

## **Listening Conversations Results Introduction**

### **Community Meeting, January 28<sup>th</sup> and February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

In the spring of 2017, a group of congregants approached the Board of Trustees with concerns about how FUSW was doing in terms of finances and congregational wellbeing.

Here are some of the reasons that prompted these concerns:

First, FUSW is financially stretched. Over the past three years the amount raised by our pledge drive has dropped nearly \$50,000. Because of this, the most recent budget approved by our congregation last June contained no salary increases for staff, a cut in the amount of our contribution to the minister's health insurance, no travel reimbursement for our intern minister and a reduction in funding for the RE program. Even so, it still contained a \$12,000 deficit.

Second, FUSW membership has been declining, and now stands at about 120 members. In 2011 we had 138 members and in 2008 we had 165.

Third, RE participation has decreased. Several years back we had enough students to support five RE classes for grades K through 8. Now, those same grades are taught by three RE classes.

Given these realities, it seemed as if the time was right to conduct a congregational self-assessment in order to better understand our situation and to plan our future.

The board of trustees met with us and then asked that a task force be formed with three board members (Greg Shunick, our Vice President, Irene Jong and Bill Reynolds), and three members of the congregation (Lenore Lupie, Paul Gross and Sarita Roy, past President).

We were charged to engage, connect and build community while discussing how to strengthen the congregation, the finances and our programs going forward. We used some of the same methods used in the 2005 Long Range Planning called "Searching for the Future: Clarifying our vision for FUSW."

Ninety-four of you participated in one of 18 small listening conversation groups . As many people noted during the course of these conversations, such small group discussions seem like a healthy undertaking for any congregation, and should probably happen periodically even when things are going swimmingly. If you are interested in the methodology used to analyze the data, that detailed description is available on the table over there.

Our aim today is to get your input. This is your opportunity, in our safe sanctuary, to listen with an open heart, respond to what you hear and take in the dialogue among us. This is your time.

Earlier in January, Peggy spoke of the importance of deepening our community of love. In so doing we hope to strengthen our understanding of what is most precious here to each one of us. We can listen receptively with loving curiosity. You are invited to think out loud, confident that in so doing, as Gina Piazza put it in 2005, "Our collective voices will produce our dreams."

In its 167-year history, FUSW has passed through many cycles of growth and consolidation, something that many current members can attest to. Given that, we feel optimistic about our congregation's ability to weather storms and move forward. As our listening conversations revealed, we share deep feelings about this place, about our shared values and about one another.

First, we will spend about 15 minutes giving you the results of the information you shared in those meetings. We will then spend about 30 minutes listening to your reactions and questions, with ten minutes to wrap up. We will have a repeat of this meeting on Sunday, February 11<sup>th</sup>, to which you are also welcome. Once we have completed both community meetings, the Board will take the next steps to move us toward realizing those dreams.

## **Info Packet for Listening Conversations Facilitators and Scribes**

Thank you for contributing your time as a group facilitator or scribe. You were asked to do this because you come to the table with the qualities that it takes to run a group well. We hope that you can work together to provide checks and balances for this very important process. This packet is intended to give you all the information needed to effectively run your group and report the information back to us (Greg S, Paul G, Bill R, Irene J, Sarita R, and Lenore L.) It is imperative that all groups are conducted in like fashion so that we can have continuity across the board.

This packet consists of six parts: overview of your responsibilities, general guidelines for (any) group facilitation and specific guidelines for these groups, agenda, purpose, questions to be addressed, and next steps.

### Responsibilities

- 1 Plan to spend 60-75 minutes. Please pace yourself so you get to all the questions.
- 2 Facilitators should write answers on newsprint. Take time to write each person's ideas, asking if it sums up what they were saying.
- 3 The scribe will be writing more complete notes. If multiple people mentioned a particular idea please indicate as such: (x 3 very important for when we summarize info)
- 4 Act in your roles within the group, not sharing your own thoughts at this time. You are asked to separately be a participant in a different group.
- 5 Immediately after the group ends, the facilitator and the scribe should sit together to review the newsprint, scribe notes, and both of your memories for accuracy.
- 6 Scribe should submit it to the six of us coordinating this effort via email preferably in a Word document. Our emails are all cc'd on cover note.

### Guidelines

The following guidelines are submitted as a framework and reminders for those of you who would like to be reminded of the tone and pointers that help any such group function well.

- 1 Attitude: the emotional tone of the group will likely vary within the time you are together. You set the tone as an attentive, accepting, calm presence. Nothing should appear shocking or out of bounds to you. That will allow others to feel safe and express themselves.
- 2 Purpose: the purpose of the group is to get accurate and relevant answers to the questions. Discussion can offer context, intensity, meaning, etc. in a richer way than a survey might. It also allows people's ideas to build on each other's.
- 3 Facilitator tone: keep a level attitude, present ground rules, stay on task and relevant to the specific questions, keep productive energy even when emotions vary.

- 4 Silence is okay: Allow people to ponder.
- 5 Don't play favorites: each individual must feel valued and respected. Call on quieter people but don't push. Ask open-ended questions. Encourage everyone to address each question.

### Basic Principles

- 1 Avoid doing anything to influence the content talk  
Get clear and specific responses to each question. Probe people to elaborate to meet the question's objective.
- 3 You may choose to go around in a circle, perhaps starting with a different person each time. This is a *recommended* technique. We defer to your read of your group.
- 4 Possible techniques: clarifying – "what do you mean by...?" Specifying – "could you be more specific about that?" Completeness – "what else? Any others?" Repeat questions as needed for focus. Repeat the person's reply and check for accuracy on newsprint.

### Meeting Agenda:

Intros        (*Scribe, Please record attendance*)

Purpose

Review ground rules

Questions

Closing

### Introduction to Listening Conversations

*For Facilitators to Share with Each Group*

#### Why are We Doing This?

- 1 Why are we gathered here today--and why are such efforts being made to bring together everyone at FUSW?
- 2 FUSW is a vibrant community, beloved by those who attend and a vital part of our lives. At the same time, our community is facing real challenges.
- 3 We believe that by asking some basic questions of ourselves we can reach a deeper understanding of what brings us to FUSW, where we stand as a community, and how we can best move forward.
- 4 We are not looking for a consensus, rather to include each individual's ideas.

Suggested Ground Rules for this Conversation--to be reviewed with the group:

- 1 Start with intros. Never assume everyone knows everyone.
- 2 Disagreeing is okay but no judgments.
- 3 Speak honestly and from your heart. Don't agree for the sake of agreement
- 4 Speak from your own perspective. Use "I statements."
- 5 Stay on task.
- 6 Correct facilitator or others if you think they are not correctly referencing your comment
- 8 What's said in here stays in here. (Note: Members should not discuss w/ others so that it can be fresh for people who have not yet participated)
- 9 The source of each comment will be kept confidential. Findings will be reported but not attributed to individuals
- 10 Others...?

**Questions for Your Group Discussion**

***Scribe,** Please keep your notes under these headings to make it easier to analyze the data later.*

**How Are Things Going?**

1. What are the things that are most important to you at FUSW?
2. What aspects of congregational life are working the best for you right now?
3. What could be working better? How could that happen?

**Looking Forward**

4. What can we all do to improve congregational life at FUSW?
5. If you could imagine one change, what would it be?
6. What ideas do you have to bring more people into our doors and get them to stay?

**Making It Happen**

7. We're confronting challenges meeting our financial goals. Outside of your pledge amount, what ideas or thoughts do you have on how to address this issue?
8. Are there ways you can think of to raise money for our congregation that we're overlooking?
9. If we had to cut expenses, what would you recommend?
10. Any final thoughts?

### Closing points to Offer Your Group

- 1 Afterthoughts or things "too tender to speak out loud" should be submitted in writing in the suggestion box, which will be available within two weeks. (Do not mention this before the end.)
  - 2 After this meeting, the scribe and I will sit down together, go over these notes and make sure that we've captured what you've said. These notes will be forwarded to the group that's organized these conversations. That group will synthesize the notes from all the listening conversations and pass that synthesis along to the Board for consideration and action. That synthesis will also be available to the congregation.
  - 3 We expect that the Board will get back to the congregation in a timely fashion to let the congregation know what it heard and what it plans.
  - 4 Our congregation's strength has always been the energetic participation of its members. Thanks for taking part in this group--and for your thoughtful and forthright comments.
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Facilitators and Scribes, again...THANK YOU so much.

## **What are things that are most important to you at FUSW? What aspects of congregational life are working the best for you?**

\*Participants refer to participants of the Listening Conversations.

### **COMMUNITY**

Participants\* value the sense of community and people at FUSW. Important aspects are that we are an accepting, non-judgmental, and welcoming community. They value that FUSW is a safe space –a place “to be my authentic self,” and “to spend time with like-minded, concerned liberal thinkers.” Others mentioned the openness that allows for disagreement. They value the friendships and the care for each other.

- Community - feel welcome
- Sense of community
- Sense of community, had stopped attending for a number of years then began feeling more of a need to feel connected. Then felt different in positive way after returning.
- Community, which is why I joined
- Like minded people
- Interesting when we disagree
- Feeling welcome
- Anybody in the room would want to know how I'm doing and potential for conversation with 50 people with whom I've had a meaningful exchange at some point even if small. Sense of acceptance, of welcome.
- Difficult to define community – great question, don't have intellectual answer but maybe not due to intellect. Something mysteriously good about being in a room of people trying to be best human beings they can – something magical about that
- one can be by yourself always, book group gives richer experience than reading by yourself.
- The people here, being connected to them: Not having enough person-to-person conversation after the sermons and in other opportunities
- The community here, the sense of community – feels like family, accepting, can be
- The people – at services x2
- People x3. The only place where I'm comfortable being a Christian, because it allows people to disagree despite our beliefs
- Like minded community –even if you meet someone new here, I am comfortable speaking with them.
- Dialogue stems from a common understanding
- Connection –sharing
- Space to allow honesty and vulnerability
- Opportunity to make friends
- Social hour
- Welcoming, accepting and non-judgmental x2 –opportunity for deep connection
- People are happy to see me even if I haven't been here for a long time. I can come and go as I please
- People want to listen and do care about what you are saying
- Caring cards
- Place to be yourself is important.
- Friendship seeking is important
- People give help to others is well.
- People can find support is well
- Community x 3
- knowing that the people here are ones that you will care about; have similar ethics; and are easy to connect with even if there are differences
- “home when you are here”
- sense of belonging
- safe place for sharing intimate aspects of life
- Group members talked about the support they feel from FUSW, especially during difficult times, getting parenting help, FUSW helps their children, the RE and youth programs.
- Shared Values- not a matter of agreeing, but like-minded in the sense of similar values. Not cookie cutters. Core values. Things that matter most to me...maybe different versions but at its core those values and feelings are shared, protected, honored, and mutually understood.
- The group repeatedly mentioned community in its many different aspects.
- They like being in a place with like-minded people, but also diverse with shared values.

- Some are looking for a haven with people who are similar to ourselves.
- the community, I love candles of joys & concerns – 1 other agreed “it’s a big plus of FUSW”
- The people, the Connections with certain people Another added- If Sarita had not called me, I would not be here now. It’s through people reaching out to me... to one another
- Building relationships, seeing the same faces week after week
- To learn about different points of view, that people are open-minded, everyone is accepted(
- Sense of community
- Community outreach but difficult to find time to join all the great activities
- Liberal, “come as you are” community
- FUSW gives my children exposure to a liberal community that they may not get in their daily routine -rainbow flag, LGBTQ persons
- Safe space for my children –great to see my daughter who grew up at FUSW finding this to be a grounding place as an adult during a hard time
- This is a place where I can be my authentic self
- I value the people –low key, welcoming; the people are more important than the programs or the minister
- Community – like- minded people, safe, good interaction x1.
- Atmosphere of intellectuals. Honesty, integrity.
- Meeting up with people, the opportunity to spend time with like-minded, concerned liberal thinkers
- I value how welcoming our community is to everyone.
- Community, the people I meet/know
- Personal Relationships – knowing people from FUSW allow for outreach and caring. There is comfort in outreach x2 x3. The feeling like in an emergency, you could call on anyone with whom you have a relationship here. Relationships here are deeper and have more content.
- Even if one doesn’t feel entirely comfortable in outreach, at least one is left feeling accepted..
- Openness, acceptance and an inviting environment . It doesn’t feel like much is required to be here.
- Things are working well in terms of the openness felt here. One feels a lot of support. One can come out of one’s shell.
- The personal connection formed from comments of others, or by Diane’s music. Sometimes is just a 30 second conversation, or a comment made during the time of personal reflection that is the most important thing that happens on a Sunday.
- Coming here to just be accepted.
- A deeply accepting place
- Shared values around social justice and right actions. A sense of kindness.
- One of the things that’s most important to me is having a community of open-minded, accepting, nonjudgmental people. It’s a safe place—the safest place in the whole entire world. (There was universal agreement about this.)
- People clustering together, helping one another.

## SUNDAY SERVICES

Participants value Sundays, not only for community, but also as an opportunity for spiritual and personal growth – “Pause – reflection, deepening spirituality, calming inner chatter, connection with what you love.”

Participants come for the sermons and look for intellectual stimulation and inspiration. The other “rituals” and parts of the service are meaningful to many. The music –Diane’s piano playing, the Choir, guest musicians – “is way above par. (There’s a) spiritual side to music.” Participants value the opportunity to share and listen to each other through Congregational Reflection and Joys and Concerns.

- Sermons
- The Best things about FUSW are Sunday (endorsed by three attendees); more specifically the choir, intellectual stimulation, inspiration. Spiritual uplifting and enrichment is getting better this season.
- Today’s service was good (on Death) -- endorsed by at least two members.
- Sunday service, meaning all the things that are in it – varied now with music, prayer-like thing, invocations to various things, small talk or sermon, singing music, conversation, sorrows joys reflections on the sermon – all of those and how they work together. Putting above together, Sunday service that then builds community
- Community important but message of the sermon is very important

- curious how you get that in an hour with coffee hour, something passes for a sermon, joys and concerns stuff like that
- Sunday morning services
- Sermons X2
- Expect intellectual stimulation in sermon and congregational response x 5
- Services are inspiring and provocative
- Traits of intelligence, compassion, and inspiration is important.
- Happenings of resonating services is well.
- Service topics are well.
- Learn, find explore new idea: expressed by all.
- Love the sermons x3 – “they really address my personal development”
- Sunday mornings are important – being here is being a part of a community
- The whole service is good – from beginning to end x2
- I love that we’re multigenerational
- I like the sermons
- Sermons directed at adults. Prefer more spiritual, less political.
- Congregational Sharing
- Participation in worship
- Opportunities to share - joys & concerns, congregational reflection, coffee hour
- Congregational sharing, Joys & Concerns x2
- Congregational reflection shouldn’t be cut short. Congregational reflection is sometimes the most stimulating part of the service
- Joys and sorrows
- Hearing opinions is important.
- Personal sharing is important
- Stand up and be counted messages is well.
- Congregational sharing
- Getting to share and hear others
- Music
- Music
- Diane’s piano -- endorsed by all members
- Diane’s music
- Hymns – moving, many are non-traditional x2
- Music – choir, musicians, piano, special performances x2
- Love the music. X 5. It’s way above par.. Spiritual side to music. Wishes there was more great music.
- Would like hear more from certain talented individuals. Would like more ways to get people involved.
- Piano music x2 “Diane is the most spiritual thing in this place”
- Music community is important
- Live music is important.
- Choir is important.
- Music is well.
- Music, choir x 2
- Love the music x3 – choir, Diane, Paul all mentioned
- Music is also good,
- Music of high quality is really appreciated.
- I love the music.
- Music
- Diane’s piano x2x3x4.
- Spirituality and Personal Growth
- Spirituality
- Being part of the hour set aside for spiritual sustenance
- Spiritual quality of the services, sense of quiet and peace, the music, and the little ritual that we have
- Spirituality, spiritual explorations including the minister’s sermons and the members
- Nourishment needs is important.
- Spiritual leadership is important.
- Getting nourished is well.
- Pause – reflection, deepening spirituality, calming inner chatter, connection with what you love
- Get here what you can’t get from the rest of the week
- Open minded community, and spiritual inspiration were mentioned. “Even after my kids have aged out of RE, I still come. I have enjoyed rediscovering why I come.”
- For one person, they shared that they first came to be part of RE teaching. At first it was just helping with kids and their education but now this person has joined because she can connect the service to the RE program and to herself.
- A place for growth.

- People discover who they are, being more of who they are, with the nurturing of spiritual growth.
- Here it is more about spirituality than formal religion. Friendships are of a spiritual nature which helps with loneliness.
- What I have liked, and I hear it less often or experience it less often now, has been the opportunity to hear from other people about how they wrestle with theology and/or emotions. We have in the past had more of that than we have now. For ex., congregational sharing time during the service has been cut from 20-25 minutes down to 8-10.

## PROGRAM GROUPS

Program Groups (PGs) foster community –people get to meet new people, work together, learn from one another, and care for each other. Engaging in a PG or putting on a layled service is an opportunity for personal growth -“Program groups are essential to adult RE.” Participants value “hearing from everyday people,” “talking from their hearts.” Moreover, participants see PGs as a part of being FUSW/UU –“each of us owns our congregational worship and we get to create how we worship. It is not handed down from on high by some other authority.”

- Program groups
- Summer service leadership
- (Community, service with meaning) Happens a lot when program groups are putting on a program – worthwhile to be there
- Like program groups more than I thought I would. Very rich a lot of times. Particularly potentially able to connect people.
- Agree lay led services are very important part of offering as well as congregational comments every week.
- Program group gives richer experience than by yourself. Where can you go to get that group experience? Not neighbors, work, country club. Something that is available at the Society...nowhere else.
- I love the Program Groups
- Lay led services – interesting subjects, get to know people, investment of presenters x 4
- Program groups and lay led groups x3 –people talking from their hearts
- Program groups is important
- Program Groups are opportunities for learning about others is well.
- Program Groups are well
- Program groups, lay led svcs.
- the Program group took care of me.
- I love the Program Groups –I enjoy listening to the services (not participating) and hearing from everyday people
- Lay-led services and program groups x2. Not getting nourished by regular Sunday services. Just come when possible for lay-led. People have different opinions of Peggy's sermons.
- when possible for lay-led. People have different opinions when possible for lay-led. People have different opinions of Peggy's sermons.
- Program groups are essential x2 to adult RE – they reinforce the sense of community, and are unique to FUSW
- Second the program groups, the community of people, warm, accepting, nurturing , creative people, and I feel that the warmth and nurturing is almost therapeutic, healing for people.
- Program groups are important because each of us owns our congregational worship and we get to create how we worship. It is not handed down from on high by some other authority.
- Program group services.
- Program Groups and people sharing personal stories (like Carter's about Parkinson's)
- Program Groups and individuals sharing music

## FUSW ACTIVITIES and GROUPS

Participants value the activities and groups that offer opportunities for personal connection, spirituality and growth, enjoyment, and activism: coffee hour, Men's and Women's Groups, Small Group Ministry, Social Justice, Midnight Run, Common Ground, Drumming Circle, Choir, Youth Group, Teaching RE, committees, New Members Dinner. For some people, these smaller ministries and not Sunday services are their connection to FUSW.

- Opportunities to get involved - committees
- Men's group
- Rock and Soul
- Drumming Group
- In last year attending services less so not so much where I'm getting value as a community but still very active in committees. Not always about Sunday services. There still is something about being in those meetings of a shared sense of purpose that satisfies me and is valuable to the congregation.
- Conversation: the actual opportunity to come together in a meaningful way I don't see that. What about tonight? This is rare. Not so rare for me (other speaker)...I was involved in RE and other activities
- The small group ministry has been very important to me
- Hospitality – coffee hour
- Mid-night Run – a spiritual exercise – provide help and bring UU values into the world
- Groups – Women's, Small Group Ministry
- Social justice – engaging in specific campaigns: Midnight Run, environmental justice, LGTTQ (welcoming, active members), Common Ground x2
- Breakfast Run and Midnight Run
- Common Ground, Rock and Soul Revue –what brings me here is not the Sunday sermons but all the cool things people do here
- Social gatherings like New Member Dinners
- Opportunities for being involved in the congregation like committees
- Social justice work
- Small group ministry help is important.
- Outreach is well.
- Listening conversations is well
- Coffee Hour is well.
- Small Group Ministry is well.
- Meaningful activities so that you do not need to attend Sunday services to feel connected to FUSW –Midnight Run, Common Ground, Men's Group, Drumming circle
- Small Group ministry is working well; it helps meet/builds community.
- "In the small group ministry, I feel more comfortable with speaking." Some are less likely to say anything in the larger group. The small groups feels more intimate, allows for discovery and exploration.
- Other items mentioned were the youth programs, the band (music), the choir, exploring one's musical side with the drumming circle. The program group planning and services were mentioned.
- Social justice, social action, environmental justice.
- Social action
- Creativity – music, performing with others
- Drum circle!
- I enjoy the people in the congregation, Midnight Run, Common Ground, Program Groups, and being a member of the finance committee, equally.
- Small group ministry
- Choir participation. Helps puts other thoughts away. You can look around and see the congregation from the front of the room.
- Small Group Ministry.
- Programs like the Sermon writing workshop. Writing one's own spiritual story is valuable yet challenging. Peggy leads it well
- Small groups facilitates getting to know others.
- Youth group –being involved with youth

## **RELIGIOUS EDUCATION and CHILDCARE**

Participants state that the RE program is important. Comments in other sections mention that RE for their children is the initial reason that people attend FUSW. Childcare allows parents of very young children to attend services.

- RE (OWL, faith exploration)
- Religious Education
- RE super important for the institution (3)
- Also youth group very critical (3)
- Having the senior youth group for our children
- Religious education
- RE program x 2
- Religious education is important.
- Julia Calderola as RE teacher is well.
- Childcare -allows parents to be able to come here
- RE and OWL curriculum set us apart from other congregations
- Many have come for their children, the RE program.
- It saved my older daughter's life! When she started participating in OWL, she was accepted, she flourished!
- Working well: Child care services
- RE x2
- RE program and its connection – including children as a part of the congregation
- R.E. is also a nurturing place, starting with the nursery.
- Programs for our children are important.
- The nursery is very important for young people (young adults coming with children) coming in, young people will come in and try us out. I always make it known that if their children cry I will get the parents from the service. It is important to have childcare during the summer, because sometimes people come then, for continuity.
- I've had a lot of the teenagers, they've started with me and grown up. It's a good feeling.
- I like the R.E. We had the kids and we went to Ethical Culture and the kids were running wild. Our childcare is excellent.
- RE curriculum
- RE Program – especially OWL program and COA

## **OUR MINISTER**

Aside from what has been mentioned above under Sunday services, participants appreciate a personal connection with Rev. Peggy Clarke.

- The minister and her availability and personal support – she is the anchoring point for me
- The Minister
- Likes the way that Rev Peggy pushes the bounds –attended Standing Rock. Would like to hear more about her experiences. Being more of a presence in social justice and making it part of our mission.
- Support minister is important, i.e. Standing Rock, Paris trips for social justice.
- Some members mentioned the minister, the DRE, all the people here are working well. They are helping me.
- Peggy as minister – the topics of the sermons
- "At one time, when Peggy walked the walk"
- Minister –I relate to Peggy
- Religious education program very important, but I sense that the congregation has changed - there are less children and families; less participation by parents and the congregations; lots of gaps in teacher volunteers
- Peggy.
- Peggy's depth of thought and passion of belief inspires him and one's family. Keeps them attending.

## UU PRINCIPLES

- What UU stands for in the world, our values, and these values ground me in relating to the world
- living the values of UU
- 7 Principles as guidelines for action – do it, don't talk about it
- We do a lot here message is well.
- In favor of “build your own” theology
- UU Values – should be shared more
- I like the fact that Unitarians are very brave people, because it takes a lot to define your own teachings.

## MORE...

- New Intern (William) -- endorsed by 4 members.
- Unknown small number of churches anywhere in the world that operate in this fashion. Many ministers hate feedback.
- one of the few things we do (a couple) together
- Our self-governing
- Events and activities are organized well
- I just want to be part of the audience. This is the one place I want to be Pollyana
- Current ministerial intern is well
- Partnering with spouse's social life is important
- Structure –can just show up, do not need to plan
- To see Nature! Through the huge window in the sanctuary
- Happy to know that the congregation is there and there will be a constancy of the community. You don't have to be concerned that there will be a service. Continuity.
- I treasure how committed and involved members are, devoted, and willing to spend their creativity.
- Seeing the participation of people makes one feel part of this place.

**What could work better? What can we do to improve congregational life? If you can imagine one change, what would it be?**

## **VOLUNTEERING/PARTICIPATION**

Almost every group acknowledged that more volunteering is needed, that a very few people are essentially doing the vast majority of the work. This was by far the greatest concern expressed. Participants acknowledged the burden placed on those doing the work, recognizing that for many, burnout is the result.

- More people need to participate. Some may be holding back.
- Engender more cooperative responsibility to help FUSW function well.
- More Participation (x2)
- Caring Committee
- More volunteering (x3)
- More responsiveness to requests for volunteers.
- For congregants to recognize responsibility as well as benefits (x3)
- Like to see more people self-govern – take charge of something
- More people participate, come up with new ideas
- More people taking leadership role
- The same people are doing everything and the same people are being asked to do things.
- If more people took a leadership role or just got involved, it wouldn't fall on the same people.
- Some members are over-taxed with too many responsibilities.
- Lack of enthusiasm, spirituality – fewer volunteers.
- Lack of follow through on committees.
- Less meetings. Burdens on time and need for volunteers and is not uplifting work.
- FUSW volunteers feel burdened and not evenly distributed
- "We are spread too thin... I am burnt out... There's too few of us... Same people wearing multiple hats doing a lot."
- When I was much more involved, I resented that 10% of the members do 80% of the work
- I fell off the volunteer lists, which is fine for me now. I found it frustrating to try to get people to come help. People come to events and leave without offering to help!
- More people contributing to the congregation in terms of the congregation as a whole. Volunteering is my main thrust. This is a community that has to be supported. It doesn't take much if there are a lot of people doing it.
- Greater pool of volunteers, too much reliance on the same people
- Centralize list of volunteer opportunities, make them more accessible

## **SPIRITUALITY VERSUS SOCIAL ACTION**

Members of many groups expressed a desire for a greater focus on spirituality over social action in the service, but this was not universal, with several expressing their support for social action activities, and many as well seeking a balance between the two, seeing each as essential components.

- Want focus on Spirituality, less emphasis on social action.
- More "Inreach" (i.e., care for our own congregation) vs. outreach (i.e., social justice) -- endorsed by 2 members.
- More spiritual enrichment – endorsed by 3 members
- More intellectual stimulation
- Wish it was a more spiritual place!
- Don't like the applause (e.g. music performance) or after J&C

- Between spiritual and social justice have listened to people on both sides of that debate. Would love to see it be "and" instead of "or".
- Activism and social justice are not in conflict with reflection, meditation, and need for spiritual sustenance. We need both, not "either/or."
- Joined both for community and social justice
- Create an envt. that has more focus on presence and being and resonance and spirituality and less on acting and doing – a quiet space and time for peace, refuge, notes of music.
- Too much emphasis on social, political action
- More commitment to social justice - very low attendance at meetings is disappointing
- More talking about faith, god, praying – “very little spirituality here for me”.
- FUSW should have more in-reach, i.e. rebalancing of in-reach and out-reach
- FUSW is not part of the larger UU conversations eg/ Black Lives of UU; lack of congregational involvement in larger UUA activities
- We need the synchronicity of social action and a spiritual sense
- Who are we serving? The congregation and new members? Or the wider community?
- More talking about faith/more praying

## **THE SERVICE: CONGREGATIONAL REFLECTIONS/JOYS AND CONCERNS/ CHURCH-Y-NESS**

Many members expressed their dissatisfaction with either (a) the lack of “controls” on what was being said, or the time needed to properly frame thoughts, or (b) the perception that a very few tend to monopolize this time. Others felt that limiting comments for the sake of service timeliness was at times unwarranted. A smaller number see too much emphasis on “church-y” presentations and trappings, preferring a more ecumenical, and even humanist, non-religious approach.

- Time limit on individual comments.
- Don't like multi-generational services.
- Combine joys and concerns.
- Joys and concerns people abuse them / same people talk too much.
- Joys and concern – need to take a moment to sink in with the community vs people grabbing for the mike.
- Intergenerational services not working/sermon dumbed down.
- Less is more with sermons, could be shorter – fewer facts etc. quieter. Sermons would be less and hence more.
- We could find a way to encourage people to speak more tersely, concisely, not to dominate the conversation. Remind them to keep comments to a few sentences.
- Those who talk a lot have a need - bring same sense of empathy to them even if it irritates us!
- Joys and concerns should not be separated
- Joys and Concerns do not resonate for me. Doesn't allow me to create relationship with someone. Excludes people who are not comfortable speaking out.
- Services “do not work for me...are an anachronism.”
- Desire to have more relaxed congregational services, less neckties and stoles.
- Catholic/Evangelical aura uncomfortable.
- Struggle with Christian roots of Unitarianism.
- Losing our humanist voice and the language is becoming more religious x 4. eg/ “Let's worship together.” Getting too “churchy.” “This is what I was leaving.” “This is why I don't come to services that often.”
- We should consider different times or different days like Friday nights maybe. It would be nice to explore new ideas and try new things.
- Want more uplifting, not like “guilt trips about white privilege”
- Expand music program – more soloists
- More upbeat, contemporary music
- More Jewish songs
- More purposeful inclusion of holidays of other religions
- Friday night Vespers was very good –liked the alternate time, intimacy, meditation, peace, but there was not a lot of attendance
- Go beyond Sunday services, such as Sunday afternoon for kids and teens. Hold services at different

- locations, such as at a college
- Regarding personal sharing, there is a need for “thoughtful coaching” regarding how and what is said.
- The skill of personal share is lost. We need to be succinct and not meandering during personal sharing. (x2)
- “There’s something in the service that isn’t speaking to me” (x2)
- Maybe shake up the order of service. More time for congregational feedback – it used to be called “Talk Back”
- I don’t like our Society referred to as a church; I would prefer society or fellowship. I don’t think we would vote to be Christian.

## MINISTER

Comments range from suggestions on speaking to Peggy about her pastoral manner and oratorical style, to comments on sermon topics and structure, to suggestions to reduce to a part-time minister of some kind, to replacement of Peggy with someone new.

- Sermons could be more inspiring, hopeful, more vital. Have lost interest in coming compared with walking outside
- Pulls a lot from personal experience which doesn’t always work for me.
- Minister and others posting on social media negative or other questions can be jarring and not helpful to the community.
- There is a split in the cong about services being a call to action and those that are more reflective and spiritual. Thinking about how to improve goes back to minister drawing a lot on personal experiences. To me that is neither necessarily a call to action nor spiritual. Could challenge the speaker to be more spiritual, more profound.
- Congregations struggle with their ministers, not the first or last...not being hurtful or negative. So what can be done, one balance to personal experience is to use texts (bible, torah, etc) so more reference and use of texts as opposed to just going into yourself and personal experience.
- Change of leadership (minister).
- Maybe the minister could be more visible in the community not just in the UU world but in the Rivertowns world too.
- Think we need a new minister (x2).
- Part-time minister – as a way to wake people up and deal with (financial) reality.
- Minister – more emphasis on spirituality.
- I want to be more inspired, stimulated and challenged by the minister’s service.
- I want a minister that recognizes the uniqueness of our congregation.
- Can’t talk to the minister where ideas will be heard and respected.
- Minister to be a stronger voice in the community to bring people in. Organization makes it difficult for minister to lead.
- Minister more focused on spiritual life of the congregation, less on administration

## TRANSPARENCY IN GOVERNANCE/COMMUNICATION

Greater transparency in direction/agenda and communication are desired.

- More and better communication between the board, committees and the congregation at large is needed.
- Lack of info sharing such as Board minutes
- Governance is not aligned for what the congregation decides, minister to be called by congregation, committees in place not established by bylaws, such as Committee on Ministry, Covenant, Worship Associates.
- No place to complain - weird control. A feeling that there’s an agenda that’s not forthright. (x3)
- Maybe find some sort of outside moderator who can help bridge the divide between “then” and “now”, an evaluation of governance structure (x2).
- Congregation is suffering from a division. Some people struggle with Peggy’s governance style. Who’s in charge? Is it the congregation generating plans or is Peggy in charge?
- How can the congregation best support leadership constructively? It is surprising that members have issues with the minister about leadership

- "If you want to discuss something in more detail, go and see someone from the committee"—that doesn't do anything for me
- I would like to see more transparency between the Board and the congregation. I would like to see a report (fleshed-out minutes) after each Board meeting, easily available to each congregant. There was a gap of eighteen months in the minutes, and I complained to the President, and she was responsive and resumed the minutes, but they were bare-bones minutes, and I didn't learn anything from them.
- Find an outside moderator who can help bridge the divide between "then" and "now"--an evaluation of governance structure
- Assess and prioritize the number and importance of committees

## **SENSE OF PURPOSE/DIRECTION**

Many members commented that we lack a central direction or purpose, and that this was needed as a faith community.

- Find and establish a sense of purpose
- Make ourselves more visually visible to the world at large. A place that people would say "oh look at that a UU church there". People don't know we're there but they might walk in the door.
- Covenant of right relations in which we would all commit to each other and to the fellowship – the need for more clarity in purpose, or what brings us together.
- Need to act based on our mission statement. Move forward based not on individual preferences but based on vision of being UU
- We need a cohesive policy
- There is a sense of conflict, like we're not all pulling in the same direction – in the past this was not the case. Maybe it's about getting something done and having a sense of purpose, not just in social action, but as a congregation
- We need a deeper conversation – something "transcendental" – something that would pull people off the street and want to come in and have a discussion
- Above all, We Need a Purpose. (x4)
- If we're going to have the whole congregation move towards something, like a mission or covenant, then it should be the whole congregation involved, not a committee. We need the whole community to be involved, so that everyone is heard from, beginning, middle and end.

## **DIVERSITY**

Our lack of diversity (nearly all are older straight whites) was seen as problematic.

- Lack of diversity
- More people in my demographic eg/single, active
- Very little to appeal to young adults, since there are few people of that age group and the programming doesn't appeal to them.
- There's "communion" here, but not as much "community", especially for people outside of the norm (i.e. straight whites). (x2)
- I would like to see our congregation be more multiracial

## **LOCATION**

The anonymity of our location was noted often as being deleterious to our public presence and accessibility.

- Our location is a challenge. Can't do outdoor activities that are high visibility with public, esp activities for families (carnivals).
- Community activities at other locations. There is no visibility at FUSW.
- FUSW location sends message about... income/social strata
- FUSW has a logistical problem. If you don't have a car, you can't get here

**What ideas do you have to bring more people into our doors and get them to stay? Are there ways you can think of to raise money for our congregation that we're overlooking? If we had to cut expenses, what would you recommend?**

## **BRINGING MORE PEOPLE INTO OUR DOORS**

Our congregants are proud of what we offer and wish that we could be more visible to the world at large. Their ideas on how to achieve this range from making better FUSW signage for Old Jackson Avenue to attracting news coverage by local media (they believe that RE, OWL and FUSW activities like Midnight Run and the drumming circle have potential news interest), from paying for ads and making business cards to heighten the visibility of our minister and our congregants in the local community, from posting signage in nearby public places to promoting FUSW special events (like Common Ground and others), from reinvigorating the membership committee to creating a "bring a guest" Sunday. There are also ideas about holding services at different times, targeting specific groups for outreach (young families, interfaith and interracial couples, young people, single middle-aged people) and using social media and new media more effectively.

- Put up/improve sign along Jackson Ave. x 4
- Make ourselves more visible to the world at large
- A sculpture in in the backyard visible from Old Jackson Ave.
- Be in a place where more people pass by
- Better coverage by local papers or cable (e.g., RE, Midnight Run, drumming circle, Common Ground) x 5
- Get local papers to write a piece about us
- More PR to local papers
- Advertise OWL program x 4
- Advertise RE x 4
- Ads (Rivertowns Enterprise or the Patch, which is free)--broad wings and deep roots x 4
- Advertise: "Are you a Unitarian and didn't know it?"
- Advertise at farmer's markets
- Brand FUSW x 2
- Brand ourselves better
- FUSW business cards
- Make FUSW business cards and distribute to therapists
- Have the minister be more visible in the River towns communities x 3
- Congregants offer classes/lectures x 2
- Get into the community more--speakers
- Community activities at other locations
- Hold discussion groups in the library in Hastings
- Serve a regular community meal
- Signs in public places
- Place chalice in front of VFW in Hastings in December
- Tables at street fairs
- More community visibility--volunteer at B&N with big FUSW sign or do food pantry collection
- Concerts to attract community x 2
- Use our musicians to draw the public in
- Promote our musical events
- Promote Common Ground as a way of raising public awareness about FUSW
- More planned events that are open to the public
- Invigorate membership committee to reach out to people, increase numbers and visibility x 2 Congregants invite friends more
- "Bring a friend Sunday"
- Invite people personally to come to the holiday party
- Bring guests

- Follow up with visitors
- Services at different times or days, e.g., Friday nights x 2
- Hold services at different locations--e.g., at a college
- Invite communities of color to connect with us
- Target middle-aged people seeking community
- Draw more people in my demographic, i.e., single and active
- Outreach to young families
- Find a way to reach out to interfaith and interracial couples
- Reach out to religious groups on campuses
- Bring in young people
- Think of ways to maintain connections among young people who went through RE together
- Reach out to high school counselors: students can come and be themselves
- Once a month live entertainment for younger adults
- Childcare in the summer
- Have a social media presence
- Better use of social media--Facebook, podcasts, live stream x 2
- Offer live or delayed streaming of services (or parts of services)

## **GETTING THEM TO STAY/BUILDING COMMUNITY**

There is an expressed desire to build stronger bonds within the FUSW community, which makes people feel connected and gets them to stay. Congregants wish for more opportunities to get to know one another better--to talk, to socialize over meals and to connect with one another in time of need.

- More outreach to people who drift away x 3
- Open conversation about issues that involve us in a forum/safe space x 2
- New member dinner--old members invite three new members to dinner
- Send condolence cards or notes of sympathy to those who lit candles of sorrow
- More pastoral care from the congregation or from a committee, not just the minister
- Invigorate the Caring & Sharing Committee
- Creative interactions between congregants and the minister on their needs
- Make a covenant of right relations--in which we all commit to each other and to the fellowship
- More in-reach
- More opportunities to socialize
- More opportunities for deeper connection
- More small group discussions and dinners
- More mission-driven activities that build community
- Potlucks for no reason
- Job support group
- Adult RE trip to Boston
- Orientation for new members
- Re-emphasize UU Pathway to Membership

## **RAISING MONEY**

Congregants have a number of ideas about how to raise money for FUSW. Some of these are actively underway, and some have been tried in the past. The suggestions range from planned giving to renting out our space, from initiating more fundraising events (e.g., tag sale, auction, concerts) to setting up a business or other revenue stream (like renting

rooms to visiting UUs through UU're Home), from charging for particular FUSW services (like RE) to investigating the success of other congregations.

- Long-term financial plan, funded by bequests
- Legacy sharing grant
- Promote planned giving
- Market the space more for events, e.g., weddings x 3
- Sell the building, lease space and brand it
- Tag sale x 2
- More events (like our auction)
- Auction where people have meals in their homes
- More fundraising concerts x 2
- For-profit concerts
- Have/hire a notable performer (off site) and share the proceeds
- Offer rooms for visiting UUs (UU're Home)--with proceeds to go to FUSW
- Soup lunch after services
- Sell organic, fair trade coffee
- Sell things at FUSW (e.g., buy art from women in Zimbabwe, sell it and keep part of proceeds)
- Sell wares and crafts
- Sell goods and services at farmer's market
- Amazon smile
- A business activity, e.g., an FUSW Starbucks
- Fundraise using something substantial, like a car
- Summer camp
- Targeted fund raising, e.g., to replace the roof
- Recognize pledge donors, e.g., plaques on chairs, bricks on a walk
- Jar to collect spare change
- Ask families to pay for RE
- Charge non-members for RE
- Community garden rental
- Charge people to hang their stuff (artwork?) on the walls and ask for 5% of their profits
- Research congregations that are successful
- Take trips to other UU congregations to see how they make money

## CUTTING EXPENSES

There are suggestions for cutting staffing costs by going to a part-time minister, for cutting overhead expenses by sharing our space or otherwise partnering with another congregation, for increasing the number of lay-led services and for asking volunteers to do congregational work that is currently paid for (e.g., music, administrative work, cleaning).

- Go to part-time minister x 7
- Share minister with other UU congregation
- Have a "contract minister" rather than a full-time minister
- Share the premises with another congregation x 2
- Merge with another congregation
- Partner with other UU congregations
- Make more program groups
- More lay-led services
- Volunteer musicians instead of paid
- Find volunteers to do administrative work
- Let a cleaning company or someone who needs office space use our space in exchange for services
- Volunteer cleaners
- Reduce UUA dues