

12 June 2017

Follenites:

I am writing today to formally resign my position as Music Director at Follen Community Church effective at the end of my current contract. I anticipate that this announcement may be confusing and upsetting for many in our community; thus, I hope to alleviate these concerns to the best of my ability in this open letter.

First, I must thank this community for your love and support. The music program at Follen would not be successful—especially in this year of transition—without extensive lay leadership. Although too lengthy to list here, I want to generally thank all the parents who volunteered and offered feedback around our Junior and Youth Choir programs as well as our annual Operetta production. I also must thank our fantastic Senior Choir for welcoming me with open arms, as well as for their willingness to “go with me” around changes I implemented this year. My support staff has been amazing, including our fantastic pianist, Shaylor Lindsay, and our four staff section leaders—Epp, Jamie, Laura, and Arthur. Thank you for all your artistic leadership. Finally, I want to thank our staff at Follen, especially for your willingness to work within the challenges I presented to our team.

These challenges are the primary reason I have decided to leave Follen. My career has always been one focused on music education, and I remain deeply committed to this path. Working as a Unitarian Universalist musician was something I fell into four years ago, but found that I deeply loved. When I accepted this full-time position at Follen, I made the decision to explore a life shift: To go from full-time teaching and part-time music ministry to the exact opposite. But, even a part-time teaching role made full-time work at Follen hard to achieve. I was unavailable during most business hours and had to do much of my leadership work via email. This put undeserved strain on our staff and congregation, and Follen deserves a Music Director who can fully—without exception—commit their lives to this role. After accepting a new full-time teaching role at Newton Country Day School, Follen’s leadership rightly convinced me that working two full-time jobs was unfair to Follen and unsustainable for me personally. Although I hoped to make it work, our conversations helped me to realize that this new role would negatively impact Follen even more than my current role already has.

I want Follenites to know that I seriously considered leaving teaching altogether over the past few weeks to focus completely on Follen’s music program. Through that decision-making process, I discerned that—even if fully committed to this role—I likely am not the best person to lead this program. This has been a tough year. I stepped into programs steeped with decades-long traditions and expectations, many of which were antithetical to my training, experience, and

vision. Through the process of navigating and managing these conflicts, I realized that I do not love this work as much as I love teaching, conducting, and playing. I did the best I could to be a confident leader for Follen; but, this experience revealed that my joy and talents exist elsewhere. Follen deserves—and needs—a strong leader with a proven track record of navigating complex church communities in transition, as well as a musician who is able to give their full, complete career focus to Follen Church for an extensive tenure. This is a very unique job that requires a very specific individual. As much as I tried to be, that specific individual is not me.

The saddest part of all this is the realization that I will be cutting short relationships I was just beginning to fully nurture. During the Operetta was the first time I truly began to feel connected to our youth, and—I think—they to me. I so wish that I could continue this relationship building process and see them mature into amazing young adults. I deeply loved this part of my work at Follen. I am regretful that the Senior Choir must also transition to a new director. We made great strides together this year, and our musical products were deeply inspiring to me. It was a privilege to lead them. This, too, is another piece of this job that I deeply loved and will sorely miss.

Follen is a resilient community, and I know you will soar through this transition.

Yours in faith,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Tyler Turner". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tyler Turner