

## **2021 Congregational Survey – Qualitative Summary- Discussion Question 1**

**How has not having physical access to the Church – due to the pandemic – impacted you?**

**What other barriers to access prevent you from participating in the life of the Church?**

At least half of the respondents indicated they feel more disconnected from church and other people in the congregation, often mentioning the value of face-to-face contact, and chance meetings with both people they know and don't know. Frequent comment: "**I miss being in a space I love. I miss personal, physical connection, the energizing spirit that buzzes through the building on Sunday mornings**"

Also mentioned by several is the sense of "isolation" and several comments about not being able to participate in the music programs and a couple of mentions of the quality of the on-line musical programming being less.

**Most responses** also included strong praise and appreciation for Reverends Shari and Margalie, and staff for developing high quality alternative on-line services and programming, including the ability of sharing services with other congregations and bringing resources in remotely.

One reference: "**The Zoom events and meetings have been very helpful, I'm grateful- Soul Matters, Elder Tree and Vespers. I feel nourished and cared for.**"

Another voiced about Zoom: "**It sucks. I hate it. I need human connection. Spend so much time alone now. I am depressed. I hate zoom. I feel like I am watching a church movie....**"

A few people commented that they preferred the Zoom services over in- person. Some of the reasons included - ease of attendance, (not driving in bad weather), programming able to expand beyond our church bringing in guests, guest choirs etc.

Several mentioned coffee hour, comments equally mixed pro and con. Pro's included meeting new people, putting names to faces, forging new connections. Reasons for not participating in coffee hour had mostly to do with the random assignment, and people self-identifying as shy, for instance: "Feel awkward attending the post church breakouts (totally on me!) so am not engaging or meeting members very well. But I do love church on line" and "I already have a tough time with social interaction with people I don't know very well and trying to have that interaction over zoom is even worse."

### **Q1, Part 2 Barriers to accessing Church (some inferred above)**

- Dependence on on-line connections and technology. Which may/may not be related to
- Covid 19, "not being able to leave the house"
- Driving in bad weather
- Being a new member makes it more difficult to establish connections when only on line.
- 3 people reflected the issue of attending at home with kids, etc." – "Being at home at church is very distracting because our children and dog needing attention."
- Others mention: "My work ramped up and I couldn't deal with one more need to be online. I have struggled with online "extracurriculars," in general, because I am on my computer all day --
- Reference to not attending church because we no longer have a sign language interpreter.

## **2021 Congregational Survey – Qualitative Summary - Discussion Question 2**

### **What remote activities would you continue in future? After physical distancing is lifted?**

#### **Regarding Sunday Services:**

- 2 people indicated they were interested in Sunday Services in-person only.
- 8 respondents indicated they would not attend any ACTIVITY (including services) on line.
- 22 stated they preferred to attend “on-line” only
- 41 respondents, while representing they prefer and/or highly prefer “In-person” Sunday services, also desired the option of attending services on line for themselves or others. **There were many references to circumstances which could create a barrier to in- person attendance:** Illness/homebound, bad weather, while traveling or job duties (one person is an in-home caretaker and could not leave her patient) and also wanting to share the services remotely with other family members and friends.

**Examples:** “I would like the option of attending services, Soul Matters and Committee type meetings in person and/or on line. There would be times, due to weather, other obligations, health that I would join on line rather than in person. In person is preferred otherwise.”

“Certain kinds of working meetings are more efficient over Zoom, not requiring travel to/from the church, especially in bad weather. I like being able to watch a church service that I missed later on YouTube. I love the virtual connections time after the service (**Please don't call it coffee hour!** caffeine is an addiction I don't think we should be promoting or attaching to our sacred time of connection.) I have connected with many people that I wouldn't have otherwise met.”

#### **Other Types of remote activities mentioned:**

- Elder tree was mentioned 21 times.
- Vespers – 10 times
- Soul Matters – 5 times
- Committee (including Social Justice and BOT and others)- 35 times. Especially when they take place at night, bad weather, etc.
- Several mentioned they would attend on-line community informational events, Face Book and other communications- types typically posted on line.

#### **Unknown:**

37 survey takers did not respond at all to this question

7 respondents were not sure or didn't know what (if any) activities they would continue on line.

Congregants (other than the 171) who did not take the 20-21 Survey!

**Outlier Response:** The solstice celebration was amazing!

## **Question 3: Please provide an example of how you feel the Church is doing particularly well in fulfilling its missions.**

### **End 1.a**

A large number of respondents said they felt well cared for by the church during the changes and difficulties arising from the pandemic, such as fear, isolation and loss. One congregant summarized, saying “the efforts to maintain and tailor congregational and pastoral care during the pandemic, specifically including high quality online worship experiences, introduction of noon time check in sessions and vespers services, and the caring stewards program, have consistently gone above and beyond. Incredibly well-executed, with quality exceeding that of most other congregations I am familiar with”

The caring and competence of Rev. Shari and the strong pastoral care program under direction of Rev. Margalie was a recurring theme. Respondents went out of their way to mention new activities and programs, such as online worship through Zoom, Elder Tree, and virtual meetings.

### **End 1.b**

There were numerous comments expressing wonder and amazement at how staff and congregants have risen to the occasion during the pandemic.

### **End 2.**

The comments regarding RE tended to laud the continuing strength of the program and of Sheila’s skill. Children services, messaging, O.W.L., and multi-generational activities were all mentioned at similar rates.

### **End 3.**

Survey participants made mention of the various church programs by name. For example, Soul Matters, Wellspring, Jubilee weekend, R3 workshops, School Partnership, RAIHN, and Greater Good, were all referenced as the vehicles for engaging in spiritual growth and development.

### **End 4**

There were numerous comments showing awareness and appreciation of the church’s increased emphasis on anti-racism. There were also various comments regarding the church leadership and member involvement in BLM protests. The comments tended to acknowledge the direction toward this end, rather than an “arrival” to this end. For example, “I recognize and appreciate the church leaders (and others) efforts at anti-racism – this will be an ongoing effort.”

## **Question 4: Please share any ideas you might have for how the Church could better fulfill a particular mission.**

Note: This question elicited a number of very specific ideas that did not supplement any overarching themes, but would be worthwhile to read and explore for those interested.

### **End 1.a**

Some respondents recognized problematic aspects of the church culture, such as the presence of frequent microaggressions, and a lack of understanding or accountability among congregants. These comments were not directed toward staff or leadership.

Two comments referenced the need to look forward and prepare for future challenges to the church's mission and vision, such as the acceleration of climate change.

### **End 1.b.**

There was a paucity of comments regarding this end. One participant, however, noted that due to our aging congregation, future resources are at risk.

### **End 2**

There were no specific comments related to this end.

### **End 3.a (whole selves)**

There were no specific comments related to this end

### **End 3.b (racial bias)**

I read numerous calls for more bias-related education. One respondent put it poignantly, "I think most white members have just started to recognize the tip of the iceberg".

### **End 3.c (loving communication)**

### **End 3.d (spiritual connection community/beyond)**

There were various comments hoping for greater collaboration with other churches and congregations, especially with other congregations that may be unlike our own.

### **End 4**

A handful of comments identified the relative shallow involvement of numbers in social justice activities. One respondent described the social justice groups as being isolated from the greater congregation, and another called for "whole church" involvement in at least one social justice activity.

## **20-21 Congregational Survey – Qualitative Summary- Discussion Question 5**

### **How have you grown Spiritually at First U over past year? What is your next step?**

A large number of respondents, over 20% of 171, did not answer this question with another 7 stating they did not know.

12 people answered the question with a “no” without explanation or otherwise indicated they did not perceive any spiritual growth this past year. A couple pointed to the Pandemic & preference to in-person services as reasons. Some examples:

*“I don’t feel I have grown much spiritually. I love Sunday services on Zoom...so impressed with the quality and variety of content. But find I don’t always give the service my full attention – it’s easy to be distracted. I miss choir. I definitely felt spiritual connection when in person.”*

*“I think First U promotes growth in areas of racial justice more than in areas of spirituality. I would appreciate more references to Spirit, that which is greater than us, Divine etc. We seem mildly allergic to these concepts.”*

Several responses indicated “personal growth” or equated other types of growth with spiritual growth. Answers indicated some overall confusion about the definition of “spiritual growth.” Some examples:

*“Probably not spiritually but definitely personally.”*

*“This past year has felt very social justice forward. I appreciate being educated to the issues within my community and have grown in knowledge around this focus. However, I don’t feel I have grown spiritually.”*

#### **Positive Responses:**

#### **Part 1 “How have you grown Spiritually at First U this year?**

About 32% of those who did respond (doesn’t include the “no responses “above) indicated they had grown in some way relating this to various programming at First Unitarian.

References included: Services/sermons, Elder Tree, Soul Matters, committee work- including voter registration, Wellspring, joining the Pastoral Care Team and especially Social Justice work done relative to BLM and racism.

## **Part 2 “What Is Your next step (toward spiritual growth)?”**

There were 3 references voicing the desire for more adult spiritual programming (i.e., History, theology). Other responses to personal “next steps” included becoming involved with “Beloved Conversations”, joining a group, soul matters, social justice ministries, the Buddhist Fellowship.

Two mentions of pursuing “leadership roles”!

A few responses focused on self-managed initiatives - for example:

*“Yes, I believe I have grown spiritually over the past year. Aging is making it imperative that I change. I am keenly aware that my time is limited on this earth. And I want now to take the time to notice the marvelous aspects of our life on earth from the expanse of our cosmos to the powerful urge to replicate that drives the corona virus on its evolutionary march. It's all fascinating, and I don't want to leave without taking a good look around. So, I will be less busy and instead be more present to noticing what comes before me. My word for 2021 is Noticing. I liked Rev. Joel's definition of worship--to notice that which is worthy.”*

Also surprising were the significant number of comments about difficulties getting engaged with church due to “self-imposed isolation” and needing to feel comfortable putting oneself “out there”. This concern was also mentioned several times in both discussion questions 1 & 2. For example --

*“The biggest work for me is to break my individualist mindset and allow myself to really be part of a group with both the benefits and the responsibilities that entails. I tend to isolate myself because I don't feel that I have value for others. So, I've been trying to become more involved but the biggest piece for me is the social aspect and that's been really hard this year. I'm hoping that as the world opens back up that I will find ways to commune with other church members on an interpersonal level.”*

**Outlier Response: “I am a mature spirit!”**