

Unitarian Church in Summit, NJ

DISCOVERY MEETINGS:

SUMMARY OF COMMENTS AND DATA



Strategic Planning Team

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Summary of Discovery Meeting Responses and Data

October 21st - November 13th

In the interests of fully sharing the work of the Strategic Planning Team, we have created the following compilation of the comments and demographic data that the facilitators gathered at recent Discovery Meetings. The comment summary is relatively rough and unedited. The Strategic Planning Team grouped the comments by each of the five questions asked at the meetings, and then further grouped the comments by common themes within the questions. You will see that many common themes also cut across questions.

There is no identifying information associated with the comments either as to individual participants or which comments were made in which meetings. Comments from the youth are presented separately by question. Five different people compiled the comments for the five questions, so there are differences in style and approach.

The demographic data for our 135 person sample of adults only is summarized by percentages of the total, or, in some cases, averages or medians. Data forms were anonymous. Zip codes and ages of children in each family are not included, but can be made available upon request.

Again, we are very grateful to the hosts who opened their homes to Discovery Meetings; the refreshment providers; the facilitators, who led lively and wide-ranging discussions and who provided a clear and detailed record of the discussions. We are also grateful to the Discovery Meeting participants, who gave us a rich, thoughtful, and candid set of comments to work with.

The Strategic Planning Team has analyzed these comments and is in the process of developing a series of “provocative proposals” based on what you told us you valued and found energizing and what you want our community to be as we enter a new and exciting period in the life of our spiritual community. These provocative proposals will form the basis of the end-state that the strategic plan will guide us toward. We will feed these proposals back to the congregation in a number of forums over the next few months as we move to the next stage of our strategic planning process.

Thank you for your continuing interest and support.

The Strategic Planning Team

Adult Demographic Survey Summary

(Compiled on 11-27-11)

A: Total of 135 respondents

B: Gender

Female: 85 (63% of respondents)

Male: 49 (37%)

Blank/Unclear: 1

C: Age

Average is 56, with a range from 34 to 89 (4 blanks)

Distribution by decades:

30s: 11 (8% of respondents)

40s: 29 (22%)

50s: 43 (33%)

60s: 35 (27%)

70s: 9 (7%)

80s: 4 (3%)

D: Race

White: 126 (94% of respondents)

Black: 1

Asian: 5

Another race: 0

Two or more races: 2

Blank: 1

E: Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin?

Yes: 0

No: 117 (100% of respondents)

Blank: 18

F: What is the highest level of education completed?

Grade School: 0

Middle School: 0

High school (h on spreadsheet): 6 (4% of respondents)

College (c): 32 (24%)

Masters (m): 67 (50%)

Doctorate (d): 29 (22%)

Blank: 1

G: Sexual orientation:

Straight (s on spreadsheet): 128 (95% of respondents)

Gay/lesbian (g): 7 (5%)

Bisexual (b): 0

Other/blank: 0

H: For how many years have you been an active participant at UCS?

Answers range from 60 years to less than one year (which are recorded as 0.5). The average is 12 years and the median is 8 years.

20 or more years: 32 (24% of respondents)

15-19 years: 8 (6%)

10-14 years: 17 (13%)

5-9 years: 33 (25%)

Under 5 years: 44 (33%)

Blank: 1

I: Are you a member?

Yes: 125 (95% of respondents)

No: 7 (5%)

Blank: 3

J: What religion, if any, were you raised in?

Various Protestant/Christian denominations: 48 (37% of respondents)

Catholic: 39 (30%)

Jewish: 17 (13%)

UU: 11 (8%)

No religion: 8 (6%)

Multiple religions: 7 (5%)

Latter Day Saints: 1 (1%)

Blank: 4

K: How many minutes does it take you to drive to church from home?

Answers range from 0 to 35 minutes. The average (and the median): 14 minutes. Blank: 2

L: What is your ZIP code?

((in the spreadsheet))

M: Do you have a spouse/partner?

Yes: 120 (89% of respondents)

No: 15 (11% of respondents)

N: Is this person also an active participant at UCS?

Yes: 96 (80% of respondents)
No: 24 (20%)
Blank/not applicable: 15

O: Do you have children in RE or Youth Group?

Yes: 64 (48% of respondents)
No: 70 (52%)
Blank: 1

P: If answer to O is yes, number of kids in RE/Youth Group:

Answers range from 1 to 3

Q, R, S: If yes, please list their ages in years from oldest to youngest:

These columns show the ages for each person's children, from oldest to youngest.

T: How many Sunday mornings a month are you usually present for worship and/or other activity during worship? (Assume a month of 4 Sundays.)

Some people circled two answers, so I used the midpoint. Others specified a midpoint. The average was 2.8 Sundays.

For the breakdown that follows, I rounded up the small number of half-percent figures:

0 Sundays: 2 (1% of respondents)
1 Sunday: 11 (8%)
2 Sundays: 34 (25%)
3 Sundays: 49 (37%)
4 Sundays: 38 (28%)
Blank: 1

U: Which session do you usually attend?

9:00 (9 on the spreadsheet): 56 (45% of those indicating a clear preference)
10:45 (10): 68 (55%)
Either/both/blank: 11

V: In the current church year, are you a teacher or other volunteer in RE/Youth Group?

Yes: 41 (31% of respondents)
No: 91 (69%)
Blank: 3

W: Outside of RE, how many ongoing groups/activities are you/ will you participate in in the current church year? (For example, if you are a member of one committee, participate in an adult education class and are in a Supper Circle, answer 3)

Average among those specifying figures from 0 on up: 1.9 groups/activities

Many of the 6 blanks may really be zeros, so I did these percentages based on the total number of participants:

6 groups/activities: 1 (1% of all participants)
5 groups/activities: 4 (3%)
4 groups/activities: 12 (9%)
3 groups/activities: 30 (22%)
2 groups/activities: 26 (19%)
1 group/activity: 33 (24%)
0 groups/activities: 23 (17%)
Blank: 6 (4%)

X: Have you served in a leadership role (such as a committee chair or a member of the board) in the past three years at UCS?

Yes: 44 (33% of all participants)
No: 88 (65%)
Blank: 3

Y: On a scale of 1 to 5, how important would you say this church is in your life?

Average: 4.1

A couple of people circled two answers or specified a midpoint. For this breakdown, those were rounded up:

1--minimally important: 0
2: 8 (6% of respondents)
3: 25 (19%)
4: 50 (37%)
5--extremely important: 51 (38%)
Blank: 1

Z: On a scale of 1 to 5, how well is this church meeting your spiritual/religious needs?

Average: 3.9

A couple of people circled two answers or specified a midpoint. For this breakdown, I rounded those up:

1--not well: 4 (3% of respondents)
2: 6 (5%)
3: 24 (18%)
4: 66 (49%)
5--extremely well: 34 (25%)
Blank: 1

AA: On a scale of 1 to 5, to what degree has your family been affected by the recession and/or the housing crisis of the past few years?

Average: 2.5

1--minimally affected: 38 (29% of respondents)
2: 31 (23%)
3: 31 (23%)
4: 25 (19%)

5--severely affected: 8 (6%)

Blank: 2

AB: On a scale of 1 to 5, how would you characterize your family's finances, in medical terms?

Average: 3.7

1--critical condition: 2 (2% of respondents)

2: 13 (10%)

3: 37 (28%)

4: 48 (36%)

5--excellent health: 33 (25%)

Blank: 2

Question 1:

1. Reflecting on your entire experience at UCS, when were you most alive, most motivated and excited about about your involvement in UCS?

Adults

1. Children/Youth RE (69 responses)

- 38 expressed joy/excitement about teaching RE (5 of these were OWL, 3 COA, 2 YG)
- 15 were most excited about the benefits of RE for their children
- 10 commented generally about positive experiences with children/youth worship services and participation in the congregation

“Most excited and involved when teaching Sunday school.”

“Most engaged when I facilitated OWL.”

“[My] kids love coming to RE.”

“Love the Coming of Age service.”

2. Services and Sermons (57 responses)

- 29 were positive about sermons and services in general
- 9 specifically mentioned Vanessa’s sermons
- 9 related to particular services, e.g., water communion, mother’s day
- 4 concerned past ministers
- 2 mentioned Green Vespers
- 1 mentioned experience as a liturgist

“Interesting and thought provoking [sermons.]”

“Being connected to something bigger than myself [through sermons.]”

“Sunday service is the most important thing to me.”

3. Committee/Board work (34 responses)

- 23 expressed excitement/fulfillment regarding committee, task force, and project work
- 8 related to satisfaction serving on the Board
- 3 concerned a leadership role

“Services Auction -- intense involvement paid off in so many connections.”

“Wonderful to be part of a committee working on a ‘big deal’ project.”

“As a Board member, getting passionate about something and seeing it come to fruition.”

4. General Programming (34 responses)

- 15 related to getting involved and working with other congregants
- 5 mentioned Supper Circles
- 2 were about GA/District meetings

- 3 concerned the trip to Transylvania

“Holiday preparation was...great -- unity, involvement, very alive.”

“Empowered to try new things.”

“Being involved in fun activities makes the place feel alive.”

“Most connected in small group activities.”

5. Quality of Community (26 responses)

- 9 concerned connection with other congregants, welcoming community (3 about “like-minded people, 1 about “diverse opinions)
- 5 expressed excitement at first joining congregation
- 2 appreciated the intergenerational make-up of the congregation
- 1 mentioned happiness when at Hillview School

“Meaningfulness and spirituality of UU...for adults and children.”

“UCS community is faith in action.”

“Tremendous community support at a time of sensitive and difficult family transition.”

6. Adult RE (24 responses)

- 13 concerned involvement in a covenant group
- The remainder involved other small groups, e.g., World Religions, BOT, Emerson

“Covenant group [is] motivated and alive; discovering together; spirited search.”

“SIP and working on my own meditation experience.”

7. Social Action (22 responses)

- 12 mentioned social action in general
- 2 concerned the Habitat project, 3 Moving Toward Peace, 2 Irvington, 2 SHIP

“Social action -- the importance of giving back.”

“Social action [is] most gratifying.”

“Moving Toward Peace” -- great sense of support for families with members in the military..., ribbon ceremony [was] solemn and caring.”

8. Music (18 responses)

- 5 related to participation in the choir
- 4 mentioned appreciation for Mitchell
- 4 related to the music program generally
- 2 mentioned specific services
- 2 were about specific visiting musicians

9. Staff (7 responses)

- 4 mentioned the staff as whole, 2 concerned Rev. Bumbaugh, and 1 was about Kim

“Having staff involved in an effort...adds energy and likelihood of action.”

“Mentoring [by] staff.”

“Relationship with staff.”

10. Memories of Personal History (3 responses)

- Weddings, renewal of vows

11. Outliers (16 responses) 16 comments did not fit into the above subjects. These were mostly unrelated comments, although it is noteworthy that 4 people said they felt unconnected to the congregation; 1 of these said nobody cares that he/she is unconnected, and 2 said that they were once involved, but UCS has become a “young person’s church.”

Youth (29 responses)

1. Quality of Community (9 responses)

“Always want to come to Youth Group.”

“Moral intentionality of the community.”

“Youth Group solidified sense of belonging.”

“Doesn’t condemn, offers real understanding of people as they are.”

2. General Programming (7 responses)

- 5 of 7 expressed enthusiasm for cons

3. Committee Work (5 responses)

- All responses were appreciative of opportunity to take on a leadership role in youth group and at cons

4. Services and Sermons (4 responses)

- All responses were about COA

“Coming of Age -- reading credo was transformative.”

“Youth Sunday [was] a chance to extend COA credo.”

5.. Children/Youth RE (4 responses)

- All were positive comments about YG; one also mentioned OWL

Question 2:

2. What do you value most about UCS?

Total ADULT responses: 279

Worship/opportunities for spiritual growth—70 responses

Some comments speak specifically to services, others are more general or refer to other programs, like SIP.

Time here for peace, a shared message to think about together, connecting with Vanessa's sermons, "it gives me a center," time out of busy week to think/feel more deeply, nondogmatic (a few of these could possibly move to the "open-minded" section below), intellectually stimulating.

Several comments about "spiritual growth," being challenged, room to grow, makes me think and question. It's OK to change your opinion or disagree with the sermon.

One mention each for SIP, shamanism, Green Vespers, the gong, podcasts, humor. One comment : "I am glad of the push for meaningful prayer."

Maybe two comments on liking the times when children are present for services. Then this one: "Intergenerational services are controlled chaos."

Two comments from two separate people that they don't come for the "watering-in" service.

People/community/connections—69 responses

Some notes are just "people" or "community" in general. Some refer to "like-minded" people or people with "shared values." Supportive deep friendships, support from the community. People you might not meet otherwise. People of all ages. Friendly welcoming people.

One comment says "some do so much they get burned out"

Open-minded/Accepting—46 responses

Comments here seem to refer both to (1) people at UCS and (2) to a creedless faith supporting people in their spiritual quests. Open-minded, accepting people. I can be myself, I can open up and say what I really think/believe. Non-judgemental.

One comment specifically about sexual orientation : "Partner and I feel comfortable here"

One comment praising open discussion about possible name change.

Some disagreement on politics: One comment says "people with same liberal political views." Then, from three people: One person says the church is "disgustingly liberal" and "we need to keep religion and politics separate" and be considerate of political differences. From another person: "We need to acknowledge benefits of others' political beliefs." Another person: "Politics and UU is a tradition."

RE/Youth—32 responses

Lots of positive comments on RE generally that should pass along to Tuli and Emilie.

Four mentions of OWL, two mentions specifically of Youth Group, two singling out Tuli.

One comment: "Some activities on Sunday trivialize the service—e.g. painting masks."

Social action/outreach—24 responses

Culture of service, outreach, giving, social justice. People can help the world through UCS efforts. Opportunities to volunteer. One notes that there is more social action than years ago. Specific mentions of SHIP, hosting the homeless, Habitat, Irvington, War.

One comment that "we are the best-kept secret"

Ministers/staff—14 responses

A few general comments of praise and then most single out Vanessa. Also mentions for Emilie, Tuli, Kim. One comment: "need more staff"

Music—8 responses

Mostly general comments

Building—8 responses

Praise for the building, a few saying we shouldn't move; one wishing "we were bigger"

Others

2 liking UCS's visibility in the UU denomination, 2 memories of personal history at UCS, 2 just for the fact UCS exists

YOUTH (29 responses)

People/community/connections—17 responses

Clearly, for the teens, it's all about community.

A couple of the notes: Youth Group is "the warmest social group." "Amazing how open people can be, how connected people can be." "People, not religion, keep me coming." One referred specifically to cons.

Open-minded/Accepting—6 responses

References to how people can let their guard down, be themselves, not be judged.

Two other comments: One says it's hard for the youth to be put in the general congregation and respected. Another says that in efforts to be open, UUs can be closed.

Two responses for Music. One for Spiritual Growth ("Rediscovered concept of faith). Three miscellaneous responses: appreciation for adults who make the whole thing run, leadership opportunities, break from school and stress.

Question 3:

3: What activities or ingredients or ways of life at UCS are most important?

Answers: 274 adult comments, 45 youth comments.

I. Adults

A. 55 Classified as **Qualities of Community**

1. 15 of these responses addresses the openness, democratic nature, or religious/intellectual tolerance and inclusion of community.
2. 24 focused on just or on the social, friendly and warm aspects of the community, including 4 that just said community or great community.
3. 6 focus on our UU religion.
4. 10 additional comments not fitting neatly into the above are: giving as a way of life, having fun, Leaders, idealism, liberal beacon, liberal voice, envious of people who want o to help talent in church, urban location, expands the mind and grow and make mistakes.

B. 42 classified as **(Children's) RE, Coming of Age, Youth Group**

1. 13 simply said RE, two of which added words indicating it was both children's and adult.
2. 10 made very positive statements about the children's RE program, including 2 that focused on the positive aspects of teaching, and 3 factually stated involvement in children's RE – presumably also reflecting positively on RE.
3. 5 specifically noted the OWL program, one of which said RE and especially OWL, and one of which noted it was the only program their child would do.
4. 5 stated youth group, one of which noted her child's role is now helping her in college.
5. 2 noted Adult RE specifically, one of which included children's as well.
6. 4 focused on the Coming of Age Program, one of which said they were inspired by the youth credos.
7. 3 were hard to categorize – Connection with church waning now that children done with RE, busy with RE now but hope to do social action, and hands full with children.

C. 41 classified as **Worship**

1. 30 focused on all worship services, with 9 specifically noting sermons and 3 more noting Vanessa challenging us. 3 more noted that the services intellectually challenged them. Various single responses mentioned individual elements of the service, including the benediction, the gong (2), SIP, spirit and community in the service, and the announcements.
- 2.. 10 focused on particular services, including the flower communion(2), the water communion, Green Vespers, animal blessing, hanging of the greens, Xmas eve, Coming of Age (2), Youth service, recognizing the dead (2), water communion, and sun worship.
3. One comment stated the lengthy pitches detracted from the spirituality.

D. 33 classified as **Social Action**

1. 19 citing social action, outreach, making a difference, or serving others through church.
2. Others cited specific volunteer activities including working with homeless or hungry (5), and tutoring (2).
3. UULMNJ, Racial Justice, affordable housing, bringing Social Action to RE each received one slip.
4. One wants more opportunities for volunteerism
5. 2 were outliers, one noting Men's Group and the other stating Covenant Group was together for 7 years.

E. 30 classified as **Adult RE**

1. 10 cite Covenant Groups, one of which asked what they are.
2. 8 cite Spirituality in Practice, one of which also mentioned Covenant groups and being on the CRC on the same slip.
3. 2 cited the forming your own theology curriculum
4. 2 cited World Religions class.
5. 5 cites one or more items including Roots Class., Clothing sale, social events, Alliance, Book Club, etc.
6. 3 cite general Spiritual Growth opportunities.

E. 24 classified as **Various Activities (Social)**

1. 3 for services auction, 2 for coffee hour, and 2 for game night.
2. 2 for social activities that do not cost a lot.
3. Many separate activities noted: being asked to volunteer, working canvass, great bios group, Green Vespers, racial justice and social action (place to go when world gets crazy), welcome desk, garage sale, pastoral committee, dinner club, all the "circles", men's group, joint activities inc. SHIP, garage sale, auction, fundraisers & fun, end of year RE party at Y, group activities.

F. 18 classified as **Participation.**

1. 6 noted wide variety of opportunities.
2. 4 noted the connection between getting involved and getting more out of it.
3. 4 noted the potential of small groups to help one meet people.
4. 1 - Nice if people reached out w/o being asked.
5. 1- When moved asked for help and no one helped, had no way home from church.
6. 2 from same person indicating that if husband got more involved would participate more.

G. 17 classified as **Music**

1. 10 generally support the music program, one specifically emphasizing the outside musicians.
2. 3 cite the choir, and 3 cite the hymns

- 3 1 focuses on Mitchell's efforts to include members especially Youth.
- H. 5 classified as **Diversity**
1. 4 note age diversity.
 2. 1 notes tat they meet people and types of people that they would not Mon. through Fri.
- I. 5 classified as **Staff**
5 generally cite staff, 1 notes staff structure as part of comment
- J. 5 classified as **Miscellaneous**
1. 2 express excitement about the future.
 2. We need a fire to get out of our complacency.
 3. Church has given to me, want to give back.
 4. Like how a chairperson owns their activity.
- K. 4 classified as **Pastoral Care Needs**
1. 2 positive on pastoral efforts, one noting addressing older member needs.
 2. 2 express concern over adequately addressing older members needs.

II. Youth (45 responses)

- A. 20 classified as **Qualities of Community**
1. 9 focus on structure, with 3 noting the covenant, 1 noting self-governance, 3 noting opportunities to lead, 2 noting enabling structure, and one focusing on he check-in questions.
 2. 8 discuss openness, accepting nature and /or principals leading to same and ability to be yourself, find yourself.
 3. 3 focus on people (nice, open, variety).
- B. 10 classified as **Activities**
- 1 Activities; 2 CONs; 1 retreats; Bridges, YAC and CONs; games; GA, HomeFirst, Fundraisers
- C. 6 classified as **Worship**
4 note sermons and worship with one of them adding in ritual; chalice (not a person); family comes.
- D. 5 classified as **RE, Coming of Age, Youth Group**
3 noted Coming of Age (one of which added in OWL); two focused on OWL.
- E. 2 classified as **Social Action**
Like Social action, gong, chimes
- F. 2 classified as **Outliers**
Food; like evening better than late morning.

Question 4:

4. What are the best features of the congregation?

Adults

Qualities of community (84 comments)

People

dynamic	thoughtful 3	like-minded 2
Well-educated	successful	sensitive to needs of others
exceptional	enthusiastic	willing to make commitments
smart/intelligent 4	competent	scholarly
talented 2	passionate	not misfits

Open-mindedness/openness 5 – that I can carry into the rest of the world

non-judgemental 3	inclusive 2	accepting 3
tolerant 3	unanchored by dogma	
see different points of view		like to hear others' thoughts 2
respect for alternate views/questioning 2		room to think
can say what I want/express opinions		honor other traditions

People here don't expect to be told how to make meaning of it all/want to figure out meaning for themselves; find the best of themselves
Communal journey toward free inquiry

Welcoming 6

emotional support 2	warmth 2	place at the table for all
embracing	compassion	caring
love	important to welcome people	

Community 3

Cohesiveness

A group of people living consciously having chosen this faith

Dedicated to our principles

Liberal community 2/liberal religion/liberalness/progressive ideas

Energy

On Sunday morning	from curiosity/questioning	constructive
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My experience of the community

I can be me

Privileged to be here

Trust that the congregation is the church; things happen without the staff

My experience of the community over time:

Rebirth of enthusiasm & energy over decades

We take care of each other even when we argue
Work together to heal divisions (name change)
Church doesn't suit me as much as it used to, but as long as vibrant & alive, it is going in the right direction
Friendliness of the congregation improved over past
Willingness to change and grow with congregation
Resilience; survived a lot of stuff made us better
Growing congregation attracting people searching & need us

Staff 61

Professional staff 2

Ministers 5

Smart	compassionate	give quality time
High quality 2	dream team/super team	personal
Fun	meaningful	make you feel important
Insightful	force of nature	thoughtful
Well-organized		

History of strong/extraordinary ministers
Minister determines what church is like
Able to adapt to new minister

Sufficient staff to handle work 2
Very well staffed

Vanessa 3

Interested in hearing every one's story	amazing
Remembers things	good speaker/thinker inspiring 2
Engaged	exceptional in community work
Superstar	

Emilie

Terrific	gold mine	in tune w/kids
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Tulli

Fantastic	great with kids	earnest efforts
Finds what works		

Kim

Going to be great	here because of Vanessa
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Interns

Great	extraordinary
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Carolyn

Robo-queen	fantastic
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More balanced & diverse staff – older, male
Don't agree with having strong staff –David Bumbaugh?

Making a difference 36

General comments re: making world better via social action 19

Irvington tutoring SHIP Maintaining the building	Home First Chancellor Ave	Transylvania church Moving Toward Peace
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Would not have joined if no social action
Reputation in Summit business community that UCS is “doing stuff”
No smug arrogance; sense of humility
High profile in denomination

Prescriptive
Need dialog about what SA activities supported
Would like specific or 1-time activities especially that can do as a family e.g.: food bank
More hands-on opportunities
Upset Home First no longer using churches; gave opportunity to meet clients
SAC activities should never feel mandatory
Troubled by lack of new volunteers on SAC

I am not interested in social action

Diversity 25

General comments on tolerance, diversity, welcoming 9
Specific to gay/lesbian-headed families 3
Racial/intergenerational diversity

Place where mixed families can celebrate all traditions – gives children traditions they can own

I am interested in knowing what seniors want

Prescriptive
Lay speakers need to be cautioned to respect political differences e.g.: jokes about politics other religions – not a new problem 2
Was distressing in past for my husband to see cross
Want more inclusiveness in political views and race – but like being with well-educated people
Can be over-eager to welcome “diverse” visitors
Was negative when we did not change name

RE/OWL/Youth 29

RE General 8
Understanding principles
Open & accepting, tolerant place

OWL 3

Youth Group general 10

Covenant democracy leadership opportunities

Youth minister 4

RE takes time & can't take on one more thing

Don't like children in service but sympathize with parents of disruptive kids

Building 21

General 3

Love current building/important

Prefer smaller full church to large empty church

Comfort & beauty

Warm, cozy

Feeling of spirituality

Like having RE in same building

Is a hub

When built new building brought people together

Need to move

Vanessa/leaders

Confused about where want to move us

Have a desire to expand outward

Sense frustration & restlessness in Vanessa

Enjoyed one service in summer; can meet new people

9 am service gets short shrift

confused by talk of need for larger building; 9 am service sparsely attended

Prescriptive

Need church-like building, not theatre or non-religious building

Music 14

General 11

Mitchell

Choir sing more often

Beatles instead of hymns

Sunday dedicated to music & art

Sermons 12

Complex challenging inspirational

Allow me to check in in ways I don't normally

Peace & quiet while kids in RE

Get charged with ideas

Money Health 6

Feel good about/want to support 4
Congregation generous
Need openness about where the money goes

Pastoral care 6

Need in-reach as well as out-reach 2
Supportive in time of need
Make PC like covenant group – can go deeper
More uniting than SAC which is divisive
Meaningful to make meal for someone in need in response to PC request

Adult Ed 4

SIP 3

Social Gatherings 3

Develop new relationships
Coffee hour 2
need structured ice breaker to encourage interaction with new people

Lay leadership 3

Passionate willing

Web & Technology 2

Miscellaneous 8

Enjoyed David Bumbaugh
UU-ism is relevant to increasingly diverse & complex society
Takes guts to walk away from what you know
Early Christianity was more open – lost that
Glad our church has grown
Like e-mail on ways to get involved in legislative ministry
Name tags

Youth

Qualities of Community 9

UU is a community, not religion; faith is rational and intelligent 2
Agree with 7 Principles but don't use them in daily life
Youth Group Covenant is not someone telling me what to do

People

Thoughtful accepting tolerant
Have a right not to like everyone but have to be kind
Have to make an effort to come here, demonstrating we want to be here
Kids find time for themselves apart from daily activities

Building 9

Location nice: close to town and train
Dedicated youth area: like sharing space with the rest of the congregation 2
Parking bad; Parking good

Services/Sermons 2

Valuable, based on current events but deeper; different religious texts

Social Justice 2

UN Conference, good talks & workshops

Peace Wall of names

Staff 2

Ordained youth minister is important

Food maintenance crew?

Question 5:

5. Make three wishes for the future for the congregation.

1. Space-related (126 responses)

Wishes for more space or intimating wishes for more space (60 responses)

While quite a few members came out right and wished for more space, a better space, a bigger space, others intimated it by desiring a sanctuary without obstructed views or wishing for growth. A couple desired to stay at 4 Waldron and suggested purchasing the funeral home next door. (28 responses)

Others focused their desire for space on the objective of bringing all of us together at one time - youth and adults no longer being split into two communities, and first and second service no longer being distant relatives. (17 responses)

An outdoor space for children where kids can interact and make friends, and adults can socialize was a prominent request. One person wished for outdoor space for adults as well - to walk a labyrinth, do outdoor meditation, and hold group spirituality groups. (10 responses)

Five responses noted the desire for more parking space or a parking lot. (5 responses)

Wishes for keeping the space we have or intimating wishes for keeping the space (31 responses)

A good cross-section of members' comments in this category recognize growth and were trying to find a way to accommodate the people we have now and to possibly add more in the future. They declared their desire to do the best with the space we have by "using it more effectively", "using different time options", and "adding worship services." Several expressed an emotional attachment to the building or its convenient location. One member suggested that we think about growth in a regional sense by strengthening neighboring UU churches. (16 responses)

Ten responses declared a desire to stay where we are, with a few noting that they don't think we are crowded, and a few asking to delay a possible move. (10 responses)

A few responses also focused on fear of losing the intimacy of a small church. "Bigger is not

always better.” (5 responses)

**Wishes related to space - but not declaring a position on either side
(35 responses)**

Fear, Anxiety, Conflict Among Community (12 responses)

There is an underlying anxiety about losing members of the community during a potential move. Participants mentioned a feeling of loss if the intimacy of the space is not maintained, and a desire to reduce conflict and heal any divisions that may occur due to a move. There was also a recognition that this is “only a building”, and that while we must respect the past, we must not be burdened by it.

Messaging, Due Diligence, and Financial Implications (12 responses)

Here members expressed their wish that leadership give clear messages to congregation about the issue of moving. A person voiced a concern that the Strategic Planning process is space-oriented. A person made a wish that we not be so focused on the building, while another asked that we gain acceptance that we won't please everyone when it comes to space issues.

There were eight responses that asked that we evaluate all options using empirical data, that we be open to several solutions, and that we not over-extend ourselves financially in the process. Two people put faith in our minister's judgment in recommending a move, and one suggested an trial option of renting a larger space for a Sunday.

Aesthetics (5 responses)

A grouping noted that the building is an attraction, and that if we moved the building should be elegant, peaceful, beautiful, inspirational, near a town center and have good acoustics.

2. Dream Big, But Leave No One Behind (47 comments, including Marketing Ourselves)

Comments in this category reflected the gratefulness felt regarding what we have as congregation, and the desire to show “courage, perseverance and love to be/do the things we talk about.”. Several members prompted us to live out our greatness, play a bigger role in the UU movement, to dream big and not hold back. Some challenged us to increase our size but maintain our cohesiveness; to have “roots and wings.” (21 comments)

Five comments cited Strategic Planning. There was appreciation in allowing all voices to be heard, the desire to have productive results and plan long-term actions, and the wish that the process not be divisive. (5 comments)

Two comments wished that we not become “too big” or cast a group aside in the process of growing. One noted that if “it ain't broke, don't fix it.” (4 comments)

Marketing Ourselves (Subset of Dream Big) (17 comments)

Many expressed the wish that we secure a larger presence in the community, and some said it is our responsibility to get the larger UU message out in the public domain. “What does Rob Bell do?” (17 comments)

3. Community-related (45 responses)

Suggestions for more activities and ways to draw people in (32 responses)

There is a yearning to build stronger ties and friendships in this community. Members are searching for ways to connect after and outside of services. Suggestions ranged from social events that engage the whole congregation to more connection for families to small group engagements.

Recognition of the difficulty for newcomers as well as longstanding members to find community (10 responses)

There seems to be an underlying sentiment that it is difficult to integrate into our community. There were a couple mentions of not being greeted as a newcomer or that after the greeting the person felt “dropped.” There is a desire to want to get to know other people and families but also recognition that coffee hour can be intimidating for newcomers. A person suggests looking at how evangelical churches welcome newcomers.

Seniors’ Needs (3 responses)

The desire to reach out to older members was noted by three participants.

4. Sermons and Services (33 responses)

More spiritual depth

Members expressed a variety of desires for sermons. The general sentiment was for greater depth; meaning less “filler”, more challenges/sacrifices, more discussion of life’s great questions, a creation of a sense of wonder and awe, and more spiritual exploration and discovery. (20 responses)

More focus on Service, Tragedies and Current Events

(3 responses)

Structural Suggestions

Better summer programming (1), bring back some form of joys and sorrows (2), better planning for services with children (1) and the desire for a Saturday evening service (1).

Two comments noted the desire for more sermons from Vanessa. A couple responses wished for more participation or “talk back” during services.

(10 responses)

5. Administrative Infrastructure (32 comments, incl. staffing)

Members cited an improved administrative and organizational structure that supports more efficient and more robust activity as a wish. Several people desired an increased use of technology. Some would like to see a business manager or CIO hired or a consultant brought in to advise on staffing and program efficiency. One person wishes the BOT was more representative of the entire congregation, and couple comments noted the desire to put more decision making in the congregants’ hands. (16 comments)

Better and more communication, including a roadmap of all activities at UCS were desired. (3

comments)

Sustainable practices in classrooms, having a leader on site for each activity and the revival of a couple committees were also noted. (3 comments)

Staffing (Subset of Administrative Infrastructure) (10 comments)

Several participants voiced a desire to maintain the stable, professional staff that we possess. A business manager or Chief Admin Officer was requested. The desire to strengthen volunteerism was noted. (10 comments)

6. Finances and Fund Raising (32 comments)

Members expressed the wish to remain financially stable, not incur more debt, and not to launch a capital campaign in this economy. Some wanted to pay off our existing debt. the mortgage. (13 comments)

Some comments also reflect a desire for a congregation that is generous; a congregation that puts UCS in their wills, a congregation that meets or exceeds Annual Giving targets each year, and improved financial resources to possibly hire staff or make the building more eco-friendly. (11 comments)

Sensitivity to members who are not wealthy when the church is fundraising was also expressed. The Service Auction was noted as an uncomfortable event. (7 comments)

There was one request to improve the method of allocating resources and funding committees also. (1 comment)

7. RE & Youth (30 responses)

Desires Regrading RE (19 responses)

Members made many varied requests for RE. There were five comments about improving the quality of teachers or providing teacher training. Four comments surfaced as to the desire to not be asked to teach RE.

There is a desire for commitment among RE families - only half attend most weeks. There is a desire to involve older members in teaching. The suggestion to have RE classes during the week surfaced. A couple comments noted the desire to have more religious foundation taught; less emphasis on holidays and food.

Desires Regarding Youth (10 responses)

There is a hope that Youth Group continues to flourish, and recognition of Emilie's efforts. Specific requests run the spectrum: one member wants more nights of Youth Group, one wants a move to Saturday nights, one would like to see teens involved as RE teachers/ helpers, one would like to see an alternative to Youth Group. There were a few members who worried about youth leaving the congregation and wanted to create a place that is attractive to them.

One member wished that we work harder to keep RE and Youth parents involved in the church after their children age out of classes and Youth Group. (1 response)

8. Outreach / Social Action (26 comments)

There was a good number of comments directed at enlarging UCS' role as a force for good in the World. Members want to do more to address injustices, offer more activities, and grow our activist role in the local area as well as globally. One member noted that a good place to start would be in caring and sharing within the community with car rides to church. (23 comments)

One member noted the need to reach out to young adults and bring them into the community, and another member wished that all committees performed as well as our current Social Action Committee. (2 comments)

9. Diversity (21 comments)

There is a strong desire for more diversity in our congregation, and a yearning that we are more reflective of the larger community in which we live. (21 comments)

10. Adult Education (17 comments)

There is a desire for more adult education opportunities; various forms took expression: Retreats, Guest Speakers, Neighboring Faiths for adults, and Green Vespers with childcare. (17 comments)

11. Senior Minister (13 comments)

The majority of the comments were wishes that Vanessa stay on as Senior Minister. (7 comments)

There is a desire to see more of Vanessa at the pulpit and in the summer months. (3 comments)

There is a desire to have a male in a leadership position. (2 comments)

12. Music (11 comments)

Eight out of the 11 comments requested more diversity in the music. (8 comments)

Youth Group Responses

1. Worship (12 responses)

The youth wished for more participatory services for adult worship, similar to Youth worship services. They want to feel less like they are "being talked at" and desire a "deeper level of sharing." There was a reference to announcements being "disruptive", a wish for more "clarity on religious intent" and to not "be afraid to speak about God."

2. Continued Strength of Youth Group (11 responses)

At the top of their wish list, Youth desired to keep up the influx of "awesome youth" and to remain "open, kind and great for new members." One response wished for the group to remain the same size in the future.

3. **Activities** (7 responses)

Three respondents desired more cons, two noted the plethora of committees and one wished for consolidated committee. There was a mention each of a wish for pastoral care for help with illness or death, and more social justice work.

4. **Marketing** (6 responses)

Six comments focused on “communicating better”, “becoming more well-known”, and being a “more prominent voice in Summit.”

5. **Space** (6 responses)

The Youth noted that since they have a dedicated time on Sunday nights that they thus have dedicated space. A couple comments hoped to stay in the current church. One sought better facilities and another would take dedicated youth space but noted that they are ok where they are.

6. **Emilie** (5 responses, but one notes says “all agreed” to Emilie’s care)

There was strong appreciation for Emilie (and the advisors,) and the way she holds the group through her organization. “She really cares.” One participant wished for paid professionals to help administer youth programs.

7. **Intergenerational Connections** (4 responses)

There was a request for more and better interactions between adults and youth (music / plays were suggested), and an appreciation noted for how well of a job we do in this area relative to other congregations. A wish for a better transition from Youth to Young Adult community at UCS was noted.

Others

There were a few other wishes to “not lose the focus on music”, for “more money”, and for “more diversity.”

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