

Announcing a new Trial Sunday Morning Schedule Beginning in September

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New Trial Sunday Morning Schedule

Starting in September

To be re-evaluated after 6 months



<i>8:30 am – 1:30 pm</i>	Coffee, Snacks and Fellowship in Howson Hall
<i>9:00 am - 10:00 am</i>	Worship Service in the Sanctuary Religious Education Classes
<i>10:00 am - 10:45 am</i>	Children's Choir Rehearsal in Rooms 15 and 17
<i>10:30 am - 11:30 am</i>	Worship Service in the Sanctuary Religious Education Classes
<i>11:45 am - 12:45 am</i>	Public Forum in the Sanctuary Childcare (Activities)

From the Interim Minister:

After nine months of observation and consultation with stakeholders, involving dozens of individual and group meetings, as well as hearing from those present at a meeting Sunday, June 5th, and carefully examining all options for helping the Sunday morning schedule be in greater alignment with FUUCA's values and mission, I believe the proposal described at the church meeting of Sunday, June 5th by Sharon Moore and Gary Bennett is the best alternative at present. I approve it for implementation beginning in September, 2011 with the proviso that it be assessed by the Minister and the Board after six months to ensure that it is indeed helping to fulfill the Church's mission. Both Rev. Lena Breen (outgoing Interim DRE) and Barbara Stoddard (incoming Interim Director of Lifespan Religious Education) are comfortable with the new schedule. Above is a description of the new schedule with comments below from the Board and representatives of stakeholders affected by these changes.

Warmly,

Rev. Ed Brock

This proposal will impact the entire church community. There are small compromises that will need to be made by all:

- Early service volunteers, staff and attendees will need to shift their schedule earlier 45 minutes (from 9:45 to 9:00)
- Late service volunteers, staff and attendees will need to shift their schedule earlier one hour (from 11:30 to 10:30)
- Public Forum volunteers, staff and attendees will need to shift their schedule later 15 minutes (from 11:30 to 11:45)

The Board recognizes that there will be some hardship involved by implementing this trial schedule. But the Board supports this change because we believe that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages, and after the church has adjusted to the new schedule, the whole community will reap the benefits.

In examining this proposal the Minister, as well as the board, gathered input from a wide spectrum of the congregation, including the leadership of Public Forum. Many alternatives were examined, including a schedule whereby Public Forum occurs in the Sanctuary in-between services. There are some who believe that the disadvantages of this trial schedule outweigh the advantages. In examining these alternatives and their impact on our ministries (Worship, Music, RE, etc), it is the conclusion of the Minister that this proposal represents the best of the alternatives. The board concurs with this conclusion and supports the decision.

In supporting this proposal the Board is attempting to consider all stakeholders in our church, including the throng of new visitors we anticipate with the arrival of Rev. Barnhouse. It is essential that our congregation be prepared to welcome newcomers in September by having this welcoming space and time available. We also consider among our stakeholders those who have already left our church because they failed to make those vital connections, and those existing members who have clearly expressed their desire for greater and deeper connection with the wonderful people that make up our community.

The Public Forum is a great asset for our church, and plays a vital role in inspiring us to achieve our end of witnessing to justice in our personal lives and beyond. During the Bridge to Our Future sessions, several members spoke of the important role of the Public Forum in the life of our church. We believe the Public Forum will be strengthened by holding it in the Sanctuary, a larger and more attractive venue. Scheduling it after the Late Service also allows it to extend beyond an hour on occasion without other groups or activities pressuring it to end.

The primary responsibility of the Board is to the church's Mission. We must ensure through careful monitoring that programs and activities of the church are directed toward the Mission and Ends. We believe this proposal will best help us achieve our mission to gather in community and our end of being a radically hospitable community where all people feel welcomed and are treated with respect and dignity and all members find connection with one another in fellowship. This trial schedule will be re-evaluated after 6 months.

We appreciate your support in implementing this trial Sunday morning schedule, beginning in September.

With respect and love,

First UU Austin Board of Trustees:

Ann Edwards, Trustee
Brendan Sterne, Secretary
Chris Jimmerson, President
Eric Hepburn, Trustee
John Franks, Trustee
Klondike Steadman, Trustee
Luther Elmore, Treasurer
Margaret Borden, Trustee
Rose Ann Reeser, Trustee
Susan Thomson, President-Elect

From Gary Bennett, Member of the Public Forum Committee:

I am writing this letter because of my interest and involvement with the Public Affairs Forum. Not only have I attended forum activities since we arrived in 2005 and participated in the committee's planning session, but I was a member for 30 years of the program planning committee (and twice chair) at my previous congregation, the BuxMont UU Fellowship in Warrington, Pennsylvania; we provided lay and guest speaker services whenever the church did not have our minister speaking. It was from this perspective that I found myself in awe of the consistent quality of the programs at this church's forum. I would not involve myself with any project which seemed to endanger this church activity; and in fact, when proposals were made last August to move it to early Sunday morning or to Sunday afternoon, I was one of the more vocal opponents of those moves, all the more so since speakers had already agreed to 11:30 times. Nonetheless, I am also a committed member of the larger church community; and I have acted in the last year on the premise that these were not incompatible objectives.

In the 1980s and '90s, Austin UUs had breathtaking growth to match that of the city, not only greatly increasing membership but also spinning off two vibrant fellowships, Live Oak and Wildflower. But somewhere in recent years it went wrong. Austin still grows, but our church has been at best treading water in membership and finances. One of the casualties has been plans for building expansion that looked so beautiful and promising when Amy and I arrived in 2005. Why the stagnation? New people are still coming in the door in large numbers, but either they don't come back a second time, or if they do, they settle for an unsatisfying, low-commitment form of membership and eventually they drop out. When Rev. Meg Barnhouse begins her settled ministry in August, we may expect newcomers in even greater numbers; but unless we find ways of making them feel a part of what draws us here, they will just leave in greater numbers.

A large part of the problem seems to be lack of social space. A number of people spoke on Sunday of the difficulties in having meaningful conversations before and after church in the overpacked space available. If we can restart our old patterns of growth, there are long term solutions that should not inconvenience any of our programs. Brian Moore spoke of plans for the new RE wing that will give the Public Affairs Forum its own dedicated space. But we have to get to that point, even if it involves some sacrifices all around.

The plan which Sharon Moore and I presented on Sunday, and which the minister and Board adopted, will shuffle everybody around a bit. The first service will be 45 minutes earlier, starting at 9; it's a good thing our church has its share of early birds. The second service will be an hour earlier, but still at a respectably churchy 10:30. The forum will shift to 15 minutes later, and in return get what is in many ways an improved meeting space. The sole focus of Howson Hall on Sunday

mornings will be social activity, with refreshments and plenty of space for standing and talking, sitting and talking or just refreshing. The Gallery may actually be walkable from one end to the other without collisions, making it useful as a gallery, of all things. None of this will automatically grow us of course; that will require us to use these new opportunities to welcome and engage newcomers. But at least the newly available space will make that possible.

Gary Bennett

From Sharon Moore, Co-Chair of the Search Committee:

SHARON MOORE
8000 HIGH HOLLOW DRIVE
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78750

JUNE 1, 2011

TO: THE BOARD AND CONGREGATION OF FIRST UU CHURCH OF AUSTIN

RE: CHANGES TO OUR SUNDAYS WITH ONE ANOTHER

DEAR ALL,

I AM WRITING TO ENTHUSIASTICALLY ENDORSE THE FOLLOWING CHANGES PROPOSED FOR THE GOOD OF OUR CHURCH COMMUNITY.

9:A.M. FIRST SERVICE

10:30 A.M. SECOND SERVICE

11:45 A.M. FORUM IN THE SANCTUARY

WITH OUR NEW SETTLED MINISTER ATTRACTING MORE PEOPLE, WE MUST FREE UP HOWSON HALL AS A MEETING PLACE FOR NEW AND VETERAN MEMBERS. THE HALLWAYS AND GALLERY ARE ALREADY TOO CROWDED AND TURN PEOPLE OFF FROM STAYING TO VISIT AFTER SERVICES.

IF THESE CHANGES DON'T WORK FOR US, WE CAN MAKE OTHER CHANGES. I TRUST THAT WE WILL KNOW HOW BEST TO PROCEED AFTER A SIX MONTH TRIAL PERIOD. THIS APPROACH WORKED WELL IN THE TWO CHURCHES I SERVED AS ADMINISTRATOR. HAVING JUST SERVED AS CO-CHAIR OF OUR SETTLED MINISTER SEARCH COMMITTEE, I CAN ASSURE YOU THAT OUR NEW MINISTER IS AMENABLE TO THESE CHANGES.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION AND HOPEFULLY GETTING THIS ACCOMPLISHED NOW. IT IS TIME TO VENTURE FORTH, TAKE RISKS WHEN NEEDED, AND TRUST OUR BEST SELVES AND ONE ANOTHER TO BETTER LIVE OUT OUR CHURCH'S MISSION.

WITH MUCH AFFECTION,



SHARON MOORE

From Brent Baldwin, Director of Music:

Dear friends,

I am writing to address the proposed change to FUUCA's Sunday morning schedule from the church's music program's perspective.

While the current proposal would require an earlier start on the part of our music staff and volunteers, I believe this would be more than offset by the benefit of a streamlined morning schedule and an earlier release for these folks (an added benefit being that our church's musicians could enjoy the Public Forum if they wished -- our current schedule doesn't allow for this). With Children's Choir overlapped with the start of the second service (prior to the start of RE) as proposed, we will be able to continue to offer the same amount of curriculum time to our young musicians.

It strikes me that the proposed change greatly benefits our congregation's fellowship opportunities and is in line with our church's stated mission and values. We in the music program are prepared to make the adjustments required to allow FUUCA to become the finest congregation it can be. Many thanks to all who have put so much work and thought into maximizing the quality of the Sunday morning experience for all FUUCA members.

Respectfully submitted,
Brent Baldwin
Director of Music

From Carol Ginn, Outgoing Chair of the Worship Committee:

As chair of the Worship Service Committee for the last two years, I've had the opportunity to get an overview of adult programs at FUUCA. I see the proposed change in Forum time and location as a win/win situation for both fellowship and the Public Forum. In addition to having Howson Hall dedicated to fellowship all morning on Sundays, Public Forum will have a larger and more central venue. I think this will be an auspicious beginning for the next fifty years of Forum!

Carol Ginn

From Jacob Williamson, Outgoing Co-Chair of Membership:

Dear First UU Church of Austin,

I would like to express my support for the plan discussed Sunday, 5/29/11, to move the first service to a 9:00 starting time, adjust the second service accordingly, and place the Public Affairs Forum in a place of honor, the sacred space of the sanctuary.

As the co-chair of membership during the awkward, divisive period between settled members, as part of a team devoted to welcoming visitors, helping them find a friendly conversation and a cup of coffee, and as well to helping our congregation be welcoming and friendly toward each other (can you really have one without the other?) I will say the situation is deeply broken, and needs a fix.

The Forum itself is not under threat. While the adjustment to the time is inconvenient, and might delay people's return home and add a few cumulative staff hours to the balance sheet, the difference of 15 minutes scarcely amounts to more than we might see during a particularly intense discussion, a popular speaker, or a small technical delay—a minor adjustment to the church's afternoon schedule.

The goods we might gain in return are significantly greater. Freeing Howson Hall from hosting the forum takes one of the church's largest spaces and puts it into service as a place for discussion—a synagogue beside the temple. In a church where finding space to have a serious conversation is an actual impossibility, where every room hosts a scheduled book group, discussion, or Sunday school class, this 15-minute adjustment creates an area that is visibly, obviously, set up for actual conversation, sit-down moments where you can face the person you're talking to.

The church of my youth reserved a complete building to fellowship and conversation. After service, there was a room for unstructured conversation—sometimes over an hour after the service, there were still things to chatter about—and time for more than one chat! In our current arrangement, there's about 10 minutes of time from the end of the service to the beginning of the next. On the clock, it's a half an hour, but assume that a few of our most social people—those smiling faces that I would LOVE to see talking to a visitor!—are in line to say their “thank yous” to the lay-leader or speaker. The bell for the next service chimes ten minutes before, and the tide of the crowd shifts toward their next agenda item—there's scarcely ten minutes remaining for conversation, and a dedicated volunteer, staffer or board member can fill that up just trying to move from the gallery to the coffee pot. And then it's time for the Forum, and all unstructured conversation ceases.

During that brief ten-minute window, how open are we? Only Howson Hall offers a space to talk without shouting, and the visitor—who, unfortunately, hasn't a clue as

to what's going on—will see the back of chairs, a room devoted to an event that they weren't necessarily planning to attend. It's a transitional space, not a dedicated space. There's a big difference psychologically, a missing "treat this room as your own" quality. We just don't have it. Certainly not in Howson Hall. It's possible to move a conversation outside, but that's marginalizing the conversation—and subjecting it to 100-degree temperature and ravenous mosquitoes.

We must have our processes planned out as soon as the church moves back to its full schedule—no messing around, no fiddling with times, no re-votes. Because that's when the wave of humanity hits, and the small team of dedicated welcoming people are trying to have 20 conversations on a Sunday—in a room that shuts down in five minutes.

The experiment has already been a success, even if we haven't started it officially. One Easter several years ago, when morale in our congregation was at a low point, and the Fellowship committee had disbanded, I reserved Howson Hall for fellowship time. We served lots of cookies, and arranged chairs in little conversation circles.

The result was something beautiful—long, friendly conversations, like being in a coffee shop filled with a hundred people that you never knew you had so much in common with. At this time, after months of tension, the chance to have several friendly conversations was like a ray of sunshine in that gloomy room, during that gloomy time. The room was filled with dialog and people didn't want to leave. I was ten years old again, back in my church's parish hall, but with lots and lots of cookies, and the patience to appreciate a long chat. Heaven!

So, I ask you to consider a room in the church big enough to hold all of our ideas, with the only scheduled item "get another cup of coffee." I ask you to consider a room big enough to have a celebration outside of the sanctuary—a welcoming ritual for new members, a springtime dance after the service, or, indeed, cookies. I ask you for the time to conduct business AND talk to every face you don't recognize—because if you don't say "hello" to them the first Sunday they're there, you may not ever have a chance again. I ask you to look beyond your own contentment and Sunday pattern, and remember being a new visitor again.

We need a space dedicated solely to welcoming, inviting conversation.

We're already a religion dedicated to the concept—sanctifying a space for it is a very logical next step.

Best wishes,
Jacob Williamson
Co-Chair of Membership, June 2009-June 2011