

**Executive Summary**  
**Emerson Unitarian Universalist Congregational Survey**  
**September 2022**

**Methodology:**

Emerson's Minister Search Committee conducted a congregational survey Sept 8-26, 2022, via Survey Monkey. The survey instrument was developed using a sample provided by the UUA, with minor modifications, primarily to more accurately describe activities at Emerson and (see question 4). Prior to the launch, the seven members of the committee took the survey themselves twice: the first to review the completeness and relevance of the information and to estimate the time required to finish the survey and the second to ensure that there were no technical problems that needed to be addressed.

The survey was originally sent to 251 people via email, using lists provided by the Emerson office and the Director of Religious Education. We also sent letters to persons with no email address on file. Approximately 8 surveys were given to requesters in paper form. (These questionnaires were input into the Survey Monkey database by committee members after the survey closed.)

The survey was publicized through Emerson's weekly eblast and Sunday announcements. Survey Monkey auto-generated a reminder email to non-respondents, as well as a "thank you" email upon submission data by email address, allowing members of the committee to personally follow-up with non-respondents.

A total of 105 surveys were submitted, a response rate of 40.1 percent.

**Findings:**

Survey responses reflected two strong themes:

- the sense of community, belonging and mutual support among congregants
- a desire to have a minister who can provide inspiring and energizing worship and have meaningful interaction with the congregation

A large majority of respondents answered each of the open-ended "In which program..." questions (5-9) with references to worship and small-group activities.

This was supported by responses to the matrix question (18) regarding expectations of Emerson's future minister, which showed that:

- *on a personal level*, respondents want a minister who presents inspiring and challenging Sunday services and fosters a sense of community.
- *on a congregational level*, respondents want someone who can foster a sense of community, provide pastoral care, develop volunteers and lay leaders and lead the overall ministry, while
- *considering the future*, respondents are looking for someone who can imagine and inspire the future, encourage social justice programs, provide visible leadership in the Houston community and support families.

Recognizing that the pandemic had a profound effect on congregational life, the search committee added a column to question 4 (on patterns of attendance and participation), asking people to indicate areas of hoped-for involvement.

- adult religious education (14.43%)
- Sunday volunteers including ushers, greeters, AV (13.68%)
- music-arts (12.90%)
- other activities such as work days (12.9%)
- congregational care such as Lay Pastoral Ministry Team, Caring Committee, Helping Hands (11.83%)
- small group activities including covenant groups, book clubs, meditation, circle dinners (11.42%)
- social or environmental action (11.58%)
- intergenerational activities (10.75%)

It's important to note that these numbers reflect a significant level of pent-up interest in new involvement beyond activities in which respondents have previously been involved.

Respondents see Emerson (on scaled questions 10-17) in regard to:

- openness to change (45.36% agree, 38.14% neutral, 16.49% who disagree)
- a flexible structure to implement new ideas (40.21% agree, 40.21% neutral, 19.59% disagree)
- a core group of leaders able to implement change (58.76% agree, 26.80% neutral, 14.43% who disagree)
- focus on the greater good rather than individual preferences (46.94% agree, 34.69% neutral, 18.37% disagree)
- trust in leadership (55.10% agree, 31.3% neutral, 13.25% disagree)

It's worth noting the high number of neutral answers on these questions. Although the majority of responses were in the "agree" range, there was no real consensus.

The lowest level of confidence on scaled questions 10-17 were in the areas of

- financial sustainability (27.83% agree, 44.33% neutral, 27.83% disagree)
- the congregation's ability to have difficult conversations while staying in relationship (42.26% agree, 40.21% neutral, 17.52% disagree)

The lowest level of responses was to questions 19-20 regarding change, and answers provided no clear-cut agreement on what types of changes made by a new minister would be contentious (question 19) or energizing (question 20).

### **The respondents:**

The demographics reported in the survey show the majority of respondents as older, white, highly educated and relatively affluent. (While this may also reflect the general sense of Emerson's overall demographic profile, these numbers can only be applied to survey respondents.)

The majority are:

- Caucasian (96.88)
- Highly educated (29.17% with a 4-year degree, 61.46% with a graduate degree)
- Without children under 18 (84.38%)
- Heterosexual (83.16%)
- In uniraical families (82.47%)
- 60+ (73.19%)
- Married (66.67%) or in a committed relationship (13.54%)
- Women (64.95%)
- Retired (61.05%)

And have been members of Emerson:

- 3-5 years = 21.88%
- 6-10 years = 21.88%
- 11-20 years = 16.67%
- 20+ years = 35.42%

Emerson's position as a metro congregation is reflected in travel times. While one in six (16.84) can reach Emerson in 15 minutes or less, the majority of respondents spend 15-30 minutes driving to church (53.68%) and for more than 8%, the commute is 45 minutes or more.

The largest number of respondents reported income in the \$50-199K range (59.98%), while reported pledge amounts were distributed somewhat evenly, ranging from less than \$299 per year (11.49%) to \$20K+ (8.05%).

Respondents reported that decisions on pledge amounts and pledge increases were primarily influenced by household budgets (including income increases and decreases) and, to a lesser extent, church needs.

#### Conclusion:

Emerson's respondents reflect a picture of a well-educated, socially conscious, but aging urban congregation bound together by a strong sense of community, belonging and mutual support, that aspires to get even more involved, expand its reach and attract a younger and more diverse group of members.

Their shared vision of a new minister is a person who can offer inspiring, challenging and dynamic worship services; connect with individual members and provide spiritual support, inspiration and congregational care; foster the development and growth of the congregation, in not only membership numbers but also involvement; and provide leadership in envisioning and planning for the future.