

# Report on Midpoint Review of Developmental Ministry

## Introduction

The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Houston entered into a five-year Developmental Ministry contract with the Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen in 2020 to serve as our Senior Minister, to develop and strengthen the congregation, and set the stage for us to call a Senior Minister. The agreement identified goals and performance expectations related to the Developmental Ministry. It was agreed that after two years, an evaluation would be completed to provide insights regarding our shared progress and to provide an interim report to the congregation.

In order to conduct this evaluation, the Board appointed an ad hoc Review Committee of persons held in high esteem by the Church and mutually acceptable to the Board and the Developmental Minister. The appointed Committee members were:

Ron Cookston

Ruth Hoffman-Lach

Bill Nelson

Sue Prochazka

David Wurdlow

The Committee was charged to work with the Developmental Minister to design and facilitate a review of his performance. The goals of the review are:

1. Assess the Developmental Minister's performance in furthering the overall mission and vision of the Church and in meeting the Church's developmental goals.
  2. Support the Developmental Minister to remain motivated, creative, and flexible.
  3. Equip the Developmental Minister and Board to make any needed adjustments and maintain an effective partnership to advance the mission, vision, and developmental goals of the Church.
- The Committee's report to the Board, together with a written response from the Developmental Minister, will be published to the Church along with the Board's plan for addressing any recommendations it may contain.

## Process

In order to complete this evaluation, the Task Force employed a 360-degree review process which included input from staff and from a sample number of congregants who represent the breadth of Church diversity and are active in Church life.

With input from the Developmental Minister, the Committee identified a sample of congregants who completed an online survey.

The Developmental Minister provided a self-assessment using the same survey instrument.

The Committee conducted follow-up conversations with a number of survey participants and non-respondents. In particular, community leaders that were approached to complete the survey declined participation but provided feedback.

## Summary of Survey Responses

The Task Force received survey responses from 33 congregants and 7 staff.

The Board utilized the data and comments at its February retreat to help shape the goals and open questions it will present to the Congregation at the June annual meeting. Staff are able to use the results to inform their efforts to support the Church, particularly the expressed desire for more activities that support greater spirituality.

A complete summation of the responses is provided in Appendix A - “Developmental Ministry Midpoint Review - Survey Responses”.

## Committee Observations

Respondents who were working on teams/committees to implement the developmental ministry goals had a better sense of the progress that has been made than others had. Responses from the general congregation focused more on the general well-being of the church.

The general congregation still has a limited understanding of the principles of governance.

The response of the staff can be summed up in the quote “we’ve done so much but we still have work to do.” The staff expressed great appreciation for the support of the Senior Minister.

## Committee Conclusions

Overall, the committee feels, in light of the congregation's responses to our survey, that the developmental ministry is proceeding well. In some areas (Goals 2 and 3, for example), those who are actively involved in teams or committees, or on the board, are aware of the progress that has been made, while the general congregation is not. A specific example is progress on developing Principles of Governance. In fact, they have been completed, though that is not well known. The same goes for a good deal of work on inclusion and anti-racism. One important area on which much more needs to be done is preparing the church to call a new minister. Here the committee and the congregation-at-large seem to agree.

As for the minister's performance of ordinary ministerial tasks, the committee and the congregation at large think that things are going very well. The only area in which any significant number of respondents saw a problem was the area of communication with the congregation. This is viewed by the committee as a matter of ongoing concern.

### **Developmental Ministry Review Committee:**

Ron Cookston, Board, President

Ruth Hoffman-Lach, Board, Past President

Bill Nelson, Member

Sue Prochazka, Member

David Wurdlow, Healthy Communications Team, Chair

# Response from the Developmental Minister

Uploaded to Website on May 16, 2023

Dear Review Committee Members,

I appreciate the thorough process that the ad hoc Review Committee conducted to review our Developmental Ministry and the time and energy that went into gathering feedback from the staff and so many members of the congregation. I found your thoughtful analysis helpful in understanding what we have accomplished together and the work that lies ahead.

While a global pandemic was never envisioned when we entered our Developmental Ministry contract, it must be acknowledged that the COVID-19 crisis greatly complicated or delayed many of the goals that we sought to undertake. Nonetheless, at the mid-point of this five-year period we can celebrate the successes of our shared ministry. First Unitarian Universalist is prepared to thrive well into the future.

In general, I agree with the levels of progress that members observed about the congregation's developmental goals. It is worth highlighting the success that we have had in improving staff morale and the work environment. It is also important to recognize the refocusing of the ministry of First Unitarian Universalist on the Museum District campus and the relaunch of both Tapestry and Thoreau as independent religious communities. I was initially hired by the Board to work with the congregation on improving staff treatment and discerning the future of multi-site ministry. I am pleased with the progress made on the first item and the resolution that was reached on the second.

Looking ahead, the focus over the next two years will primarily be on Goal 3 and Goal 5. The work that we have engaged in together has largely been designed to help First Unitarian Universalist move from a pattern of instability to one of stability. Having reached a point of stability, we are well prepared to focus on growing the congregation in membership and diversity.

I note that there are two other areas that need particular attention: communications and preparing the congregation to call a new settled minister.

Communication is a constant challenge. The staff and I regularly seek out new and more efficient ways to communicate from the pulpit; via the newsletter and web site; and through social media. We are open to feedback and advice on how we can improve. I also suspect that one reason communications can be a challenge is that First Unitarian Universalist is a growing community with so much going on that no one person can possibly be involved in or even really know about it all. We have grown to the point where we serve around 500 people (children, adults, in-person, and online) each month through our Sunday morning programs and have almost 1,500 on our mailing list!

As for the search for a new settled minister, this is something that has naturally not been an emphasis of the first half of my developmental ministry. It will, however, be something that requires an increasing amount of energy in the next two years. I look forward to working with the congregation to prepare it for a successful settled ministry.

I am grateful for the support of the staff, Board, and members of the congregation. I am committed to working with all of you to widen love's circle and increase the impact of First Unitarian Universalist on the lives of our members and the communities of greater Houston.

Thank you again for the opportunity to serve. My time with you has been a great joy. I am excited about what is to come!

love,  
Rev. Dr. Colin Bossen

# Appendix A

## Developmental Ministry Midpoint Review - Survey Responses

### Progress Evaluation of Achievement of Developmental Ministry Goals

#### Goal 1: Identity - Mission / Vision / Covenant:

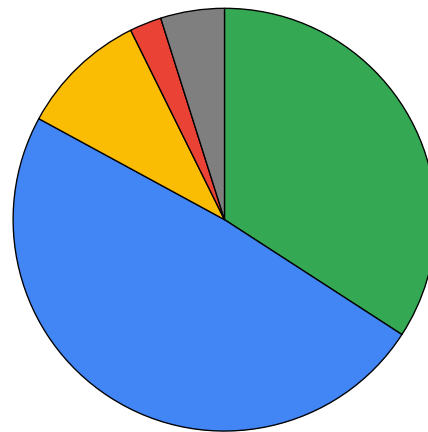
*“What kind of a church do we want to become?”*

- Discern who we are now, where we are going in the future, and how we will treat one another.
- Build a culture of mutual trust and develop effective ways to have open and transparent communications with each other (members, Board, clergy, and staff).
- Craft a Mission, Vision, and Covenant that are common knowledge and, along with a Strategic Plan and Annual Vision of Ministry, inform decision-making.

#### Summary of Responses:

The vast majority of respondents feel that we are on schedule or well under way to completion of this goal. Many respondents seem unclear about the differences between Mission, Vision and Covenant (MVC), Strategic Plan, Principles of Governance, and Annual Plan of Ministry. Also, there is confusion about the difference between progress on MVC and progress on the 8th Principle.

Responses in general seem to indicate that members are not all accessing and synthesizing the variety and volume of communications regarding work and progress on the issues included in this review.



<span style="color: green;">■</span> 4 - Well under way to completion or completed	34%
<span style="color: blue;">■</span> 3 - In progress and on schedule	49%
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> 2 - Somewhat behind schedule	10%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> 1 - Inadequate discernable progress	2%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> N/O (cannot say/have not had the opportunity to observe)	5%

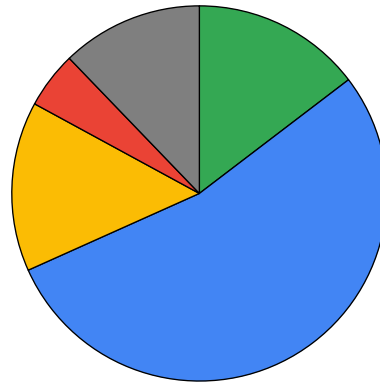
**Goal 2: Governance, Ministry, and Administration:**

*“How can we have a healthy relationship with our Senior Minister and with the UUA?”*

- Implement and refine our new Principles of Governance, including our new management and administrative structure.
- Expand the financial capacity of the Church in order to sustain fair compensation, enhance our physical plant, grow programs, and achieve Honor Congregation status in the UUA Annual Program Fund.
- Prepare the congregation to call a Settled Minister.

**Summary of Responses:**

The majority of respondents feel that we are on schedule or well under way to completion of this goal, though there is a significant gap in understanding between the Board and congregation regarding the Governance of the Church. Respondents did not address the question of the congregation’s readiness to call a Senior Minister. Current efforts around the capital campaign appear effective at raising optimism around the financial condition of the Church, though there remains concern around the ability of the Church to fairly compensate staff.



<span style="color: green;">■</span> 4 - Well under way to completion or completed	14%
<span style="color: blue;">■</span> 3 - In progress and on schedule	54%
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> 2 - Somewhat behind schedule	15%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> 1 - Inadequate discernable progress	5%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> N/O (cannot say/have not had the opportunity to observe)	12%

**Goal 3: Multiculturalism, Anti-racism, and Inclusion:**

*“How can we increase diversity in our church and work to dismantle white supremacy?”*

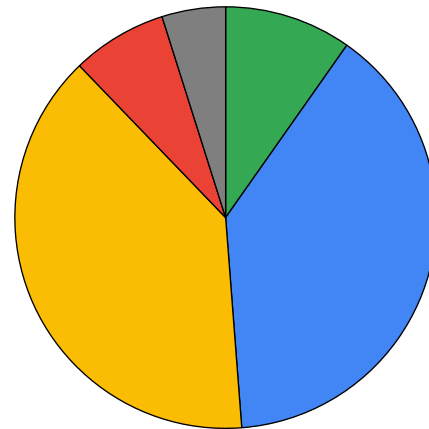
- Engage the congregation in deep dialogue on multiculturalism, anti-racism, true inclusion, and our journey towards spiritual wholeness.
- Align the institutional framework of the Church with the proposed 8th Principle of Unitarian Universalism. Encourage the increased involvement of members from underrepresented groups in congregational life and Church leadership at all levels.
- Build a diverse, intergenerational, multicultural Beloved Community in the Church.

**Summary of Responses:**

There is a noticeable difference in perceptions of progress between members of the Board and Staff, on the one hand, and some members of the congregation on the other. Those involved in working to address this issue are aware of the work being done and feel good about it, while those who are primarily informed by seeing who is in the pews each Sunday are concerned that we are not making enough progress. Board members are particularly concerned about lack of diversity on the Board.

A number of comments noted the lack of progress toward the Congregational vote on the 8th Principle, when so many other UU congregations have already done so.

“I feel our Congregation has made good progress, but we still have a long, long, long way to go to be a true "diverse, intergenerational, multicultural Beloved Community.”



■ 4 - Well under way to completion or completed	10%
■ 3 - In progress and on schedule	39%
■ 2 - Somewhat behind schedule	39%
■ 1 - Inadequate discernable progress	7%
■ N/O (cannot say/have not had the opportunity to observe)	5%

**Goal 4: Multi-site Model:**

***“What is our vision for and commitment to multi-site”***

- Due to negotiations between the members that were associated with the campus in Richmond and the Board of First UU Houston, a mutual decision was made to separate into two congregations which has been accomplished. Therefore, please do not rate but rather comment to reflect your thoughts regarding the result.

**Summary of Responses:**

There seems to be a good deal of satisfaction with the outcome of the multi-site issue. At least one thought we should never have tried it—and that it never had the real support of the congregation. Not everyone agrees, but there is a general sense that the outcome was fair and reasonable. Still, there is sadness about the animosity and bitterness that developed as we separated. One expressed hope for healing in the future.



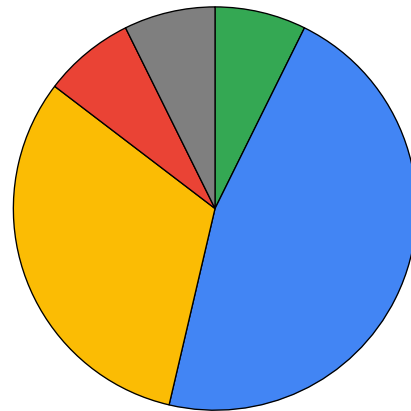
**Goal 5: Growth and Membership Engagement:**

*“More people should be here with us – how do we engage them?”*

- Provide more structure and opportunities for engagement within and beyond the Church:
  1. In congregational life -- spiritual and intellectual growth, pastoral care, building community, finding meaning, contributing skills to teams and committees, developing leadership, etc.
  2. With community needs, programs, and organizations, so that the Church is visibly engaged with our partners.
  3. With larger organizations like the UUA, UUSC, and Houston area UU congregations.
- Increase active membership and provide a path for involvement of members, their children and youth.

**Summary of Responses:**

Just over half of respondents feel that we are on track in this area. A variety of comments were received about the need for opportunities for more spiritual growth, and specific desires for more young and culturally diverse members and more new members with children. There is an interest in working with other local organizations and UU congregations.



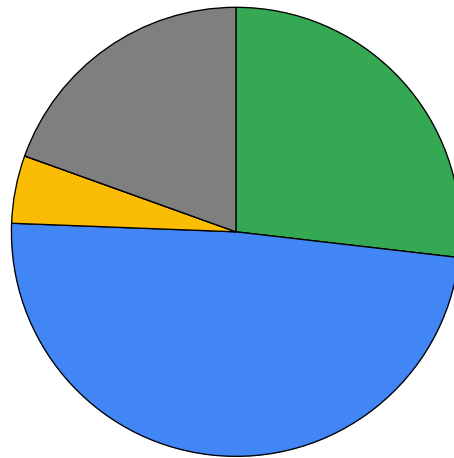
<span style="color: green;">■</span> 4 - Well under way to completion or completed	7%
<span style="color: blue;">■</span> 3 - In progress and on schedule	47%
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> 2 - Somewhat behind schedule	32%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> 1 - Inadequate discernable progress	7%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> N/O (cannot say/have not had the opportunity to observe)	7%

### Rating Performance Expectation of the Developmental Ministry

**MP1 - Collaborates with the Church’s staff to provide leadership and help the Church and the staff develop, understand, and fulfill the Church’s mission.**

**Summary of Responses:**

Nearly 80% of respondents believe the Senior Minister is meeting or exceeding expectations in this area. Comments from the board and congregation expressed confidence that Colin has “a very positive and effective working relationship” with staff, noting the strength in this area in response to the pandemic shutdown and redirecting efforts to online services.

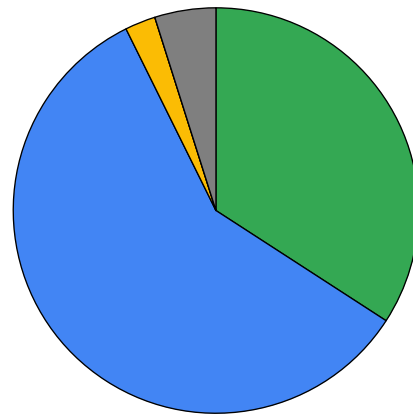


<span style="color: green;">■</span> 4 - Exceeds Expectations	27%
<span style="color: blue;">■</span> 3 - Meeting Expectations	49%
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> 2 - Needs Improvement	5%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> 1 - Unsatisfactory	0%
<span style="color: gray;">■</span> N/O (cannot say/have not had the opportunity to observe)	19%

**MP2 - Is responsible for pastoral services. May partially delegate these duties to other ordained ministers and may enlist the assistance of trained lay people in these duties when appropriate.**

**Summary of Responses:**

Overwhelmingly positive responses to a dramatic improvement in this area. Congregants, members, and staff all report good support through several difficult experiences. Many comments praising Rev. Scott's excellent pastoral care and coordination with the Care Team.



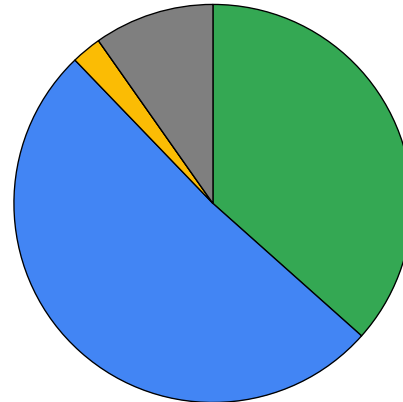
<span style="color: green;">■</span> 4 - Exceeds Expectations	34%
<span style="color: blue;">■</span> 3 - Meeting Expectations	59%
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> 2 - Needs Improvement	2%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> 1 - Unsatisfactory	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> N/O (cannot say/have not had the opportunity to observe)	5%

**MP3 - To the best of his ability, takes an active part in a broad spectrum of Church life, including most major social and fellowship activities.**

**Summary of Responses:**

Over 80% of respondents believe the Senior Minister is meeting or exceeding expectations in this area, with more than a third noting exceptional performance. In general, Colin is far more visible and engaged than past ministers, though he tends to be “more prominent in social action groups than other groups in the church, since social action is his passion.” It is also noted that this participation was missed during the time Colin was away from the Church on sabbatical.

[NOTE: Neither Colin nor Scott took their contractually allotted leave time during the COVID pandemic, prioritizing the delivery of pastoral care and ministry during this challenging time.]

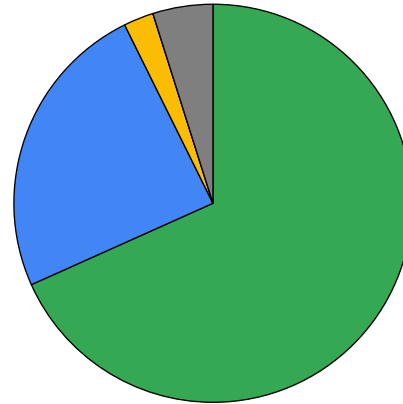


■ 4 - Exceeds Expectations	37%
■ 3 - Meeting Expectations	51%
■ 2 - Needs Improvement	2%
■ 1 - Unsatisfactory	0%
■ N/O (cannot say/have not had the opportunity to observe)	10%

**MP4 - Endeavors to impress on the congregation the Unitarian Universalist historical commitment to social justice and peace and identifies opportunities for members to engage in activities that promote these values. Represents both the Church and Unitarian Universalism in local community affairs and interfaith activities.**

**Summary of Responses:**

Nearly all respondents believe the Senior Minister is meeting or exceeding expectations in this area, with more than a 60% noting exceptional performance.

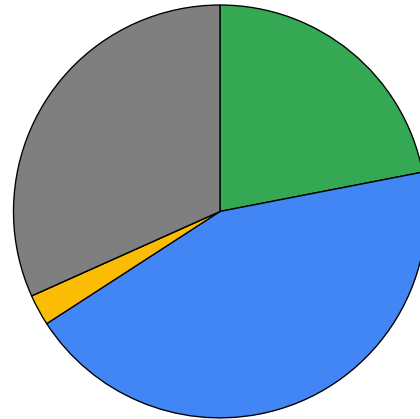


<span style="color: green;">■</span> 4 - Exceeds Expectations	68%
<span style="color: blue;">■</span> 3 - Meeting Expectations	24%
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> 2 - Needs Improvement	3%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> 1 - Unsatisfactory	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> N/O (cannot say/have not had the opportunity to observe)	5%

**MP5 - Directly or indirectly supervises all ordained and lay staff.**

**Summary of Responses:**

Nearly all respondents who scored this factor indicated the Senior Minister is meeting or exceeding expectations in this area, though almost a third of respondents felt unable to rate this area due to lack of observation. Staff responses acknowledge challenges with turnover, but recognize Colin's skill in conflict resolution.



<span style="color: green;">■</span> 4 - Exceeds Expectations	22%
<span style="color: blue;">■</span> 3 - Meeting Expectations	44%
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> 2 - Needs Improvement	2%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> 1 - Unsatisfactory	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> N/O (cannot say/have not had the opportunity to observe)	32%

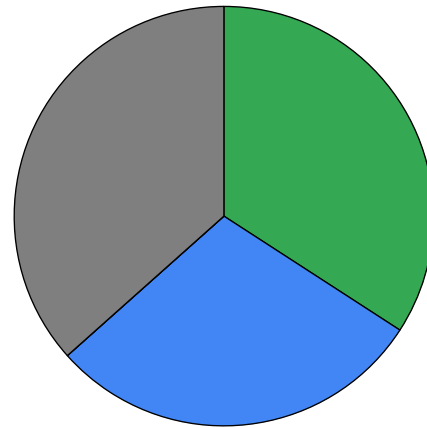
**MP6 - Attends and participates in the meetings of the Board and Board officers and provides leadership.**

**Summary of Responses:**

All respondents who scored this factor indicated the Senior Minister is meeting or exceeding expectations in this area, with over a third noting exceptional performance. Approximately 20% of respondents felt unable to rate this area due to lack of observation.

Board members agree that Colin or his representative is at every Board meeting, and he has a good working relationship with the Board. Colin’s leadership, advice, and “insight into the working of boards, in general” has benefitted the Board.

Congregants generally reported that they assume this is happening, but lack direct observation.



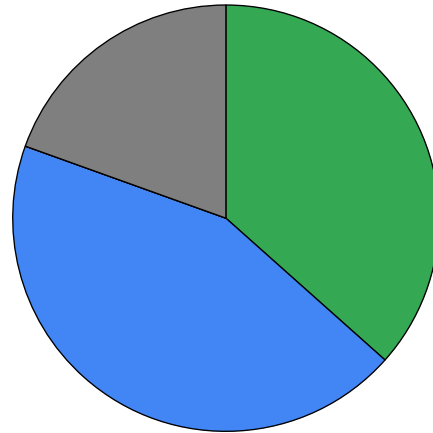
<span style="color: green;">■</span> 4 - Exceeds Expectations	34%
<span style="color: blue;">■</span> 3 - Meeting Expectations	29%
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> 2 - Needs Improvement	0%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> 1 - Unsatisfactory	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> N/O (cannot say/have not had the opportunity to observe)	37%

**MP7 - Ensures that the Church is sound with fiscal and financial integrity.**

**Summary of Responses:**

All respondents who scored this factor indicated the Senior Minister is meeting or exceeding expectations in this area, with over a third noting exceptional performance. Approximately 20% of respondents felt unable to rate this area due to lack of observation.

Respondents familiar with the financial operations of the Church had strongly favorable opinions of Colin’s performance in this area, noting the progress that has been made to place the Church on a sound fiscal and financial footing. Optimism was expressed across all groups, though this is clearly an area where Congregants are unfamiliar with the details and responded based on confidence in staff and assumptions.



■ 4 - Exceeds Expectations	37%
■ 3 - Meeting Expectations	44%
■ 2 - Needs Improvement	0%
■ 1 - Unsatisfactory	0%
■ N/O (cannot say/have not had the opportunity to observe)	19%

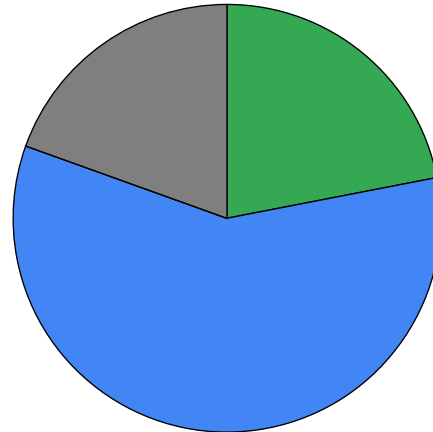


**MP8 - Oversees facilities, directly or indirectly. Ensures the proper functioning of all facilities and the repair or replacement of all facilities and equipment.**

**Summary of Responses:**

All respondents who scored this factor indicated the Senior Minister is meeting or exceeding expectations in this area. Approximately 20% of respondents felt unable to rate this area due to lack of observation.

There is a general acknowledgement of the deterioration of the Church facilities and appreciation for the work of the senior minister, staff, and volunteers to address these challenges within our fiscal constraints. Many expressed optimism that the current capital campaign will allow the Church to address more deferred maintenance issues.



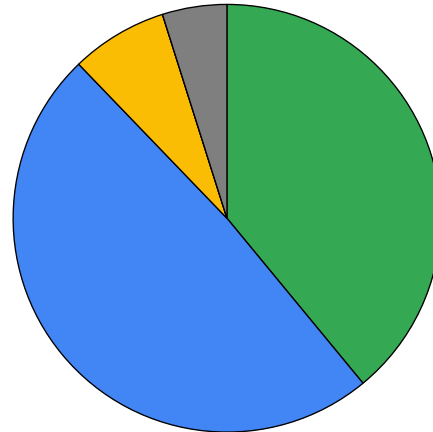
<span style="color: green;">■</span> 4 - Exceeds Expectations	22%
<span style="color: blue;">■</span> 3 - Meeting Expectations	59%
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> 2 - Needs Improvement	0%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> 1 - Unsatisfactory	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> N/O (cannot say/have not had the opportunity to observe)	19%

**MP9 - Communicates regularly with the members through the Church’s various communications channels.**

**Summary of Responses:**

Over 80% of respondents believe the Senior Minister is meeting or exceeding expectations in this area, with more than a third noting exceptional performance. This area generated differences in opinion within Congregation respondents, with both the largest number expressing “exceeding expectations” and “needs improvement” of any question in the survey. Comments varied widely, with some seeking “more spirituality and inspiration...integrated into sermons and other congregational communication”.

“Colin communicates with us most frequently through the newsletter and this serves most of us well.”



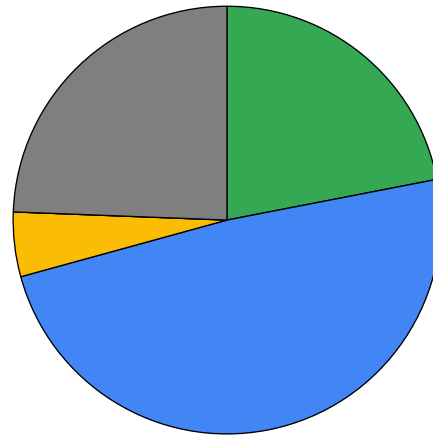
■ 4 - Exceeds Expectations	39%
■ 3 - Meeting Expectations	49%
■ 2 - Needs Improvement	7%
■ 1 - Unsatisfactory	0%
■ N/O (cannot say/have not had the opportunity to observe)	5%

**MP10 - Keeps the Church informed of the important issues within the wider Unitarian Universalist movement. Is strongly encouraged to participate in metropolitan and regional level Unitarian Universalist Ministers' meetings and the General Assembly of the UUA and contribute to regional and denominational Unitarian Universalist events.**

**Summary of Responses:**

Nearly all respondents who scored this factor indicated the Senior Minister is meeting or exceeding expectations in this area. Approximately a quarter of respondents felt unable to rate this area due to lack of observation.

Opinion in this area varied; the overall mood was that the Church remains well connected to the larger UU movement, but several noted a reduced focus in this area since COVID and differed on their opinions as to whether this was an issue requiring attention.



<span style="color: green;">■</span> 4 - Exceeds Expectations	22%
<span style="color: blue;">■</span> 3 - Meeting Expectations	49%
<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> 2 - Needs Improvement	5%
<span style="color: red;">■</span> 1 - Unsatisfactory	0%
<span style="color: grey;">■</span> N/O (cannot say/have not had the opportunity to observe)	24%