

Responses Part 4 — More Comments

Our discussions during the small-group meetings were lively, candid and, while they didn't always stay right on track, they produced some perceptive observations and useful suggestions.

- Focus the service on the congregation that is there. No children, no children's story
- Maybe we need to redefine what 'younger' means and what family means.
- Younger adults- don't judge them for being young parents. We need younger people. We need to find out how to not judge them.
- Younger often means younger than we are currently seeing, not necessarily young.
- People get tired of long-term volunteering.
- We need better words for inclusivity.
- COVID has done so much damage. You cannot compare before and after.
- We need to overcome the COVID years.
- We need to overcome the inertia.
- Keep online streaming as it helps make it more inclusive for everyone. Online needs to stop being seen as less effective and important. Motivate current members and welcome new ones.
- Articulate to the congregation what the requirements are to be a part of the congregation (talking about a ministry of presence).
- I don't want to be one of the 3 people teaching the kids.
- Teaching RE takes us out of worship.
- Return to 10:00 a.m. RE with supervised play at 11:00.
- What will the congregation do with someone "too" different? (staff)
- Time-related benefits are important aspects of the contract. (staff)
- Churches draw congregants who reflect the minister.
- Happy that Frank Shulman wore a robe (not culture)
- Adult Religious Education has been at 10:00 am ONLY.
- UU101 Classes for new members taught by the minister, with congregational mentors
 - educate people as to what we are all about
 - help the minister get to know people
- How to address the fear of what Texas represents to those outside it
- We need to be less resistant to change, for example, having children in the full worship service every Sunday.
- It will help to have a minister who has experience moving a congregation forward and can lead us through incremental steps.
- As a group, are we willing to say to a prospective minister that we are ready to step into the next phase of our history?
- After a year, do another congregational survey. Be ready to do something with the feedback.
- Congregation needs to nurture Emerson for the long run.
- This is an exciting adventure.
- In this time of changing demographics, we need to be open to possibilities/flexible/creative/cognizant of reality.

- The congregation is suffering from a lack of strong leadership.
- We should rethink the Adult RE program.
- There should be a defined process for setting goals and objectives with the minister — and established procedures for an annual or semi-annual review
- Consider reestablishing the Committee on Ministry.
- The Search Committee needs to do careful due diligence of candidates.
- We want vision and energy.
- Be cautious of everyone's feelings.
- Emerson has had lots of trauma and changes since 2016.
- There is a lack of structure now.
- We need to resume Building Your Own Theology and Spirituality courses.
- Have gatherings like UU lunch or Adult RE but specifically for young adults to bring in this population.
- What brings us together as a beloved community?
- Do not emphasize that it is liberal.

What should be most important? (Board of Trustee ideas about ministerial focus) Worship (8), Social Justice (2), Community Outreach (2), Denominational Activities (1), Pastoral Care (1), Interfaith Connection, Prophetic Witness, Administration (least important) - (Board)

What does the ideal minister look like?

- Magnetic personality
- Charismatic - inspire people to come and participate
- I want to feel that they know who I am.
- Person with warmth
- One job qualification – How to overcome Covid times and Covid isolation
- Believes in global warming, recognizes income disparity
- A strong staff leader. Willing/able to advocate for staff (staff)
- Knows and respects the people (staff)
- Good at taking care of their own needs (staff)
- Sets good boundaries (staff)
- Can say “NO” in a loving yet firm manner (staff)
- Can explain the meaning of “liberal religion” (staff)
- A good connector: Helps the right people have the right conversations (staff)
- A listener (staff)
- Genuinely curious (staff)
- Integrated sense of spiritual justice; why justice is required. (staff)
- Nurture a true lifelong learning environment. (staff)
- Willing to make time for “dreaming space.” (staff)
- A keen eye for seeing power in the system. (staff)
- An experienced minister (staff)
- Needs vision to address the current apathy
- Minister shouldn't have a set agenda, theologically or politically
- Minister should be open to discourse. Open and outgoing

- Minister should give occasional adult religious education. Should also engage with children and youth
- Outgoing minister
- Minister has good administrative skills: able to give Board perspective/direction/guidance
- Minister has good communication skills: listens, is open-minded
- Minister is not defensive: is willing to accept criticism and isn't dogmatic
- The minister should have pastoral skills.
- The minister should inspire social justice efforts.
- The minister needs to bring us new ideas.
- Volunteers need positive feedback from the minister
- They need to see what's available for us to connect.
- It will help to have a minister who has experience moving a congregation forward and can lead us through incremental steps.
- Need a minister who knows people
- We seek someone who will push our boundaries.
- We need someone who has the essence of a leader: Vision, plan and work to achieve it.
- A 21st century minister who can embrace a digital ministry.
- They have to be able to connect with millennials and Gen Z, both with technology and relevant preaching.
- They must have a good heart.

What mistakes could seriously damage the ministry (from the staff)

- Dishonesty. Lack of transparency.
- Forming cliques with members
- Finances spent on things long disagreed with
- Outside the balance of liberal vs. conservative
- Moving outside known to unknown policy
- Intervening in conflict in unsoft ways. Naming the conflict
- Inflexibility: Unwilling to learn, change and grow from/with the congregation

What can we do to make a new ministry successful?

- Show up (note showing up isn't always physically being at church.)
- Encourage people to come back. We need to help people get over the disconnect caused by Covid.
- Show up. But that doesn't mean being there.
- Accept that we are all going to mess up.
- More non-dual thinking
- Think "among" rather than "between"
- The congregation acknowledges its role in helping the minister be successful.
- Members have a role in the success of a new minister and need to share responsibility.

How would you help a new minister “learn the norms” as that person settles in? How can the congregation help a new minister to feel comfortable and at home during the first year or two?

- We need to ask the minister, “What can we do to help you?” Maybe follow their lead?
- Parties
- Small group meetings
- dinners/lunches
- Monthly lunch with specific groups
- Catered lunches for a while
- Welcome packet about Houston to introduce them/her/him to the city
- Guide list - who to ask about what
- Members sign up to take minister places
- Host the new minister at home meals
- Circle dinners
- Congregants admit their vulnerability
- Families invite the minister to dinners in their homes
- Focused circle dinners with the minister, both with and without the children
- Small group gatherings so that the minister gets to know the members
- Orient the minister to the committees and key leaders as well as the Board and the general congregation
- Pick trusted members to serve as culture guides (Board will fill some of that role)
- Remind the congregation that new minister doesn’t know us
- Have families invite minister to dinner
- Friday nighters for families and invite minister
- Circle dinners
- In advance, remind people to wear name tags, Move rack to a more accessible place, greeters remind people to wear them
- Pictorial directory
- Promise to show up
- Invite minister to activities, dinners
- Express our thanks
- Help them get settled
- Help them find resources (for home maintenance and the like)
- Share with them about how we came to be what we are
- Cupcakes
- Give them ample opportunities to meet and get to know members
- Introduce them to local clergy - UU and other liberal clergy
- Introduce them to TUUJM
- Introduce the minister to our committees/small groups
- Get the minister involved in some of our committees/small groups
- Have dinner parties with minister and small groups/committees
- Restart Council of Committees but don’t meet monthly