



**Ministerial  
Search Committee**

**Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Princeton  
Ministerial Search Committee 2010  
Summary of Questionnaire Findings  
March 2010**

## **Introduction**

During February 2010, the UUCP Ministerial Search Committee invited members and friends of the congregation to participate in the ministerial search process by completing a confidential online or paper questionnaire. They received an email linking them to the survey web site or a paper copy through regular mail if they did not have an email address on file with the UUCP office.

To ensure the widest participation in the survey, members of the Youth Group completed the online survey during one of their meetings. Additionally, children in the RE program shared their thoughts and ideas through a brief paper survey completed during the RE Children's Worship. Those results are included in the addendum.

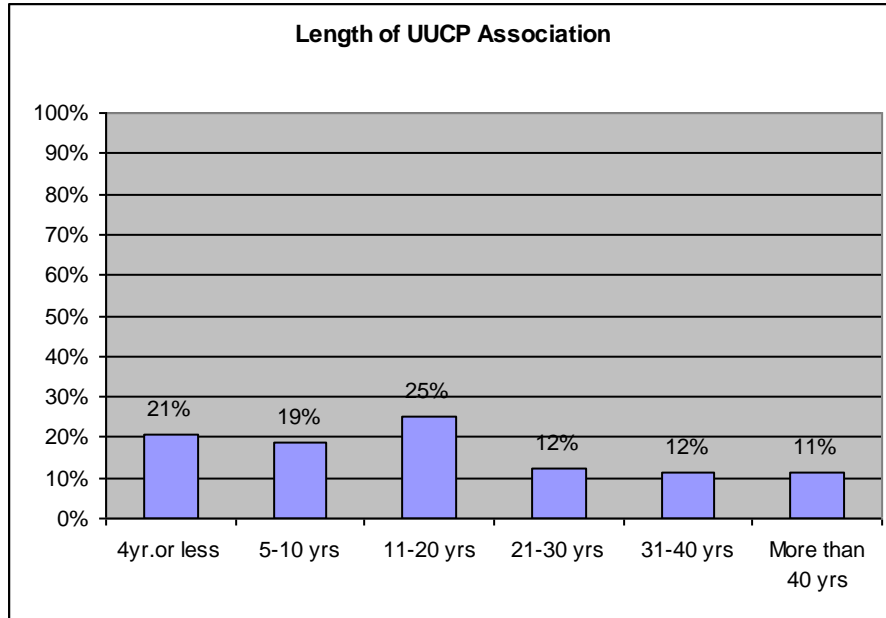
The Ministerial Search Committee designed the survey with the hope that the results would help it describe UUCP to prospective ministerial applicants, as well as help the committee understand the congregation's preferences for the type of person it should seek to be the new minister.

The time frame for the survey was the month of February. Out of a current official membership of 365, a total of 236 respondents completed the questionnaire. Of the 236 responding to the questionnaire, 193 reported they were members (58% of UUCP's total membership of 365), 31 reported they were friends, and 12 did not answer this question.

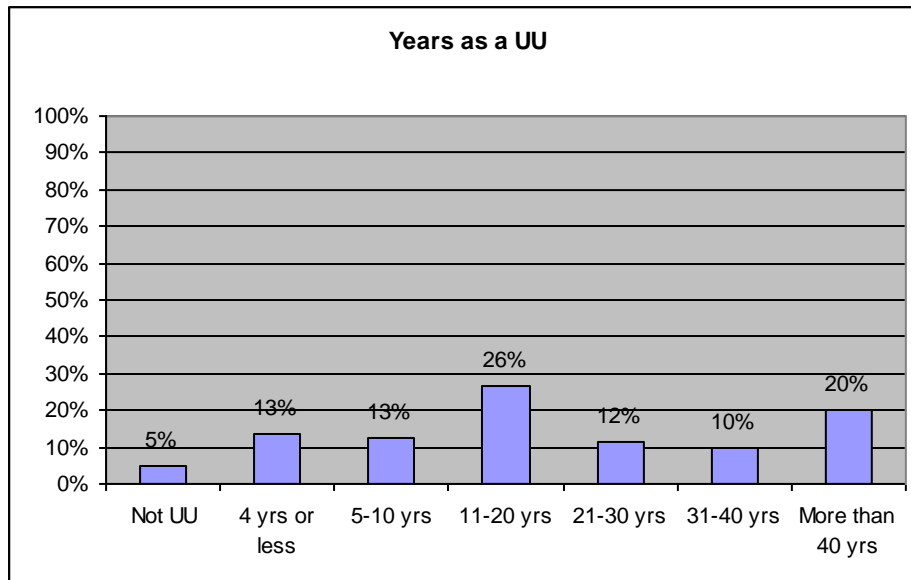


## Who We Are

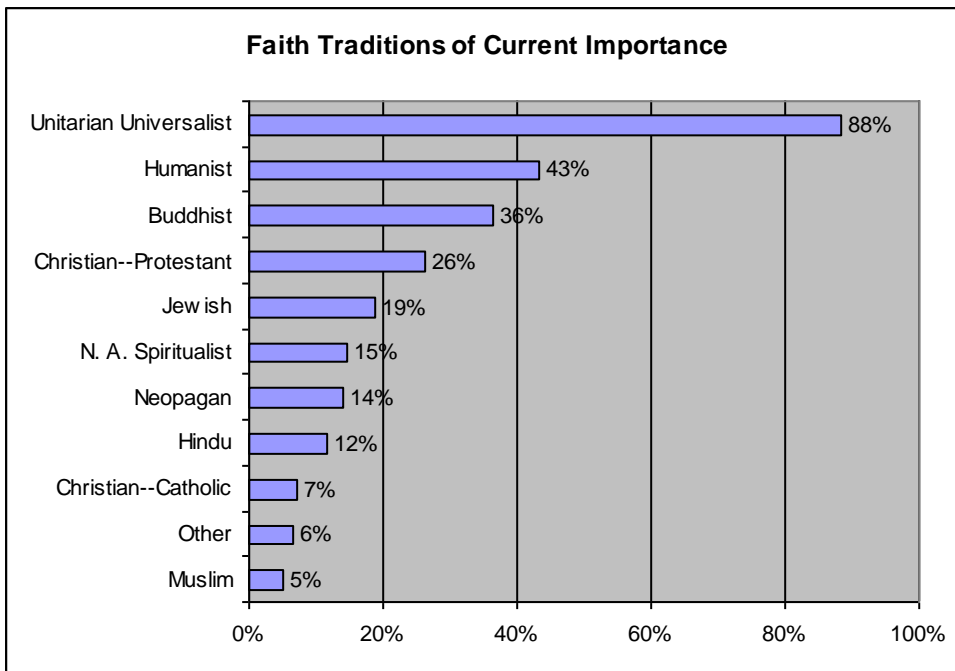
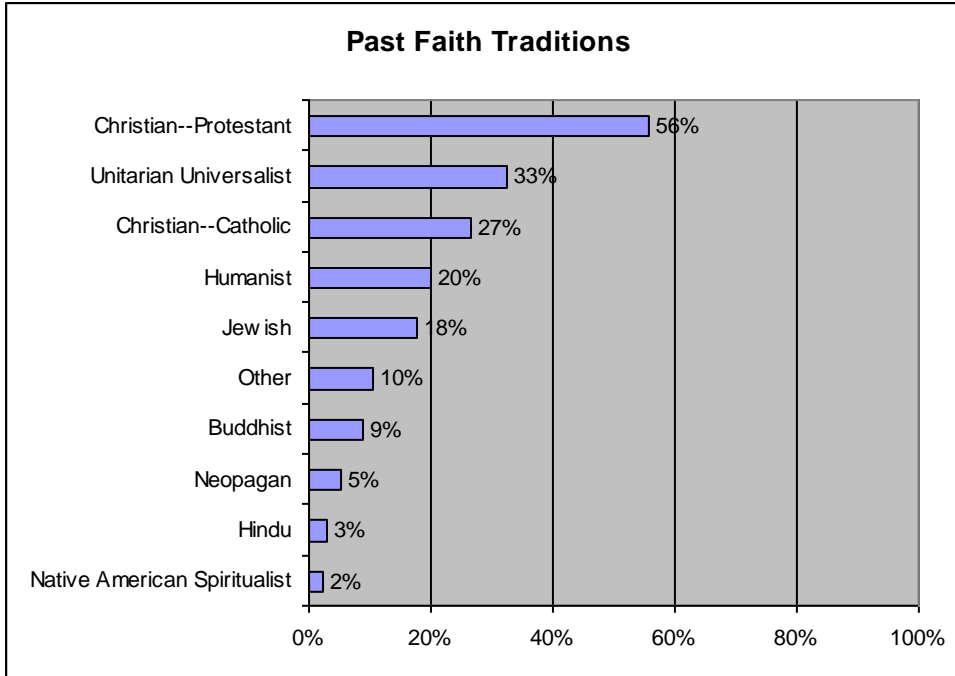
The congregation is fairly uniformly distributed among those with short-, medium-, and long-term associations with UUCP.



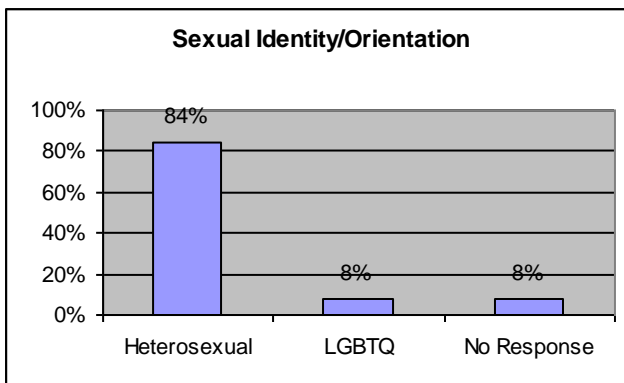
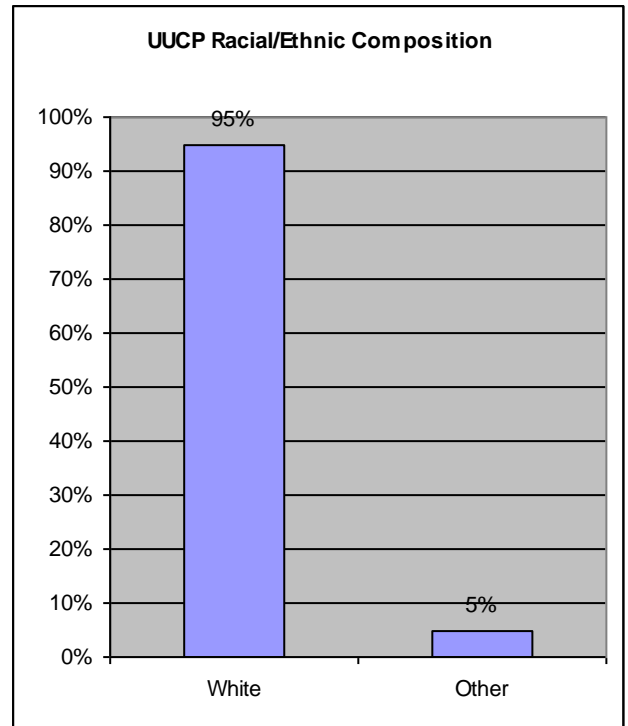
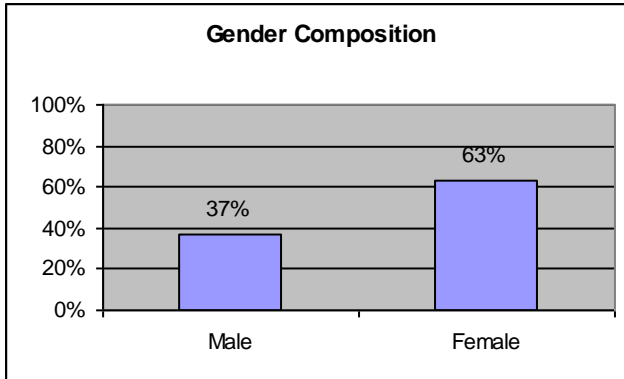
Many members are long-time Unitarian Universalists.



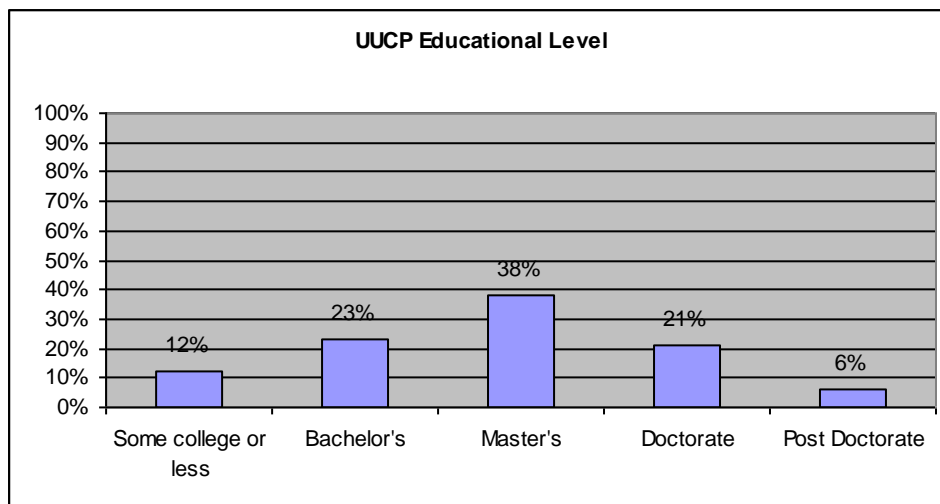
The past faith traditions of current UUCP participants are varied, as are those faith traditions currently important to them.



More females than males responded to the survey and 95% of the survey participants were white. Most respondents self-identified as heterosexual (82%). Eight percent indicated an identity with the LBGQT community and 8% did not respond.

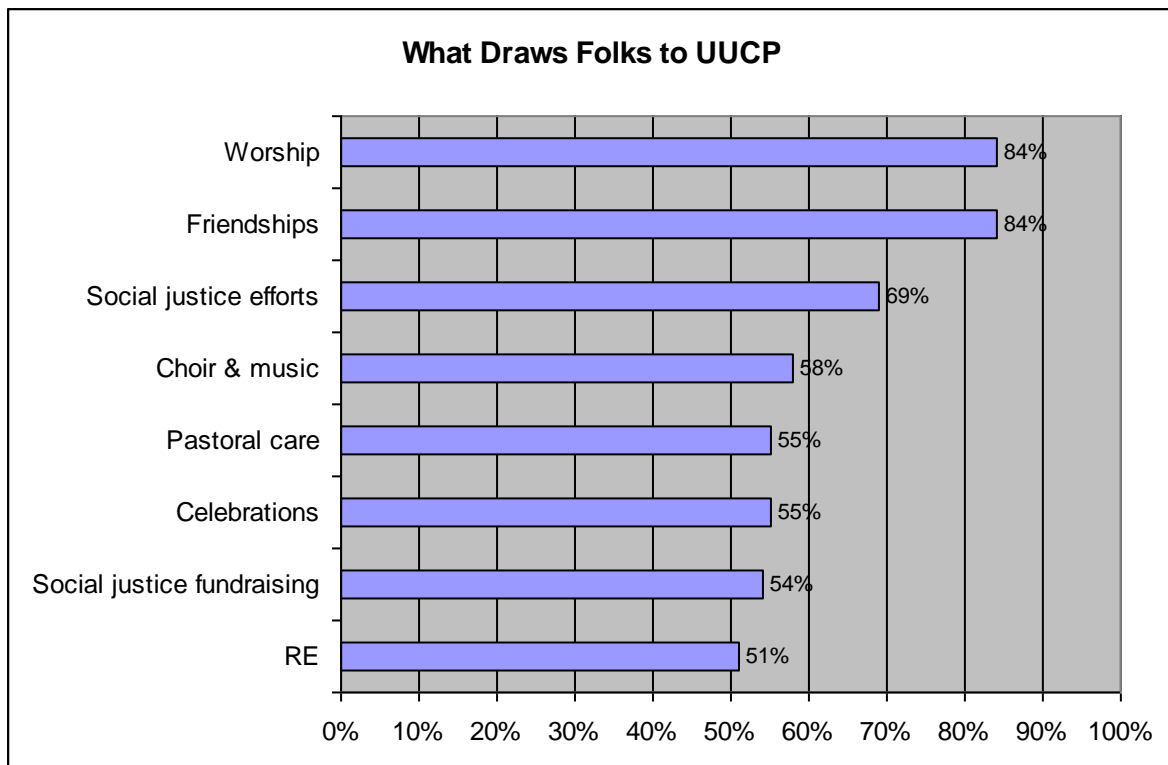


Reported ages of the 218 responding to the age question ranged from 15 to 91 with the average 57. Forty-five percent were over 60. Of the 218 respondents who reported their current educational attainment, most had at least a bachelor's degree or higher. All youth taking the survey were still attending high school.

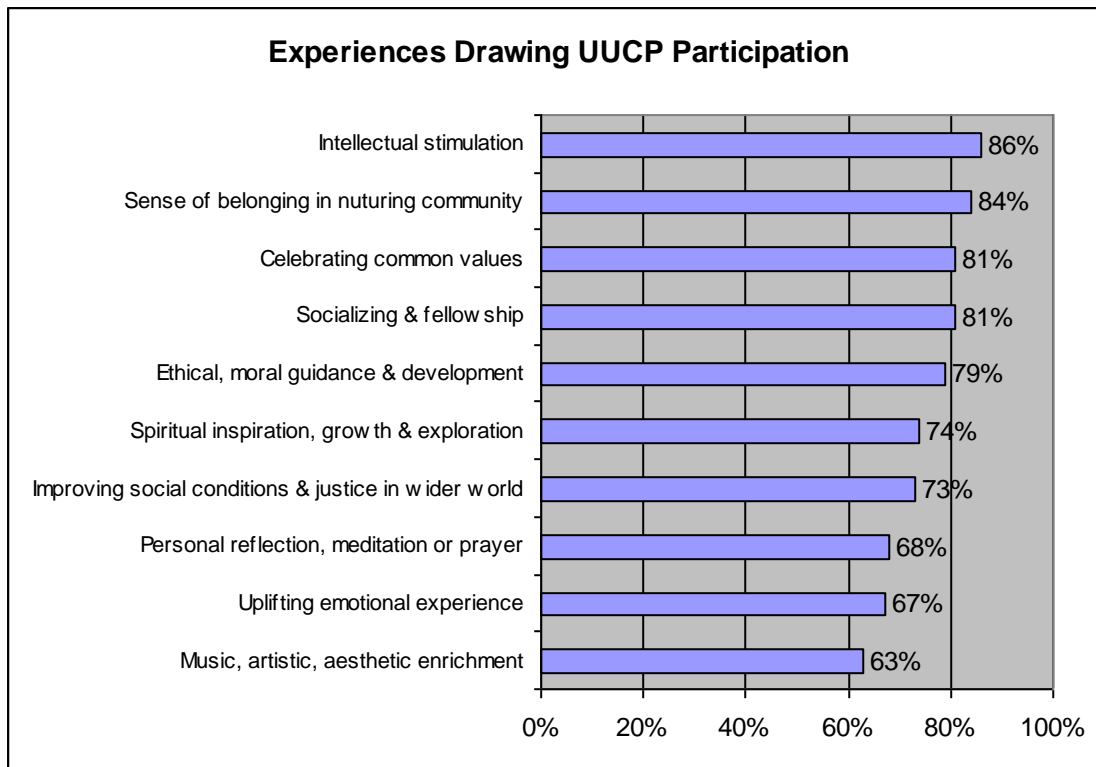


## What UUCP Means to Us

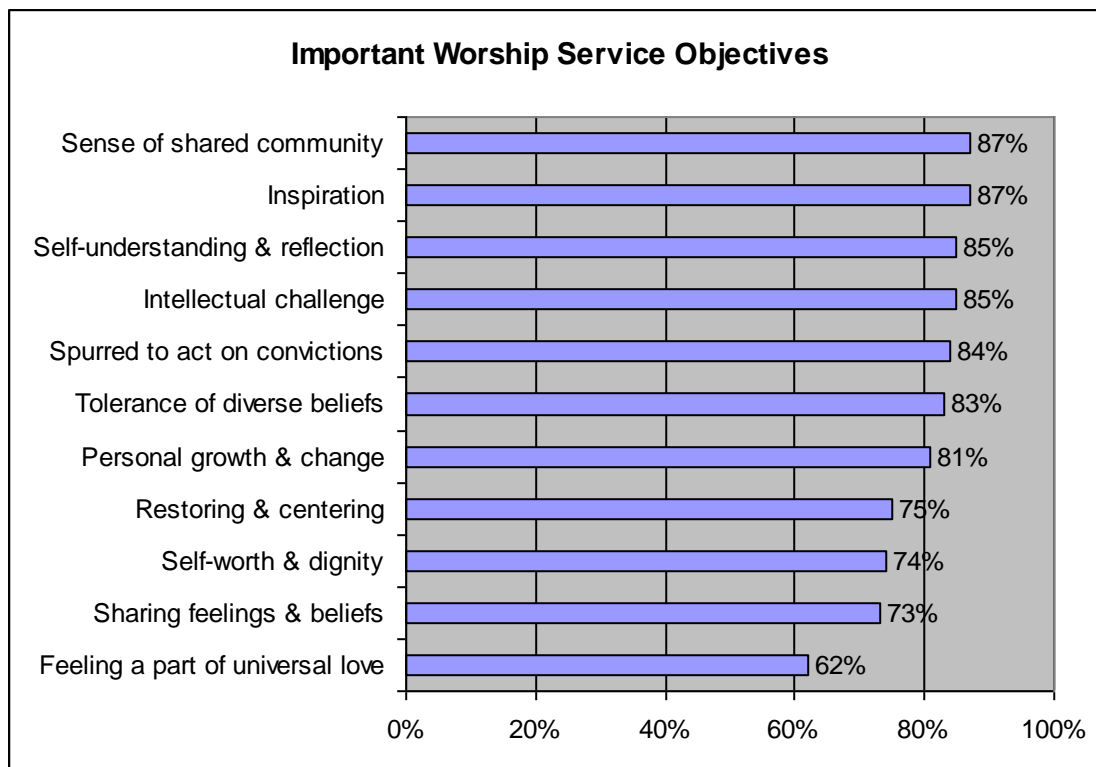
A number of activities keep people engaged with UUCP. Worship service and friendships lead among those items that were rated as *important* or *most important* to their continued participation.



Participation in UUCP activities and programs provides meaningful experiences that draw continued participation. Those of most value to survey respondents include intellectual, social, spiritual, emotional, and aesthetic experiences.

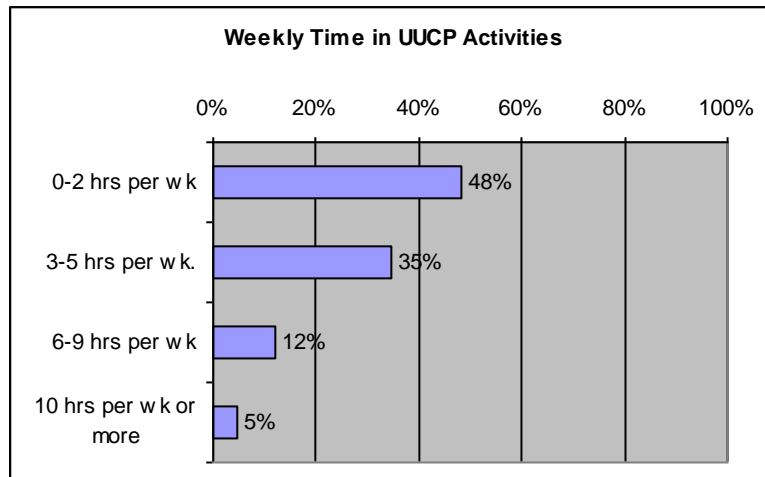


When asked about the importance of worship service objectives, those responding to the survey were in close agreement as to their value.

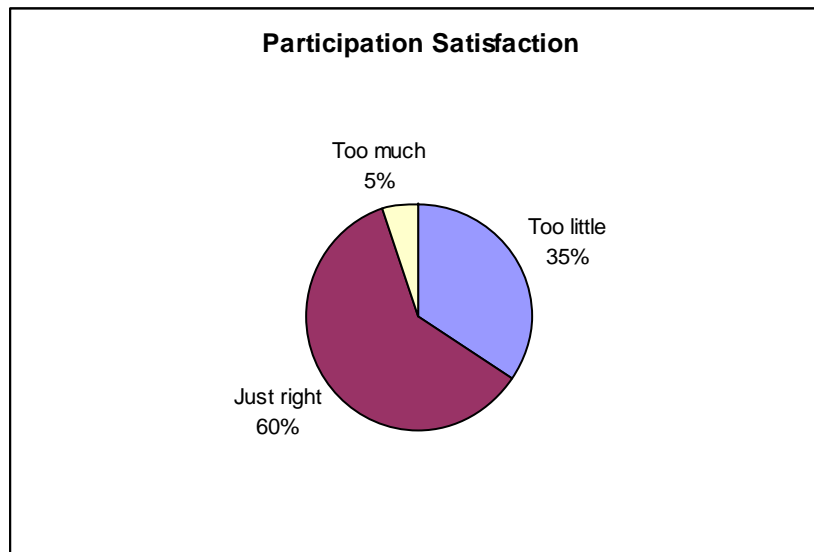


Sixty-three, or 27%, of survey participants reported that they currently had (approximately) two children in the Religious Education program. They reported a total of 112 children participating in RE or the Youth Group. This is 64% of the total RE enrollment of 175.

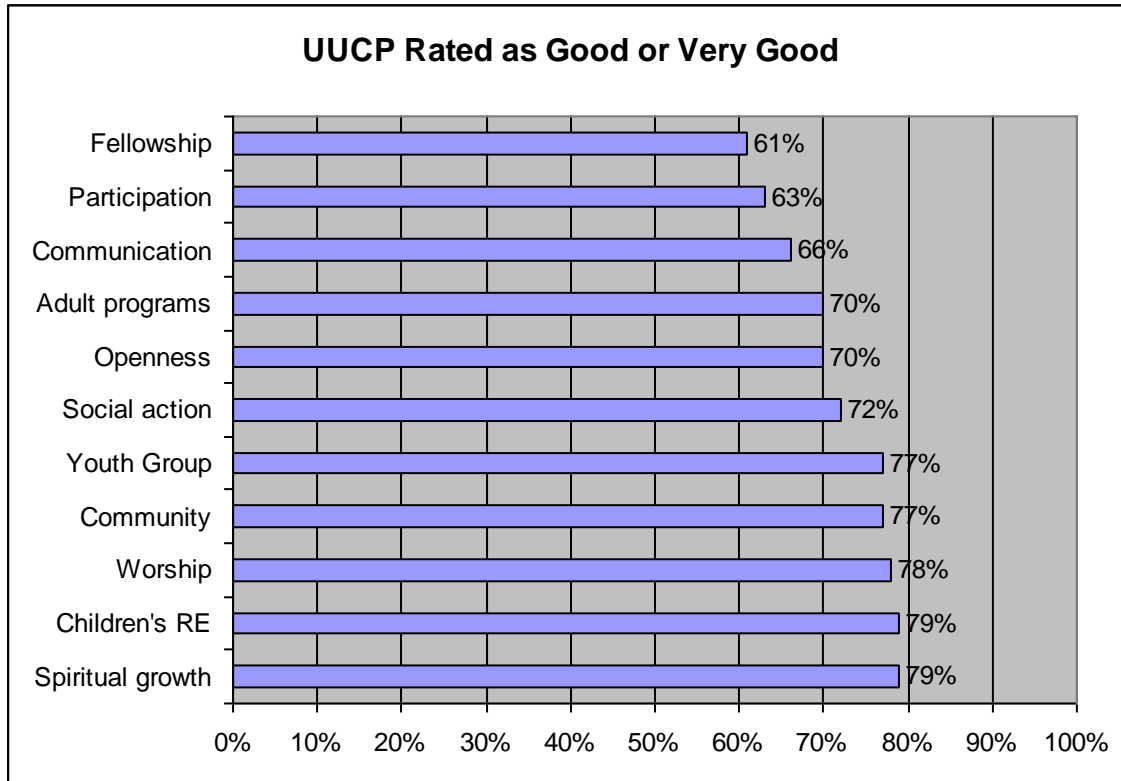
Almost half of those who responded to the survey limit their participation at UUCP pretty much to their attendance at worship and subsequent socialization (0-2 hours per week). Fifty-two percent contribute three hours or more per week. Seventeen percent, often those in lay leadership roles, contribute six hours or more per week



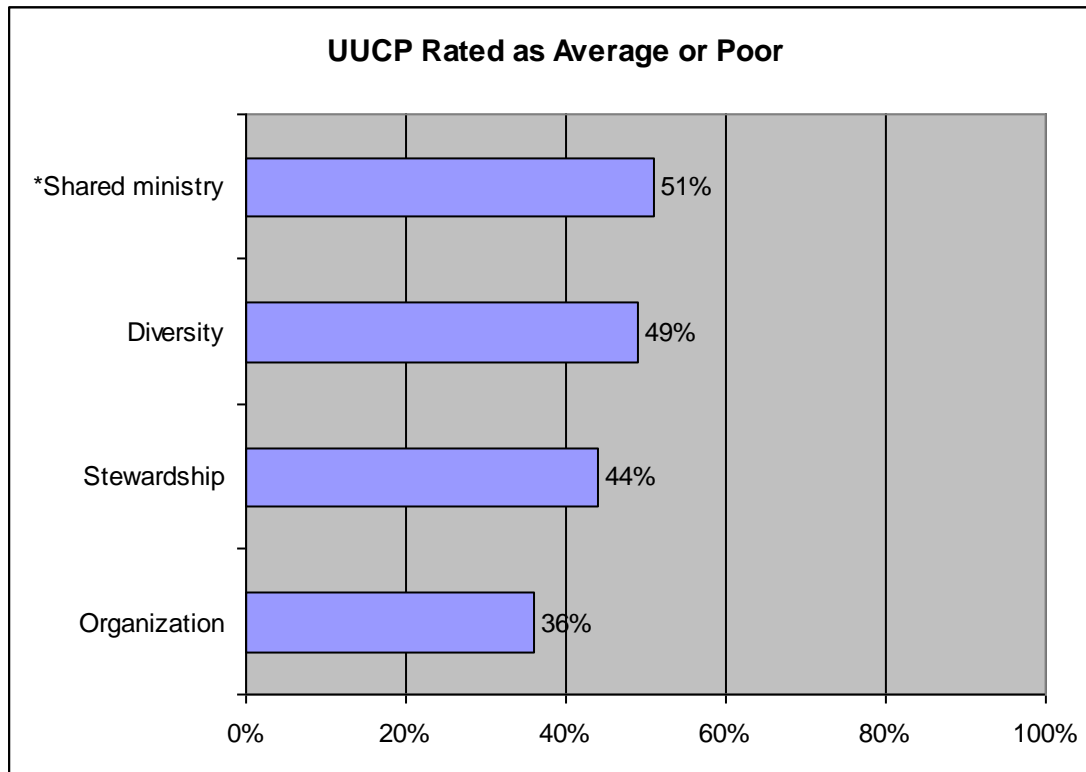
Most are satisfied with their level of participation, although more than a third reported it to be too little. This may be an indicator of an untapped reserve of those ready to increase their participation in UUCP activities. Only 5% indicated that they feel overburdened by the time they contribute.



When asked to rate how well UUCP was doing on a set of items, those responding rated the congregation as good or very good in the following areas, shown as percentages.

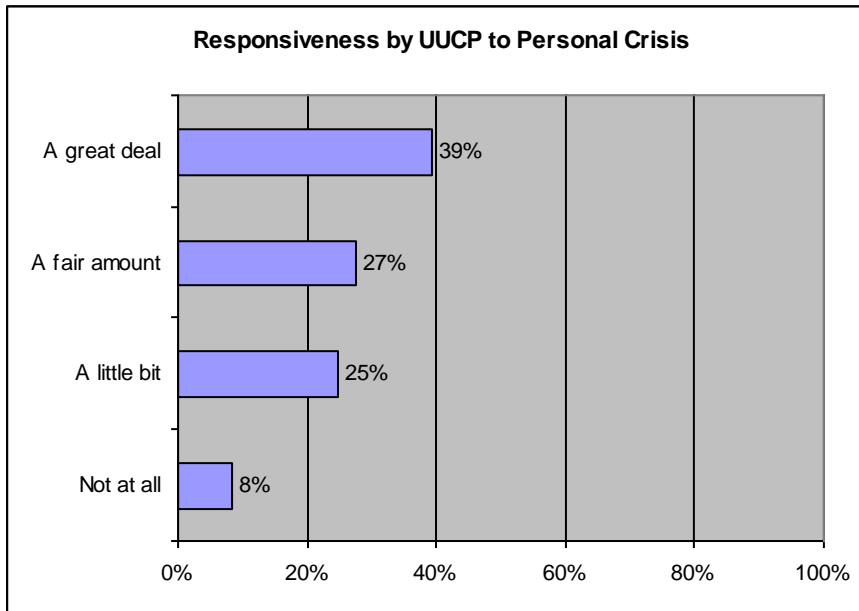


UUCP was rated as average or poor in five areas.

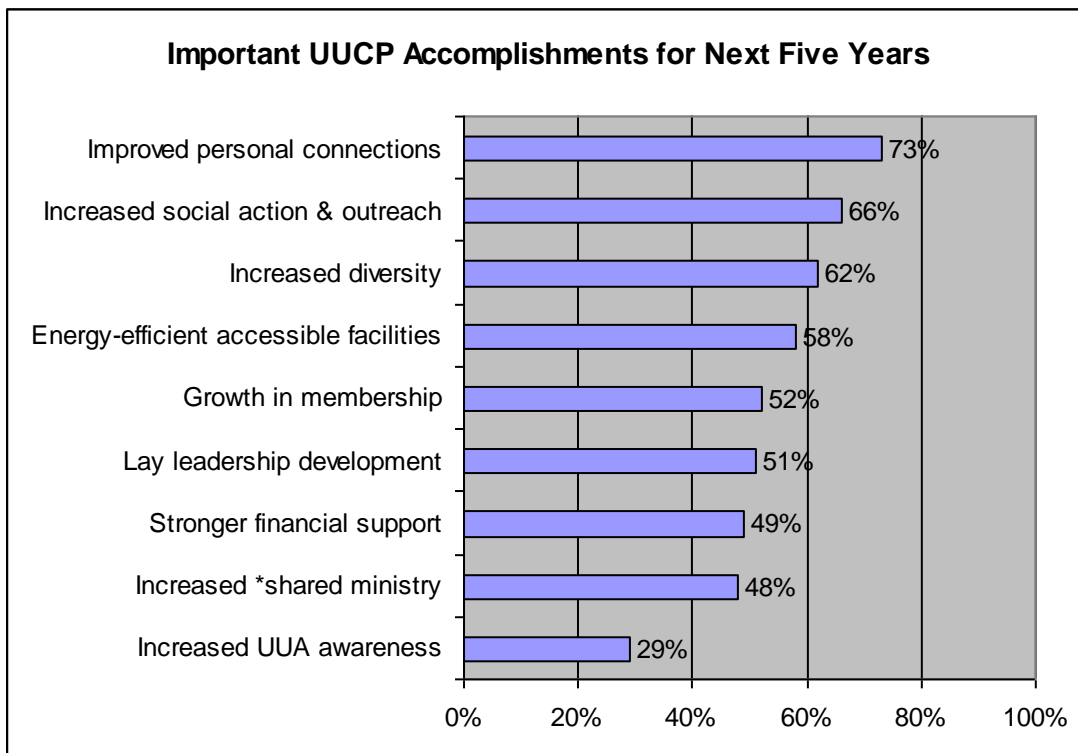


*\* While congregants were completing the online questionnaire, they were also attending cottage meetings sponsored by the Board of Trustees to discuss the forms of ministry it wanted to consider. One form, currently being used by UUCP is co-ministry – two ministers with equal pay and benefits. In the questionnaire we asked about shared ministry, which includes all that the ministers, lay leaders, and congregants do to accomplish our mission as a congregation. It is possible that some respondents were confused by the term and read shared ministry as co-ministry.*

For the 142 (60%) respondents who reported needing support in a crisis (health, personal, economic, etc.), two-thirds reported that UUCP had been responsive to them.



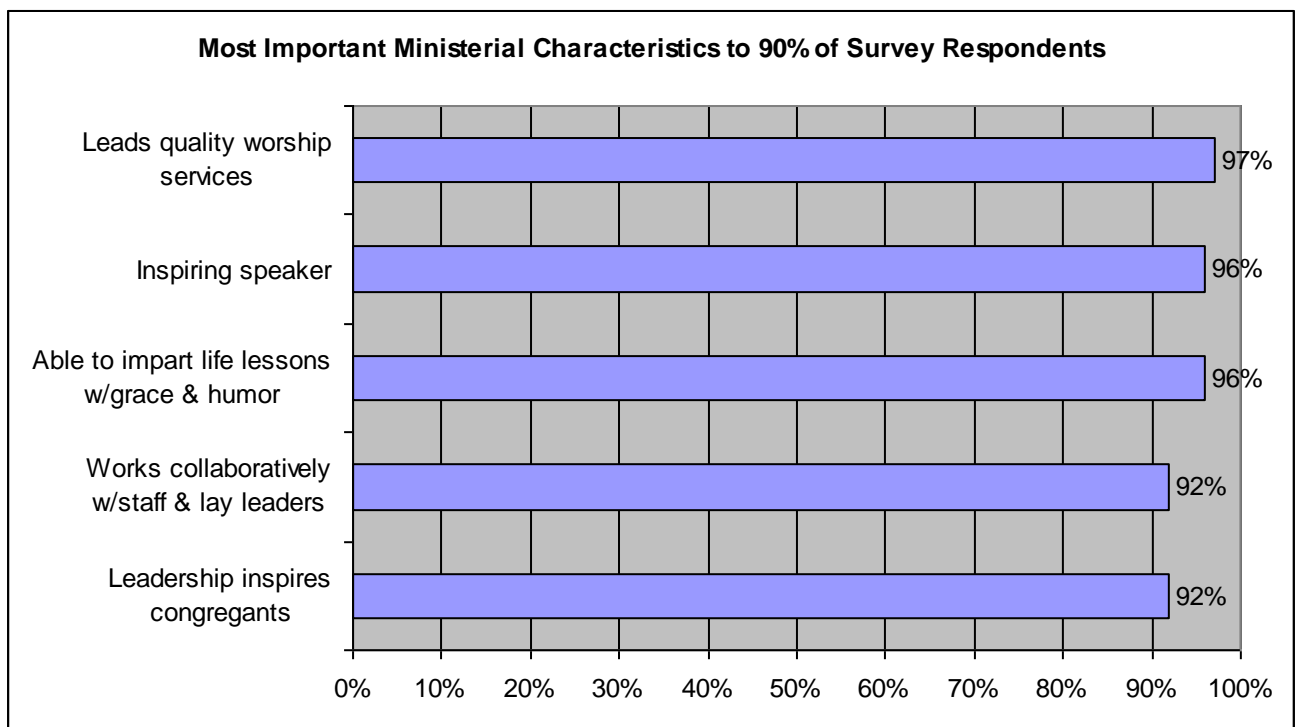
Nine accomplishments for the next five years were rated as important or most important.



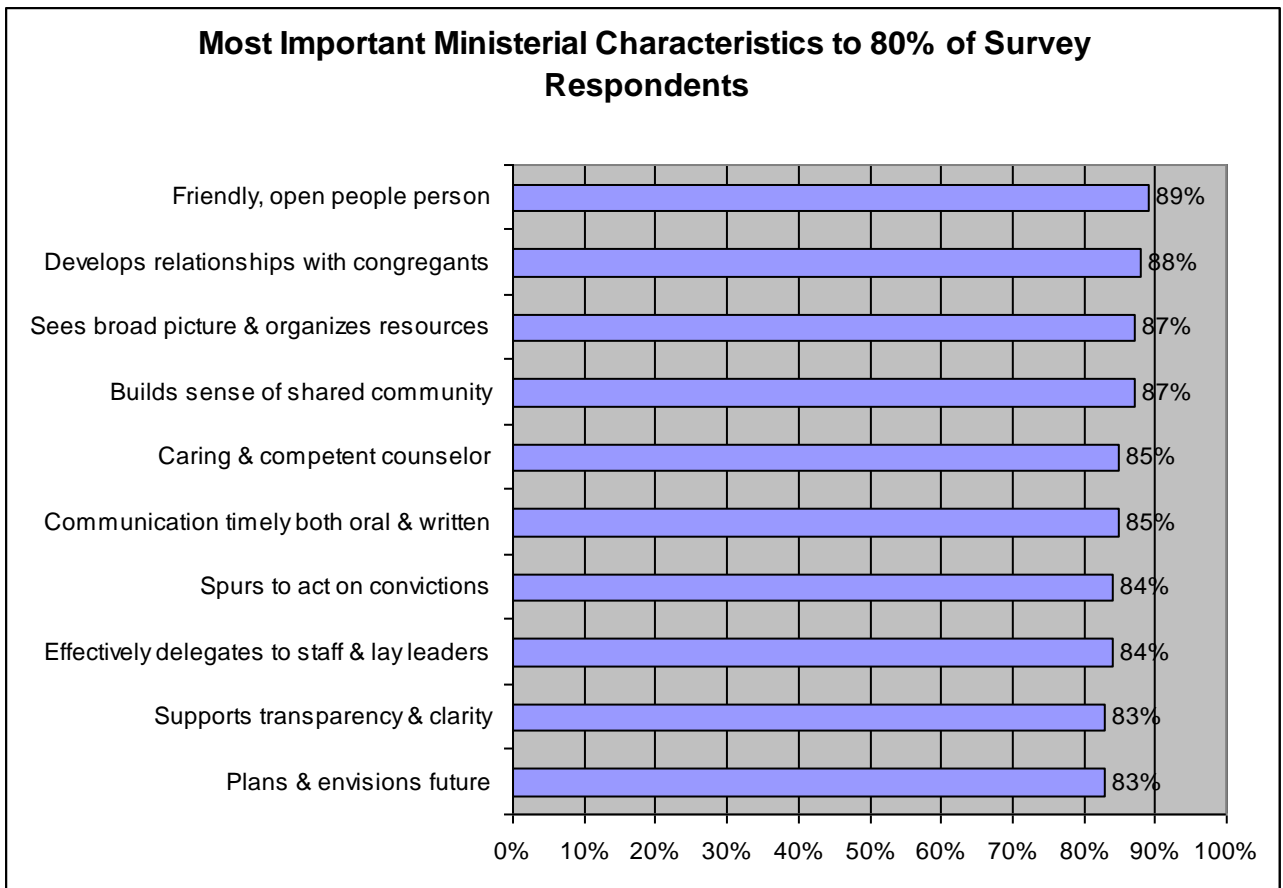
## What We Want from Our New Minister

The survey presented participants with a variety of personal characteristics, and ministerial and administrative skills. It asked them to rate the importance of items for the new minister.

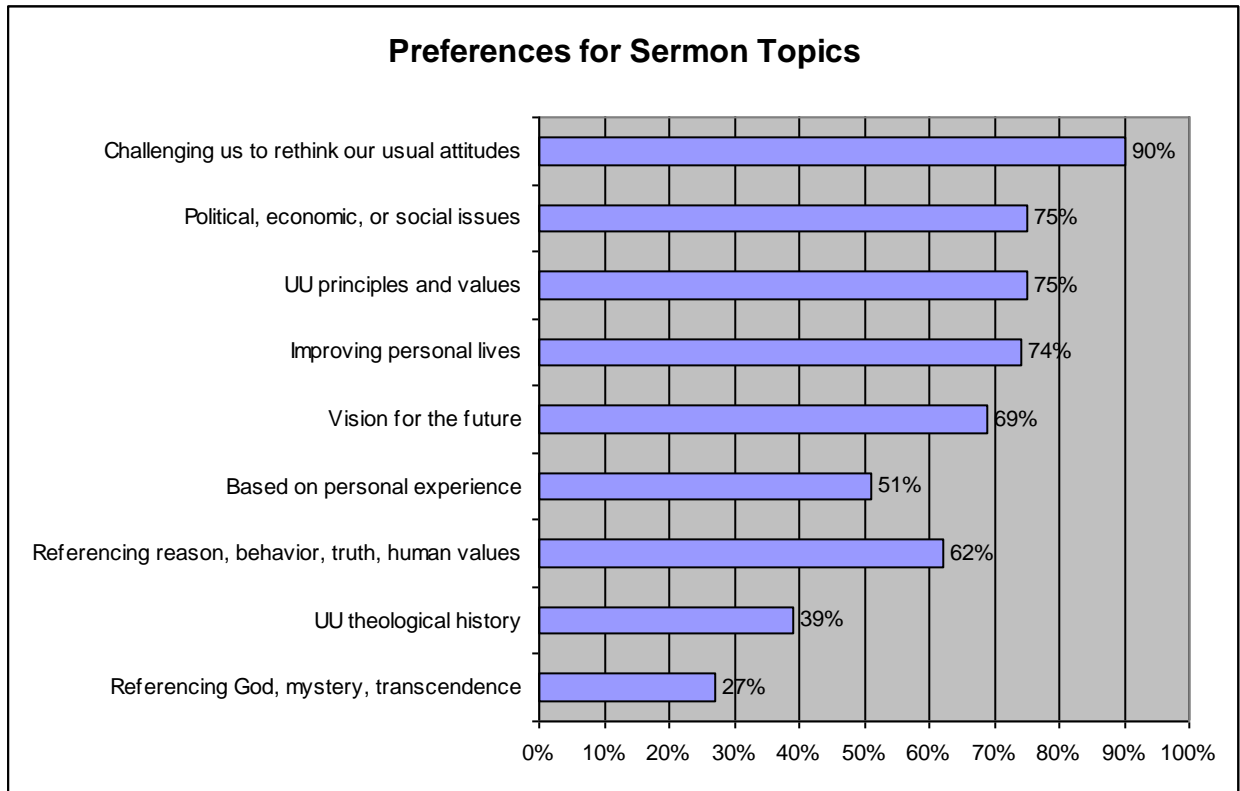
Five characteristics were identified by 90% or more of the survey respondents as important or most important for the new minister.



Eighty percent of survey respondents rated ten more ministerial characteristics as important or most important.



Although UUCP congregants celebrate a minister’s freedom in the pulpit, they do express a clear preference in the type of sermon topic they would like to hear preached.



## **Open-ended Questions**

### **What expectations do you have about the minister's family and personal life?**

More than half (56%) of respondents gave no response or specifically noted that they had no expectations about the minister's family and personal life.

*I have no expectations and do not believe their family and personal life is relevant.*

Another 10% commented that they affirmatively supported the minister having a family and personal life as a healthy balance, but they had no specific expectations.

*I would like our settled minister to be settled in his or her family life.*

*I think a minister needs to balance one's personal life with the life of the congregation.*

Thirty-one comments (13%) stated that they expected the minister's family to be involved at some level in the life of the UUCP congregation.

*It would be lovely for them to be part of the community.*

*While I don't expect the minister's family to play leadership roles in the church, it would be nice to have them be a part of the congregation, in the same way you would hope most members of the congregation would be.*

Eleven percent expected that the minister would uphold UU principles and ethical conduct in her/his family and personal life.

*I expect that the minister we call will model caring, compassionate relationships.*

*The minister shall not abuse or exploit family members and shall not commit crimes in his or her personal life except for such acts of civil disobedience as may be necessary for social-justice causes.*

Finally 9% stated that they expected that family and personal life would not interfere with the minister's performance of UUCP duties. They did expect the personal and familial aspects of the minister's life to be supportive of his/her professional responsibilities.

*I would hope that the minister's family will support him/her in their work on a personal level.*



*I would hope that there would not be so much turmoil, distraction, or need in the family or personal life that the minister would not be able to carry out the work of UU ministry.*

*...however, it should not negatively impact his/her performance.*

### **In your opinion, what is the best thing a new minister could do?**

Almost everyone taking the survey made comments in response to this question. Most of these responses fell into six conceptual categories – *inspire, embrace, preach, unite, listen and learn, and be authentic.*

Mentioned at least 63 times, the *best* thing for a new minister would be leading, inspiring, and energizing. Sample comments follow:

*Inspire us toward a deeper spiritual experience . . . to be a congregation that is a force for good.*

*Energize the congregation.*

*Bring out the best in us; get us to work together for our common aims.*

*Challenge people to think and feel in complex ways about their spiritual life.*

*Inspire me spiritually. Raise me up. Make me a better person.*

*Help me with being inspired, revitalized to go into the next day with joy and knowledge that I can spread the light, even if it is only with one person that week.*

The next “best” thing identified 25 times for the “new minister was the idea of embracing and getting acquainted with the congregation.

*Be open, friendly, accepting of differences, and become empowered by the people in the congregation.*

*I hope the new minister will show enthusiasm and affection for the congregation as we are, but also as we could be, in ways we may not yet have seen for ourselves.*

*Embrace the community with enthusiasm.*



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*Really get to know people.*

*Be involved with UU community, making sure to know people's names and how they are involved with the Princeton community.*

*Find us to be a challenge but not a threat; want to work with us and help us grow.*

Many respondents believed that the *best* thing a new minister could do is preach well. They mentioned this 23 times in comments such as the following:

*Be a really good, intelligent, inspiring, dynamic, and interesting speaker. Share ideas and explorations and learning with congregation, so as to expand our own spiritual and religious education and awareness.*

*Give excellent sermons!*

*Give inspiring sermons!*

*Give great, wonderful, inspiring sermons.*

*[Provide] sermons that are interesting to listen to and leave one thinking.*

Uniting the congregation, including expanding its membership, diversity, and participation, is another hope for a *best* effort of a new minister. The concept of unity and building community turned up in 22 of the comments.

*Help a strong community grow stronger still, in part, by broadening participation in the various ministries and activities of the congregation.*

*Encourage growth and diversity and social justice across the generations.*

*Build a stronger sense of community in our congregation.*

*Bring the congregation together.*

Many (18) mentioned that a *best* action for a new minister is to *listen and learn* during the first year of ministry.

*Learn about the congregation; especially what in the past it has done well and what it has done poorly.*

*Listen to and communicate with congregants to understand the nature of the congregation before making any major change.*



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*Slowly work themselves into the fabric of the congregation.*

*Tread lightly while establishing rapport.*

*Be willing to listen and learn.*

Finally, also mentioned 18 times, was the view that the best thing a new minister could do is be *authentically him/herself*.

*Love his/her work!*

*Be open and transparent with congregants as is comfortable (and in good taste) with all parties.*

*Be charismatic, joyful, hopeful, and intelligent.*

*Be a person who walks the walk, then talks.*

*Smile.*

*Make people laugh.*

*Be sincere.*

*Be enthusiastic, energetic and excited--approachability is key.*

*Be personable and able to be honest about their own search for truth.  
Bring a breath of fresh air into the congregation.*

**In your opinion, what is the worst thing a new minister could do?**

As in the question about the best thing a new minister could do, this question elicited a variety of responses. Respondents were most concerned that the new minister not ***disengage from the congregation, handle change inappropriately, alienate the congregation, be uninspiring, be rigid and autocratic, be ineffectual, and betray trust.***

The most mentioned concern was *disengaging from the congregation* by being unfriendly, distant, cold, aloof, not showing up, or leaving after only a few years. Sample comments follow:

*Leave after a short stay.*



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*Be unfriendly, unreachable, contemptuous, and disinterested in the individuals in the congregation.*

*The worst thing would be to not know who we are and want to be.*

*Not be involved; remove themselves from the community.*

Under matters related to change, respondents thought the minister could make mistakes in both implementing and avoiding change.

*Change things without first getting a feel for what the congregation wants.*

*Not build on our strengths—keep the status quo.*

*Try to change too many things too quickly.*

*The worst thing would be to arrive with an agenda—with a preconceived notion of how our congregation should be led—not finding out who we are, what we want, and what we need from him/her.*

People thought the minister could make the error of alienating through relationships, being divisive, or promoting a religious agenda.

*Get caught in conflict and take sides, splitting the congregation.*

*Be a divisive force; be opinionated.*

*Divide the congregation through favoritism.  
Become a polarizing influence.*

*Talk about God too much.*

*Act superior, discriminate, or offend members.*

*Become identified with any of the myriad power groups in the congregation.*

The most often cited best thing for a minister was to be inspirational, so many agreed that it would be unacceptable for a minister to be boring, uninspiring, humorless, cold, or cerebral.

*Be boring, self-righteous, social advocate do-gooder.  
Be boring and too intellectual.*



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*Poor preaching, poor teaching.*

*Give poor sermons.*

*Fail to inspire me. Fail to raise me up.*

Whereas leadership was seen as an important best asset, inappropriate leadership worried some.

*Attempt to run the church as a business proposition rather than a place supporting spiritual growth.*

*Worst...come in with preconceived ideas that seem to dictate to others.*

*Be excessively autocratic without responding to needs of congregation.*

*Be insensitive to other people and be overly concerned about self and image.*

*In a pompous manner, discount the gifts and talents of the congregants.*

*A person rigid in their thinking and who needs absolute control.*

An inexperienced minister who feels overwhelmed could create problems according to some comments.

*To be disingenuous in any way. Do not try to meet everyone's various expectations – simply impossible.*

*Through lack of experience or lack of self-awareness harm congregants or the community.*

*Be afraid to have an opinion.*

*Be a divisive flake trying to be everything to everyone and ending up being nothing to anyone.*

*Insist on doing this by him/herself. Fail to inspire the rest of us to get involved and active.*

Finally, some comments saw the worst in the betrayal of trust by the minister.

*Be the source of some kind of icky personal or ethical behavior or scandal. Not having it together personally.*



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*Be fake.*

*Be dishonest and betray our trust.*

*Steal the money.*

## Addendum: RE Children's Survey Results

|                                |     |      |
|--------------------------------|-----|------|
| <b>Total Surveys Submitted</b> | 57  | 100% |
| <b>Characteristics</b>         |     |      |
| Girls                          | 26  | 46%  |
| Boys                           | 31  | 54%  |
| <b>Average age</b>             | 9.7 |      |
| Youngest                       | 4   |      |
| Oldest                         | 14  |      |
| <b>Attendance</b>              |     |      |
| Weekly                         | 33  | 67%  |
| Bimonthly                      | 13  | 27%  |
| 1 a month or less              | 3   | 6%   |
| Unreported                     | 10  | --   |

Official RE enrollment is 175. The 57 completed surveys represent a third of all children enrolled.

After giving information about themselves, we asked the children to tell us, ***“What do you like about RE? List as many things as you can think of.”***

All the children completing the survey answered this question.

Children mentioned *making and seeing friends* (listing this 17 times) as the favorite thing they liked about RE.

This reason was closely followed by *hosting brunches* (14 mentions) and enjoying *snacks* (also 14 mentions).

Clearly they value the content of the RE experience mentioning 12 times such things as liking the content of RE including *class time, lesson topics (specific mentions such as OWL and Neighboring Faiths)*, also with *learning new things*. In addition they like their *teachers* and the *nice people* at RE noting these reasons 9 times.

Other things they liked (the following reasons received 7 or fewer mentions) included *stories, games and play, outside time, neat activities, arts and crafts, projects like fundraising and planning what to do with the money they raised, field trips like visiting neighboring churches, children's worship, songs, reading, writing, and discussing beliefs, a couple of enthusiastic everything, and one grumpy nothing*.



The final question we asked the children was, “*What do you want the new minister to do with the children in RE?*”

The children were a bit less responsive to this item. Four left this question blank and most listed only one or two items in response to the question.

The most frequently mentioned comments (noted 17 times) referred to direct contact between the children and the new minister including the *minister visiting their classes occasionally, telling them stories, talking to the children, saying “hi”, and have group chats* (mentioned by the older kids).

Younger children wanted the minister to *play with them, bring them candy, and eat the candy with them*. (4 mentions)

Other items mentioned two or three times included *singing, hanging the greens, letting children be part of the worship service, liking kids, being nice and calm, having humor, planning more field trips and cool activities for the older children*.

One independent-minded pre-K wanted *freedom from the minister*. Four noted that they *did not know* what they wanted and four expressed a desire that *things remain as they are*.

Several older children suggested refreshments and *chats with the minister*.