

SUMMARY REPORT



first unitarian church of providence

LEADERSHIP RETREAT - JANUARY 3RD AND 4TH 2020 - ATTLEBORO MA.

Introduction

Our church is changing. And as we transform, we will need to discuss a variety of topics. Some may be polarizing. However, these topics are important to the congregation and to the development of our next round of strategic planning. It will be important to talk to each other, to hear, understand, and appreciate each other's perspectives.

In October, Imagine the Future provided opportunities to start having those conversations. Members and friends of the First U community were invited to participate in one of three discussion sessions. What follows is a report of the results of the three sessions. The report was produced by John Simmonds, Caroline Mailloux, and Michael Cappelli.



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Goals

- Create space for deep listening, diverse voices, and transformative conversations regarding fundamental concerns of congregation life
- Provide leadership with a better understanding of people's viewpoints for strategic planning purposes
- Provide congregants with an opportunity to come to a wider and shared understanding of people's viewpoints as they imagine and move into the future together



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Process

| October Session Dates | 27th | 24th | 12th | Totals |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|--------|
| Total Registered | 71 | 44 | 27 | 142 |
| Total Attended | 55 | 41 | 25 | 121 |

- Each session lasted 90-100 minutes and was facilitated by two UUA New England Regional Facilitators
- Attendees were placed in small groups of 5-8. PruComm & Ministers facilitated these small groups to manage listening, sharing, ground rules and timekeeping.
- Attendees answered two of the following three questions on post-it cards and shared them within their small group (Part I):
 - What role do the church buildings play in your worship experience at First Unitarian?
 - What does a growing congregation mean to you?
 - It is 5 years from now. Imagine the social justice work First U is doing.
 - What does it look like?
 - How does it differ from what we are doing today?
 - How is it living our faith?
- Selected responses from each small group were read aloud by small group facilitators.
- Attendees were then asked to reflect on what they heard and to respond to the following two questions on post-it cards and share responses within their small group:
 - What surprised you in what you heard? What are you curious about?
 - What trends did you notice as you were listening to responses from Part I?

Process & Observations

| October Session Dates | 27th | 24th | 12th | Totals |
|-----------------------|------|------|------|--------|
| Total Registered | 71 | 44 | 27 | 142 |
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- Themes from each small group were read aloud and shared by small group facilitators.
- The session ended with attendees providing one word to describe how the session was for them.
- Post-it cards were collected and later transcribed.

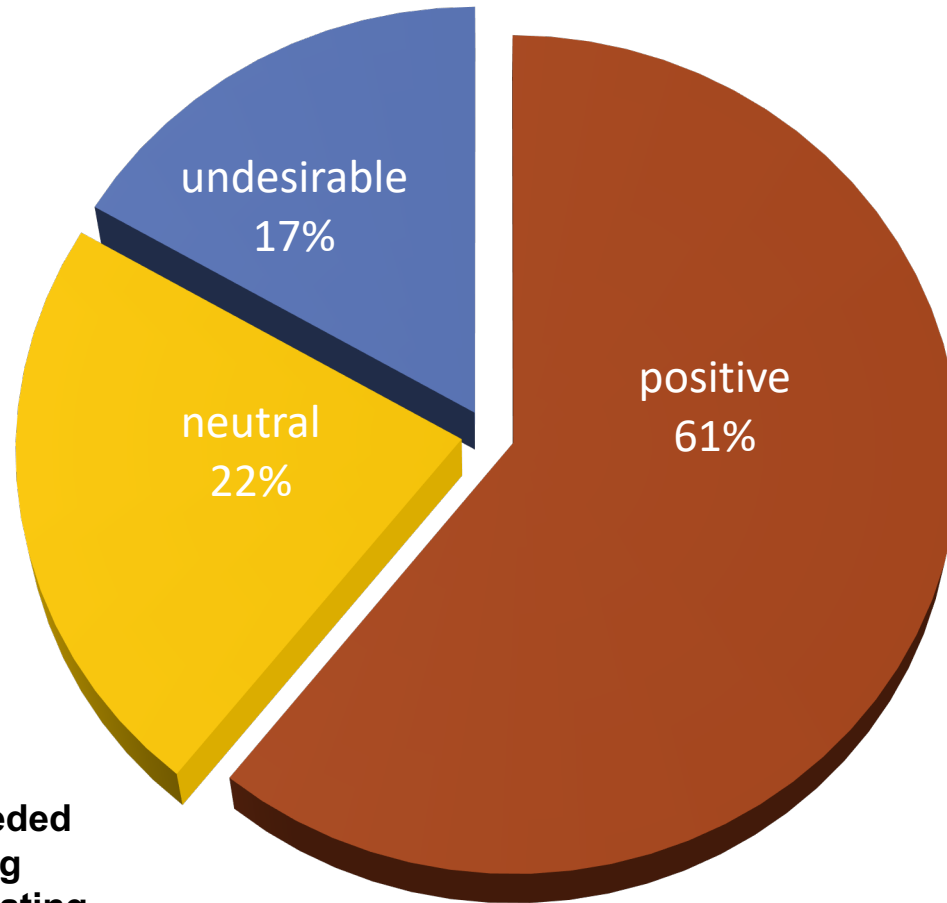
Observations

- It was a challenge to recruit younger and more diverse participants.
- Members who do not normally speak out were appreciative of the opportunity.
- The majority of participants were older long-term members.
- Participants were open to hearing additional perspectives and reconsidering their own.
- Participants acknowledged what they love about our community and that some things need to shift to accommodate change and growth.

Role of Church Buildings in Worship

constraining
expensive
un-welcoming
accessibility issues
jaded and dark
needs redesign
safety issues
limiting

historic - limiting
high pulpit- mixed feelings
improve acoustics
historic - non functional
spiritual - improvement needed
beautiful - requires updating
inspirational - requires updating
functional- expensive



uplifting
love
symbol
sacred space
spiritual
inspirational
beautiful
essential
wonderful
central
worshipful
amazing
supportive
home
joy
treasure
special
meaningful
contemplative

■ positive ■ neutral ■ undesirable

In 5 Years, What Does Social Justice Work Look Like at 1st UU?



What Does a Growing Congregation Mean to You?

Reaching out into the broader community

Encourage more cultural and ethnic collaboration

Bring in more families with young children for the religious education program

More young adults, more families, and more racial and ethnic diversity

Attain the generational and racial diversity

Targeting non-member populations & Find other ways to get the word out about First UU

Giving equal focus to spiritual growth and social justice

Judging by the content of UU world, our church is focused on social action only. My concern is that something is missing in our general practice and that is faith

Growth is both internal and external

Internal awareness of our faith and spiritual practices which can grow

Bring more diversity to our community. That is part of spiritual growth

Support each other and not spread ourselves too thin

More numbers means being open to people joining us

Remember welcoming? Don't be afraid of failing, learn from our mistakes

Growing connections within congregation

Age, race, economic background, different perspectives

More programs of smaller group discussions

Increasing new members while retaining long-time members

Expanding operations and capital support by at least 15-25% over next 5 years

Meaningful relationships more resources (teaching, lay ministry)

Support relationships and stay connected to prevent silos

Strengthen opportunities for fellowship

We need to invest in bigger staff and better infrastructure

More young people along with us gray hairs

Many more decisions should be made by staff

Parking Lot

The “parking lot” includes ten other topics that came up during the three sessions for future discussion. They included:

- We think we are welcoming; we really only talk to each other.
- It’s time for First UU to adopt a formal statement in support of gay and LGBTQ rights.
- No focus on children in the congregation.
- How do we decide where our social justice efforts go?
- Ways for small groups to contribute to worship service; poems, sharing shared experience.
- Get rid of the bad folding chairs upstairs, they are awful.
- Feeling welcome: Why do some feel welcome and some not?
- Wanted the questions; “Why are you here?”, “What brought you here?”
- Let’s be open to change and other ideas, like compromise between differing ideas.
- The parlors are very formal – like a set from Downton Abbey.

What's Next?

- Share presentation with the congregation
- Share the information with the Strategic Planning Team
- Strategic planning working closely with the commitment drive
- Additional opportunities are coming up, including a Potluck with David Pyle in Feb.



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