

Summary of Learnings from the WSUU Survey and Cottage Meetings

Dec. 2018

Executive Summary

The cottage meetings and surveys tell us that WSUU is aspirational—we seek a minister who will join with us in developing, articulating, and realizing a shared vision, and who will companion us as we become the kind of community we long to be.

The congregation is a strong community: we are friendly, caring, resilient, competent, and fun. We yearn to be known and appreciated by our minister. We miss having a minister who is one of us—who is a part of us and not apart from us. We seek a minister who is curious about who we are—who is intent on listening to us, learning our history, and becoming part of our story. We want to be embraced for who we are, and we seek a minister who challenges us to be our best.

The extended period of interim ministry has clarified the role of the minister as a unifying leader for the staff and congregants. The survey showed that the greatest percent of respondents, 43%, favor a minister who is visionary: “envisioning a future of promise, the minister inspires the congregation and the larger community to pursue it.” Discussion of this type of inspirational ministry was repeated in the cottage meetings. Common themes articulated were a desire for a minister who will exhibit a passion for social justice, lead by example in addressing conflict, and build bridges within and outside the congregation.

The congregation is desirous of and recognizes the need for positive change but is cautious and uncertain about the pace and impact of change. The congregation recognizes that for WSUU, the minister’s leadership style and facility with change management is crucial to how we will respond to change. The terms “servant leader” and “change agent leader” were used by many people to describe someone who could successfully lead WSUU. The congregation would not welcome a minister who is autocratic or dictatorial, but at the same time, we respect a minister who can make a hard decision and is not conflict averse. The congregation values the democratic process and listening, considers collaboration to be vital, and expects transparency in decision making.

The congregation is proud of its resilience, history, and direction; but we are also humble and know we must stretch and grow beyond our comfort zones. We need guidance and leadership to navigate and successfully embrace the challenges of honestly engaging in the work of anti-racism, anti-oppression, and cultural awareness. We want WSUU to be a space where people can be brave. From the cottage meetings and the survey, it became evident that the congregation seeks a role model or mentor who through their interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and appropriate expressions of vulnerability, can share their experience of being inclusive, engaging in hard conversations, and building solidarity. In particular, from the cottage meeting for people of color came the following directive: the new minister should have relationship building skills, a sense of humor, sensitivity to language, and an awareness of intersectionality.