

# Understanding Ourselves

## *Understanding Ourselves*

### **A Report on the Faith Communities Today Survey for Unitarian Universalist Congregations**

Extension Education  
& Research Office  
Department of  
Congregational, District  
& Extension Services, UUA

In Association with  
Faith Communities Today,  
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## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

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## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES



“The Faith Communities in the United States is the largest survey of congregations ever conducted in the United States. It also is the most inclusive, denominationally sanctioned program of interfaith cooperation. It is intended to provide a public profile of the organizational backbone of religion in America—congregations—at the beginning of the new millennium.”

-Carl S. Dudley and David Rozen,  
*Faith Communities Today: A Report on Religion in the United States Today*

*Understanding Ourselves* represents the initial report of a comprehensive survey of Unitarian Universalist congregations. It is the most comprehensive current information that we have on our congregations and provides us with an opportunity to develop an understanding of ourselves based on data and not merely on anecdotes or outdated or common opinions we may have of ourselves.

This initial report presents only some of the information available from the survey of Unitarian Universalist congregations and from the surveys of the other 41 denominations or faith groups that participated in Faith Communities Today. Consequently, this report is only the beginning. We encourage you to become familiar with this information and to “interact” with this data on the Faith Communities Today (FACT) web-site (as described in the final pages of this report.) Our use of this Unitarian Universalist data will reveal useable insights about your congregations and our association of congregations.

### Methodology

The participating faith groups developed a core questionnaire, and each group adapted it to reflect (more or less) the language and traditions of the faith group. The core questionnaire included more than 200 questions and covered six broad issues: worship and identity, location and facilities, internal and community oriented programs, leadership and organizational dynamics, participants and finances.

The Faith Communities Today survey, with a letter of introduction, was sent to all 1043<sup>1</sup> Unitarian Universalist congregations in the United States and Canada. According to the protocols established by the national interfaith research group, a key informer (who was either a minister or congregation president—when a minister was not listed in our database) was instructed to complete the survey. Reminder post cards were sent to each site.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the UUA data for 1999-2000.

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523 surveys were returned, which comprises a 50% return, which exceeds the norm for mailed surveys of this length. Of these, 500 were from the United States and 23 were from Canada. Although we have included all of those returned to our office in this report, the Faith Communities Today national report only includes information from congregations in the United States, since their study was of congregations in the United States only.

*Understanding Ourselves* is intended as a resource for congregations. In addition to a synopsis of the results of the Unitarian Universalist survey, reflection questions are provided in each section. These questions are intended to assist you in gaining some insights about your own congregation and in determining some directions for your ongoing growth and development.

Rev. Lawrence Palmieri Peers  
Extension Education and Research Director

Adam Stuhlfaut  
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Extension Education and Research Office  
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## Extension Education and Research Office

Committed to:

*Serving the needs of members congregations  
Organizing new congregations  
Extending and strengthening Unitarian Universalism*

-from UUA Bylaws

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### Training Programs and Resources For Congregational Growth and Vitality

**Planning for Growth and Vitality for Small and for Midsize Congregations**

**Sharing Our UU Faith**

**The Inner Work of the Leader**

**Over the Threshold for Midsize Congregations**

**Trustee Leadership Development for Large Congregations**

**Continental Conferences for Midsize and Large Congregations**

**New Congregation Development Program**

**Extension Ministry Training**

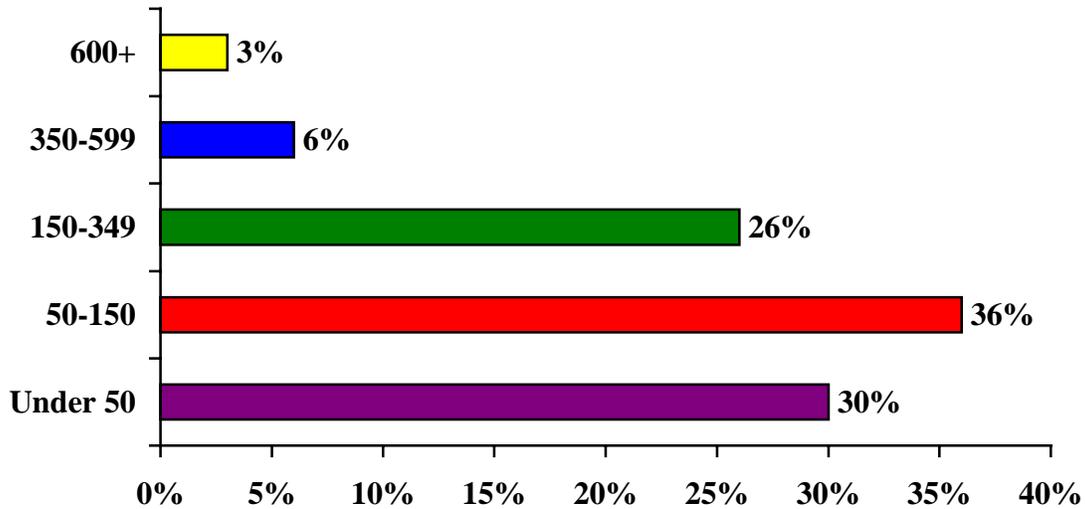
**Demographic Profiles**

**Faith Communities Today**

**SECTION ONE:  
CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR CONGREGATIONS  
AND THEIR REGULAR PARTICIPANTS**

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### A. Size of Our Congregations:



The congregations that participated in our survey included:

- Under 50 regularly participating adults (30%).
- 50-149 regularly participating adults (36%).
- 150-349 regularly participating adults (24%).
- 350-599 regularly participating adults (7%).
- 600 regularly participating adults or more (3%).

This sample of congregations closely mirrors our current actual distribution of congregation size in the UUA. From our 2000-2001 UUA Directory questionnaire, we have:

- Under 50 regularly participating adults (30%).
- 50-149 regularly participating adults (36%).
- 150-349 regularly participating adults (26%).
- 350-599 regularly participating adults (6%).
- 600 regularly participating adults or more (3%).

The largest congregation in our sample reported 1500 members. The smallest congregation reported 8 members. The median membership of all congregations in our sample is 80 members. The mode (or most often occurring congregation) is 150 members.

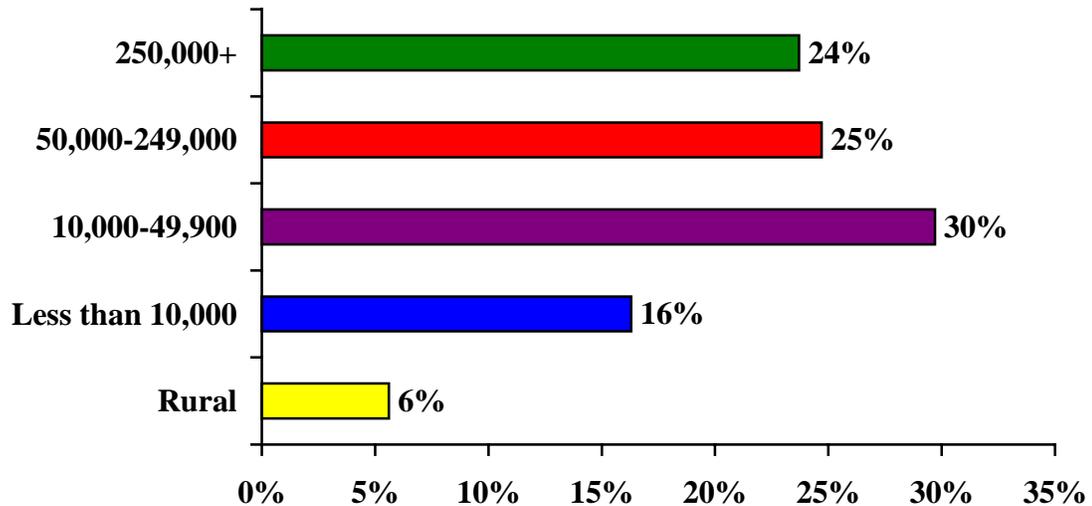
**Comparison**

**Size**

In the national FACT report 50% of all participating congregations were under 100 regularly participating adults. 33% were 100-349 members, 11% were 350-999 and 6% had 1000 or more members.

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### B. Location of Our Congregations



Our congregations tend to be located in the larger population areas:

Almost half (49%) of our congregations are in cities with 50,000 or more population. Of these:

- 24% are located in areas with a population of 250,000 or more.
- 25% are located in areas with a population of 50,000-249,000.

The rest of our congregations are distributed in this way:

- 30% are located in areas with a population of 10,000-49,900.
- 22% in areas less than 10,000 population.

### Comparison

#### Location

In the national sample, over half (52%) of the congregations are located in town and rural settings with populations of less than 10,000. These town and rural areas have the lowest number of UU congregations.

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### C. How well does each of the following statements describe your congregation?

	Very Well	Quite Well	Somewhat	Slightly	Not At All
Our congregation is like a close-knit family.	8.6%	30.0%	43.8%	15.0%	2.7%
Our congregation is spiritually vital & alive.	12.3%	44.0%	37.2%	6.0%	0.6%
Our congregation is working for social justice.	9.5%	29.5%	43.2%	16.1%	1.7%
Our congregation helps members deepen their relationship with God (or the Holy)	4.9%	20.2%	45.7%	22.7%	6.5%
We are trying in increase our racial/ethnic diversity.	5.0%	16.3%	37.5%	29.3%	11.8%
Our congregation celebrates its UU heritage.	18.4%	49.6%	25.8%	5.6%	0.4%
We are a moral beacon in our community.	11.3%	26.6%	39.5%	18.9%	3.7%
We welcome new ways of doing worship and ministry.	7.5%	33.8%	45.0%	12.5%	1.2%
Disagreements and conflicts are dealt with openly here.	6.4%	36.8%	39.9%	15.7%	1.2%
Our worship services are inspirational and uplifting.	17.0%	56.5%	23.3%	2.4%	0.8%
Our congregation has a strong racial/ethnic or national heritage it is trying to preserve.	1.9%	2.3%	8.9%	18.2%	68.7%
Members are excited about the future of our church.	29.5%	42.1%	21.7%	5.6%	1.0%
New members are easily incorporated into the life of our congregation.	9.4%	42.2%	40.8%	7.2%	0.4%
We have a clear sense of mission and purpose.	7.2%	32.9%	49.0%	9.1%	1.6%
Our congregation provides many opportunities for members to learn about their faith.	8.5%	33.5%	42.7%	14.3%	0.8%
Our programs and activities are well-organized.	7.5%	45.8%	39.8%	6.2%	0.8%
The community around the church is well informed about the activities taking place in our congregation.	4.3%	18.4%	34.2%	36.6%	6.6%

The survey asked the respondent to describe the characteristics of their Unitarian Universalist congregation, the most characteristic description that described the congregation “very well” was:

- “Members are excited about the future of the church,” (29.5%).

No other characteristic came close in the “very well” ranking. Interestingly enough, the survey results had more responses in the next ranking down, the “quite well” category. The highest response in this “quite well” was the statement:

- “Our worship services are inspirational and uplifting,” (56.5%).

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After the above, the next cluster of responses that ranked high as a statement that described the congregation “quite well”:

- "Our congregation celebrates it UU heritage," (49.6%).
- "Our programs and activities are well-organized," (45.8%).
- "Our congregation is spiritually vital and alive," (44.0%).

Combining the “very well” and the “quite well” rankings, the survey found the following characteristics as the most characteristic of Unitarian Universalist congregations:

- "Members are excited about the future of our church," (71.6%).
- "Our congregation celebrates its UU heritage," (68.0%).
- "Our congregation is spiritually vital and alive," (56.3%).
- "Our programs and activities are well organized," (53.3%).

On the other hand, not surprisingly the most uncharacteristic description of UU congregations was “Our congregation has a strong racial/ethnic or national heritage it is trying to preserve,” at 68.7%.

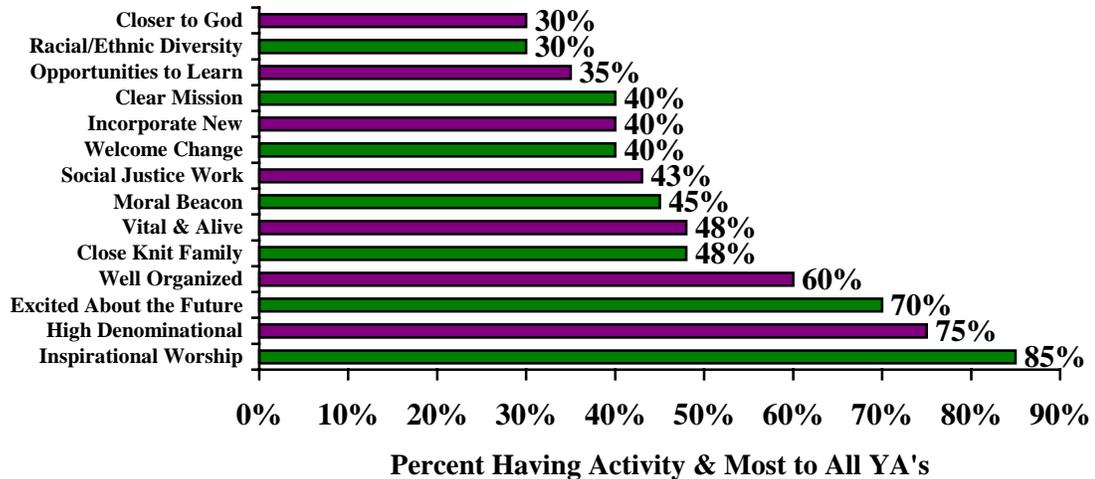
No other characteristic scored highest on a “not at all” ranking. However, when combining the “slightly” and “not at all” rankings the characteristics chosen as least definitive of our UU congregations were:

- "Our congregation has a strong racial/ethnic or national heritage that it is trying to preserve," (86.9%).
- "The community around the church is well informed about the activities taking place in our congregation," (43.3%).
- "We are trying to increase our racial/ethnic diversity," (41.1%).

A noteworthy point is that 43% of our congregations do not feel that the community, surrounding their congregation, is informed about the activities their congregation offers. At the same time, most of our congregations do not do much outreach or publicity in the community to inform the community about the congregation and its programs (see Section Five: Outreach and Community Service).

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### D. Characteristics of Young Adult Populated Congregations:



Among congregations that have a high percentage of young adults (60% or more of the membership) the statement chosen as most characteristic was:

1. “Our worship services are inspirational and uplifting,” (85%).

Of those congregations that have a high percentage of young adults, other statements chosen to characterize these congregations with a high number of young adults were:

2. “Our congregation celebrates its UU heritage,” (75%).
3. “Members are excited about the future of our church,” (70%).
4. “Our programs and activities are well organized,” (60%).

### E. Participants and Members

In this next segment, we examine some of the characteristics of the membership of our congregations as reported in the survey: age, income, education, commute to congregation, race/ethnicity and life-long Unitarian Universalists.

#### 1. Congregations with members 60 years old or over:

Among regularly participating members:

- 11% of our congregations reported that most to all (61% or more) of their regularly participating members are 60 years old or over.
- 26% of our congregations reported that "about half" (41-60%) of their regularly participating members are 60 or over.

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- 63 % of our congregations reported that “none to some” (or 40% or less) of the members are 60 years old or over.

### 2. Young Adults or persons 18-35 years old

We have a relatively small number of congregations that reported high percentages of young adults as regularly participating members. Only:

- 5% reported that “most to all” (61% or more of their membership) were young adults.
- 5% reported that they had 41-60% or about half of their membership.

A remarkable majority of our congregations reported that the percentage of regularly participating young adults is small:

- 90% of our congregations reported that they have 40% or less of their members who are young adults.

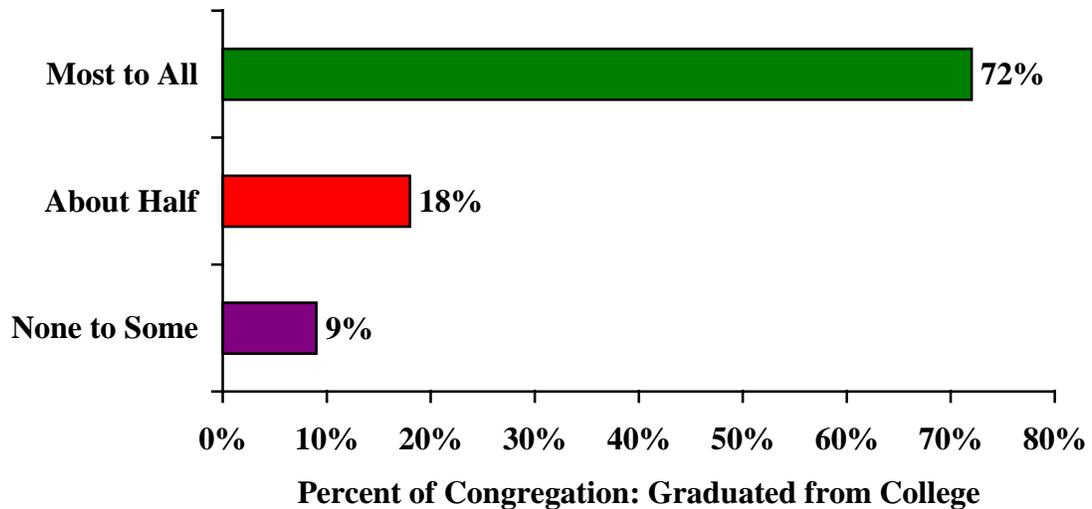
### Comparison

#### Age

In the national sample, the percentages were similar:

- 12% reported that most to all of their members are 60 years old or over.
- 21% reported that about half of their members are 60 years old or over.
- 67% reported that none to some of their members are 60 years old or over.

### 3. College Graduates



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Among UU congregations in the sample, 72 % said that “most to all” (that is 60% or more) of their participating adults are college graduates. 18% report that about half of their regularly participating adults are college graduates, 9% reported that less than half are college graduates.

### 4. Income Distribution

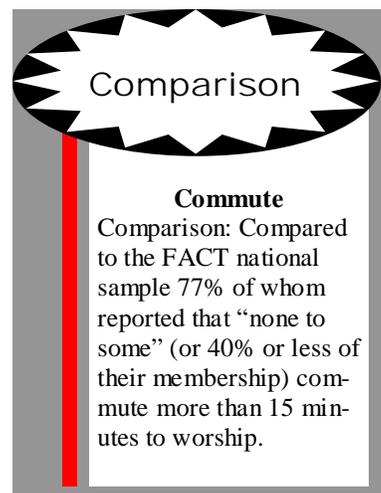
In our UU sample, 97% of the congregations said that “none to some” (i.e., less than 40%) of their regularly participating membership have a household income less than \$20,000. 2% of our congregations reported that "about half" (41-60%) of their membership have household incomes of \$20,000 or less.

63% of our congregations say that "none to some" (fewer than 40%) of their congregation’s regularly participating members have household incomes of \$75,000 or more. 24% say that "about half" (41-60%) of their regularly participating members have household incomes of \$75,000 or more. 13% report that “most to all” of their membership (that is 61% and above) have household incomes of \$75,000.

A larger percentage (40%) of our largest congregations (350-599 and 600 and above membership) report that “most to all” of its membership (60% or more) have household incomes of \$75,000 and above. Our smaller congregations (under 350) report a smaller percentage (19% or less of their membership) of household incomes of \$75,000 or more.

### 5. Members Commute

70% of our UU congregations reported that either “about half” or “most to all” of their membership commute more than 15 minutes to the congregation. Our membership tends to have higher percentages of the congregation that have longer commutes (perhaps due to the relatively lower number of UU congregations).



The graphic consists of a white starburst shape at the top containing the word "Comparison". Below it is a white rectangular box with a red vertical bar on the left side. Inside the box, the word "Commute" is written in bold, followed by a paragraph of text comparing the UU sample to the FACT national sample.

**Comparison**

**Commute**  
Comparison: Compared to the FACT national sample 77% of whom reported that “none to some” (or 40% or less of their membership) commute more than 15 minutes to worship.

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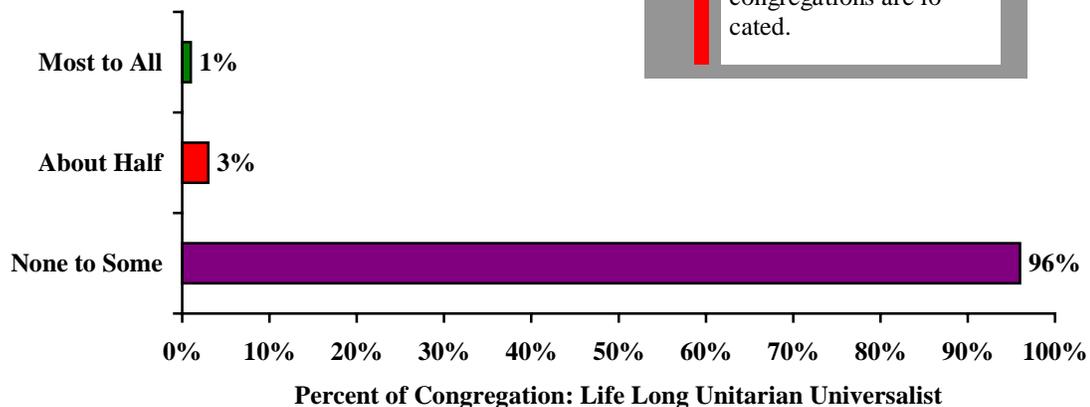
### 6. Racial and Ethnic Composition

Our congregations reported that the racial ethnic composition of their regularly participating membership is: 91% European American, 1.6% Latino, 2% African American, 2% Asian, 2.1 % Biracial or Multicultural and 1% Other.

**Comparison**

**Racial/Ethnic**  
In the national study, a congregation's participants tend to represent a mirror image of the racial composition of the zip codes in which their congregations are located.

### 7. Lifelong Member of Denomination



It is no surprise that we have a significant number of people who are not lifelong members of our denomination. 96% of our congregations reported that “none to some” (or less than 40%) of their members are lifelong Unitarian Universalists. This is “good news” and “bad news.” The good news is that we are attracting a significant number of people who are new to Unitarian Universalism. The “bad news” is that we are not retaining many of our members who grow up in our faith.

**Comparison**

**Life Long Members**  
In the FACT national data, 26% of the congregations report that “most to all” (61% or more) of their congregation's regularly participating members “grew up” in the faith of that congregation. 24% report that “at least half” of their members are life-long members of their denomination and 50% percent of the congregations report that a “none to some” (or 40% or less) of their members are life-long members of the congregation's denomination.

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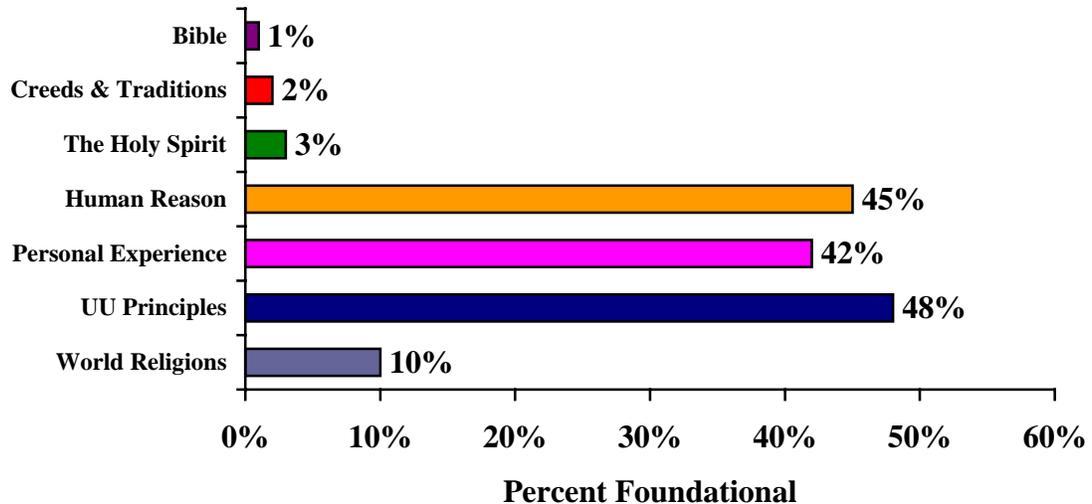
### **Reflection Questions:**

1. What is the profile of your congregation's participants (sex, age, race, education, income, lifelong UU, etc.)?
2. How does your congregation's profile compare to the overall profile of Unitarian Universalists presented in this report? How does your congregation's profile compare to the community that surrounds your congregation?
3. What are descriptions (in segment C: How well do each of the following statements describe your congregation?) that most represent your congregation currently? What are the descriptions that you would want to represent your congregation? Is there a difference?
4. Is "the community around your congregation well informed about the activities taking place in your congregation"? Why or why not? What actions can your congregation take to inform the community?

**SECTION TWO:  
SOURCES OF AUTHORITY AND  
DENOMINATIONAL HERITAGE**

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### A. Sources of Authority



The survey asked, “How important are the following sources of authority in the worship and teaching of your congregation?” Across the sample of UU congregations, three “sources” received the highest percentages. No single source among these three clearly stands out:

- Unitarian Universalist Principles (48%).
- Human reason (45%).
- Personal experience (42%).

Next, the survey forced the issue by asking respondents to choose the “*one source* of authority that is most important in your congregation’s worship and teaching.” Again, only three responses were characteristic of UU congregations. The distributions among the three most foundational are:

- Human Reason (37%).
- UU principles (33%).
- Personal Experience (24%).

The Bible, creeds, Holy Spirit and world’s religions received very low single digit responses from 1-2%.

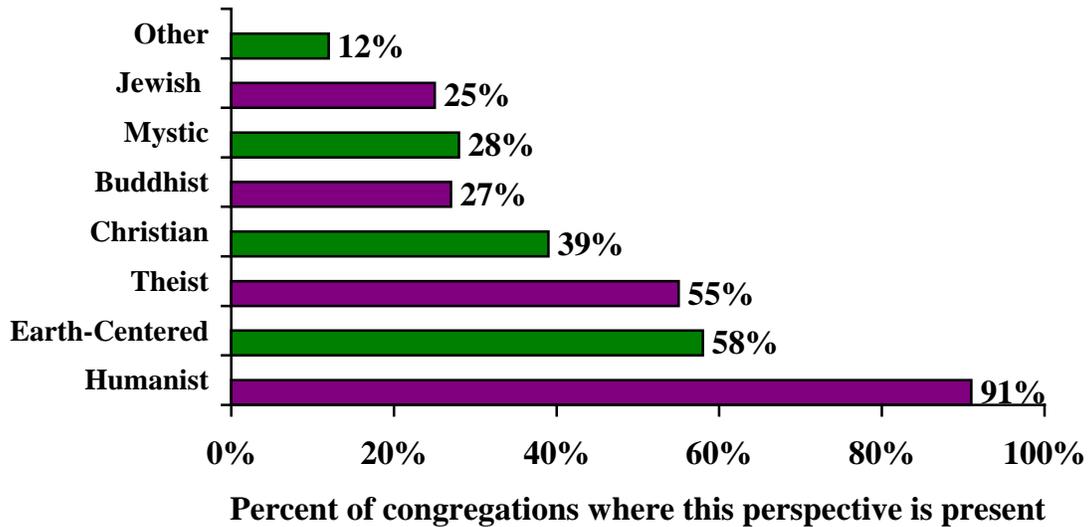
**Comparison**

**Sources of Authority**  
In the National FACT results, the sources of authority in the nation sample included Sacred Scripture (82%) and The Holy Spirit (60%) as the highest sources. Among Unitarian Universalists, these both got the lowest ranking (1 and 2 %).

The National Fact report states that, “While creeds, doctrines, reason and personal experience are important for a large number of congregations, they are acknowledged as foundational in relatively few.”

Some of the differences among the faith groups are to be expected. Baptists and Muslims are particularly oriented toward scripture. Assemblies of God and Nazarene are oriented toward the Holy Spirit.

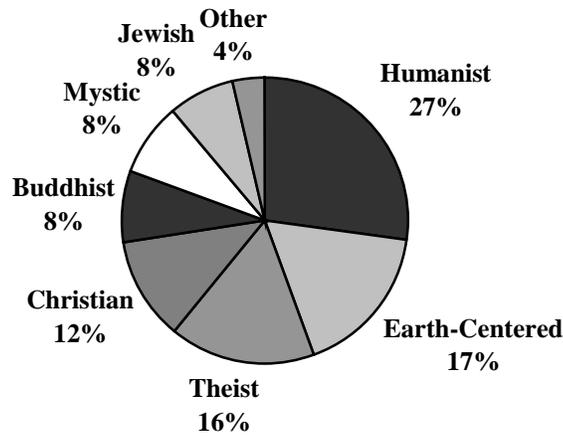
**B. Theological Perspectives Present within Our Congregations**



The survey asked “to check any of the following that best describes the primary theological perspective(s) of your congregation.” Consequently, a single congregation may have more than one theological perspective. In the total sample of congregations:

- 91% of the congregations indicated the presence of Humanist perspective represented in their congregation.
- 58% indicated the presence of Earth-Centered perspective represented.
- 55% indicated the presence of Theist perspective represented.
- 39% indicated the presence of Christian perspective represented.
- 28% indicated the presence of Mystic perspective represented.
- 27% indicated the presence of Buddhist perspective was represented.
- 25% indicated the presence of Jewish perspective was represented.
- 12% indicated the presence of “Other” perspectives was represented.

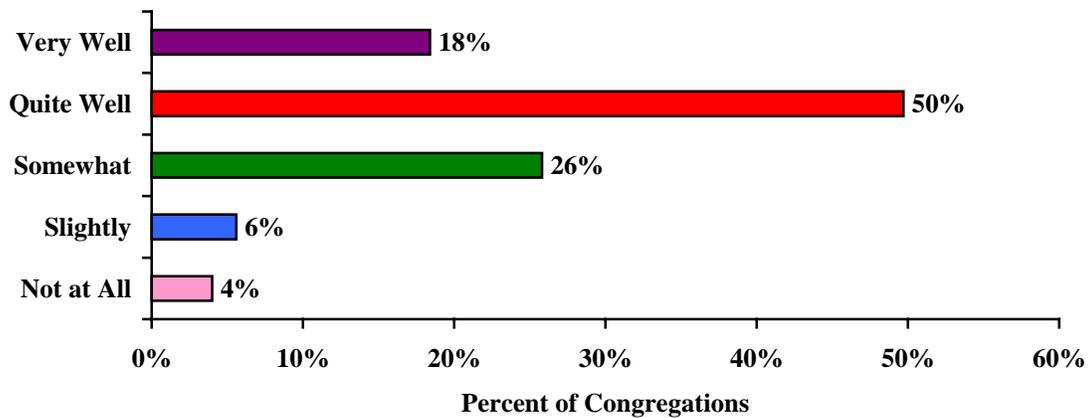
## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES



When all the responses to this question are represented proportionally:

- 28% of the total responses are Humanist.
- 18% are Earth-centered.
- 16% Theist.
- 12% Christian
- 8% Buddhist.
- 8% Mystic.
- 7% Jewish.
- 4% Other.

### C. Expressing Denominational Heritage



When asked if “our congregation celebrates its Unitarian Universalist heritage”, 50% replied “quite well”, and 18% said “very well”, for a total of 68%.

### **Summary: Sources of Authority**

Our association of congregations is distinctive in its plurality in both the “source” of authority that we use in our “religion-making” as well as in the theological perspectives present *across* our congregations and, in many cases, *within* our individual congregations. Our plurality provides both challenges and opportunities. One challenge is how to build a sense of cohesion as a congregation and as a religious movement in the midst of such plurality. Another challenge is how to provide a level of depth and discipline in any of the sources (reason, personal experience, etc.) or theological perspectives (e.g., humanism, Christianity, theism, etc.) so as to enrich our congregational life. We have an opportunity as Unitarian Universalists to utilize our plurality to deepen and enrich our Unitarian Universalist congregations and to model some of the personal and communal benefits of a pluralistic religious community and interfaith dialogue in the increasingly multi-faith societies in the United States and Canada.

The expression of our denominational heritage as Unitarian Universalists seems to be high in most of our congregation’s.

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. What are the characteristics of your congregation’s “sources of authority” and your congregation’s “theological perspectives”?
2. How evident is the plurality of perspectives in the worship, education, symbols and communication within your congregation?
3. What opportunities for theological dialogue and spiritual deepening exist in your congregation?
4. How does the image you present of your congregation reflect the actual perspectives within your congregation?
5. How will a visitor or people in your surrounding community know the distinctive characteristics of your Unitarian Universalist congregation?

### Comparison

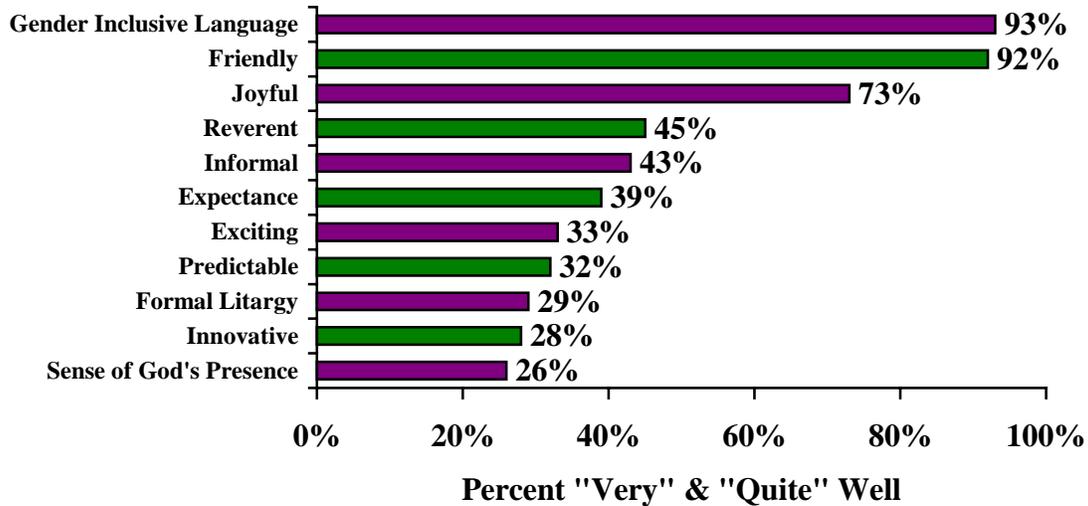
#### **Denominational Heritage**

In the National Fact report, 28% of the congregations surveyed stated that they express their denominational heritage “very well” and 34% reported that they expressed their denominational heritage “quite well.” This means that 62% of the congregations say they “reflect clear expressions of their denominational heritage.” This varies according to faith tradition—with stronger expression in those denominations with a distinctive racial/ethnic or national identity, and lesser expression in some of the Mainline Protestant denominations.

**SECTION THREE:  
CONGREGATIONAL WORSHIP**

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### A. Qualities of the Worship Service



When asked, "How well does the following describe your worship service with the largest attendance?" the most characteristic responses of our congregations were:

- "It uses gender neutral or inclusive language," (93%).
- "It is friendly," (92%).
- "It is joyful," (73%).

Less than half of our congregations describe their worship as:

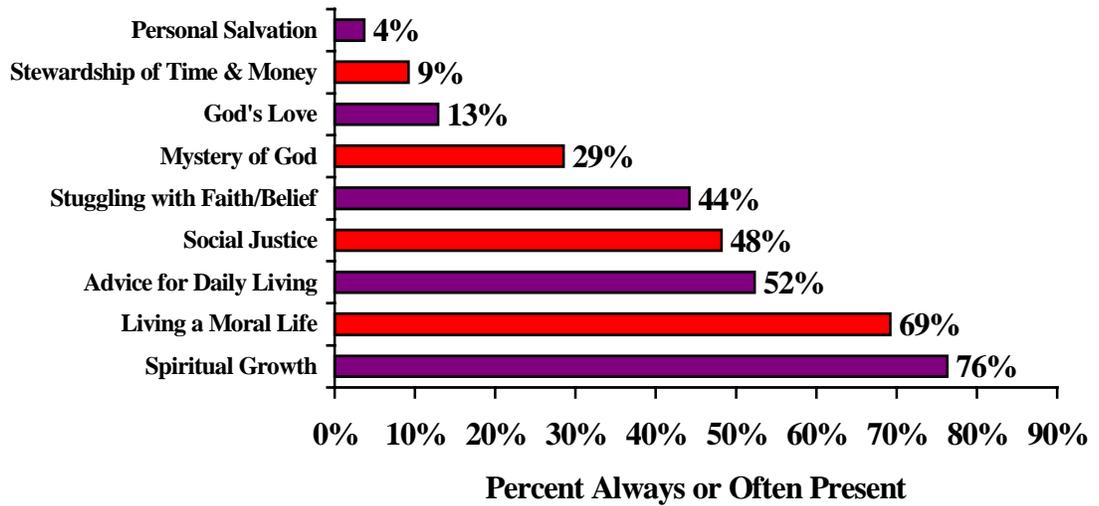
- "It is reverent," (45%).
- 

Less than a third of our congregations describe their worship as:

- "It is exciting," (33%).
- "It is innovative," (28%).
- "It has a sense of God's presence," (26%).

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### B. Focus of the Sermon



The most frequently cited topics of sermons in Unitarian Universalist congregations are:

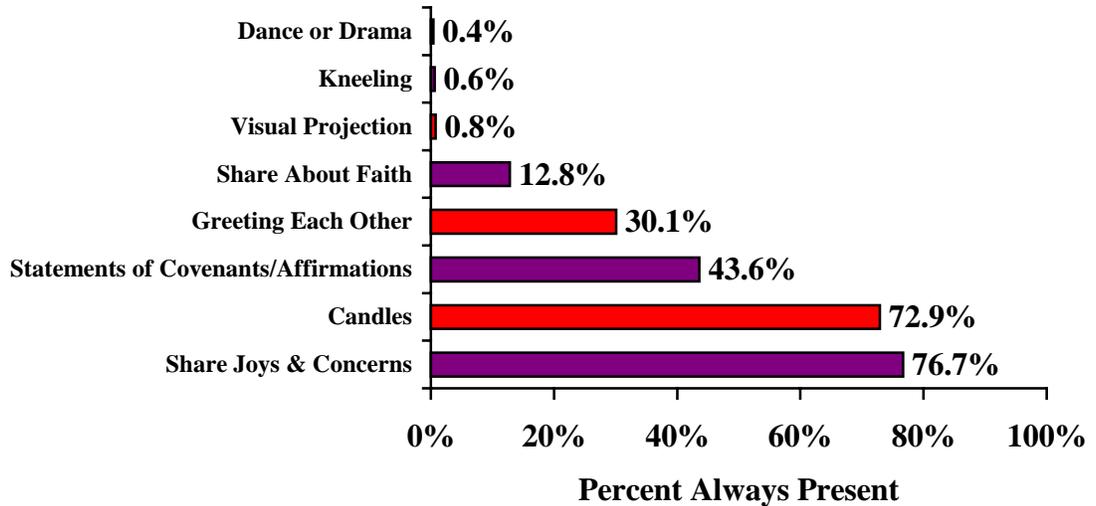
- “Personal Spiritual Growth” (76%).
- “Living a Moral Life” (69%).
- “Practical Advice for Daily Living” (52%).
- “Social Justice or Social Action” (48%).
- “Struggling with Faith and Belief” (44%).

On the other side of the spectrum, the least often the topics of the sermon are:

- “God’s Love and Care,” (13%).
- “Stewardship of Time and Money,” (9%).
- “Personal Salvation,” (4%).

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### C. Elements of Worship



The most common elements in the UU worship service are:

- “Sharing of Joys and Concerns” (77%)
- “The use of candles,” (which is most often used in the “sharing of joys and concerns”) (73%)

The next two most common are:

- "Reading/recitation of covenants or affirmations," (43%).
- “A time during worship for people to greet each other,” (30%).

### D. Musical Instruments

Our congregations did not report much variety in the use of musical instruments in their worship. The vast majority (76%) of our congregations always use organ or piano in their worship service, with the next two highest being always using recorded music (7%) and always using electronic keyboard (3%).

When asked what instruments are used “always” or “often” then there is more variety:

- Organ or piano (89%).
- Non-electronic strings or wind (25%).
- Recorded music (7%).
- Electronic keyboard (7%).
- Drums (5%).
- Electronic guitar (2.0%).

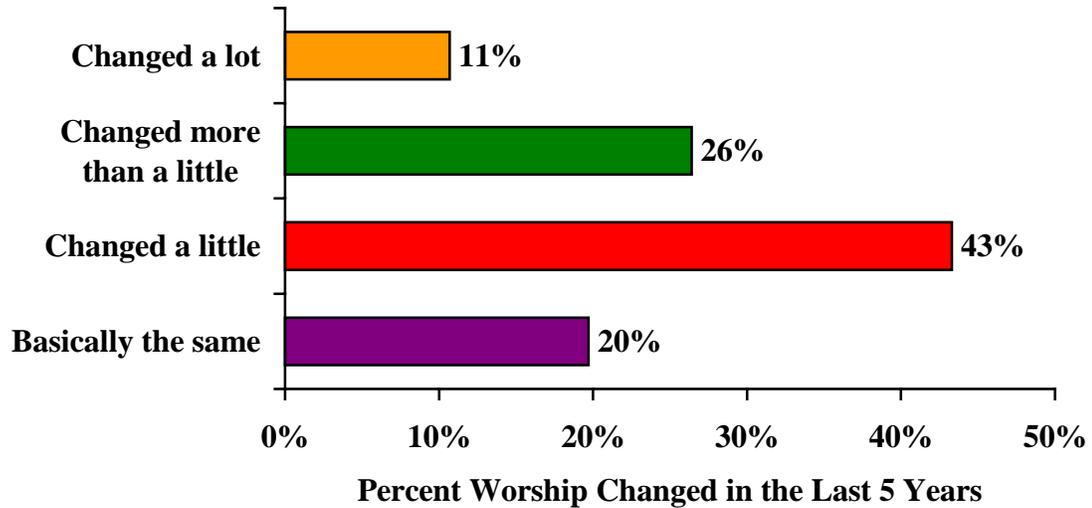
### Comparison

#### **Musical Instruments**

In the national FACT study, it was determined that “larger congregations of every faith group use a broad array of alternatives to provide their members with a rich diet of music and other energizing worship experiences. It is stated in this report that “Growth occurs when this diversity of nurturing worship accompanies good organization, caring for members and clear vision.”

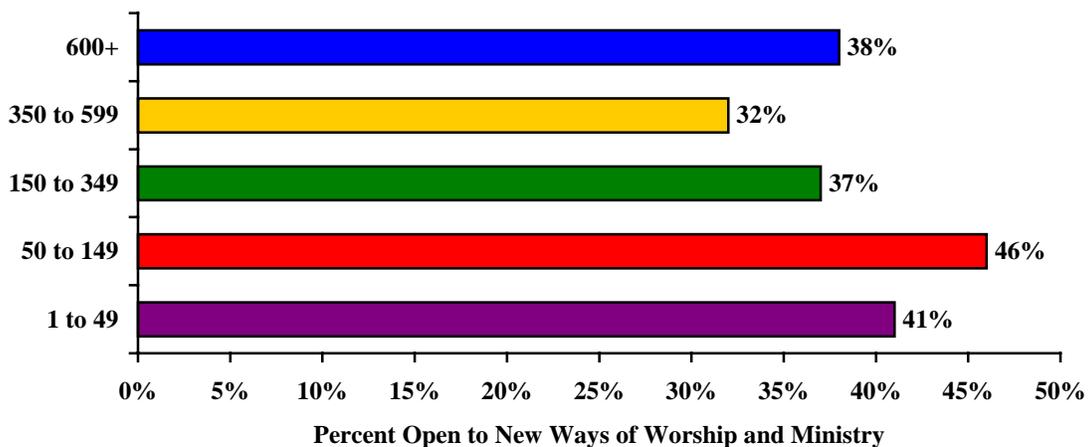
## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### E. Change in worship style over the last year



When asked, “In comparison to the style of your congregation’s primary worship service 5 years ago, would you say the style of your current primary worship service” has changed? Most of our congregations (43%) reported that it has “changed a little” and 37% state that their worship has either “changed more than a little” (26%) or “changed a lot” (11%).

### F. Congregation Size and Openness to New Ways of Worship and Ministry



Interestingly enough, although in the national FACT survey congregations of larger sizes tended to be more open to “new ways of worship and ministry,” in our UU

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

congregations, the size of the congregation did not seem to matter. In fact, our smaller congregations reported more “openness” than our larger congregations. This may be due to the variety of “programs” and worship in these smaller congregations and to the tendency of congregations in the 50-149 membership range who are considering increased or full time ministry.

Overall, less than half of our UU congregations of any size are “open to new ways of worship and ministry.”

### **Summary: Congregational Worship**

Our worship tends to be “joyful” and “friendly” and our sermons focus on personal spiritual growth and practical approaches to living a moral life or daily living. There is relatively less of a focus on sharing our faith or on reverence.

About a third of our congregations experienced a significant change in worship. Less than half our congregations are interested in changing their worship services.

### **Reflection Questions:**

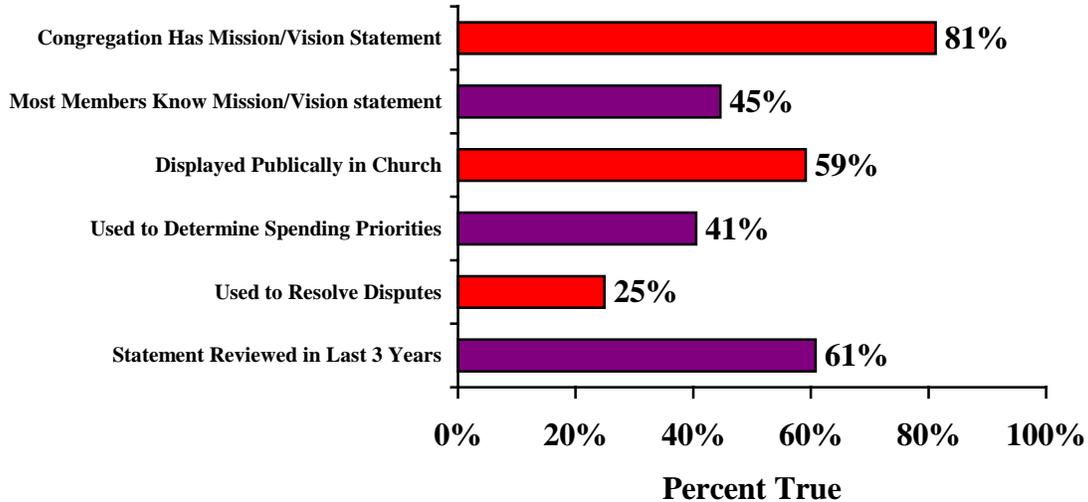
1. What characteristics would you use to describe your typical worship service?
2. What characteristics do you wish would describe your worship?
3. What is the gap between your aspiration for worship and its reality?
4. Does your worship service serve the needs of contemporary seekers and visitors or does it embody a need and style that reflects a particular generation or perspective?
5. What can you do regularly as a congregation to assess your congregation’s worship experience? Why would this be important for your congregation?

For further exploration of the worship of your congregation as it compares to other Unitarian Universalist congregations or other congregations of other faith traditions, go to the “Public Worship” section of the FACT Interactive Workbook at <http://fact.hartsem.edu>.

**SECTION FOUR:  
CONGREGATIONAL PROGRAMS**

# UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

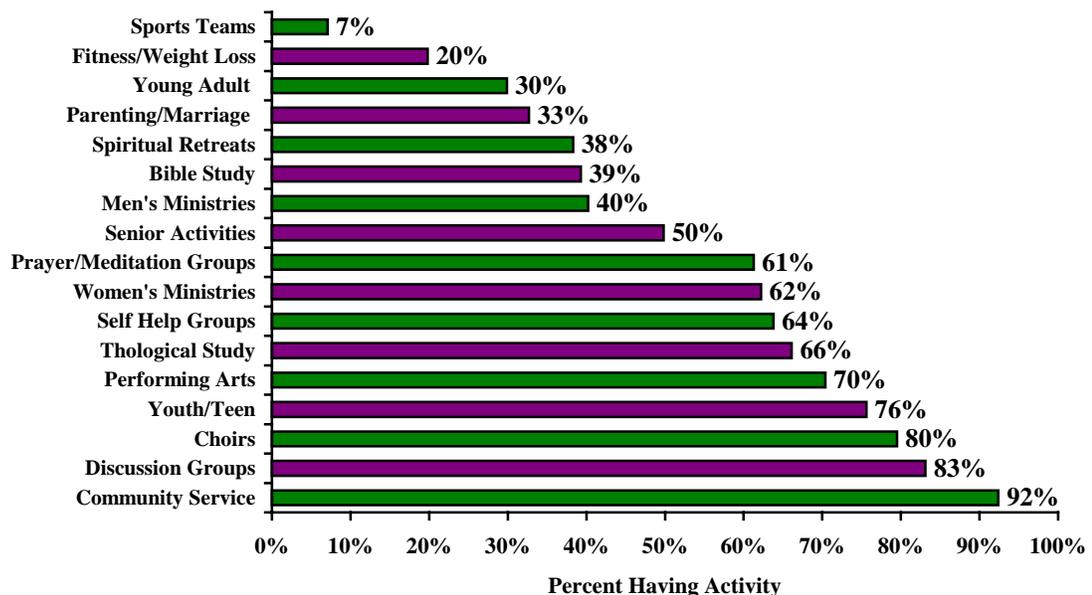
## A. Mission Statement and Its Use



A large majority (81%) of our congregations report having a mission or vision statement. Of these, 61% reviewed the statement within the last 3 years and 60% display their statement in the congregation.

Of those congregations that have a mission or vision statement, 45% report that their members know it and 40% claim to use it to determine their spending priorities.

## B. Programs Offered in Congregations



## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

When asked, “During the past 12 months did your congregation have any of the following programs”, a vast majority of our congregations (92%) offered "community service" and another high percentage (83%) offered “discussion groups.” The other most common programs in our UU congregations are:

- Choirs (79%).
- Youth/teen programs (75%).
- Performing arts (70%).
- Theological study (68%).
- Self-help/personal growth groups (66%).
- Prayer/meditation (65%).

The frequencies of these program offerings within the congregations are presented in Table 1 below. The ongoing programs tend to be: choir, discussion groups, community service and youth activities.

### Comparison

#### Programs

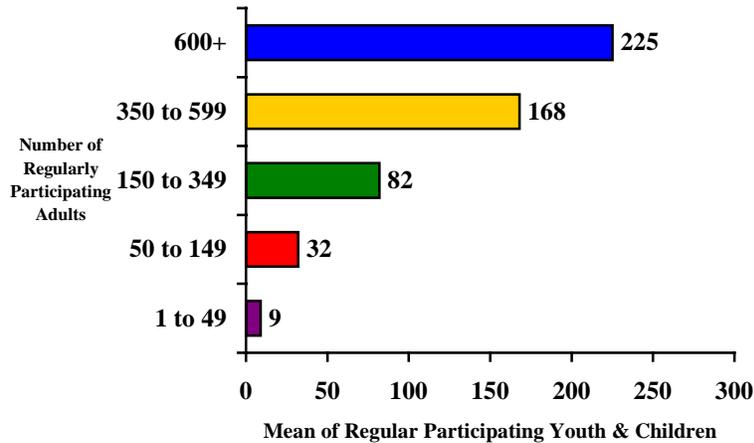
In the National FACT report, community service was high as well at 85%. However, “discussion groups” were only 40%, and “prayer and meditation” were higher at 82%. Scripture study was much higher among the other faith groups at 92% compared to the UU sample, which was at 42%.

Table 1: Congregational Activities Offered in the Last 12 Months:

	No	One-time/Short Term	On-going During a Season	On-going Thru the Year
Bible Study	57.5%	22.4%	11.3%	4.2%
Theological or Doctrinal Study	32.2%	35.8%	19.7%	8.0%
Prayer or Meditation Groups	36.8%	19.7%	15.1%	25.1%
Spiritual Retreats	58.2%	29.8%	5.5%	2.7%
Community Service	7.5%	29.7%	14.1%	51.1%
Parenting or Marriage Enrichment	63.6%	18.2%	9.0%	4.2%
Choir(s)	19.9%	10.7%	12.6%	55.4%
Other Performing Arts (music, drama, dance)	28.5%	40.1%	10.2%	18.9%
Groups That Discuss Books or Contemporary Issues	16.5%	20.2%	15.5%	48.3%
Self-help or Personal Growth Groups	34.1%	20.1%	16.6%	25.3%
Exercise, Fitness or Weight Loss Groups/Classes	75.7%	6.1%	3.4%	9.2%
Sports Teams	87.9%	1.5%	4.4%	1.3%
Youth/Teen Activities	23.9%	18.6%	10.0%	46.1%
Young Adult Activities	65.9%	12.5%	3.6%	12.3%
Senior Adult Activities	47.5%	12.1%	9.6%	26.8%
Men’s Ministries	56.2%	6.5%	5.9%	26.3%
Women’s Ministries	35.8%	8.0%	12.1%	40.5%
Other	8.1%	5.0%	3.3%	12.3%

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

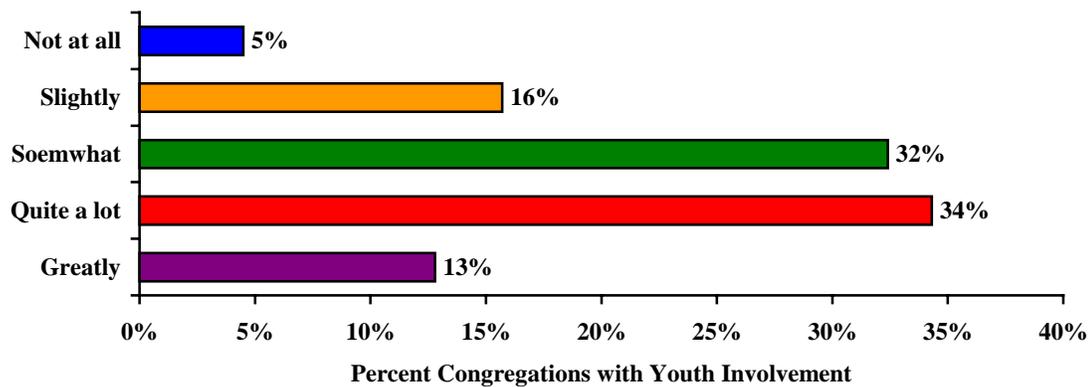
### C. Children and Youth in Religious Education by Congregation Size



The average number of participating children and youth in our congregations varies, as might be expected, by the size of the congregations:

- Congregations with 1 to 49 adults have an average of 9 youth and children.
- Congregations with 50-149 adults have an average of 32 youth and children.
- Congregations with 150-349 adults have an average of 82 youth and children.
- Congregations with 350-599 adults have an average of 168 youth and children.
- Congregations with 600 or more adults have an average of 225 youth and children.

### D. Involvement of Youth in Congregations

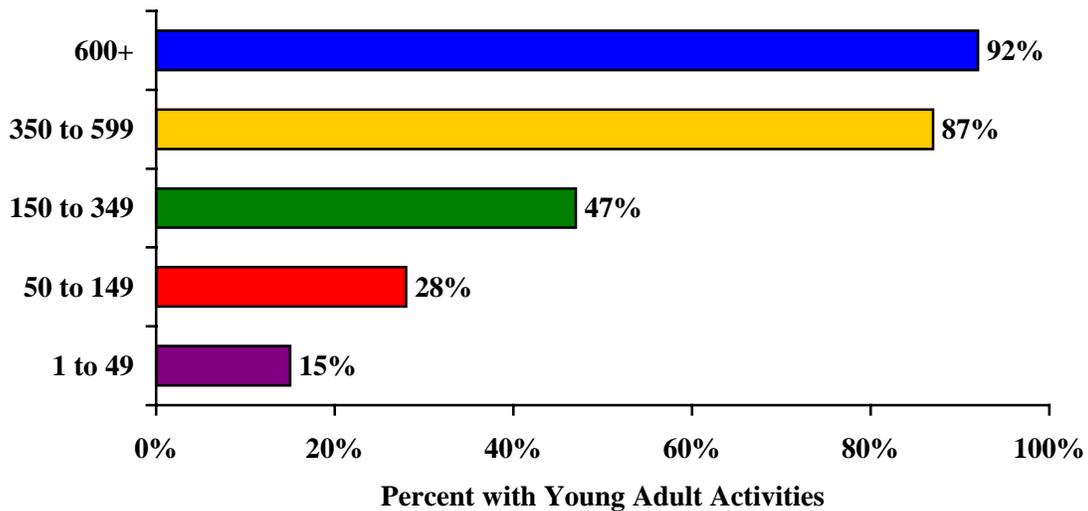


## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

When the survey asked congregations how involved their youth were in the religious life of the congregation:

- 5% of the UU congregations reported "not at all."
- 16% reported "Slightly."
- 32% reported "Somewhat."
- 34% reported "Quite a lot."
- 13% reported "Greatly."

### E. Young Adult Programs



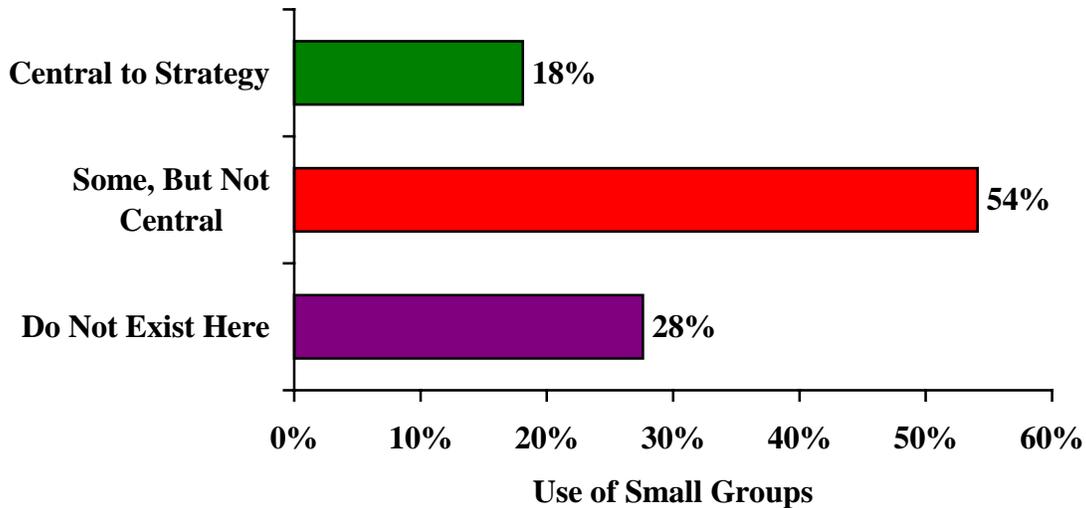
67% of our congregations do not have activities or programs specifically for young adults (18-35 year olds). Of the congregations that do offer Young Adult programming:

- 12% offer one-time/short term activities.
- 4% offer on going or during a season activities.
- 12% offer programs that are ongoing throughout the year.

Of the 28% of the congregations that do offer young adult programs, most of these occur in the larger congregations—with 92% of the programs offered in large congregations and 87% in the larger mid-size congregations.

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### F. Small Groups in our Congregations



Interest in small groups and small group ministry seemed to increase in recent years within our Unitarian Universalist congregations. This question in the survey asked more specifically if small groups were utilized (i.e., not specifically what has come to be called “small group ministry”) and how central were these small groups to the congregation’s “strategy for spiritual growth”. 18% of the congregations in the UU sample reported that these are “central to our strategy for spiritual growth.”

### Summary: Congregation Programs

Most of our congregations have mission statements (80%). Yet, the mission of a congregation is more than its statement about its mission. How a congregation actually *lives out* that mission in its programs within its congregation and within the surrounding community is what gives the “mission” of a congregation meaning.

A vast majority (92%) of our congregations reported doing some kind of community service over the last 12 months (the various community services offered are discussed in Section Five: Outreach and Community Service.) Our congregations also offer a variety of programs for personal and spiritual growth and learning.

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### **Reflection Questions**

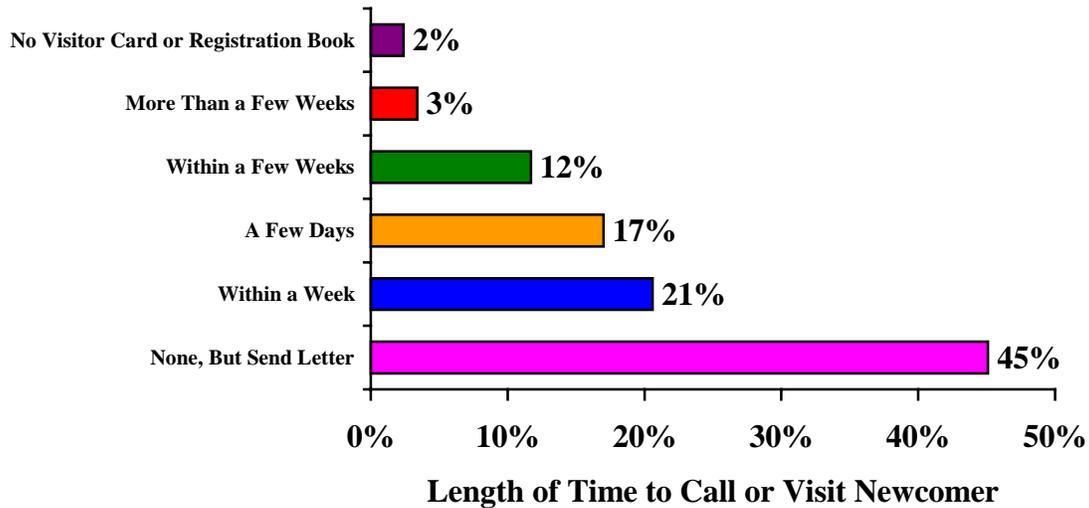
1. What programs does your congregation offer? How do these programs express the overall mission (or guiding purposes) of your congregation?
2. Are there some patterns (topics, schedule, etc.) in your programming that are worth noting? Could these patterns unintentionally exclude persons in your congregation or the community from participating?
3. Do your programs mostly focus inward—i.e. on the needs of your gathered congregation? Are there ways that your programs could also serve the needs and aspirations of people in the surrounding community?
4. What is one program that you offer as your congregation's unique gift to your surrounding community? How will you make this available?

For further exploration on the programming of your congregation as it relates to other Unitarian Universalist congregations or other congregations of other faith traditions, go to the “Spiritual Growth” section of the FACT Interactive Workbook at <http://fact.hartsem.edu>.

**SECTION FIVE:  
OUTREACH AND COMMUNITY SERVICE**

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### A. Follow-up of Visitors



The survey asked, “If someone visited your church and indicated that they were a visitor in a visitor’s book, or on a visitor’s card, how long would it take on average before they received a visit or phone call from the church?”

Many of our congregations do not follow up with a visit or a phone call. Less than half, 45% send a letter. 20% report that they do call or visit within a week and 17% report calling or visiting with a few days.

Congregations in our sample reported making from 0 to 40 visits/calls per month. On the average our congregations make about 3 visits/phone calls per month.

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### **B. Reaching out to Prospective or Less Active Members**

	Done in Last 12 Months	No...But Members Would Support this Activity	No...But Members Would Not Support this Activity
Advertisements or Stories Local Newspaper	86.8%	12.0%	1.2%
Radio or Television Advertisements	20.4%	48.4%	31.2%
Direct Mail or Distribution to Area Residents	12.3%	45.1%	42.6%
A Programmed Growth or Outreach Program	11.6%	70.5%	17.9%
Efforts to Identify and Contact New Residents	6.2%	62.0%	31.9%
Stressing Importance of Faith Sharing	34.6%	40.4%	24.9%
Special Worship Services Intended to Attract to Unchurched	32.7%	56.8%	10.5%
Special Programs to Attract the Unchurched	35.1%	53.8%	11.0%
Phone Calls or Visits by the Ministerial Staff	41.0%	42.0%	17.0%
Phone Calls or Visits by the Lay Members	42.8%	37.2%	20.0%

UU congregations tend to be very limited in their actual use of publicity or outreach methods. The majority of our congregations (86%) rely on advertisements or stories in the local newspaper to inform prospective members about their congregation.

Also, the results do not show much consensus on practices for “reaching out” beyond this in our congregations. For example, even though 43% reported calls or visits by lay members in the last 12 months, 37% said that they have not done this. Also, even though 41 % of our congregations reported phone calls or visits by ministerial staff in the last 12 months, 42% have not done this in the last 12 months. 43% of our congregations would not support “direct mail or distribution to area residents” and 45% said they have not done it but their members would support it.

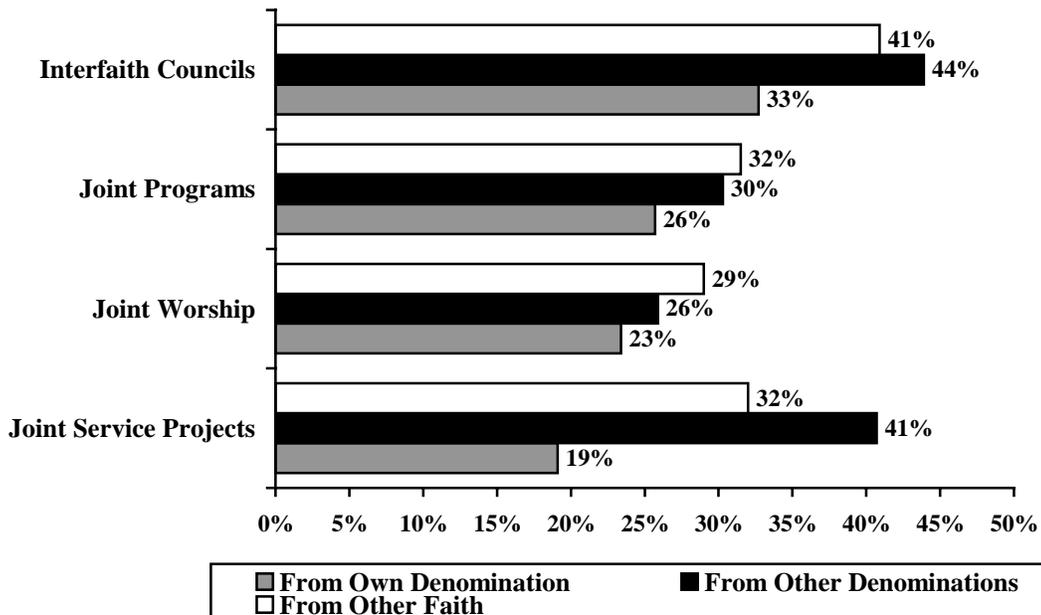
UU congregations said that they would support several outreach strategies, but they have *not* actually done them over the last twelve months:

- 70% said that they would support a programmed growth or outreach program, but they have not done it over the last twelve months

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- 62% of our congregations reported that they would support “efforts to identify and contact new residents.”
- 57% would support “special worship services to attract new members.”
- 54% would support “special programs to attract the unchurched.”

### C. Interfaith Activities



26% to 41% of our congregations reported joining with other Christian denominations for activities that include joint worship, joint projects or programs, or interfaith councils.

We also have a relatively high percentage of our congregations involved in activities with “other faith traditions” (i.e., interfaith, not specifically other Christian congregations) during the last 12 months (before filling out the survey).

- Interfaith councils (41%)
- Interfaith programs or joint service projects (31%)
- Joint worship services (29%)

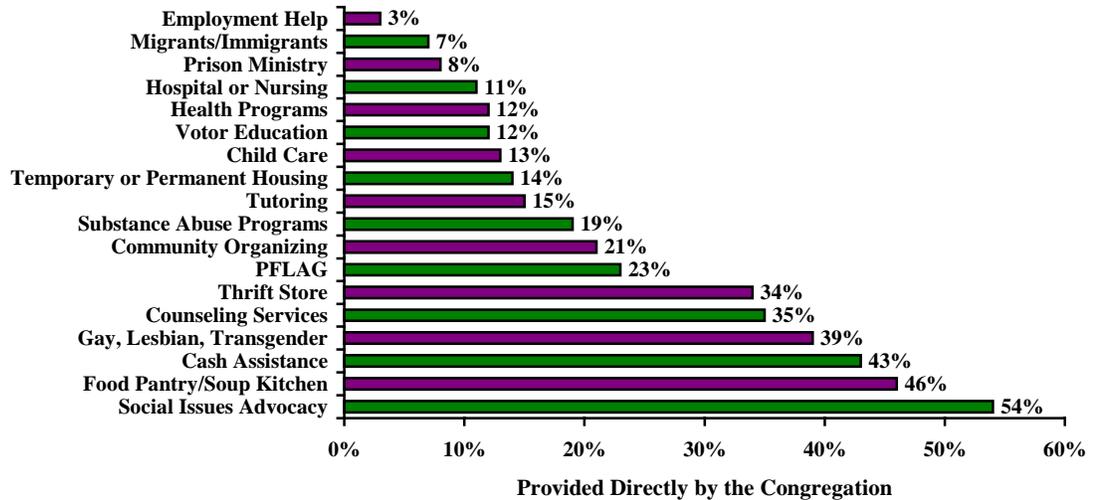
### Comparison

#### **Interfaith Activities**

In the National FACT report, 45% of congregations reported joint worship with other denominations and much fewer (7%) with other faith traditions. 60% of other liberal or moderate Protestant groups report worshipping together. Around 50% of other liberal or moderate Protestant congregations are involved in joint outreach ministries.

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### D. Community Service Activities



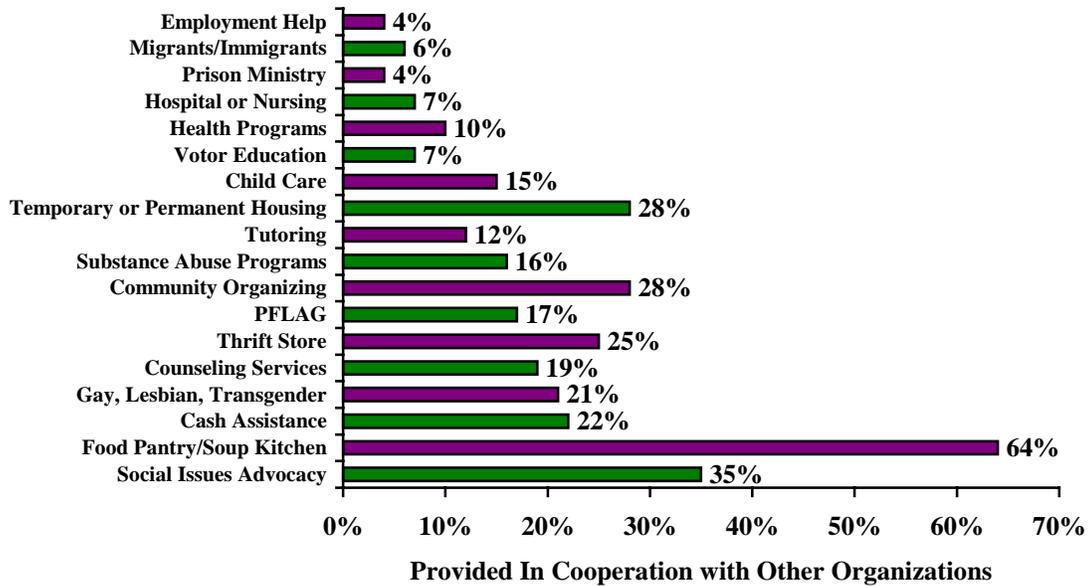
Our congregations offer a variety of social outreach programs. The highest percentages of our congregations offer the following types of activities:

- Social issues advocacy (54%).
- Food pantry/soup kitchen (46%).
- Cash assistance (43%).
- Gay lesbian and transgender groups (39%).
- Thrift store (34%).
- PFLAG (Parents and Friends of Lesbian and Gays) (23%).

The range of people served by these congregation's program is anywhere from 0 to 2500 people per month. The average number of people served by our congregations is 127, with most congregations serving about 100 people per month in their various outreach programs.

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### E. Community Service Activities with Other Faith Groups



Most of our congregations (64%) work with other faith groups or organizations in food pantry or soup kitchen service to the community. Other outreach activities done in conjunction with other organizations or faith groups in provide:

- Community organizing (28%).
- Temporary or permanent housing (28%).
- Thrift store (25%).
- Cash assistance (22%).

#### **Summary: Outreach and Community Service**

Most of our congregations have a minimal response to newcomers or visitors to their congregation (e.g., they mail a letter). Also, most of our congregations rely solely on a newspaper ad or an occasional local story to inform the surrounding community about their congregation and its activities.

Although our congregations said that they would support being more pro-active in their outreach to the “unchurched” and others in the surrounding community—few actually do this. Consequently, one wonders if the materials and resources were available would our congregations actually use them? Many of our congregations report that their surrounding communities do not know them—yet these same congregations are not doing much to be known within their community.

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. What are your current practices for reaching out to new comers or visitors to your congregation?
2. What is the first impression a visitor would have of your congregation given your typical response to their visit?
3. What resistances to being more proactive in reaching out to people within your community are present in your congregation or its activities? How do these resistances to proactive outreach impact your congregation's presence in the community?

Community activities are one way that our congregations embody their religious values and become known as a resource within the community. Congregations vary in their capacity to do outreach because of their own resources. For example, larger congregations tend to have more resources and thus provide more outreach programs. Our congregations are most involved in social issues advocacy, food pantry and cash assistance—and our congregations tend to be least involved in direct services to people in need (tutoring, prison ministry, substance abuse programs). Yet, we have some distinct areas of community outreach (Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays; Gay, lesbian and transgender groups, etc.).

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. What are your congregation's primary community outreach programs? What is the relative proportion of social advocacy to direct service?
2. What do these outreach programs communicate to your community about your religious values as a congregation and about your commitment to emerging concerns and aspirations in your local community?
3. How do you want to be known in your community?
4. What ways does your congregation discover the needs within its local community and discern your response?
5. Do you “walk your talk” about social justice and compassion through your actual presence in the community? How?

To explore more on the outreach to prospective members and community outreach of your congregation in comparison to UU or other faith congregations, go to the “Inviting and Including” and the “Community Outreach” sections of the Interactive Workbook on the FACT website at <http://fact.hartsem.edu>.

**SECTION SIX:  
CONFLICT IN UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST  
CONGREGATIONS**

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### A. Types of Conflict in Congregations

	No	Very Serious	Moderately Serious	Not Very Serious
Theology	50.7%	3.0%	16.4%	28.4%
Money, Finances, Budget	34.8%	7.5%	28.7%	29.1%
How Worship is Conducted	42.7%	3.7%	15.9%	37.8%
Program/Mission Priorities or Emphasis	44.6%	4.2%	18.3%	32.9%
Who Should Make a Decision	45.3%	9.6%	19.7%	25.4%
Minister's Leadership Style	49.4%	19.2%	15.3%	16.1%
Minister's Personal Behavior	72.1%	8.9%	6.2%	12.8%
Member's Personal Behavior	44.0%	10.4%	22.3%	23.3%

The survey asked, “During the last 5 years has your congregation experienced any disagreements or conflicts in the following areas?” The areas in which conflict of any level of severity were most reported were:

- Money, Finances, Budget (65%).
- How worship is conducted (57%).
- Member's personal behavior (56%).
- Program/Mission priorities or emphasis (55%).
- Who should make a decision (55%).

Congregations reported few areas where serious conflict existed, and relatively few congregations reported very serious conflict. 19% of our congregations reported that conflict over “minister's leadership style” was “very serious.” 10% stated that “member's personal behavior” was a source of “very serious conflict.”

When combining the “very serious” and the “moderately serious”, the strongest areas of conflict among our congregations are listed below (note that these conflicts are serious in only 29-36% of the congregations responding.):

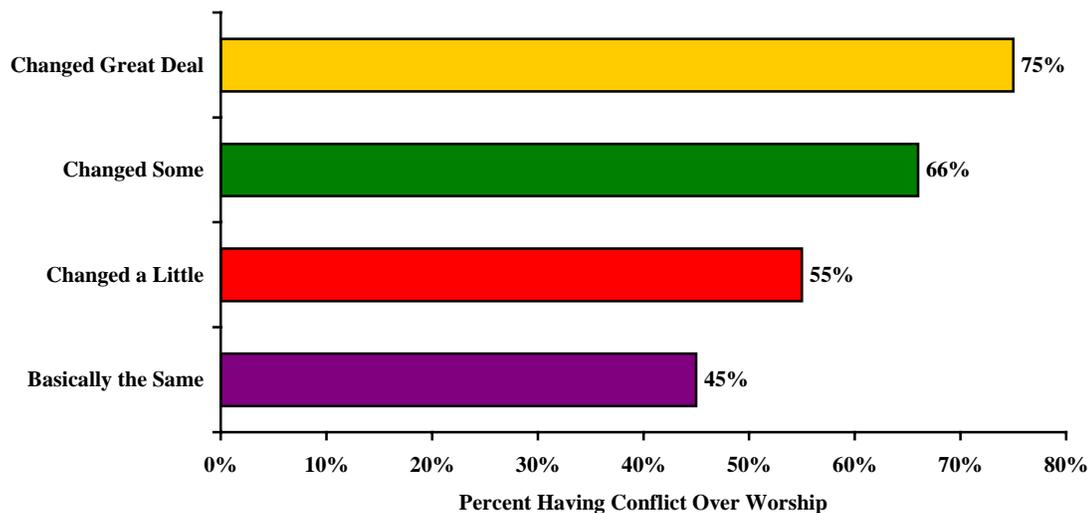
## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

- “Money, Finances and Budget” (36%).
- “Minister’s Leadership Style” (34%).
- “Member’s personal behavior” (32%).
- “Who should make a decision” (29%).

Respondents were also asked to what degree does the following statement describe their congregations, “Disagreement and conflict are dealt with openly.” Conflict and disagreement are dealt with

- “Very well” in 6% of the congregations
- “Quite well” in 38 % of the congregations
- “Somewhat” in 40% of the congregations
- “Slightly” in 16% of the congregations
- “Not at all” in 1% of the congregations

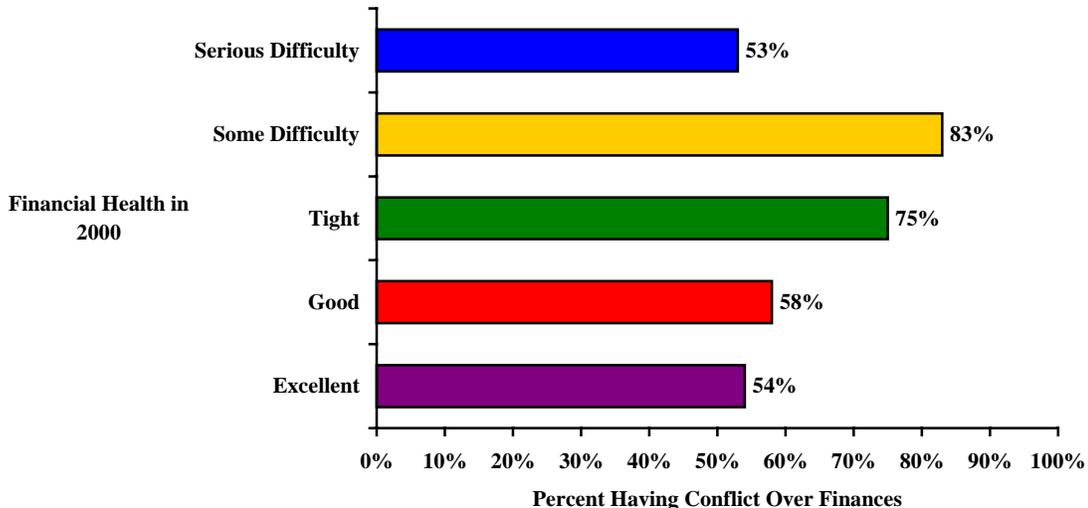
### **B. Worship and Conflict**



Of those congregations that experienced conflict over worship, a higher percentage (75%) of that conflict was over changing the worship a “great deal.” Yet, conflict also occurs over worship in churches that changed it “some” (66%) and even those congregations that changed worship “a little” (55%).

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### C. Finances and Conflict



Of those congregations that reported having conflict over “Money, finances or budget”, 53% of those congregations had “serious difficulty” with their financial health in 2000, 83% had “some difficulty” with their financial health in 2000 and 75% reported that their finances were “tight.”

### Summary: Conflict

Less than half of our congregations (44%) report that they deal with disagreement and conflict in an open way. The strongest areas of conflict are in finances, minister’s leadership style, member’s personal behavior and “who should make a decision.” Yet these areas of conflict are only present in 29-36% of our congregations.

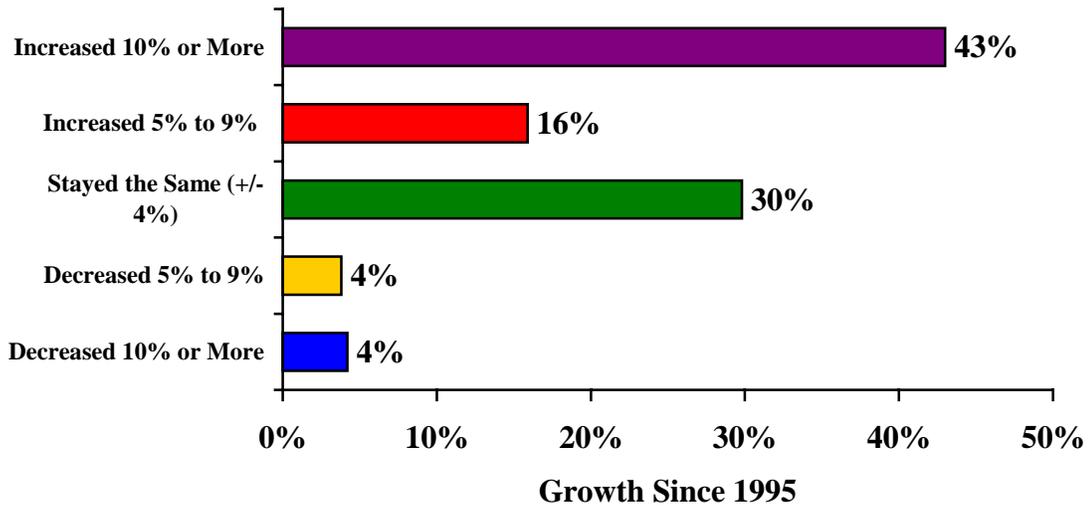
#### Reflection Questions:

1. Does your congregation deal with disagreement and conflict openly? What examples do you have to support your assessment?
2. What are the areas of congregational life in which there is the most disagreement or conflict?
3. What procedures or processes do you have in place for dealing with conflict in a constructive and effective way?
4. What are the healthy behavioral norms in your congregation? Are there some norms that are unhealthy and disruptive to your congregational life?

To explore more on “conflict” and compare your congregation to other UU congregations or congregations from other faith traditions, go to the “Managing and Leading” section of the Interactive Workbook on the FACT website at <http://fact.hartsem.edu>.

**SECTION SEVEN:  
GROWTH AND CHANGE IN UNITARIAN  
UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATIONS**

**A. Growth of Regularly Participating Members**



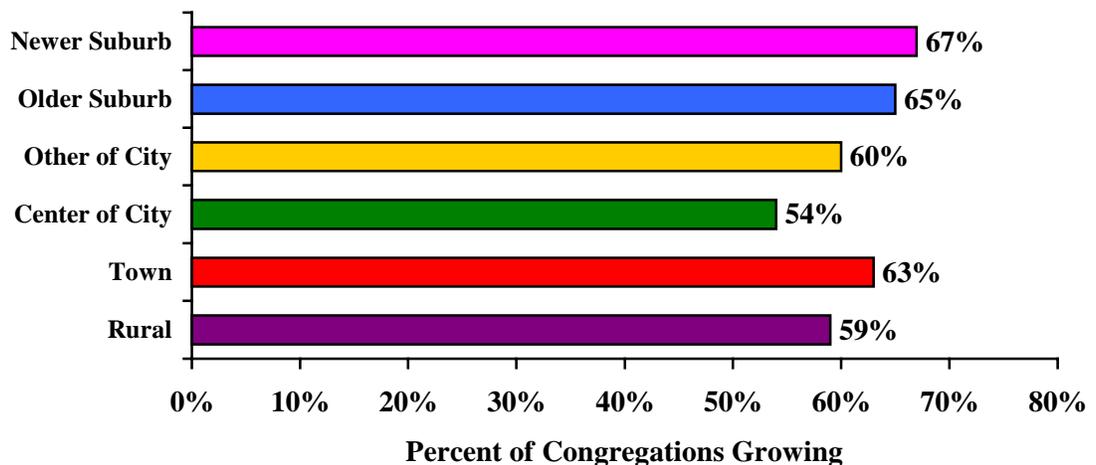
More than half (61%) of our congregations reported growth since 1995. Of these growing congregations, 43% reported 10% or more growth and 16% reported growth of 5 to 9%. About a third (30%) of our congregation plateaued (i.e., reported a 4% increase or decline). 4% have decreased 5 to 9% and 4% decreased 10% since 1995.

**Comparison**

**Growth**

In the National FACT report, 50% of the congregations reported growing in the last five years. Of these, 34% increased 10% or more.

**B. Location of Growth**



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67% of our growing congregations are located in the newer suburbs and 65% are located in the older suburbs and 63% are located in towns. We have fewer growing congregations located in the Center of City (54%).



### **C. Descriptions of the Congregation**

Those congregations that have grown significantly in the last five years described their congregations in this way:

- Our congregation is spiritually vital and alive (72%).
- Our congregation celebrates its UU heritage (74%).
- Our worship services are inspirational and uplifting (81%)
- Members are excited about the future of our church (89%).
- New members are easily incorporated into the life of our congregation (64%).

### **D. Space needs:**

71% of those high growth congregations (i.e. 10% or more) and 72% of those congregations that have grown 5-9% in the last five years need more educational space. From 63-66% of these congregations need more fellowship and parking space as well.

48% of the fastest growing congregations need more worship space, 45% of those that have grown 5-9% need more worship space.

Of those congregations that have increased 10% or more, about 80% reported that their worship space is more than 80% full and 34% of high growth congregations report that they are "completely full, with some people standing."

### **E. Advertising and Outreach**

The high growth congregations reported more of the following activities than the declining congregations:

- Special programs (parenting classes, single nights, festivals) intended to attract the unchurched in the community (38%).
- Phone calls or visits by the minister (43%).
- Phone calls or visits by lay members (45%).

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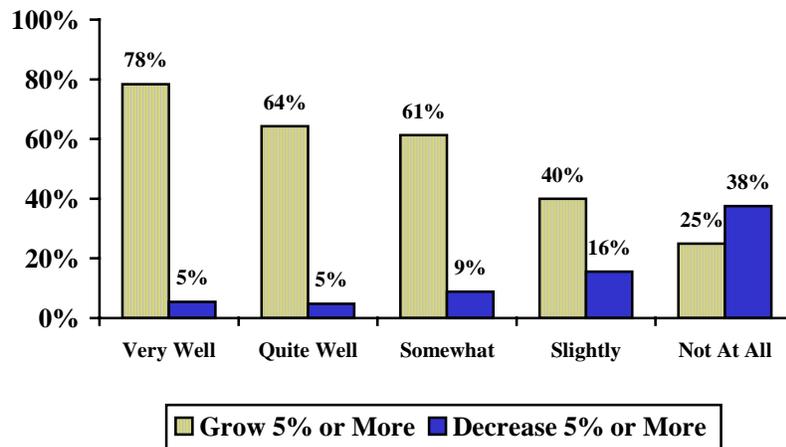
No significant differences existed in advertising or direct mail between the high growth congregations (10% growth or more) and the steepest declining congregations (10% decline or more). 87-91% of both groups reported ads or stories in their local newspapers. Less than 13 % of either the high growth or steepest declining congregations use direct mail or a programmed growth or outreach program.

### **F. Characteristics of the Ministers in the Fastest Growing Congregations**

The distinguishing characteristics of the ministers within our high growth congregations (that is congregations that have grown 10% or more in the last 5 years) are:

- Knows how to get people to work together (82%).
- Knows how to get things done (78%).
- Effective administrator (66%).
- Charismatic leader (63%).

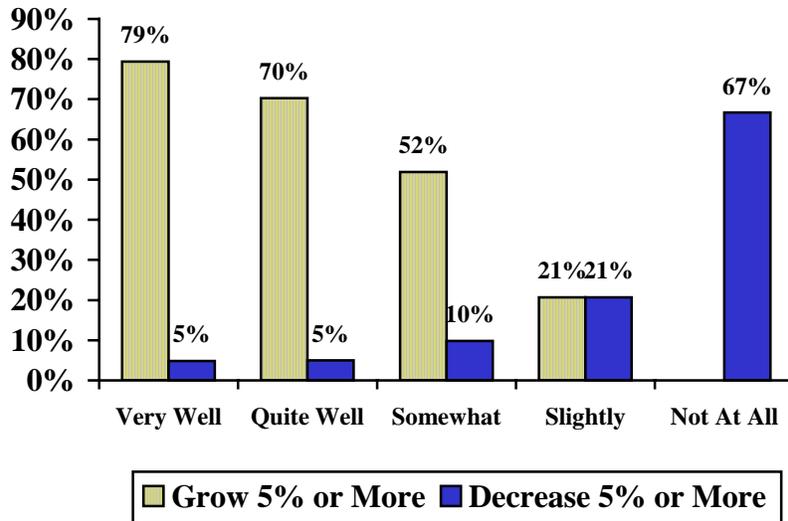
### **G. Growth and Clear Mission and Purpose**



Congregations that described themselves as having a “clear sense of mission and purpose” show some correlation (but not strong) with congregational growth. Congregations that declined are least likely to describe themselves as having a “clear senses of mission and purpose.”

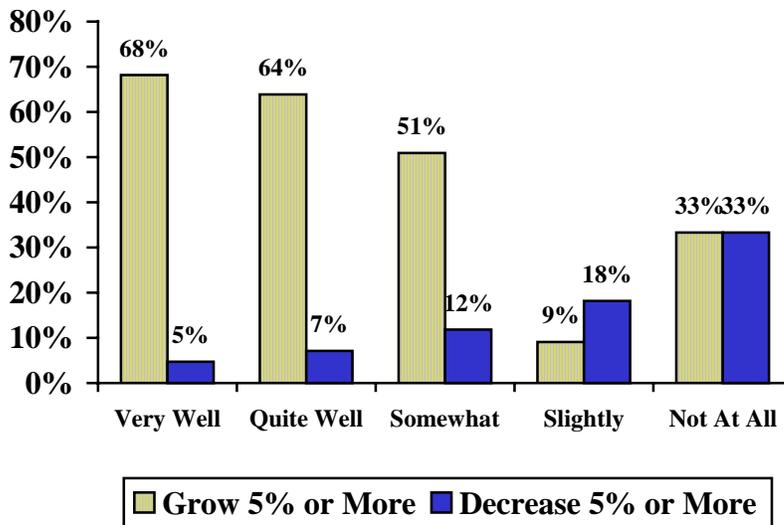
## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### H. Growth and Vital and Alive Congregation



A strong correlation exists between growth and congregations that report being “spiritually vital and alive.” Those congregations that have declined are least likely to describe themselves as “spiritually vital and alive.”

### I. Growth and Inspirational and Uplifting Worship



Likewise, those congregations reporting growth of 5% or more over the last five years are more likely to state that “Our worship services are inspirational and uplifting.”

**Summary: Growth and Change**

Growth in Unitarian Universalist congregations seems to be correlated most strongly with congregations described as “spiritually vital and alive”, “members are excited about our future” and “our worship services are inspirational and uplifting.”

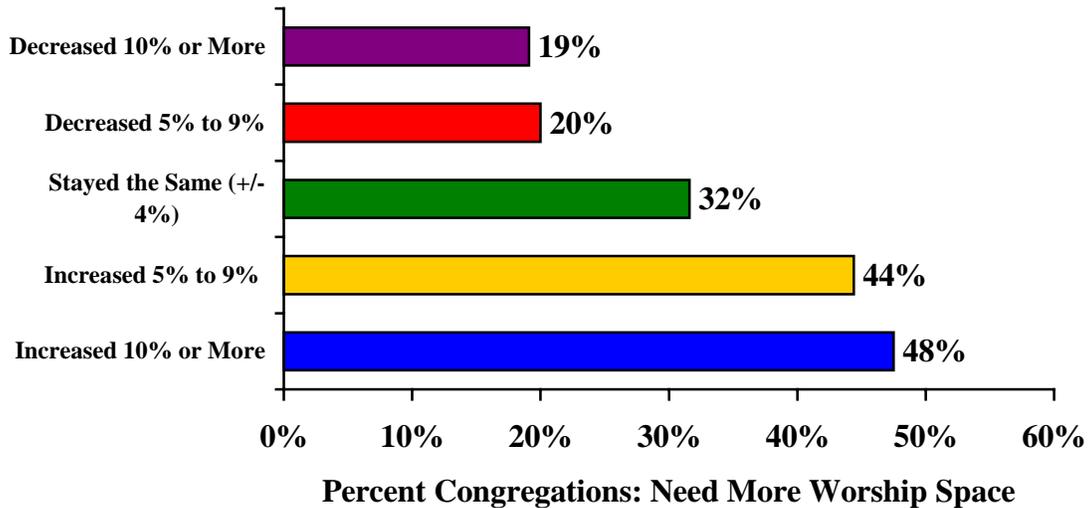
**Reflection Questions:**

1. How would you assess your congregation on each of these characteristics: (a) spiritually vital and alive (2) members are excited about our future and (c) inspirational and uplifting worship? What examples could you give to support your assessment?
2. What internal (to the congregation) factors inhibit your congregation’s growth? What external (in the surrounding community) factors impact your congregation’s ability to grow? If you want to grow as a congregation, what changes will you need to make either internally or in your relationship to the surrounding community?
3. What is the relative attention given to worship, future directions or spiritual growth and vitality within your congregation?

**SECTION EIGHT:  
FACILITIES AND FINANCES**

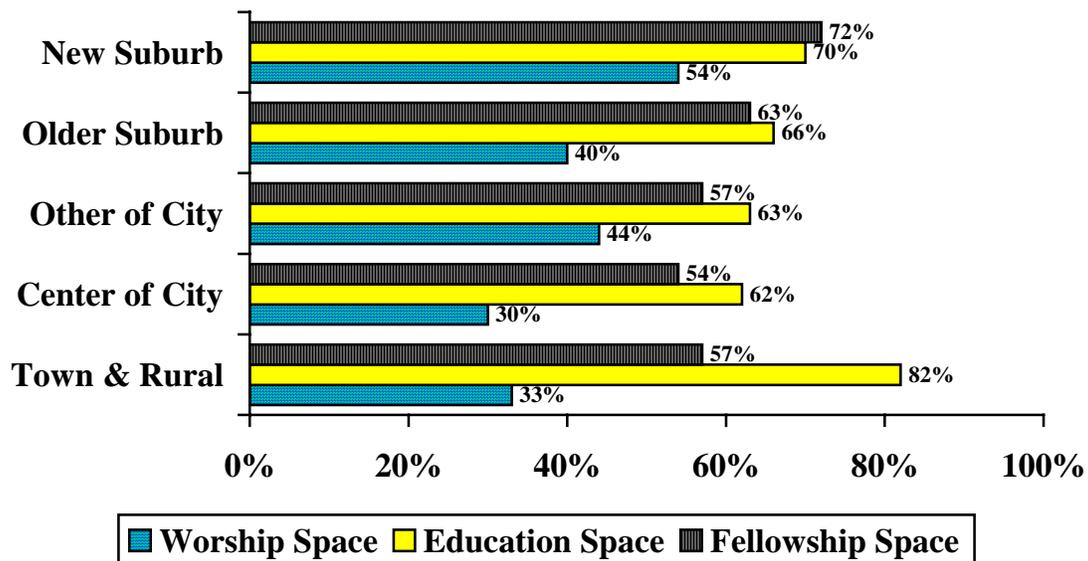
## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### A. Growth and Worship Space



More worship space is needed in about 44-48% of our growing congregations. About a third (32%) of our plateaued congregations also report needing more worship space. Worship space is not as critical an overall need in our congregations as the need for religious education space and fellowship space (as described below).

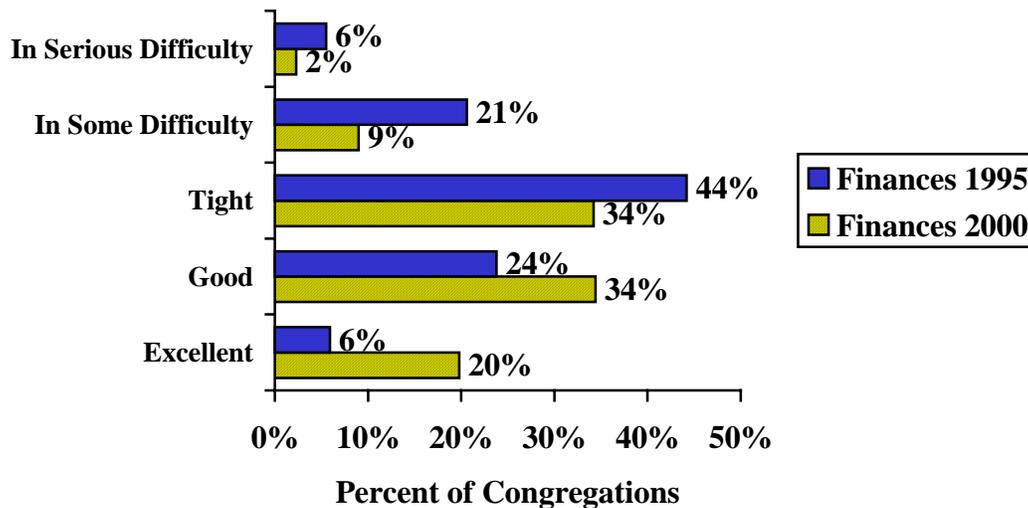
### B. Space Pressure by Location



## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

More education space is needed in our congregations in various locations. More fellowship space is a need predominately in the new suburbs and older suburbs (which are also the locations where most growth is reported.)

### C. Financial Health of Congregations



Overall, our congregations reported that they are in better financial health than in 1995. 54% of our congregations state that they are in either “good” (34%) or “excellent” (20%) financial health, compared to only about 6% who reported that their 1995 financial health was “excellent” or 24% who reported that their 1995 financial health was “good.”

Even though the overall financial health of our congregations improved, 45% of our congregations reported that their current financial health is somewhere between “in serious difficulty” to “tight” in 2000.

### D. Congregational Expenditures

In our sample, the expenditures in the congregation ranged from \$100 to \$2,000,000. This compares to the UUA directory questionnaire total expenditures range of \$300 to \$15,500,000. The average annual expenditures of the congregations in our sample are \$163,800—due to the few churches in the sample that have high total expenditures. The largest number of churches in our sample fell below this mean.

## UNDERSTANDING OURSELVES

### **Reflection Questions:**

1. Has the financial health of your congregation improved over the last five years? Why or why not?
2. Does your congregation have a plan for developing the giving potential and improving the financial health of your congregation? What are the major strategies for developing the giving potential of your congregation? For maintaining or improving the financial health?
3. How does the financial health and stewardship practices within your congregation impact your capacity to live out your mission and fulfill your potential?