

Unitarian Church of Vancouver – 2016 Visioning Survey Summary

Compiled from responses to survey questionnaires distributed to the UCV congregation in early October, 2016. What follows is a summation of the most popular or common responses.

Motivations that brought you to UCV/What keeps you going here?

NOTE: There was a great deal of overlap in the answers to both of these questions, so I have combined them into one section.

- Seeking a progressive, non-dogmatic spiritual community to be amongst people of like mind – the church provides many opportunities for social, spiritual, and intellectual engagement
- Resonance with Unitarian Universalist values
- Seeking spiritual guidance, solace, and comfort following a personal loss or major life change
- A desire to be more active role in community affairs through advocacy for/participation in social justice, environmental, and refugee committees
- An intangible feeling of ‘coming’ or ‘being’ ‘home’
- Seeking a spiritual community that is welcoming to families, youth and small children
- Interested in religious education programs (both for adults and for youth/children)
- Appreciation of the physical space – the beauty and tranquility of the church buildings and grounds
- The ‘outstanding music and musicians’ (enjoyment of the choir was by far one of the most universal responses)
- Steven’s sermons/presence/personal approach to the ministry (another very common response)
- Familial legacy of Unitarian Universalism and/or referrals from friends and colleagues

What are the challenges and drawbacks?

- A lack of ethnic/cultural/spiritual/economic diversity in the congregation
- Concerns over the aging congregation and the relative lack of young families and newcomers to the church
- Concerns over Steven’s retirement and succession
- Several people commented that the congregation is not as inclusive as it could be, especially considering that inclusivity is cited as a core value of the church – they have had trouble getting

to know people and navigating the social 'heirarchy', or have had negative experiences with some of the more longstanding or active members (negativity, cynicism, judgmental attitudes, factionalism/elitism, etc.)

- Concerns about financial instability, both within the church itself and in the greater Vancouver area as a whole
- Several people were sensitive to what they perceived as pressure to contribute more financially – concerned that the church is exclusionary toward people in lower income brackets
- Concerns about too few people undertaking too much of the important work – paradox of committee members needing more help, but also being resistant to accepting it, especially from newcomers
- Lack of time/over-commitment in other areas of life prevents many people from being more active in church services or programs
- Travel time/lack of accessibility via public transit

Considerations/suggestions for the future

- Focus on outreach and public engagement – build bridges with local organizations and institutions with similar values, as well as local aboriginal communities and other spiritual communities – in order to increase the overall strength and diversity of the congregation
- Work to further increase accessibility while minimizing environmental footprint of the buildings & grounds
- Consider bringing back the Adult Religious Education program (this was a popular response)
- Several people voiced a desire for more ritual/pageantry in church services or in church-sanctioned events
- Several people put forward the idea of 'rebranding' to remove the word 'church' and replace it with something more 'neutral', such as 'community', the rationale being that many people find that the word 'church' is triggering or has certain connotations (dogmatism, oppression, etc.) that people are resistant to or suspicious of. There are many people in the world today who are spiritually-inclined, but who do not resonate with the idea of a 'church' as it is popularly conceived – the idea is that since the UCV offers a non-dogmatic approach to spirituality that is open to and accepting of all cultures and beliefs, it should take efforts to distance itself from the word 'church' in order to better engage with young spiritual seekers.
- Coordinate a ride-sharing program to make it easier for people to attend on Sundays (particularly elders) – this would also have positive environmental effects as well

- Look for opportunities to create a Unitarian presence in other areas of the city – e.g, creating location-based ‘splinter groups’ of the various committees to help tackle local issues and increase community engagement, offering classes or talks in public venues, distributing UU materials to community centers and libraries, etc. As wonderful as the buildings and grounds are, there are concerns that focusing too much of the congregation’s collective energy within a singular location is not advantageous when it comes to community engagement
- Create more ‘fun’ opportunities to gather outside of the Sunday services – circle dances, pot lucks, etc.
- Involve local government: invite local MPs to attend Sunday services/committee meetings, etc.
- Nurture stronger relationships with other Unitarian churches and the Unitarian Council of Canada
- Several people responded: ‘more of the same’. ☺

Compiled by Marcus Hynes, Office Assistant (info@vancouverunitarians.ca). The raw data from which this report was compiled is also available as an Excel spreadsheet.