

First Unitarian Church of South Bend

Contract Minister

South Bend, Indiana | MidAmerica Region

Regional Contact: Rev. Lisa Presley | lpresley@uua.org

About First Unitarian Church of South Bend

Contact Methods

Website: <http://www.FirstUnitarian.us>

Meeting Address

Same as mailing address

Mailing Address

801 E Washington St
South Bend, IN 46617-2918

This Congregation **does not have** a 501(c)(3) status of its own

Congregation Life

Describe your Congregation and its culture:

Our congregation is a vibrant, diverse, and inclusive community where people come together to explore personal growth, spirituality, and shared values without the constraints of dogma or rigid beliefs. At the heart of our culture is a deep commitment to community, providing a space where individuals from all walks of life feel welcome and supported. Whether people identify as atheist, theist, LGBTQ+, BIPOC, or any other background, they find a spiritual home here, where authentic connections are fostered, and diversity is celebrated.

Our members value thoughtful, open dialogue and are driven by a collective desire to be morally and ethically engaged in the world. The congregation prides itself on being a sanctuary for those seeking refuge from more traditional religious spaces, offering a place where difficult questions can be explored, and where personal growth is encouraged without judgment. We are also deeply committed to social justice and activism, with a long-standing tradition of addressing important societal issues, advocating for human rights, and contributing to the well-being of our local and global communities.

The culture of our congregation reflects a balance between nurturing internal community connections and engaging in external efforts for social change. Members describe the church as a “beacon of light” and a “trusted voice,” providing moral guidance while encouraging personal freedom. Whether through Sunday services, community outreach, or small group gatherings, our congregation seeks to be a place where individuals can learn, grow, and make a positive impact on the world around them.

In essence, our congregation is a family of thoughtful, engaged, and open-minded individuals who come together to support one another, advocate for justice, and contribute to the wider community—all within a culture of acceptance, diversity, and kindness.

The church continues to experience a great interest in our congregation as shown by those attending Newcomer’s Classes to learn more about the Church and UUism. Sixteen individuals are currently enrolled in the fall 2024 Newcomer’s classes.

Your Congregation's mission:

Purpose

This church is a fellowship of seekers after the truth, bound by no dogma, restricted by no creed. The purpose of this fellowship is to bring those who believe in free inquiry into matters of religion into a closer acquaintance and cooperation. Relying upon reason as our guide, and upon freedom as our method, we seek to grow in understanding of ourselves and of our world, and to serve humanity.

To further the vision of this church, we strive to:

- Provide a variety of religious education opportunities for all ages.
- Gather regularly for reflection and celebration on Sundays and at other times.

- Create and sustain a loving, caring community.
- Affirm our Unitarian Universalist heritage and identity.
- Provide avenues for working towards the good of the greater community.
- Provide the physical, personnel, and fiscal resources to realize our Vision.

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

We live our values in the following ways:

- We have been a Welcoming Congregation. Our most recent demographic poll (2024) shows about 6% of the Congregation identifies as other than male/female, and about 33% of the Congregation assert a sexual orientation other than heterosexual. We have plans to read the UU common read, “Authentic Selves” in the next few months.
- Our commitment to climate responsibility is reflected in the installation of solar panels on the Church roof in 2017 and the installation of native-plant rain gardens on the church property in 2018 to retain storm water on site. Our new HVAC system allows us to heat and cool by zone remotely, to save on energy usage.
- Our Peace and Justice initiatives are shown in our partnership with the food pantry at Broadway Christian Church and the collection and delivery of food and basic supplies on a weekly basis through our P&J Committee. We are also a member of We Make Indiana, an initiative uniting diverse faith communities and people of conscience to make Indiana safer, healthier and more whole. We participate in CROP Walk as a way to work with other congregations and individuals to express and advocate for our shared values.
- The Church Care Committee keeps track of members and friends of the Church who have expressed needs through the minister, at Joys and Concerns at Sunday Services, or through other members of the Congregation. We maintain a supply of medical equipment (wheelchairs, crutches, etc.) on site for use by anyone who wishes to borrow them.
- Our commitment to Religious Education is shown by our continuing classes and activities for children and by a weekly Adult Forum and other periodic classes for adults.
- We consciously foster community among our members and friends by holding

a variety of social activities such as monthly Feasters meals at local restaurants, Game Nights, GEN XMZ, a social group for members of Gen X, Millennials, and adult members of Gen Z.

- The generosity of our Congregation is shown in our multi-year financial commitment to one of our members who is an amnesty refugee from Burundi who was unable to bring his wife and four children to the US without significant financial support. His family is now here and they are reunited.

What potential applicants should know about the congregation's lay leadership:

The Church's eight trustees and two assistant treasurers represent a broadly diverse cross section of the church and include individuals with several years experience in the Church and in Church governance.

Eleven different individuals and 31 members comprise our 23 committees and all are active in the overall support and governance of the Church and the execution of its mission.

Overall, 52 members and friends are active in governance and committee work.

Link to your Safe Congregation policy:

<https://firstunitarian.us/safe-congregation-policies/>

Worship service schedule:

Sundays, 10:30 am (in person and on Zoom); child care is available at all services.

Personnel

Name	Position	Paid Hours per Week	Year Started
David Mayfield	Treasurer	Volunteer	2023
Charles Leone	President/Chair	Volunteer	2024

Name	Position	Paid Hours per Week	Year Started
Louise Williams	Church Administrator	20	2024
Gail deSomer	Vice President/Chair	Volunteer	2024
Fern Hamlin	Secretary, Board of Trustees	Volunteer	2024
Finda Kamanda	Bookkeeper	5	2017

Describe the diversity in congregational staffing, now and in the past. Detail how leadership can assure opportunities and on-going support for people with marginalized identities in hiring practices:

Other than the minister, the only regular Church staff over the past 8 years have been a part-time office administrator and a part-time bookkeeper. Our bookkeeper during that 8-year period has been a Black woman. We have had several office administrators; most have been white, but one has been of Hispanic heritage. Leadership attempts to remain aware of the need for diversity of all types in the hiring process. On-going support involves regular interaction between leadership and support staff, and awareness of any issues that may arise to address them promptly.

Additional personnel notes:

The church felt that Rev. Beu exhibited unprofessional conduct including a numerous unfulfilled duties. He made people feel uncomfortable this included the DRE leaving the congregation.

Congregation History

Provide your Congregation's founding history:

Our congregation formed as a fellowship in 1949. On February 22, 1952, over 50 individuals and families officially became the First Unitarian Church South Bend, Indiana and members of the American Unitarian Association. The official dinner meeting was held at the Izaak Walton League clubhouse.

The members met on a regular basis, first at the YMCA and then at the recreation building at Beacon Heights, relying on their own resources and guest speakers for programs. Rev. Erwin A. Gaede was our first minister. He came to town in 1952 and got things going. At about the same time, the congregation also had recently purchased a mansion that had been owned by a local prestigious family to use as the first church. The mansion was renovated so that there were classrooms and an office for the minister, as well as space for the Sunday morning gathering.

Rev. John Morgan, our second minister, came to us in November of 1956. Around that time, it was evident we needed additional space and we held a building fund drive that resulted in enough pledges so that a new church sanctuary and social hall could be built. The building, initially and in addition to the mansion, was dedicated in 1960. In the 1960's, the addition to the church made it possible for one to walk from the old mansion directly into the new sanctuary. Rev. John Morgan was the minister when our group voted to merge with the Universalists on April 12, 1959, and became a Unitarian Universalist congregation.

In the tumultuous 1960's, our congregation, like sensitive citizens throughout the country in the sixties, became quite involved in our community and in national social action causes. Copies of the church newsletter "The Unitarian" from this period reflect congregational interest in fair housing, anti-Vietnam war activities, civil rights, and other social issues.

Rev. Rudolph C. Gelsey was our minister from September 1960 until December 1963, followed by Rev. Joseph Schneiders from January 1965 through 1968. The church's political activism increased during this period, with members taking part in marches and demonstrations in our community as well as elsewhere, including the historic march on Selma.

In 1968, the mansion burned down in an apparent accident and other churches in the community opened their doors to us until a new entrance and rehabilitation could be done to the existing building. Members of the church, led largely by Rev. Schneider, protested in the late 1960's against segregation and the Vietnam War. The story was front page news in the South Bend Tribune. There was an outpouring of support from members of the local religious community as well as the Central Midwest District of the UUA. Several Protestant, Catholic and Jewish congregations offered assistance and the use of their facilities. The members continued to meet in other churches while the remaining building was put back in order and a new entryway built. The chalice hanging in the church entryway was made from the stained glass salvaged from the mansion after the fire.

The fall of 1970, saw the opening of the refurbished building and a search for a new minister. In the summer of 1971, Rev Joel Scholefield arrived from California. He had an outgoing personality that attracted some new members. Scholefield left in 1977. In 1979, Rev. Patricia Bowen was called our sixth minister, and her New England roots were evident in the traditional services she conducted, including a silent candlelight recession on Christmas Eve. Rev. Susan Weickum was called our seventh minister in 1984. A recent theological school graduate who was married and in mid-life, she was a solid Unitarian Universalist. She stayed with us until 1989 and then in the spring of 1990, we welcomed Rev. John Morehouse. He was an excellent preacher, and his inspired sermons drew many people to the church. Before long, two services became necessary. With his wife Kathy, as religious education director, the two moved the church forward in a very positive manner. Rev Morehouse left in 1994 for a larger church in the Washington DC area. After two years with interim ministers, in 1996 the congregation called Rev Lisa Doege to the pulpit. She was a native Minnesotan who had held various positions within the denomination, and this was her first ministry in a church. She was with us for 11 years and left in 2007 to return to family in Minnesota.

After two years with interim ministers, Rev. Denise Tracy and Rev. Jennie Barrington, we called Rev. Harold Beu to our pulpit. He helped the congregation transition into an interim home and was active in the Social Justice areas where church members were involved. During the fall of 2010, the congregation sold its building of 59 years to find a larger building in which to grow. As the church settled into a temporary location, a change in ministry brought the Rev. Sian Wiltshire to assist the congregation with its endeavor to find a larger facility with better amenities and access to call our permanent home. We stayed in the temporary location for four years.

Following the two year interim period with Rev. Wiltshire, the congregation called Rev. Chip Roush as Consulting Minister in 2013. We purchased the current location of our church on East Washington around the same time and completely renovated the building. In June of 2014 the congregation called Rev. Roush as our settled minister, and in August 2014 we moved into our newly renovated building. Rev. Roush attended the Selma 60th Anniversary Jubilee. During this time, our congregation supported Black Lives Matter. Rev. Chip left the congregation in Summer 2024.

Today we are primarily lay-led congregation with a robust community of committed Unitarian Universalists supporting each other and our local community.

Date founded: 2/22/1952

Describe important events in your Congregation's history:

In 1968 the original Church building burned and was razed. The congregation then renovated its classroom building constructed in 1960 to serve as the sanctuary, offices and classroom space.

In 2010 we sold the Church building and moved into temporary space shared with Good Shepherd Montessori School, and in 2013-14, purchased, renovated and moved into a new space which was formerly a medical office building. Capital fundraising drives of over \$700,000 and a mortgage to secure the remaining construction costs of \$400,000 allowed the completion of the new space.

The mortgage on the new building was paid off in August 2024 through a “Burn the Mortgage” special fund-raising effort that raised over \$90,000 for that purpose. The special fundraising was completed just months after the conclusion of the annual stewardship pledge campaign which increased giving over the previous year by \$15,000.

Ministerial History

Start	End	Position	Name	Job Title
2013	2024	Called	James Roush	Settled Minister
2011	2013	Interim	Sian Wiltshire	Interim Minister
2009	2011	Called	Harold Beu	Minister
2008	2009	Interim	The Rev. Jennie Ann Barrington	Interim Minister
2007	2008	Interim	Denise Tracy	Interim Minister
1996	2007	Called	Lisa Doege	Minister
1995	1996	Interim	Anne Buehler	Interim Minister
1994	1995	Interim	Arlene Lukas	Interim Minister
1990	1994	Called	John Morehouse	Minister
1984	1989	Called	Susan Weickum	Minister
1979	1982	Called	Patricia Bowen	Minister

Start	End	Position	Name	Job Title
1971	1977	Called	Joel Scholefield	Minister
1956	1960	Called	John Morgan	Minister
1951	1956	Called	Erwin Gaede	Minister

List non-UU ministers who have served the congregation, including their names, denominational affiliation (if any), and approximate dates of service:

No non-UU ministers have served with the congregation.

Recall if a minister with a marginalized identity has served the congregation, and describe how this ministry did go / is going:

To our knowledge, no minister with a marginalized identity has served with this congregation, although a recent minister had begun to use pronouns he/they.

Additional ministerial history notes:

The church felt that Rev. Beu exhibited unprofessional conduct including a numerous unfulfilled duties. He made people feel uncomfortable this included the DRE leaving the congregation.

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
2024	\$134,724	\$142,405	114	20	51-75
2023	\$148,926	\$139,787	105	18	51-75
2022	\$131,540	\$131,766	106	0	51-75
2021	\$144,581	\$126,878	110	0	51-75
2020	\$143,635	\$150,611	110	15	66

Year	Total Pledge Income	Total Operating Expenses	Membership	Youth Enrollment	Avg. Attendance
2019	\$147,564	\$149,656	106	0	62
2018	\$142,649	\$166,764	113	15	74
2017	\$141,769	\$164,200	109	30	79
2016	\$147,575	\$170,180	110	30	78
2015	\$110,881	\$144,234	114	36	71

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)?

10-24%

Please describe the gender makeup of your congregation

According to our recent congregational survey, 58% respondents were woman, 37% were men, and the remaining 5% identified as Agender/Gender Androgenous, Transgender, or Gender Queer/Gender Fluid.

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?

1

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

1

What can you say about the diversity in congregational leadership, now and in the past? How does leadership assure opportunities and on-going support for people with marginalized identities in leadership development practices?

The current Board of Trustees of the Church (8 members) is mostly white (7 members) with one Trustee of Hispanic origin. Three are female and five are male. Three identify as members of the LGBTQ Community. There is no formal program to assure opportunities and on-going support for those with marginalized identities, other than a culture of awareness at the Board level and on the Church Nominating Committee that diversity is an important part of the selection process.

Accessibility

Does your Congregation provide assisted listening systems? Yes

Assisted listening system details:

The assisted listening system has been in place for several years and is maintained by the Technology Committee. Availability of the equipment is noted publicly near the entry to the sanctuary.

List parts of the building(s) which are accessible to people who use wheelchairs or have disabilities which affect mobility:

All public parts of the building are accessible to people who use wheelchairs or have mobility disabilities.

List parts of the building(s) which are not accessible:

The pulpit is not accessible to those in wheelchairs, but can be made accessible under any circumstance.

Does your building have accessible, automatic exterior doors? No

Describe other ways your congregation is working toward being more accessible:

We have already made ourselves more accessible by providing all services and most meetings on Zoom. We are currently working through adding accessible, automatic exterior doors and have already identified this as a future endowment campaign capital project.

Resources & Programs

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

Ministerial Search Workshop, New DRE Training, RE Kickoff, two members attended General Assembly in 2024, 2024 Certification Report, Whole Church Religious Education.

Describe your religious educational programs across the lifespan:

We define religious education as learning where we come from, how to live a good

life, and how to figure out where we are going.

Although we don't have a paid director of religious education we do have what we call the DREAM team, directors of religious education and mindfulness. This is a team of volunteers who are coordinating the children and youth religious education.

At First Unitarian, we take children's spiritual, emotional, ethical, and social development seriously. We offer a safe place for children and youth to wonder, ask questions, and discover. We do this through the exploration of themes such as Unitarian Universalist identity and values, world religions, the web of life, how to treat others, and social justice. For a better understanding of what we teach, please read our Unitarian Universalist Kid's Principles & Values.

Children's Religious Education classes are offered during our worship services throughout the year, offering meaningful, age-appropriate activities for children and youth. Our curriculum is designed to foster a place to explore together in a caring community.

We believe social development and the opportunity to interact with different age groups is important to children. In order to foster a sense of belonging, we offer a variety of social activities throughout the year such as Intergenerational Games Nights, a Halloween Party, an Easter Egg Hunt, Playground Meetups, and more!

For the 2024-2025 school year we have child care for those four and under. For kindergarten and up we have a "one room schoolhouse" every week where we will provide a Legos ValUUes lesson based on the newly adopted values of Justice, Equity, Transformation, Pluralism, Interdependence, and Generosity, with Love at the Center.

Twice per month we have added a class for middle school age children. The first Sunday of the month, beginning in October will be "The Twilight Zone". The kids will watch an episode and then discuss it. Rod Serling, the producer of the series was a Unitarian. On the 3rd Sunday of the month will be Dungeons and Dragons.

As soon as the high school Our Whole Lives curriculum update is available, we will offer OWL. We plan to alternate offering high school and middle school OWL.

For adults we offer an Adult Forum in the hour before church on topics of interest. After the service there is often a talk back session in which to discuss the sermon. The speaker of the service decides whether they want a talkback and typically leads the discussion. This is open to anyone who would like to join in either in

person or on Zoom.

In addition, each year we offer “Great Decisions”, an eight session program prepared by the Foreign Policy Association. The Great Decisions program represents our congregations commitment to living our 2nd, 4th, 6th and 7th principles as we work for justice, equity, compassion, search for truth and meaning, support the goal of peace, liberty and justice for all, respecting and learning about interdependence throughout the world.

In the past we have also had classes on various topics or book discussion groups.

Describe your youth and campus ministry programs:

The Church has no youth or campus ministry programs.

Surrounding Community

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

Nestled around the glistening St. Joe River, South Bend is a vibrant cultural hub that maintains the charm and community sensibility of a small town.

South Bend residents have ample opportunities to enjoy the arts. The Morris Performing Arts Center regularly hosts national and regional touring shows including Broadway productions, concerts, and other live performances. The South Bend Civic Theater is our beloved community theater where resident thespians can participate in local productions and acting classes.

Our cultural scene is further enriched by local art galleries, museums, an award-winning public library, and numerous festivals and community events that invite residents to experience an array of artwork, music, and cuisines while connecting with other community members.

For those who enjoy the bustle of larger cities, South Bend is just a train ride away from Chicago, and within a few hours’ drive to Indianapolis and Detroit. We’re also just a short drive from several popular Lake Michigan beaches—a staple summer destination of many South Benders.

St. Joseph County, where our city is located, is home to over half a dozen colleges and universities, including the world-renowned University of Notre Dame. Football season is typically abuzz with Notre Dame spirit, as many residents attend games,

tailgates, and watch parties on Notre Dame football weekends.

South Bend is home to several close-knit neighborhoods with active organizations that foster healthy relationships amongst residents, local businesses, city officials, colleges, and visitors.

Although we're located in the "red state" of Indiana, South Bend is a liberal-leaning town that offers a number of safe spaces for folks with varying identities. We're proud to have twice elected now Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg as our mayor. Our local LGBTQ Center hosts programming for adults and teens, and numerous local businesses are proactively welcoming to members of the LGBTQ community.

The church is located on the East Bank of South Bend, population 100,000 people with a total of 259,000 people in the entire South Bend Urbanized Area (UZA); some of our congregation comes from the surrounding area. The demographics of the South Bend UZA are 68% white, 14% Black or African American, 9% Hispanic/Latinex, with a 2.5% Asian Population. The church is located close to the University of Notre Dame Campus. South Bend is approximately 5 miles south of the Michigan state line and 45 minutes away from Lake Michigan beaches.

South Bend offers all this lifestyle affordably, with lower housing prices and a cost of living well below national averages. In June of 2024, U.S. News and World Report named South Bend No. 25 on its "Best Places to Live in the U.S. in 2024-2025" list.

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

Our impression is that we are not well known in the larger community although we do participate in community events and organizations such as the CROP walk, the United Religious Community, We Make Indiana, Broadway Christian Parish and host quarterly concerts.

Describe how the surrounding community shaped your congregation, and how your congregation has shaped the surrounding community:

The roots of our founding members were largely secular humanist. Our current makeup is very diverse. Our recent survey shows we are 15% secular humanist, 15% agnostic, 11.4% spiritual but not religious, 11.4% atheist. For the full range of beliefs see the demographic data in [our most recent congregational survey](#). In the 1960's the church was active in the civil rights movement and anti-Vietnam war

movements. More recently we supported the Black Lives Matters movement.

South Bend has a culture that is strongly influenced by Roman Catholic and protestant church presence. The University of Notre Dame is a major part of that culture. Our Church participates and interacts with others in the community where our values and efforts are in parallel and we are becoming known over time for the UU values that we hold.

Position Basics

Anticipated Start Date: February 2025

Term: Date of Hire until July 31, 2026 or July 31, 2027. Target start period is between February and August 2025

Percent Time: 50% Time

Minimum Salary + Housing: \$37,000 | Benefit package includes self-employment offset tax, professional expenses, retirement plan, health insurance.

Benefits: Self-employment offset tax; Retirement Plan; Other Health Plan; Professional Expense Allowance

Plan to offer relocation expense reimbursement:

We are willing to provide up to \$5,000 for moving expenses.

Information about the draft ministerial agreement:

We will use the UUMA agreement for part-time ministers.

Questionnaire

How did the last ministry end (or how is it ending)? How is the congregation doing with this time of transition? What momentum would you like to maintain in the next ministry?

The last ministry ended with the minister giving notice in April 2024 that he would be leaving at the end of July 2024. Coming out of the pandemic, a significant portion of the congregation were dissatisfied. Those that were dissatisfied perceived that he did not listen to concerns, particularly from older people in the

congregation, and that he responded in anger to individuals who wanted to have a discussion with him on various topics. Other people had concerns with the quality of sermons.

Since that time, our Church has flourished with 16 participants in our Newcomers' classes resulting in 7 new members joining and with a robust offering of Sunday Services on a variety of topics, led by members of the congregation, other ministers, video presentations through the UUA's offerings and visiting academics. Response to the variety and quality of the services has been very positive. We would expect to analyze the successes of this interim time and capture what worked best for our role in providing Sunday services when our part-time minister is not in the pulpit.

What does the congregation hope the minister will focus on in the next ministry partnership?

We want the minister to focus on preaching. In addition, we are searching for someone who can provide leadership in one or two of the following categories: spiritual guidance, pastoral care, lifespan religious education, community engagement and social justice advocacy, depending on the minister's interests and time constraints.

According to our survey the congregation defined the functions of a future minister as follows:

Spiritual Guidance: The minister will lead Sunday services with thoughtful, thought-provoking sermons that support congregants' spiritual journeys, intellectual growth, and alignment with Unitarian Universalist principles. This includes acting as a source of inspiration and wisdom, challenging members with new perspectives, and fostering lifelong learning.

Pastoral Care and Community Support: Providing compassionate, responsive care for members in need is essential, from supporting individuals facing personal challenges to offering counseling and presence during key life events. The minister will play a significant role in nurturing a connected and inclusive community, fostering an environment of acceptance, compassion, and mutual care.

Community Engagement and Social Justice Advocacy: The minister will represent the church's values in the broader community, acting as a bridge for collaborative efforts with other organizations and religious communities. This outward-facing role will help the church actively manifest its progressive values through social

justice initiatives, outreach, and public advocacy on local, regional, and global issues.

Additionally, members appreciate qualities such as flexibility, administrative oversight, and active support for congregational leadership and volunteer efforts. The ideal minister will balance these roles with an inclusive and forward-thinking approach, building a thriving and resilient community.

See responses to [Question #2 of the Congregational Survey](#).

Describe the minister's relationship to other paid staff. Who is responsible for hiring and firing other paid staff?

Minister supervises other paid staff, currently two part time staff members. The minister is responsible for hiring and firing other paid staff.

Is your congregation designated as a Welcoming Congregation? Please include information on Welcoming Congregation Renewal status.

We are committed to renewing our Welcoming Congregation status in 2025.

Is your congregation designated as a Green Sanctuary? Are you participating in the Green Sanctuary 2030 process?

We are not currently, but are considering applying. Our building has solar panels, we recycle, use natural cleaning products, have rain gardens with native plants, and use zone heating and cooling.

Does your congregation support our association of congregations through the UUA's Annual Program Fund at the Honor level?

Yes.

What debt does the congregation have? How is the debt structured (terms)? Reserves? How are reserves used/accessed?

No debt and an Endowment of over \$330,000. The Endowment Fund is accessed pursuant to an Endowment Resolution that allows withdrawal of 5% of the principal balance annually for capital and one-time expenses, with congregational approval.

Describe how the congregation defines good preaching and worship:

Much of the definition is shown in the comments made by members of the Congregation to the question "Why is this Church Important?" during the

Congregational Conversations held in September 2024. In particular:

Summary of Responses

The responses to this question reveal that members view the church as an essential space for authentic connection, community engagement, and moral grounding. It is seen as both a sanctuary for personal and spiritual exploration and a platform for external activism and social justice.

Themes and Insights

1. Community and Belonging:

- o Many feel the church provides a safe, welcoming community where members can be their authentic selves without fear of judgment.
- o The church is a consistent and supportive presence, offering a sense of belonging that extends beyond the church itself.
- o For some, the church has become an “extended family” or “community of friends,” especially valuable in an area where other liberal or inclusive spaces are scarce.

2. Moral and Ethical Guidance:

- o The church is seen as a morally grounded place that fosters ethical discussions without imposing beliefs or dogmas.
- o It offers an inclusive space for people of varied backgrounds—such as BIPOC, LGBTQ+, atheists, and agnostics—who seek a community that respects different spiritual paths.
- o Several members appreciate the church's commitment to non-judgmentalism and the willingness to explore complex moral questions openly.

3. Social Justice and Activism:

- o The church is valued for its role in social justice, advocating for issues that other local religious communities might avoid.
- o Many members are involved in community service, and they see the church as an essential hub for activism and outreach, particularly in areas such as LGBTQ+ rights and interfaith cooperation.
- o It serves as a “beacon of light” or a “light on a hill,” representing progressive

values in the broader community and standing as a counterpoint to more conservative religious spaces.

4. Spiritual Freedom and Diversity:

- o Members emphasize the importance of a church that supports spiritual freedom, providing a space for open exploration without rigid doctrinal boundaries.
- o The church is appreciated for its inclusiveness, allowing members to bring diverse beliefs and spiritual practices, from atheism to more traditional religious views.
- o It is described as a place where people can continue to learn, teach, and grow spiritually in a way that feels comfortable and true to themselves.

5. Support for Life's Transitions and Challenges:

- o The church plays a significant role in supporting members through personal challenges, offering resources and companionship during difficult times.
- o Several respondents mention how the church provides a refuge from loneliness and an opportunity to connect with others across generations.
- o Many feel that, in addition to spiritual support, the church offers practical support, such as helping those who are aging or providing meaningful roles for those seeking to make a difference.

6. A Place for Progressive Voice:

- o The church is noted for offering an alternative perspective in a predominantly conservative area, giving members a place to express liberal views safely.
- o Members see the church as a critical institution for promoting American liberal values and upholding progressive ideals in a community that may lack such representation.

Most Common Responses

The most commonly mentioned reasons for the church's importance include its role as a place for community and belonging, its commitment to moral and ethical reflection, and its support for social justice and activism. Members also frequently highlight the church's importance in providing spiritual freedom and a non-dogmatic space for personal exploration. Overall, the church is seen as a unique and irreplaceable resource in the community for those seeking a progressive,

inclusive, and supportive environment.

How does the congregation handle conflict?

When there is conflict between the minister and the congregation we have made use of UUA resources, including the congregational life consultant. We have also involved our Committee on Ministry. The process can be messy but we are committed to moving forward respectfully and bringing resolution as a congregation.

We recently re-formed our Committee on Ministry. This committee has historically worked to gauge the sentiment of the congregation, identify conflicts and suggest paths toward resolution. The committee annually creates a project to encourage input from the entire congregation, including underrepresented voices, with the goal of effective ministry.

When there is conflict between church members we make use of our Disruptive Person Policy. We encourage those who have a disagreement to speak directly to the other person. If they are not comfortable doing so they can request a trusted friend for assistance.

Recent survey results on resolving conflict with the minister show 33% of congregants would ask a trusted friend within the congregation to help, 27.5% would write a note to the minister and 22% would tell the minister immediately of their concern.

What is a current source of pride for your congregation?

We recently paid off the mortgage on our building! Attendance at services and many activities has been increasing. We are adept at holding multiplatform services and meetings, with the use of Zoom and a meeting Owl (speaker/camera). We are proud of our renewed sense of community, increased attendance across generations, and quality services.

What work is slow, stuck, or left undone within the congregation?

Some committees need better staffing. The church is currently not funding and staffing a DRE. Our committees could benefit from better funding. GA attendance and Leadership Development need attention.

How is trust in your congregation right now? Historically? Do people trust the minister? Do congregants trust leaders to lead? How can the minister best build trust with the congregation? How could a minister break trust in

your congregation?

Currently 19% of the congregation have low trust in leadership, 45% are neutral and 36% have high trust in our leadership. Our recent survey shows 26% of congregants are neutral toward whether or not our current leadership is able to lead in a confident way, while 62% of congregants trust current leadership to lead in a confident way.

Towards the end of our last minister's tenure there was a lack of confidence in his leadership and a lack of trust on the part of some people. A new minister would break trust by not following through on what they said they would do. Additionally, a new minister could break trust by not respecting the members and friends of the congregation.

A new minister would build trust by effectively communicating, following through on their commitments, and living and interacting in a manner consistent with UU values. We are aware that our congregation will need education and training on the differences between a full time and a part time ministry.

How has your ministry changed since COVID began? Where do you see decline? What have you let go of? Where do you see fresh energy?

Since Covid began we have expanded our ability by instituting services and committees via Zoom, this was enabled by a grant from our Endowment Fund. During the pandemic, attendance at Sunday Services declined and for a while, but more recently is increasing. While weekly activities for our children were not offered during Covid, we did deliver seasonal activity packets to our families with children. Currently there is a great deal of fresh energy in social activities to fulfill our need for connection and belonging. A newly formed group aimed at those who are Generation X, Millennials and adult members of Generation Z has created a space for this group to feel connected and engaged in our church community.

Our religious education for children and youth has also changed since the pandemic. We are focusing more on fostering a sense of belonging for our children through a more play based approach and having once per month social activities that are intergenerational.

When faced with a large deficit budget following the pandemic, a group formed a "Defeat the Deficit" task force that focused on additional ways to raise money. They were not entirely successful in their goal, however they raised everyone's awareness for the need in increased giving and our last year's pledge campaign was more successful. "Defeat the Deficit" had the added benefit of increasing

community building activities.

Following this was our success in our “Burn the Mortgage” campaign in which we raised over \$90,000 to now be mortgage free. Disbursements from our Endowment were put on hold during the first year of the pandemic as we were unsure of our financial future. Since then we have had a variety of Endowment funded projects. Some examples include equipping the sanctuary with cameras, screens and increased internet to support service on Zoom, a meeting Owl to support Zoom attendance at small group meetings, an additional door to our patio/yard space from a classroom so that children and adults can more easily make use of the outdoors, security upgrades for our doors, and a 70th Anniversary weekend celebration to draw the community to our building. This year we approved funding to provide repair to our sanctuary piano and additional insulation for our attic space.

Imagine that, early in the next ministry partnership, a member of your congregation behaves in a way that escalates over time from curmudgeonly criticism to disruptive actions to bullying staff or other members. Keeping in mind your congregation’s real experiences, policies, and covenant, how would leaders handle this situation?

The Church has in place a [“Disruptive Persons Policy”](#) which is available for use in situations such as the one described. In addition, the Committee on Ministry has traditionally acted as a communications conduit between the minister and the congregation and has been instrumental in identifying and working to resolve potential conflicts early.

There have been some theological divisions and spirited discussions in Unitarian Universalist circles in the last several years about our shared values, how to articulate these values, and what these values call us to do, especially around equity, inclusion, power, and covenantal relationship. Please share some examples of how this is playing out in your congregation.

We have not yet experienced any theological divisions about our shared values. There is discussion on how to articulate our values but those discussions are in the early stages, particularly prior to the most recent General Assembly. No formal plan is yet in place for those discussions.

What else would you like potential applicants to know about your congregation?

We have asked the congregation why a new minister should join us on the next phase of our journey, and this is a summary of their responses:

A minister should consider joining us on this next phase of our journey because we are an open-minded, intellectually vibrant, and caring community with both long-standing members and newer voices energized to help us grow. We bring together diverse perspectives, unified by a commitment to making a positive impact on each other and the wider community. This congregation offers an environment ripe for collaboration, inspiration, and challenge—one that values curiosity, diversity, and compassion. We are actively doing the work to adapt and thrive, creating fertile ground for a minister who is ready to lead, support, and grow with us.

Note: ChatGPT has been used in creating and presenting summaries of responses to several of the questions in the Congregational Survey.