

Strengths and Concerns

What the December 2009 Survey of UUCE's Congregational Ministry Tells Us

The Committee on Congregational Ministry is charged with watching over and promoting the spiritual health and ministry of the congregation as a whole. One of our responsibilities is to review our entire ministry at regular intervals – minister, leadership, members and programs. To accomplish this a survey was conducted in December 2009. This report summarizes the results of that survey. We will also be arranging times when COCM members will be available to discuss the survey and answer questions.

Methodology

The survey of congregational ministry conducted in December 2009 was filled out by 209 people. 197 of them took the survey online and 12 filled out the paper version. The survey consisted of 40 questions, 35 of which were multiple choice. The remaining 5 were open-ended questions. The survey was put together partly from questions used on previous surveys at UUCE, partly from UUA resources, and partly by the minister and the COCM adding to and revising these questions. We do not claim the result to be a perfect survey, but we believe that we have collected a wealth of data that is very informative.

This report first gives our assessment of the strengths of our ministry, and then of the areas about which we need to be concerned. Then there is a section giving special attention to the open-ended questions on the survey. The next section covers the questions that fell in between the "strengths" and "concerns" categories. Finally, we offer our conclusions. There is also an addendum at the end of this report explaining the contents and format of the other files attached to this email. These files contain the data on which this report is based.

The responses to the multiple choice questions were analyzed as a whole, and also broken down by gender, years a UU, and by whether a member or a friend.

168, 82% of the total, were members of the church and the remaining 37, 18%, were friends. The 168 members represent about 44% of the 384 members reported to the UUA in January 2010. 74% were women and 26% were men. The actual ratio of women to men in our congregation is about 70% to 30%. 26% had been UUs for less than 5 years, 29% for 5 to 10 years and 45% for more than 10 years.

The agree and disagree percentages cited in this report are combinations of the original survey's "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" categories, and the "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" categories respectively. For purposes of this report areas receiving an 80% or higher

positive score are considered to be strengths and areas receiving positive scores of less than 60% are considered to be areas for concern.

Strengths (positive score $\geq 80\%$)

Our greatest strength is our community, with nearly 91% (Q1) agreeing that it is warm and caring. This number is even higher, 96%, among members. This was also the most often mentioned strength listed in response to Q37 which asked for the top three strengths of the congregation. Closely related to this was the strong agreement (Q2 80%) that **we warmly and openly welcome newcomers**, a sentiment also echoed in the answers to Q37.

Opportunities for individual spiritual growth are also highly rated (Q4 85%). This opinion is also reflected in the answers to Q37 where the acceptance of many spiritual paths was important to many. Unsurprisingly, members agreed with Q4 more strongly than friends (87% to 73%), and agreement increased with longevity as a UU, rising from 80% for the newest UUs to 89% for those who've been UUs the longest.

Our music program garnered the highest approval rating (Q11 96%) of anything on the survey. This is confirmed by equally high ratings for the choir director, Tom Sears, (Q25 96%), and also by Q39 in which it was picked as one of the three most important church programs by a majority of those responding.

Our Religious Education program also receives strong support (Q8 81%) with men being even more approving than women (89% to 80%). The support for the RE director, Candee Cole (Q26 83%) is similarly strong and goes up with longevity with those who have been UUs more than 10 years giving her a 90% approval rating.

The **board's responsiveness to the congregation** (Q21) was agreed with by 80% of the congregation, the most positive response given to any of the four questions about the board.

I am contributing to the well being of my church community (Q27 78%), and **I am contributing a fair amount of money and/or time to our church** (Q28 78%) appear at first glance to fall short of the strength level. However, if we look at the members and friends separately we see that, understandably enough, friends rate themselves much lower (Q27 57%, Q28 53%) than members (Q27 83%, Q28 83%). We, therefore, rate these areas as strengths also. Q31, **I handle conflicts in a respectful and helpful way**, received 79.7% approval, which just meets the strength level when rounded to 80%. More men (83%) than women (78%) agreed with this question.

Concerns (positive scores $< 60\%$)

One area of concern is **the level of our church's awareness of and involvement in community affairs and interfaith activities** (Q13 45%). Women had lower levels of agreement with this statement (39%)

than did men (69%). 58% of people who have been UUs less than 5 years agreed compared with 39% and 41% in the two longer categories. Because of the way the question was worded it is not clear if people are concerned only with participation in interfaith activities or if they were applying this question to social justice projects as well. Social justice was number four on the list of most important programs mentioned in answer to Q39, barely behind adult RE, and trailing choir and Sunday worship. This concern is also reflected in Q19 where 53% of the congregation agrees that **the minister is sufficiently involved in community and interfaith affairs**. Again, women are more critical than men (51% to 60%).

Another area of concern is **the adequacy of our financial resources** as only 46% agreed with Q12, **Our congregation...raises enough money**. This may be due to the current recession and to the increased demands the new building will put on us. **The budget** was also the number one concern, cited by 52 people, when asked in Q38 to list their top three concerns. Women agreed with this question only 42% of the time compared to 62% for men. We wonder if this could be due to wage differentials between genders that may make women, especially single mothers, more aware of money issues. By contrast, 78% of individuals thought that they were contributing a fair amount of money and/or time to the church (Q28). 85% of men were satisfied with their contributions compared to 75% of women. This gender difference was even more striking in Q27 where 91% of men agreed they were contributing to the well being of the church compared to 74% of women.

Other concerns are **the ability of individuals and groups to work together** (Q6 57% agree), and of **our ability to handle conflict** (Q7 55% agree). This is likely due to the difficulties the board and the minister have been having. The lowest ratings on the entire survey were the 41% who agreed with "Our minister works productively with the board and with church committees" (Q16) and the 40% who agreed with "Our board works productively with our minister" (Q22). It appears that awareness of these difficulties extends beyond the leadership, although judging from the comments made by persons who signed their surveys, the negative feelings are highest among leaders and their partners.

While 52% think the **minister adequately supports the RE program** (Q15), only 42% of women agree with this statement compared with 73% of men. This might be due to more involvement by women than men in the program, both as parents and teachers. Those who have been UUs for 5 to 10 years are the most critical in this regard with 40% agreement compared with 50% and 64.4% for those who have been UUS for shorter and longer periods of time.

Our minister is helping our church to grow spiritually and organizationally (Q17) had a 58% positive rating.

This gender gap is also apparent in Q20, "**our minister is responsive to the needs and concerns of our congregation.**" While there is 49% agreement overall, only 46% of women agree compared with 57% of men. This is in contrast to the previously mentioned parallel question about the board (Q21) where the gender gap is just two points (81% to 83%). The higher rating for the board may mean the congregation is focusing their concern more on the minister than on the board for the difficulties we have had.

A final concern is the 58% agreement to Q30, "I find **volunteering on committees is a rewarding experience.**" This seems to be even more of a problem for men (47%) than women (59%). The numbers for Q29, "I find it easy to get involved with this church," are higher (72%), but show the same gender gap (75% for women and 64% for men).

In between questions (positive score between 60 and 79%)

There were 10 questions whose positive ratings fell between our somewhat arbitrary criteria for strengths and concerns. We list them here without comment for completeness.

Congregational Ministry

- 2. Our church provides spiritual and ethical vision that is inspiring and transforming. 76%
- 5. Our church helps me be more whole and healthy. 77%
- 9. Our adult religious education program provides a rewarding experience for adults. 71%
- 10. Our Sunday services are rewarding and meaningful. 72%

Leadership

- 14. Our minister organizes and conducts enriching services. 69%
- 18. Our minister models spiritual and ethical living. 61%
- 23. Our board works well with our committees. 68%
- 24. Our board is helping our church to grow. 75%

Individual and Demographic

- 29. I find it easy to get involved with this church. 72%
- 32. I model spiritual and ethical living. 77%

Open-ended questions

The last five questions on the survey mostly reprised the findings from the multiple choice data while adding more detail and nuance. More detailed summaries of these questions are available in other files as explained in the addendum to his report.

The most often mentioned "meaningful moments" (Q36) had to do with Sunday services. Also frequently mentioned were congregational support received in many different circumstances and feelings of the church as home.

Our top three strengths (Q37) were the warm, caring people who make up our community, our music program, and our shared values and open mindedness.

Our top three concerns (Q38) were the budget, the move to the new building, and a collection of concerns about the minister.

The three most popular programs mentioned (Q39) were the music program, the Sunday worship services, and adult education.

Question 40, which asked for any additional comments, produced 22 expressions of support and concern for the well being of the minister. There were also 36 comments critical of him. The church as a whole received 24 appreciative comments and 12 expressing disappointment or hope for change. There were 19 comments about the Sunday services, 5 expressing appreciation and 14 expressing discomfort or requests for change.

A total of 106 people, 51% of the total provided their names. Thirteen people wrote other comments in the space provided for their name including 8 who expressed concerns for their safety should they be identified.

Conclusions

We are impressed and heartened by the strength of our community in general and by the quality of our music and RE programs in particular. We think that we have a wealth of talent and a depth of caring that can help us in dealing with the problems that we face.

We know that everyone would like to have very specific, concrete proposals that would lead us inevitably back to a state of trust and common vision but we do not think we have the wisdom or ability to do this. Areas that seem useful to address include building a common vision, and clarification and improvement in our policies, processes, understandings and expectations, roles and responsibilities, communications, and ability to work together. Consultation with Janine Larsen, PNWD District Executive, is underway to facilitate initiating specific steps.

We also need to be continually **mindful of the many transitions that are contributing to stresses in the church**. The congregation is buying a new building which is causing anxiety about finances and feelings of loss regarding the old church. The church is also trying to understand how a program church is different from a pastoral church and what this means in terms of how we relate to our minister. For his part, the minister is trying to learn to pastor a church more than four times the size of his previous one. At the same time he is experiencing marriage and fatherhood for the first time in his life. Changes, even positive ones, tend to raise levels of anxiety.

In our opinion, UUCE has many strengths, as well as some significant challenges. We believe that we can continue working together to become the most effective church that we can, for ourselves and for the community.

Committee on Congregational Ministry
Julia Clark
Judie Hansen
Erik Fisher
Dick Loescher
Maren Petersen-DeGroff
Gil Osgood, chair

Addendum

There are eight other files containing survey data in addition to the one you are reading. The first three (MemFrnd1to35, Gender1to35, Years1to35) contain the results of questions 1 to 32 broken down by membership status, gender, and longevity as UUs. The data for questions 1 to 32 is given both as absolute numbers and as percentages of people in each category saying they agree, are neutral, or disagree. Persons who said they had insufficient information to answer the question were excluded from the calculations of percentages of those answering the question. In other words, the percentages of those saying they agree, disagree, or are neutral should add to %100 even if many people did not answer the question.

There was room in the MemFrnd1to35 and the Gender1to35 files to add another column, the last one on the right, showing the combined percentages for all those choosing the same answer to a question. In theory, this should mean for example, that the percentage of members and the percentage of friends saying they agree with a particular question should add up to exactly the percentage of all the who took survey and said they agreed with the question. In actuality, the percentages don't quite add up this way because four people didn't say whether they were a member or a friend, six people omitted the length of time they have been UUs, and eight people did not give their gender.

Some of the percentages in these files are shown in bold and colored type. Blue type indicates an area of strength where 80% or more agreed. Percentages that rounded up to 80%, e.g. 79.7%, are also shown in blue. Red type marks areas of concern where fewer than 60% agreed. In addition, disagreement by 10% or more is indicated by bold face.

There are also five files containing detailed summaries of questions 36 to 40. They are named Q36sum.doc, Q37sum.doc, etc. The raw answers took up more than 60 pages which has been reduced to about 18 in these summaries.