

Summary of Cottage Meeting Group Notes

Six cottage meetings were held, with about 40 congregation members attending, to gather additional information for our congregational profile. During these meetings, congregants are invited to come to a group conversation for an opportunity to hear and build on what others say about topics related to the search process. The following questions were presented to each group:

- How would you describe this congregation to its prospective ministers? to prospective members? to close non-member friends?
- What do you want to see in a new minister?
- What do you think the congregation wants in a new minister?
- What kinds of biases do you think we need to watch for during the settled minister search?

Following is a summary of the key points made during these conversations, and some cross-references to Congregational Survey findings:

While there was a wide variety of answers to how the congregation would be described to prospective ministers, the most frequently cited responses were, in order of preference:

- “welcoming”
- “supporting social action and anti-racism”
- “liberal values,” and
- “aging white congregation,” “demographic gaps related to the BIPOC population”

Notably, about 35% of those taking the Congregational Survey identified one of their favorite things about UUCW being its (liberal) values, beliefs, and openness.

Similarly, when asked to describe the congregation to prospective members and close non-member friends, the most frequently described responses were, in order of preference:

- “welcoming”
- “supporting social action and anti-racism”
- “liberal values,” and
- “broad/diverse - embracing all faiths”

There was even a wider variety of answers to what the meeting attendees want to see in a new minister and/or what they think the congregation wants to see. The most frequently cited responses were, in order of preference (at least 2 responses):

- “social action advocate,” “anti-racist and white privilege,” “community activist”

- “inspiring,” “affirming and challenging sermons”
- “Promotes leadership,” “leads, but does not control”
- “younger in age”
- “approachable”
- “sense of humor”
- “promotes growth, especially of under-represented and youth”
- “attracts younger members”
- “open to change”
- “good character”
- “good manager”
- “collaborator”
- “innovative”
- “energetic”

Notably, the most preferred ministerial style cited in the Congregational Survey was “prophetic”- helping us imagine our future and inspiring us. In addition, the second most preferred ministerial quality cited in the Congregational Survey was "inspirational and dynamic speaker". The responses received at the cottage meetings to what we want to see in a new minister reinforce those survey preferences. The cottage meeting responses on character and diversity, also reflect the preferences on ministerial roles noted in the Congregational Survey; 4th and 5th choices out of 12 options.

A couple of other noteworthy comments were offered:

- “many of us are carrying baggage from the last 4 years - we need help on that”
- Some people noted that the word “church” can be off-putting
- The importance of listening to our YRUU opinions was noted.
- Regarding sermons - “I want to feel like I’ve been to church, not like I’ve been to a lecture”
- “I (want someone committed) to fulfilling the recent adoption of antiracism and undoing white supremacy culture...the 8th Principle. A POC could help carry out that work. Is our congregation ready to support a black minister? In coming here, they would meet many unintentional negatives.”

The following comments were offered regarding potential biases in candidate identities to be aware of during the Search Team’s work:

- sexual orientation
- physical appearance
- physical impairment / ableism
- ageism
- delivery style
- halo effect (impressions left by Rev. Jullan’s ministry)

Focus Groups

During October, we held seven formal focus group meetings with eight individual groups and/or committees. They included the staff, the anti-racial transformation team (ARTT), the Board of Trustees, the Transition Team, the Wellspring Group, a combined meeting with Lay Pastoral Care and Community Connections, and our Earth Ministry Team. (The Transition Team was formed to provide support and advice for our interim minister, as well as to develop a new UUCW mission statement.)

We also had additional input from members of the Adult Choir and Kaleidoscope (our in-house band) as well as Membership and Stewardship teams. In addition we contacted members from previous search teams for their insights and advice. In all about 35 people representing these groups gave us their input.

Each focus group was asked to answer the following questions:

#1 Looking back after our new minister has been with us for a year, what will be your measure of success?

#2 What achievements will make you say you are glad the new minister is among us?

Although the answers varied widely, certain themes were very clear.

In the **answers to the first question**, there was consensus that people think success would be to have a minister who works collaboratively, who communicates well and is honest and transparent. Building trust is key. Additional desired qualities include the ability to delegate, and to establish relationships with communities outside UUCW. People want a minister who encourages leadership development and who stimulates them intellectually and emotionally so they are excited to participate. Ideally, our new minister would demonstrate the ability to work with the Board and staff to foster a sense of shared ministry.

For the second question, people expressed the desire for our minister and congregation to be visible in the social justice community. Other desirable achievements are for the congregation to have a deeper understanding of the work various UUCW groups are engaged in (lay pastoral care, community connections, Wellspring, for example). We will be glad to have a minister adept in conflict management, who can create an inclusive atmosphere of trust and respect. And, of course, we would love to see an increase in attendance and more engagement by our youth.

Here are some specific and unique comments from each of the groups.

- 1) **Board of Directors** - We will have role clarity — committees will know how they fit into the big picture and who to go to for help. The Board and minister will work together productively and have a truly shared ministry.

2) **Staff** - For our staff, who are very committed to UUCW, one measure of success after a year will be that they all will still be here! They would like to have a relationship of mutual respect and trust with a staff leader who is flexible and trusts them to do their jobs. If changes are being made, they hope the goals will be stated clearly and implemented gradually.

Here are a few more observations:

- * the minister should be visible and accessible when staff are working
- * the minister should have a good grasp of technology but not be reluctant to seek help
- * the minister should act like a coach: inspire by example
- * The staff would love to have someone who is artistic and performance oriented to enhance our worship atmosphere
- * It is important for our minister to get to know our children (at least know their names), and to help them build relationships with each other and feel they are part of our community

3) **Transition team** - We will have a minister who is good at delegating and who has learned to use conflict management skills. We will pay our fair share to the UUA. Social justice work will be more present and natural to the members of the congregation.

4) **Lay Pastoral Care** - Our new minister will be clear about their strengths, limits and boundaries.

5) **Community Connections** - Our minister will help the congregation gain a broader and deeper understanding of the role Community Connections can play in our congregation.

6) **Earth Ministry team** - Our minister will have an awareness of societal and environmental challenges and will support outreach regarding climate change. They will be aware of the Green Sanctuary program and offer sermons on environmental topics.

7) **Wellspring** - We hope our new minister will help people to understand how beloved conversations can be very spiritual and are foundational to social action.

8) **Anti-racist Transition Team** - We want a minister who is not only doing but also leading this work. (Which means we also will have to support it!) We hope everyone will see that it is their responsibility and not leave it to the few. Anti-racism is social justice work and we want a minister committed not just in words but in action. Our minister will encourage and lead others to join in this work and help us figure out ways to get people to show up.