

Unity Unitarian 2023-2024 Congregational Record

About Unity Church Unitarian

Contact Methods

Website: <http://www.unityunitarian.org>

Meeting Address

733 Portland Ave
Saint Paul, MN 55104-7146

Mailing Address

732 Holly Ave
Saint Paul, MN 55104

This Congregation **has** a 501(c)(3) status of its own

Overview questions:

Congregation Life

Describe your Congregation and its culture:

"...Any church...must command and receive the positive loyalty of its constituent members... [T]here must be a core of wholeheartedly devoted members, whose loyalty has been built up through many years of disinterested service, surviving the test of many a clash of opinion and many a time of stress. They care so much for their church that it has become part of their very selves, as they have become part of the 'self' of the church. They believe in their church with deep and abiding conviction. They are 'living stones' in its edifice."

— Frederick May Eliot, *An Anthology*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1959, 88

Unity Church Unitarian (Unity) is a vibrant, active, and ever-evolving liberal religious community of about 870 adults and 215 children and youth. Located in Saint Paul, Minnesota, residing on the homelands of the Dakota Nation, and founded in 1872, the congregation boasts a rich history with inspired ministers including William Channing Gannett, Frederick May Eliot, Wallace Robbins, and Arthur Foote— recognized as significant leaders in the Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist traditions.

In the last 50 years, Unity has had only three called ministers, two of whom were a married couple, the Reverends Janne and Rob Eller-Isaacs, who served Unity from 2000 to 2021. The

longevity of these ministers can be seen as testament to the sustaining nature of the congregation. Unity has nurtured the growth and development of congregants' individual spiritual lives, fortified the community as a whole, and urged us to stretch beyond our walls to make a positive impact in the broader community. This framework—within, among, and beyond—provides us with an invaluable foundation for how we choose to exist in the world, and Unity's Ends Statements have been conceived with the idea that each of us must grow our spiritual selves (within), build and deepen our relationships with one another (among), and take our values out into the world to make a difference in the lives of others (beyond).

Unity's leadership is shared. The senior minister serves as part of an Executive Team (ET) that reports to the Board of Trustees, along with the Executive Director and other ministers, senior staff, or members. The Board plays a vital role in providing vision, accountability, and linkage between the ET, the congregation, and our many ministerial teams.

Originally built in 1905, Unity's entire building has been a source of pride for the congregation, especially since its renovation in 2012 that included an award-winning reconstruction of the entrance to the sanctuary allowing folks passing through the neighborhood to glimpse the inside of the church. No longer a fortress keeping non-church goers out, it invites all comers into the building. The sanctuary, especially, holds an important place in the hearts of congregants—the big open space with skylight, and the thick, dark beams contrasting with the light wood of the meditative reredos behind the chancel contribute to a deep sense of sacred space.

Sunday worship is usually the first point of contact for a visitor, and a vital experience of the church for many of us. The consistency of worship and the rites, words, and amazing music have been the glue that has held our days, weeks, and months together, especially in difficult times like the COVID pandemic.

Most days and into the evenings, every room in the building is occupied by multiple church groups, and many community groups. It can be difficult to schedule meetings because the calendar is so full of activities and events! The commercial kitchen is the heart of a robust food ministry; the parish hall with its revolving art exhibitions is a gathering place for meals, lectures, and celebrations. The basement is cheery and welcoming with special spaces for babies, children and youth; the library is well stocked with contemporary literature, theology and history from diverse sources.

While the new entrance together with new signage transformed the physical building, Unity is still working out how to make the congregation more welcoming to the broader community. Our culture is reflective of a Minnesota that no longer exists, if it ever did. That Minnesota was perceived as progressive, well-educated, white, upper-and middle class, somewhat repressed, but "civilized," tolerant, and well-intended. Over the decades, the Twin Cities have changed considerably—besides sizable Black, Latinx, and indigenous populations, we boast the largest Hmong, Somali, Oromo and Karen communities in the country. Saint Paul is now a predominantly multicultural city and as much as we would wish it, Unity no longer reflects its community in that way.

In 2000, when the Reverends Eller-Isaacs came to Unity, they brought with them an urgent sense of the need for racial reckoning. For the last 20 years, antiracism (mostly focusing on Black antiracism) has been at the core of much “within, among and beyond” energy and activism at Unity. Programs, outreach ministry teams, activities, and pilgrimages have advanced this work. In 2019, we hired Team Dynamics, a consulting group, to audit policies, help train us to recognize our own biases, and be effective social and racial justice leaders. The Ends Statements established by the congregation in 2018 focus on creating a multicultural, inclusive community. More recently the Beloved Community Staff Team has arrived at a double-helix model that integrates antiracism with spirituality that they hope will serve as an important visual and conceptual tool for furthering antiracism work. Despite our sometimes slow progress, we are still a community of hope, eager to establish our church as a place of radical welcome and inclusion.

Unity has a culture of caring. A large congregation has many moving parts and in this multigenerational community, birth, sickness, death and all of life’s transitions are duly and appropriately recognized. Celebration and mourning go hand in hand. Unity has been known for its moving memorial services, rites of passage for our children and youth, weddings and other celebratory occasions. The ministers have been outstanding models of caregiving; the Pastoral Care Ministry was critical during the grief and trauma that accompanied the onslaught of COVID, the isolation caused by the pandemic lockdown, as well as the murder of George Floyd and uprisings that followed.

Unity Church is a place in which shared values allow individuals and a community to grow and live lives of integrity, joy, and service. The dream of the Beloved Community is fiercely held, and even in the knowledge that this journey is often arduous and heartbreaking, we are confident that Unity has the capacity to hold it all.

Your Congregation's mission:

Mission

Unity Church-Unitarian fosters transformation through a free and inclusive religious community that encourages lives of integrity, service, and joy.

Values

Unity Church-Unitarian honors the ambiguity and uncertainty in the search for greater truth, meaning, and equity. In all we do, we strive to embody:

- Wonder
- Open-hearted engagement
- Courageous action

Ends Statements 2019-2023

Working within ourselves, among our church community, and beyond in the larger world, we the people of Unity Church-Unitarian:

- Create a multicultural spiritual home built on authentic relationships.
- Ground ourselves in personal practice and communal worship that grows our capacity for wonder and spiritual deepening.
- Articulate our Unitarian Universalist faith identity, teach it to our children, share it with others, and live it courageously in the world.
- Know each other in all our fullness and create an ever-widening circle of belonging for all people.
- Generously give and openly receive compassionate care in times of joy, sorrow, and transition.
- Discover and pursue our individual and collective work to advance justice, wholeness, and equity for people, our Earth, and all life on it.
- Create brave space for racial healing and dismantling dominant culture.
- Sustain and steward the church and our larger Unitarian Universalist movement for the future.

The Board of Trustees conducts a renewal process every five years, engaging with the congregation to discern its aspirations and updating the Ends Statements accordingly. The Board has voted to extend these ends through 2024 so that the new settled minister can take part in the renewal process.

Moral Owners Statement (Governing Policy)

“The Moral Owners of Unity Church-Unitarian are members of Unity Church-Unitarian and others who yearn for the Beloved Community and see Unity Church-Unitarian as an instrument for its realization. The Beloved Community is engaged in the work of the spirit. It is community at the highest level of reality and possibility, where love and justice prevail.”

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

Wonder: As you’ll see throughout this document, wonder is central to our spiritual education and faith formation—both for children and adults. It’s at the core of our music ministry, our arts teams, and our worship. It is embodied in the first of what we call the three expectations of membership: to “develop personal spiritual practice to help you find and keep your balance.” We explore multiple faith traditions and derive inspiration and a deep sense of grounding in the natural world. Our film series, book discussions, community forums, workshops, pilgrimages, and other programs and events engage our minds in exploration of new ideas and new partnerships.

Open-hearted engagement: This value is an integral part of the second expectation for membership, to “develop the skills of intimacy that let you go deep quickly with strangers.” We are a large congregation, with many “strangers” here among us. We try to build in opportunities for meaningful relationships in our social gatherings, classes, and workshops; and longer-term commitments such as Chalice Circles and participation on shared ministry teams. This value

also drives our work with community partners to build authentic relationships and collaborate on justice making projects.

Courageous action: The third expectation of membership at Unity is to "Take the compassion that rises from doing the first two and use it to bless the world." Among the many ways we try to live this value is through personal engagement in social action, from work projects to protests to structured opportunities for deep on-going commitment to social justice and racial healing. We have adapted institutional policies and offered our building for a variety of uses, even when it has required sacrifice and the hard work of personal accountability.

Link to your Safe Congregation policy:

Our Safe Congregation Policy is [Here](#).

Our Safe Congregation policy covers:

- Background checks for all staff and volunteers who work with children and youth
- Protocol for church-sponsored field trips
- Building safety
- Protection and Safety of Children and Youth
- Overnight Policy
- Youth policy

We also have an Emergency Action Plan, covering

- Medical Emergencies
- Weather Emergencies
- Public Health/Pandemic
- Loss of Power
- Persons Showing Inappropriate Behavior
- Demonstrations
- Active Shooter Events

These policies are included in the supporting documents packet for this record.

Worship service schedule:

Sunday services are held in-person at 9:00 and 11:15 a.m., and via livestream at 9:00 a.m. This is later posted online for viewing. Drop-in nursery care is available for little ones ages six months (and sitting up) to three years. There is religious education programming for children ages 3 and up through 12th grade.

In the summer there is one service at 10:00 a.m., conducted by lay leaders. During this service, children and youth participate in garden ministry in Unity's garden. Drop-in nursery care is provided during this service.

Regular messages about worship and education opportunities are shared via email, video posts, and on our website.

Personnel

Sherifatu Akibu	Facilities Specialist
Ahmed Anzaldúa • He/Him	Director of Music Ministries
Robert Baker	Facilities Manager
Heidi Birkholz • She/Her	Facilities Maintenance Coordinator
Teresa Connor • She/Her	Facilities Operations Coordinator
Rev. Lara Cowtan • She/Her	Minister of Congregational Care
Drew Danielson • He/Him	Coordinator of Youth and Campus Ministries
Dion Jones	Facilities Specialist
Rev. KP Hong	Minister of Faith Formation
Barbara Hubbard • She/Her	Executive Director
Carlos McAdory	Facilities Specialist
Nelson Moroukian • He/Him	Coordinator of Children and Family Ministries
Claire Newhouse	Facilities Specialist
Katrina Nichols • She/Her	Nursery Coordinator
Laura Park • She/Her	Director of Membership and Hospitality
Rev. Kathleen Rolenz • She/Her	Interim Senior Minister
Sani Shaibu	Facilities Specialist
Song Thao • She/Her	Financial Assistant
Martha Tilton • She/Her	Director of Communications
Mo Todd	Facilities Specialist

Staff profiles on [Unity's website](#)

Additional personnel notes:

Unity Consulting (www.unityconsulting.org) is a program of Unity Church whose mission is to liberate and empower the leadership of progressive religious congregations and institutions to awaken compassion, transform lives, and bless the world. This organization helps congregations understand their purpose, the difference they make in people's lives, and then we help them organize to deliver on that promise. Their primary tool is Policy Governance® as we've learned to adapt it for congregations.

Five percent of Unity Consulting's fees go to support Unity Church's operating budget. Ten percent of Unity Consulting's fees go into a development fund to support the program's operating expenses. Unity Consulting also provides occasional pro-bono services to the denomination through governance consulting with denominational and congregational leaders.

Laura Park has been Managing Director of Unity Consulting for thirteen years and does most of the consulting work. Rev. Roger Bertschausen (Unity Temple UU, Oak Park IL) also occasionally consults with clients using Unity Consulting materials. Congregant Bill Etter works extensively with Laura to develop and implement the Spirit Map product (spiritmap.org). Unity Consulting has worked in one form or another with most of the large congregations in the Unitarian Universalist Association, and with many congregations in other liberal religious denominations.

Unity's newly called minister, in collaboration with the rest of the ET and Laura, will determine how involved they will be with Unity Consulting. A new minister would serve in an advisory role for the program, in their role on the ET.

Congregation History

Provide your Congregation's founding history:

Unity Church resides on the homelands of the Dakota Nation. We honor with gratitude the people who have stewarded the land throughout the generations and their ongoing contributions to this region. We acknowledge the ongoing injustices that we have committed against the Dakota Nation, and we wish to interrupt this legacy, beginning with acts of healing and honest storytelling about this place.

Unity Church was officially founded on February 25, 1872, after twenty years of sporadic Unitarian services. Interested parties had taken up a subscription to maintain a minister for one year. John R. Effinger preached his first sermon on February 11, 1872. Two weeks later, fifty members signed Articles of Association. In 1873 the church was incorporated as "Unity Church of Saint Paul," the first Unitarian Church in the Upper Midwest.

Date founded: 2/25/1872

Describe important events in your Congregation's history:

After meeting in various rented spaces, in the fall of 1875 the growing membership moved into the vacant Universalist church. Rev. Effinger left in the spring of 1876, due to ill-health. During the summer of 1876 Jenkin Lloyd Jones, Unitarian minister and secretary of the Western Unitarian Conference, came to Saint Paul, met with the Saint Paul Unitarians, and informed them that he could put them in touch with “exactly the right man” for them: William Channing Gannett of Boston.

In the beginning, it seemed an unlikely match. The Congregation feared that Gannett was too liberal, too young and not vocally Christian enough for St. Paul. He was also not yet ordained. At the same time, the small St. Paul group of Unitarians did not believe they could secure Gannett’s services based on his background, education, and ability. Nevertheless, the church took a chance and called Gannett to serve as minister for three months. Gannett came to preach his first sermon and all opposition and doubt disappeared.

Gannett wrote this “bond of fellowship” for his ordination at Unity Church:

As those who believe in Religion,

As those who believe in Freedom, Fellowship and Character in Religion,

As those who believe that the religious life means the thankful, trustful, loyal and helpful life

And as those who believe that a church is a brotherhood of helpers where it is made easier to lead such a life,

We join ourselves together, name, hand and heart, as members of Unity Church.

We still recite it today as part of the Ingathering of New Members, adapting it only to replace “brotherhood of helpers” with “community of helpers.”

This founding story has been a keystone for us as we search for a new settled minister. There are many other important events in our history that we’ve woven into our answers later in this document, to keep them in context with the culture and fabric of the church.

The [Church History](#) tab of our website gives important dates and events up to 2007 in chronological order, as well.

Ministerial History

Ministers of Unity Church Unitarian

Name	Job Title & Position	Start	End
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Rev. Lara Cowtan	Minister of Congregational Care (contract)	2023	Present
Rev. Kathleen Rolenz	Interim Senior Minister	2022	Present
Rev. Karen Gustafson	Interim Minister of Pastoral Care	2022	2023
Rev. Dr. Kathy Hurt	Interim Senior Minister	2021	2022
Rev. K.P. Hong	Minister of Faith Formation	2013	Present
Rev. Lisa Friedman	Minister of Congregational & Community Engagement	2012	2020
Rev. Karen Hering	Associate Minister (contract)	2009	2022
Rev. Caroline Eustis	Chaplain (affiliated)	2009	??
Rev. Ann Romanczuk	Community Minister (affiliated)	2008	Present
Rev. Robert Eller-Isaacs	Senior Co-Minister (called)	2000	2021
Rev. Janne Eller-Isaacs	Senior Co-Minister (called) Minister Emerita (2021-present)	2000	2021
Rev. Davidson Loehr	Interim Minister	1999	2000
Rev. Gretchen Thompson	Minister (contract)	1995	1998
Rev. Roy Phillips	Minister (called)	1971	1998
Rev. Arthur Foote	Minister (called)	1945	1970
Rev. Fred Rutledge	Associate Minister (called)	1966	1970

Rev. Lon Ray Call	Interim Minister	1963	1964
Rev. Ronald J. Walrath	Assistant Minister (contract)	1955	1959
Rev. Wallace W. Robbins	Minister (called)	1938	1944
Rev. Frederick May Eliot	Minister (called)	1917	1937
Rev. John Dumont Reid	Minister (called)	1908	1917
Rev. William R. Lord	Minister (called)	1900	1907
Rev. Samuel McChord Crothers	Minister (called)	1886	1894
Rev. Clay MacCauley	Minister (called)	1884	1886
Rev. William Channing Gannett	Minister (called)	1877	1883
Rev. John R. Effinger	Minister (called)	1872	1876

Ministers Emeritus/Emerita

Rev. Robert Eller-Isaacs	2021 (voted)	Deceased: 2022
Rev. Janne Eller-Isaacs	2021 (voted)	

Rev. Arthur Foote 1970 (voted) Deceased : 1999

Staff Emerita

Ruth Palmer, previous	2023 (voted)
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Additional ministerial history notes:

- 1852 first Unitarian sermon in Saint Paul — Rev. George Woodward
- 1858-1859 Frederick R. Newell, an inactive Unitarian preacher, came to Saint Paul with his wife to establish a business. He agreed to preach at regular Sunday services if he could use his collection of old sermons. After ten months, the services ended.
- 1861-1866 saw occasional services with various preachers.
- The History of Unity Church, 1872-1972 Revised Edition, by Elinor Summers Otto, (Reredos Press, 1972, 2020) describes renewing contracts so it is unclear with several early ministers whether they were called or on contract. When unsure, this document identifies them as “Called.”
- Rev. Clarence Diven died unexpectedly of peritonitis.
- Rev. Kathy Fuson Hurt served as the pre-interim minister from March-June 1999, after Rev. Roy Phillips tenure ended in a negotiated resignation. We discuss this in more detail in the questionnaire on how we have evaluated ministers.

Describe any important Lay Leaders:

Unity is committed to shared ministry under the Board of Trustees and the ET. Many lay leaders are involved in a variety of ministry teams, including the worship associates, congregational care associates, teaching associates, community outreach ministry teams, religious education ministry team, Generosity Ministry Team, Sunday welcome teams, and the Beloved Community staff team. The various ministry teams offer a means of leadership development that often leads to greater involvement in other areas, such as governance or fundraising.

Beyond these shared ministry teams, church members have been active with Minnesota Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Alliance (MUUSJA), led denominational affairs committees, offered historical perspectives on UU history, advised on investment strategy, served as general counsel to the church, organized interfaith activities, planned and offered Sunday services during summer months, and served on ministerial intern support teams. These are a few examples of how and where lay leaders volunteer their gifts and talents to support Unity’s work.

Membership & Finances

The data for the table below come directly from the UUA's annual congregational certification.

Year	Total Pledge Income	Total Operating Expenses	Membership	Youth Enrollment	Avg. Attendance
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2024 (expected)	\$1,433,200	\$1,824,135	869	185	720
2023 (as of 11/11)	\$1,321,084	\$1,794,168	842	259	720
2022	\$1,344,058	\$1,887,441	851	211m	794
2021	\$1,354,064	\$1,468,056	871	155	725
2020	\$1,298,527	\$1,660,422	900	377	612
2019	\$1,292,845	\$1,518,750	850	403	666
2018	\$1,310,739	\$1,477,919	908	447	702
2017	\$1,266,699	\$1,453,271	904	510	681
2016	\$1,216,607	\$1,448,288	870	545	670
2015	\$1,221,149	\$1,396,037	826	531	686
2014	\$1,134,153	\$1,351,884	864	446	732
2013	\$1,110,785	\$1,291,823	790	413	697
2012	\$1,168,175	\$1,352,679	818	408	752

The following notes and/or explanations offer context to the numbers:

Year	Notes
2021-2024	Attendance includes both in-person and livestream figures.
2021	Sunday services, memorials, ministers' messages, religious education, youth and adult programming all conducted online, averaging 700 views across all offerings.

2020 All in-person activities stopped as of March 2020. This took some time to gear up for a robust online presence. George Floyd's murder and subsequent police brutality protests were a significant focus in our communities, both small and broad.

2013 Services moved back into the building in November 2012 after major renovation. Members and friends were asked for capital campaign contributions to reduce the amount to be borrowed as well as ongoing capital and operating pledges.

2012 The church committed to a major renovation and frequently used parts of the building were restricted. The sanctuary was cut off from the rest of the building during construction. Church members and friends were asked to contribute to the annual pledge and to commit to an \$8 million capital campaign. The Grotto Avenue entrance to the sanctuary was opened in 2013, with full access to all facilities restored.

Demographics

Out of a membership of approximately 870 people, 367 filled out the 2023 Congregational Survey, a 57% increase from the prior year's 233 respondents and representative of 45% of the congregation. 2019 saw 491 responses, but otherwise 2023 is on the high end of Unity's usual survey responses. Despite the decrease in total membership since the pandemic, this increased response rate shows a high level of investment in the future of the church by the congregation as a whole. It also gives us good confidence in our survey-related answers.

In addition to the questions below on gender, sexual orientation, and racial/ethnic diversity, important demographic indicators of our congregation are:

- We are highly educated. 60% of survey respondents report at least some graduate school education.
- We overwhelmingly consider ourselves financially secure. Only 5% of respondents to the 2023 survey indicated they were "living paycheck to paycheck" or "one unexpected bill away from a problem." 16% indicated they were on a fixed income. 69% indicated they were "financially secure for now," "financially secure," or had "more than enough."

What percentage of members do you estimate identify as people of color?

In our 2023 Congregational Survey, 4.4% of members identified as people of color.

What percentage of members do you estimate identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ)?

In our 2023 Congregational Survey, 14% of members identified as LGBTQIA+.

Please describe the gender makeup of your congregation

Respondents to our 2023 Congregational Survey were:

57% women

26% men

2.4% Non-binary/agender/genderqueer/other

15% no response

What number of staff (including full and part time) identify as people of color?

7 of 20

What number of people of color serve as leaders or chairs of your volunteer committees and program teams?

9

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

1 of 9

What changes have you made in the last 3-5 years, if any, to include the racial and ethnic diversity of your congregational staff and volunteer leadership?

Including congregants and community members who identify as BIPOC continues to be an important and intentional priority. This includes representation on the Board, staff, volunteers, lay leaders, and our inclusivity in welcoming visitors and new members. Team Dynamics, a consultant group that focuses on diversity, equity, and inclusion, has provided honest, actionable guidance and a roadmap for Unity's hiring processes. The organization has conducted training for individuals and groups at the church, including the Board and the 2021-22 Ministerial Search Team (MST). All members of the 2023-24 MST were provided with their Hiring Revolution book and we look forward to Alfonso Tomás Wenker, with Team Dynamics, creating and conducting a workshop for Unity's congregation. The workshop, entitled "Engaging Awareness, Disrupting Dominance" will be conducted on Saturday December 2, 2023 in the sanctuary. Alfonso will guide us through discussions to help us in our preparations for a new senior minister and guide us in delving into the truths about ourselves and the congregation and create space for meaningful reflection on the implications of these truths. This will be an opportunity to deepen into more rigorous practice of noticing how our preferences show up when we care deeply, moving from our individual wants into how to make choices in service of the collective "we."

Work around the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) has become more robust and members of community outreach ministry teams and other lay leadership teams had the opportunity to participate in the IDI with both personal and group feedback in order to receive support in creating ongoing IDIs. Over 100 congregants participated in this valuable work and church programming has been developed to explicitly address our congregation's orientation of minimization to move us to an orientation of acceptance and adaptation.

The Board has incorporated a matrix of identity, expertise, and perspective into trustee recruitment and application, as well as in the formation of the MST.

Accessibility

Is your Congregation's meeting space wheelchair accessible?

Yes

Wheelchair accessibility details:

There are four entrances to the building, two of which are wheelchair accessible. The sanctuary entrance at 733 Portland Avenue and the program entrance on the east side of the church (accessible from the parking lot) are wheelchair accessible.

Most of the building is physically accessible to those of all abilities. Exceptions to this include the balcony, bell tower, a second level office, and the chancel, all of which are accessed via stairs. Modifications of the chancel are under consideration and would be necessary to allow comfortable wheelchair access. The sanctuary has wheelchair cut-out spaces in the regular pews so that all people can engage in the congregational space.

Does your Congregation provide assisted listening systems?

Yes

Assisted listening system details:

The sanctuary is equipped with an assisted listening system. We also provide American Sign Language (ASL) upon request. Closed captioning is available on our livestream.

Describe other ways your congregation has dealt with accessibility

When we reopened the church building in 2021 we integrated increased video streaming into the church, allowing for online participation in many church programs and activities. We offer large print orders of service every Sunday.

The building offers all gender and family restrooms. Restrooms on the main floor have handrails and broad stalls.

Unity is a tree nut-free space.

Resources & Programs

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

Unity has a rich and comprehensive set of programs as part of our robust and committed community, many of which we will describe in upcoming sections of this document. We have had to pare back some programs and offerings during the past few years as a result of the pandemic and the ministerial transition.

In-person worship attendance continues to be below pre-pandemic levels, but we still have several hundred attendees each Sunday. On average 60 people join via livestream during Sunday's 9:00 service, including many who cannot attend in person due to distance or mobility. Due to this, livestreaming and services available to view on YouTube are one change that came out of the pandemic that we plan to continue. One friend of the church commented on how online access allowed her to attend her own church service as well as Unity's, where she finds the Story for All Ages especially meaningful.

Church services, special events, and some other program offerings are available through the Unity YouTube channel. Wellspring Wednesday is a keystone of our multigenerational worship, adult faith formation, and community engagement efforts, and has a high attendance.

Unity's congregation participates and facilitates many fellowship groups, including the Dine with Nine monthly dinner get-togethers, various men's groups, support groups for caregivers or those experiencing grief, LGBTQ+ affinity group, Women in Retirement group, book clubs, and many more. These groups provide avenues for people to join together to form a "community of communities." There are also many resources for adult faith formation, addressing our desires to develop more loving and effective lives. Using the framework of Within, Among and Beyond, the Unity website offers resources for developing a personal spiritual practice, like a Chalice Circle; places to engage in small group interactions, such as the Antiracism Literacy Partners; and opportunities to "bless the world" through a Community Outreach Ministry Team.

This fall, much of our work as a church has revolved around our [search for a settled minister](#). We started with deep listening and commitment to hearing the congregation's hopes, dreams and concerns at cottage meetings, through emails, informally at coffee in the Parish Hall, and with the results of the congregational survey. We conducted 21 cottage meetings with approximately 250 total attendees, including repeat attendees. We used a talking circle format for the cottage meetings, to encourage attendees to listen to each other, as well as share their hopes and dreams. Attendees were truly engaged, receptive to the talking circle format, and have shared that they feel the cottage meetings are something we should do regularly as a congregation to make connections and hear one another. A few mentioned that it's helped build bridges after a rough period of disagreement following the 2022 vote meeting.

We are continuing this work through the winter, with workshops by Team Dynamics on "Engaging Awareness, Disrupting Dominance," and a Unity Common Read and author visit and discussion in February centered around Terasa Cooley's "Transforming Conflict."

Describe your religious educational programs:

Unity's religious education program is extensive, and many families first came to our congregation searching for a place to raise their children in a liberal theological tradition. In the past, we have had as many as 545 children and youth participating in the program. Currently, we have around 180. We also offer extensive adult religious education programming.

Religious Education for Children and Youth

The structure of our religious education classes for children and youth reflects the conviction that the congregation as a whole is vitally important in faith formation. Each child's caregivers volunteer as part of the RE program and teach the RE classes, from Spirit Play in preschool all the way through Coming of Age in 9th grade. In the words of our Minister of Faith Formation, Rev. KP Hong: 'We hold this as axiomatic in our shared ministry with children and youth: "*The most significant curriculum for any child is the person who teaches. For children, revelation takes human form.*" (Kenda Creasy Dean) For being the person and teacher through whom revelation occurs, and for seeing each child as a revelation... only gratitude.'

Our nursery is a safe, nurturing place for babies and toddlers, as well as a place for our teens to contribute, be a part of the congregational community, and earn money they can use towards future youth trips if they so choose. Several teens have described it as an important part of their connection to the church. An adjoining room offers parents a chance to sit with their children to nurse, calm, and still watch the service on a screen.

Spirit Play preschool programming for 3-5 year olds explores our values and history with a focus on wonder.

Our 1st-6th graders experience programming based on multiple intelligences with rotational lessons in science, drama, body, art and music. Each year, we have five units, each one touching on themes or "big ideas" related to our theological questions:

- What is the nature of God?
- What does it mean to be human and alive?
- How is the Sacred present in each of us and in our lives?
- What is the purpose of Beloved Community?
- How do we live in the face of death and loss?

These are the same questions our youth examine in their Coming of Age credos.

Our middle school programming, for grades 6-8, explores a topic in depth every semester. The content is related to our own religious heritage, our developing personal theology and the traditions and wisdom of world religions. The structure of each lesson includes a reflective meditation, energizing fun and participatory learning about ourselves and the human experience. One of the key courses is Beloved Community, which explores identity through

many lenses and incorporates our antiracism work. Courses also incorporate the six sources of Unitarian Universalism.

Describe your youth and campus ministry programs:

We use the Our Whole Lives (OWL) curriculum with our 8th and 9th graders. The Coming of Age program runs September - April and involves the youth and many adults as mentors and class leaders. Our youth group, Tower Club, involves 20-30 youth from 10 - 12th grade, and includes an important pilgrimage trip to Boston to learn about our UU roots the third week of October each year. We don't currently have an active campus ministry program.

We have descriptions of our programs, and our current curriculum, [at our Religious Education for Children and Youth page.](#)

Adult Faith Formation

Unity has dedicated significant resources to build adult faith formation programming that is equal to our robust Religious Education programming for children and youth. The Beloved Community Staff team at Unity Church frames our adult faith formation as a [double helix](#), with strands of faith formation/spiritual practice and antiracist multicultural practices joined together to build a more loving and effective life. Adult faith formation programming has been scaffolded over the past several years to introduce the concept of spiritual practice, build an understanding of antiracism and multiculturalism, and foster a community of practice that connects the two.

Teaching Associates: since the Fall of 2019 small groups of congregants have been engaging in a repeating 3 year program to learn how to be "resident theologians." Part of the impetus for this new ministry was the ministerial desire for lay leaders to support adult faith formation across the congregation. How could congregants best show up for the faith journey of others and their own, and be truly present within, among and beyond? The study is focused on: foundations of UU theology, honing one's interpersonal theological skills with case studies, and developing personal statements of theology. Graduates are then asked to take their training out into the congregation and the world.

Surrounding Community

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

Minnesotans are often vehemently—maybe notoriously—vocal about the virtues of our home state. And while, in part, it's a defense from phrases like "flyover country" or "frozen tundra," we are so vocal because we are deeply invested in our home. You can tell how much we care by the strength of our civic engagement, the variety of our social and cultural institutions, and the investments we make in our communities.

Saint Paul, as the capital of Minnesota, is a microcosm of that attitude. We are a vocal community, an engaged community, an interconnected community. Forget six degrees of separation, in Saint Paul we're often at about *two*. We are also a community of communities: our

neighborhoods used to be described as a collection of small towns, and we still have strong neighborhood identities. Our ethnic communities Hmong, Karen, Somali, Ethiopian, Latino, African-American, Irish, Polish, Norwegian and others often maintain strong internal ties and have a strong sense of community engagement.

Saint Paulites largely maintain the “Minnesota Nice” attitude that combines helpfulness, pitching in, and civic pride with an indirect, high-context communication style. Rooted in Scandinavian culture— and the need to get along with people you may be snowed in with for months!-- that indirect culture can be difficult for people from direct, low-context cultures. In recent years, Minnesotans have been confronting the ways that “Minnesota Nice” can feel not nice, especially as our recent immigrants bring their own communication styles and traditions and as we confront difficult questions of equity and injustice in our communities. While those are uncomfortable conversations, they’re important to keeping the kindness in Minnesota Nice.

Minnesota is known as the “Land of 10,000 Lakes” but we boast more than 11,000. Our lakes are a prominent feature of our geography and culture and range in size from small ponds to Lake Superior—which is the coldest and deepest of the Great Lakes and the world’s largest freshwater lake by area. A trip to Duluth or the “North Shore” feels like a trip to the ocean. These offer lots of opportunities to get outside wherever you are in Minnesota and drive a lot of our economy and ecosystem. If you drive north far enough, bring your passport as Canada is our Northern boundary. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA) is the largest wilderness east of the Rockies and north of Florida’s Everglades, and is a destination experience for novice and experienced camping and canoeing enthusiasts. It’s also a Dark Sky Sanctuary!

The larger Twin Cities community actually encompasses far more than the Saint Paul metro area. In addition to Minneapolis, the “Twin Cities” officially covers seven counties of south-central Minnesota— but in reality, economically includes 15 counties, including 2 counties in western Wisconsin. There are large and broad swathes of rural farmland, recreational and forestry areas, as well as the confluence of the Minnesota, Mississippi, and Saint Croix rivers. With 3.7 million residents, the greater Twin Cities area is the 3rd largest metropolitan area in the Midwest and the 16th largest metropolitan area overall.

Economy

The greater Saint Paul and Minneapolis metro area has a 3.20% unemployment rate, compared to the long term average of 4.06% and the national average of 3.8%. The Twin Cities are home to a [wide variety of employment sectors](#), private and public. We are a business headquarters hub, with 24 Fortune 500 companies including UnitedHealth Group, Target, Best Buy, 3M, Ecolab and General Mills. We are also home to over 24,000 nonprofit organizations, including Second Harvest Heartland and Scholarship America. There are 1,700 arts, culture and humanities organizations, and 65 museums and historic sites.

Transportation in the Twin Cities

The Twin Cities have an abundance of transportation options. In the core cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, it’s possible to get around without a car, or using one very seldom. [Metro Transit](#)

runs two light-rail lines and over 100 bus routes, including several Bus Rapid Transit routes, and Metro Mobility supplements those routes for those with disabilities. Saint Paul has over 180 miles of [bicycle-friendly paths](#) and roadways. Minneapolis has 16 miles of on-street protected bikeways and 98 miles of bike lanes. Minneapolis has the third-highest five-year average of bicycle commuting for large U.S. cities (based on the 2017 census). An estimated 5 percent of Minneapolis commuters and 2.1% of Saint Paul commuters said they biked to work in 2015 (U.S. Census data). We also have several car share services, including one offering all-electric vehicles. Minneapolis-Saint Paul International Airport is a hub for two major airlines, Amtrak will provide twice daily train service from St. Paul's Union Station, and there are several long distance bus services providing transportation from Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Climate and outdoor recreation

One stereotype we must admit is true: it gets cold here. It is also, in the summer, quite hot. As with anywhere in the upper Midwest, we will get below zero in the winter, and into the 90s in the summer. Long underwear and the right footwear help. We take joy in our seasons. Snow plowing isn't the most fun activity, but neighbors take a sense of pride in helping each other out, plowing driveways for someone while they're away, and clearing off a coworker's car. In January we celebrate our [Winter Carnival](#): ten days of parades, ice carving, snow carving, treasure hunting, dances, puzzle competitions, and general bundled-up joy. Hockey, pond hockey, skiing (downhill and cross country) and ice fishing are all popular activities. The quietness of the winter season can feel a bit slower and lead us to a more contemplative place, helping us go deep in our reflections (and our blankets).

In the warmth of summer, we have [farmers' markets](#), jazz festivals, art festivals, cultural festivals, the St. Paul Cat Video Festival (the biggest and best in the country!), and the [State Fair](#) – termed “The Great Minnesota Get-Together,” one of the biggest state fairs in the nation, and certainly considered by us to be the best! The biggest challenge on any summer weekend is that there are too many activities to choose from. We love our lakes, rivers, hiking trails and camping. We fill our [park system](#) (the second-best in the nation) with snowshoers and skiers in the winter, and hikers, paddle-boarders, kayakers, beachgoers, bikers, and pretty much the whole town the rest of the year. Fall is considered by many to bring out the best in Minnesota. There are dozens of varieties of apples to pick from orchards, many developed at the University of Minnesota.

We also understand the challenges our climate presents to our unhoused and low-income neighbors. Many civic groups organize to meet those challenges, through legislative means, municipal services, and non-governmental organizations, and yet the need remains high. There is always more work to be done, and opportunities for us to engage in it.

Demographics and Cultures

Saint Paul and Minneapolis sit on the homeland of the Dakota people, including the sacred sites of Bdóte, where the Minnesota River meets the Mississippi, and Wakáŋ Tipi and Mounds Bluff in Saint Paul. The Rev. Jim Bear Jacobs (Mohican) has led tours of local indigenous sacred sites revealing the vital history of the tribes whose lands were confiscated by the white settlers. A

number of Unity members have participated in this learning which has been foundational to the formation of Unity's Indigenous Justice Team. Today, the Twin Cities—particularly Minneapolis—are home to a large and diverse Native American population, with a strong cultural and activist community.

Saint Paul and Minneapolis's early settlers were largely Northern and Central European, and later Eastern Europeans, Italians, and Latin Americans. The Great Migration of the 1920's brought many African Americans to join the already-existing population. Still, until the 1970's the Twin Cities were largely white. Beginning in the Vietnam War, several Minnesota nonprofit organizations began sponsoring refugees for resettlement, including Vietnamese, Laotians, Cambodians, and Hmong. They were followed by many others, notably Ethiopians, Somalis and, most recently, Karen and Karenni refugees from Burma/Myanmar. Today, Saint Paul is majority non-white: the 2020 census shows Saint Paul is 48.8% white, 16.5% Black, 9.7% Hispanic, 19.2% Asian, 0.7% American Indian, and 4.7% Multiracial. The Twin Cities have the largest urban Hmong population outside Southeast Asia, and the largest Somali population in the United States. More than 100 languages and dialects are spoken by Saint Paul Public School students. All these waves of immigration are reflected in the culture and activities of the Twin Cities today.

Civic Engagement

Saint Paul is a hub of social and civic engagement in the state. Unity Church is just down the road from the State Capitol, and there are congregants involved in a broad range of political and advocacy matters at the Capitol and across the city. Saint Paul is faced with the same social disparities, racial and achievement gaps in both educational and economic outcomes as most American metropolitan areas, but with well-resourced and robust community and non-profit organizations who address systemic inequalities and provide support and sustain community. Our weekly offerings support many of these organizations whose work aligns with our values.

There are two specific examples of Unity's involvement in significant ways in the social and civic engagement of our metropolitan area. Several of our congregation members have been central to [Saint Paul's Recovery Act](#) Reparations work, which has been looked at as a model for reparations. Another is a group of Unity Church lay leaders who have organized an annual pilgrimage walk through the [Rondo](#) neighborhood to George Floyd Square, where we have worked to build authentic relationships and to support the transformative work of these communities.

Arts and culture

The Twin Cities are a hotbed of culture—we have to do something with those cold winter nights, or celebrate the summer evenings. Some of the names are iconic: the Minnesota Orchestra, the [Minnesota Fringe Festival](#), Prince. They don't even scrape the surface. Our cultural opportunities run deep and wide.

The Twin Cities arts scene nurtures artists in different practices and of all ages—there are opportunities for early and mid-career artists, as well as very well established ones. It's a great

place to get into any artistic field as a spectator—or a participant! There are many small venues that tend to be inexpensive and highly accessible, as well as many events and associations that serve as ways to find and support local artists and help the public interact with them more directly instead of remaining a gatekeeper. Minnesotans have even [constitutionally-dedicated funding](#) to support our arts and cultural heritage. Our progressive political outlook provides artists with safe spaces to present [challenging work](#).

As a result there are too many [amazing opportunities](#) to support the arts or be an artist to name here—literally. The lists we tried to write quickly became absurdly long and still left out critically important artists and venues. You can't throw a rock in the Twin Cities without hitting a choral group (so please don't), not to mention orchestras from the small to the internationally-renowned, local bands and solo performers, numerous small theater groups, an abundance of film festivals, art cinema locales, art festivals, art crawls, museums and galleries at every price point, and all sorts of small dance groups from many traditions. In Greater Minnesota, festivals like the Waterfront Festival and the Homegrown Music Festival in Duluth, and the Beethoven Festival in Winona draw Twin Cities crowds, and there are great local arts scenes to be found in every corner of the state.

Minnesota's [food scene](#) is just as numerous, diverse, and homegrown as our arts scene, with multiple local chefs who've won James Beard awards, breweries and distilleries that have won national and international awards, and a rich assortment of restaurants from many ethnic traditions and cuisines. From scorchingly hot Caribbean curries to Kurdish koftas, farm-to-table pork or vegan burgers, street-food elotes to haute cuisine on a patio by the fire, the Twin Cities has it.

There are a host of professional sports teams in the Twin Cities, including the most successful team in Minnesota, the Minnesota Lynx of the Women's National Basketball Association. Also of note is the Lynx counterpart, the MN Timberwolves (NBA). Other professional sports teams include the MN Twins (MLB) and St. Paul Saints (minor league baseball), the MN Vikings (NFL), MN United men's soccer (the Loons) and MN Aurora (women's soccer), MN Wild (NHL), MN Whitecaps (National Women's Hockey league), MN Strike (Premier Ultimate League), and MN Wind Chill (American Ultimate Disc League).

Higher Education

The Twin Cities – and Saint Paul in particular – has numerous colleges to add to the event options and learning opportunities: the University of Minnesota has both a Minneapolis and a St. Paul campus, Augsburg College is just across the river, and Macalester College, Concordia University Saint Paul, Hamline University, University of Saint Thomas, University of Saint Catherine, St. Paul College, and Metro State University are within five miles of Unity.

The Neighborhood

Unity is located in the Summit-University neighborhood, situated near the Summit Avenue Historic District, and Grand Avenue's shopping scene. Designated a historic preservation district because of the diversity of architectural styles from 1870 to 1930, Summit Avenue features the

longest stretch of Gilded Age mansions in the country. Running from the Mississippi River on the west, the Avenue winds east to the Saint Paul Cathedral, just a short distance from the Saint Paul Capital and Downtown.

To the south is the Mississippi River--still a working river--replete with barges and other boat traffic. Harriet Island, a Regional Park, is one of St. Paul's most popular parks and site of many community celebrations. The river itself is home to trophy walleye fishing and its shores home to eagles, deer and wild turkeys and other wildlife. On the other side of Harriet Island, in the neighborhood known as the West Side, the highest concentration of first and second generation Mexican and other Latinx immigrants reside and operate businesses.

A few short blocks to the north of Unity sits the historically African-American Rondo neighborhood. Highway planners in the 1950's and 1960's routed the new Interstate-94 through the neighborhood, causing the destruction of numerous homes and businesses and the dislocation of what was a thriving community and the heart of the Black middle class. Residents and others interested in reclaiming the vitality of Rondo are engaged in efforts to physically reconnect the neighborhood, making the area whole again, and restoring its viability as a desirable place to live. Unity sits at the intersection of the history and evolution of these two very different parts of Saint Paul.

The Obama School, a grade school across the street from Unity, has a diverse population of students, with 85% of the students receiving free and reduced lunch. Unity members volunteer there, tutoring reading and math. The school is undergoing a two-year remodeling project and volunteers are serving another grade school within walking distance of Unity.

There are several houses of worship within blocks of Unity from various denominations, including River of Life Christian Church, House of Hope Presbyterian, Saint Paul's United Church of Christ, the Cathedral of Saint Paul, Vertical Church of Saint Paul, Mt. Zion Temple, and Saint Thomas More Catholic Church, to name just a few.

Many cultural opportunities are right near Unity: the Saint Paul Chamber Orchestra, Ordway Theater, MN Opera, Schubert Club, Minnesota History Center, Science Museum of Minnesota, and Lowertown artist lofts are located downtown, perhaps a mile from the church. The Selby Ave. Jazz Festival each fall is right in the neighborhood, as is Walker West music academy with its frequent offerings. Penumbra Theater, (housing Minnesota's only Black professional theater company) is known for showcasing the works of August Wilson. Grand Avenue to the south and Selby Avenue to the north offer extensive shopping and dining options, and University Avenue's Little Mekong district is not much farther away.

Unity Church and the White Bear UU Church in suburban Saint Paul, First Universalist Church of Minneapolis and First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis along with smaller UU congregations in suburban communities provide dynamic liberal religious opportunities. Collegiality between the ministerial staff of these congregations is strong. Unity, as a teaching congregation over the past 20 years, has had numerous interns move into ministries within these churches. Minneapolis is also home to Rev. Meg Riley, current Co-Moderator of the UUA and Rev. Ashley Horan, Organizing Strategy Director of the UUA.

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

Unity has been in the Saint Paul community for over 150 years. While we are well-known, like many Unitarian Universalist congregations, our denomination is not always well-understood. We have community partners directly in our neighborhood and in the larger Twin Cities. Prior to the COVID pandemic we shared our building for several years with a non-denominational, Christian and primarily African American congregation, Above Every Name, as they explored where to plant their roots. That congregation has relocated to another space.

Our 2012 building renovation created a more open and inviting entry, in keeping with the way we have expanded the use of our space by community groups. As we have transitioned from the restrictive nature of gatherings during the pandemic, we have resumed our efforts in making our building available to a variety of community organizations, including recovery groups, community cultural groups, a pre-school, an LGBTQIA+ Choir, and other musical entities. Additionally, we host election voting, Red Cross blood drives, community Circles of Peace, and provide sanctuary housing for individuals and families who are experiencing uncertain immigration status. Along with other churches, prior to the pandemic we also took a turn every year providing overnight shelter capacity for unhoused families through Project Home. Since the pandemic, they have been able to increase their own shelter capacity, and we now support them in other ways.

Describe your Congregation's religious, political, and social context from a historical and current perspective.

From the history of Unity Church as shared on our church website, there is a thread from Unity's earliest days that stretches to today:

William Channing Gannett, an ardent abolitionist and strong woman suffragist, arrived from Boston in 1877 on a three-month trial. By this time the congregation numbered about 150 and there were 70 children in the church school. In 1879, after two years as minister, Mr. Gannett requested to be ordained. On that occasion he read a "bond of fellowship," an agreement that he had written. It was signed by 84 members of the congregation present and is still recited when new members join the congregation.

Unity Church not only brings forward William Channing Gannett's words - we aspire to continue his commitment to religious and social causes that align with our Unitarian values and allow us to live our faith with integrity, service, and joy. From the earliest days of Unity's establishment, the ministers and congregation have been involved in local and national issues and organizations. In 2007, Unity started the practice of giving away the plate; each week, the larger part of the Sunday offering is donated to a community group that shares our values. Our congregation members have been deeply invested in the political and social fabric of local and national communities, and our ministers have led the way in helping us see the ways that our faith calls us into the world.

Questionnaire

Description of minister's role in relation to other paid staff

Unity Church operates under a policy governance framework. The minister is an integral part of the Executive Team (ET), and aligns their actions with the policies adopted by the Board.

The senior minister, as a key member of the ET, holds primary responsibility for overseeing the implementation of Unity Church's mission, values, and Ends. The ET as a whole is responsible for administering the church's programs and is expected to foster a collaborative environment among the staff. The senior minister also assumes the role of leading the ministerial team, with any ministers not part of the ET reporting to them.

During the tenure of Reverends Rob and Janne Eller-Isaacs, the ET generally consisted of two senior co-ministers, the Executive Director, and one another member. The Board determines the membership of the ET. For example, other members have been: ministers on staff in a non-ministerial role such as Membership Coordinator, in a ministerial role such as Minister of Faith Formation, and a congregant deeply involved in church finances. At times additional ministers have been included in the ET, subject to approval by the Board, to broaden the representation of ministry areas on the team. The ET operates in covenant, strives for consensus, and presents a unified message to other church bodies.

ET ministers have specific oversight and authority over worship, pastoral care, and other aspects within the clergy's purview. The Executive Director handles financial, human resources, board liaison, and other institutional aspects of church life. Additionally the Executive Director takes on the role of the chief of staff in coordinating all-staff communications.

Each ET member collaborates with those who report directly to them. The ET, as a whole, is responsible for hiring, evaluating, training, coaching and managing the talents of all non-ET staff. The ET member primarily responsible for a specific area takes the lead in these processes. For instance, the Executive Director leads the hiring of administrative and facilities staff, with input and participation from other ET members. In 2019 when searching for a new music director, the senior co-ministers led the process, formed a search committee to assist them and the ET made the final decision.

All members of the ET report to the Board as part of the executive leadership, and individual evaluations are not carried out. Instead, the Board assesses the performance of the ET as a cohesive team on a structured, monthly basis, ensuring alignment with board policies and progress towards Unity's stated Ends. This approach serves to decentralize authority within the church and enhances administrative capacity.

We provide more about the ET's history and functioning in the response on "governing structure."

Primary areas of focus for the minister

In cottage meetings, we asked congregants to discuss four primary areas of focus for the minister: spiritual leadership, congregational management/governance, community engagement and justice work, and pastoral care.

The four areas can be broken down as:

Spiritual Leadership

- Providing historical and theological perspectives.
- Taking a leadership role in the development of spiritual practices.
- Contributing to and delivering meaningful and moving services.
- Assuming overall responsibility for the worship life of Unity Church and being accountable for all worship services.
- Collaborating with the congregation and staff to identify next steps for creating a multicultural spiritual home built on authentic relationships.
- Conducting rites of passage, including weddings, child dedications, Coming of Age ceremonies and memorial services. Also, providing pastoral care services in collaboration with the Minister of Congregational Care, including crisis intervention and home visits for the sick, homebound, dying, and bereaved, both independently and in coordination with Unity Church's congregational care program.

Congregational Management

- Collaborating as a part of the Executive Team to implement Unity Church's programs, lead the staff team, and manage the church's business operations.
- Taking an active role in serving the Unitarian Universalist Association and the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, as part of maintaining the connection between the congregation and the UUA.

Community Engagement and Justice Work

- Advocating for social justice within the congregation and in the broader community.
- Addressing systemic prejudices and biases present in all sectors of society. This includes both an internal examination of how bias is manifested within Unity and external relationships with community partners.

Pastoral Care

- In collaboration with the Minister of Congregational Care, providing pastoral care to members of the congregation during times of joy or need.

- Coordinating and identifying effective ways to administer additional pastoral care.

Desired strengths of the minister

Unity's Ends statements guide the congregation's path for the near future and dictate what we seek in a new minister. The current Ends of the church are:

1. Create a multicultural spiritual home built on authentic relationships.
2. Ground ourselves in personal practice and communal worship that grows our capacity for wonder and spiritual deepening.
3. Articulate our Unitarian Universalist faith identity, teach it to our children, share it with others, and live it courageously in the world.
4. Know each other in all our fullness and create an ever-widening circle of belonging for all people.
5. Generously give and openly receive compassionate care in times of joy, sorrow, and transition.
6. Discover and pursue our individual and collective work to advance justice, wholeness, and equity for people, our Earth, and all life on it.
7. Create brave space for racial healing and dismantling dominant culture.
8. Sustain and steward the church and our larger Unitarian Universalist movement for the future.

The 2023 Congregational survey found that the congregation believes that the three most important Ends are:

1. Generously give and openly receive compassionate care.
2. Discover and pursue our individual and collective work to advance justice, wholeness, and equity for people, our Earth, and all life on it.
3. Ground ourselves in personal practice and communal worship that grows our capacity for wonder and spiritual deepening.

(Full results are in the congregational survey summary in the Documents Packet.)

In the 2023 survey, the congregation indicated that we find the following traits most important in a new minister:

1. Preaching ability/presence: The ability to inspire from the pulpit while communicating a clear message that aligns with Unity's mission, values, and ends is essential for all ministers.

2. Administration/staff relationship skills: A senior minister should have a clear vision for the future and collaborate with the ET and staff to create and implement strategies that realize that vision. Understanding the congregation's culture and the importance of good policies, practices, and procedures is crucial. The minister should assess other's strengths and limitations and delegate tasks effectively while fostering personal responsibility and a sense of belonging.

3. Spiritual leadership skills: The ideal minister should be spiritually grounded with a developed personal spiritual practice, allowing them to preach from experience and lead by example. They should also nurture a rich spiritual life in Unity Church members and seek wisdom from appropriate mentors to continue their own spiritual growth.

4. Engaging lay leadership and members: Unity has a large, devoted and active congregation. During cottage meetings members shared their experiences getting involved:

- I felt seen and heard when I got involved as a worship associate.
- I appreciate feeling a sense of "teamwork" among the ministers and parishioners, which I believe has led to many groups forming and deepening our sense of community.
- It would help to have a minister encourage me to volunteer, through identifying me as someone they think could do well at something.

Given Unity's strong emphasis on shared leadership, and numerous community, ministry, and fellowship teams, having a senior minister engage and foster lay leadership is critical for our work as a church.

5. Intellectual Leadership Skills

Many congregants share the importance that intellectual stimulation and challenge play in their experience of worship, as well as faith formation and community engagement. The ideal minister will be able to incorporate themes from a wide variety of theological sources, as well as other sources, into their work with the congregation.

The next set of key qualities on the congregational survey results were nearly equal in importance with each other. This is the "Mary Poppins" list for the perfect leader:

- Social action/justice commitment
- Committing to antiracism work
- Building a multicultural spiritual home
- Pastoral care/calls

A sense of humor also ranked highly on the survey—though we neglected to ask members to define it!

Ongoing momentum we would like to continue

The 2023 survey gave respondents room to describe work we would like to continue or would find it energizing to do. Some of the top survey comments centered on continuing our racial and social justice work, much of which is described in other sections of this document, notably “recent successful work of the congregation.”

During our cottage meetings, many participants expressed a desire to continue cottage meetings and discussions around how we perceive the work of our church, and our hopes, into the future. We are also pursuing work around right relations, including a potential team, and work around a church covenant.

As a church, we are also working on pay equity for our staff, and congregants have expressed support for this project in cottage meetings.

- We need to pay our staff in line with the UUA.
- Our staff team is full-on management. They are the horsepower, very strong and amazing, that needs to be maintained.
- The minister needs to let them do their job and be able to recruit similar, strong talent.

Programs and traditions we want to maintain

In the 2023 survey and cottage meetings, congregants expressed the importance of several areas of Unity life:

- Music! This is an unsurprising constant in our responses, as you will see reflected in the questions on our art and music work, our worship service, and elsewhere. Whether performing or appreciating, our music ministry is central to Unity.
- The tradition of shared staff involvement in the work and direction of the church, through the ET and the ministry teams, and the shared work of lay leaders in the involvement and direction of the church, through ministry teams, action teams, and engagement opportunities both internal and external.
- The involvement of our worship associates in the spiritual and worship direction of services.
- Our Christmas traditions, especially the youth Christmas Pageant. While Unity is an eclectic church, theologically-speaking, this tradition is very important for many families—one of the most-mentioned traditions in the survey. Several congregants reflected that these traditions represent key moments of intergenerational worship in the church year.
- Reflecting similar feelings on the importance of intergenerational worship and spiritual experience, many congregants also said it was important to maintain traditions like the Coming of Age Celebration, Wellspring Wednesdays, and the Youth Musical. For decades, the youth musical has been a key element of community-building for junior

high and high school youth and parents, as well as connection to the larger congregation.

Participation of children in the worship service, and the frequency of intergenerational services

Unity has a thriving community of families with children of all ages. Monthly during the church year, there is one Sunday that is either a [Family or a Story Sunday](#). Family Sundays are generally centered around major celebrations, such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, Merging of Waters, and Flower Communion. There is a story for all ages told by a member of the Religious Education ministry team and an activity book provided to children. No RE classes take place on these Sundays and children stay in the sanctuary with their families. Story Sundays occur in the months without a major holiday. On those Sundays, the children go to their RE classes after the story, while junior high youth remain in service.

Infants, toddlers, and children who are not going to RE classes may sit in the service with their parents. Children and Youth also participate in service through the [Children's choir](#) or Youth Choir.

There is 30-minute intergenerational service every Wednesday evening as part of our Wellspring Wednesday programming. Wellspring Wednesday begins with a communal meal, followed by the intergenerational service, and then adult faith formation programming and programming for children.

Unity has had a culture over the years of a Sunday service that is designed to serve adults. Children should be 'seen but not heard' if they are in the service at all on regular Sundays. Although the congregation has come a long way in loosening up, a family with a squirmy child or a chatty toddler is more likely to leave the Sanctuary than stay. We have a Family Room next to our nursery, where there is a TV screen with the service for parents to watch while spending time with their children. This concerns some congregants as an unwelcoming experience for families, especially visiting families.

For many years the first-to-sixth-grade children would join their families attending the second service and be sung out to go to their class after the first ten-fifteen minutes. This tradition was eliminated prior to COVID in favor of the children at all services having a consistent experience of children's chapel.

Our church year uses monthly themes to center the services, the focus of the monthly newsletter, and adult programming. The monthly themes are integrated into the weekly Sunday middle school worship service, as well as the Wellspring Wednesday services that reach for a greater intergenerational experience of church. Our RE director currently sends emails to parents and volunteers helping draw parallels between the worship themes and the themes in class.

Our RE Ministry Team expressed a strong desire to see a more vibrant integration of the youth into the service, whether through direct participation, or the incorporation of their voices into the

service in creative ways. Youth participating in our cottage meetings also wanted more connection to the rest of the congregation and each other. Adults whose primary volunteer work with the church will often refer to themselves as “always in the basement,” as a way of describing the separation they can sometimes feel from others in the church. Better integration of the “upstairs” and “downstairs” church would be a growing edge for a new senior minister to steer our congregation towards.

Traditional holiday services celebrated outside of Sunday morning

Maundy Thursday Service is a service of ritual and community, sharing in traditional holy week practices of Eucharist and Foot Washing. In the Memorialist tradition, we join to remember the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, which include welcoming all people to a meal of love, giving thanks for the gifts of life, and serving each other in humility. This is a small (about 30 attendees) service.

Good Friday Service of Tenebrae, or “shadows/darkness,” is based on a twelfth century liturgy of solemn observance and extended meditation on the passion of Christ. With candles extinguished after each reading and silent reflection, the increasing darkness on the evening of Good Friday invites worshipers to enter into the dramatic narrative of Jesus’ betrayal, arrest, and crucifixion, and to reflect on God’s steadfast love. This is also traditionally a small service.

A winter solstice celebration, a Celtic-inspired family friendly ritual, marks the turning of the year toward light. Though it was well-attended, this has not been celebrated since the pandemic, as the lay leaders have either died or moved away. We are exploring options for the future.

About a week before Christmas, an evening ‘Blue Holidays’ service for those for whom the holidays are not merry.

On Christmas Eve there are multiple services: a contemplative service in the morning; the annual Christmas pageant performed twice in late afternoon; and a ‘lessons and carols’ service in the evening.

In April, we hold a Coming of Age ceremony on a Saturday for our 9th grade youth, families, friends, and church members. Youth meet with their mentors for lunch, read their credos, and celebrate their work. We then include portions of those credos in our Sunday service with the entire congregation.

Status of the congregation as a Welcoming Congregation

Unity Church became a Welcoming Congregation in 2007.

Status of the congregation as a Green Sanctuary congregation

Unity is not yet certified as a Green Sanctuary Congregation but will be working with the UUA's Green Sanctuary staff to explore how to build on our work over the last 15 years to be recognized as a Green Sanctuary congregation. Act for the Earth, Unity's Community Outreach Ministry Team addressing climate change and sustainability, has been working on the four Green Sanctuary elements of: Congregational Transformation, Justice, Mitigation, Adaptation and Resilience, but has not formally applied for the designation.

The mission of Act for the Earth is: to engage the Unity Church-Unitarian community to act to stop climate change, species extinction, and environmental injustice by practical and systemic solutions while grounding this work in our own spiritual and antiracist/justice stance.

While the Act for the Earth Team of 25-30 meets monthly as a whole team, most work is done through projects such as:

- A 7-part Indigenous and climate justice series
- Canopy Connectors (tree planting project to increase canopy in neighborhoods with less trees.)
- Church building environmental improvements (solar, EV charging, parking lot)
- Engage with ongoing antiracist and spiritual practices including IDI work, ritual for meetings, nature walks, and more
- Active Hope/The Work that Reconnects Workshops and book groups for spiritual grounding (Based on Joanna Macy's work)
- Pollinators (pollinator gardens, pollinator friendly lawns, park restoration, pollinator friendly farms)
- Plastics Crisis campaign (legislation, incinerator project)
- Food systems (food campaign, Farm Bill)
- Policy campaign (e.g., Minnesota 2023 climate justice legislative advocacy)

Unity has partnered with Minnesota Interfaith Power & Light to assess adding solar panels to its roof. Unity completed an electricity audit and recently received its first bid for panels. It is also evaluating the best methods of financing a solar array.

When Unity undertook major renovations in 2012, it placed a priority on sustainable building and practices, including new HVAC systems with high tech efficiency, high efficiency boilers, and other improvements.

Status of the congregation as an Honor Congregation

Unity Church is currently not an Honor Congregation. Over several years the Board has been adding 5% to our Annual Program Fund dues each year, and in 2023 we have budgeted \$70,540 to the UUA and MidAmerica Region. The 2024 budget provides for \$72,304 in dues, which is 70.3% of the Annual Program Fund request.

Lessons the congregation has learned about nurturing ministers and ministry

Unity Church had been a community for education and development for ministerial interns, but this waned by the middle of Rev. Roy Phillips' tenure. When the Reverends Janne and Rob Eller-Isaacs arrived at Unity, they reconstructed the church's role as a teaching congregation.

In 2001-02 Unity instituted the Hallman Ministerial Internship. This internship is in honor of the Rev. Dr. Laurel Hallman, a former member and staff of Unity Church, who is minister emerita of the First Unitarian Church of Dallas, Texas. The Hallman Ministerial Internship focuses on developing interns who plan to serve large congregations. Through this education and training, many participants have flourished in their ministerial progression.

The internship was paused after the 2018-19 church year, due to the planned retirement of Janne and Rob Eller-Isaacs, until a new settled minister is in place. One person on the MST remembers fondly her toddler son running down the aisle every time he saw Leon Dunkley, one of the Hallman interns, at the back of the church and going in for a full huge lifting swing around hug. A full list of the Hallman interns is provided in the documents packet.

We have also had numerous ministerial interns over the last twenty years. Many arrived from United Theological Seminary of the Twin Cities, completing either full-year or half-time residencies.

We have had several interns utilize Unity's resources to do community ministerial internships, primarily in correctional institutions. The majority of our interns have worked with and within the congregation, becoming a part of our beloved community. They have been sewn into the quilt of who we are and are valued as an integral part of our congregation.

Rev. Phillips explored a worship associate program, and the Eller-Isaacs implemented a sustainable framework from their ministry at First Unitarian Church of Oakland, California. This program allows participating lay members to share their perspectives and worldviews with the ministers and the congregation.

Historically senior ministers have taken sabbaticals which have given them time for reflection and restoration. Through these experiences the congregation benefits from the broadened perspectives, the wider world-view and deepened understanding that they experience and share.

During their ministries, both Roy Phillips and the Eller-Isaacs had children diagnosed with cancers. The congregation rose to meet the minister's needs, whether it was covering the pulpit on a Sunday, acknowledging their needs to be away from active ministry at Unity, and to

providing them what the Care Associates offer to all congregants. When the health of Janne Eller-Isaacs' parents went into decline, she needed to be in California monthly to see to their care. After her father's death, Janne arranged for her mother to move to Minnesota. Once here, the Care Associates added the elder Ms. Eller to its rolls.

How the congregation has evaluated its ministry and its history with ministers

Unity's leadership is structured as an Executive Team (ET), comprised of the called minister(s), executive director, and others. The Board evaluates the ET, including the ministers, through the ET's monthly reports to the Board addressing a rotating calendar of policies, and on progress toward achieving Unity's stated Ends. The Annual congregational survey is a component of the rotating calendar of evaluations, capturing members' perceptions regarding progress toward our Ends.

The Board implemented these processes following the ministry of Roy Phillips, which ended in 1998 after a prolonged period of conflict. Rev. Phillips was a gifted preacher, and active in the UUA. There are still members who remember his friendship and ministry well. However, Rev. Phillips also engaged in behavior that was unethical and abusive toward staff and failed to disclose the church's problematic finances to the Board. It was later discovered that he engaged in sexually abusive behavior towards members.

After significant staff turnover and congregational pressure, Rev. Phillips was counseled to leave Unity and his departure was negotiated with the Board of Trustees. At the time, many members of the congregation knew little about the issues and felt that there was a culture of secrecy, which led to later conflict and an After Pastor process. The aftermath of the conflict lingered for a long time, and is still a difficult subject with some of the congregation who were members at the time.

The conflict also brought into stark relief the importance of transparency in decision making, shared leadership, and addressing conflicts so that healing may take place. The decision to operate under an ET rather than a CEO model at the start of the Eller-Isaacs' ministry has demonstrated significant value in the years since then.

These values are now deeply embedded at all levels of Unity's culture.

Over the past two decades the Board has tried a number of different evaluation processes, none of which they've been fully satisfied with. At times, they have had an end-of-year assessment with called ministers, in which they identified goals related to their personal and professional development. At other times the Board has filled out a survey assessing the ministers' performance, and hosted a conversation with them based on those findings. In recent years the Board has discussed other options to ensure full transparency and accountability concerning the performance of the ET, including the called minister.

For details on Unity's formal procedures, see Governing Policy IV in the document packet, which outlines the relationship between the Board and Executive Leadership; specifies the ET's

job contribution; how performance is monitored, and the process for disciplinary action. All Unity's Governing Policies can be found in the Documents Packet.

What cottage meetings and surveys tell about the congregation

In total, the 2024 MST conducted 21 cottage meetings. Most of these meetings were open to all, while closed meetings were organized to encourage candid discussion and focus on the particular experiences of specific groups: BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, people with disabilities, Youth (Tower Club, Coming of Age, and Junior High), the Executive Team and staff, and the Board of Trustees. We estimate 250 total attendees, including repeat participants.

Attendees have shown engagement and receptiveness to a talking circle format, and have expressed that the cottage meetings should become a regular congregation activity to foster connections and promote open dialogue. Several participants mentioned that these meetings have played a role in building bridges, especially in the aftermath of the rough period of disagreement following the 2022 vote.

Recurring themes that congregants shared include:

- Spirituality and community in music ministries
- Intellectual stimulation in sermons and church groups
- A desire for transformation (in all aspects of Unity life)
- A commitment to community outreach, and bringing in younger, diverse Unity members and their families to build membership and ensure future membership

Appreciation was expressed for the Unity ET and staff. A few comments shared include: "They are the ones who make our Ends possible," "they run this place," and "they do ministry through their work".

Many attendees fondly reminisced about memories of Revs. Rob and Janne Eller-Isaacs, expressing their emotions through tears and laughter. Some openly shared the conflicts that they had with the Eller-Isaacs. Congregants reflected on the dual nature of our community - welcoming, committed, and engaged, yet at times complicated, self-righteous, overly intellectual, and closed. There was some collective acknowledgement of the contradictions within our hopes and wishes; the desire for change, tempered by reluctance to alter things deemed important; the aspiration for diversity, coupled with a hesitancy to fully embrace its implications; the yearning for a leader embodying qualities of both Rob and Janne in a singular individual. Most participants concurred that we are in a transformative period, emphasizing that this undertaking is the congregation's responsibility, extending beyond the realm of just one or two ministers or the staff.

The cottage meeting with the staff was particularly poignant, focusing on the crucial theme of trust. The staff has weathered significant challenges over the past three years - from the pandemic shutdown and the loss of long-time ministers to working with interim ministerial staff and navigating the stress inherent in periods of change. Noteworthy is the remarkable cohesiveness of this highly professional team, working harmoniously to meet challenges with sustained energy, love, and compassionate care for both congregants and each other. The

imperative of a new senior minister to seamlessly integrate into the shared ministry of staff and congregants alike is deemed critical.

Lastly, many congregants have expressed concerns and anxiety regarding the successful calling of a minister in 2024, especially after facing challenges in 2022. However, alongside this anxiety, there is a prevailing sense of hope. With the pandemic and COVID threat now less intense, congregants shared renewed optimism for repairing our conflicts as we engage face-to-face. Many conveyed that the cottage meetings have played a significant role by providing opportunities to actively listen to each other.

Overall we are nervous, excited, anxious, and hopeful as we embark on our future and navigate this ministerial search.

Each year, Unity's Survey Team compiles key findings from our annual survey. 2023's survey included questions designed to help the ministerial search. Key findings include:

- There was a drop in loyalty noted in 2022 and continued in 2023. Over the past two years, net loyalty has dropped. This drop seems directly related to the results of the 2021-22 settled minister search, and we discuss this further in the "ways the congregation handles conflicted situations" question, as well as the "describe trust in the congregation" section.
- In this time of considerable uncertainty, we still see stability in the relative importance we place on each end. If there is a gain from our 2019 to 2023 survey, it's in our first end: create a multicultural spiritual home built on authentic relationships.
- End 5, "generously give and openly receive compassionate care in times of joy, sorrow, and transition," is a signature strength. This is where the survey shows we place great importance on the end, have a lot of personal involvement, and have the most inspiration.
- End 4, "know each other in all our fullness and create an ever-widening circle of belonging for all people" is a key opportunity—an area where we have less personal involvement, but place a great deal of importance on the End.
- Music and regular worship continue as programs/activities with the most impact on spiritual well-being, as we describe in the "programs and traditions we want to maintain" section of this document.
- We feel slightly more connected to each other and the church, and slightly more optimistic, in 2023 than we did in 2022. From comments, this reflects both an increasing return to in-person church after the pandemic, and some of the work we have done around repairing the trauma from our 2021-22 search.
- Essentially no difference in our answers to questions on religious orientation in the last few years. Our religious orientation alignment over a 24 year time interval - 1999 to 2023 - is

also quite consistent. The only major change is an increase in people considering Humanism a source of theological inspiration—from 16% to 30% since 1999.

- The first three choices for our questions on why we first attended Unity, and why we continue to attend have not changed since 2022. “UU Beliefs” tops both lists.
- “Fellowship/Community” (76% value “very much”) and “Intellectual Stimulation” (71% value “very much”) top the list of what we value most in congregational life.
- What we value least: “Denominational Involvement.” (As our survey analyst notes “value the least” doesn’t mean we don’t value it— 15% of respondents said they valued it “very much,” and 44% valued it “somewhat.”)
- When asked which activities we want to place more emphasis on, congregants responded “Building congregational community and connection” and “Community/neighborhood involvement and engagement”.
- “Growth in antiracism and multiculturalism” had an interesting dynamic: 28% of respondents wanted more emphasis placed on it and 58% felt the amount of emphasis was about right, but it had the highest number of respondents who wanted less emphasis placed on it- 9%. This dynamic is not unexpected, and reflects conversations we have seen in cottage meetings and other areas.
- “Drawing connections between daily living, multiple traditions and universal truths of the human experience/life” tops the list of worship service content areas of interest. Of least interest: “Judeo-Christian traditions.”
- As we describe in the questions on what we find important in a minister, preaching ability/presence tops a list of what respondents feel is important for ministerial candidates. The ability to expand membership and participating in denominational activities are least important to congregants. As with other questions, “least important” is relative—on a scale of 1-5, denominational activities rate 2.7.
- As we address in the question on “describe trust in the congregation,” the biggest change from 2021 to 2023 in our questions about the characteristics of Unity Church as a whole is the 9.6 point drop in people who agree that “there is a high level of trust in leadership at Unity Church-Unitarian”.

The work that the minister(s) is expected to do on their own

The minister serves as a member of the ET and works in collaboration with that group to ensure successful implementation of all Unity programs and policies, and to delineate responsibilities of each member of the ET.

The senior minister, however, has sole accountability for all worship services and is the leader of the ministerial team.

In addition, the minister is expected to be the primary driver of the following work:

- In partnership with the Minister of Faith Formation, ongoing spiritual exploration and development, including a full and ongoing awareness of how the congregation is challenged to grow and develop spiritually.
- Participate in UUA-related activities, both locally and nationally.
- Stay current with community issues and spiritual development to ensure services are relevant and meaningful to the congregation.
- Cultivate meaningful relationships with people who attend or visit the church.
- In partnership with the Minister of Congregational Care, provide pastoral care.
- Provide leadership to advance social justice within and beyond the church.
- In partnership with members of the Executive Team and lay leaders, lead the congregation in its antiracist, anti-oppression work to ensure this commitment is seeded throughout all Unity does.

The work that the congregation is expected to do on their own

Members are strongly encouraged to actively engage in the life of the church. We bear the responsibility of reading, understanding, and embodying the Mission and Ends of Unity Church-Unitarian. Both our ministers and ourselves are expected to demonstrate effective leadership, openness to change, and a commitment to expanding the concept of community. Mutual expectations include the communication of issues or concerns in a respectful manner through appropriate communication channels.

Unity provides a pathway to membership through the "[Finding Yourself at Unity](#)" series, comprising eight sessions to help seekers gain a better understanding of how Unity Church supports their faith journeys, contributes to building Beloved Community, and endeavors to bless the world. The final session, "Committing to Unity," delves into the profound meanings and expectations of membership and shared ministry. It provides an opportunity for reflection on the significance of generosity and encourages individuals to explore how they can align the world's needs with the gifts and joy they have to offer in their lives.

Expectations of members include:

- Develop personal practice to help you find and keep your balance.

- Develop the skills of intimacy that let you go deep quickly with strangers.
- Take the compassion that rises from doing the first two and use it to bless the world.

To strengthen our capacity to become an antiracist, multicultural, spiritual community built on authentic relationships, we have aligned these elements of faith formation with antiracist multicultural practices, working within ourselves, among our church community, and beyond in the larger world. We offer resources to aid members in faith formation and antiracist practices.

We encourage members to make an identifiable financial commitment through a yearly annual pledge. Pledging members are voting members and have the right to participate in all congregational votes, including the calling of ministers to the church. Voting members are also eligible to apply to serve on the Board of Trustees and the Worship Associates Team.

We are aware that requiring pledging in order to be a full voting member is something many churches have eliminated or are re-evaluating.

The work of the congregation and minister(s) that is shared by both

Unity has a long history of shared leadership and shared ministry. We have ministry teams that work with ministers, other staff, and congregants to offer congregational care, engage in community outreach/social justice work, manage and provide direction for religious education, and develop and participate in conducting worship services. We find these teams empower lay people, significantly strengthen congregational life, and extend the impact of our church in the community and the world.

Congregational Care work is shared by ministers and congregational care team members who are specially trained members of the congregation. They lend support to congregants in moments of challenge, crisis, or celebration. Interactions are confidential, and no information is shared unless a congregant indicates that they would like others in the congregation to be involved or informed. Congregational care work can include checking in, offering support, providing respite, and providing connections to services.

Unity's Community Outreach Ministry Teams provide the foundation for the church's community outreach and social justice work. Each team has a focus (sustainability, racial justice, affordable housing, etc.) and partners with one or more organizations in the community to engage in education, service, and advocacy within the context of our spiritual development and lives. Teams include Act for the Earth, Housing Justice, Evergreen Projects, Gun Sense, Indigenous Justice, Mano a Mano, JJ Hill/Obama School, Partner Church (Transylvania), and Racial and Restorative Justice. Congregants form the core of these teams and receive support and guidance from a minister or other staff person.

The congregation and ministers share responsibilities for developing worship content and themes for the church year through partnership in the Worship Associates program. The minister has overall responsibility for worship, including monthly themes and overall structure. Worship Associates generally meet as a group three to four times a year with the ministers and some staff to discuss and plan the specific elements of upcoming worship services. Each

associate works with a service leader (minister or other) to develop and conduct three to four services during the church year, including selecting readings, recommending music, drafting a call to worship, and potentially offering a reflection on the worship topic. Experienced associates also have the opportunity to lead Sunday services during the summer.

The Religious Education Ministry Team works with the Minister of Faith Formation to coordinate and guide the programming for children and youth. Working with parent volunteers, the program goal is to cultivate and sustain in our young people a love of the spiritual life, a foundation for a personal theology and a confidence in their ability to be stewards of their own souls.

An important addition in the past year is the Interim Monitoring Team (IMT). Rev. Rolenz established this team when she came to Unity, to help the congregation understand and engage with the tasks of Interim Ministry: to interpret the history, identity and culture of the congregation to Rev. Rolenz, to provide critical feedback that would assist her in the time of transition and to participate in her bi-annual evaluations to send to the Transitions Department. The Interim Monitoring Team was created with the Board's support and approval; however the IMT does not report to the Board.

The ET is also assembling a Development Ministry Team with five to seven church members, that will work with the Executive Director and advise the ET on the gathering and management of financial resources at Unity.

Work of the congregation done by other staff

Membership staff offer the Finding Yourself at Unity series for newcomers, coordinate the welcome teams, support the community outreach teams, and provide technological support for online gatherings.

Communications staff produce the monthly newsletter, the weekly order of service and inserts. They also manage social media and the website, send out regular e-mail broadcasts to the congregation, and operate sound and video technology for live streamed events.

Facilities staff do the set up and take down of spaces for Sunday "coffee hour" and for all meetings and events that take place in the church space. They are also responsible for cleaning and maintaining the building and grounds. A garden team works with facilities staff to tend the plantings around the building.

Financial/Development staff manage the finances and investments, develop the annual budget, and provide regular financial reports to the Board of Trustees. They also work with the lay-led Pledge Team to support the annual pledge drive that provides the operating funds for the year.

Description of a typical Sunday at the congregation, including a typical Sunday worship service

The church is abuzz by 8:00 a.m. on Sundays, with choirs practicing, coffee perking, and people arriving for the 9:00 a.m. service. That service is both in person and livestreamed. The 11:15 a.m. service is in person only.

During a typical Sunday service, attendees are greeted by members of the service's welcome team at entrances to the church building and sanctuary. Music, featuring a soloist, guest musician, choir, etc., accompanies people as they settle into the sanctuary.

In the past year, Rev. Rolenz and the ministerial team have explored changes to our order of service, but each service includes, in some order:

- Several musical interludes, including prelude, postlude, offertory, and at least one other piece
- Welcome and ringing of the church's bell
- Call to worship
- Chalice lighting, opening hymn, and responsive reading
- Embracing meditation, sharing joys and sorrows of the congregation and the community
- Prayer
- Moment of silence
- Offering (60% of each offering is given to a congregation-nominated community partner)
- An occasional reflection from the worship associate, often with a connection between the theme of the service and the worship associate's lived experience
- Sermon
- Congregational news, other recognitions or congregational business
- Benediction

Religious education (RE) for children is offered in the classrooms downstairs at the same time as services. RE staff conduct a chapel service in the beautiful Ames Chapel as part of the RE program, except for Family and Story Sundays.

The Welcome Team, composed of congregants, greets attendees to service, provides orders of service, assists with seating and collects offerings. Refreshments are served in the Parish Hall after each service, creating a popular avenue for connection and communication. The virtual coffee hour, initiated during the pandemic-induced closure of the church building, continues to thrive with a diligent following. New membership classes, titled "Finding Yourself at Unity," are offered weekly.

Before the pandemic, a third service occurred every Sunday at 4:30 p.m., followed by a soup supper. This service, more lightly attended, has not been reintroduced.

How the congregation defines good preaching and worship

Worship is at the heart of our congregational life. Survey responses highlight that the primary characteristic people seek in ministerial leadership is “good preaching.” We attend church on Sundays to be inspired and led, both spiritually and intellectually, relying on the service to draw connections between our daily lives, multiple traditions, and the universal truths of the human experience.

Inspired sermons offer solace during vulnerable times, address difficult events such as 9/11, changes in political administrations, George Floyd’s murder, the COVID-19 pandemic and the death of Senator Paul Wellstone and 2 members of his family in a plane crash. To congregants, inspired sermons include lessons from literature and art, various theological, historical, and philosophical texts, and often derive from a minister’s own lived experience, incorporating touchstone moments of pain and vulnerability.

Some sermons noted during the 2021 and 2023 cottage sessions included ones that call upon the congregation to participate in unexpected ways, Rob Eller-Isaacs’ annual Yom Kippur service that included the Litany of Atonement (Singing the Living Tradition #637) spoken by the congregation, and a service offered by Janne Eller-Isaacs focused on the #MeToo movement where survivors of sexual assault came forward in a ritual of remembering and proclamation. Inspired preaching helps us center our hearts on values and perspectives around social issues, particularly the church’s focus on antiracism, anti-oppression and our shared goal of becoming a multicultural spiritual home.

The weekly church service has followed a patterned, orderly way for many years, with high expectations for the quality of speaking, reading, and musical performance. While these expectations and order bring comfort to many due to familiarity, they have brought a sense of rigidity and formality for some others. Introducing new service elements can lead to complaints. Rev. Rolenz and the worship teams have been exploring changes to the order of service, along with feedback sessions for congregants, to help us explore different options, and better articulate what we find meaningful in each element and order.

Since worship is at the heart of our life together, we need leadership that will center us on the path toward unconditional, nonjudgmental love for one another, helping us work toward our Ends statement to “know each other in all our fullness”—differences and flaws included—and “to create an ever-widening circle of belonging for all people.”

For over a decade, Unity has operated on a schedule of [monthly theological themes](#) which cycle through every four years. During the pandemic and subsequent interim ministries, we have departed from the cycle of themes scheduled for every four years. Instead, during the last two years of Interim Ministry, Rev. Rolenz has met with the Worship Associates and the monthly “Theme Team” meetings to identify themes for the upcoming year.

Themes are seen as an entry point to worship, enhancing creativity and theological depth. This thematic schedule has served to strengthen participation in the Worship Associate program, which participates in discussion of the themes and worship planning.

Poetry and short readings from literary texts are vital to the crafting of good preaching and worship. Poetry is evocative and, whether spoken in unison by those attending the service or read from the reading desk by a single individual, offers a unifying moment to those in the service. We have made dedicated efforts over recent years to include voices and perspectives in our readings that come from marginalized or non-dominant cultures, and we expect this work to continue.

Prayer and silence allow congregants to experience an intensive presence with one another during worship. Ministers and congregants have shared that time for this type of reflection within the service is highly valued.

Music holds a central role in enriching worship and conveying the minister's message. It acts as a conduit, translating the preacher's message into spiritual moments that resonate with mystery, magic and passion. While the minister's words are integral, music makes a tangible difference. One of our Coming of Age students described the sermon and reflections as the intellectual part of the service that challenges us and music as the part of the service that brings us together and energizes us. The congregation firmly expects the music ministry to remain a vibrant and indispensable part of the worship experience.

The creation of the worship service is a collaborative effort involving the scheduled minister and a Worship Associate. This special addition of Worship Associates strengthens the ties between the minister and the congregation. Throughout the service, they share personal and relatable stories, illustrating how to bridge the gap between lived experiences and spiritual growth. Rob Eller-Isaacs often playfully reminded Worship Associates that the congregation would perceive and relate to their messages differently than those delivered by the minister. Both he and Janne placed immense trust in the instincts of Worship Associates, assigning them a meaningful role in shaping the service. This includes tasks such as recommending readings and hymns, and composing reflections. Notably, Worship Associates, both current and former, frequently step into the role of lay leaders during the summer Sunday services.

The congregation places high value on the contributions of Worship Associates. Both the Cottage Meetings and the survey reflect our desire that the program continue and grow.

Things a prospective minister should know about the theologies of the congregation, including where to find inspiration, comfort, and conflict

The 2023 survey gave this breakdown of the religious orientation of Unity members (results add up to more than 100%, as respondents could select as many options as they wanted):

- 47% Eclectic
- 39% Ethical Religion
- 35% Earth-Centered Spirituality
- 30% Humanism
- 29% Agnosticism

- 27% Naturalistic Theism
- 25% Mysticism
- 23% Ethical Christianity
- 12% Buddhism
- 12% Theism
- 10% Atheism or Non-Theism
- 5% Taoism
- 3% Undecided
- 2% Judaism
- 2% Theological Christianity
- 0.3% Islam

The list clearly illustrates our diverse backgrounds, with members embracing a wide array of traditions and leaning towards an eclectic orientation of religious belief and practice. Unity attracts individuals from various traditions, reflecting the richness of our community's religious tapestry. With this diversity, we draw inspiration from a multitude of sources in our worship and contemplation, including poetry, readings, personal reflections, and engaging Story Sunday narratives. Our ministers weave a tapestry of inspiration using sacred texts, stories from different religious traditions, and reflections from theological, philosophical, sociological and activist sources.

Music is a significant wellspring of inspiration, providing emotional release, comfort, joy, and contemplation during regular services and special events such as holidays, memorials, and the annual youth musical. We integrate music in various forms, including congregational singing, sung responses, and performances by Unity's choirs and external professional musicians.

Recognizing the challenges inherent in balancing diverse sources of inspiration and faith among our members, we also grapple with the influence of White dominant traditional liturgical culture in shaping our worship. Questions arise about how the church serves the needs of those who call Unity their spiritual home while coming from or practicing different faith traditions. Are we attentive to the various theologies housed under one roof? Do all members feel ministered to in a manner that ensures authentic welcome and a true sense of belonging? Would a visitor easily see the theological nature of Unity?

These questions prompt ongoing reflection and action, pushing us to foster an inclusive environment where diverse beliefs coexist harmoniously under the Unity umbrella. We aim to ensure that every member, regardless of their background, finds genuine welcome, a sense of belonging, and a deep connection to the theological essence of Unity.

Ways the congregation handles conflicted situations

In our 2021-2022 Congregational Record, this answer began with survey results that described us as a congregation somewhat open to change, flexible, and good at handling conflicted conversations while staying in relationship.

That we have a 2023–2024 Congregational Record is testament that we have put those assumptions to the test in the last year in ways we never anticipated. In 2021, less than a year after the Eller-Isaacs retired and with staff and the congregation still in our pandemic mode of operation, Unity began our search for a new settled senior minister. We thought that we, as a congregation, were ready. We had handled conflicts over the capital campaign in 2011 and 2012 and learned from them, we felt we were realistic in our assessments of our points of conflict, and that it was time to welcome a new settled minister.

In March 2022, the congregation was informed that Rev. Rob Eller-Isaacs had been diagnosed with terminal cancer, sending much of the congregation into deep grief. We pressed on with our search and brought forward a candidate for introduction and candidating week. Then, in an hours-long and highly contentious congregational meeting, voting members declined to call the candidate to serve as our settled minister. The meeting, and the process leading up to it, left many of us reeling. The result felt confusing and the situation was unfair to the candidate. What had happened to us? We had thought we were ready!

We were not.

In retrospect, the divisions we discovered in ourselves in that meeting were unsurprising and had been present longer than we realized. We discovered differences in what we wanted in a minister, where we saw our church heading, and uncertainty about moving on. Some members expressed concern that a vocal minority of the congregation had built a cult of personality around the Eller-Isaacs and could not be forward-looking until the church did the work of discernment. Our biggest questions were: how were we going to repair our relationships with each other? Could we do it? And how could we keep this from happening again?

Faced with a choice between difficult conversations or losing important relationships, as a church community we committed to searching ourselves rather than blaming others, to repairing relationships rather than putting our heads in the sand, to examining our sources of conflict and finding a way forward together. Unfortunately, we did lose some members— it would have been unusual not to after a conflict like we'd experienced. But the work of the church since, assisted by Rev. Rolenz, the UUA, and our community, has allowed us to deepen our understanding of ourselves and each other, helped us to understand our history as a congregation, and allowed us to have conversations as a community that we had not known we needed.

We developed opportunities to process in small and large groups. We enlisted help from Team Dynamics to facilitate conversations on Change, Conflict, and Complexity. Our lay leaders during their summer worship services and our congregational teams dedicated themselves to exploring our stories and our relationships, to naming our grief and discomfort and shaping it into a path forward. Rev. Rolenz has helped us to remember that we are a congregation based

on being in covenant with each other. She has also led an examination of our congregational history, shaken up our order of service, and established the Interim Monitoring Team— we have been practicing change!

We have intentionally set up this year's search process to emphasize listening to each other's stories: by structuring our Cottage Meetings as listening circles rather than forums, we lift up our shared voices— something many participants have told us they found healing. We are exploring attitudes towards change and courage in our services, chalice circles, and spiritual teams and reinvigorating community in our congregational teams and workshops. We reflect these expectations for ourselves in the Board's [Charge to the Congregation](#) for the 2023 ministerial search. At our November 2023 Annual Meeting of the Congregation, the congregation voted unanimously to raise our threshold to call a minister from 75% to 85%, as a reflection of these expectations.

So how are we at conflict?

One Unity member shared during the first cottage meeting, while pointing to herself, “we are a congregation of recovering know-it-alls, and some of us have been in recovery longer than others.” Despite our intentional and often difficult work, the results of our 2023 survey show the impact of this event is still significant. The number of people who agree that there is high trust in leadership at Unity has dropped from 79% in 2021 to 69% in the 2023 survey. The number of survey respondents who say they are highly likely to recommend Unity to others dropped from 79% in 2020 to 67% in 2023— the lowest we've seen in over a decade.

We know that repairing this conflict will take time, and we are committed to this work. This December, we are having Team Dynamics lead discussions on “Engaging Awareness, Disrupting Dominance,” helping us move from individual wants to a collective “we.” In February, we are engaging with Therasa Cooley's book “Transforming Conflict.” We are still working on practicing change and learning to listen in ways we had not known we needed to.

We have learned that we were right about the most important thing: we are determined to stay in relationship with each other.

Role of music and the arts in the life of the congregation

Music, especially choral music, holds a profound significance within Unity. On days when all the choirs are present, choir members occupy more than a third of the pews. Beyond the regular services you can find our choir members in Saturday pick-up hymn sings, offering their voices by the bedsides of ill members, contributing to memorial services, and engaging in various other musical practices. The first Sunday in May is dedicated to former, longtime minister Rev. Arthur Foote in honor of his dedication to and building of Unity's music program. On [Arthur Foote Music Sunday](#) all services revolve entirely around music and readings. Throughout the year, we welcome guest musicians and accompanists and host concerts, establishing close connections with music schools and the professional music community throughout the Twin Cities.

The growth and development of our music program has been led by a succession of accomplished and forward-thinking music directors, most recently Dr. Ahmed Anzaldúa. Dr.

Anzaldúa is also the director and founder of Border CrossSing, an organization committed to breaking down historical barriers by integrating audiences, repertoires, and musicians through choral music performances. Since assuming the role in the fall of 2019, he has broadened Unity's repertoire to encompass worship music from various cultures and historical eras. Together with the ministry team, he has explored innovative ways to incorporate responsive music throughout the service (though we are still working on mastering the art of clapping on beats 2 and 4 rather than 1 and 3!) Further evidence of our commitment to music is that Unity's only emerita staff person is our retired Director of Music Ministries.

- Unity Choir is a substantial choral ensemble, typically between 60 and 80 voices, and serves as the robust cornerstone of Unity's choral program. It exudes vitality and plays a central role in our community. Its members bring diverse levels of musical experience and a wide array of activities and interests, all united by their shared passion for singing, music, and community.
- The Women's Ensemble, currently consisting of about 20 voices, has experienced continual growth and evolution. It organically emerged during a Women's retreat. These singers gather for a half-hour each Sunday morning, infusing it with remarkable creative energy, commitment and joy. While this group functions as a space supporting and empowering women, Unity's Women's Ensemble encourages all soprano and alto singers, regardless of gender to join.
- Unity Singers is an auditioned, chamber choral ensemble, typically composed of 20 to 28 voices. Each member's involvement is rooted in a deep passion for singing and a commitment to ministry through music. This ensemble boasts an impressive history of representing Unitarian Universalist music both locally and internationally. They have commissioned and premiered works by world-renowned composers, participated in professionally-produced recording projects, collaborated with other ensembles and community organizations, and made multiple appearances at conventions of the American Choral Directors Association.
- The Children's choir is open to children from grades one through five, offers engaging musical experience through movement, games, playing instruments, reading music and learning about the elements of music.
- Youth Choir, our newest addition, caters to grades 6-9, providing older youth with an opportunity to engage in music-making. While primarily a vocal group, the Youth Choir welcomes instrumentalists to join.
- Unity has also recently added a band, which started out as an ad-hoc opportunity last year. We are looking forward to seeing how they grow!

The Arthur Foote Music Fund, established in 1999 upon the passing of former minister Arthur Foote II, who was a staunch advocate for choral music, serves as a permanent endowment. It funds an annual music Sunday in his memory.

Beyond our commitment to the local musical community, Unity Church has an active Art Team that fosters relationships with local artists and provides opportunities to display and sell their work in the church's Parish Hall. The Art Team has been a pioneer in incorporating Unity's Ends

into their work. In recent years, they have made considerable strides to ensure that Unity's permanent art collection reflects the congregation's values while honoring the diversity of the surrounding community. The Art Team has also organized immersive programming, including an event in partnership with the Karen Organization of Minnesota's Weaving Circle, offering education about the Karen people's story and the opportunity to share a meal prepared by Karen community members.

In addition to Unity's Art Team, the church established an Artist in Residence program using multicultural initiative funds. This program aims to foster productive relationships between the church and creatives across diverse art forms. Recent residencies have included Marcus Young, Ina Yukka, Rebekah Crisanta de Ybarra, Lester Mayers, Geno Okok, and Paul Kruse. This program aligns with the congregation's vision of becoming a multicultural, antiracist Beloved Community, and broadening Unity's role in effecting cultural change. However, it is important to note that funding for this initiative expired in 2023 and there is currently no future funding in place.

The Literary Ministry of Unity Church, developed over the past sixteen years, is much appreciated by the congregation. Included below are some of the main offerings:

- Cairns: The Unity Church Journal of the Arts is an annual, edited journal with an open call for submissions of poetry, prose, art, sermons, and music by members, friends, staff, and youth of Unity Church. Its fifteenth volume was published in 2023.
- The Library-Bookstall Team (LBT) manages and staffs the Bookstall in the Parish Hall and the Anderson Library on Sunday mornings, both welcoming places for visitors and longtime members alike. The proceeds from the Bookstall go to fund new materials for the library, literary programs, and occasionally, other special events.
- The LBT co-sponsored the Unity-UUA Common Read in 2023, On Repentance and Repair by Rev. Danya Ruttenberg, and sponsored three literary readings in 2023. In addition, the team held the 15th Annual Café Unity: Poetry and Music Salon, live at Unity and on Zoom.

In addition to publishing Cairns each year, Reredos Press, an imprint of Unity Church, has published The Vintage Cookbooks of Unity Church-Unitarian, a compilation of two cookbooks produced by Unity Church in the late 20th century, and The Story of Unity Church 1872-1972, Revised Edition, by Elinor Sommers Otto.

The governing structure of the congregation and how the minister is a part of this structure

Unity Church practices congregational polity, with the ultimate authority vested in the membership of the congregation. The congregation operates under a policy governance model, where the Board of Trustees elected by the congregation sets church policy. The ET reports directly to the Board. The ET currently consists of the Senior Minister, the Minister of Faith Formation, and the Executive Director.

The ET model has served us well and is an expression of shared ministry at Unity Church. It is guided by that intention, by our norms, and always by what is in the best interests of the church. Unity's mission, ends, and values are central to its work.

Membership on the ET has varied over the years, based on the Board's perceptions of the current needs and trends of the church. For instance, at its founding the chair of the Development Ministry Team was a member of the ET as part of the Board's commitment to restoring trust in the fiscal integrity of the church. In 2007, when congregational survey responses indicated the centrality of community and congregational engagement, the Board added the Director of Congregational Life. The addition to the ET in 2019 of the Minister of Faith Formation stemmed from our growing commitment to multicultural concerns and to faith formation. Only the Board may change the composition of the ET.

Our devoted Executive Director, Barbara Hubbard, will retire in March 2024, a well-deserved transition that has been planned for quite some time. After over two decades of dedicated leadership, Barbara has profoundly shaped our path. At the congregational Annual Meeting on November 18, the Board has announced Laura Park as our next Executive Director. Laura, currently our Director of Membership and Hospitality, brings continuity and operational insight to this role. This transition, while presenting changes and challenges, offers space for new perspectives. The settled minister, Board and others will reflect on structuring the executive role within policy governance amidst new leadership.

Lay leadership is cultivated through membership in ministry teams and through programmatic offerings in the church. This includes but is not limited to:

- Community Outreach Ministry Teams
- Religious Education Ministry Team
- Welcome, Food Ministry, and New Member Mentor Teams (hospitality)
- Care Associates
- Worship Associates
- Music Ministry
- Teaching Associates

Recent successful work of the congregation

A lot of our work in the last year has been inward—repairing the hurt we caused each other and examining ourselves in the light of the 2021-22 search, as we describe in the section on “how we handle conflict as a congregation.” This year, we are more often speaking of it as a “revealed search” rather than a “failed search” - we're realizing the gifts that have emerged from the perspective and challenges that search helped us understand about ourselves and our congregation. Also, as the 2023-4 MST, we want to acknowledge the extensive work of the 2021-22 MST. We built on their strong foundations for this Congregational Record.

Whether this work of repair is successful isn't something we can know now— or perhaps for several years— but it is hopeful work. Because of this focus, our interim ministry, and our desire to protect the time of staff who have been overburdened with our long transition, we have pulled back on some of our activities.

We still have much to celebrate, however! We've talked extensively about our ministry teams, our community engagement teams, our work with music, arts, and culture, elsewhere in this document and those answers reflect a lot of our successful work both recent and ongoing. Beyond that, here are some works from the last several years that we have not yet had a chance to highlight in this document:

When George Floyd was murdered in May 2020 by Minneapolis police officers, there was a gathering of congregants, facilitated by staff. The purpose was to speak to the grief and outrage and to identify where people might be useful. The initiative was called "Next Right Action" and included discussion of various ways people could stand up for justice. These included posting on social media, protesting in the streets, providing financial support, educating ourselves, and having tough conversations with friends and family about race, policing, justice.

This was followed up in the fall with a seven-week Equity + Justice series presented by Team Dynamics and attended by almost 200 people. Team Dynamics was hired by Unity in 2019 to help us as we work toward our Ends of dismantling dominant culture and creating an antiracist multicultural spiritual home. Building on the Next Right Action initiative, expert facilitators and trainers led Tuesday evening workshops to explore critical concepts to equip us as advocates for racial justice in our own lives, in our communities, and in our spiritual growth and development.

Series Learning Goals in Service to Unity's Multicultural and Racial Healing Ends

- Increase self-awareness to understand how our experiences of race, gender, and more inform the choices we make in pursuit of our personal and collective justice goals
- Explore tools for deeper practice as an advocate for racial justice
- Understand how movements for social change work and how we experience them
- Situate ourselves within a movement for justice and consider when and how to deploy our tools and take actions

Another outgrowth of the Next Right Action initiative is the Antiracist Literacy Partners (ALP), an ongoing resource for individuals to address what it takes to be racially literate and engaged in antiracism on a day-to-day basis. The ALP program identifies a range of books, podcasts, videos, and more. Participants choose a resource and are matched up with partners or small groups to discuss the topic over the next two months.

The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) was first introduced to the congregation in 2017. Unity made a commitment to offer and provide resources to get more people to take the IDI and create an Individual Development Plan. Over 350 congregants have completed the IDI and have participated in a group debrief session.

A significant number of those have also participated in a two-part workshop to empower individuals to create their Intercultural Development Plan and establish a communal learning process to make progress together. Cultural competency is seen as critical to building authentic relationships across differences. Unity sees using this approach as one avenue to developing that competency.

In the fall of 2021, the Beloved Community Staff Team introduced a framework to help ministry teams see and strengthen the links between faith formation and antiracism multicultural work. The “Double Helix” is envisioned as a tool to assist with integrating this approach to how a team works together. An example of how a team might begin to use this tool can be found in the Documents Packet.

The work within the congregation which is slow, stuck, or not attended to

Here are some of the areas congregants brought up most often through cottage meetings and the survey as areas where we would like to do more:

- Creating a community where BIPOC and LGBTQ feel genuinely welcomed and a sense of belonging. Many congregants who are not in those groups feel “all is well” and that we’re “past” any exclusionary history, but those who identify as such tell a different story in which they do not feel seen and acknowledged in the congregation, or are not invited into circles of belonging and leadership.
- Integrating youth engagement through intergenerational worship and other contributions. Children and youth, as well as their caregivers who teach RE classes, are physically separate from the rest of the congregation on Sunday mornings. This can result in a sense of separation between the experiences of those in the “upstairs” church and the “downstairs” church.
- Expanding and encouraging leadership and shared ministry from all quadrants of our community, rather than what some congregants feel is an “inner circle” or “in-group” identified by top leadership.
- Creating authentic welcome and belonging for all, and working to facilitate connection for visitors and new attendees. We are a large church, where visitors and new attendees can feel lost and unconnected.
- Developing a process for discerning issues that the church will support in a public way.
- Addressing the needs of people with disabilities, and supporting parents who have children with disabilities. Over the last several years, the church’s physical site has been made more accessible for people with mobility access needs/requirements. We have made efforts to make the spoken word accessible to those with hearing loss as well. However, we need to do more for people with a variety of physical, sensory, and developmental disabilities as well as mental health disorders, in order to provide not just access but equity.

Why people leave the congregation, and why new visitors do not return

Apart from moving out of the area, in no particular order, people have left Unity or not returned because:

- They are not happy with the persistent emphasis on antiracism/oppression work
- Perceived clash with ministerial leadership style or the focus on certain theologies or modes of worship
- Dissatisfaction with the paucity of BIPOC and LGBTQ opportunities for engagement
- Pressure to pledge or perceived bias towards those with money
- Their children have completed RE and the parents have not connected with the rest of the church, or they feel too many volunteer hours are required of families in RE.
- They perceive that they are members by extension to other family members who are more active in the church.

Other Membership Notes:

Over COVID, membership and the pledge base declined slightly, a common trend within the UUA as well as in other denominations and faiths in the Twin Cities. Some members also left after we did not call a minister in spring 2022.

How money is raised within the congregation

Money is primarily raised through pledges and donations. Annually, during the month of October, our congregation engages in a pledge drive. A three-person team of church members plans for the drive, develops a theme, and schedules activities. The pledge team members and other congregants provide testimonials as to why they pledge at each service in October.

Ministers also ask for pledges during services in October. Documents are sent via mail and email to members so they can read the material and pledge online or on paper. In addition, the minister might meet with families or individuals to discuss their financial contributions directly.

The Heritage Society was created in 1999 as a way for members and friends to make a legacy gift to the church. Society members do not need to be wealthy or have a large estate to use legacy giving through a charitable bequest or naming Unity Church as a beneficiary of life insurance, retirement plan assets, or other planned gifts. The Society holds an annual dinner, with an invited guest speaker, to celebrate and honor those who have chosen to contribute in this way to Unity Church's future.

The most recent capital campaigns in the congregation

The most recent capital campaign began in 2010 in order to fund major renovation to the church space. The congregation raised roughly \$6,800,000 towards a \$8,000,000 project that saw a completely new lobby space, a welcoming entrance, new restroom and kitchen facilities, a more open religious education space among other renovations.

Historically, capital projects at Unity were funded by a small number of families. When we decided to do the 2010 capital campaign, we were able to engage over 600 households in making commitments to the project. This was a significant shift in Unity's history.

In the 2024 Pledge Drive, Unity requested that people reallocate the percent of their Operating and Capital pledges with more weight toward the Operating pledge, knowing that we will retire the debt service in three years.

Debt and reserves that the congregation has

2017 was the first year of our long-term debt that resulted from our 2012 Unity Tomorrow capital project. The Unity Tomorrow renovation tied together the church campus that had been built in five stages over more than 100 years.

We created a new main entry, a restroom addition and updated the infrastructure with new, high efficiency systems. The project cost \$8.0 million and we raised \$6.8 million in commitments. After paying principal and interest on the short term construction loan for 4.5 years, we converted the remaining \$1,950,000 of debt to a long term note on January 1, 2017. This was a five year note on a 20-year amortization schedule with a fixed 4.0% interest rate. The congregation approved this debt with the caveat that debt service could not exceed 10% of the annual operating budget, and we have stayed within that limit.

2024 marks the eighth year of our long-term mortgage. After five years of debt service and additional gifts toward the principal, the balance was \$860,772 on December 15 of 2021 when we renegotiated the terms. The new note is amortized over seven years with a fixed 3.70% interest rate. We hope to be able to pay the loan in full by the end of December 2026 through debt service payments and additional gifts, two years prior to its maturity date. Annual debt service payments are \$140,018 and in 2024, this amount represents 6.6% of the proposed operating budget expense.

Capital pledges allow us to pay debt service and provide funds for capital acquisitions and repairs, thus avoiding deferred maintenance and protecting the operating budget. Capital pledges have averaged \$218,000 each year from over 300 households. Beginning in 2024, we are asking the congregation to reallocate their operating/capital pledges, putting more emphasis on the operating fund and resulting in gross capital pledges of \$166,000 each of the remaining years.

As of September 30, 2023, we had \$259k in capital reserves. Between then and the end of 2024, we are projecting an additional \$222k in capital receipts, \$80k in capital acquisitions and repairs, and \$175k in additional debt service.

We are anticipating capital reserves of \$226k at the end of 2024.

The 2024 capital budget is included in the Document Packet.

How the congregation feels about its stewardship

We take the concept of stewardship very seriously, and define it broadly. One significant form of stewardship is in the ongoing love and respect for our building. Members of the congregation support the upkeep of the building and grounds, help maintain plantings and the garden outside. During the summer, children help plant and grow vegetables in the garden.

Another form of stewardship of our space is in support of the use of our building by other churches, neighbors, or people in need. Our congregation has supported other churches using the sanctuary. Unity has also become a Sanctuary Congregation and created living space in the basement for individuals and families with issues around immigration status, as well as in the duplex. In addition, our congregation actively participates in creating and maintaining relationships with a broader community through partnering on events and activities. Members of our congregation have invited local community members and leaders to use our church space for important gatherings.

In terms of financial resources, in addition to pledging annually, members of the congregation regularly contribute to offerings during services. In 2006 we began giving away 70% of the Sunday offering. By 2021 we had taken in a total of \$1,629,411, with \$1,233,116 going out to community organizations. Prior to the change, the offering plate brought in about \$30,000 annually. By “giving away the plate,” the congregants have contributed an annual average of \$108,000, of which 70% has gone “out the door” to organizations working directly in communities. These organizations are advancing work connected to the values of Unity Church Unitarian and are often working to achieve social justice and meet social needs. In 2024, we are increasing the Operating budget percentage to 40% and the recipient percentage to 60% in order to provide a larger source of funds for community outreach staff time. This is intended to be a temporary change in allocation in an effort to balance the 2024 budget. We will continue to give 100% of emergency offerings to the recipient, as well as those offerings for the Arthur Foote Music Fund and the Hallman Ministerial Intern Fund.

Role of the minister(s) in stewardship

Ministers at Unity are active participants in fundraising. They support the pledge process and speak to the need for contributions during Sunday services, including the theological basis of generosity. In addition, ministers meet directly with some individuals to discuss their contributions and will meet with higher donors and discuss their interests, needs, and concerns.

In addition to fundraising, ministers play an active role in recognizing the non-financial resources that members bring. Ministers are active in recruiting and supporting volunteers in various aspects of church life. They work with congregants to see their strengths and to help steer them into rewarding roles in the church, such as being a worship associate, serving on the board, teaching religious education, or serving on a ministry team.

The ten largest pledges within the congregation

The ten largest pledges in 2024 are:

1. \$68,544
2. \$33,000
3. \$23,500
4. \$20,000
5. \$18,530
6. \$17,000
7. \$17,000
8. \$13,500
9. \$12,500
10. \$12,000

What a prospective minister should know about the building and grounds for the congregation

Unity Church is in the second building of its 150-year history. The current sanctuary was constructed in 1905, with additions to the building in the 1920s—the Ames Chapel and Parish Hall; mid-century modern Eliot Wing for church school classrooms, offices, a new kitchen, and restrooms in 1957; rebuilding after the sanctuary fire in 1963, resulting in the current worship space, a blend of old and new sensibilities; and the addition of a second level to the Eliot Wing in 1988 providing space for meeting rooms, the adult library, choir room, as well as additional office and meeting spaces. An elevator was added to the church at this time, connecting all levels.

By 2010, years of deferred maintenance had caught up with an extremely well-utilized building. A major capital campaign, Unity Tomorrow, was initiated in 2011, with the \$8,000,000 infrastructure project completed in 2012. The result is a well-integrated and highly efficient building. Asbestos and other hazardous materials were removed or abated; new windows and insulation were added, the entire building was ultimately provided with a sprinkler system; numerous HVAC systems were replaced and streamlined into one.

New and enlarged restrooms were created; the kitchen was remodeled into a highly functional space. The lower religious education level saw a maze of hallways replaced by a single corridor with classrooms branching off it. A new stairwell to this level allows light to filter into a previously dark space. Significantly, a new front entrance was created: a non-ADA compliant stone-walled cloister with fortress-like doors was replaced with a curving glass walled entrance, accessible to all. A hidden courtyard is now a garden viewable from the street. The neighborhood, once seemingly excluded, is now welcomed into the embrace of Unity Church.

As of 2021, most of the building is physically accessible to those of all abilities. Exceptions are the balcony, bell tower, a second level office, and the chancel, all of which are accessed via stairs. The sanctuary has audio and video enhancement; various pews have been modified to allow those using wheelchairs to sit with their families.

The Art Team has spent the past years cataloging and re-hanging Unity's extensive art collection. Embracing our Mission and Ends statements, the team has stated that "exhibitions provide spiritual enrichment and liveliness for those attending the church [and] will...[enhance] the mission and values of the church." Recent purchases have been made to broaden representation of local artists of color within the collection.

The church building is open seven days a week. Besides myriad uses generated by the congregation, Unity houses One Voice Mixed Chorus, an LGBTQ and straight allies community chorus, which uses the Parish Hall for its rehearsals. One Voice also rents office space on the second floor of the Eliot Wing. Unity is home to a preschool, Medley Village, the MISI Hungarian language school that meets on Saturdays, and The New Century Club has held their monthly forums at Unity Church for nearly a century. Various recovery groups meet at Unity throughout the week, and Unity is an election site for the City of Saint Paul.

Gardens surround much of the church, tended by an active team of congregants. Along the Eliot Wing, a rain garden was created to capture runoff from the roof. A pollinator garden, sapling bed to support tree planting in the neighborhood, and a children's garden is maintained in the green space, an open lot to the east of the sanctuary. The children's garden serves as the focus of the summer RE program. A new feature of this space is a large tent that provides shelter for events deemed appropriate for an outside setting.

Unity Church owns a duplex to the east of its building, on Holly Avenue. Its two units have provided rental income for many decades. During the 2012 reconstruction project, the church offices and religious education functions were moved to this site. It was used to house the Hallman Ministerial Intern prior to the pandemic.

Unity Church has handicapped parking available in a lot next to the church building, maintains a parking lot a short block away from the sanctuary entrance (Portland Avenue), and is able to use, on Sunday mornings, the staff parking lot of the elementary school across the street from the religious education and church offices entrance (Holly Street). On street parking is also available surrounding the church building.

The condition of the buildings and grounds

Because the 2012 reconstruction was extensive, only minor needs have arisen in the last decade. Recent changes have included repair to a section of the red slate roof, which dates to the 1905 and 1920 sections of the building, the repair of subflooring in front of the chancel and re-carpeting the sanctuary. A portion of the parish hall drop ceiling failed in January 2023 and has been repaired.

The video and sound systems in the sanctuary were upgraded during the pandemic to enable livestreaming. The Portland Avenue parking lot is currently due to be resurfaced.

During the initial planning for the 2011 Unity Tomorrow capital campaign a columbarium was envisioned, which would be created in a space under the bell tower. This project has continued momentum. An architectural schema has been developed and over 100 families have expressed an interest in this offering.

Expectations of the congregation for a minister(s) around pastoral care / spiritual guidance / counseling / home and hospital visitation

Pastoral care was siloed for many years, seen by the congregation as something separate from the rest of the church's work, attended to by the senior leadership, as reflected in the term "pastoral". Many of the participants on the Congregational Care Team are retirees with little connection to families with young children or young adults.

Currently, our model for pastoral and congregational care is in flux, moving away from a singular entity to one where pastoral care is integrated at all levels of the congregation— as indicated by the name of the [Care Associates](#) ministry team. Our new Minister of Congregational Care, Rev. Lara Cowtan, is bringing fresh energy to this area. The new senior minister will work with her, and with the Care Associates ministry team, to determine needs and opportunities for further growth and outreach and to build a sense of shared ministry in congregation care, as well as in balancing the congregation's sense of "within/among/beyond".

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around children and adult religious education

The Senior Minister works directly and significantly with the Minister for Faith Formation to address ideas and concerns around faith formation across the lifespan. Additionally, the Senior Minister works with the RE Ministry Team and the Teaching Associates to continue to broaden and deepen work around faith formation.

Many cottage meeting participants and survey respondents said they would like to see more intergenerational worship and relationship-building opportunities at Unity, as we describe in some of the other questions focused on religious education in this document. They would like to see a new senior minister help build this change.

In a cottage meeting with our youth, they expressed hopes they have for a new senior minister:

- Make sure children and youth feel and find a home here as part of the community.
- Engage with children and youth as equals, and at the same time on their own level.
- Help connect youth with community engagement activities and other opportunities for social justice and change.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around community building / facilitation skills / coffee hour and social times

One important way that congregants stay engaged at Unity is through membership in our Community Outreach Ministry Teams. Members of these teams take Unity Church out into the world, working with community organizations close to home and far away.

While the minister will not be expected to be involved in the day-to-day work of each group, they need to support our teams in the work they do. We want to see Unity Church generally become more visible in church and in the community on social issues, making the outreach teams a living example of our Unitarian Universalist faith and spirituality blended with social action.

Pilgrimages have been part of Unity's DNA since the early 2000s, with groups traveling around the country or to other parts of the world for learning and reflection. Groups of pilgrims, both young people and adults, have traveled with our ministers to Boston, to Transylvania (Homoródszentpéter, our partner church), and to Selma, Alabama. Shorter, closer-to-home pilgrimages are also part of our congregational life, including weekend writing retreats in Northern Minnesota and meditation weekends in the Twin Cities.

Some pilgrimages are in fact service project trips, engaged in with a pilgrim mindset. Members of Unity have traveled with ministers to New Orleans to participate in Habitat for Humanity rebuild projects, starting after the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. Others have traveled to see the work of [Mano a Mano](#) International, a non-profit community development organization with which Unity has deep ties, that works in partnership with rural Bolivian communities to build medical clinics, schools, roads and water projects.

While the minister participates in many of these travels and projects, we know that no one person can be present at everything! It's most important that our new minister is enthusiastic about, and supports, each of these events, and attends where they can make the most difference.

Coffee hour and social times: while the senior minister and the ET are often busy elsewhere during coffee hours, it's important to us to have our minister present at social times such as Wellspring Wednesday dinners, pancake breakfasts, and other social events. It helps us build trust and confidence in the minister and offers us the opportunity to get to know each other, in ways that make it easier to weather conflicts together and make members more confident when they feel a need to speak up.

Besides the regularly-scheduled social events, we have other activities sprinkled throughout the year:

- Unity usually has a congregational day at a Saint Paul Saints baseball game.
- In past years, we've had ice-skating parties at The Depot in Minneapolis.
- Once a year, church-goers gather in the Parish Hall for Café Unity, an evening of poetry, story, and song as we celebrate each other's creativity.

Times like these spark joy and connect people to each other. We expect the minister to be engaged in some of these activities and celebrations.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around committee / task force work

When asked what a prospective minister needs to know about us at Unity, several cottage meeting participants gave a variation on this theme: given Unity's plethora of teams and other groups it's far more important for a minister to be able to be a "networker to networks" and help connect groups to each other across all the work we do, than for them to lead groups themselves.

We describe this shared work, and the congregation's expectations for engagement, in more detail in the sections on "work the minister and the congregation do together" and "governance structure."

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around leadership development

As we have described in previous sections, we operate under a model of shared leadership within the church. We talk in more detail about expectations around leadership development in the section on "work shared by the congregation and minister." Our ministry teams provide opportunities for developing and nurturing leadership among the congregation.

There are many of us who are very engaged in this work already– or would like to be very engaged, but just need an invitation! Many cottage meeting and survey participants expressed a desire to have a minister who is able to recognize the gifts we each bring, reach out to invite us into this shared work, and help connect us with the right teams. Several respondents mentioned a desire for fresh voices or multiple paths to leadership.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around membership and membership growth

The congregation expects that the minister will lead, foster and participate with other members of the ET, staff, and lay leaders in an accessible and comprehensive path to membership. However, the ability to expand the membership is not seen as absolutely critical. Responses to the 2023 survey show we place only moderate focus on this area for a minister.

We do expect that ministers learn the names and faces of congregants old and new, greet any new visitors warmly, and seek out new faces and engage with them in openhearted welcome. Before Sunday worship service, the minister and other worship leaders stand in the foyer and greet persons as they enter the building. During the worship service they also invite service attendees to greet them in the reception line immediately after and will mingle in the Parish Hall to chat with people when it is possible to do so.

We asked in the cottage meetings what participants would see, three years from now, that would show us we had gotten the right ministerial match. Many gave variations on the theme that they wanted to see Unity having grown, attracted more people from diverse backgrounds,

and had our children stay as they grow into young adults. Additionally, a large, robust membership has remained vital to Unity's role as an institutional leader within the denomination.

It is important to us, especially after our losses from COVID and after our last search, to have Unity provide welcome to the curious, and to demonstrate that we are not only a safe harbor and place for receiving congregational care and spiritual deepening, but also a place that is vibrant with people who are committed to advancing social justice, antiracism and multiculturalism. We expect a minister to model authentic welcome, and encourage congregants to demonstrate radical hospitality to all comers.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around staff relations and supervision

While the minister and staff operate under a model of shared leadership, as we describe in the section on governance, survey and cottage meeting participants see competency in supervising and managing a large staff as extremely important. Administrative and staff relations skills rank second-highest on the survey's list of qualities respondents want in a new minister, as described in the "desired strengths" section. We expect a minister to use these skills within the ET model and lead collaboratively rather than unilaterally.

We recognize the work of staff as critical to the stability of church operations and the foundation of a vibrant, healthy organization. We expect a senior minister to appreciate the values of covenantal leadership and treat staff with respect, regarding each as intrinsic to the overall health and wellbeing of the church. We also expect them to work with other members of the ET and Board to ensure the safety, wellbeing and satisfaction of staff members.

As a member of our Board put it, we "expect them to nourish shared ministry— without hiding behind it."

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around anti-oppression work / social justice / social action

We expect the senior minister to be a strong, effective, persistent leader in this work within, among, and beyond the walls of the church. As a congregation, we are used to messages from the pulpit, challenging relevant programming from our community ministry teams and adult education, and action-oriented leadership out in the community. Previous ministers have embodied Unity's values in local and national movements to advance equity, like the Poor People's Campaign, and connecting with other progressive movement leaders. As we discuss in the section on "desired strengths of a minister," survey and cottage meeting results show that many of us expect ministerial leadership that is able to inform, guide, and provide vision for antiracism, anti-oppression work and articulate how this work connects to spiritual development and growth.

In the 2023 survey, 55% of respondents value social justice work "very much" as part of congregational life, and as a reason they continue attending Unity. We discuss this work in more

detail in multiple sections in this document, notably recent successful work of the congregation, areas where we would like to see more momentum, and cottage meeting/survey results.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around interfaith / community work

While it isn't a reason people first attend Unity, 48% of survey respondents find community engagement to be a vital part of why they stay here. Interfaith work is integral to our community engagement and our ability to make an impact on the larger community. Our outreach teams partner with outside groups for their work in racial, social and environmental justice, affordable housing, and more. This often involves working with groups in other faith communities (Beacon Interfaith Housing, Interfaith Action, the Minnesota Multifaith Network, etc). We do not see this work as belonging to the senior minister alone; we have staff to help oversee this work, and lay leaders are also often trained for specific outreach activities.

In the past, we have had interfaith connections that have not been sustained. Previous senior ministers were members of an interfaith group of local ministers; for a brief time there was a music exchange with Reverend Carl Walker, Jr. pastor of Morning Star Baptist Church. Most significantly, Above Every Name Ministries (AEN) held Sunday services in Unity's sanctuary for a few years before the COVID lockdown. AEN and Unity congregants participated in a couple of crossover programs such as Beloved Conversations as well as a Christmas eve service lauded by many who attended.

Current ministerial staff, and participants in several cottage meetings, have expressed a desire for more interfaith connection, especially regarding antiracism and multiculturalism work. Unity would benefit from stronger relationships with other local denominations.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around denominational activities

The congregation tends to have fewer sightlines into this area of ministerial work. We expect a senior minister to sustain and steward the larger Unitarian Universalist movement for the future, but not all of us equate that work with denominational service. While participation in denominational activities does not figure strongly regarding congregational expectations of the minister, it has been an important part of past ministerial leadership and the congregation would be happy to see that continue.

Any expectations there might be about a minister's family and personal life

While the last ministers' family was quite visible due to the fact that they were a married couple, the congregation understands that this was a choice on their part. There is little to no expectation that a minister's family must take part in the life of the church community, nor should the minister's life apart from church be an issue unless it affects their responsibilities and obligations as senior minister.

While life and work balance is key, the work of the senior minister means that there will be times when events both expected and unexpected could require the minister's presence at any time, in accordance with UUA policies.

What have you let go of? Where do you see fresh energy?

We address these questions in multiple places in the document, especially in "recent successful work of the congregation," "work that seems stuck or not attended to," and answers on topic areas such as pastoral care, music and arts, religious education, and community engagement.

One area we are exploring with fresh energy is right relations training and work around a church covenant. These seem especially relevant at the moment.

Members of our Board also noted fresh energy around the conversation about whether we see Unity more as a place for fellowship, or to help us do work in the larger community. There are members of the congregation who feel strongly about both, as the 2023 survey also reflects. A senior minister could help guide conversation and new ways of thinking about what we value, and how we support these ends.

Expectations the congregation has for a minister(s) around other areas not already addressed above

None. We feel these questions have allowed us to be very thorough.

How trust is built between the congregation and the minister

As our Unity Church Unitarian bumper stickers say, "It's complicated." Trust between the congregation and the minister depends on the tricky balance of safety, vulnerability, and the expanded capacity for discomfort. In our cottage meetings, many congregants spoke of feeling seen or known by the minister - of being called by name or having a minister remember a story or detail about their lives, especially when they were new to the church. Another clear story emerged from our cottage meetings about the power of a minister who can preach from a place of deep vulnerability, who trusts the congregation enough to tell hard truths about themselves, about our congregation, or about humanity. We also heard many stories about feeling challenged by our minister's sermons, of staying with the discomfort of that challenge, and finding the curiosity that helped them grow in their faith. After the vote in 2022 and the work we've done in the wake of that difficult season, it's possible that our understanding of our covenantal faith has expanded and become more complex, and the work of building trust between the congregation and minister will be an outgrowth of that work.

One mistake a minister could make that would seriously affect the ministry

A pattern of violating trust would cause a rift between the minister and the congregation, as would a lack of transparency, or a sense of high-handedness or not listening to the ET or the Board of Trustees. Not considering the needs and capacity of staff would also lead to a loss of trust by the congregation. As we noted in the section on cottage meeting results, staff have been through a lot in the past three years with the pandemic shutdown, loss of long-time

ministers, working with interim ministerial staff, and all the stress that comes with change. We want to support them, not overwhelm them, as we move in new directions.

Making unilateral changes to worship or beloved rituals at Unity without conversation or in collaboration with those for whom those rituals are especially important would also cause a significant loss of trust.

Have you passed the Eighth Principle, or is the congregation in process of moving to a congregational vote?

Unity Church did not adopt the 8th Principle. We have a long history of doing deep antiracism, anti-oppression work, which are clearly delineated in our Ends statements, our by-laws, our governing policies and programs. Given the substantive work of antiracism embedded throughout congregational ministry, and that the Eighth Principle and its ideals are at the heart of the Article 2 Commission currently making its way through the General Assembly, we felt that to adopt the Eighth Principle would be redundant.

Describe trust in the congregation

Trust in the congregation has gone down significantly since we ended our 2021-22 search without a call. The results of our 2023 survey show that the number of people who agree that there is high trust in leadership at Unity has dropped from 79% in 2021 to 69%. The number of survey respondents who say they are highly likely to recommend Unity to others has dropped from 79% in 2020 to 67% in 2023. We have described the steps we are taking to restore trust in the “ways the congregation handles conflicted situations” question, as well as the “How trust is built between the congregation and the minister” question.

How did the last ministry end (or how is it ending)? How is the congregation doing with this time of transition?

Originally planning to retire in 2020, Reverends Janne and Rob Eller-Isaacs decided to postpone their retirement for one year due to the pandemic. During this time, they played a crucial role creating the worship and spiritual practices that guided Unity through church closure and the first year of the COVID pandemic. In the spring of 2021, they retired, and the Rev. Dr. Kathy Hurt assumed the role of interim minister.

Unity had anticipated a single interim year, forming a MST in the spring of 2021. Unfortunately, Rev. Rob Eller-Isaacs was diagnosed with terminal cancer during the search process, significantly impacting the congregation. Soon after, Rev. Janne Eller-Isaacs also received a cancer diagnosis. Regrettably, Rob passed away on July 23, 2022. These events left the congregation in deep grief, still spiraling from the pandemic, not being able to be together to celebrate the much deserved retirement of two long time spiritual leaders, the anticipated loss of one of those leaders and the difficult diagnosis of the other.

In hindsight, the congregation needed a longer interim ministry. The single year of interim ministry was not enough to process the losses and to collectively explore our hopes for the

future. As a result, the congregation decided not to call the candidate selected by the 2021-22 search team.

We have detailed the effects of these events elsewhere in this document, notably in the section on how the congregation handles conflict. While considerable repair work lies ahead, there is a shared desire within the congregation to reflect, come together in community, and rebuild trust. The congregation draws strength from various sources, including the ET, lay leaders, ministerial teams, community bonds, and each other.

As the interim senior minister, Rev. Kathleen Rolenz's focus has been on preparing us for a new settled minister. Her role as an Accredited Interim Minister has brought timely expertise to our community. Rev. Rolenz has emphasized learning, listening, coaching, and inspiration while guiding us analytically and emotionally to utilize our vast resources in the new search. She reminds us that, while our practices for governance and love for certain rituals may be unique, Unity Church's joys, sorrows, and concerns are not uncommon among UU churches, each of which tends to view itself as "special."

Elsewhere in this document, especially in the section on resources or programs we have engaged with in the past year, "recent successful work of the congregation," and the section on conflict, we describe the ongoing work we are doing to repair our relationships, examine our history, strengthen our capacity for change, and get ourselves ready.

Our 2023 Congregational Survey shows that 72% of respondents continue to attend Unity because of our fellowship and community, the second highest response after "UU beliefs." We still believe in, take comfort in, and find faith in each other as we navigate the latest chapter in this transition.

How is technology currently used in your congregation and what are the expectations of the minister around that?

Staff manages all technology, from website development and maintenance, to operation of sanctuary audio and video, to hosting Zoom meetings large and small. The minister's role is to be open to changes in technology that may require adaptation, and to support the church's commitment to livestreaming Sunday services and other events.

One area a new senior minister can help bring fresh energy and ideas to, is how to help members who primarily engage online feel connected to the larger church community. Several comments on the 2023 survey indicate that members who cannot attend church in person still feel isolated, though they appreciate the virtual options.

Questions the congregation would have liked to have been asked which were not included here:

"How does the Executive Team support and participate in Unity's search process?"

The ET has been integral to the systems and functions of the MST from the beginning. Their partnership and collaboration in the work of search has resulted in a sense of trust between the leaders of the MST, ET, and Board and helped build a sense of confidence from the congregation.

The ET established from the start of the search that the congregation plays an integral role in the search and that we remain in covenant as we undertake this work. When the 2023-24 MST was formed, the Board created a charge both to the MST *and to the congregation* to emphasize the significant work of both..

Rev. Kathleen Rolenz has been steadfast in her support of our team, helping us establish lines of communication and workflow with the church staff, offering context, perspective, and encouragement, and ensuring that we're staying on track with our work. Rev. Rolenz and Barbara Hubbard, our Executive Director, have taken turns joining our autumn MST meetings as well as several of the cottage meetings to provide support, be available to answer questions, and show solidarity with the search team. As we mention in multiple places throughout the questionnaire, the ET also brings the work of search to the larger congregation through the Team Dynamics workshop in December, our work with Terasa Cooley in February, and providing the MST a monthly time during worship to update the congregation. The Board invited the MST to take an active role at the Annual Meeting in November, providing an update on the search process so far and the work ahead, which the congregation greatly appreciated.

As our search shifts into our winter work, the Board and the ET will continue to monitor the work, while respecting the confidentiality of the specifics of the search. They will continue to be available to the MST for support, perspective, and guidance.