
VII. Congregational Profile

Example #1 – a small congregation

Although we are now a church, we are proud of our status as the first UU Fellowship established in the state and retain the idea of fellowship in both our hearts and name.

The Fellowship is a growing liberal religious community and has had all the accompanying signs of growing pains. After many years of using other meeting places, we with much trepidation built our own meeting house. This moved us forward for several years as we worked on our new home: raising money and raising spirits, learning the true meaning of consensus, hearing our many voices, speaking with one.

Our congregation consists of many elders (the average age of the survey respondents was 59) and we seek to nurture our youth and young adults through various programs designed to meaningfully incorporate them into the fabric of our fellowship; while also educating our adult members in the history and principles of our UU heritage, both Sunday morning and beyond.

Our Fellowship reflects some interesting numbers due in part to the seasonality of our resort area. We see about a third new friends and visitors in summer as people vacation here, and about 30% of our members go south for the winter. This can be an interesting challenge.

About 20% of our members have been with us almost from the beginning, 50% have been with us for 8-10 years, and we have a very active group of newer members who are now energizing our committees and activities. We feel this mix is a very positive indication of our openness to change. 59% have also had some experience with other UU congregations.

Because the diversity of thought often seen in a UU church is present here (UUs have always been known for their willingness to express their own individualistic views on almost every subject!), we have felt the lack of a strong mediating presence to listen and lead through example and experience the energetic and exciting group that embodies the Fellowship and we hope that you are the person we seek to fill this challenging position.

Example #2 – a midsize congregation

We are a congregation on the move. A congregation in flux. With the assistance of our current interim minister, we have made a congregational decision to grow in every way - spiritually, financially, and in membership.

Our long range planning theme is "505 in '05." Our goal is to grow from a congregation of 250 to over 500 in the next five years. We seek a minister to accept the challenge of guiding us on that journey.

During the next five years, we expect to have moments of great joy and triumph mixed with the pains of growth. Our survey and anecdotal experience demonstrate that there are several divergent theological viewpoints strongly held within our church community.

For the first time, we have a full-time church administrator and a three-quarter-time director of religious education. Our 2000-2001 budget increased twenty percent over the previous year. This fall, we added a second Sunday service, for the first time. This is a huge leap for our church, and we need someone to go with us to the next level. For these reasons, there are some specific characteristics we seek in our next minister.

Example #3 – a large congregation

Our congregation has a short history but one of long and stable parish ministries. Our first called minister served for 13 years, our most recent 22 years.

We have loved and celebrated our ministers. With them we have grown and prospered as a church community, growing not only in membership but also in our physical facilities, our finances, our staffing, our programming and, most important to us, our ministry. We feel good about our church. We have liked our leaders. We are financially sound, we have a new highly functional as well as esthetically satisfying physical home. The arts are especially important to our members who enthusiastically participate in and support a tradition of fine music and the fine arts. And we like each other. While we are not afraid to express our differences, we have been relatively unfactionalized through our history. Through practice and tradition, a constantly rotating leadership keeps our lay leadership from becoming entrenched.

The status quo is not where we wish to be. In announcing his decision to retire, our most recent minister noted that there are cycles of ministry and that we were at the end of one (our rebuilding and becoming established following our disastrous 1990 fire) and on the verge of defining a new one. We started a visioning process in 1999 which continues. Already we see many ways for us to grow, improve, adapt and prepare for our continuing ministry to each other and those who would join us.

Our ministerial structure has worked well for us in the past. But as we are now a large church, we are exploring whether a team or shared ministry would be a better structure to meet the needs of the church and its members.

As we continue to grow, we become more diverse; we need to find ways to be more sensitive and responsive to and skillful at dealing with differences.

While we are reviewing our professional clergy leadership, should we be reassessing the effectiveness of our governing structure that has served so well all these years?

We built a beautiful and functional facility after our disastrous fire in 1990; but it's just about filled to capacity and then some most Sunday mornings. Should we be looking to expand? spin off?

Our finances are sound; but could we be doing much more if we raised our sights?

We care a lot about social justice and we have six task forces. But what about our own personal commitments to doing first-person action? How can we reconcile our commitment to furthering social justice with the daily demands in our personal lives? Is our commitment more vicarious than productive?

We have been instructed, inspired and challenged from the pulpit over the past four decades; have we become insular in our thinking? Have we valued the intellectual, perhaps at the expense of the spiritual?

There are skills, energy, vitality and vision within our congregation but they have, for the most part, been inner-directed. Many feel that we are approaching a transition where we can expand our horizons and take some new risks in furthering the principles that guide us.

As we ponder these questions we are very aware that we want to maintain what has been at the core of our church community: a spiritual home in which we care about and value one another, where worship services inspire and challenge us, bring us together; where there are common bonds of our Unitarian Universalist principles.