

Ministerial Search Congregational Survey Results

As part of the search for a settled minister, the UUCW Search Team surveyed the congregation in September and October of 2023. We had 105 responses, for a response rate of nearly 40% of the congregation. The results of the survey have provided UUCW with a snapshot of the congregation; in demographics, in how they feel about the workings of the church, and in what they would like in a new settled minister.

What we like

In response to “what is your favorite thing about UUCW”, not surprisingly the people and community were most often mentioned. The following word cloud shows the top 25 mentioned words used in the congregation’s answers. Just under 50% of all respondents mentioned the “people”, “community” or “congregation” in some way or another. Almost 35% mentioned the values, beliefs or openness of UUCW.



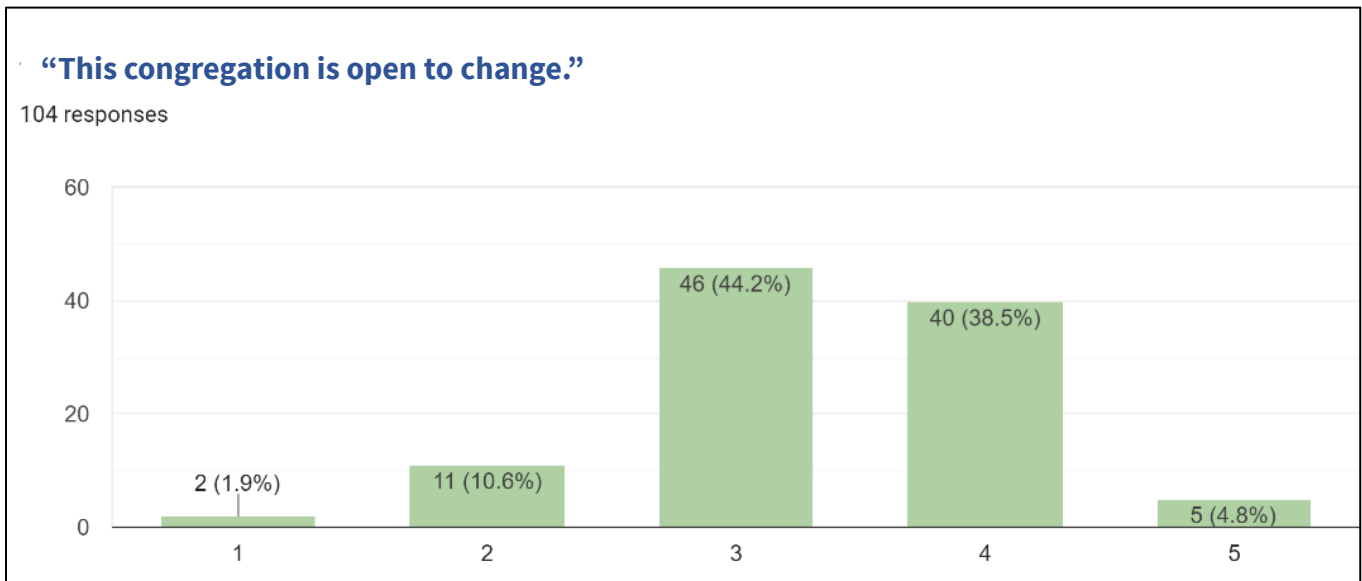
According to the survey, 60% of the congregation attends services weekly. However, due to the response bias of those completing the survey are typically the more engaged members of the congregation, this result can’t be extended to the congregation as a whole.

As a congregation, “we feel at our most UU” on Sunday. Slightly over 50% of respondents indicated that they felt the most Unitarian Universalist during Sunday services. Furthermore, almost 25% of respondents indicated that they are most in touch with their UU feelings when working on various social action activities, including Black Lives Matter events and bringing meals to the Guest House.

The Sunday service, with the sermon, readings and other aspects that make us think, is the activity that most helps just over a third of the congregation ‘stretch and grow’. There is a tremendous variety of other activities that help our congregation grow spiritually and stretch ourselves personally. Among those listed included Soul Circles, Unity Groups, meditation, Our Whole Lives, Twisted Stitchers, Split the Plate and external environmental activities. This shows that we are a congregation with a broad spectrum of activities we engage in to help us improve ourselves. While these myriad activities are diverse, they all have a common central core, our UU principles.

How does the congregation feel about itself?

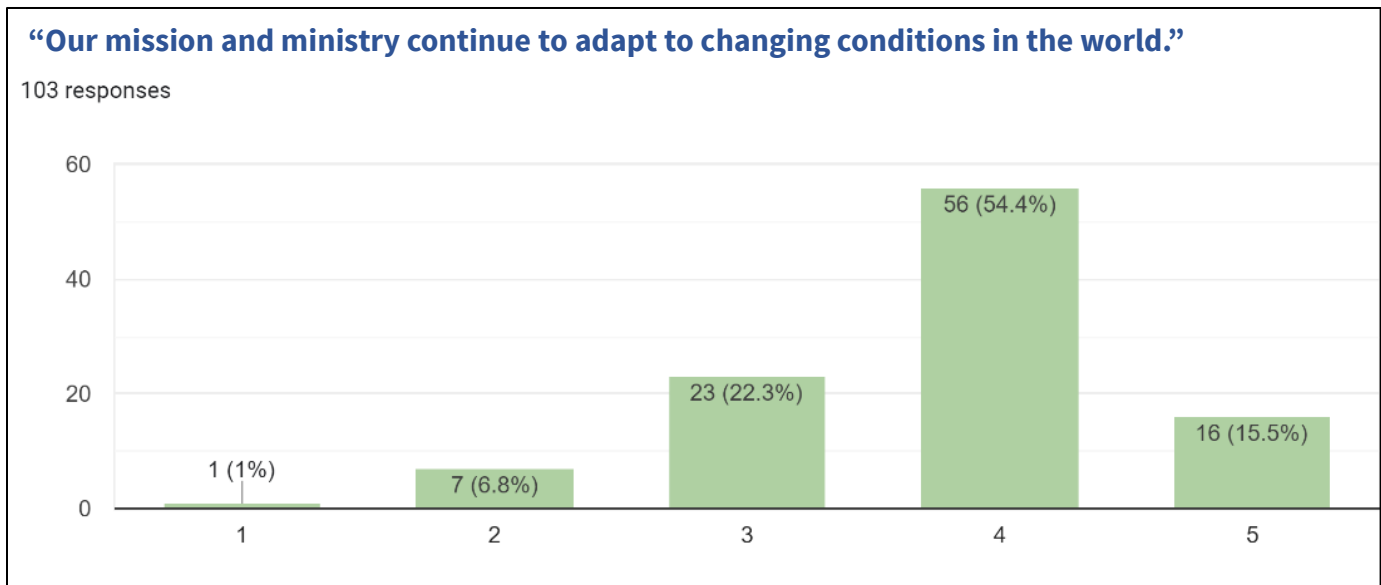
As can be seen in the first of the following tables, in general, the congregation feels it is 'open to change'. About four times as many respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with that statement (columns 4 and 5), as compared to those that disagreed or strongly disagreed (columns 1 and 2).



The second table shows that by even greater numbers, the congregation feels that it is focused on 'the greater good' and mission related activities, rather than the activities that are preferred by a smaller, but perhaps more vocal, portion of the congregation. While there is not 100% support for either, that is to be expected in a congregation as disparate as that of UUCW.

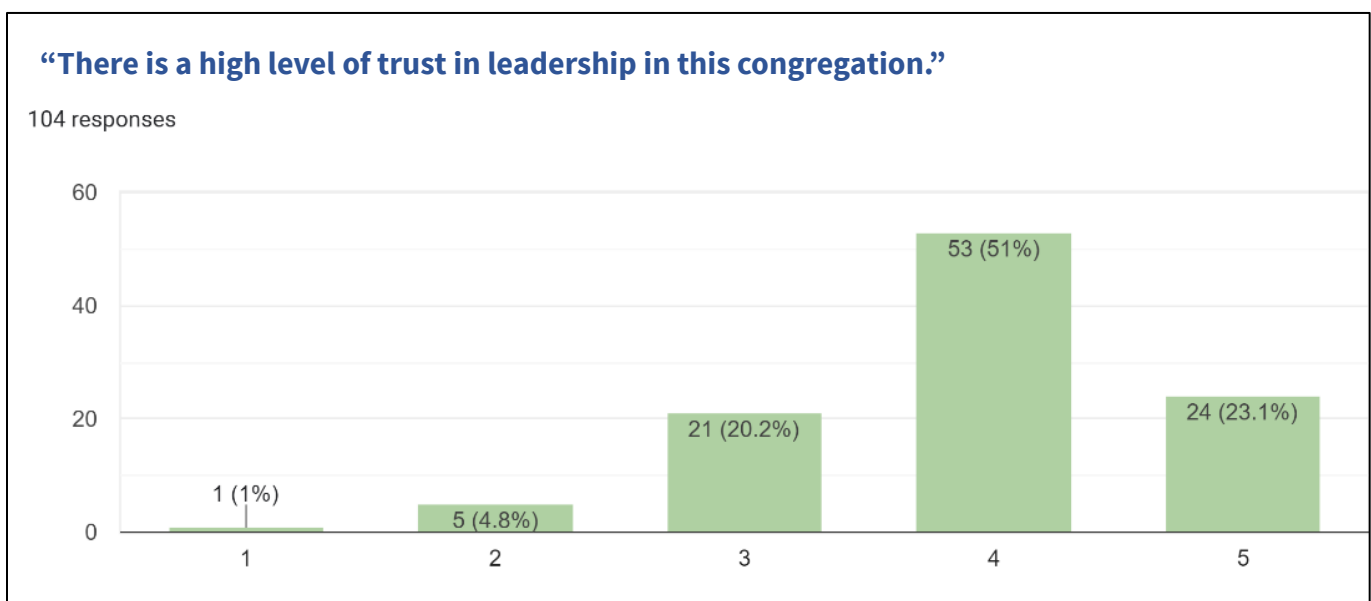


As a congregation that is, in general, open to change and focused on its mission, it is not a surprise that it also believes that as the world changes around us, the congregation’s mission and ministry can adapt to those changes. This can be seen in the third table, where about 70% of the congregation either agrees or strongly agrees with that belief and less than 8% would disagree in some way.



Leadership and finances

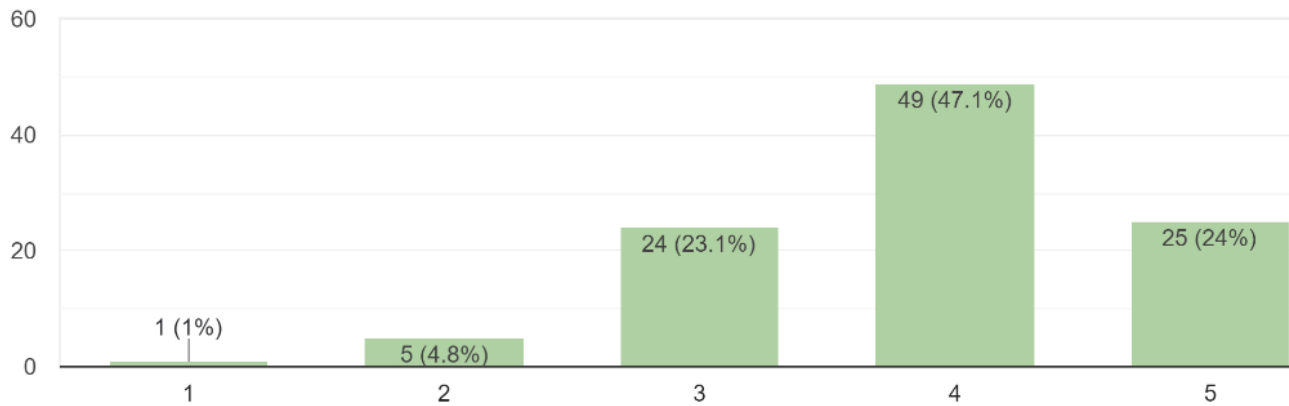
The survey questions that asked respondents for their opinions on the leadership and financial stability of the congregation showed a congregation that believes in its leadership. About 75% of the congregation either agrees or strongly agrees that there is a high level of trust in its leadership. This, coupled with the fact that only 6% disagreed to some level, shows a strong congregational approval of those who are, or who have been, leading UUCW in all that it does.



As noted previously, the congregation at UUCW feels it is open to change. With the changes brought on by both the pandemic and the retirement of Rev. Lynch, UUCW has experienced recent change and will again soon, as we call a new settled minister. Fortunately, by about the same proportions as their trust in leadership, the congregation feels that there is a core group of leaders that are capable of leading UUCW through times of change. As a whole, the congregation feels it is in good hands with its leaders.

“We have a core group of leaders able to lead change in a non-anxious way.”

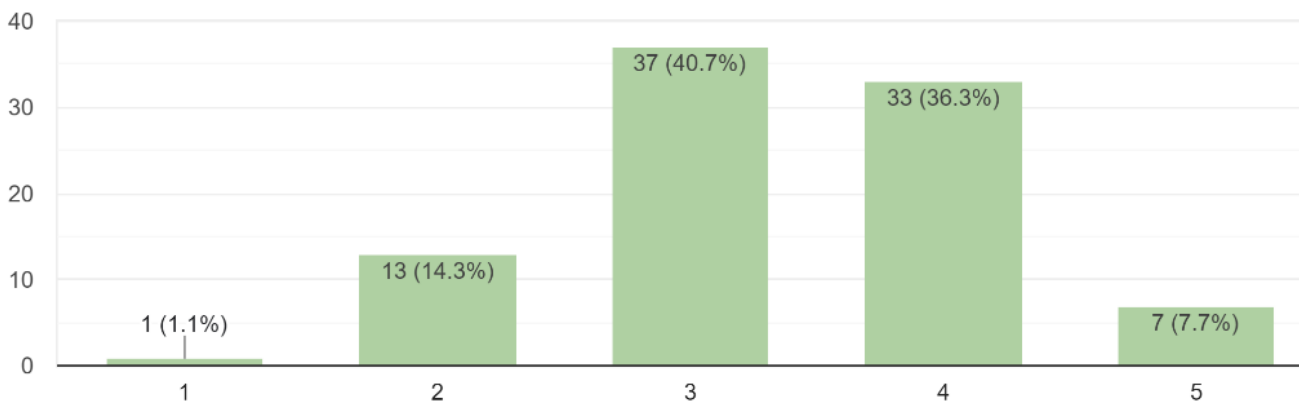
104 responses



While the table on belief in the congregation’s financial stability indicates somewhat less confidence in its finances than in its leadership, only about 15% of the congregation lacks confidence.

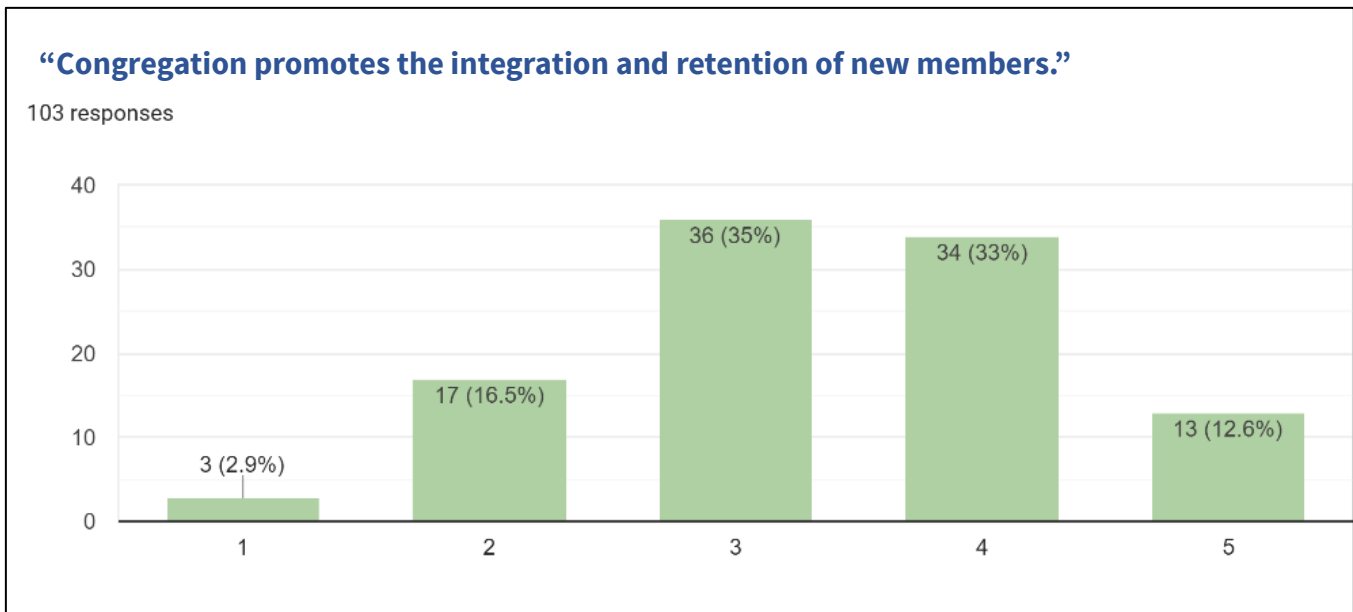
“I am confident in our congregation’s financial sustainability.”

91 responses



The congregation and new members

When asked about how the community integrates new members, the survey showed that about 45% agreed or strongly agreed that the congregation promoted their integration. However, it also showed that about 20% disagreed in some manner. This might point to an area where the congregation can be proactive and improve on itself. With past members of the old Membership Committee reestablishing some of their work post-pandemic, there already could be improvements on this front that the community, as a whole, was unaware of. At the time of the survey, there was a new orientation class being run with six prospective new members. In addition, a recent new initiative undertaken to engage members in church activities may also help with retention. This also is indicative of UUCW being proactive in its outreach to new members.



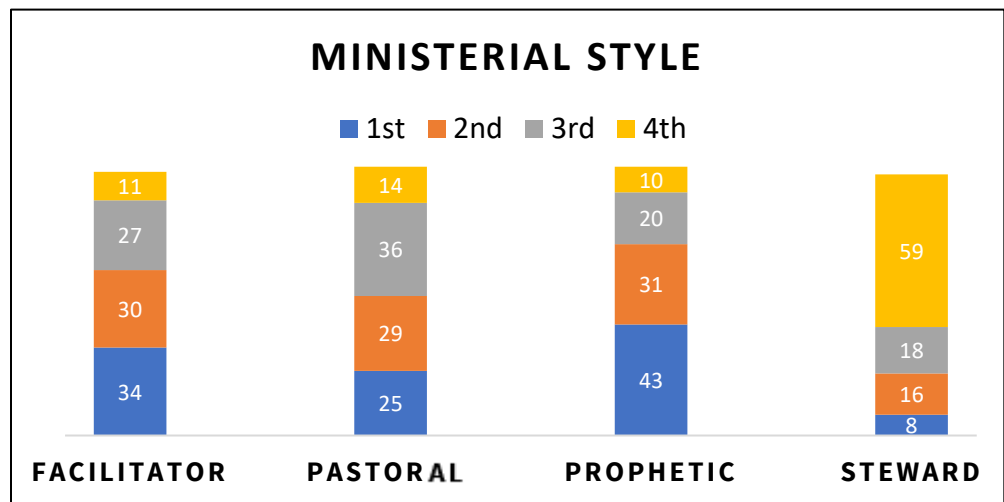
What we seek in our new settled minister

The congregation of UUCW, and especially the Ministerial Search Team, knows full well that finding a prospective minister that checks all of the boxes and fits every desire is more difficult than finding a four-leafed clover, a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow or a unicorn. But that doesn't mean the congregation shouldn't determine which boxes it should check or what its desires might be. The survey asked the congregants several questions to rank their top preferences. The questions asked were about the ministerial style, the roles the minister should adopt and the qualities preferred in a settled minister.

The Search Team is certainly aware that a settled minister will follow more than one style, that they will fill multiple roles and that they can have more than one of the mentioned qualities. So, the results of the survey are meant to help guide the Search Team in terms of the general traits preferred by the largest portion of the congregation. The Search Team is also well aware that it will not be possible to satisfy every member's wishes.

Style

In the first of these questions, ministerial styles were broken down into four options and members were asked to rank their preference. These four styles were described as follows:

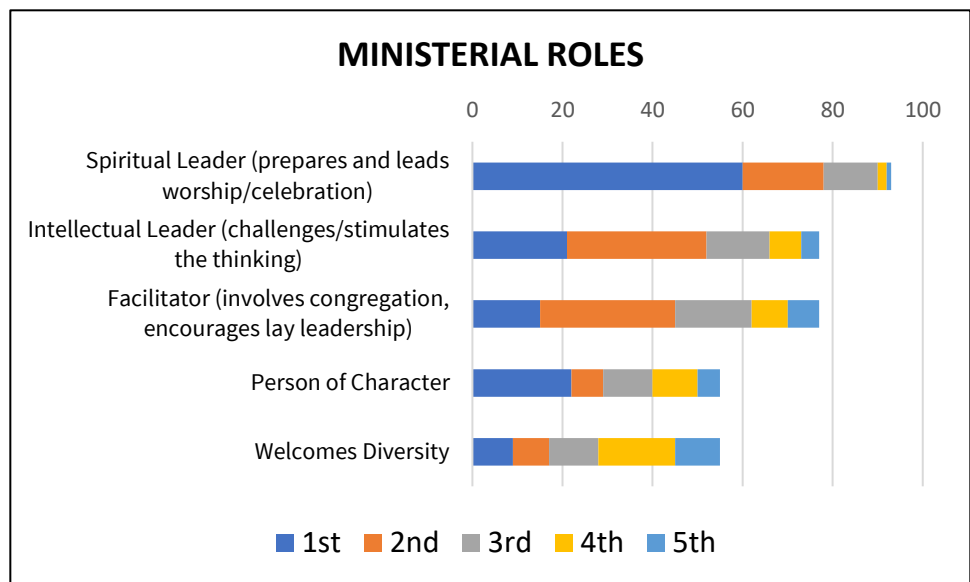


- **Facilitator** - Guides Congregation members to become engaged in activities and events of community by example and suggestion.
- **Pastoral** - Provides pastoral care, and, by example shows us how to care for one another.
- **Prophetic** - Helps us imagine our future and inspire us.
- **Steward** - Preserves our Congregation by wise management.

The table above shows that the congregation's lowest ranked style was that of a Steward. While the others seem quite similar, the Prophetic style was both the most popular first choice and second choice.

Roles

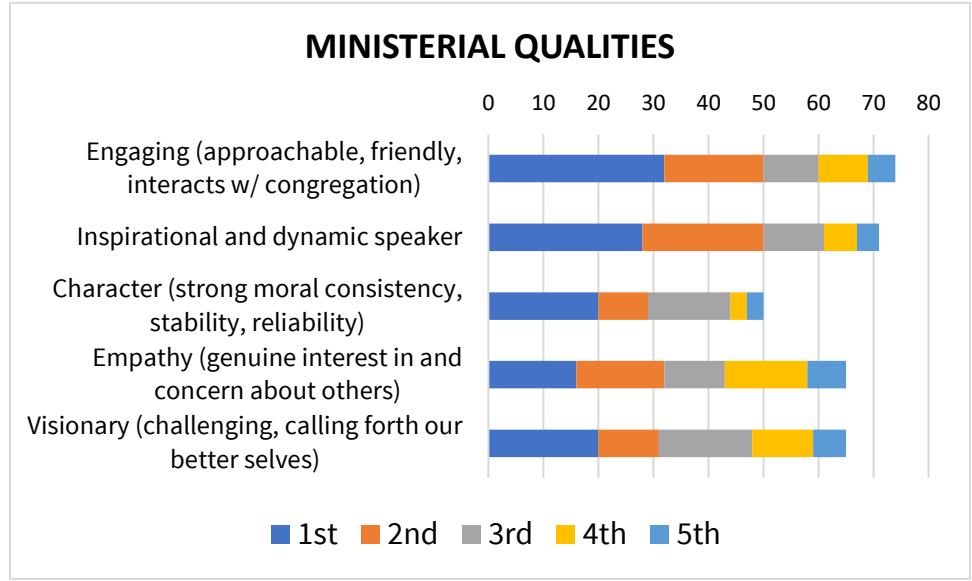
Regarding the preferences for the roles that the community would like their new minister to take on, the survey listed 12 options. While all roles had at least one member of the congregation rank it as their first choice, five of the roles stood out: Spiritual Leader, Intellectual Leader, Facilitator, Person of



Character and Welcomes Diversity. The accompanying chart shows the congregation preferences for these five roles. With more than 50% of the congregation ranking it as their first choice, the congregation's preferred Ministerial Role is Spiritual Leader. It should be noted that a minister who fits one of these roles can also fit others. While it should not be expected that a ministerial candidate can fill all 12 roles listed in the survey (or perhaps not even the five listed roles), the Search Team will treat these five roles as the preference of the congregation.

Qualities

In terms of the Ministerial Qualities the congregation prefers, again it can be seen that there are a five of the 14 listed qualities that stand out above the others: being 'Engaging', being an 'Inspirational and Dynamic Speaker,' having 'Character,' having 'Empathy' and being 'Visionary.' Like with the Ministerial Roles, it should be noted that an individual minister can have multiple qualities and it should be remembered that it is highly unlikely that a minister will have them all. The Search Team will treat these five qualities as the preference of the congregation.



'Joys' and 'Concerns'

Not meaning to make light of the Sunday service period of Joys and Concerns, two of the more challenging questions to answer on the survey asked us to think about potential changes a minister could make that might be 'unifying and energizing', and others that might be 'contentious.' The responses were as varied as our congregation. The Search Team has read all of your responses and will take these thoughts into account as it conducts its work.

When looking at what the congregation thought would be invigorating and what would be troublesome, it was interesting to note that there were some responses that showed up in both camps. By grouping responses into blocks that represent similar changes, it was possible to get some aggregate data. The most popular 'contentious' issue was changing the Sunday worship service in some way. Approximately 17% would be concerned if there were changes in things like the structure of the service (from start time to length of service) or the focus (from going away from earth spirit services to becoming too Christian). The second most popular issue concerned how the change would occur, either too fast or without appropriate member approval. This was the concern of 12% of respondents. At about 6%, the last two blocks were concerns about changes in social action activities and changes in the staff. There was only one block of reasonable size on the 'unifying and energizing' question. Engagement, either getting more of the congregation engaged or increasing membership, was mentioned by about 17%.