

Transition Team Congregation Discussion Summary

March/April 2023

Overview

As part of the ministerial transition process, and in support of the goals of clarifying our identity and encouraging open sharing and listening, the transition team convened a series of 7 open discussions with members, across a range of times and venues. The format of each meeting was:

- Opening/Purpose
- Discussion Question: “What aspect or aspiration of UCC drives you to attend services or be an active participant in the life of our community?”
- Q and A on the ministerial transition process
- Discussion Question (time permitting): “What is the title/subject of a Sunday service that would most inspire to join us on a Sunday morning?”

We had approximately 50 participants across the various sessions, including John Burns or Shandra Stout as facilitator and at least one board member at each session. A feedback form was also provided on the transition page, and promoted during sessions for those with more to share.

Findings

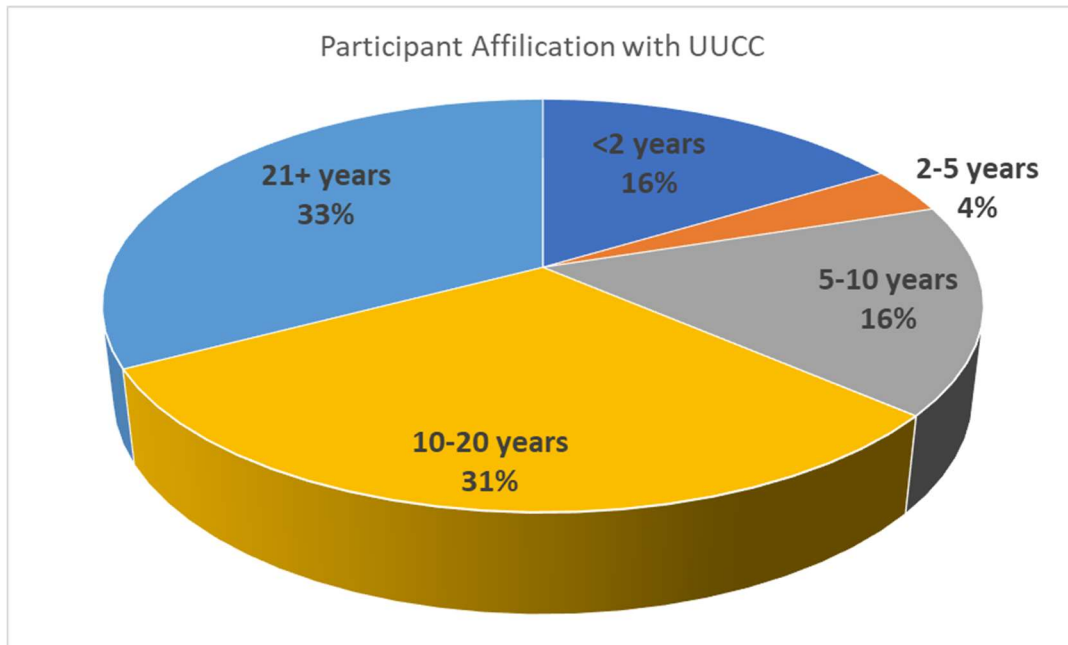
The following Word Cloud (graphic depiction of words sized according to frequency) depicts the overall themes in people’s responses:



Clearly the role of UUCC as a community of belonging is primary in people’s minds, and there were many comments made about the value of community, as well as the challenges in creating those connections here. “Service” was used both in the context of the Sunday service, and also in being of service to the community.

Demographics

The UUCC-affiliation demographics for the attendees were:



A majority of the participants have been members for 10 or more years, likely reflecting both their interest/engagement in the topic, and also their availability to participate in meetings. Numerous people expressed a desire that younger members should have a significant role in the selection of a minister, as they will form the core of UUCC in the future. Although childcare was provided and sessions were offered across weekdays, weeknights, weekends and Zoom, the median participant age was likely around 60.

Transition Process

The discussions of the transition process was primarily a walk-through of the UUA ministerial search timeline (basically what is documented in the [Settlement Handbook](#), particularly the calendar on page 91), and responding to questions. Some participants voiced specific goals for a new minister, and a few mused on whether we could follow a non-traditional recruitment process, such as directly reaching out to ideal candidates at our convenience.

In general people expressed a desire to see the transition process move forward, with a search team convened this spring and the goal of introducing a settled minister candidate in the spring of 2024.

General Observations

Having youth more present in the service is widely appreciated, and seen as a big shift from how things were prior to Lisa's service. Closely related to this is that many of the discussion participants are keenly aware they are the past and present of UUCC but not the future, and that we need to be incorporating more and more the voices of the emerging generations (basically anyone under 50).

How to create community in a large congregation was topic that came up several times, with some advising that it needs to be based on smaller groups. The choir was cited as one example where a sub-community within the congregation is well established (in a positive way). Geography is also a factor, with many people traveling 20-30 minutes or more to reach 234 Sharon Amity, which makes it more onerous to participate in activities held there.

A number of people report feeling more disconnected from UUCC, or observing disconnection of members who were previously more active – this is seen as definitely tied in with the pandemic, but has people feeling like they are waiting for something to reforge their bonds.

The RE program as the gateway to UU involvement is one of the most common stories among longer-affiliated members, with a lot of value placed on a place where kids can get an open and supportive spiritual foundation, and participate in programs like OWL and Coming of Age. Those who currently volunteer in CRE generally find it very rewarding.

We heard some but not as many people as expected express their delight in finding Unitarian Universalism as a breath of fresh air and sheltering place. As mainstream Christianity has started to experiment with new approaches (e.g. Elevation Church, welcoming the LGBTQ+ community in some denominations, etc.), and the on-line world provides an infinite number of "spiritual outlets", UUism is probably less of a novelty than in years past, at least in this country.

Next Steps

The settled minister search recruiting team is forming, and they should continue the process of identifying candidates to serve on a search team. Gaining greater representation/participation from younger members remains a challenge for which there are no obvious simple solutions. Continuing to leverage multiple communication channels (particularly on-line ones such as Zoom, Facebook, SignUp Genius, etc.) is important but not sufficient, so research and seeking expert guidance (including from the UUA?) are recommended.

Appendix

Answers to the question “What is the title/subject of a Sunday service that would most inspire to join us on a Sunday morning?”

- How to cope with the challenges of life
- Leading with kindness
- Activist archetypes
- Spiritual growth for non-theists
- Why are we here?
- What does it mean to be an individual/to be us
- Overcoming my hatred of cruel people – how to think about evil as UUs
- The inherent worth and dignity of Donald J. Trump
- Non duality
- If God is love don't be a jerk!
- Jesus, Buddha and Mohammed walk into a bar...
- How to understand diversity
- How to balance competing views
- Is there racism in the room?”
- Doubt
- Native American spirituality/earth relationship
- The Courage for Uncomfortable Change
- What will Happen the Day Cable News Ends
- RESPECT – Covenanting around what that word means to me
- Drawing spirituality from non-religious texts
- How UU's would love their enemies
- A reunion of past ministers
- *Something unique/unusual*
- *Anything where I laughed, cried and took notes*

Many people commented that they felt the lay service leader sharing was often a highlight of the service, and they strongly encouraged that we continue that tradition.