

**Ministerial Search Committee**  
**Cottage Meeting-Focus Group Summary**  
**Unitarian Universalist Church (UUCS) in Surprise, Arizona**

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this summary is to share highlights from the Cottage Meetings and Focus Groups hosted by the Ministerial Search Committee and to identify information that will be useful to the congregation and prospective ministerial candidates. The goal of these meetings was to engage the congregation in the search for a new minister and to better understand the congregation's perspective as part of this search.

This summary is based on discussions with current members and friends of UUCS over the course of eight small group meetings held from Oct. 12 to Nov. 1, 2022. The meetings were facilitated by members of the Search Committee. Notes were taken during the meetings by another member of the Search Committee. The results were analyzed by a member of the Search Committee with review by all committee members.

**Participation:**

The meetings included the following sessions with a total of 56 people:

- Two Cottage Meetings held in the homes of Search Committee members with a total of 13 people.
- One Focus Group held with nine members of the Choir.
- One Focus Group held with six members of the UUCS Board.
- One Focus Group held with six youth and one adult from the children's religious education program.
- One Focus Group held with the Women's Group with 7 people.
- Two Cottage Meetings held at UUCS with a total of 14 people.

**Who Participated?**

Participants either self-selected or were included by virtue of their membership in another group, such as the Board or Choir. The selection was not large enough nor randomly generated, meaning the results from the small group discussions cannot be extrapolated to represent the full congregation. The perspectives shared represent the participants. This summary represents one input opportunity among others, including, but not limited to, a congregational survey.

**Overview of Main Themes:**

Trends: These themes were repeated by several participants:

- Strong focus on relationships within the congregation and a yearning to have more connections with the community;

- Appreciation for diverse programming and music;
- A desire to expand membership, particularly among families with children;
- The need to attain financial sustainability.

Gems: These were shared once but offer memorable perspectives.

- “People care about me.”
- “We need more unicorns.”

**Summary by Question:**

Question #1: Think for a moment about the life of this congregation as you see it right now.

- *What do you want to keep the same about the congregation?*
  - Maintain positive relationships within the congregation and those we already have in the community.
  - Maintain connection with and support from members.
  - Continue offering quality programming in areas, such as music and religious education.
  - Maintain the vitality, connections, and casual atmosphere on Sundays.
  - Continue cultivating the importance of diversity in areas such as age, race, culture, and spiritual perspectives.
- *What do you wish was different?*
  - I wish we had greater presence in and involvement with the community at large.
  - I wish we had a greater focus on new member recruitment and a more diverse membership, including people of color and families with children.
  - I wish we were more stable financially.
  - I wish we were more connected with the UUA.
  - I wish we had more flowers, art, and colors in the building.
  - I wish we would bring back people sharing their own joys and sorrows in worship, and add more spiritual elements and contemporary music.
  - I wish we had more involvement in social justice activities, opportunities for spiritual growth and religious education programs.

Question #2: What do you want the life of this congregation to look like after one or five years with our new minister?

- We have expanded diverse programming, particularly in music and spirituality.
- We have a minister who is personable, present, and supports the members, one who is genuinely connected with the congregation.
- We are an enthusiastic growing congregation with many families and activities.
- We are offering intergenerational Sunday services that feature rituals and thought-provoking discourse.
- We are engaged in the community, including other UU congregations.

Question #3: What will be your part in working with a new minister to create the beloved community here at UUCS?

- I will be an active participant in the services, programs, and social interactions of the congregation.
- I will personally donate and volunteer.
- I will communicate effectively with members, lay leadership, and the new minister.

Question #4: How can we build more connections with the community and with greater diversity?

- Volunteer in the community.
- Share the congregation's music at community events.
- Host community events at the congregation.
- Maintain a stronger presence in the community.
- Conduct targeted outreach to communities and congregations of color.