

Spiritual Maturity Survey Results Executive Summary – Unity Church–Unitarian

In May 2013, we invited congregants to participate in a pilot study of spiritual maturity. We wanted to better understand the dimensions of spiritual growth, transformation and maturity that are at the heart of our church's purpose.

The items in the survey we piloted are grounded in the theological and theoretical knowledge of many individuals, including the Revs. Rob and Janne Eller-Isaacs (over 50 years combined parish ministry), Theo Jolosky (psychological/educational test design and measurement consultant), Bill Etter (marketing research design and analysis consultant), Rev. Kendyl Gibbons (author, "Twelve Qualities of Spiritual Maturity"), Rev. Jason Seymour (Unity Church Hallman intern at the time with a background in market research, currently Minister of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Greater Springfield), and Laura Park (Managing Director, Unity Consulting). Theo and Rob developed the original list of survey items for the "us as individuals" section in the 2004 congregational survey. These items evolved as we used them over the next eight years in our congregation, and we integrated the current version of those items with items related to Kendyl's Twelve Qualities of Spiritual Maturity, with her help and assistance.

We've now completed the spiritual maturity survey in four Unitarian Universalist congregations across the country, including Unity Church-Unitarian, and shared the results in a written report with the leadership of those congregations. We're very grateful to everyone who took the time to complete the survey, and would like to share some of what we learned about our church through that pilot.

This report highlights the important information we gathered from the pilot. If you'd like more detailed information, ask Laura Park, Managing Director, Unity Consulting (laura@unityconsulting.org) for a copy of the Spiritual Maturity Pilot Survey Results Report.

Spiritual Maturity Rating

On a scale of 1-10, respondents' average rating of their spiritual maturity now is 6.71 and they expect to rate their spiritual maturity at 7.66 five years from now. Since we'll continue to ask these questions on the congregational survey, we look forward to seeing how the trends progress on this rating.

Big Opportunity Individual Items

We analyzed people's responses on the individual survey questions and found that the following items were both strongly correlated with overall spiritual maturity at Unity Church and that people rated themselves relatively low on them. We call these items our "Big Opportunity" items:

Item Number	Statement
52	act in religious manner
9	actively practice my spiritual/religious faith
54	work on issues related to my spiritual development
42	I make good decisions about when to act
46	have ability to repent, forgive myself, and change
47	can ask for and accept forgiveness
55	be in presence of another's pain w/o needing to flee/fix it
8	have a clear purpose to my life and am able to articulate that purpose to myself/others

Some questions to ask ourselves about these items:

- *In what ways do our programs, activities and initiatives help people develop these areas of their spiritual lives?*
- *What could we enhance about our programs, activities and initiatives to promote or encourage improvement in the above areas?*

Big Leverage Individual Items

We also found items that were strongly correlated with overall spiritual maturity at Unity Church and that people rated themselves relatively high on them. We call these items our "Big Leverage" items:

Item Number	Statement
56	I can identify people whose qualities I aspire to grow into
22	I act with integrity
20	I believe it matters what I do
7	leading a moral life makes me happy

Some questions to ask ourselves about these items:

- *In what ways do our programs, activities, and initiatives leverage these strengths to help people develop new strengths or areas where we're not particularly strong?*
- *If we think of these items as reflecting our identity and brand, the items our community values and feels relatively confident they possess, how could we reinforce this identity in our community and beyond? For example, can we leverage these strengths in our communications or promotional materials?*

Development of Macro Factors

Through a statistical process of factor analysis with data gathered from across the country, we've been able to group the 56 individual survey items (beliefs, attitudes, behaviors) into 10 macro areas:

1. Cares for others
2. Actively develops and integrates spirituality in their life
3. Connects to a sense of wonder
4. Thinks symbolically or metaphorically
5. Develops their self-awareness
6. A wise decision maker who can deal w/ a variety of situations and outcomes
7. Opens themselves to a wider connection they're unable to control
8. Pursues understanding and growth
9. Develops dedication to purpose
10. Develops clear boundaries to inform intentional action

If the individual items give us a 5,000-foot view of spirituality in our congregation, these macro items give us a 30,000-foot view.

Big Opportunity Macro Factors

When we analyzed the data on these factors, we found that the following factors were both strongly correlated with overall spiritual maturity at Unity Church and that people rated themselves relatively low on them. We call these items our "Big Opportunity" factors:

Factor Number	Factor
2	Actively develops and integrates spirituality in their life
6	A wise decision maker who can deal with a variety of situations and outcomes
9	Develops dedication to purpose

Some questions to ask ourselves about these factors:

- *Are we clear as a congregation that these areas are worthy of our focus and our resources? Has our board identified them as important outcomes?*
- *Does this 30,000 ft view give us additional insights into the what could we enhance about our programs, activities and initiatives to promote or encourage our congregants' spiritual development?*

Big Leverage Macro Factors

We also found factors that were strongly correlated with overall spiritual maturity at Unity Church and that people rated themselves relatively high on them. We call these items our “Big Leverage” factors:

Factor Number	Factor
5	Develops their self awareness
1	Cares for others

Some questions to ask ourselves about these items:

- *In what ways could we leverage our strength in this area to develop the areas where we’re not particularly strong?*
- *If we think of this item as reflecting the big picture of our identity and brand, how could we reinforce this aspect of our identity with our community and beyond? For example, can we leverage this strength in our communications or promotional materials?*

Program Evaluation

Finally, we asked respondents to indicate in which church programs they participate and the extent to which (scale of 1-5) that participation developed their overall spiritual maturity. We did not list all church programs in the survey (although people could add programs and ratings), so our results cannot be taken as a comprehensive picture of congregational life at Unity Church. However, some interesting findings from the data we collected:

- Pilgrimages strongly develop participants’ sense of overall spiritual maturity. Of the five most-highly rated programs, two were pilgrimages; of the top 12 most-highly rated programs, three were pilgrimages.
- Lower-rated programs tended to be social groups, which is perhaps not surprising.
- The top ten most-highly rated programs:
 1. Unity Choir
 2. Worship Assoc
 3. Boston pilgrimage
 4. Sunday Services
 5. Living with grief group
 6. Jeremiah Program
 7. Restorative Justice Ministry Team
 8. Spiritual growth activities outside of church
 9. New look at the Bible
 10. OWL participant

Survey Impact

Although we can't yet point to specific changes these survey results have inspired, they have had a significant impact on our understanding of our strengths and opportunities here at Unity Church. They've renewed our commitment to opportunities to develop spiritual practice, and to live our faith. The religious life is always developing, and we look forward to integrating our learnings from this survey into the articulation of our purpose as a congregation and the way we live it out in the world.