to serve our congregation and its mission. While we continue to question whether unionization is the best way to achieve the goals we share, we also recognize that a continued conflict will drive us further apart and begin to change the nature of members' relationship with their church. Congregants come to First Unitarian to be nourished spiritually and to live

out their values in the world, not to be forced to take sides in a conflict.

Given all this, we have decided that we will recognize our employees' right to unionize. The first step in our process will need to be to negotiate what that means. We enter this process assuming the good will and the best intentions of our employees. We hope that you will assume our best intentions as well.

We recognize that this process likely will not be easy. While we share the goal of fair compensation, we are charged with managing the church within its resources. Our entire community will need to stay in right relationship as we make the decisions -- including financial decisions -- that this new arrangement will call us to make.

We pledge to do our part to move forward in seeking right relationship with our staff.

Sincerely yours,  
Bill, Tom and Kathryn