

UUC Ministerial Search - Small Group Meetings - Fall 2025

The Process

Almost 200 people attended a total of 28 small group meetings facilitated by the Search Team between October 5 and November 12th. 25 meetings were held at UUC, 2 meetings were held at retirement facilities with significant UUC membership (Horizon House and Hearthstone) and 1 meeting was held via Zoom.

Members and friends of UUC were invited to attend the small group meetings via pulpit announcements; articles in the Gateway (the UUC electronic weekly) and on the UUC website; and flyers posted in the church. Search Team members also sent personal invitational emails to many different groups within UUC offering to meet with them.

13 of the meetings were “open registration,” which allowed attendees to meet new people and hear new perspectives. Meetings were also held with 15 UUC groups:

Finance Committee	Office Staff	Dialogue Group
Young Adults	Zen	Pink Haven Coalition
Children	Wise Women	BIPOC Fellowship
Parents	Men's Group	Horizon House
World Religion Class	Awakening Spirit Team	Hearthstone

Each small group meeting followed a specified format: an opening chalice reading, covenant agreement, grounding reading, questions for discussion and a closing reading. Two Search team members facilitated and took notes at each meeting. The following questions & prompts were used:

- Please share your name and, in one word, what fills you with pride about UUC.
1. How would you describe this congregation to a prospective minister?
 - What makes this place feel like home?
 - Where does it fall short or short or feel challenging?
 2. What qualities or gifts do you hope our new minister will bring?
 - What kind of leadership would help us thrive?
 - What kind of leadership could help us move through places where we feel stuck?
 3. Envision our church in five years —
 - What do you hope we have changed (including in areas where we've struggled or stalled)?
 - What do you hope we have carried forward?
 4. Additional follow-up prompts, if needed and/or time allows:
 - Where in our church life do you see unmet needs, unfinished work, or places we've lost momentum?
 - Have you ever felt unseen, unsupported, or disconnected here? What would help?

Summary of What the Search Team Has Learned in the Meetings

During our 28 small group meetings, we witnessed people listening closely to each other and appreciating each other's differences, including in situations where congregants didn't know one another. Congregants' feedback indicates that these meetings have increased their trust in the Search process, and have given many congregants a broader understanding of who we are. Almost 200 UUC members and friends participated in these small group meetings and 259 completed the survey. From the small group meetings, we learned that:

- Strong preaching matters: congregants want sermons that are engaging, meaningful, and well-crafted. During small group meetings some people indicated a preference for “intellectual or scholarly” sermons and an equal number preferred “emotional depth & spiritual grounding.” But most people preferred a combination of the two styles. The congregational survey results for worship preferences reinforce this interest in balancing the head and heart.
- People are extremely proud of the quality of UUC's music program. Many people also expressed a desire for more varied musical experiences (e.g. week-day concerts, more instrumental soloists during worship, and more non-European music including jazz and blues)
- Strong administrative and managerial skills are essential for leading a large church, including financial competence and the ability to delegate.
- Our new minister must be relational, approachable, and a good listener—someone who knows congregants personally and is warm rather than distant.
- People want to see more young families, youth and young adults at UUC. But the connection between congregational growth and antiracism/anti-oppression work and accessibility — in order to retain middle-aged adults and their families as well as young adults — has not been widely discussed. There are opportunities for a new minister to link the near-universal interest in growing family ministry to the culture change that would support these new families.
- Growth areas include understanding and acknowledging unmet needs and embracing justice and care ministries within congregational life (not just as programs).
- The congregation simultaneously describes itself as resilient, open-minded, and welcoming while also acknowledging being conflict averse, resistant to change, and struggling with a culture of silence where decisions are made behind closed doors.
- Many congregants are interested in revitalizing UUC's social justice legacy

We were surprised:

- To hear multiple voices challenge the "myth that we are a wealthy congregation." We were also surprised to learn that very few people ask for financial assistance, suggesting that the perception of wide-spread wealth may make congregants hesitate to ask for financial help. Several people commented that we are no longer providing support for our own community, such as rides to doctor appointments and meals. This disconnect between perception and reality may affect both resource allocation and community care. On the other hand, numerous people have expressed an interest in creating a mutual aid infrastructure that would better help us take care of our own community.
- Congregants across all generations want to grow the Family Ministry program.
- Across all gatherings, a consistent current flowed — a longing for connection, care, and purpose that bridges generations. This included mentions of more intergenerational social gatherings such as potlucks. Participants not only wished to be seen, but to rekindle their energy through clear, shared goals that give meaning to both individual and collective participation. Congregants yearn for a church that helps each person's gifts find expression within a mission that strengthens the congregation and radiates outward into the wider community
- Young adults spoke with openness and care, offering a vision that reached beyond their own experience. They emphasized authenticity, inclusion, and real connection across generations — a community where people feel genuinely respected, seen, and invited to participate. Their reflections revealed untapped energy and a desire to be more engaged, along with greater clarity about how to take part in meaningful ways. They also underscored the need to stay relevant and connected in a world that values purpose and realness over formality. At its heart, the message was simple: lasting impact begins with trust and connection within the community. Some noted that young adult gatherings often depend on their own funds — a gentle reminder of the need for stronger support and recognition of their leadership.
- Adults who are not retirees (with or without children) and parents of teens want more opportunities to make connections outside of Sunday services, such as dedicated social-groups; retreats; or adult programming.