Summary of responses from congregational discussion groups.

*Q1. Do you envision a future for FUSW? Do you want to continue being a part of this congregation?*

Yes! (15 people gave this answer)

Yes, but I can't contribute much to making it work. (7 gave this response)

Yes, but I envision a different version of FUSW going forward. (2 responses)

We should merge with another congregation (1 response)

Comments included:

* We are too removed from the personal because of the need for virtual services.
* I would like FUSW to exist for others and for myself sometimes, but personally I will be pulling back.
* I can't imagine life without FUSW.
* We are an aged and aging congregation; those holding us above water will not have the energy to keep doing this.
* We can't continue as we are.
* Merger might be our only choice.

*Q2. Some have proposed that FUSW merge with another (presumably UU) congregation. Do you like this idea, or would you prefer to see FUSW continue as an independent entity?*

In general the consensus was "only as a last resort" and some preferred closing to merger.

Some common reasons not to merge were:

* Our culture - retaining FUSW’s unique attributes like Program Groups, post-sermon personal sharing, traditions.
* Being subsumed by the other congregation - loss of autonomy
* Travel distance

*Q3. Until the most recent surge in COVID cases, we have been holding services in the chapel of South Church. As the chapel in South Church cannot hold our entire congregation, as South Church meets some, but not all, of our needs, and as our lease at South Church is unlikely to be extended indefinitely, we will need to start actively looking for a new home for FUSW. This would have to be a rented building or space, as we do not have the funds to purchase a property,* *What qualities (location? configuration?) would you like to see us look for in our next home?*

Accessibility was a major concern in the responses, though this meant both access through public transportation as well as a location with sufficient and nearby parking. In addition, there was concern about geographic location, both in terms of being “close enough” for current members to travel there but also visible enough to perhaps attract new members and/or let others in the surrounding community k now of our existence.

Many members expressed concern that the new space not look too “churchy.” Some expressed support for looking beyond traditional religious buildings and into storefront/strip malls or other options (empty space that used to be restaurant, car dealership, bank, school, etc.)

In terms of size, most members expressed a preference for something largely similar to what we had at 25 Old Jackson Avenue: a large meeting space (with piano), kitchen, office space, some classroom space, storage space. Some also expressed a desire for a communal space separate from the sanctuary/meeting space, as well as for some outdoor space for communal gatherings and/or play space for children/youth. The possibility of having extra space that could be rented out as a source of income was also mentioned.

*Q4. Shall we make a priority of preserving financial assets or investing in growth?*

General comments

* We can’t be successful in our current state
  + We have nothing to market
  + What happens to assets if we disband?
  + We don’t have the energy to stay alive
  + Look at all possibilities
  + We need leaders and events
  + Our situation is dire
  + No spending without input from all
  + Don’t shoot from hip or waste money, it’s our patrimony

In favor of preserving

* + Maybe preserve, but why?
  + Try to preserve, but we need space
  + Preserve *(mentioned six times)*
  + But use investment income
  + Don’t waste on rent
  + We’re fine with Arlin
  + Don’t go into debt
  + No spending on congregation

In favor of investing in growth

* + Invest in marketing and outreach *(mentioned four times)*
  + A full-time minister is our best chance to grow
  + Space first, then minister
  + Invest in space *(four times)*
  + Minister *(four times)*
  + We need a plan to invest in
  + The money is there to be used
  + Spend on staff to assist minister

Q5.  *At present, we are a congregation that is predominantly white and predominantly of retirement or pre-retirement age. What would you like the demographics of our congregation to look like? Should we make sustained efforts to create this more diverse congregation?*

There is a clear desire on the part of congregants for us to have a more diverse congregation. Greater generational diversity seems to be the top priority. One congregant mentioned that there's no shortage of young families in Hastings and the Hastings schools are staying full--so there should be a sufficient pool to draw from.

Racial diversity is a goal as well. This is a chronic problem for Unitarian congregations, and congregants seemed less optimistic about the chances of achieving racial diversity in the short term, although everyone agrees that it is a long-term goal we should aim for.

*Q6. What ideas do you have for attracting new members to our congregation?*

People believe that we offer something that people want. People are hungry for community and connection--and in these contentious times want the openness and acceptance offered by liberal religion. The questions are: (1) what specific things to offer that would draw people through our doors, especially those we particularly want to attract (see Question 5); and (2) how to let community members know that we're here.

* A number of people felt that an active minister committed to drawing new congregants was key to this process. A staff member who looks like the people we're trying to attract might also help fill this role.
* Many felt that having our own space in a desirable location was critical.

Some specific ideas that were proposed for attracting new members:

* Courses, classes—Michael Carmen's writing group was seen as a model
* Be a cultural center
* Interesting speakers and refreshments
* A course on all religions; an event or series of workshops on how to get along
* A parenting coop, painting group, choir
* Potlucks, game nights
* OWL
* An RE program, although most saw this as a long-term project

Some ideas about how to get the word out:

* A social media presence
* A brochure to highlight our offerings
* Flyers everywhere—e.g., the library and real estate offices

*Q7: Are there other issues or ideas about FUSW’s future that you would like to raise?*

**General Survival Concerns**

* There is pessimism and feeling of exhaustion from even many stalwarts.
* We need to address the disruption and painful feelings of previous minister's leaving.
* We need young people but many younger people can't afford to live in our area.
* Can we afford to rent for two years?
* It's hard to contemplate leaving our home area Yonkers/ Hastings.
* To attract younger adults and kids, we need a place.
* Make sure we have ways to stay connected if we lose FUSW.

**Suggestions about space**

* Partner with a synagogue.
* We need a large enough space to safely meet in person.
* Perhaps we can take over a disused school?

**Strategies for survival and growth**

* Need to set up a strict, vigorous long-term financial plan: an endowment fund with goal of permanent home.
* We need to publicize ourselves, esp. our music, to attract people.
* We need strong social media presence.
* We need to have activities through-out the week.
* We should hire someone to lead us to growth