



WBUUC Congregational Record Summary:

An update from the Ministerial Search Committee, December 2022

In October, the WBUUC congregation gave vital input on our lead minister search process through an online survey open to members and friends, as well as five multiplatform cottage meeting conversations.

Our search team feels we gained the insights we needed to tell our story, show potential candidates who we are and who we hope to become, and share what the congregation as a whole needs in our next lead minister. Thank you for your thoughtful answers and participation!

We spent the month of November synthesizing all we heard and gathered into our official Congregational Record—a robust and transparent collection of reflections, data, information about our congregational life and history, as well as anticipated needs for a minister as we focus on our future. Searching ministers will spend the month of December reading these records and deciding where to apply.

What we learned and shared

Here are some of the most important points we learned from you and integrated into the Congregational Record.

We are resilient

The two-year interim process under Rev. Roger's leadership is serving us well. While we cherished Rev. Victoria and other key staff members who have left, it seems that we are not collectively in a state of grief anymore. As Rev. Roger has reflected back to us, our congregation is showing great resilience.

We care deeply about Sunday services and sermons

When asked what we value most, the top answer was great sermons and well-designed services that, in their entirety, are inspiring, deeply felt, and personal—experiences that speak to the head, heart, and spirit that we can put into practice as we head out the door.

We're here for belonging, community, social action, music, and beauty

We strongly value a sense of belonging, community, our social justice work, music, and our beautiful church building and its setting in nature.

We are a congregation of theological diversity, all the while tending to the shared values we hold together

We balance reverence and intellectualism. We value pluralism. Our call to worship—"Come into this place"—reminds us of the radical welcome we want for ourselves and each other whenever we are together. This I Believe talks inspire us and orient us to the diversity of our congregation's stories and beliefs.

We hope to widen the circle

We cherish our multigenerational community and hope to welcome more families and young adults in the future. We aspire to become truly inclusive and open, welcoming people of different backgrounds and races. We know we have more work to do together toward that goal.

We are strong and generous

We have strong financial stewardship and a culture of generosity in our giving, both in our church and beyond its walls. We value giving of our time as well. Our lay leadership has historically been particularly strong, from the board to committees to Religious Education support and other important roles.

We are trusting and collaborative

We seem to have good trust among our congregation and of our leaders. Our new relational covenant helps us maintain healthy communications and boundaries. Our new organizational structure will better support staff work/life balance. Our congregation values relational, collaborative approaches to our work together.

We are ready

Many of us craved getting back together in person and are feeling a renewed sense of community and possibility this fall. Many of us feel excited to welcome our next lead minister and continue shaping our journey together.

More on the survey and its results

Search team members designed our congregational survey based on a UUA sample and knowledge of our own congregation. We invited members, friends, and visitors to take our anonymous online survey from the end of September through October 18, 2022. A total of 321 people responded, nearly half our number of members.

The survey consisted of 39 multiple choice questions, and 11 open-ended questions. A majority of respondents (227) filled out some portion of the open-ended questions.

Here's a brief summary of the kinds of questions we asked and the results.

Congregational culture

The first section of the survey consisted of multiple choice questions focused on respondents' favorite things about church and how often they participated in various congregational activities. By a wide margin, respondents stated that Sunday morning worship, music and a sense of belonging were their favorite things. Sunday worship was respondents' primary way of interacting in the church community.

A series of questions asked respondents to gauge the congregation's ability to adjust to change, respond positively to new leadership, ask tough questions while staying in relationship, and represent different faith backgrounds (theist, humanist, earth-centered, atheist). The majority of answers indicated that respondents felt confident in our ability to adapt to change and new ideas, that they trusted in strong leadership and could focus on the greater good rather than the concerns of individuals. The majority of respondents felt that the congregation was sustainable and adaptable, and could balance representing various viewpoints while meeting spiritual needs.

Ministerial expectations

One question asked how respondents would handle a situation in which a minister said or did something they didn't agree with. It was a multiple choice question, and it was possible to mark more than one answer. The top three answers were "tell those in my circle," "keep my opinion to myself," or conclude that this "said more about myself than about the minister."

Three questions asked respondents to choose the most important roles of a future lead minister. The top answers included, "a prophetic role of helping us imagine our future and helping to inspire us," "presenting inspiring and challenging Sunday services," "supporting families and multigenerational ministries," "leading the overall ministry," and "fostering a sense of community."

Demographics

The final multiple choice questions were demographic. The survey indicated that respondents tended to be over the age of 50, identified as white, were female, heterosexual (although 17% of respondents identified with a category other than this), married, had no children at home, had a college degree, were retired, and had a household income above the Twin Cities Metro average (which was \$66,000 at last census). Of those respondents with children, most lived with them and had enrolled them in Religious Education at the church.

The vast majority of respondents lived within 15 minutes of the church. Over 60% of respondents belonged to the church for more than 6 years (many over 20 years). Most respondents had joined as members. Over a third were members of another religious community also, and most were raised in another faith. Most respondents reported that their spiritual life was important and they had a regular spiritual practice.

Open-ended questions

Here are the optional open-ended questions and a very general summary of the most common themes of the responses:

1) Why should a future minister consider joining the next chapter of our journey?

Great people, high energy, vibrant, financially in good shape, welcoming, at an inflection point, many and varied strengths in the congregation

2) What originally brought you to WBUUC?

Covenant - not creed, preaching, music, social justice, the atmosphere, specific programs, welcoming community

3) What keeps you at WBUUC?

Community and spiritual practice

4) In which program, ministry, and/or activity do you feel most UU?

Sunday services, social justice, theme circles, programs which promote community

5) Which program, ministry, and/or activity gives you concrete tools to live a dynamic UU life?

Wellspring, religious education, Sunday services, theme circles, social action

6) Which program, ministry, and/or activity inspires you to stretch and grow?

Sermons, open conversations about difference, natural surroundings and beauty

7) Which program, ministry, and/or activity gives you the deepest sense of belonging?

Volunteering, serving, working together, social gatherings, Sunday services

8) In which program, ministry, and/or activity have you experienced transcendence?

The Sunday service, the site (woods, labyrinth, music, art), the traditions

9) What do you perceive the top three functions of our future minister to be?

Guide and inspire from the pulpit, coordinate and inspire the staff, be visionary with collaborative abilities, be calm and inspirational, help us best serve the world, form relationships with the congregants

10) What future changes would unify and energize the WBUUC community?

Volunteer activities that allow congregants to contribute, more diversity and younger members, very clear shared mission, promote community building and engagement, celebrate, laugh and have fun together, help congregants get to know one another

11) Anything else you would like the Search Committee to know?

We hope to find a minister who has good communication and delegation skills, is inspiring, and can make real personal connections.

More on the cottage meeting conversations

We held five 1.5-hour multiplatform cottage meetings over the course of two weeks in October. These facilitated conversations began as large forums and split into longer, facilitated small-group conversations. Participants had the opportunity to share their own thoughts and hear others' concerns, desires, and hopes

for our church and our next lead minister. Additional unique perspectives helped us validate what we'd heard from members and friends.

The insights gathered from 166 members and friends at our cottage meetings and nine staff members at one focus group are woven into the Congregational Record. Below are the questions we asked at each of the five cottage meetings. Following that is a section that pulls out some of the biggest trends we heard (which also appear in the Congregational Record).

Questions

Open Forum (in person and online, with a facilitator, scribe and timekeeper) – 30 minutes

Question: Name one of your favorite WBUUC traditions, including favorite music, programs or services. Say why you appreciate it. And if you're new, what are some things that have struck you right off the bat?

Question: How would you describe our church's version of Unitarian Universalism to someone you think might be interested in attending our church? (Prompt: Think about how you would describe WBUUC, now that we don't have Victoria as part of our core identity. Does it help to think about how we are different from or alike to other UU congregations in the Twin Cities or elsewhere?)

Question: How do you define good preaching and worship? (Prompt: When you think about a favorite service, what made it so special to you?)

Question: What are some things you would want a new minister to know about WBUUC and who we are? (Prompt: Imagine someone moving here from another part of the U.S. or think about how we might show up to visitors.)

Small Group discussions (in person and online with a facilitator and scribe) – 1 hour

Question: What are some areas where we have ongoing momentum that you especially appreciate? (Prompt: Think of things that were going on before the pandemic or that were more recently introduced that you enjoy and hope we build on.)

Question: If you think about our past several years, are there some things you feel we should change? (Prompt: This could include letting go of programs or traditions that don't serve us so well anymore or could include ideas for how to improve what we do.)

Question: What are your desired strengths in a lead minister? (Prompt: What do you feel they need to do particularly well, considering that some things can be done by others? Remember what the UUA has said, that ministers are human and that one person cannot reasonably sustain perfection in all of the key areas that UU's say they expect in a lead minister. Those 5 P's are – Preaching, Pastoral Care, Prophetic Voice, Promoter of Congregational Life and Personnel Expert.)

Question: How could our church community nurture and support its ministers? (Prompt: What have we learned about how this could look, going forward? This could apply to a new minister who experiences micro-aggressions, or to our finding ways to share the load as a community.) It's okay if this very open-ended question doesn't spur a lot of responses.

Question: Are there some things that you feel you – or others in our community – need to work on before we welcome a new lead minister?

Question: What are some things that you're excited for, going forward?

Question: Are there some concerns you have that we haven't talked about today?

Extra Questions (which can be folded in before the final question, if time allows, and which can be added to as trends or issues come to light from the surveys):

Question: How do ministers and congregations build trust with each other?

Key take-aways

- The congregation is excited to welcome a new lead minister and feels open and ready for this transition
- We have maintained our resilience as a congregation through many recent big changes
- There is a strong level of trust in our congregation — for our staff, lay leadership and, during this process, for the Search Committee
- The congregation seems cohesive and self-aware, and we saw many strong trends in response to cottage meeting questions, as opposed to lots of conflicting answers
- There are several traditions that the congregation feels tied to, but in other areas, people are open to new ideas and ways of interacting
- Our church has a solid foundation, in terms of our revised organizational structure, newly adopted relational covenant and strong financial stewardship

Questions?

Reach out to your Ministerial Search Committee at search@wbuuc.org or visit wbuuc.org/transition to find more information about the search process, timeline, and more.