One hundred and thirty-six (136) members and friends of the Unitarian Society offered opinions and advice in response to our survey as we prepared to renew our strategic plan. Survey results complement listening circles as the Planning Committee and Trustees update our plan.

Executive Summary

Demographics Most survey respondents have been long-time participants of our congregation with another significant group attending less than five years. Most are participating members and are older.

Participation Most of us participated in Sunday Worship. Committee work, service auction, Sunday jobs, social events, and Sanctuary volunteering are other ways we frequently participate. Most are moved to participate in our congregation by wanting a sense of community. Nearly as important are inspiration, spiritual growth, and social justice. Climate action, respite, and opportunities for volunteer service are also important. Four in ten participate very frequently and a third fairly often.

Our vision Two-thirds of survey respondents very much liked our draft vision, "May we be a congregation that nurtures and sustains hope, resilience, and sanity. May we cultivate openness to new ideas and voices. May we offer welcome, respite and renewal, fueling courage and strength to work together for justice and the protection of our planet." Some offered amendments, most often, to add "spirituality" and replace the word "sanity."

Hoped-for outcomes in next 3-5 years Most often we said: continue the good work we’re doing; attract more young people and families with children; continue and expand our community leadership, outreach, and collaboration with other congregations; welcome and diversify our membership; strengthen our climate action work; build our RE program; continue and expand our social justice work; and better connect, and support each other. We asked what we might do differently. Most often suggested: Offer services at alternate times, deepen spirituality in services, and build community.

Newcomers’ opinions Newcomers most frequently learned about the congregation by personal recommendation and our website. Newcomers offered why they first visited. Most often they were: UUs who moved to the area looking for another UU congregation. Others were seeking a conducive spiritual home or seeking connections with a community. Newcomers report they felt acceptance, warmth, and hospitality here. Three quarters of newcomers felt warmly welcomed into our congregation. However, over half say it was somewhat of a challenge to get to know people and find their way into the life of our congregation. Nearly all newer people say it’s likely they will continue.

Communication We learn about our Unitarian Society primarily through email, the Pioneer newsletter, Sunday Times, and Sunday announcements. About half feel very well informed and half somewhat informed about USNF activities and programs.

Social hour Half of us often visit the parlor during social hour after Sunday services and a third sometimes do. Most frequent comments and suggestions: the parlor is crowded and noisy; keep reminding us all to greet newcomers; and use the social room more often.
Social Justice and environmental issues Climate action is the issue of highest concern. Racial justice is very important and sanctuary and immigrant justice and political action are also important. Peace and refugee work are important for many. Our members are actively engaged with many social justice and environmental issues. We work through USNF initiatives, through other organizations, by individual initiative, and through work. Sanctuary/immigration is the issue through which most are engaged through our USNF. Also important USNF initiatives are demonstration and vigils, lectures and workshops, and climate action work. Political action, peace efforts, and letter-writing advocacy are more often carried out through other organizations. Racial justice is more often an individual initiative.

Half would like to be more engaged in social justice/climate action through USNF, but when asked how, most indicated we were already deeply engaged or working at capacity. Common suggestions about what else we should do: we do a lot already, let’s keep it up; continue/expand interfaith efforts with other congregations; highlight/celebrate stories of what we do; make anti-racism work a priority; and invite more guest speakers or workshops.

Cultivating leadership Most of us have served as a volunteer-support role and over half have served in leadership at USNF. We step up to leadership primarily for three reasons: to give back to our community; we were asked; we saw the need. When asked about leadership experiences all but two said the experience has been positive. Most often mentioned: learned a lot, rewarding and fulfilling, both challenging and rewarding, and a good experience. Others mentioned leadership was time consuming, we felt supported and appreciated, and leadership is inspiring.

For those not yet in leadership, about four in ten said more information on what’s needed would encourage them. Over a quarter would welcome an invitation. Some might lead if working with a co-chair or partner. Suggestions to identify and nurture the leadership: ask directly, learn the strengths and skills of members; offer more information and invitations, start people with small tasks and grow responsibilities, and mentor and train.

What else is important for us to consider as we plan for the next few years? Most frequently suggested were: prepare for Janet’s eventual retirement/ministerial transition’ plan to help the community during any social/environmental disruption; and try to attract young people and families.

Survey Methods

We sent the survey invitation by email to about 500 people on our mailing list, posted a link on our website, and promoted four weeks in the Sunday Times. We opened the online survey November 27, 2018, sent two email reminders, and closed the survey December 21. We heard from 136 people, including 109 members (43% of our formal membership), 12 friends (participating non-members), six visitors, and three youth. This is a good response and a fair representation of our congregation.

The full survey results section offers details. Fixed-response questions are reported in bar charts indicated percentage of people who responded to each fixed-response option. Content analysis determined common trends and repeated comments to open-ended questions. Comments and suggestions were summarized in clusters of similar statements, ranked in order of most frequently mentioned, as well as the approximate number of times each category of statement was offered. We encourage congregants to read the survey appendix, which presents all comments verbatim and is a rich collection of opinions and suggestions.
Full Survey Results

**Length of association**  Most survey respondents have been long-time participants of our congregation with another significant group attending less than five years. About a third (34%) reported they had been associated with USNF a long time (“forever”), a quarter (25%) for 11-20 years, nearly a quarter (22%) one to four years, 14% attended for five to ten years, and 5% less than one year. N = 110 (110 people answered this question)

**Participation**  Most participated in Sunday Worship (six in ten often attend services). Committee work, service auction, Sunday jobs, social events, and Sanctuary volunteering are other ways we frequently participate. The following chart illustrates frequency of participation, ranked in order of those “often” participating. People could select multiple responses. N = 132
Why we participate  Most of us are moved to participate in our congregation by the community. Nearly as important are inspiration, spiritual growth, and social justice. Climate action, respite, and opportunities for volunteer service are also important motivators. A few seek support as parents or caregivers. (Multiple responses were possible.) N = 130

Membership  Over eight in ten (83%) responding to the survey are participating members (have signed the membership book and are eligible to vote). About one in ten (9%) are participants who have not formally signed the membership book (friends). Another 5% are visitors or exploring involvement, 2% are youth, and 1% are non-participating members. N = 131
**Age** If our survey is representative, our congregation skews older. Most (69%) are sixty or older. N = 132

**Extent of participation** Over four in ten respondents (44%) participate very frequently and about a third (34%) participate fairly often. Nearly two in ten (19%) don’t participate very often and 4% participate rarely or not at all. N = 131

**Comments** Mostly people offered explanations of why they are not more regular participants. Two comments were repeated.

- Family obligations prevent participation (cited 2 times)
- Active in Small Group Circles (2)
Vision  We shared a working draft vision and asked if it resonated. “Our trustees’ working intention for our planning is this: "May we be a congregation that nurtures and sustains hope, resilience, and sanity. May we cultivate openness to new ideas and voices. May we offer welcome, respite and renewal, fueling courage and strength to work together for justice and the protection of our planet. "Does this vision resonate with you?

About two thirds (68%) of survey respondents, indicated “Yes, very much.” About three in ten checked, “Yes, somewhat” and for the remaining 3%, the response was “Not very much.” N = 132

Vision comments: Themes and repeated comments in order most frequently mentioned

- Add spirituality, faith or worship (cited 10 times)
- Replace sanity with a less reactive word, what we’re for, not against (10)
- Statement is abstract, impersonal, bland (5)
- Add peace, justice, or equity (3)
- Add multigenerational (3)
- More specific calls to action, especially climate action (2)
- Support each other (2)
- Add compassion (2)

What would you most like to see our congregation accomplish in the next 3-5 years?

Repeated themes and comments in order most frequently mention (numbers in parentheses indicate the approximate number of times this or a similar idea was expressed) N = 82

- Continue our good work: inspiring worship, RE, community building, social justice, climate action, etc. (cited 19 times)
- Attract more young people and families with children (17)
- Continue to expand our community leadership, outreach, and collaboration with other congregations (16)
- Welcome all, diversify our membership re. privilege, class, race, religion (14)
- Strengthen our climate action work, integrate into all we do (13)
- Build our RE program, integrate youth into congregation (10)
- Continue and expand our social justice work (9)
- Better connect, support, inspire each other (9)
- Build our membership (7)
- Engage new people in leadership, volunteering (4)
- Graceful transition as Janet retires (3)
- More adult education programs (2)
- More social activities to connect us (2)
- Balance robust social activism with nurturing our community (2)
- Cultivate openness (2)
- Grow our choir (2)
- Welcome and engage newcomers (2)
What might we do differently that would be important to you?

Repeated themes and comments in order most frequently mentioned (numbers in parentheses indicate the approximate number of times this or a similar idea was expressed) N = 74

- Offer services at alternate times, e.g., evening vespers and after traumatic events (cited 7 times)
- Deeper spirituality and inspiration in services, (6)
- Build community (6)
- We’re doing well (6)
- More varied music (5)
- Not sure, no opinion (4)
- More social events, home gatherings, meals (4)
- Fewer children’s stories, intergenerational services (3)
- More interfaith elements in services (3)
- More young adult programs (3)
- Be open to change (2)
- Better communication, PR in community (2)
- More active social justice (2)
- Encourage young families (2)
- Welcome and engage newcomers (2)
- Climate action more widely held in congregation, more urgency (2)
- Congregation is stuffy (2)
- More emphasis on inclusivity (2)
- More active anti-racism work (2)
- Better sermons (2)
- Stop community greeting during service (2)

NEWCOMERS’ OPINIONS

Thirty-eight people (28% of our sample) answered yes to the question, “Do you consider yourself relatively new to our congregation (less than five years or so)? They answered the following five questions.

How newcomers found us

Four in ten (40%) learned about the congregation by personal recommendation. This was the most frequent response. Nearly as many (36%) learned through our website. Some saw our building and walked in (16%), consulted the national UUA website (12%), or saw a listing in the Daily Hampshire Gazette (8%). N = 25
**Newcomers: Why did you first come to our Unitarian Society? N = 31**

Repeated themes and comments in order most frequently mentioned (numbers in parentheses indicate the approximate number of times this or a similar idea was expressed) N = 30

- UU who moved to area, looking for another UU congregation (cited by 7) (78% of newcomers are 50 or older)
- Long-time UU, looking for a UU congregation (didn’t mention moving) (5)
- Seeking a conducive spiritual home (5)
- Seeking connections with a community (5)
- Seeking a religious education program (3)
- Value the UU philosophy (3)
- Appreciated the worship services (2)
- Curiosity (2)

**Newcomers’ experiences**

Newcomers report they felt acceptance, warmth, hospitality, authenticity, caring and inspiration. Of these, acceptance, warmth, and hospitality were most strongly felt. N = 31
Newcomers’ initial welcome  Three quarters of newcomers felt warmly welcomed into our congregation. About half were invited to coffee hour or other events (56%) or introduced to others (50%), or encouraged to return (47%). A few felt ignored (13%), two were overwhelmed (6%) and one felt pressured (3%). N = 32

Newcomer integration  Over half of newcomers (55%) say it was somewhat of a challenge to get to know people and find their way into the life of our congregation. About four in ten found this relatively easy and six percent felt this a real challenge.

Newcomers’ continuing participation  Nearly three quarters (74%) of newer people say it’s very likely they will continue to participate in our congregation. The remaining quarter (26%) think this likely.

QUESTIONS FOR ALL  The balance of survey questions were presented to all survey respondents (N numbers indicate how many answered each question)
World news sources  Nine in ten (90%) learn about community, national, or world events through newspapers and magazines. Eight in ten learn through radio or TV. Few use blogs (8%), Twitter (4%), or Instagram (4% - only youth).

N = 125

USNF news sources  Congregants learn about our Unitarian Society primarily through email (77% frequent source), the Pioneer newsletter (75%), Sunday Times email (66%) and print (61%) versions, and Sunday announcements (59).

N = 125

How well-informed  Half (50%) feel very well informed and 44% somewhat informed about USNF activities and programs.

N = 124
What steps might we take to improve communication? Summary of repeated themes and comments
N = 42

- Doing OK, keep it up (cited 12 times)
- Not sure, no ideas come to mind (9)
- Use redundant means of communication (4)
- Continue Facebook updates (2)
- Print the Pioneer (2)
- Improve communication to youth (2)

Parlor visits  Nearly half (46%) often visit the parlor during social hour after Sunday services. A third (33%) sometimes do. Twelve percent rarely do and 9% do not. N = 124

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do you visit the parlor during social hour after Sunday services?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes, often</td>
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<td>46%</td>
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Please share your suggestions for changing/improving the social hour experience  N = 51

Summary of repeated themes and comments

- Parlor is crowded and noisy (Cited 17 times)
- Keep reminding us all to greet newcomers (6)
- Use social room more often (5)
- It’s OK, fine with me (5)
- Try games to meet new people (find someone wearing red) (3)
- Encourage folks to visit in the Great Hall (2)
- Identify/introduce newcomers (2)
- Move coffee service (2)
Social Justice and environmental issues  Climate action is the issue of highest concern, very important for 60%. Racial justice is very important for half (50%), Sanctuary and immigrant justice and political action are very important issues for 45%. Peace efforts are very important for 37% and Refugee work for 29.

N = 120

Active participation with public issues  Our members are actively engaged with many social justice and environmental issues. We work through USNF initiatives, through other organizations, by individual initiative, and through work. Sanctuary/immigration is the issue through which most are engaged through our USNF. Also important USNF initiatives are demonstration and vigils, lectures and workshops, and climate action work. Political action, peace efforts, and letter-writing advocacy are more often carried out through other organizations. The most important areas for individual initiative are climate action, racial justice, demonstrations, and letter writing. (Height of columns indicate proportion participating in each. Please see the chart next page for quantitative data). N = 114

The same social action/climate action data presented quantitatively on the next page.
More engagement  Just over half of us (51%) would like to be more engaged in social justice/climate action through USNF. (N = 110)  Summary of repeated themes and comments  N = 49

- Already deeply engaged (cited 13 times)
- Don’t have enough time (6)
- Already working at capacity (5)
- Not sure (4)
- Offer more anti-racism workshops/readings/initiatives (3)
- Identify specific tasks (3)
- Provide more information about how to be involved (3)
- Transportation a problem (2)
- Meetings not conveniently timed (2)

What else should we be doing as a congregation to advance social and environmental justice?  Summary of repeated themes and comments  N = 44

- We do a lot already, let’s keep it up (cited 10 times)
- Continue/expand interfaith efforts with other congregations (4)
- Highlight/celebrate stories of what we do, individually and collectively (4)
- Make anti-racism work a priority, readings, discussions (3)
- Invite more guest speakers or workshops (3)
- Stress climate action urgency (2)
- Political action is key (2)
- Sanctuary is great example of what we can do (2)
- Not sure (2)
Volunteer service  Over half of respondents (53%) have frequently served as a volunteer-support role and over a third (34%) have occasionally done so. N = 116

Leadership  Over half (53%) have served in leadership at USNF (elected position, chaired a committee, or initiated a congregational project and encouraged others to join them. N = 117

Why serve in leadership?  About two thirds of our leaders step up to leadership primarily for three reasons: to give back to our community (67%); they were asked (65%); they saw the need and stepped up (64%). Over a third (37%) wanted to meet and work with others. Numbers exceed 100% because people could select multiple options. N = 78

Leaders’ comments about their experience  Summary of repeated themes and comments N = 42

- Not currently in leadership, used to be more active (cited by 8)
- Learned a lot (7)
- Rewarding, fulfilling (7)
- Both challenging and rewarding (6)
- A good experience (5)
- Time consuming (4)
- Felt supported, appreciated (3)
- Inspiring (3)
- Became more connected with others (2)
- Energized, empowered (2)
- Stressful, difficult (2)
- Sort of/mixed results (2)

**What could help identify and nurture the leadership potential of more of our members?** Summary of repeated themes and comments  N = 42

- Ask directly, one-to-one (cited 9 times)
- Learn the strengths and skills of members (6)
- Offer more information about leadership opportunities, more invitations (6)
- Start people with small tasks and grow responsibilities (4)
- Mentoring (3)
- Training (3)
- Don’t know (3)

**What would encourage leadership** For those not yet in leadership, about four in ten (39%) said more information on what’s needed would encourage them. Over a quarter (28%) would welcome an invitation. A quarter (26%) might lead if working with a co-chair or partner. Fifteen percent wanted mentoring. The survey allowed multiple responses.

N = 46
Listening circles  Community Building, Social Justice, and Climate Action are the issues of most interest for listening circles to hear advice for our strategic plan. N = 108

What else is important for us to consider as we plan for the next few years? Summary of repeated themes and comments  N = 43

- Prepare for Janet’s eventual retirement/ministerial transition (8)
- Plan to help community during social/environmental disruption (4)
- Try to attract young people and families (3)
- Welcome diversity (2)
- Welcome and engage newcomers (2)
- Better interest/serve young people (2)
- More social/home gatherings (2)
- Help care for our elders (2)
- Shorter surveys (2)
- Thank you (2)