

Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston

Settled Minister

Houston, Texas | Southern Region

About Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston

Contact Methods

Website: <http://www.emersonhouston.org>

Meeting Address

Same as mailing address

Mailing Address

1900 Bering Dr
Houston, TX 77057-3708

This Congregation **has** a 501(c)(3) status of its own

Congregation Life

Describe your Congregation and its culture:

Emerson is primarily a destination church, rather than a neighborhood church.

The most common words that Emersonians use to describe themselves are older, involved in social action/social justice, welcoming, friendly and warm, intellectual and well-educated, and liberal. Others note that we are a predominately white congregation and that we have made more inroads becoming diverse in some ways than in others.

We are multi-generational. We have 5 generations of adults in the church, but not many young adults or families with children are showing up these days.

We have a core of committed members who have found good companions for life's journey at Emerson. 60% of current membership have been members for 11 years or longer, 34% have been members for 3-10 years, and 6% have joined us in the past two years.

We are sociable. At church auctions, the most popular items are parties and dinners. We enjoy social events to increase our connections with one another. We missed being together during COVID. While we appreciate the benefits of being a multi-platform church that provides greater accessibility to our members and friends, many feel a loss of connection because we haven't been in the same place at the same time.

We are resilient. Emerson has had to respond to several significant challenges over the past six years.

- One of our co-ministers, Rev. Mark Edmiston-Lange, died unexpectedly in 2016.
- Over 40 families in the church were flooded during Hurricane Harvey in late August and early September 2017.
- The church switched to online services in March 2020 when COVID hit and remained online for about 20 months. There was a second short-term church closure during a COVID spike.
- Our senior minister, Rev. Becky Edmiston-Lange, retired in August 2020.
- In the summer of 2021, Emerson's music director left to accept a faculty position at The Juilliard School.
- Our membership coordinator left in October 2022 for health reasons.

We are in transition. Emerson hasn't fully examined what resources will be required to implement the ministry members say they want.

We are still adjusting to where we are now and will need to consider capacity while being ready to step into the next phase of our ministry.

We are located in a large city with other UU ministers and liberal ministers from other faith traditions around, so there are opportunities for Emerson's minister to find collegial connections.

Emerson has had two ministries of more than 20 years in its history, providing the church with a stable foundation.

Culture

During its first few decades, Emerson was a more traditional, formal, conservative Unitarian Universalist church compared to its peers. The church has undergone change through the years: no more minister and choir in robes processing down the aisles and a greatly increased emphasis on social action and social justice through the church itself, among other changes. The church has opened up in terms of theology, focus, and worship style. Even so, the feel of the church is less casual compared to what UUs from other places might have experienced, from its impressive entry and worship space to Sunday worship services that are often more traditional than circular or exuberant.

Members have come to expect having both their hearts and minds to be engaged at church. Emerson's two longest-serving ministers were known for "intellectual" sermons and messages. However, the congregation now yearns for a minister who can also touch their hearts as well as their minds.

Since its inception, Emerson has hoped for numerical growth in membership because we believe we have an important message to share – the message of Unitarian Universalism – and we want to share it with as many people as possible. Nevertheless, Emerson's membership has followed the trajectory of most mainstream churches, and we are now smaller than before.

Opportunity for a Meaningful Ministry

Emerson provides a prospective minister the opportunity to make a meaningful difference both in our church and in the world outside our walls.

In a sense, Houston is a bellwether for the country. Population experts tell us that the diversity we now have in Houston will be duplicated elsewhere throughout the U.S. in the coming decades. We are at a unique time and place in history, poised to provide a religious experience that can fulfill the needs of a wide range of people. A minister who joins us in that quest will gain professional expertise that will benefit them throughout their ministerial career.

Texas is at a crossroads. A minister who wants to work toward changing policies to better align with our UU values will find support from groups like the Texas UU Justice Ministry, among others, that are already in the fray.

Your Congregation's mission:

In 2011, the congregation adopted this Statement of Purpose and Identity:

Our beloved community of faith, reason, and affection welcomes all to grow in mind and spirit as together we build a better world.

Describe and provide examples of how your Congregation lives its values:

We are diverse in faith, ethnicity, history, and spirituality but aligned in our desire to make a difference for the good. We have a track record of advocating for love, justice, and peace.

Here are a few highlights of Emerson's commitment to social action:

Share the Plate

Members and friends sustain the operating expenses of the church with their pledges, enabling us to give away 100% of the Sunday offering. Our outreach committee selects organizations from those nominated by congregation members; recipients include local, state, national, and international organizations. Interfaith Ministries' Meals on Wheels program receives 25% of the plate each Sunday (with occasional exceptions), while each Share the Plate recipient receives 75% of the offering for the designated month.

Emerson English Class Program (ESL/ELL) – In order to promote the church's mission to build a better world, in 2015 Emerson began hosting free English classes for anyone in Houston who wanted to learn. What began as one class grew to four levels before the program had to pause because of COVID restrictions. Part of the funding was provided by UUA grants and congregational fundraisers that have involved the students, and The Board of Trustees recently affirmed that the program can use their special fund as they see fit, including the hiring of a part-time program director. The program has served hundreds of people from 59 different countries, speaking over 35 different languages.

Ministry for Earth – This group focuses on promoting the seventh principle of Unitarian Universalism. Ministry for Earth's mission is to educate ourselves and others about environmental issues; advocate for public policies to protect the global environment; act locally in our homes, church, and city; and connect spiritually with the web-of-all-existence. Ministry for Earth works toward that mission by organizing educational, community-building action and service projects. We are closely aligned with UUA Ministry for Earth.

- We offer opportunities for spiritual connection to the earth in the solstice and equinox services, as well as special lay-led services acknowledging extinction of species, blessing of animals, and indigenous peoples.

- Our group is also tied into resources and events of Texas Impact and Texas UU Justice Ministry.
- We held a climate vigil last year for COP 26, along with Green Faith.
- We promote a plant-based diet at congregational dinners.
- Our strategy has been that suggested by the Green Sanctuary program, to integrate sustainable practices into as many programs of the congregation as possible, including worship, justice, religious education, and sustainable facilities.

Additional Social Action Council Projects - Our dedication to social justice and social action has remained strong and focused, during and post-pandemic.

UU the Vote – Emerson has been very active in 2020 and 2022 UU the Vote campaigns. We have collaborated with Houston-area UU churches and the Texas UU Justice Ministry. Emerson and First UU jointly funded a Houston Voting Coordinator for the 2022 UU the Vote campaign. We have written postcards, text-banked, and phone-banked.

Reproductive Justice – Emerson is a Reproductive Justice Congregation through the Just Texas organization. We are working with Planned Parenthood and the local ACLU to identify best options for activism within Texas.

Support for Democracy – Over the last 2 years, we have collaborated with Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice, Texas Impact, and our local League of Women Voters to contact local, state, and national legislators on policy and laws that we as UUs support.

Houston UU Afghan Refugee Project - Emerson, First UU, and Northwoods UU joined to form a team to support Afghan refugees. We raised \$15,000 and “adopted” 2 refugee families. We have assisted with their financial, educational, and medical needs.

Link to your Safe Congregation policy:

<http://emersonhouston.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Emerson-UU-Church-Child-Protection-Policy.pdf>

Worship service schedule:

Our worship service is at 11 a.m. on Sunday morning.

10 a.m. adult education

11 a.m. worship service

11:15 a.m. children and youth religious education

Personnel

| Name | Position | Paid Hours per Week | Year Started |
|--------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| Michelle LaGrave | Interim Minister | 40 | 2020 |
| Katy Carpman | Director of Religious Education | 40 | 2011 |
| Karen Van Horn | Business Administrator | 40 | 2005 |
| Alejandra Gonzalez | Congregational Administrator | 40 | 2022 |
| Julia Morsher | Director of Music | 20 | 2021 |
| Hui Shan Chin | Pianist | 20 | 2013 |
| Angel Rose | Worship Tech Coordinator | 12 | 2022 |
| Ariel Deshotel | Lead Singer (Soprano) | 5 | 2018 |
| Hans Coster | Sunday Sexton | 5 | 2004 |
| Dori Wolfe | President, Board of Trustees | Volunteer | 2022 |
| Michael Bloom | Vice President, Board of Trustees | Volunteer | 2022 |
| Jill Rose | Office Volunteer | Volunteer | 1994 |

Additional personnel notes:

We are in the process of considering our church staffing right now. Our business administrator will retire at the end of January 2023. Some of her responsibilities will be taken on by Alejandra Gonzalez, who will assume the title of congregational

administrator, while other responsibilities will be contracted out: bookkeeping, payroll, and website maintenance.

We currently use a contract cleaning service.

Our part-time membership coordinator left for health reasons in October 2022. We hope that we can fill that position again in the future.

Congregation History

Provide your Congregation's founding history:

Emerson Unitarian Church had a strong and successful founding as a mission of First Unitarian Church of Houston. Its minister, Rev. Horace Westwood, saw a need for a second liberal church to serve Houston's growing population. The new church was populated by First Church members who lived in the city's then-western edges in 1960.

Leading the growth in the western suburbs was a group of business leaders, men of vision, entrepreneurship and social standing, some of whom joined Emerson with their families. They contributed large amounts of money as well as time, energy, wisdom, and connections. Two acres of land on Bering Drive were purchased by four families and donated to the church. The church later purchased two more acres.

Groundbreaking for an impressive modern building was on Valentine's Day in 1960, construction was complete by October and the first service was held that month. By December the charter membership book listed 217 adult members representing 120 families. By the next month, January 1961, the church was financially self-sustaining from the earlier help it received from First Church.

This was a church started in a big way, accomplished in an amazingly short period of time—from groundbreaking to a building with 200+ members and financial independence in less than 12 months.

Date founded: 2/14/1960

Describe important events in your Congregation's history:

Sunday, February 14, 1960 – Ground was broken for Westwood Hall

Sunday, October 16, 1960 – At Emerson's first service Rev. Horace Westwood preached on "Dimensions of Growth" to a standing-room-only crowd.

April 1961 – The Women's Alliance was founded. This multi-generational group undertook many projects and served numerous social and environmental causes during its long life.

August 1961 – Rev. Eugene Askew was called as Emerson's first minister. Due to conflicts with staff, board, and congregation regarding allegations of ministerial misconduct, Rev. Askew resigned in September 1962.

October 6, 1963 – Dr. Frank Schulman preached his first sermon at Emerson.

1964 – Rev. Schulman began the first of several radio spots he would have on Houston radio stations over the years.

August 1965 – Lois Jackson was hired as church school director. The program was so successful that by November 1966 the congregation approved construction of new religious education buildings to accommodate the needs of the ever-growing church school program.

May 7, 1974 – Ground was broken on the sanctuary where we now worship. It was dedicated on May 27, 1975.

1980 – Emerson hosted the first of its Kilgore Lectures. Noted speakers are invited once a year to speak on religious or related topics.

Late March 1987 – Rev. Schulman announced his intention to retire after 25 years at Emerson. His final service was June 26, 1988.

September 4, 1988 – Rev. Arthur Jellis conducted his first service as the interim minister.

November 12, 1990 – Rev. Jan Knost was called as the new minister.

1992-1996 – Emerson hosted a series of interns beginning with Kathleen Ellis in 1992. She was followed by Lucy Ijams in 1994 and Ann Fox in 1996.

1996 – Church leadership brought in Terry Foland of The Alban Institute to help the congregation understand tensions in the church that had resulted, in part, from the different leadership styles of Rev. Knost from that of previous long-time minister, Rev. Schulman.

1996 – Rev. Knost suffered a serious physical health crisis in the fall, and intern Ann Fox played a crucial role in the church at that time.

March 1997 – Emerson negotiated a resignation with Rev. Knost, who announced his retirement.

1997-1999 – During the search for a new called minister, Emerson was served by two interim ministers: Rev. William Leggett (summer minister) and Rev. David B. Parke.

August 1999 – Reverend Dr. Becky and Rev. Mark Edmiston-Lange began their co-ministry.

2002 – Emerson began a capital campaign for the construction of Delaney Hall, which opened in June 2004.

2003 – A Social Justice Task Force at Emerson was instrumental in founding The Harris County Drug Court Foundation (now called Justice Forward), a foundation that works with nonviolent drug offenders to keep them from incarceration. Justice Forward has now served more than 700 individuals through 20 Harris County specialty courts.

2007 – The two ministers took their first sabbatical.

2014 – Consultant Michael Durall helped the congregation deal with disagreements that arose over the ongoing use of our endowment to fund church operating expenses.

June 2014 – Our church paid off the mortgage on Delaney Hall.

July 11, 2015 – With the help of about 100 volunteers and donors, Emerson offered a complete free wedding and reception to 14 LGBTQ+ couples after the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark decision on marriage equality.

2016 – The Revs. Edmiston-Lange took their second sabbatical.

September 2016 – After a short illness, Rev. Mark Edmiston-Lange died suddenly and unexpectedly. The congregation grieved Rev. Mark's death together, without the level of comfort a minister would normally provide, because ours was herself bereaved. We helped each other get through it.

August 2017 – Hurricane Harvey inundated Houston with rain for days, causing wide scale devastation. The impact of the storm was felt by many across the Houston area, including 40 families from Emerson whose homes were flooded.

We pitched in together to help each other clean up the mess. The Emerson community was a source of strength and solace during that time.

September 2017-June 2019 – Interim transitional minister Rev. Sam Schaal led the church in a period of discernment and aided Rev. Becky Edmiston-Lange with the regular duties of the church.

June 21, 2020 – Rev. Becky Edmiston-Lange's final Sunday in the pulpit before her retirement. Due to the pandemic we were unable to personally say good-bye to Rev. Becky or properly celebrate her more than 20 year ministry with the congregation.

March 2020-October 2021 – The church closed for in-person services because of COVID. Since reopening, we have continued offering online streaming of the in-person services.

August 2020-July 2023 – Rev. Michelle LaGrave serves Emerson as interim minister.

The events of the past few years have left many in the congregation feeling tired and even numb. Nonetheless, we remain a resilient congregation that is beginning to look toward its future.

Ministerial History

| Start | End | Position | Name | Job Title |
|-------|------|----------|------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 2020 | Now | Interim | Michelle LaGrave | Interim Minister |
| 1999 | 2020 | Called | Rebecca Edmiston-Lange | Minister |
| 2017 | 2019 | Other | Samuel Schaal | Transitional Assistant Minister |
| 1999 | 2016 | Called | Mark Edmiston-Lange | Co-Minister |
| 1997 | 1999 | Interim | David Parke | Interim Minister |
| 1997 | 1997 | Interim | William Leggett | Summer Minister |
| 1990 | 1997 | Called | Jan Knost | Called Minister |

| Start | End | Position | Name | Job Title |
|-------|------|----------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1988 | 1990 | Interim | Arthur Jellis | Interim Minister |
| 1987 | 1989 | Called | Leonora Montgomery | Associate Minister |
| 1963 | 1988 | Called | J. Frank Schulman | Minister |
| 1961 | 1962 | Called | Eugene Askew | Called Minister |

Ministers Emeritus/a

| Name | Date Voted Emeritus/a | Year Deceased |
|-------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| J. Frank Schulman | 11/24/1991 | 2006 |

Membership & Finances

The data for the table below comes directly from the UUA's annual congregational certification.

| Year | Total Pledge Income | Total Operating Expenses | Membership | Youth Enrollment | Avg. Attendance |
|-------|---------------------|--------------------------|------------|------------------|-----------------|
| 2022* | \$562,643 | \$542,933 | 254 | 70 | |
| 2021 | \$553,865 | \$557,117 | 278 | 66 | |
| 2020 | \$562,378 | \$619,698 | 313 | 67 | 110 |
| 2019 | \$584,964 | \$674,404 | 354 | 82 | 136 |
| 2018 | \$561,607 | \$616,705 | 367 | 90 | 138 |
| 2017 | \$571,773 | \$631,230 | 369 | 120 | 150 |
| 2016 | \$574,256 | \$612,752 | 412 | 127 | 161 |
| 2015 | \$540,558 | \$659,569 | 396 | 129 | 150 |
| 2014 | \$486,138 | \$729,431 | 407 | 135 | 174 |

| Year | Total Pledge Income | Total Operating Expenses | Membership | Youth Enrollment | Avg. Attendance |
|-------------|----------------------------|---------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| 2013 | \$528,842 | \$759,263 | 432 | 132 | 208 |

The following notes and/or explanations have been offered by the congregation:

| Year | Note/Explanation |
|-------------|---|
| | <p>We are now a midsize level I congregation with 241 members on our membership roll. We won't know our actual size until we complete our pledge drive this fall and remove members from our membership roll in accordance with our church constitution.</p> |
| 2022 | <p>Average in-person church attendance for September and October 2022 was 58 people; average online attendance was 21 people. The number of people watching the service on YouTube later is estimated to be 42-63 people.</p> <p>Fewer than 10 children at a time have been attending church since the church opened up after the pandemic. Different children come on different weeks as well as a constant few who come every week.</p> |

Demographics

What percentage of members do you estimate identify as people of color?

5-9%

What percentage of members do you estimate identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ)?

5-9%

Please describe the gender makeup of your congregation

We are a Welcoming Congregation that welcomes and affirms all genders. Although the majority of our congregation identifies as binary (both cisgender and transgender) we have a few non-binary Emersonians who are active in our congregational life. 65% of the respondents to our congregational survey

answered that they were female. We haven't routinely kept demographic data on our members, but a review of the church directory shows that female members make up an estimated 60% of the congregation.

What number of staff (including full and part time) identify as people of color?

1

What number of people of color serve as leaders or chairs of your volunteer committees and program teams?

0

What number of your Board of Trustees identify as people of color?

0

What changes have you made in the last 3-5 years, if any, to include the racial and ethnic diversity of your congregational staff and volunteer leadership?

We currently have a full-time staff member who identifies as Hispanic. One paid member of our music program is Black and one is Asian.

Whenever we have filled staff positions in recent years, we have intentionally sought out and interviewed diverse applicants. Additionally, we have done educational programming to address white supremacy culture within the congregation at large.

A person of color serves on the Transitions Team and the Worship Committee, neither of which has a chair person.

Accessibility

Is your Congregation's meeting space wheelchair accessible? Yes

Wheelchair accessibility details:

Our buildings reflect our commitment to the inclusion of people of all ages, abilities, and mobilities.

Restrooms in the sanctuary building were renovated to be ADA-compliant many years ago. “Cutouts” were provided in several pews to accommodate persons in wheelchairs. Delaney Hall, a LEED-certified building that houses religious education and administrative offices, was constructed in compliance with ADA standards in 2004, including an elevator to the second floor. Recently automated door openers were installed on the doors of ground floor restrooms in that building; funds were provided by members of a covenant group.

Although there is currently no wheelchair access to the chancel area, handrails have been installed.

Does your Congregation provide assisted listening systems? Yes

Assisted listening system details:

Individual audio headsets are available in the sanctuary for those who prefer to use them.

Describe other ways your congregation has dealt with accessibility:

Large-print hymnals are available to those with limited sight.

We have a multi-platform workshop service on Sunday mornings.

Resources & Programs

List the resources and programs your Congregation used or participated in during the past year:

- Beyond Categorical Thinking Workshop
- Texas UU Justice Ministry
- Emerson English Class Program (ESL/ELL)
- Kilgore Lecture – neuroscientist Dr. David Eagleman
- Trans Power Vigil Conference
- UU The Vote
- UUA Faithify – for Emerson English Class Program (ESL/ELL) pending board approval as of November 2022
- UUA General Assembly worship services and workshops
- UUA video worship services
- UUA retreat resources
- Tapestry of Faith

- Soul Matters

Describe your religious educational programs:

Emerson supports learning and spiritual deepening at every age and stage. We have strong leadership from a UUA Credentialed Religious Educator who has worked with UU congregations since 2006 and at Emerson since 2011.

Religious Education for Adults

Our adult religious education program includes multi-session classes, discussion groups, short courses, and other offerings. Many adult programs take place on Sunday morning from 10:00-11:00 a.m., with others during the week. Emerson offers lectures and discussions to encourage lifelong spiritual growth for those interested in probing life's most persistent questions.

Recent Sunday morning adult education topics have included:

- UU fundamentals, including our principles, sources, and history, and other religious and philosophical traditions, such as Buddhism and Taoism.
- Introductions to the annual Common Read, followed by study and discussion sessions during the week.
- Personal and spiritual growth topics, such as caring for loved ones with dementia, giving and receiving feedback, forgiveness, and faith perspectives as we move through adulthood.

This fall, a church member led a 6-week, Zoom-based class entitled *Bible Stories for All Without the Dogma* on Monday evenings for those who wanted to participate in a joint study group.

Recurring events include:

- Beginner's Meditation Practice
- Poetry Group

Religious Education for Children and Youth

Children and youth at Emerson know that they are unique, wonderful, and loved. Our members have a wide range of backgrounds and beliefs, and we know we all can learn from one another. We proudly provide liberal religious education, creating opportunities for our children and youth to ask questions, hear stories,

and be joyful with each other. We teach the values and stories of many religions – as well as our own unique heritage – and celebrate each person’s gifts as important to our world.

Before COVID, Emerson’s Sunday school program was a mix of:

- Sunday classes using UUA curricula. These learning communities, led by volunteer teachers, lit a chalice, shared stories, and took part in games, crafts, and experiments.
- All-ages worship – a monthly multi-generational service, helped children learn the rhythms of worship and held us all in community.
- Milestone programs – (Coming of Age that paired an 8th grader with an adult mentor to explore life’s Big Questions and Our Whole Lives comprehensive sexuality education)
- Special Events – Homecoming Sunday (September), UNICEF Carnival (October), Souper Bowl of Caring (February), Gardening Days, etc.

After the disruption of two years of COVID, Emerson is thoughtfully reopening our religious education programs for children and youth.

Our goals at this time are to build community, nurture joy and wonder, and grow our spirits in a mixed-age group. We are not currently using a single curriculum. Our DRE works with the children and volunteers to develop lessons that fit their interests. Sometimes this involves adapting old favorites like creating tabletop Zen gardens, using something from the Soul Matters theme materials, or lessons with the ‘Why is this UU?’ angle on a hobby/interest.

In the months to come, we hope to add more programs as capacity allows. We’re starting with one classroom and will expand as interest and volunteers increase. Next up is likely a middle school group, as volunteers and critical mass develop.

Our Director of Religious Education also sends out monthly packets of materials for families to use with their children at home.

Describe your youth and campus ministry programs:

Our religious education programs for children and youth are described above. We aren’t currently involved in any campus ministry programs.

Surrounding Community

Describe the character of the surrounding community, including population and demographics:

Overview

Houston is one of the fastest-growing major metropolitan areas in the country. As the nation's fourth largest city, Houston appeals to people from around the globe who are drawn to our unique mix of cultural amenities, diverse communities, and low cost-of-living.

It's no wonder Houston is recognized for our seamless blend of Southern hospitality and urban sophistication, of neighborhood cafes and James Beard Award-winning restaurants, of big business and unbreakable entrepreneurial spirit. National publications such as *GQ* cite Houston as a must-visit destination, calling the city "the New Capital of Southern Cool." The *2023 World's Best Cities Report*, powered by Resonance Consultancy, ranks Houston as one of the 100 best cities in the world. The report describes the Bayou City as an "educated, diverse, and hard-working powerhouse."

Population and Diversity

Houston's estimated 2022 population is 2.29 million, and the population of the Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land metropolitan area is about 7.21 million.

For the second year in a row, the personal finance site *WalletHub* ranked Houston as the country's most diverse city out of the 500 most populated cities, rated for socioeconomic diversity, cultural diversity, economic diversity, household diversity, and religious diversity.

Houston residents speak more than 145 languages and one in four was born outside the United States. Houston is now a minority-majority city, a bellwether for the demographics of the U.S. in the future.

Friendliness

Houston is the kind of place where it wouldn't be unusual for strangers to talk about their favorite soup ingredients while in the produce section of the supermarket or to strike up a conversation with someone sitting nearby at the coffee bar.

Economic Climate

Not surprisingly, countless corporations and multi-national institutions recognize the benefits of our diverse cultural and economic base. 25 Fortune 500 companies call Houston home. Among our unique advantages: no state income tax and, within the City of Houston, no zoning restrictions, resulting in a greater diversity of communities spread throughout the city.

While the economic vitality and growth of our region's economy is inextricably tied to energy, today's priorities are focused on positioning Houston as the global leader in transitioning the energy industry for a more efficient and sustainable low-carbon future.

We are also leaders in other emerging industries, including digital technology, aeronautic research, medical research, and other life sciences. The Texas Medical Center, with 47 highly lauded institutions, is a top destination in the world for clinical health care.

From a resident's point-of-view, affordability is high on the list of reasons to love our city. According to a recent *Houston Facts* study, Houston is the third most affordable major metro area among the nation's 20 most populous MSAs. The cost of living is about 6% lower than the national average. Housing costs are a standout for Houston; home costs are well below the national average.

Things to Do

With over 20,000 concerts, plays, and exhibitions annually, Houstonians can take their pick from a literal smorgasbord of cultural activities.

Houston is one of only five cities in the U.S. that can boast major symphony, ballet, opera, and resident theater companies of worldwide acclaim, all situated in downtown's vibrant Theater District.

A short drive or light-rail ride from downtown is the Museum District, where 19 institutions showcase important works of art, cultural artifacts, and prominent exhibitions from around the globe. Adjacent to the Museum District is the Houston Zoo, part of the 445-acre Hermann Park.

Cultural offerings aren't limited to the city center, however. A wide variety of theaters, museums and musical performances are spread throughout the metro area.

Houston is a major-league sports town and one of the premiere sport destinations in the U.S. Our five professional sport teams have long-winning traditions and loyal lifelong fans. After the Houston Astros won the 2022 World Series

Championship, an estimated million fans turned out for the parade to celebrate. The *Houston Chronicle* said the following about the team having so many players who personify the American dream, "The team reflects what we want Houston to be: an inclusive, welcoming, worldly city, where dreams aren't limited by language, birthplace, or ZIP code." In addition to supporting our professional sports teams, Houstonians show up in full force for the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, the world's largest.

Houston's restaurant scene is as ethnically diverse as its residents, and Houston has been ranked as one of the best restaurant cities in America.

Houston's eccentric side, epitomized by the Beer Can House and the Orange Show House, is on full display each spring during the annual Art Car Parade.

NASA's Johnson Space Center is less than 35 miles away, and Galveston – with its beaches, historic sites, and Moody Gardens – is less than 60 miles away.

Schools

As you would expect in a sophisticated city the size of Houston, educational opportunities and options are abundant and varied. The Houston region has numerous public school systems; dozens of state-approved charter schools; roughly 200 private K-12 schools; several large 2-year community college systems; public and private 4-year universities; and trade, vocational and business schools.

The Emerson campus itself is in the Houston Independent School District, the largest public school system in Texas. Evaluations of the public schools are available through the Texas Education Agency and the nonprofit Children at Risk.

Airports

The city is served by two major airports, George Bush Intercontinental Airport and William P. Hobby Airport. They offer direct and connecting flights to dozens of domestic and international destinations.

Green Spaces

According to the Trust for Public Land, Houston was ranked first in the nation for total green space among cities of comparable density and fourth in the nation for total land devoted to parks. In addition, many neighborhoods have large greenbelts, pocket parks, and other green spaces.

Whether you'd like to relax beside a tranquil lake, jog amid an urban forest of tall pines, kayak down a freshwater bayou with glistening skyscrapers as a backdrop, or play one of our 150+ golf courses, you can do it all in Houston.

Weather

The weather in Houston allows for year-round outdoor activities. Summers are unquestionably hot, balanced by mild winters, so residents rarely have to deal with snow and ice.

Driving

Houston is a driving city with an extensive freeway system. Unlike older cities in the Northeast, Houston's modern freeways have access roads running beside them. Houston has three beltways: Loop 610, which encircles the inner city; Beltway 8; and State Highway 99 in the far north and west. An east-west tollway near Emerson intersects with all three beltways on the west side of town.

Off the freeway, there are multiple alternate ways to get to any destination. In the areas where it runs, Houston's light rail system is easy-to-use, clean, and very affordable.

Politics

Houston is politically liberal, and Democratic party candidates have generally won local elections in the city for many years. Our mayor and District Attorney are both Democrats, and a large majority of our judges are Democrats as well. Although our state-wide elected officials are overwhelmingly Republican, Houston is a stronghold for the national and state Democratic party organizations – a blue dot in a red state.

Emerson

Emerson UU Church is located eight miles west of downtown, nearly two miles west of Loop 610, in an area called Greater Uptown. This is a mixed-use area that, in some respects, serves as a second downtown area. It has a very large mall (The Galleria), many strip retail centers, office towers, multi-family housing in the form of apartment buildings and condos, as well as single-family housing.

Like many parts of Houston, the demographics are mixed in the church's immediate surrounding area. In the zip code where the church is located, 42% of the residents are white, 39% Hispanic/Latino, 9% Asian, 8% African American, and 3% multi-racial. Non-citizens comprise 6.5% of the total population near the

church. The median household income for the 77057 zip code is \$63,695. 36.8% of households have an income under \$50,000 per year, 33.40% have an income from \$50,000 to \$100,000 per year, and 29.8% have an income above \$100,000 per year.

Most of our church members come from other areas of town. In the congregational survey, 54% of respondents said they drove from 15-30 minutes to get to church while 29% drove more than 30 minutes. A Metro bus line runs on Bering Drive where the church is located. Emerson is between two main thoroughfares, each of which has at least one bus line, in addition to the one in front of the church. Few Emersonians take the bus to church, but a person who wanted to would need to walk only one long or one short block.

Find Out More

The [41st annual 2022 Kinder Houston Area Survey](#) provides a view of how area residents perceive and understand Houston's ongoing challenges and opportunities. No other city in the nation has been tracked in this way over such a long period of time.

Describe how your Congregation is known/perceived by the larger community:

Our members are on the front lines of social justice and environmental action. We have regularly worked with nearby houses of worship of several different beliefs to benefit the community as a whole.

Because Emerson has undertaken some high-profile social justice projects, we have a good reputation among the social activist part of the community. We are also well-known among organizations such as Interfaith Ministries of Houston. However, in this large metropolitan area with nearly 2000 churches, including 37 megachurches, most probably don't know who we are.

Among the local UU community, Emerson is still thought of as "the wealthy UU church."

Describe your Congregation's religious, political, and social context from a historical and current perspective.

Although Emerson was, in its early years, described as both a liberal church in a conservative Bible Belt city and as a relatively traditional church in a liberal denomination, both Houston and Emerson have grown and changed together. Our city is now the most diverse in the nation, and Emerson has moved from being a

more traditional congregation to a spiritual community that places a high value on social action and supporting and affirming diversity in our own church and the broader community.

Position Basics

Anticipated Start Date:

Term: N/A

Percent Time: 100% Time

Minimum Salary + Housing: \$93,500 | As more fully described in the proposed Ministerial Agreement, Emerson offers a comprehensive benefits package including the benefits listed below plus state-required employee insurance and relocation/moving expenses. We are now a Mid Size I Congregation.

Benefits: Self-employment offset tax; Retirement Plan; Other Health Plan; Disability Coverage; Term Life Insurance; Dental; Professional Expense Allowance

Questionnaire

Description of minister's role in relation to other paid staff

The minister is the chief administrator and is responsible for the supervision of the staff. The minister may delegate supervision of individual staff members. The minister is responsible for maintenance of all personnel records, clear and accurate job descriptions, timely enrollment of eligible staff in offered benefits plans, annual compensation reviews, staff evaluations, and a dispute resolution process.

- The minister, as staff lead, will foster a collaborative environment among staff.
- The minister will take care that staff roles and relationships are reviewed, discussed, and re-negotiated with clarity, respect, and honesty.
- The minister will enter into a covenant with the other professionals on staff to delineate the roles and responsibilities of each as well as the means to resolve any disagreements.

The Board of Trustees, in consultation with the Minister, has the authority to employ and discharge staff. The minister cannot employ and discharge staff unilaterally.

Primary areas of focus for the minister

- directing the overall ministry of the church
- leading dynamic, intelligent, thought-provoking worship services
- providing pastoral care
- inspiring the congregation to develop a sense of direction for the future
- overseeing staff

Desired strengths of the minister

- a captivating, charismatic speaker
- high energy level
- a desire to co-create a beloved community with congregation
- the ability to inspire and re-energize the congregation to live our UU principles and grow both as individuals and as a church
- great interpersonal skills, including a willingness to get to know members
- a strong leader who understands the importance of listening, boundaries, and supporting and encouraging lay members of committees and teams

Ongoing momentum we would like to continue

- ongoing increases in the in-person attendance at the Sunday worship services
- building on the work of our former membership coordinator to connect members and prospective members to the church
- newly started children's choir
- adult education programs during the week such as the online study group *Bible Stories for All Without the Dogma*
- the after-church LUUnch BUUnch that provides visitors and members with an easy, low-commitment way to connect

Programs and traditions we want to maintain

- adult religious education
- religious education for children and youth
- poetry group
- covenant groups
- church auction
- book clubs

- Sunday “Turnings” service in January
- flower communion in May
- equinox and solstice services
- Christmas Eve service
- Monday night meditation group
- stitchers group
- Emerson English Class Program (ESL/ELL)
- adult choir
- Lay Pastoral Ministry Team
- Caring Committee
- Helping Hands
- Friday Zoom social hour

Participation of children in the worship service, and the frequency of inter-generational services

The children participate in the worship service through the offering (around 15 minutes after the service begins), then go to their class. Emerson has intergenerational services several times a year, including the Homecoming and Christmas services. There are plans to have more intergenerational services during this church year.

Traditional holiday services celebrated outside of Sunday morning

We have solstice and equinox services and a Christmas Eve candlelight service.

The solstice and equinox services are offered to provide a moment to reconnect the natural cycles of human life with the cycles of nature and to express our reverence for nature and the universe. These lay-led services are family-friendly evenings of candlelight, music, meditation and readings.

The Christmas Eve Candlelight service includes Bible readings, singing Christmas carols, and lighting of candles.

Status of the congregation as a Welcoming Congregation

Emerson was certified as a Welcoming Congregation by the UUA in May 2004.

Status of the congregation as a Green Sanctuary congregation

We became a Green Sanctuary Congregation in 2003. In 2005 our newest building, Delaney Hall, was the first church building in the U.S. to be LEED-certified.

Other ways in which the congregation lives its values

- single-stall, gender-neutral, accessible, bathrooms as well as traditional multi-stall bathrooms. We invite all to use the facilities that best match their gender identity.
- a Fair Compensation congregation with the settled minister whom we call
- a Reproductive Justice congregation
- support of community PRIDE activities

Status of the congregation as an Honor Congregation

Emerson is not currently an Honor Congregation to the UUA, although we have been at times in the past.

Lessons the congregation has learned about nurturing ministers and ministry

The lessons below about nurturing ministers and ministry came from the Transition Team's session in September 2022.

- a need to adjust expectations so they are more realistic
- to pay attention to communication structures and ensure there are multiple avenues of communication
- to take care in establishing a relationship with the next minister from the beginning that includes clear expectations of each other
- while the minister might set a tone of welcome and appreciation, it is the congregation's responsibility to put it in action

We have nurtured our ministers by providing time off for study and professional development, time off in the summer, and sabbaticals. We nurture our current interim minister by welcoming her service dog in the church.

In September 2016 when one of our co-ministers, Rev. Mark Edmiston-Lange, died, the church provided Rev. Becky with more than 3 weeks of time off that was not credited to sick leave or vacation. We funded Rev. Mark's salary for the next month. Rev. Becky's compensation was increased in the next budget year which began in January 2017. Below is what Rev. Becky wrote in her 2017 report to the congregation:

Throughout this entire time, this congregation has sustained me by your caring presence and by your willingness to step into the breach. I can't name all of those whom I've called and said, "I need you to...." and who have unhesitatingly said

"Yes!" The love, commitment, and generosity of this congregation is an enduring inspiration to me. I am privileged to serve you."

In our small group meetings, one of the questions that we asked was how we could help our new minister settle into Emerson. Participants came up with a long list of ways that we can help to start off the new ministry successfully.

How the congregation has evaluated its ministry and its history with ministers

In the latter part of 2018, our transitional associate minister Sam Schaal led the congregation in a series of informational and participatory sessions. The History Wall that we created helped us consider our history with early ministers. That was the first time that most members learned about the allegations of ministerial misconduct from Emerson's first minister because by then there were few active members at Emerson from the 1960s.

Several factors contributed to the negotiated resignation of Rev. Knost, which included a difference in leadership style from the previous minister, lack of his presence at church events, bullying staff, and losing his temper with the youth group. By 1996, the congregation was becoming increasingly polarized over Rev. Knost's ministry. In an attempt to resolve these issues, he and the Board agreed to hire the Alban Institute to evaluate the relationships between the minister, members, and staff. The consultant's report found, among other things, that a significant fraction of the congregation faulted Rev. Knost's ministerial leadership in several aspects. Shortly thereafter, Rev. Knost's serious health issues intervened, and he accepted a negotiated resignation offer.

Interim minister Rev. Michelle LaGrave and the Transitions Team led us in a session in September 2022 to review the ministry of our former co-ministers. The themes that were uncovered align well with what we discovered in our survey and small group meetings, both of which had broader participation.

- communication – for the next minister to have good communication skills
- connection – for the next minister to be warm and approachable, able to bond with and nurture relationships with people
- collaboration – for the next minister to have good collaboration skills in working with the congregation, Board and staff
- ability to hear constructive criticism
- ability to be a leader in terms of setting a tone of both welcome and appreciation for all people

What cottage meetings and surveys tell about the congregation

Respondents to the congregational survey told us that Emersonians

- see our congregation as a spiritual home that provides a sense of belonging, renewal, inspiration and support.
- feel most UU, most connected and most inspired by Sunday worship and small group programs and activities.
- want a dynamic minister who will provide spiritual growth and inspiration, vision and leadership, high-quality worship – especially sermons – and foster the growth of the congregation.
- have a significant level of pent-up interest in new involvement beyond activities in which respondents have previously been involved (or had lapsed) during COVID.

Responses 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. We are ready after the pandemic to get re-involved and hope to expand our reach and attract a younger and more diverse group of members.

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

105 people completed the congregational survey. Of the 96 members who answered the survey question about their affiliation with Emerson, 93 were members and 3 were friends or visitors.

Attendees at the small group meetings reflected strong preferences for a minister who:

- delivers dynamic, inspiring Sunday worship services with intelligent, thought-provoking sermons.
- motivates people to be present in Sunday worship and to get involved in other aspects of congregational life.
- is warm, personable and approachable. gets to know members of the congregation (adults and children—by face and name at the very least and in greater depth for people who are there regularly and are involved).
- is visible in congregational life—before and after Sunday worship and at church wide social functions, including the annual church auction and, at least

occasionally, at smaller group functions such as dinners.

- is accessible to members in times of need and establishes a clear-cut way for members to reach out.
- can inspire Emerson to re-energize, revitalize, re-establish connections and rebuild the former strong sense of community that has been lost during the last few years.
- can expand Emerson's reach and attract young adults and parents and a more diverse group of members
- can help Emerson to grow—not only in membership numbers, but also in spiritual insight and depth of involvement for members.
- supports the religious education program—both children's and adult—and is willing to teach occasionally when possible (such as special sessions or series that take place at times other than Sunday mornings).
- is fully aware of the work of the church (i.e., committees and task forces) and, while not expected to attend every single meeting, meets with active groups on a rotating basis.

A total of 79 people attended a small-group meeting. That number includes 5 children (who had their own conversation during a focus group of parents) and 4 staff members. Small-group meetings included 4 focus groups (RE parents, past presidents, board, and staff) and 6 open-participation meetings offered either in person or via Zoom.

The work that the minister(s) is expected to do on their own

The overall direction of the worship service is the responsibility of the minister. In addition, the congregation looks to the minister for

- spiritual leadership
- historical and theological perspective
- leadership of the staff team

The work that the congregation is expected to do on their own

The Board of Trustees is responsible for the development of appropriate policies and practices.

Lay members carry out the ongoing mission of the church through service on various committees and teams, including

- Caring Committee
- Helping Hands

- volunteers in the children and youth religious education program
- adult religious education volunteers
- social action and outreach volunteers
- communications and public outreach
- membership
- greeters and ushers
- A/V support
- choir and performing artists
- finance committee
- investment committee
- stewardship committee
- Ministry for Earth
- buildings and grounds maintenance
- nominations
- governance
- various ad hoc committees

The work of the congregation and minister(s) that is shared by both

The Worship Committee assumes the responsibility for the worship services when the minister is not in the pulpit. The Worship Committee also consults with the minister regarding the direction of the worship services.

In the summer of 2022 between the Memorial Day and Labor Day weekends, 5 Sunday worship services were lay-led, 4 guest ministers (counting the General Assembly service) led services, 3 were staff-led, and 3 were conducted by Rev. LaGrave (one of which was co-led by a church member).

The Lay Pastoral Ministry Team works with the minister to provide ongoing support to Emerson members and friends who can benefit from a ministry of presence. It is an extension of the formal ministry which operates in confidentiality. The minister trains the LPMT, and all referrals to the program are made through the minister.

The minister provides administration of the congregation's business operations in collaborative partnership with lay leaders and staff.

The minister provides assistance with setting and implementing the congregation's mission and oversees the congregation's programs.

The Board of Trustees, in consultation with the Minister, has the authority to employ personnel necessary in the operation of the Church and to designate the terms of employment, including hiring, discharging, changing the compensation of

congregational staff, or implementing other major personnel-related changes.

Work of the congregation done by other staff

Katy Carpman, Director of Religious Education – provides professional leadership to sustain and grow our religious education program for children and youth; works with the adult religious education committee; collaborates on worship services and a wide variety of church programming

Karen Van Horn, Business Administrator – handles financial information; oversees facility management

Alejandra Gonzalez, Congregational Administer – responsible for communications functions; will oversee facility management when our Business Administrator retires in January 2023

Membership Coordinator – connects members of the church; widens our circle to include new members (Our membership coordinator left for health reasons at the end of October.)

Julia Morsher, Director of Music – provides diverse and imaginative ways to integrate the performing arts into the church; primary conductor of the church choir

Hui Shan Chin, Pianist – plays for Sunday worship services

Angel Rose, Worship Tech Coordinator – handles the technology for our Sunday morning multi-platform worship services and for other church events

Ariel Deshotel, Lead Singer – supports the Emerson choir during the Sunday morning worship service

Hans Coster, Sunday Sexton – unlocks the church for the Sunday service; sets up coffee and snacks for after the service

Bookkeeping and payroll – The church is determining the best way to handle bookkeeping and payroll when the business administrator retires at the end of January 2023.

Website maintenance – updates and maintains our church website; contract service

Child care – provides child care on Sunday morning and during other church events; contract service

Description of a typical Sunday at the congregation, including a typical Sunday worship service

Sunday schedule

9:00/9:30 Monthly/quarterly committee meetings (Most committees meet during the week, but the Finance Committee and the Investment Committee typically meet on Sunday morning.)

9:45 Greeters arrive and set up materials. They greet before the adult education session and before and after the service. Usually a Board of Trustees member is present each Sunday as well.

10 a.m. Adult education

10:45 a.m. Candles are available before and after the service to light for a joy, sorrow, or milestone. There are also joy, sorrow, and milestone cards available; completed cards go to the Lay Pastoral Ministry Team.

11 a.m. Worship service: A typical worship service could include these elements:

- prelude
- welcoming
- opening words (reading)
- chalice lighting
- a story for all ages
- collecting the offering
- meditation
- a reading
- special music
- sermon/homily
- closing hymn
- extinguishing the chalice
- benediction
- announcements
- postlude

11:15 a.m. Children and youth religious education

After the service, there is social time in the Gathering Place and on Zoom for members who attended the service virtually on YouTube.

15 minutes after the service, LUUnch BUUnch – Members and friends who want to have lunch together head to a local restaurant.

Religious education and exploration in the congregation for children, youth, and adults

Emerson volunteers arrange adult ed programming on Sunday mornings during the hour preceding the worship service. Adult ed programs include a multitude of topics. Children and youth RE programming runs concurrent with the Sunday worship service. We've described our church religious educational programs in greater detail under the Resources section of this Congregational Record.

How the congregation defines good preaching and worship

- to feel intellectually and spiritually stimulated by sermons
- to hear sermons that tie together Spirituality, UU principles, and actions we can take in our lives
- to say "Wow!"
- to have discussions on the sermons during social time
- to feel invigorated to invite others to the Sunday worship service

Things a prospective minister should know about the theologies of the congregation, including where to find inspiration, comfort, and conflict

We are people of many beliefs and backgrounds: people with a religious background, people with none, people who believe in a God, people who don't, and people who let the mystery be. We were raised Unitarian Universalist, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Humanist, Jewish, Muslim, Pagan, atheist, agnostic, theists, deists, or without a faith.

In December 2019, our middle school class surveyed the social hour crowd, asking people to mark three statements that best align with their personal beliefs. The class matched each statement to a range of theologies using definitions from the Compass Point curriculum.

Idea - Theology - (# of people who chose this statement)

- We can use science and reason to understand our Universe. Humanist, Atheist (40)
- There's a spark of divinity in each of us. Pantheist (25)
- There are probably as many ideas about God as there are people. Humanist (22)
- I find God in nature. Pantheist, Pagan (22)

- God and the Universe are the same. God is in everything and everyone. Pantheist (21)
- There's no way we can know whether or not there is a God. Agnostic (19)
- God is present in the relationships among people. Theist, Pantheist (15)
- God is my conscience calling me to make the world a better place. Theist (14)
- Creation is on-going, and we are co-creators with God. Pantheist (10)
- There's no such thing as God, and even the word is meaningless. Atheist (6)
- God is like a loving mother who sustains us and all life. Pantheist, Pagan (3)
- My beliefs about Jesus make me feel closer to God. Christian, Theist (3)
- God cares for us and listens to our prayers. Theist (3)
- God created the universe and then left it to run itself. Deist (2)

Ways the congregation handles conflicted situations

In 2020 and 2021, our congregation faced a significant challenge that was resolved through dialogue between two groups with conflicting viewpoints.

The issue was whether to join a local nonprofit organization that had historically assisted and provided support to the leadership of our Emerson English Class Program (ESL/ELL) with curriculum choices and information concerning teaching English to immigrant populations. On its website, the nonprofit organization did not explicitly state that it was welcoming to the LGBTQ+ community. There was also concern about working alongside volunteers from some of the very conservative member churches.

At a congregational meeting, a group of members proposed that the church join the organization. Some members (including a trans man) vehemently opposed joining because it appeared not to openly welcome the LGBTQ+ community. The vote was postponed so that more information could be gathered about the nonprofit's position on accepting people with differing sexual orientations and gender identify. Because the congregation failed to immediately reject the proposal to join, two church members left the church.

After several months of research on the nonprofit's position concerning accepting and welcoming the LGBTQ+ community, and after several meetings with the nonprofit's leadership team, the nonprofit posted a specific statement on its website openly welcoming the LGBTQ+ community. During this time, formal discussions and informal dialogue regarding the issue continued among church members.

At a subsequent congregational meeting, the consensus of the congregation was that we wanted all members to feel supported and heard on the issue of LGBTQ+ inclusion. The congregation voted not to join the nonprofit organization, in part because the issue had caused too many hurt feelings. However, due to these actions as well as meetings with the couple and the interim minister and education given by an ally, those who had resigned their membership have since rejoined the congregation.

After changing the church constitution and by-laws in December 2021, the congregation has moved from two to one regularly scheduled congregational meetings a year. That should prevent some disagreements over budget issues because the pledge drive should be complete when the congregation votes on the budget in January, which hasn't been the case previously. An information session will be held prior to the congregational meeting to answer questions about the budget.

Role of music and the arts in the life of the congregation

Music has played an ever-evolving, but important role in the life of Emerson. In earlier times, the classical training of Emerson's long-time music director fit perfectly with Rev. Frank Schulman's formal liturgical style. After the director's retirement in 2002, a succession of younger music directors has updated and diversified the choral repertoire. Today's repertoire is more contemporary and often more upbeat.

At various times over the years, Emerson has had

- children's and youth choirs
- a coffeehouse
- a rock band
- a theater troupe
- an intergenerational orchestra (EIO)

Emerson has the good fortune to own a 9-foot Steinway concert grand piano, considered to be one of the finest pianos in Houston and a major attraction for pianists. Earlier this year, it underwent comprehensive maintenance and repair work. Our piano is an integral part of our Sunday worship service.

Emerson's music program suffered greatly as a result of suspension of in-person worship services, but some aspects are experiencing a revival. In-person choir rehearsals began in November 2021, just in time for the choir to sing at the December holiday service. The choir is once again participating regularly in

morning worship services. About 8 choir members perform during a typical Sunday morning worship service. Instrumentalists have been recruited to provide additional musical interest, and steps are being taken to restart a fledgling orchestra group in the spirit of the EIO. A small children's choir has been organized in preparation for inclusion in this year's holiday music service. Emerson's Performing Arts Council recently inaugurated a new concert series, "Music Sundays." All donations will go to the Performing Arts Council.

The governing structure of the congregation and how the minister is a part of this structure

The Board of Trustees, subject to the authority of the members of the congregation, is the principal policy and governance-framing body of the congregation. It has general charge of the conduct of all business affairs of the church and control of its administration. The Board is the fiduciary agent for the congregation; each year it submits a budget for congregational approval.

The minister and the congregation, acting through the Board of Trustees, share the leadership and ministry of the congregation.

After a change in the church constitution in December 2021, Emerson's Board of Trustees is transitioning from 10 members (9 members plus the past president) to 7 members. We currently have 8 members plus the past president.

The three congregational committees – Nominations, Charitable Outreach, and Minister Search – are elected from and by the church membership and are responsible solely to the church membership. Other committees that are needed to carry on the work of the church may be appointed by the Board. Most committees can recruit their own members.

Emerging leaders often begin engaging with Emerson by serving on a committee or task force, then moving to leadership positions. Elected positions are recruited by the Nominations Committee after nominees have been active in the affairs of the church.

How the work of the congregation happens

The work of the church happens through the Board of Trustees, church committees, task forces, and individual members. Committee membership is open to all members and active friends of the church on an unrestricted basis except as outlined in the church governing documents. The minister(s) and the president are ex-officio non-voting members of most committees.

Recent successful work of the congregation

- Our congregation successfully reopened the doors after the COVID pandemic in October 2021.
- After having been shut down twice for over 2 years during the pandemic, Emerson's English Class Program (ELL / ESL) started again this summer with 3 small classes. Seeing students from Ukraine and Russia sitting side by side in Emerson classrooms reminded the volunteers why they had invested so much time and energy in developing the program.
- Over 25 church members, including children and adults of all ages, attended a weekend retreat at Brazos Bend State Park in May 2022. The retreat provided an opportunity for members to reconnect and to discuss interconnectedness through activities such as building a giant spider web.
- In December 2021, culminating a more than two-year review process, the congregation voted to amend Emerson's Constitution and Bylaws, updating them and bringing them in line with applicable UUA guidelines.
- Our Board of Trustees began updating the church policy manual in September 2022 and is considering one section of the policy manual each month.

The work within the congregation which is slow, stuck, or not attended to

- rebuilding of lifespan religious education programs, some of which were temporarily discontinued during COVID
- supporting the congregation's professed desire for diversity by creating an atmosphere where members and visitors who are not of the predominant culture can feel genuinely welcome, comfortable and valued
- circle dinners (Once held quarterly in people's home, these had been a significant way of creating engagement and connection between members by allowing them to interact in comfortable small groups.)
- encouraging a larger pool of volunteers (Currently a small group of members shoulder a disproportionate share of tasks.)
- various in-person social action activities
- decision regarding update and repair of Westwood Hall
- rebuilding the LGBTQ+ group that regularly met at Emerson pre-pandemic

How money is raised within the congregation

Money is raised through an annual stewardship campaign held in the fall for the church fiscal year, which parallels the calendar year.

Portions of Delaney Hall are rented out on a long-term basis to Tanglewood Academy, a private school for toddlers through first grade.

The sanctuary is occasionally rented out for lectures and musical performances and has long been the meeting place of the Tuesday Musical Club.

Westwood Hall is rented out for meetings, lectures, and receptions.

In 2019, tenant and rental income accounted for 9% of Emerson's income; that number shrank to 5% in 2021 because there were fewer in-person events because of COVID.

We've held an annual church auction for many years now. Some of the proceeds from the church auction are dedicated to a particular need in the church such as shortening some pews to accommodate wheelchairs, upgrading the sound system, making our campus more energy-efficient, and replacing outdated office computers. Auctions have raised anywhere from \$9,643 in 2020 (when COVID hit during the spring when we have often held our church auction) to \$37,115 in 2015. Our church auction in the fall of 2022 raised \$17,192.

The most recent capital campaigns in the congregation

Emerson's most recent capital campaign began in 2002 to partially fund the construction of Delaney Hall, the building that houses our administrative offices and classrooms.

The building project was paid for in part through a \$2 million capital campaign, which members pledged to support through donations over 3 years. Member Andrew Delaney donated \$500,000 to the capital campaign, and the capital campaign also received substantial donations from the Martel Foundation and the Mullineaux family.

\$750,000 was taken from the endowment at the beginning of the building project to help pay for the building.

The Delaney Foundation initially agreed to pay the interest on the mortgage for 5 years and later extended its payments until the balloon payout date of June 2014.

Move-in for the building was in June 2004. The total final cost of the building was approximately \$3.65 million. The church signed a mortgage for \$915,575 in October 2005.

When the balloon payment became due in 2014, the congregation voted to retire the mortgage by taking \$785,676 out of the endowment.

Debt that the congregation has

The congregation has a small loan of \$12,450 for the recent replacement of an air conditioner chiller.

How the congregation feels about its stewardship

While the church has assets (buildings, grounds, an endowment), it has sometimes been a challenge to meet the operating budget through member contributions. Despite an annual fall stewardship drive directed to all members and the requirement for some recorded financial contribution to maintain membership, the majority of the budget is still underwritten by a minority of donors.

Last year (for the 2022 fiscal year), a total of \$456,230 was pledged by 127 pledging units. (Multiple members in one household are considered to be one pledge unit.) The mean pledge was \$3,592, the median was \$1,992 and the mode was \$500.

In the congregational survey, church finances were the area where Emersonians expressed the least confidence. When asked to respond to the statement "I am confident in our congregation's financial sustainability," 27.83% of respondents agreed, 44.33% were neutral, and 27.83% disagreed.

Role of the minister(s) in stewardship

The minister is expected to communicate with the Stewardship Committee, to give a "stewardship sermon" at the beginning of the pledge drive, and to write or co-write a stewardship letter to the congregation.

The ten largest pledges within the congregation

For the 2022 church fiscal year, the ten largest pledges were

- \$38,000
- \$25,000
- \$20,000
- \$20,000
- \$15,600
- \$13,750
- \$13,200
- \$13,000
- \$11,320
- \$10,000

The top ten pledges accounted for 32% of the total pledge amount for 2022. The pledge drive for 2023 is currently underway, so the amount of the 10 largest pledges is not yet available.

What a prospective minister should know about the building and grounds for the congregation

The church owns its buildings and the four acres they sit on. The last mortgage was retired in 2014.

Westwood Hall, with its unique arched, laminated-wood roof, opened in 1960. It was built primarily as a fellowship hall, but also served as Emerson's worship space for 15 years until the current sanctuary was constructed. The building still serves as our fellowship hall.

Emerson's sanctuary was designed in a style reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple in Oak Park, Illinois. The groundbreaking ceremony was held in May 1974, and the building opened in April 1975. Seating capacity is 400 persons.

Delaney Hall, which houses religious education and administrative offices, opened in 2004. A bright, soaring entryway called the Gathering Place connects Delaney Hall to the sanctuary, providing a common area where children and adults pass through and mingle on their way to classes or worship. On most Sundays, it serves as the location for after-worship social time.

We are blessed that previous generations of Emersonians were thoughtful about landscaping from its very inception. Mature live oak trees provide welcome shade for the courtyard and the memorial garden. Red oaks, maples, and other varieties of trees are interspersed throughout the campus.

The condition of the buildings and grounds

Our 47-year old sanctuary continues to provide a comfortable, traditional, meditative worship space. It has been well-maintained, and various upgrades have been undertaken over the years.

Unfortunately, due to the Sanctuary's flat roof, leaks have been an on-and-off occurrence for years. A leak is under investigation right now but should be covered by a warranty. The air conditioners need repair and maintenance more often than we'd like. Air conditioning units in Delaney Hall may need to be replaced in the next five years at a cost of \$45,000.

With the construction in 2004 of Delaney Hall, low-maintenance, native plants were incorporated into much of the landscaped area of the church. A member donated an additional native prairie garden several years ago. Due to COVID and a recent drought, some areas of the campus currently show the need for further attention.

We are now self-insuring Westwood Hall, which we continue to rent out occasionally and use for our church auction and memorial service receptions. Sometime in the next few years, the congregation will need to decide whether to undertake a capital campaign for improvements to the building. The kitchen is not up to code as a commercial kitchen, so when the building is rented, food can only be reheated and not cooked. The toilets don't flush well, but the plumbing is under concrete, which adds to the cost of repairs. The estimated cost for those two fixes is \$350,000.

Over time we have discovered that we need to add at least \$30,000 per year to our Reserve Fund to keep up with capital improvements and repairs to our building and grounds. We have an evergreen document available in our documents packet called Emerson's Long- and Short-Term Capital Improvements List, which lists and prioritizes capital improvements and maintenance items along with their projected costs.

Expectations of the congregation for a minister(s) around pastoral care / spiritual guidance / counseling / home and hospital visitation

In the congregational survey, the pastoral role was considered important for what members personally wanted and for the good of the entire congregation.

The minister should have pastoral skills and a caring presence. Members want to feel a warm connection with the minister and expect the minister to recognize members, including children. People need to feel the minister knows them – at least their names.

The minister should provide support and guidance to the LPMT (the volunteer Lay Pastoral Ministry Team). This includes identifying members who might need help through this program, helping train the volunteers in this ministry of presence, and emotionally supporting these volunteers.

Even though the congregation has an LPMT, people still expect to access the minister, and there are times when only contact with the minister is satisfactory. The settled minister will need to understand when contact with the LPMT is sufficient.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around children and adult religious education

For most of our history, Emerson was known for its strong religious education programs. The congregation places a high value on revitalizing its religious education programs for children and adults and wants a minister who is highly supportive of the education function.

Members told us the minister should be involved with the education of children, youth, and adults, including religious education and educational sermons.

Members would also like to see the minister teach occasionally when possible, especially non-Sunday sessions such as Building Your Own Theology or UU101 classes.

The minister will need to work with our director of religious education, the Adult Religious Education Committee and the congregation to determine the future of our educational programs.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around community building / facilitation skills / coffee hour and social times

Members would like the minister to stay for social hour after the worship service, attend church social events including the annual auction and circle dinners at members' homes, and occasionally attend Sunday services when not in the pulpit.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around committee / task force work

This role was not mentioned among the highest expectations on the congregational survey or in the small group meetings.

Members would like for the minister to attend committee meetings occasionally. They would like for the minister to be familiar with and provide guidance for the work of the various committees and task forces, which will help leaders do their work in a productive and caring manner.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around leadership development

On the congregational survey, respondents rated developing volunteers and leaders as being relatively important for the good of the whole congregation.

Leadership development was not mentioned specifically in the small group meetings, although attendees did express a desire for the minister to inspire members to be engaged at a higher level.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around membership and membership growth

In both the congregational survey and in the small group meetings, Emersonians expressed the hope for membership growth, including growth among younger and more diverse members. Emersonians would like the church to regain a critical mass of members and some of the energy that it had in years past.

Members place a high value on new members, as well as member retention, not so much because higher numbers "look good," but because they feel that the message of UU is an important one that deserves to be shared more widely.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around staff relations and supervision

Our expectations are laid out in our policy manual and are answered in a previous question.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around anti-oppression work / social justice / social action

On the congregational survey, "encouraging social justice programs" was listed as the 4th most important ministerial role of 11 for the good of the next generation. However, it came in last when members were thinking about what was good for the whole congregation. Individual member's own preference for the minister to take on a social justice role was right in the middle.

In the small group meetings, members generally expressed a desire that the new minister prioritize the Emerson community over social justice activities in the beginning of the ministry.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around interfaith / community work

Our former co-ministers were actively involved in the community and in interfaith organizations. While we continue to financially support Interfaith Ministries, members did not mention active involvement in interfaith/community work as a priority for our minister at this time.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around denominational activities

It would be helpful for the minister to keep the congregation aware of denominational activities of importance. We expect our minister to participate in General Assembly and in UU conferences for ministers. There is no expectation, however, that our minister will take on a significant role in denominational activities.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around other areas not already addressed above

We expect to live out our statement of purpose: Our beloved community of faith, reason, and affection welcomes all to grow in mind and spirit as together we build a better world.

A minister should be prepared to help Emersonians consider both qualitative and quantitative measures of success. There were numerous qualitative responses in the survey and small group meetings about how members would know that a ministry is being successful, such as "I will want to come to church." Others talked about quantitative measures of success: concrete goals with action steps and measurable outcomes.

How trust is built between the congregation and the minister

To build trust, a minister should be able to

- foster communication among members and staff (including the minister)
- create an environment of openness, honesty and acceptance
- be visible and available to members
- develop methods of accepting member feedback in a non-defensive way

The congregation, on the other hand, should be willing to see the minister as a individual and not to have unrealistic expectations or expect the minister to be perfect or "all things to all people."

Why people leave the congregation, and why new visitors do not return

People leave the congregation because

- they move out of Houston for work or to relocate closer to family
- they came to Emerson for religious education for their children and lost interest when the children grew up

- they are unhappy about a decision that the church has made
- they disagree with the minister
- they feel the church is no longer meeting their needs.

We rarely know why visitors don't return.

Any expectations there might be about a minister's family and personal life

The survey and small group meetings told us that the congregation wants a minister who is physically present at church on Sundays (even sometimes when the minister is not in the pulpit) and for other congregational events. Because Houston is a large and spread-out city, it would probably be best if the minister didn't live extremely far away.

Some members have expressed a hope that if the minister has a family, the family will get along well with the congregation.

One mistake a minister could make that would seriously affect the ministry

While we recognize that we are all humans and we all make mistakes, anything that violated the code of ethics for ministers could seriously affect the ministry.

If the minister damaged the trust of the congregation or failed to be honest and transparent, the ministry would be profoundly affected.

Questions the congregation would have liked to have been asked which were not included here

There aren't additional questions that we would have liked to have been asked. We look forward to sharing more information about Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church in our documents packet and in interviews.

Describe trust in the congregation

The congregational survey showed a reasonable, but not extremely high, level of trust in leadership (55.10% agree, 31.3% neutral, 13.25% disagree).

The congregation's ability to have difficult conversations while staying in relationship was one of the two areas where respondents expressed the least confidence (42.26% agree, 40.21% neutral, 17.52% disagree) – the other area being the congregation's financial stability mentioned previously.

These numbers indicate that as we move toward reconnecting, rebuilding and revitalizing, we have work to do in the area of trust-building. Ironically (and anecdotally only), members who have attended small-groups meetings and had one-off conversations with members of the search committee have expressed a high level of trust in the committee.

How is technology currently used in your congregation and what are the expectations of the minister around that?

We expect the minister to be able to use Zoom and microphones and to have basic computer skills. Emerson employs a worship tech coordinator and has a cadre of A/V technology volunteers who handle in-house A/V and live-streaming issues.