

UU Congregation of the South Jersey Shore

Congregational Survey 2015

This survey of Members and Friends of UUSCJS was conducted in September 2015. The survey was conducted primarily online with hard copy surveys made available (and hand delivered) by request.

The Ministerial Search Committee determined that 91 Members and 4 Friends of the congregation could be considered “active,” for a total of 95 people who should complete the survey. The MSC very actively encouraged these 95 and successfully persuaded 90 of them to do so (95%). There were 3 additional respondents from among less active or formerly active Members and Friends, for a total of 93 completed surveys.

A small number of respondents started the survey online but faced technological issues and ultimately switched to hard copy surveys. When we manually entered their responses, we were unable to identify and remove original responses they had entered via Survey Monkey. There may be additional respondents who started the survey online but never finished. For these reasons there are several items early in the survey where the number of responses exceeds 93. There is likely “double counting” of responses for a handful of individuals on some of these items. This was unavoidable but does not substantially alter the results.

The results are presented here in four sections:

- I. Members and Friends: Demographics
- II. Beliefs, Traditions, Philosophies and Practices
- III. Congregational Involvement and Feelings about UUCSJS
- IV. Views on Professional Ministry

This version of the results includes data from all quantitative items in the survey and summarized themes from open-ended items. Details from open-ended responses are shared elsewhere in the Informational Packet as appropriate.

An abbreviated version of these survey results is available as a Powerpoint slide show that was presented to the congregation in November 2015.

UUCSJS Members and Friends: Demographics

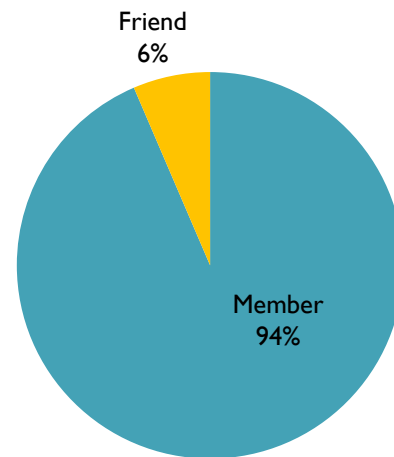
Congregational Affiliation and Length of Association

Of 93 total respondents to this question on the survey, 87 are enrolled Members of UUCSJS, while 6 are Friends of the Congregation.

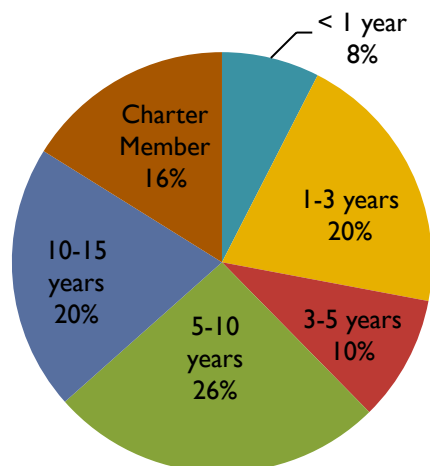
What is your affiliation with the congregation?

Member	87	94%
Friend	6	6%

Congregational Affiliation



Length of Congregational Association



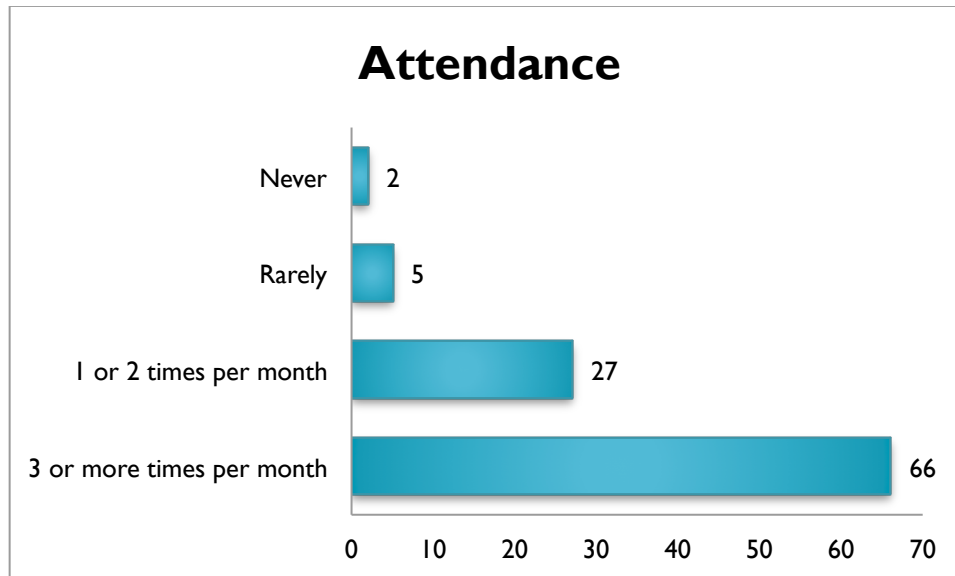
Our survey participants include fifteen Charter Members of the congregation, or 16%. Another fifth (20%) have been with the congregation for a decade or more. A quarter of participants have been part of UUCSJS for 5-10 years, with about 10% of participants having been Members/Friends for 3-5 years, and another 20% in the 1-3 year range. 8% have joined within the past year.

How long have you been associated with the UUCSJS as a friend or member?

< 1 year	7	7.5%
1-3 years	19	20.4%
3-5 years	9	9.7%
5-10 years	24	25.8%
10-15 years	19	20.4%
Charter Member	15	16.1%

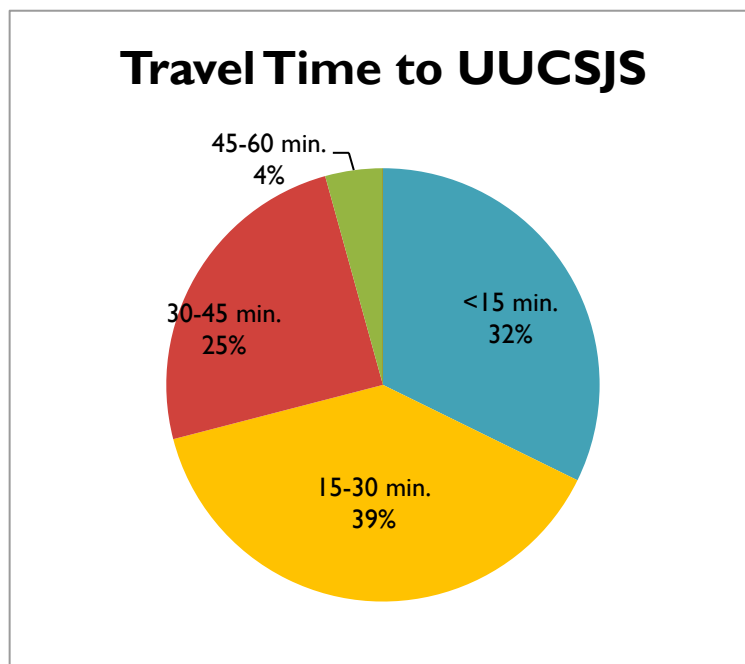
Attendance & Travel Time

“Averaged over the last year, approximately how often have you attended UUCSJS services on Sunday morning, either as an attendee or as a Religious Education teacher?”



About how long does it take you to travel to the church from home?

<15 minutes	30	32.3%
15-30 minutes	36	38.7%
30-45 minutes	23	24.7%
45-60 minutes	4	4.3%



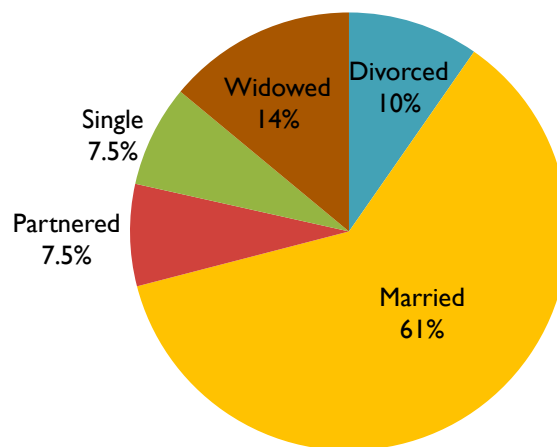
About a third of survey participants travel less than 15 minutes to get to the UUCSJS Center from home. Another 40% live within 15-30 minutes travel time, with the remaining 30% traveling 30-60 minutes. Only 4% travel more than 45 minutes. No one who responded to the survey travels more than an hour to the Center.

Marital/Partner Status

Over 60% of participants in the survey are married. Another 14% are widowed and about 10% are divorced. About half the remaining participants (7.5%) are partnered, with 6 of these cohabiting with their partner and one living separately from their partner. The remaining 7.5% are single. None of our respondents reported being either separated or in a domestic partnership.

What is your current marital status?		
Divorced	9	9.7%
Married	57	61.3%
Partnered	7	7.5%
Single	7	7.5%
Widowed	13	14.0%

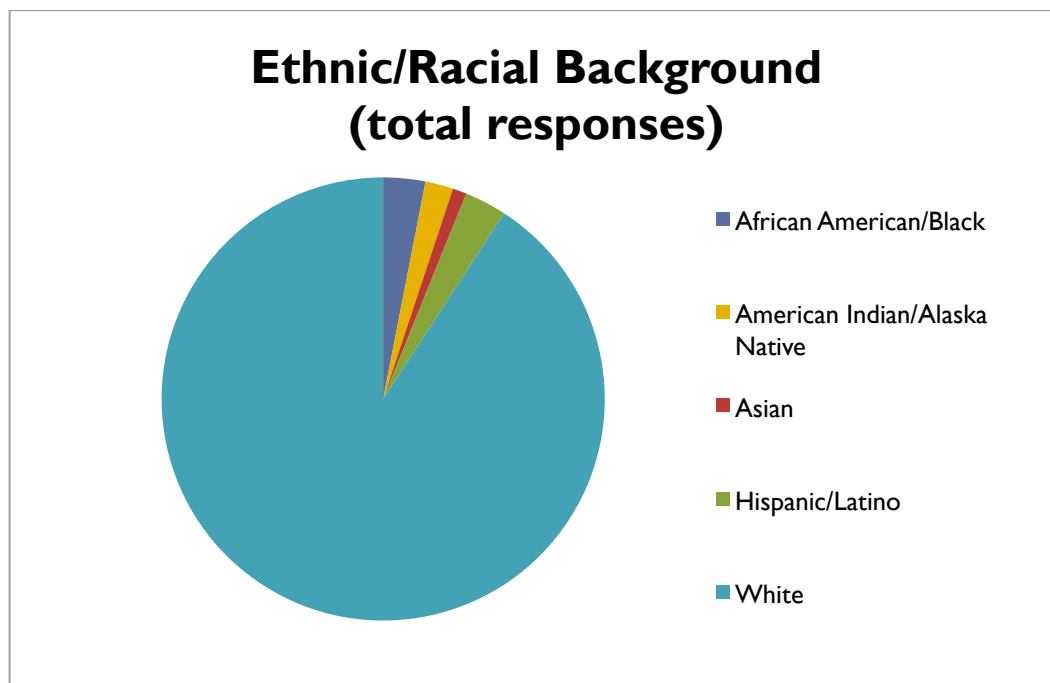
Marital/Partner Status



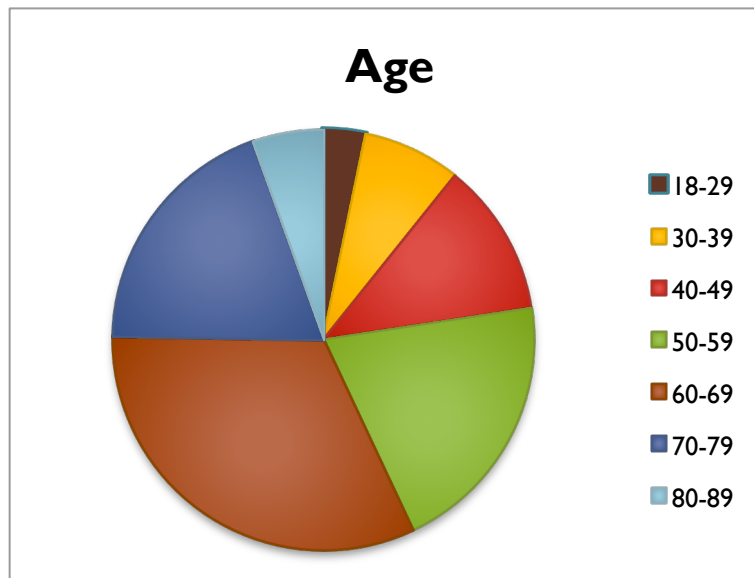
Ethnic/Racial Background

Ninety-two people responded to the survey question about ethnic/racial background. Collectively these 92 offered 98 total responses. Ninety-one percent of responses were “white,” and 97% of respondents indicated that their ethnic/racial background is all or partly “white.” Nine percent of both responses and respondents indicated African American/Black (3%), Hispanic/Latino (3%), American Indian/Alaska Native (2%) and/or Asian (1%) backgrounds (these plus Pacific Islander were all of the “nonwhite” ethnic/racial options offered).

What is your ethnic/racial background? Please check all that apply.			
		of responses	of respondents
African American/Black	3	3.1%	3.3%
American Indian/Alaska Native	2	2.0%	2.2%
Asian	1	1.0%	1.1%
Hispanic/Latino	3	3.1%	3.3%
White	89	90.8%	96.7%
Total Responses	98		
Total Respondents	92		



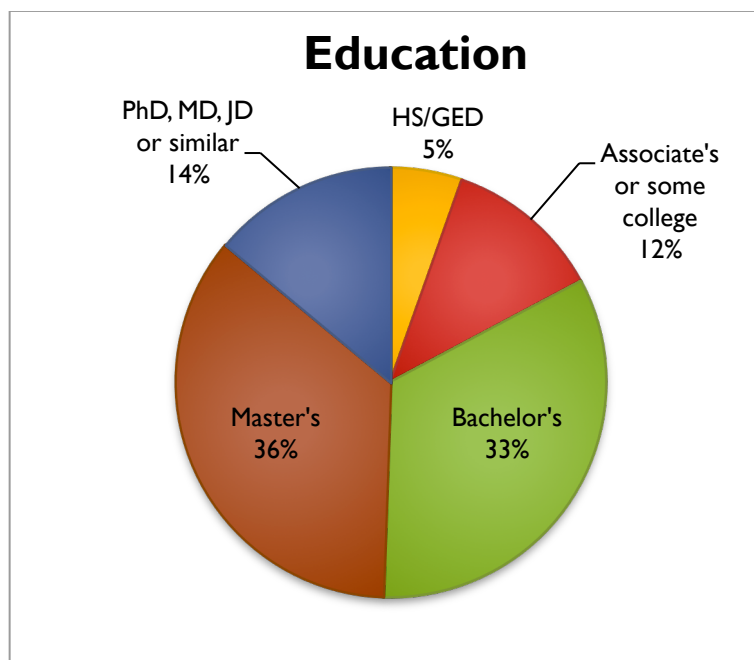
Age and Education



What is your age as of September 1, 2015?

Age	#	%
18-29	3	3.2%
30-39	7	7.5%
40-49	11	11.8%
50-59	19	20.4%
60-69	30	32.3%
70-79	18	19.4%
80-89	5	5.4%

Over three-quarters of survey respondents are fifty years of age or older. Well over half (57%) are sixty or over. Twelve percent are in their forties. Only 11% are under forty years of age, and only 3% are under 30.



Of 93 respondents, half have a graduate degree (MA, PhD, MD, JD or similar). Another third have a Bachelor's degree. 12% have an Associate's degree or some college, and 5% have a high school degree, GED or equivalent. No respondents said they have less than a high school education.

What formal education have you completed? (Check highest level)

High school or GED equivalent	5	5.4%
Associate's degree, trade school, or some college	11	11.8%
Bachelor's or conservatory degree	31	33.3%
Master's degree	33	35.5%
PhD, M.D., J.D., or similar advanced degree	13	14.0%

Gender and Sexual Identities

What is your gender?

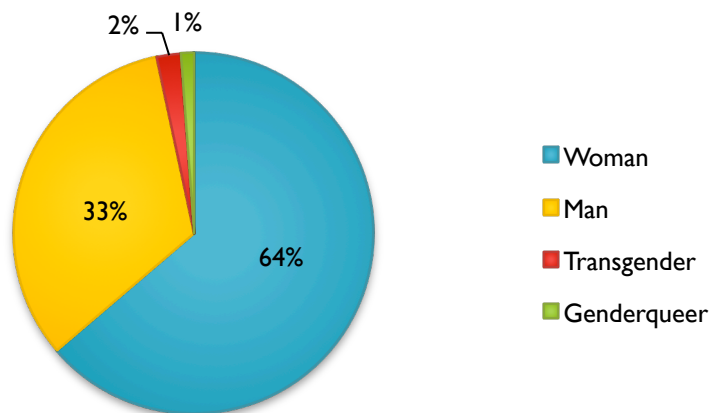
Woman	58	63.7%
Man	30	33.0%
Transgender	2	2.2%
Genderqueer	1	1.1%

What is your sexual orientation?

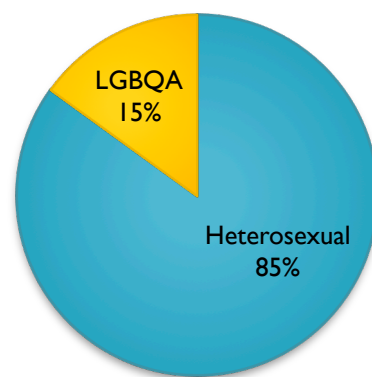
Heterosexual	79	84.9%
Bisexual	6	6.5%
Gay	3	3.2%
Lesbian	2	2.2%
Queer	2	2.2%
Asexual	1	1.1%

Of 91 survey participants who answered the question about gender identity, just under two-thirds identify as women, and one-third as men. Three percent of participants identify as transgender or genderqueer. Of 93 respondents to the question about sexual orientation, 15% identify as LGBQA and 85% as heterosexual.

Gender Identity

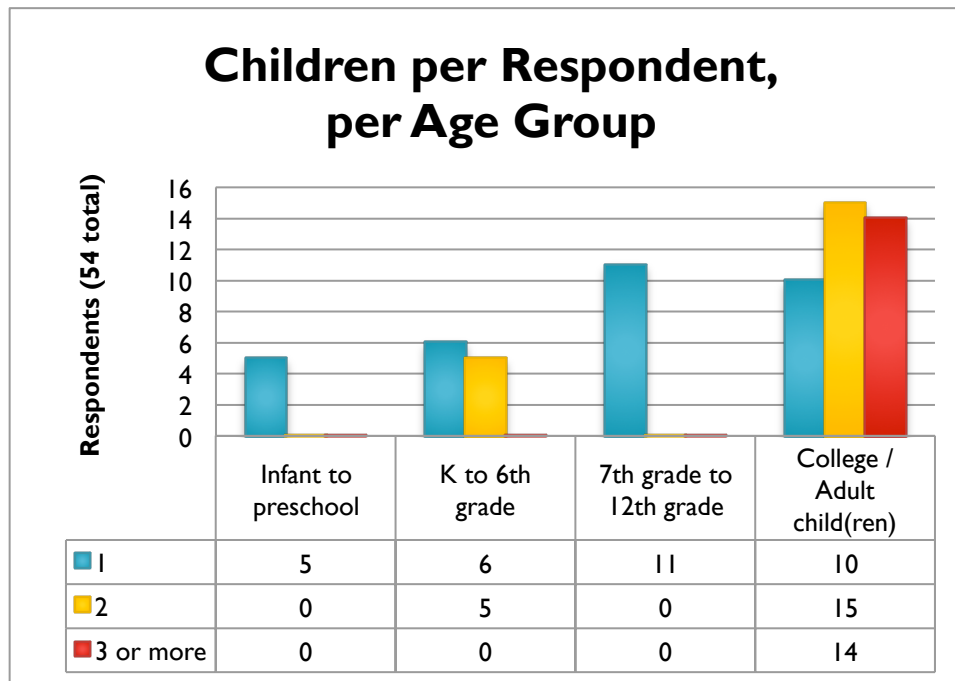


Sexual Orientation

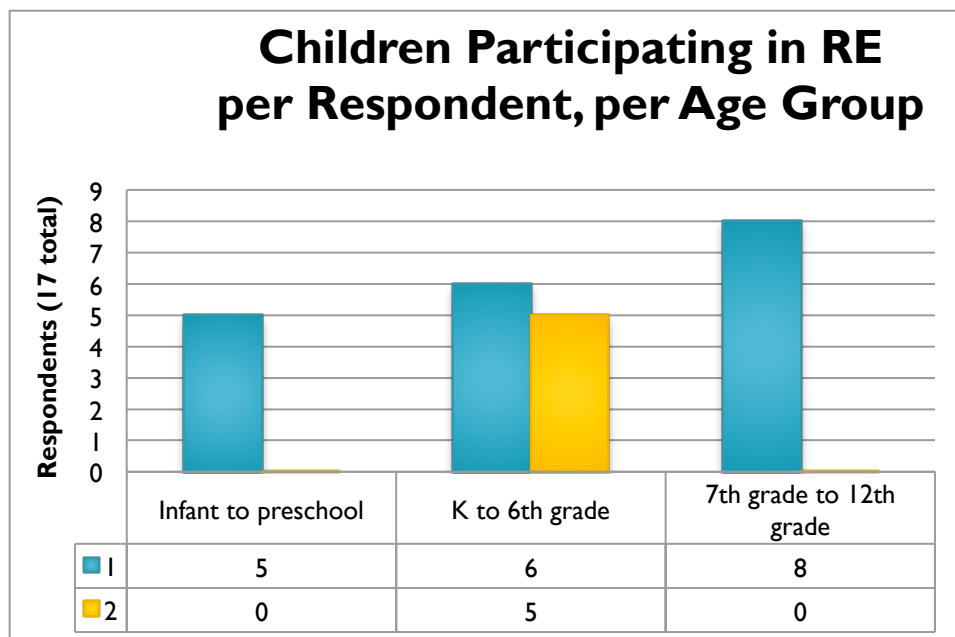


Children & Children's Religious Education Participation

"If you have children, please indicate how many in each group."

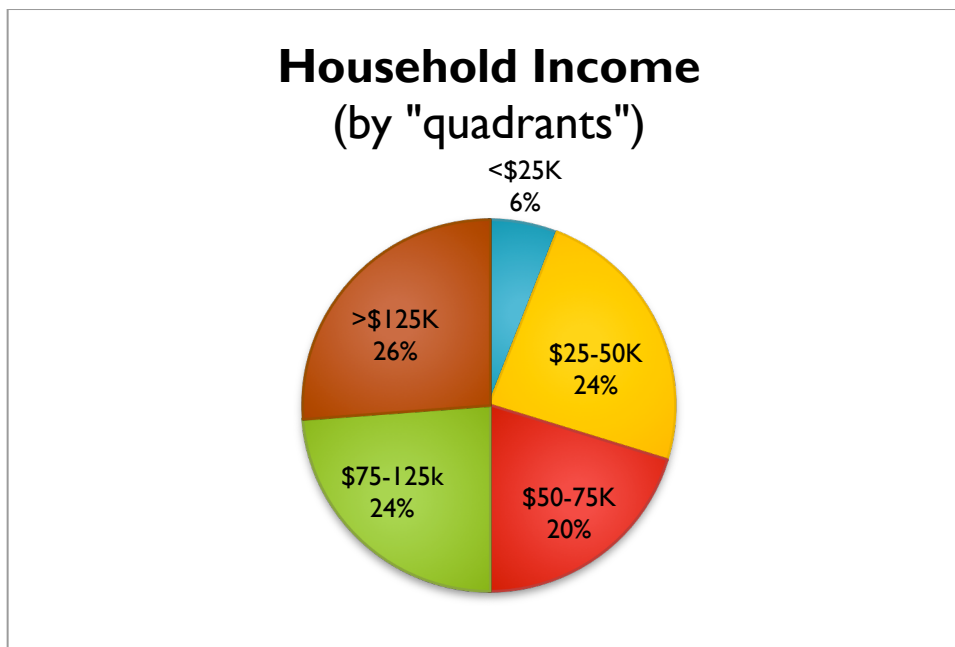
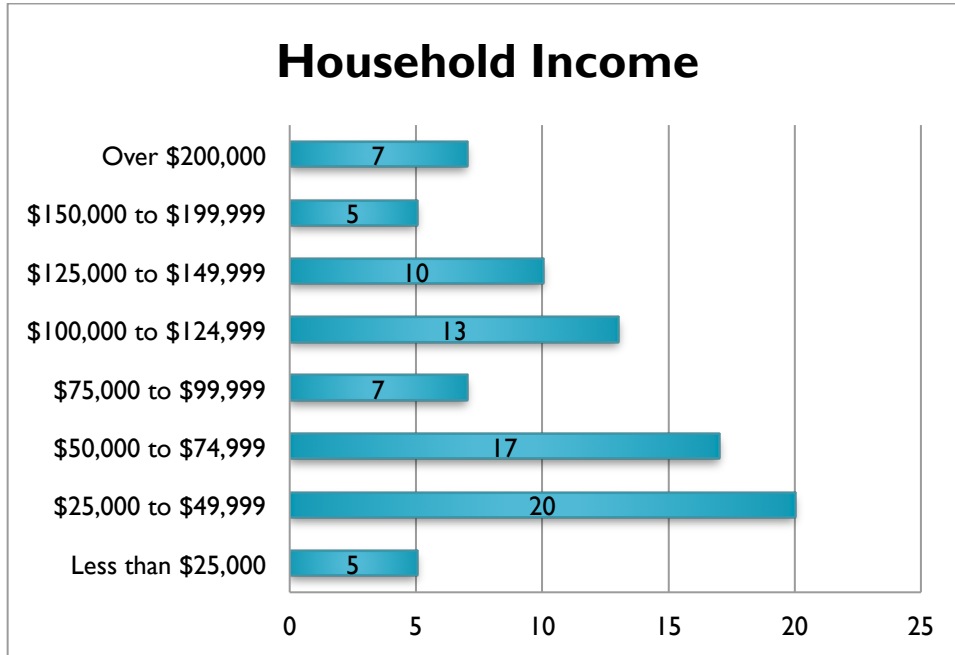


"If you have children, please indicate how many participate in UUCSJS Children's RE."



Income

Eighty-four participants provided responses regarding gross household income. Half of the respondents have less than \$75,000 in annual household income. A quarter have between \$75,000 and \$125,000, and a quarter have more than \$125,000. Six percent have less than \$25,000 in annual income, and another 6% have more than \$200,000. The highest number of responses (20) was in the range from \$25,000 to \$50,000 in annual household income, at 24%.



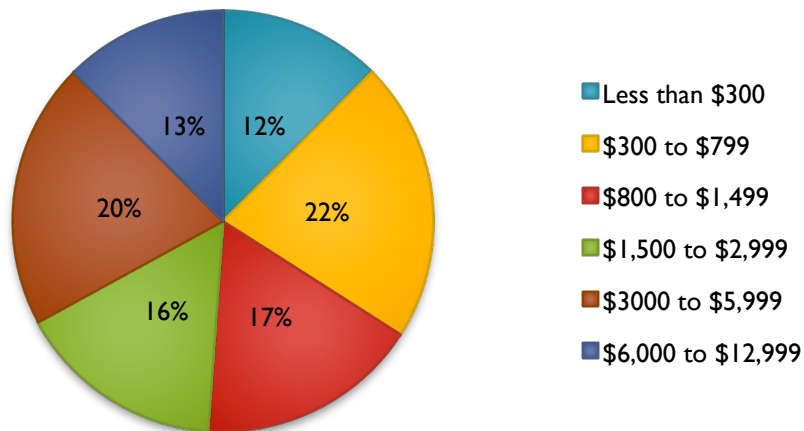
Pledges

What is your current family/household pledge (whether you pledge as individuals or as a family)?

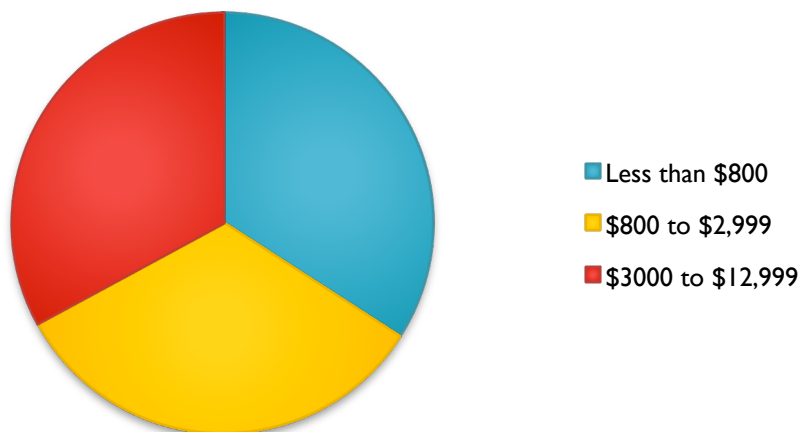
Less than \$300	11	12.5%
\$300 to \$799	19	21.6%
\$800 to \$1,499	15	17.0%
\$1,500 to \$2,999	14	15.9%
\$3000 to \$5,999	18	20.5%
\$6,000 to \$12,999	11	12.5%

Family pledge amounts reported by survey participants were evenly divided into thirds across the following ranges: Less than \$800; \$800-\$3,000; and \$3,000-\$13,000 (with no one in the \$8K-\$10K range, but some above and some below).

Family Pledge I



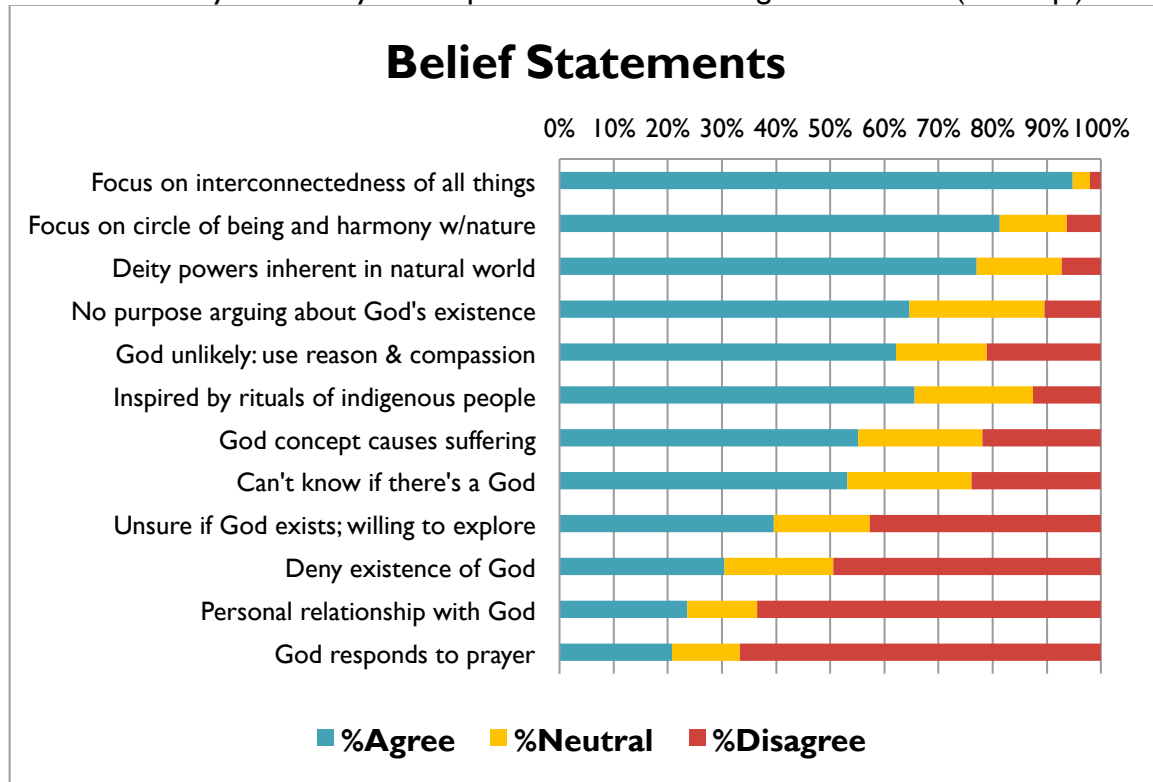
Family Pledge II



Beliefs, Traditions, Philosophies, & Practices

Belief Statements

“Where would you locate your responses to the following statements?” (96 Resp.)



Statements:

- My spiritual life is grounded in a sense of the fullness and **connectedness** of all things.
- My spiritual life is lived in response to the sacred **circle of being** and the effort to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.
- The powers traditionally attributed to a supernatural deity are inherent in the **natural world**.
- Whether or not a god or gods exist, it serves **little purpose to argue** over their existence.
- Since I find god's existence unlikely, it is important that I approach the world with **reason and compassion**.
- I am inspired by the traditions of **indigenous peoples** and find in their rituals and practices a deepened sense of the sacred and interconnected quality of life.
- The **concept of god** is a human illusion that has caused vast suffering throughout human history.
- It is **beyond the capacity** of human beings to know whether there is a god.
- I do not know whether or not god exists but I am **willing to explore** the possibility.
- I **deny the existence** of a god of any kind.
- A **personal relationship** with god is a vital part of my spiritual life.
- I believe that god interacts directly with the world and **responds to prayer**.

Belief about a Personal God

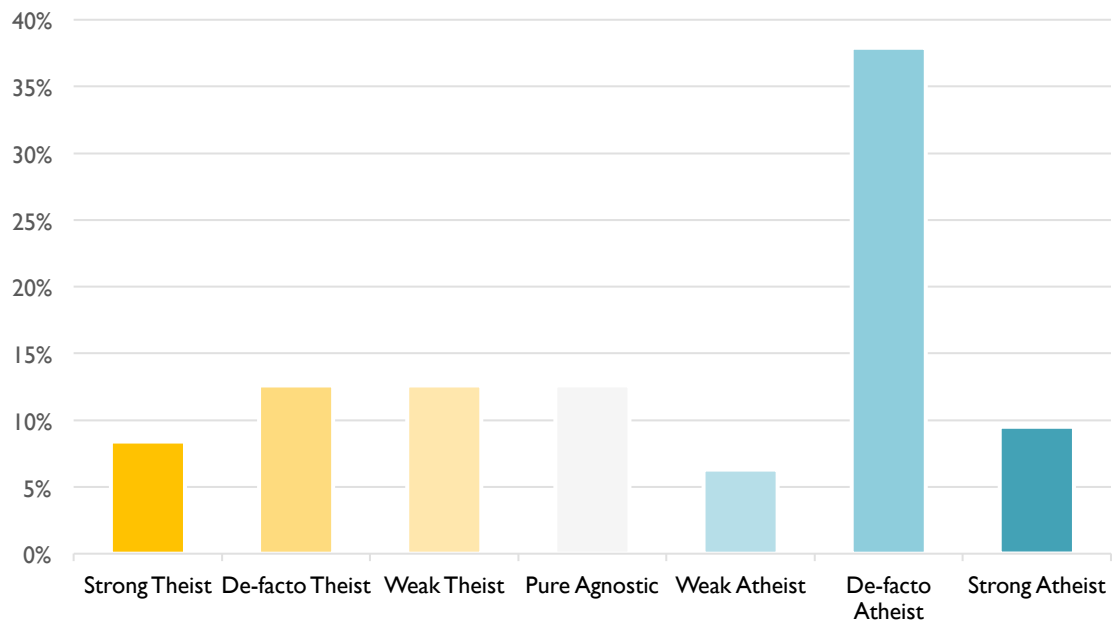
“How would you describe your belief about a personal god?” (95 Respondents)

Personal God / Dawkins Scale I



Strong Theist De-facto Theist Weak Theist Pure Agnostic
Weak Atheist De-facto Atheist Strong Atheist

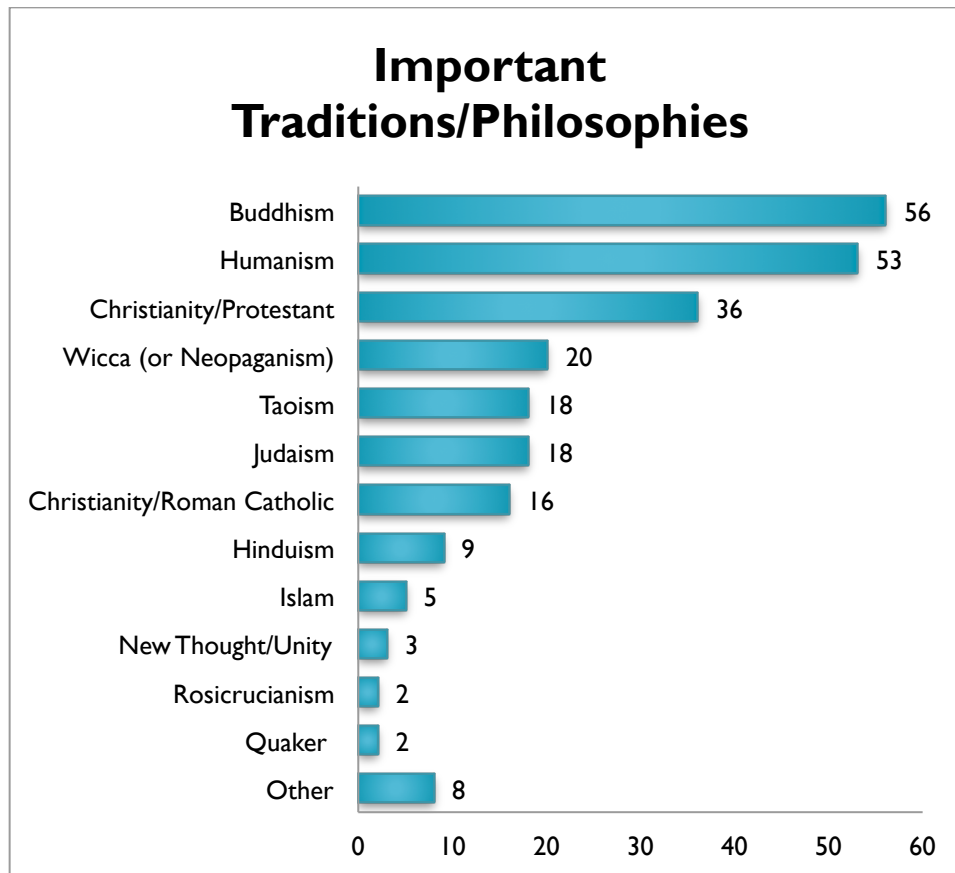
Personal God / Dawkins Scale II



Important Traditions/Philosophies

“In addition to Unitarian Universalism, what traditions or philosophies are important in your personal development, not necessarily as a belief system, but at least as a source of inspiration and guidance?”

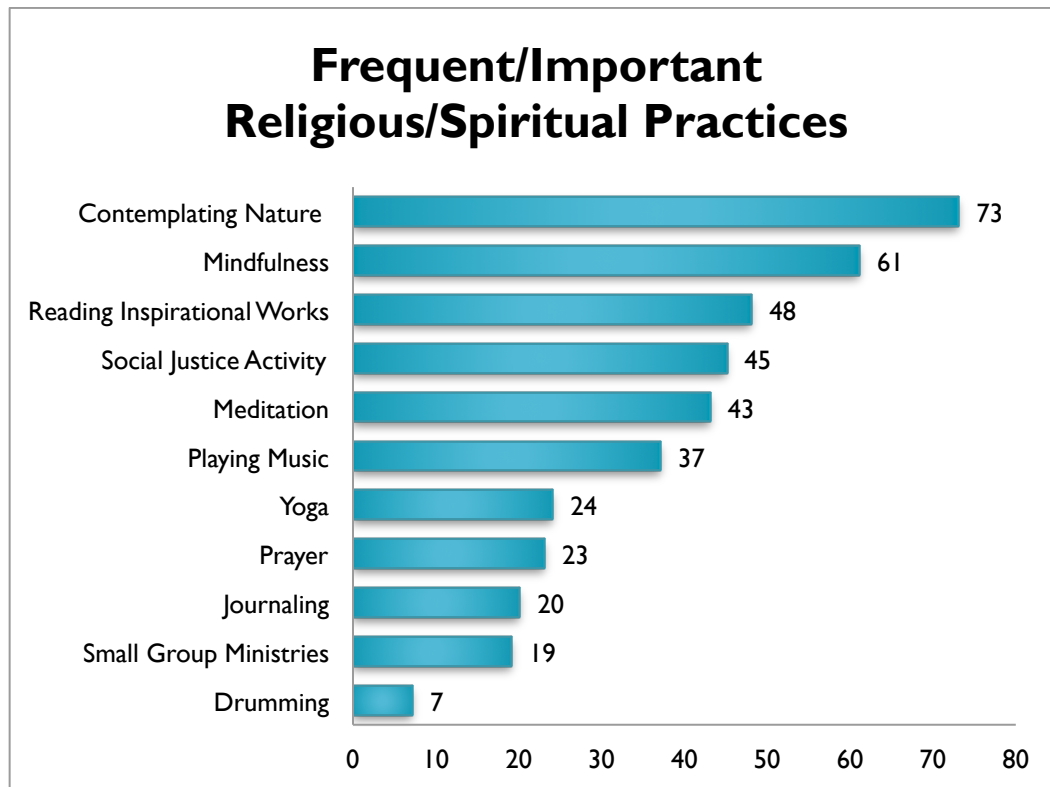
85 respondents; 246 responses.



Religious/Spiritual Practices

“Which of the following are religious or spiritual practices that you employ frequently and that are very important to your personal life?”

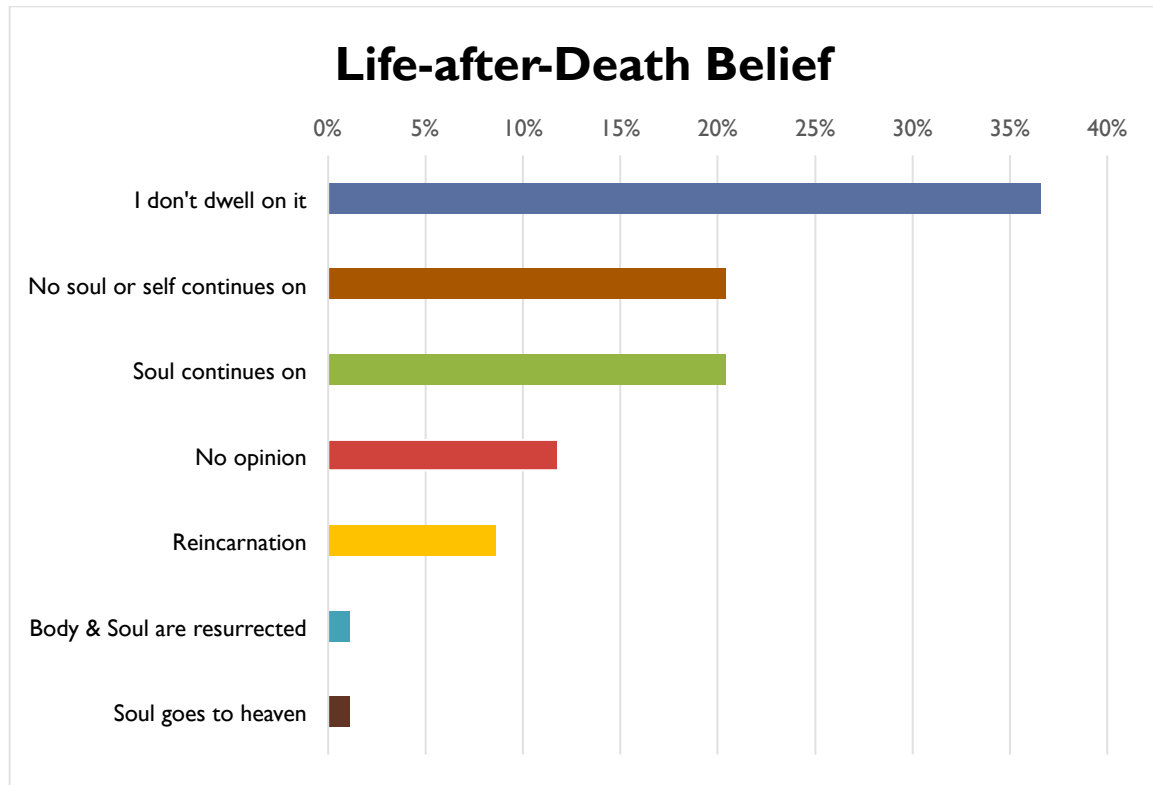
92 respondents; 400 responses.



Beliefs about Life after Death

“Which of the following most closely corresponds with your belief about life after death?”

93 Respondents



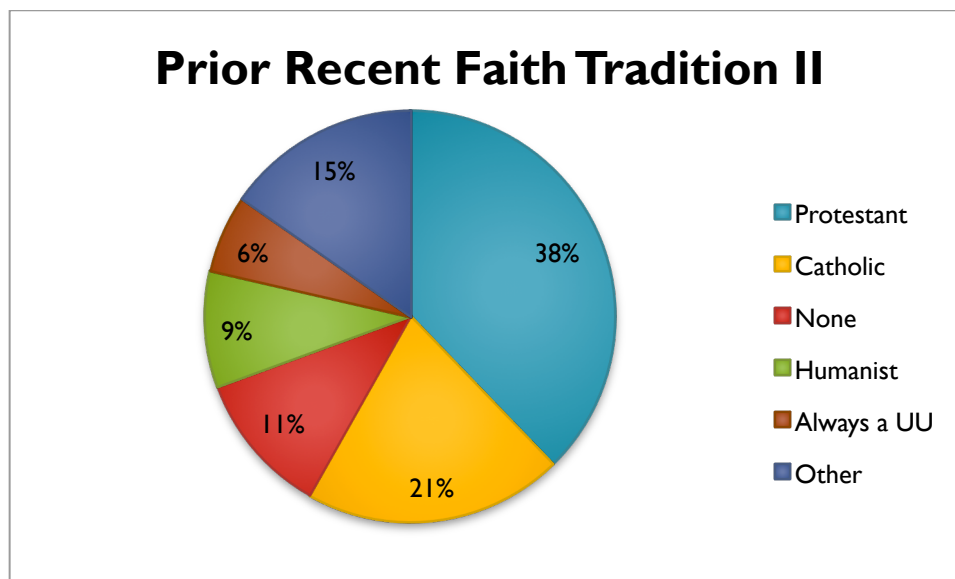
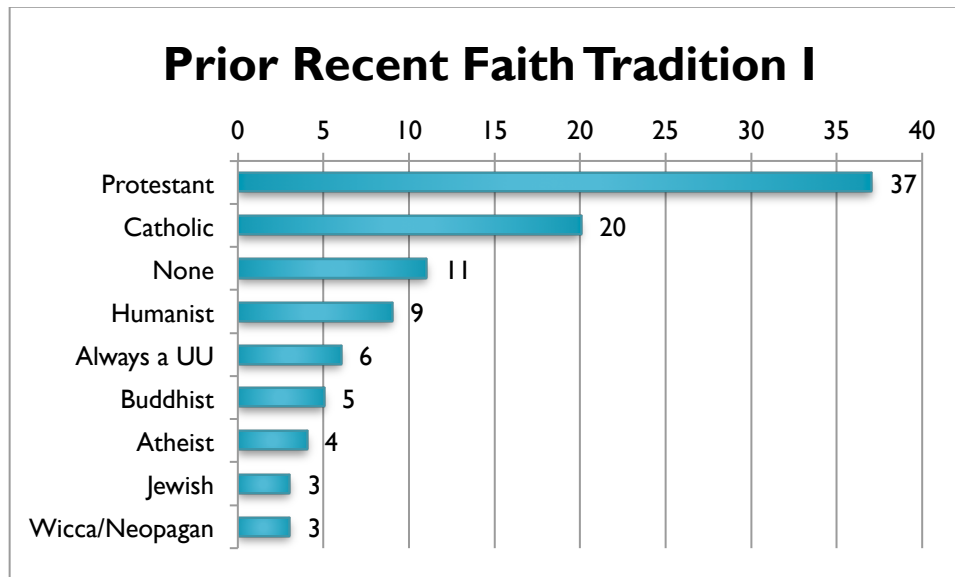
Statements:

- **I do not dwell on** the issue of life after death since it distracts from fully living in the moment.
- There is **no soul or self** that continues after death.
- The body dies but the **soul** continues on.
- I have **no opinion**.
- I believe in **reincarnation** - our soul goes into another living being.
- At some point in the future, a person's body and soul are **resurrected**.
- There is a **heaven** into which all souls are received.

Most Recent Prior Faith Tradition

“Prior to Unitarian Universalism, what faith tradition, belief, philosophy or religion have you most recently identified with?”

86 Respondents

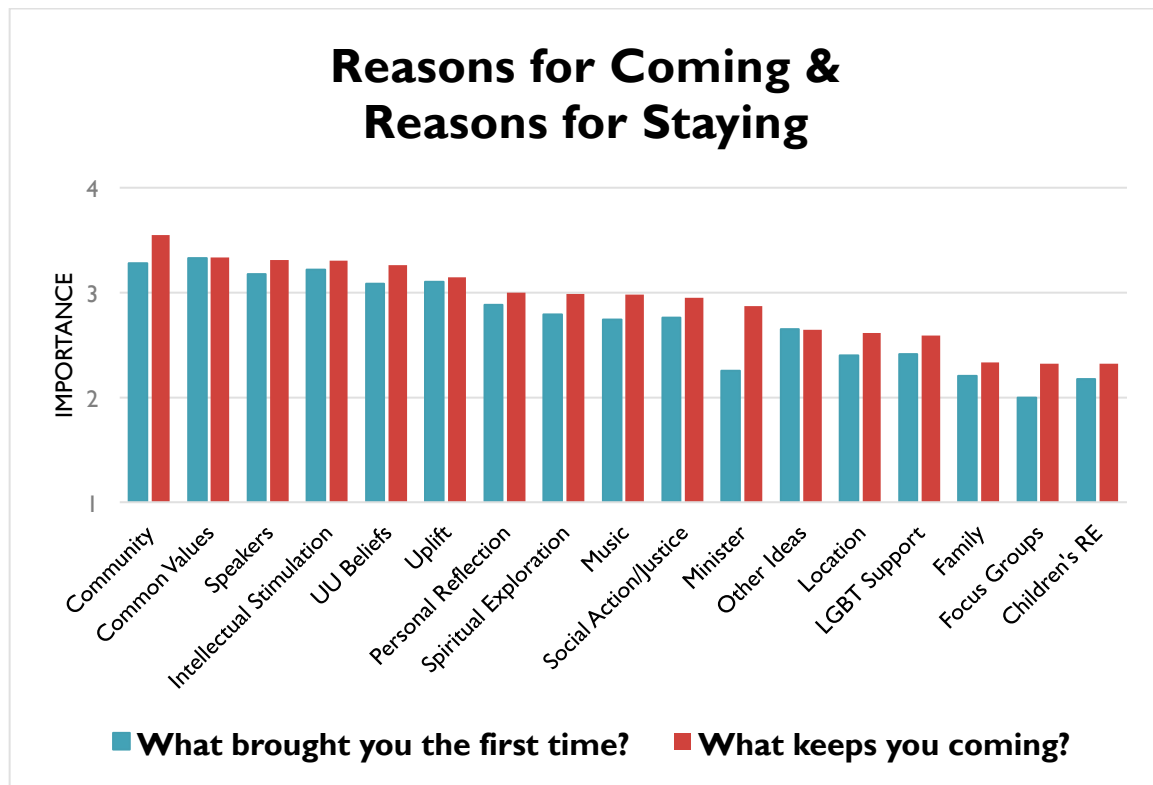


Congregational Involvement & Feelings about UUCSJS

Reasons for Coming to UUCSJS & Reasons for Staying at UUCSJS

1. "Which of the following reasons **brought you** to UUCSJS for the FIRST time?"
2. "Which of the following reasons **keep you coming** to Sunday Services at UUCSJS and what is the importance of each?"

100 Responses

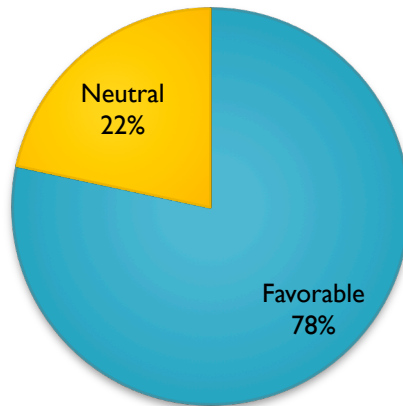


"Other" Reasons for Coming (write-in)		
Acceptance/Nonjudgmental/Safe place	4	4%
Prior UU history/Welcomes my beliefs/Interdep. Web	4	4%

Feelings about Membership Growth

What are your personal feelings about our membership growth?	
Favorable: I would like to see the size of our congregation grow.	76
Neutral	21
Unfavorable: I prefer the size of our current congregation.	0
Total	97

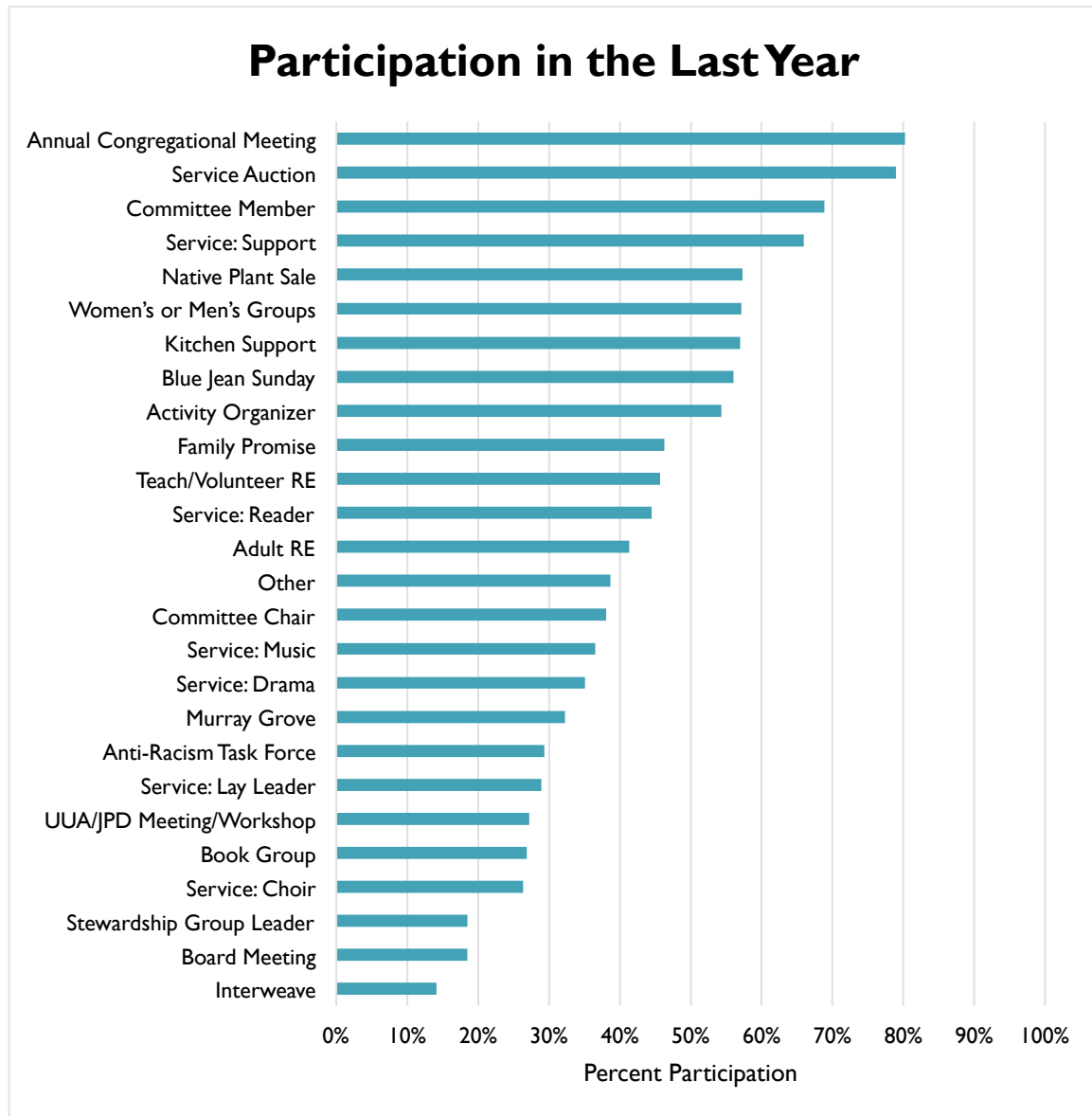
Feelings about Membership Growth



Participation in Congregational Activities

“In which of the following church activities have you participated during the last year?”

97 Respondents



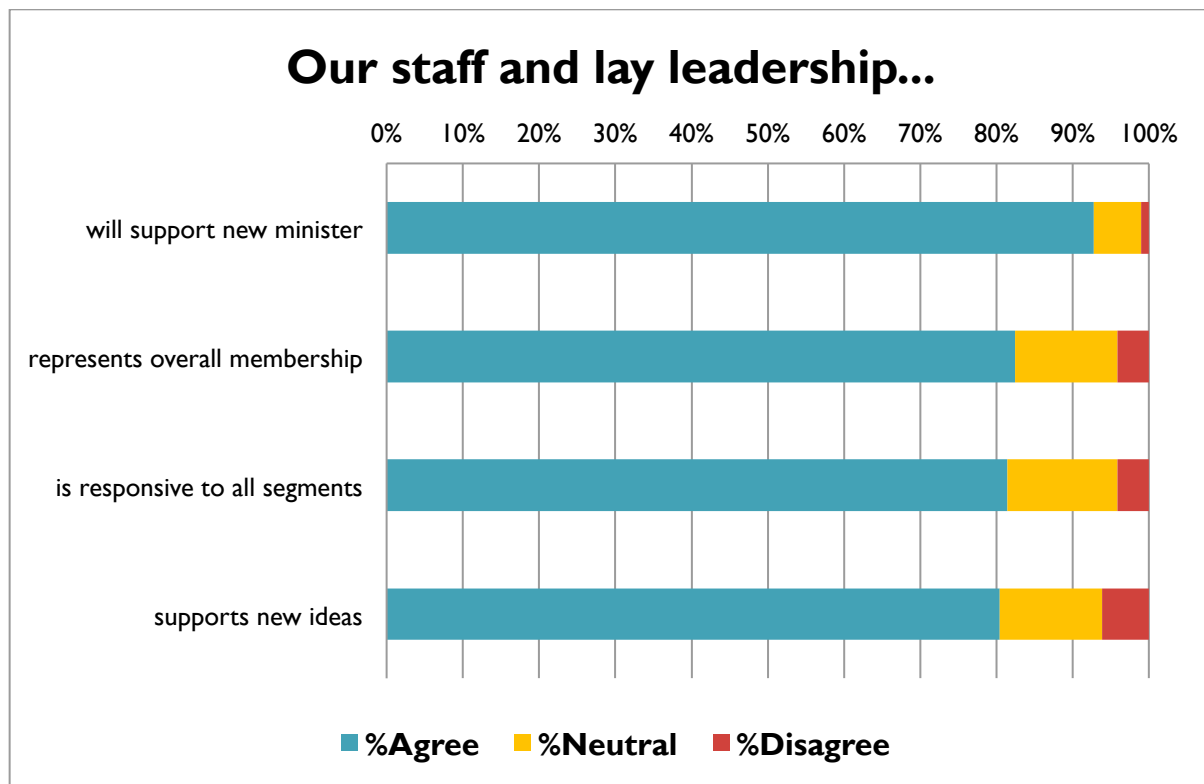
“Other” Activities (write-in)		
Road Clean up	4	4%
Course in Miracles/Spirituality Group	4	4%
Greenlight Coffeehouse	3	3%
Communications/Publicity	2	2%

UUCSJS Leadership

“Do you feel our current staff and congregational lay leadership (Board of trustees and committee chairs)...

- will be supportive and encouraging to a new minister?
- represent overall church membership?
- is generally responsive to the stated concerns of all segments of the congregation?
- encourages and supports development of new ideas and programs?”

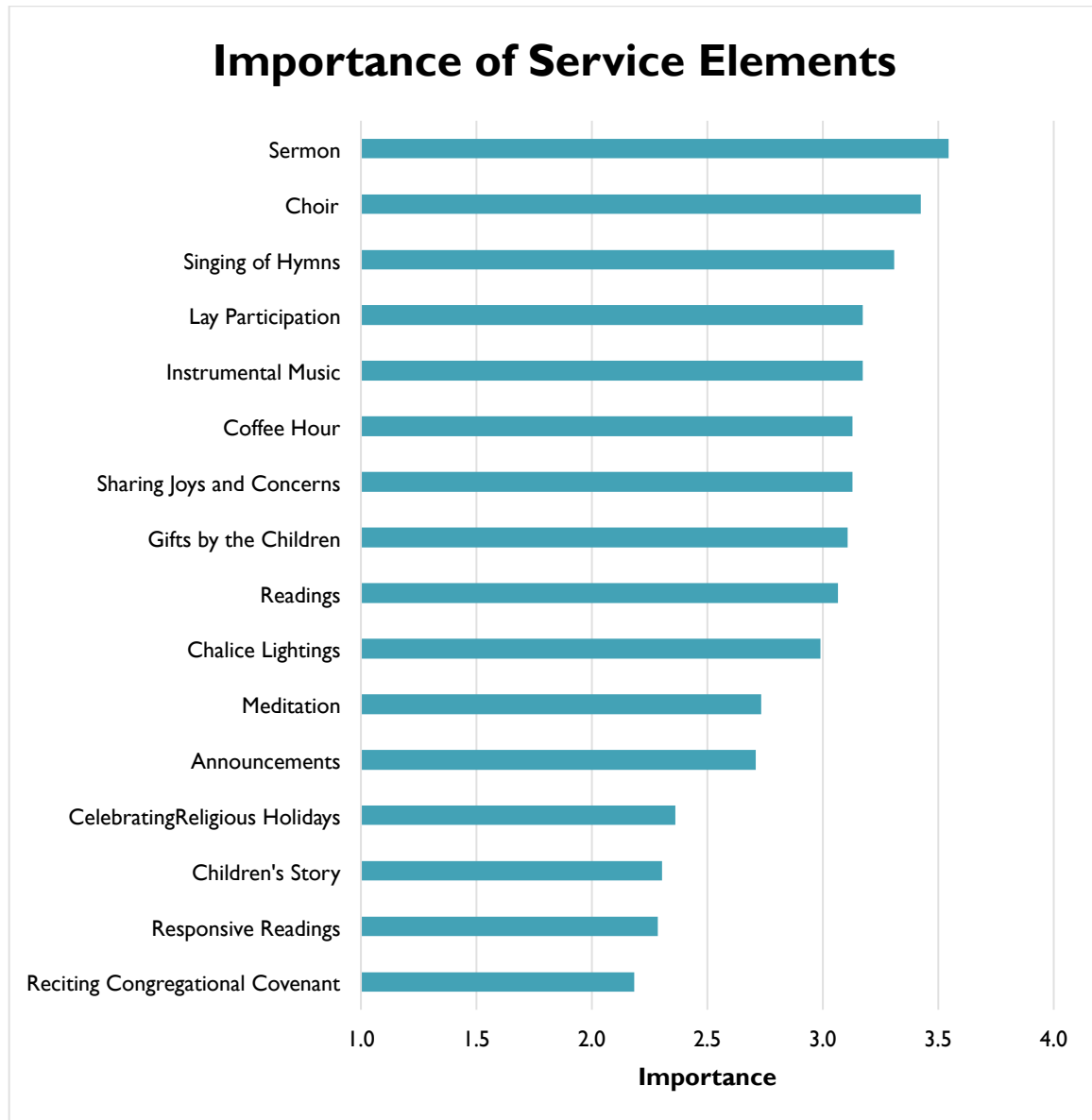
97 Respondents



Importance of Service Elements

“How important to you are the following specific items which may be part of a Sunday worship service?”

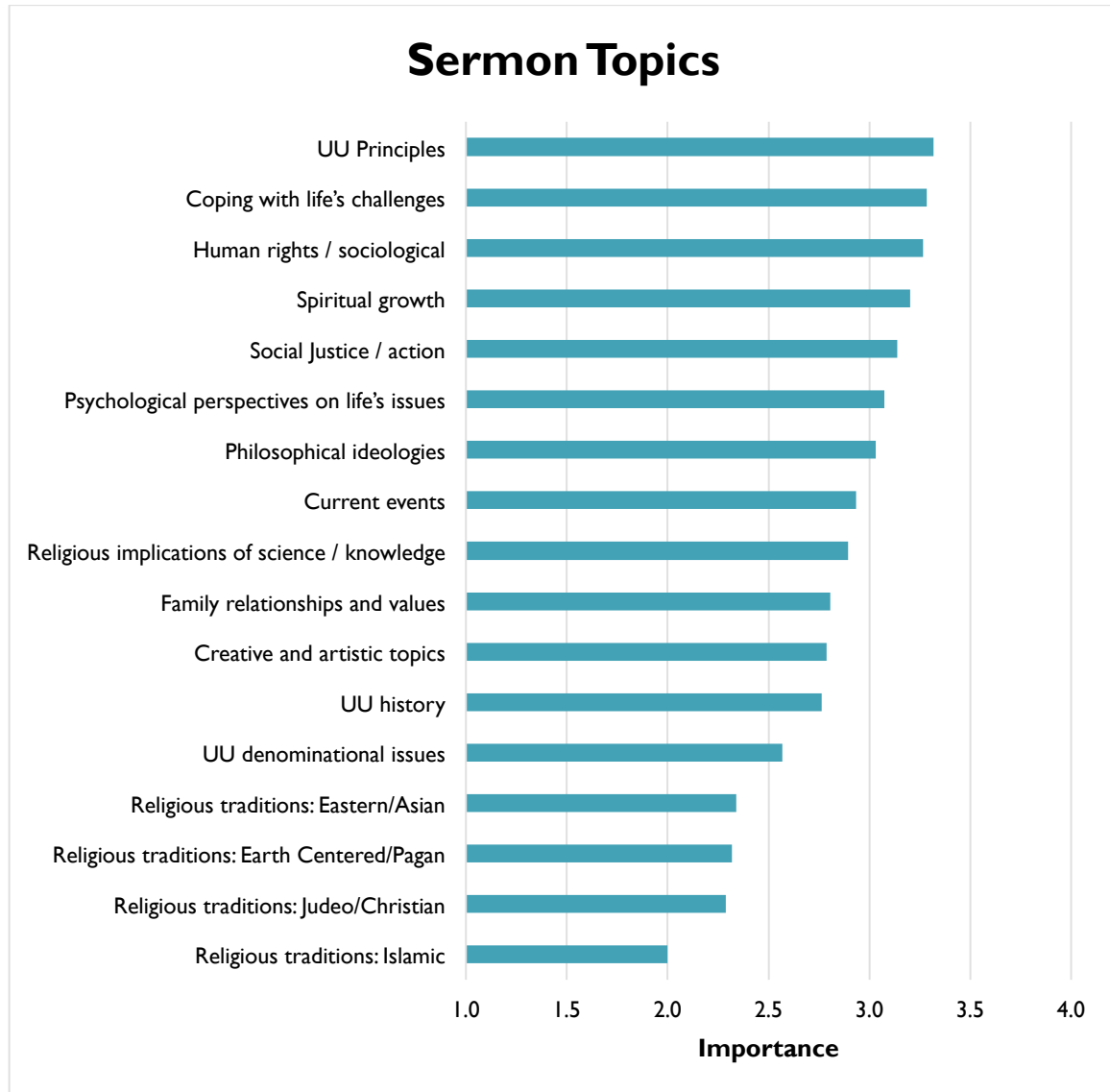
94 Respondents



Importance of Sermon Topics

“How important to you are these various Sunday worship sermon topics?”

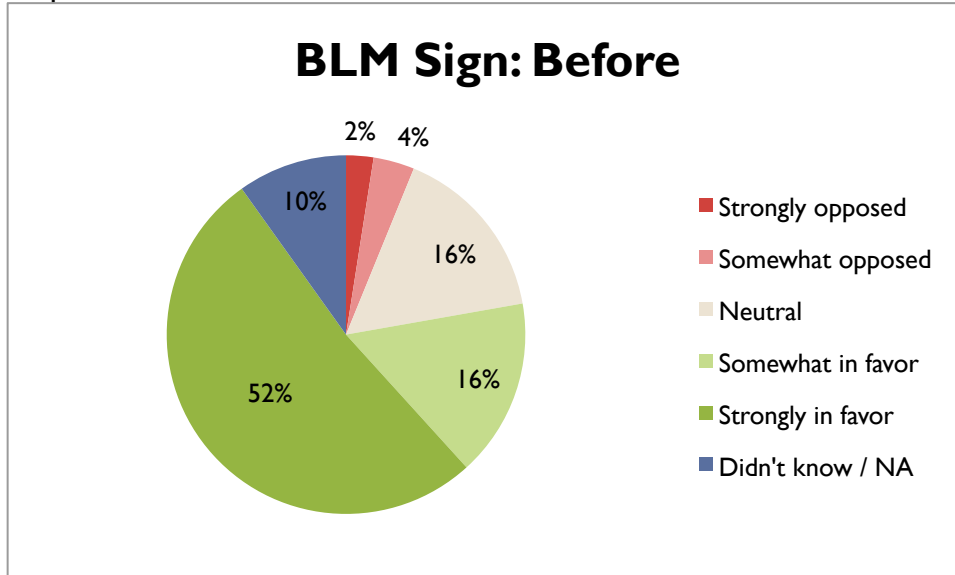
94 Respondents



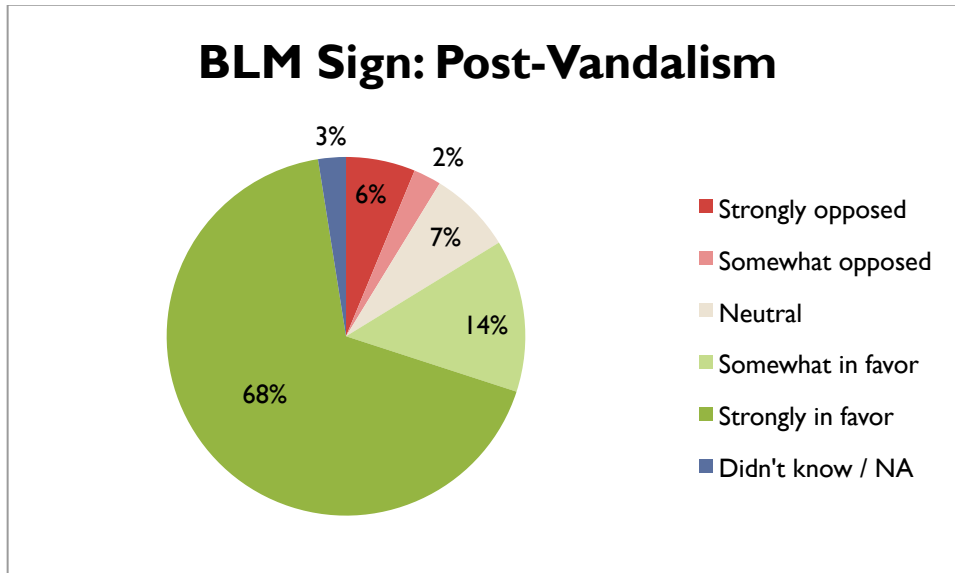
Black Lives Matter Sign

UUCSJS posted a Black Lives Matter sign in front of our building in August 2015. Shortly thereafter it was defaced. The congregation decided to repair and repost the sign. Upon launching this survey two weeks later, the MSC took the opportunity to gauge congregational opinion.

“Before we posted our Black Lives Matter banner, what was your opinion about putting it up?”



“What was your opinion about putting the Black Lives Matter banner up after it was vandalized?”



Congregational Strengths, Concerns, & Goals: Themes from Open-Ended Responses

Strengths

“What current strengths does our congregation possess that you would like to either see maintained or developed in the immediate future?” (76 respondents)

Congregational Strengths: Themes	
Welcoming/friendly/accepting	41
Social activism	21
RE	15
Music	11
Lay-led services	7
Committed core	5
Ritual/ceremonies	3

Concerns

“What current congregational issues concern you?” (69 respondents)

Concerns: Themes	
Loss of members; attendance; need to grow	19
Too much done by too few; burnout	15
Money concerns; paying staff more	11
Lack of diversity	8
Safety (mostly relating to Black Lives Matter sign)	6
Social justice actions will weaken us	4
Lack of social justice	3
Cliques; top heavy; power players	3

Goals

“Other than securing a new minister, what additional things would you like to see our congregation achieve in the next few years?” (69 respondents)

Goals: Themes	
Grow the membership; community outreach	40
Social justice outreach	22
Improve financial situation	6
Increase diversity	5
More music	4

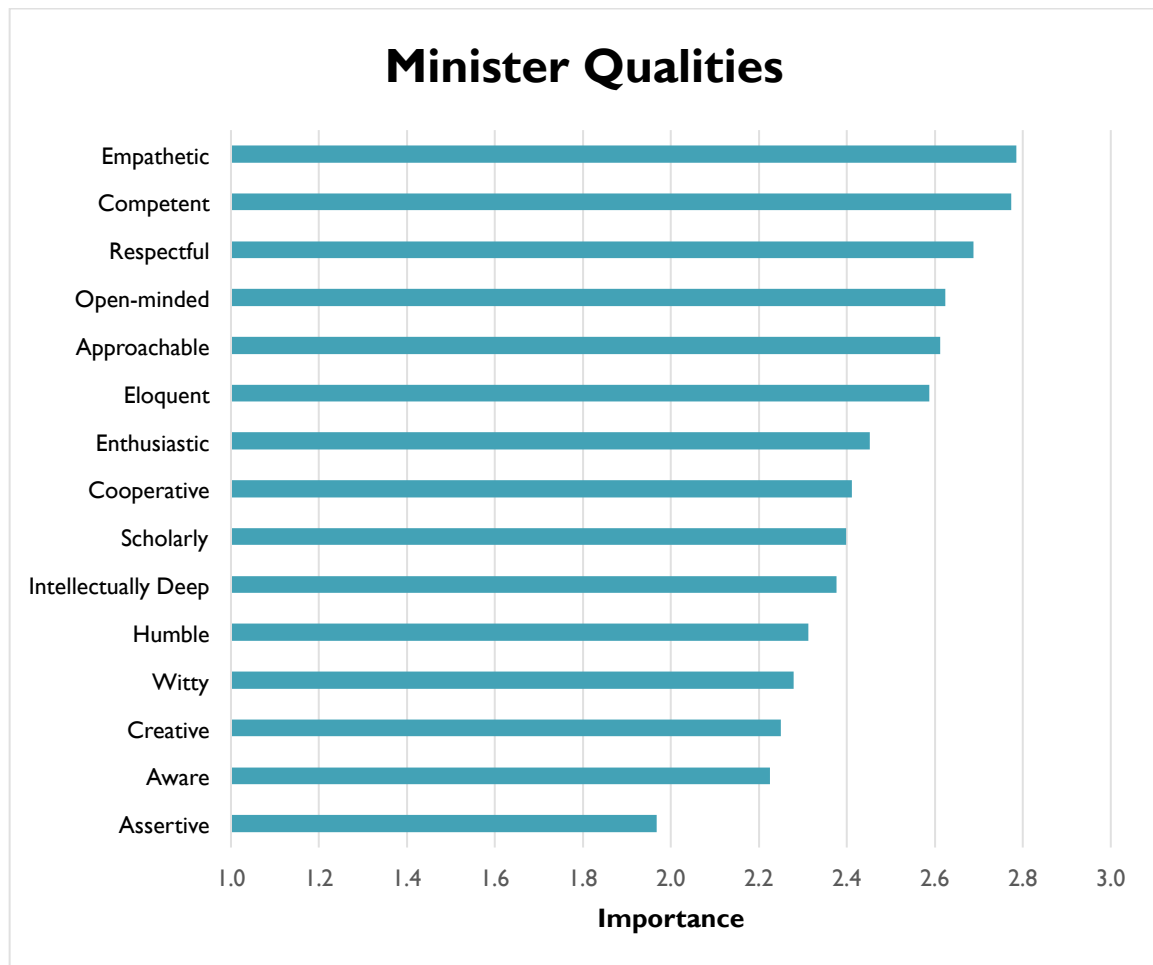
Views on Professional Ministry

Minister Qualities

Ninety-three respondents ranked empathy and competence as qualities most desired in a minister, with being respectful, open-minded, approachable and eloquent close behind.

“How would you measure the importance of each [of the following qualities]?”

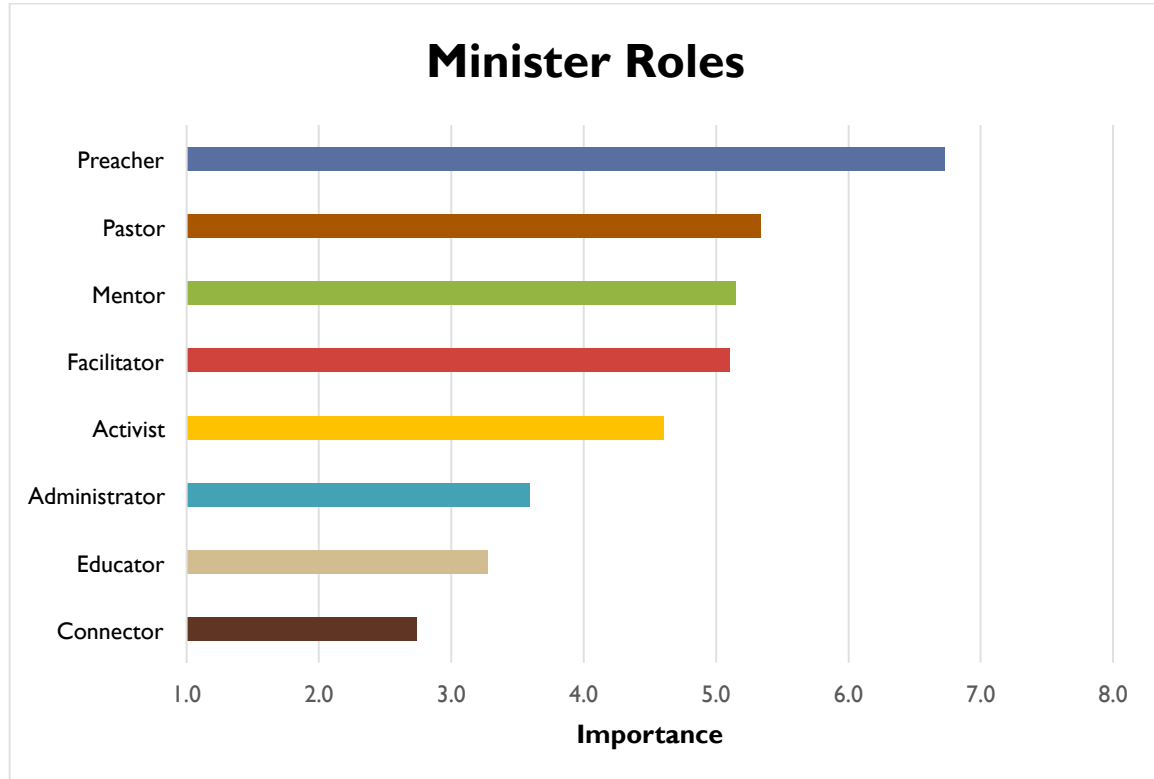
93 Respondents



Minister Roles

The role of Preacher was the clear frontrunner among 89 respondents to this question, with the roles of Pastor, Mentor and Facilitator closely ranked as “second tier” priorities, and Social Activist in the fifth position by a half-point margin.

“In what rank order would you like our next minister to [prioritize the following ministerial functions]?” (89 Respondents)



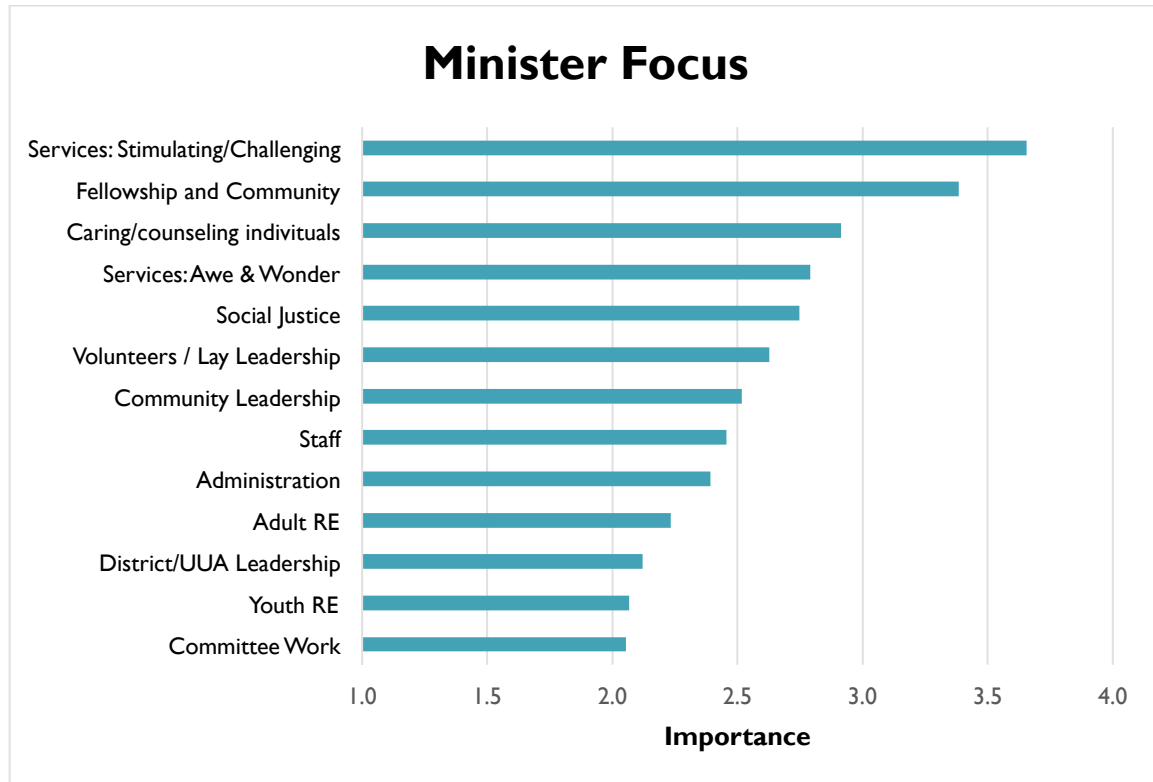
Response Options:

- **Preacher:** prepares and leads spiritual and intellectually enlightening Sunday services. Leads celebrations, rites of passage, etc.
- **Pastor:** counsels in times of stress, visits the sick, coordinates caring activities, internally advises on ethical dilemmas, etc.
- **Mentor:** serves as listener and adviser to individuals, committees, and the board on ethical and moral issues. Challenges and stimulates the thinking of the congregation.
- **Facilitator:** involves people in congregational life, engenders community and mutual support.
- **Social activist:** promotes ethical values in the larger community, serves as spokesperson for the congregation on public issues when needed, helps understanding and advises on social justice issues.
- **Administrator:** achieves results by coordinating and supporting the efforts of others.
- **Educator:** provides leadership and insight in children and adult RE programs within UUCSJS.
- **Connector:** helps the congregation stay connected to the larger UU world.

Minister Focus

Parallel to the “Roles” question and the reasons people said they came and stayed at UUCSJS, Stimulating/Challenging Sunday services and supporting Fellowship and Community were at the top of the list for areas of preferred ministerial focus, with Caring/Counseling, Awe/Wonder-inspiring services, Social Justice and developing Lay Leadership next.

“In terms of personal capabilities, time and attention, how important do you consider the following priorities for our next minister?” (93 Respondents)



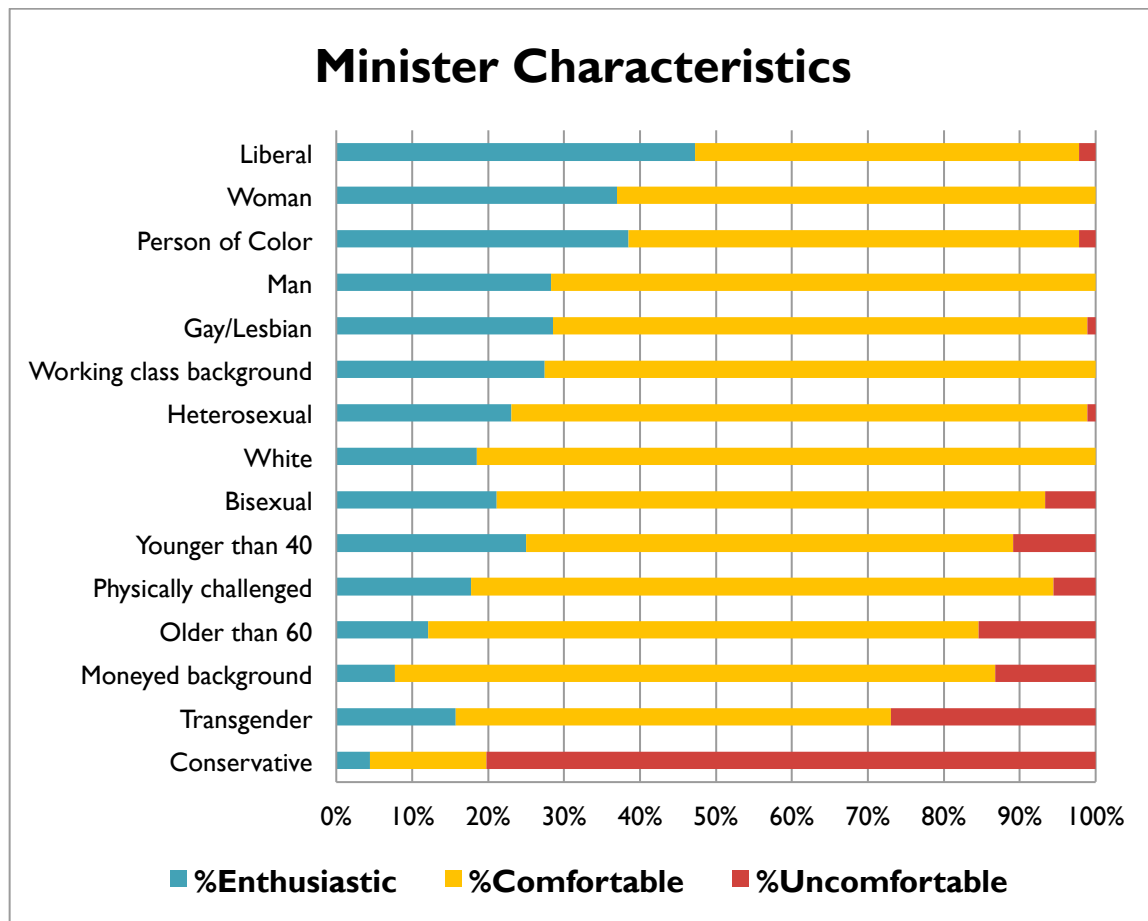
Response Options:

- Assuring efficient and effective church **administration**
- **Caring for and counseling** individuals
- Creating a sense of **awe and wonder** in Sunday services
- Presenting **stimulating and challenging** Sunday services
- Encouraging congregational **social justice** programs
- Encouraging **volunteers** and developing **lay leadership**
- Fostering a sense of **fellowship and community** within the church
- Guiding/facilitating **committee work**
- Leading and guiding the church **staff**
- Offering stimulating adult enrichment programs (**Adult RE**)
- Participating in **Religious Education** for youth
- Providing a connection to the **JPD (our district) and UUA**
- Providing visible **leadership in the community** beyond the church

Minister Characteristics

Respondents were overwhelmingly enthusiastic or comfortable with most categories of identity on the list, with the notable exceptions of political conservatism and transgender identity. Comments on this item reflected an effort among respondents to be honest about their reservations. The highest levels of “enthusiasm” were expressed for the categories liberal, woman and person of color.

“How would you personally feel about our congregation calling as a minister a person who is...?” (92 Respondents)



- Note: “Person of color” = “A person of color/member of historically marginalized ethnic/cultural group”

Views on Ministry: Themes from Open-Ended Responses

Applying the UUA Equal Opportunity Policy

“Do you have any reservations regarding the application of [the UUA policy re: non-discriminatory ministerial search procedures] in regard to our church?”

67 respondents

Any reservations re: UUA EO Policy?		
None	61	91%
Other response	6	9%

“Worst Mistake”

“What is the worst mistake our new minister could make?” (74 respondents)

“Worst mistake”: Themes	
Change too fast/too much	28
Arrogance	12
Show favoritism	8
Poor communication skills	6
Poor sermons	5

Minister’s Family/Personal Life

“What expectations, however silent, do you have about the minister’s family and personal life?” (70 respondents)

Expectations re: Family/Personal Life: Themes	
None	29
Stable; at peace; healthy	10
Be part of the community	8
Not have 19/20 children	2

Issues for MSC Consideration

“Are there any special other issues that you would like our Ministerial Search Committee to consider?”

Special Issues for MSC Consideration re: Candidates/Search (Themes)	
Enthusiasm/Energy/Dedication	5
Experience	4
Social justice	4
Universalism; open to many beliefs/traditions	3
Open to/skilled with Change/Transition	3
Understanding of local area/region	2
Approachable	2
Rev. Cynthia's Strengths	2
General/Other Characteristics (Wit, Conflict Resolution, etc.)	2
Trust/Appreciate MSC	4
Tips for MSC	5