



# Who We Are!

Final report of PUUC's "Who Are We?" process, May 2024

## OPENING WORDS

BY JAMES VILA BLAKE (ADAPTED)

Love is the spirit of this congregation  
and service is its call.

Let this be our covenant:  
to dwell together in peace,  
to seek the truth in love,  
and to help one another.

## INTRODUCTION:

### Why did we conduct this process?

PUUC is experiencing a period of strength and growth. We have a minister, Rev. Lane Fisher, who cherishes her work with us and from whom we receive meaningful opportunities for spiritual growth. Our membership is growing, with 34 new members in the past three years. These new members comprise over 25% of the congregation. We are changing and we have many ideas of 'things we would like to do' or 'things that should be done.' Examples include: rewrite our Covenant of Right Relations to reflect current thinking; develop a conflict policy that honors the current role of the Committee on Shared Ministry and incorporates a focus on conflict transformation; improve building accessibility and increase space utilization; hire a director of lifespan spiritual development; become more recognized in the region; welcome a more diverse community in terms of age and family configuration; consider the name of our community; and more. All of these goals are important, but not all can be accomplished quickly, especially with a  $\frac{3}{4}$  time minister and a dedicated but older group of volunteers.

During the 2022-23 program year, the Governing Board (GB) and Committee on Shared Ministry (CoSM) worked together to identify priorities, but quickly realized that church leadership alone could not determine those priorities. We needed a clearer sense of what we as a congregation value and aspire to become. We needed to know what congregants would be willing to support with their time, talent, and treasure. Rev. Lane sought guidance from a religious education consultant and her ministerial mentor. In addition, a member of the GB and a member of CoSM attended the 2023 General Assembly (GA) and took advantage of various presentations to gather ideas from other UU congregations.

The consistent recommendation was to take the pulse of the congregation, learn who we are and what we value, and then move into actions based on a shared understanding of our depth and breadth as a congregation. One particular GA webinar advised not making important decisions without first knowing the congregation's needs and desires. Wise counsel encouraged us to take the time to hear from a wide range of perspectives. How will we welcome new ideas if we only look at those that are most familiar? Based on these sources of advice we developed the "Who Are We?" process. We anticipate that the outcomes of this process will guide the Governing Board, CoSM, our

People say, what is the sense of our small effort?

They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time.

A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions. Each one of our thoughts, words and deeds is like that.

No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless.

There's too much work to do.

~ DOROTHY DAY

various committees and working groups, and Rev. Lane, in shaping the initiatives our congregation undertakes over the next several years.

### PREPARATION:

## How did we plan for the process?

Faith is taking the first step even when you don't see the whole staircase.

~ DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

The GB and CoSM decided to constitute a separate group to oversee the next steps. A planning team consisting of 5 members plus Rev. Lane was formed in November 2023. These team members were selected to represent the GB and CoSM, and three at-large members were chosen to represent diverse faith traditions and religious backgrounds, varying amounts of time at PUUC, and a range of involvements at PUUC. Members included Mary Vallier-Kaplan (GB rep), Dottie Bauer (CoSM rep), Stewart Harris, Dwight Schenk, and Beverly Spiro, with Rev. Lane *ex officio*. Regular feedback was provided to the GB and CoSM throughout the process. Dottie Bauer agreed to serve as facilitator of the planning team, and each member played an important and unique role in the overall planning and implementation of the process. The collaborative work accomplished was truly inspirational to those of us on the team.

The team spent time developing relationships and gaining an understanding of each other's strengths and interests. They then determined that a series of focused listening sessions, both in-person and virtual, would be an effective strategy for gathering perspectives and also provide the opportunity for congregants to hear

various points of view. The plan was based in part on the successful experience of the Cottage Talks during the previous ministerial transition, but that process had a different purpose, focus, and potential to inform future activities and goals. The Cottage Talks resulted in a job description for a part-time minister, based on congregants' priorities for the ministerial role. This time the purpose was to open our hearts and minds to new ideas, not to make decisions immediately. In a sense, one of the outcomes was to have the process - to get to know each other and listen carefully for new perspectives. A major purpose was to answer the question: **"Who Are We?"** -hence the name of the project.

Several priorities emerged during the planning phase. The team wanted to involve as many people as possible and to cast a wide net for ideas. We wanted to pose open-ended questions in a group setting to stimulate diverse ideas, foster deep listening, and create new relationships among congregants. We wanted to ensure that there were opportunities for those who attend virtually to participate. We wanted there to be a way that people who couldn't attend a listening session had an opportunity to contribute.

In preparation for the listening sessions, facilitators and notetakers were recruited. The facilitator role was to ensure that everyone had an opportunity to respond to each question in the time allotted. Note-takers were asked to take notes on the content of the responses. Steve James, a clinical psychologist and new member, offered a training session for these volunteers to review ground rules, discuss their concerns, and brainstorm strategies to address potential "glitches." This session was videotaped; a follow-up online discussion was held with those unable to attend the in-person training session.

Four open-ended questions were developed to focus on our individual and shared identity, values, aspirations, and dreams. The first three questions became the focus of the listening sessions; each participant shared their thoughts and listened to the

### THE QUESTIONS

- Q1.** What brought you to PUUC? What brings you back?
- Q2.** What are the 3 most important values that you aspire to? What values do you want PUUC to aspire to?
- Q3.** How is PUUC seen in the community? How would you like PUUC to be seen in the community?
- Q4.** If we could ever find a way, I would like to see us . . . (fill in the blank individually, as a closing response)

ideas and reflections of others in their group. The fourth question was completed individually at the end of the session. Individuals who participated in a virtual session were sent a link to complete Q4 online. Individuals who were unable to attend a listening session were given the opportunity to complete the entire survey online.

Ground rules were developed and modified at the training session for facilitators and notetakers. The final versions of both ground rules and questions were distributed to participants in advance of each listening session, to provide time for members to reflect on their responses in advance of their session.

While this preparation was unfolding, the process of scheduling the 10 listening sessions, matching facilitators and notetakers to scheduled sessions, and taking sign-ups from congregants was underway. In addition, the online survey and Q4 response forms were prepared. Regular communication in The Cresset and via email to share information, confirm sign-ups, and remind participants of session time also occurred throughout. Individual members of the planning team took responsibility for each aspect of scheduling, and adjusted to the many changes that occurred.

## IMPLEMENTATION

### What did we do?

Ten listening sessions were held over a two-week period in March 2024. Three sessions were virtual and seven were held in-person. Of the in-person sessions, six were at PUUC, three on Sundays after worship and three at various weekday times; one session was held at RiverMead in order to reach out to the many congregants who live there. Each session posed the same four open-ended questions, as noted above. Responses to the first three questions were shared aloud in the group sessions; the final question was completed in writing as closure to an in-person session, or online after a virtual session.

Each session had a designated facilitator

## GROUND RULES (FINAL VERSION)

- All responses deserve to be heard.
- Speak for yourself. Use "I" not "We" statements.
- Stay on topic. Avoid going down "rabbit holes".
- Talk to the group. Avoid "cross talk." This is an opportunity for sharing and listening, not a discussion or a debate.
- Stay focused and respect time in order to allow everyone to speak on each question. Use ditto when appropriate. OK to pass if you wish.
- OK to share thoughts and ideas heard in the session with others. NOT OK to share names.

and notetaker team. Attendance was noted by the facilitator; names of speakers were not recorded by the notetaker. Session notes were reviewed by the facilitator and notetaker before being submitted to the planning team. An online version of the questions was available to those who were unable to attend a group session and remained available for the first week of April. The planning team contacted those people who had not signed up for a session to encourage participation. At final count, 84 people participated in listening sessions (virtual and in-person) and 12 people completed the online survey questions, for a total of 96 participants.

Once the listening sessions were complete, a team of eight, drawn from the Governing Board and CoSM and including Rev. Lane, began to analyze the many pages of notes. Each question's responses were compiled into one document, typically consisting of more than 12 pages of comments compiled into a bulleted list. Each question's data were shared with two members of the analysis team, one from the GB and one from CoSM, who worked both independently and collaboratively. Because of the open-ended nature of the questions, qualitative analysis techniques were used. A minimum of two reviewers considered every idea that was shared to determine themes, creative suggestions, shared values and aspirations.

Love can work its way into improbable and impossible situations. Like water over stone it has the potential to wear down our suffering, create new pathways of possibility, and support life in inhospitable terrain.

— REV. JEN CROW

The sub-teams for Q1, Q2, and Q3 collaborated to produce a draft summary statement for their question. Summaries were circulated and edited for the preliminary report, then expanded to provide more of the rich discussion and detail for the final report. Q4 required a different process as the individual responses were on notecards or in a printout from the online survey; responses were sorted and grouped by theme and transcribed by the Q4 team. The original data for all four questions will be made available upon request.

The analysis team included Mary Vallier-Kaplan, Sarah Dengler, and John Saywell, representing the Governing Board, and Dottie Bauer, Linda Field, Peter Johnson and Jane Eckert, members of CoSM. Rev. Lane attended many of the listening sessions, participated in the review of the data and editing of the drafts. Jill Shaffer Hammond contributed her graphic design skills to lay-out the reports, resulting in more readable documents.

As the analysis team completed its review, it became clear that we have moved from wondering **"Who Are We?"**, based on the shared responses. We are now able to better understand **"Who We Are!"**

### THEMES:

## What we learned about Who We Are!

What follows are the summary narratives for each question, based on the notes assembled for each question and prepared by the analysis team. You will no doubt hear echoes as you read through each question, indicating consistency of response across questions and across the congregation.

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

– TS ELIOT

## Q1 Who We Are!

### Who Are We in 2024?

How do you describe the typical member or friend in the Peterborough Unitarian Universalist congregation? We are often longstanding UUs, some from birth and others by marriage and still others as a result of their life journey. Many of us grew up in another religious tradition, such as Catholicism, one of the many 'mainline' Protestant denominations, or Judaism, but left those faiths for a wide range of reasons.

We have a calling in this world: We are  
called to honor diversity,  
To respect differences with dignity,  
And to challenge those who would  
forbid it.

We are people of a wide path. Let us be  
wide in affection And go our way in  
peace.

~ JEAN RICKARD ROWE

Many congregants are long-time members of the PUUC congregation, while others came to PUUC from experiences with other UU congregations in different communities. Some of us have more recently discovered Unitarian Universalism and PUUC, either when moving to the Peterborough area or because of some other life event. Some attend every Sunday and others more infrequently. Some attend in person, some virtually, and some make use of both worship platforms.

Often we come for the first time to worship on a Sunday morning as newcomers to the Peterborough area who are searching for a religious community, or just curious. In the past, typically we were parents seeking spiritual support while raising a family, and then stayed involved after that phase of life ended. Currently, many newcomers arrive at PUUC after retirement and moving to the area or to start anew during the next phase of life. Very few of us have young children in our households at the present time. Implicit in this description is that we are predominantly a congre-



gation that is from an older demographic. This reality must be acknowledged as a facet of our identity.

**Why did we come to PUUC?**

We almost all came here looking for a community that is caring, open and like-minded, a place that is welcoming and safe where we could belong. Sometimes a family member or friend recommended that we visit and give it a try. Often a welcoming minister, one who gave thoughtful sermons and created spiritually fulfilling worship, drew us to attend and eventually to become part of the congregation.

Many reported that their first visit to the PUUC sanctuary was for a Monadnock Summer Lyceum speaker or a musical concert with friends. Some felt welcome after attending a holiday worship service such as Christmas Eve or Easter. The BLM sign, the rainbow flag, the earth based services on our front lawn complete with a roaring fire and music, have all encouraged people to visit. In the past, seeking religious education for children was a strong motivation to come to PUUC; often the parents found spiritual nourishment for themselves, too.

Both the serenity of worship in the beautiful sanctuary, and the value and inclusiveness of worship on Zoom, support people to come to PUUC. Our stated commitments to social justice and to helping others are important reasons why people are drawn to PUUC. An overall commitment to spiritual enrichment and growth was identified as important, as well as the priority placed on beautiful music that supports the worship experience. Unitarian Universalist principles, values, and beliefs that are grounded in diverse religious beliefs and practices, led us to choose PUUC as a community to which we wished to belong.

**What brings you back to PUUC?**

The friendships we have made and the people in the community overall sustain our ongoing commitment to the PUUC community. Openness to the diversity of religious beliefs and practices, lifestyles,

ideas, and backgrounds makes us feel like PUUC is the community of our choice. The emphasis on "seeking" and not just "believing" keeps us coming back; this is seen as different from prior religious experience for many. The sermon, music, and readings during Sunday worship bring us back, as do the opportunities for more personal spiritual growth, such as Small Group Ministry, book study, etc.

We thrive on the intellectual stimulation, including questioning, that is grounded in a safe place with people who share UU values. One may experience this by listening to a sermon by the minister or lay members during worship, participating in a conversation at coffee hour, taking part in a committee meeting, participating in a social justice activity, etc. Spiritual enrichment and growth also keep us at PUUC. We find that the opportunity to serve and help others is a major part of our chosen ongoing life at PUUC.

We have found our spiritual home at PUUC. We stay because being part of PUUC satisfies our desires for community, spiritual enrichment, service, and intellectual stimulation.

**Q2 What we value**

**Personal Values**

Members and friends responded thoughtfully and authentically to the question about their three personal values. More than 60 specific values were expressed, although respondents sometimes used different words to describe the same value, e.g. equity and fairness. The most frequently reported values were love, kindness, and compassion, followed closely by respect, honesty, justice, equi-

If you are proud of this church, become its advocate.  
If you are concerned for its future, share its message.  
If its values resonate deep within you, give it a measure of your devotion.  
This church cannot survive without your faith, your confidence, your enthusiasm.  
Its destiny, the larger hope, rests in your hands.

~ MICHAEL A. SCHULER

ty/fairness, generosity, and integrity. Love was the basis of many of the values most frequently stated. Other values were the importance of spiritual practice, care for the environment and its inhabitants, community, curiosity, service, inclusiveness and openness. Several people mentioned the UU principles, particularly #1: The inherent worth and dignity of every person and #7: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Two prevalent values were acceptance of others and inclusiveness, even when ideas or beliefs are different. Many respondents believe that it's acceptable to have different religious beliefs or points of view; everyone will still be respected, included, and loved. Respect was mentioned frequently in this context. Sometimes the values cited appear contradictory. For example, there are those who value diversity of ideas and spiritual practices and those who value being with like-minded people.

Acceptance and inclusiveness were listed more frequently than diversity. People are ready to welcome people with different beliefs from them, but did not often indicate that they were actively looking for diversity. To value diversity and inclusiveness, respondents acknowledged that respect and compassion were vital.

In complex issues, integrity, honesty, and justice were noted as values to put in the forefront. Justice *per se* was noted, with many valuing those who "walk the talk".

While many values spoke to the heart, members also valued qualities of the mind, including critical thinking, open mindedness, tolerance, reflection, and curiosity. Change and growth were values noted by a few people, as was the desire for stimulation and learning new things.

### Values for PUUC to aspire to

The values of aspiration for the church community were remarkably similar to the personal values expressed. The most prevalent values for our congregation to aspire to were social justice and connection to the wider community, especially to multiple generations. One person also mentioned being connected to the wider UU denomination. For this question, the focus was on expressing our values through action. Many expressed a desire for more proactive social justice and more engagement with the wider community. Respondents mentioned wanting to appeal to and invite in different generations, especially younger people and families. There was also a desire expressed here to communicate more frequently and more effectively, and to be more creative and varied in our approaches to reaching a wider demographic.

These values involve a lot of "doing" without specifying who would "do." It is important to note that one of the issues raised by the desire for more action is identifying the "doers." This may be in direct conflict with our aging congregation, in that we have many more ideas for "doing" than people who are ready, willing, and able to "do." Committee leaders often comment that they can't find enough volunteers for current projects. However, one person commented that we need to "Be more democratic and participatory, not just the minister doing things. We are all the church." This observation may be seen as a call to action and an imperative to establish priorities, as we can't do everything immediately.

## UU Principles

- 1st Principle:** The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- 2nd Principle:** Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- 3rd Principle:** Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- 4th Principle:** A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- 5th Principle:** The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- 6th Principle:** The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- 7th Principle:** Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.



### Q3 What we aspire to

#### How is PUUC seen in the community?

The predominant message we heard is that we need more outreach. A surprising number of people said they had no idea how we are seen. Members living outside of Peterborough reported lack of knowledge of PUUC within their communities. A strong feeling exists that we have a welcoming, spiritually enriching, exciting community and yet we are failing to communicate this to the wider community. How can we publicize that we are a vibrant place to explore?

For those who know us, we are seen as an aging, white, homogeneous, educated, progressive, perhaps wealthy community. Some respondents are concerned that we are viewed as on the "fringe," believing whatever we want. Still others think we are seen as very liberal in the political realm, noting the BLM and rainbow flags. It appears that the larger community does not know what Unitarian Universalism stands for, nor what we believe and how we seek to participate in the community.

The Monadnock Summer Lyceum

brings attention to PUUC, as does the Messiah Sing in December. Some suggested that the Dinner for Two raffle increases our visibility, as do events such as the Maypole, the Ukraine vigils, and other happenings on the lawn. Being an historic building in the center of town is recognized as an asset. Participants ask: What else can we do to be noticed? How do we communicate our UU values to those attending community suppers, concerts, and other similar public events?

Some participants commented that while older people respect the institution, younger people tend to have limited involvement with religious communities in current society. Younger members noted that "church" is not part of their peer

Mindful of our highest aspirations,  
Bound by common faith and purpose,  
And, yet, beginning with ourselves as  
we are, Let us take one more step,  
together,  
In our unending quest for dignity, justice  
and love.

– REBECCA A. EDMISTON-LANGE

group's experience or conversation. PUUC is not alone among mainstream religious groups in having fewer younger people involved, even though we think of ourselves as different from other churches in the community. This observation leads to another question: How do we communicate our uniqueness to a wider demographic?

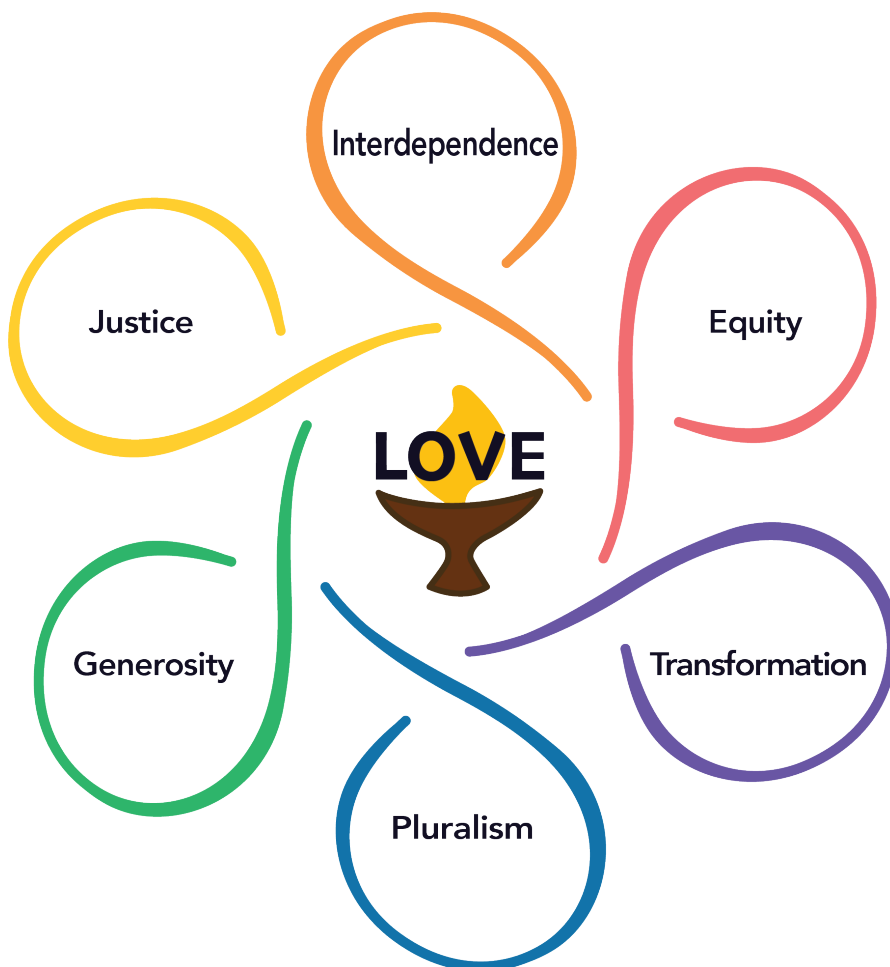
On a positive note, we are known for our music programs and the Lyceum, both of which draw in community people from various backgrounds and locations. We are recognized as a resource for arts and learning. Our beautiful building is well known, a "bedrock in the community," expressing our strong heritage as an iconic building in the center of town, often seen in town photos, which we make available for many town activities.

A few negative comments have also been heard within the community, such as resentment about allocating LCHIP money for a "church" building, or "snarling up traffic" with BLM posters on Saturdays (even though the current vigils are organized by

another group). One member noted that we are viewed as "very conflictual" by the regional UUA. It was also noted that a former minister from decades ago set a tone of anti-Semitism that some feel may need to be overcome. In contrast, however, we are noted as hosting Interfaith services and responding to tragic events such as the Pulse nightclub shooting.

We are recognized as serving the wider community through the community supper. One member mentioned that we are perceived positively in the community, and they are proud to identify as UU. It was noted that in the RiverMeade community we are well respected. Another mentioned articles in the Monadnock Ledger Transcript showing our members being a force for change and presenting us in a good light.

Our Gay Pride and Black Lives Matter flags are viewed as welcoming symbols to many, and so are our social justice activities. For example, the Ukraine vigil and bell ringing stopped people in the street and attracted the wider community. We are seen as supporting marginalized folks. Many noted that we are recognized as a place where spirituality can be freely celebrated in non-traditional forms - Buddhist meditation, Sacred Circle dancing, Pagan celebrations, etc.



### How would you like PUUC to be seen in the community?

We want PUUC to be seen as a place where spiritual growth happens through inspiring Sunday services. We also want to be an organization that is open and active on other days and in other ways. We want to show that we are energized and progressive, that "things happen here." We want to be seen as a safe haven, a refuge, a home, a joyful, dynamic, and energetic group. We want to be viewed as an environmentally aware culture showing respect for all living things. We want to move out into the community with outdoor opportunities, and invite the community into different formats within our building.

Many want us to be seen as having a



## "BY THE NUMBERS"

- 6 planning team members
- 1 trainer for facilitators and notetakers
- 14 trained facilitators + notetakers
- 4 questions
- 10 listening sessions - 3 on zoom and 1 at RiverMead, each with 1 facilitator and 1 notetaker
- 84 participants in listening sessions \*\*
- 12 online respondents
- 96 total responses
- 8 analysis team members
- 1 guest facilitator for congregational meeting
- 53 attendees at April 28 conversation
- 1 final report compiler
- ∞ Countless email communications

\*\* Note corrected number of participants. One name was mistakenly entered twice in the master list.

diversity of ages with a strong program for children and youth. We wish to be a place where children and youth are nurtured and offered a wide ranging spiritual education, including the OWL program. Some would also like an outreach ministry to return to RiverMead. Many want the community to know of our commitment to accessibility for people with diverse physical needs. Some said we need to make it known that our building is more accessible than it looks!

We wish to be a creative center and intellectual leader. Many mentioned a desire for us to be seen as good neighbors, good friends with a strong moral compass, as we continue to make the building available for community groups. In addition, we seek to communicate more with other spiritual communities, interfaith and UU alike, sharing information and supporting each other in serving the needs of our community. We wish to bridge the gap with other churches by being willing to embrace the concept of "God" as Love. Here, we also need to be aware of extending to communities outside of Peterborough.

We hope to be open to and accepting of all spiritual beliefs, to be viewed as non-dogmatic and inclusive. Some of us would like to be seen as accepting of a range of viewpoints, able to "reach across the aisle." In keeping with this, many mentioned the need to change from the "Christian" language of "church" to words that more accurately reflect us as a home for anyone who wants to explore their spirituality in community, including those who identify as "nones." Some members expressed that the word Community, instead of Church for the C in PUUC, might be more welcoming and inclusive.

Social justice stands out. We wish to be viewed as courageous, collaborative, known for inspiration, and as stewards for learning and celebration. We want to be known as a community of caring people bound together by our liberal values, striving to improve the world we live in, and caring about our neighbors in our local community. Some feel that the Window-Dressers project will show us as collaborating with the community and "walking our talk."

One member, in summing things up, said we should be seen as "the best place in town!"

## Q4 What we wish for

Over 200 hopes and dreams and wishes were contributed from the cards completed at the end of listening sessions and the online submissions. They were read individually and then grouped with similar statements. The clusters were then sorted, categorized, refined, and reconfigured until

**Hope rises.** It rises from the heart of life, here and now, beating with joy and sorrow.

**Hope longs.** It longs for good to be affirmed, for justice and love to prevail, for suffering to be alleviated, and for life to flourish in peace.

**Hope remembers.** It remembers the dreams of those who have gone before and reaches for connection with them across the boundary of death.

**Hope acts.** It acts to bless, to protest, and to repair.

– JOHN A. BUEHRENS AND REBECCA ANN PARKER

a common thread for each grouping was identified. These common threads became the eight "big ideas" listed below; the first 3 were mentioned most frequently. What follows each "big idea" is a direct quote from a response to Q4; #8 is an amalgamation of items included in this category.

**1. More diverse congregation with regard to demographics (age, racial background, other identities)**

"... to see us grow significantly as a congregation that is more diverse with all ages represented and has a strong program for children and youth."

**2. More visible and collaborative social justice action within the region**

"... to see us be more directly engaged with others through voice, presence, work, etc., taking action on challenging issues in the greater Peterborough community."

**3. Increased communication and public relations within the wider community and region**

"... to see us be known and valued as a safe and loving community for all ages and situations in the greater Peterborough area."

**4. Increased music and arts in all aspects (worship, community activities, space usage)**

"... to see us be a hub for music and cultural events, concerts, children in the arts, performances, Messiah, as well as speakers throughout the year."

**5. Increased spiritual growth opportunities for current congregation**

"... to see us maintain the opportunity for intellectual stimulation and spiritual connection in worship services, focus on expanding our sense of spiritual connection and depth, and be left with good questions or a new way to think."

**6. Expanded use of the building, including accessibility**

"... to see us create more spaces for community connection and gathering."

**7. Connection and collaboration with interfaith activities, other religions and other UU congregations to broaden impact**

"... to see us create forums for inter-religious dialogue to learn more about other faith traditions."

**8. Improved policies and procedures**

This item included suggestions such as: revise the Covenant and Conflict policies; change our name to be less exclusively Christian; acknowledge the anniversary of our building; examine the history of PUUC in regard to Black and Indigenous peoples; focus on our identity; support volunteers; develop leadership participation.

One respondent summed up our hopes and dreams this way: "... to see us leading more 'external' events to reach the none-churched in our community, calmly thriving such that they swell our ranks and increase our capabilities for worship and action."

We cannot conclude that these topics are necessarily the most important to the congregation, only that more people wrote more suggestions related to these topics as part of this process. Some suggestions fit into more than one category and thus were included in more than one section. The entire list of suggestions will be included in an Addendum to this report. One respondent shared that they "appreciate(d) the effort being made to listen, pay attention to each other's voices.



## NEXT STEPS: WHAT COMES NEXT?

**May** Full report completed and published on PUUC website in Members Section

**June 2** After worship discussion group opportunity for congregants.

**Summer 2024** Governing Board and CoSM review to establish priorities for coming year

**September 2024** PUUC leadership meeting to discuss priorities, potential new projects, and connections to ongoing work of existing groups.

More will depend on your involvement!

## Summary of Congregational Discussion on April 28

On April 28th a congregational discussion, facilitated by Rev. Michael Leuchtenberger from the UU Church of Concord NH, was held after the worship service. 53 people attended the conversation, which was loosely organized around the 8 themes from Question 4 (above). People expressed joy, hope, inspiration and excitement at the possibilities outlined in the preliminary report. Other general comments included appreciation for the opportunity to get to know newer people in small groups with a common purpose, and anticipation of next steps. Members expressed the importance of moving to the nitty-gritty to determine what we can accomplish, and recognized that we need to step out into public spaces and find out what the needs are before taking actions.

There was focused discussion about what it means to us to have a more diverse congregation, with most examples describing families with children as a more visible part of the congregation, to be able to share parenting and spiritual development experiences in a loving community. Ideas related to improved communication with the community included use of social media, having events outdoors on

the lawn, more musical opportunities, and sharing more boldly why we are involved in PUUC. How can we articulate the importance of a spiritual life and help others understand the value of being part of a spiritual community? Many people acknowledged that we talk about social action and donate funds to various groups, but our actual physical presence working in the community is less visible. The hope was expressed that the WindowDressers project moves us to work as a congregation in collaboration with other groups to accomplish the Community Build.

The discussion ended with many more ideas remaining to be shared. Additional specific ideas from this session will be included in an Addendum to this report. A final comment summed things up: "Lane is the heart, but we are the lungs. We have to work together!" It's time to shine our little lights all around our region.

## CLOSING WORDS

### Much of ministry is a benediction

BY SUSAN MANKER-SEALE

Much of ministry is a benediction—  
A speaking well of each other and  
the world—  
A speaking well of what we value:

honesty  
love  
forgiveness  
trust

A speaking well of our efforts—  
A speaking well of our dreams.  
This is how we celebrate life:  
Through speaking well of it,  
Living the benediction,  
and becoming as a word  
well-spoken.

# Expressing Our Gratitude

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**Planning team:** Mary Vallier-Kaplan (GB rep), Dottie Bauer (CoSM rep), Stewart Harris, Dwight Schenk, Beverly Spiro, Rev. Lane Fisher *ex officio*.

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\*If we have inadvertently misspelled your name or omitted you, please accept our apologies.