

# **The Unitarian Church in Westport Ministerial Search Committee**

## **Focus Group Methodology**

(Groups conducted September-October 2014)

Focus groups contained from 8-12 people. Most signed up in advance, but many dropped in. In order to keep size close to 10 sometimes two groups had to be held to accommodate those that showed up. Over 150 congregants participated. Two members of the search committee attended each session, one as facilitator the other as recorder.

The sessions lasted for about an hour. Each person introduced themselves, and ground rules were established to allow that each might talk without interruption.

Two questions were posed (see below). As each person answered a question the member of the search committee who was acting as a recorder wrote a shortened version of their answer with magic markers on an easel in letters big enough to be seen by participants (and corrected immediately by the speaker if necessary). When question 1 had been exhausted the same procedure was followed for question 2. At the end of the session all participants were given magic markers and asked to check 3 from each list that they thought were most important. This enabled the self-correcting part of the focus group to take place. Many items did not receive a check, which meant that even the person who mentioned the item now thought others were more important.

The Questions were:

1. "Looking back, after our new minister has been here for two years, what will be the measures of success? What achievements will make you say you're glad this minister is among us?"
2. "If you were on the search committee, what are the most important attributes you would look for?"

Analysis of data:

All items that received at least one check were included in the analysis, and the others were disregarded. Linguistically similar items were then aggregated across all groups allowing a count for each to be done of the total number of checks each item received when all groups were aggregated. These items were then coded into more general themes. The ranks are based upon the number of times items in that category (theme) were chosen, and the numbers of the individual items are also provided within each theme/category. The number in parentheses at the end of each theme/category is the total of the checks received for each item included in that theme. These numbers were then used to establish the rank order of each theme/category for each question.

## **Question 2: MEASURES OF SUCCESS in rank order**

I. There are strong yearnings for greater community. If the congregation is happy 5, that we feel loved and cared for 6, more members feel more connected to the church 8, and are enthusiastic 5, that “I want to come to church” 2 or more generally it feels more like a community (or home) 13, members are engaged and committed 8, we regain warmth 2 (49)

II. Growth is a strong theme and has many definitions: old members return 9, wounds healed 6, new members come 15 and more younger families as members 11. (41)

III. More robust annual giving and fund raising 5, and improved financial situation 15, (20)

IV. Compelling Sunday services (13) (Note overlap with Attributes)

V. Stronger lay leadership 6, which are interested in the health of the church 2 greater number of members on committees 2 (10)

VI. If there are good staff relationships 1 high staff moral 1, minister must be a team builder 1, an effective CEO 1, strategic plans are in place and followed 3, better relations between the minister and the Board 2 (9) (Note that these overlap with attributes)

VII. If the Minister is viewed as approachable 2, authentic 2, trustworthy 2 (6) (same note as above)

VIII. If there is a stronger RE program better connected to the minister and the rest of the church 3 a stronger Adult education program 2 (5)

IX. Miscellaneous: If there is a more humanistic tone to sermons 3, new forms of worship 4, more activities with/for non UUs 1, progress in LGBT issues 2, if the name of the “church” changes 1, a better building, 1 a more accessible building 3.

### **Comments**

The major themes can be summed up as strong desires for growth, and strong yearnings for a greater sense of community (note that these two together are seen by a few as contradictory goals).

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**Question 2: ATTRIBUTES THEMES in rank order**

Great preacher 12, Inspirational 10, charismatic 6, great sermons [3 said that make you laugh and cry] 26 (54)

Leadership skills 6, strong leader 12, intellectual leader, visionary 6, spiritual leader 2, CEO 4, facilitates healing 3 (33)

Good listener (10) Pastoral skills 6, empathy-compassion 13, emotionally intelligent 8 (27)

Good manager 6, works well with staff and Board 15, works well with others 5 (26)

Personable 6, secure in who they are / healthy ego 5, trustworthy 3, genuine 4, approachable 5 (23)

Well versed in all world religions 11, exposes us to diverse theologies (as they relate to UU 12 (23)

Intellect, makes you think, creative, articulate 14, well and deeply educated 3 tell us how to think not what to think 2 (19)

Sense of humor (18) [three said this was a sine qua non]

Needs to be a builder 4, team builder 5, collaborative 7 (16)

Involved in social action 6, the community 3, more international 1, more attention to LGBT issues 2 (12)

Entrepreneurial sophistication 4, brings in money 2, comfortable fund raising 4 (10)

Confident but accepts feedback 2, humility 3, and flexibility 2 (7)

Believes in shared ministry (7)

Mature, not a beginner 5, not at the end of their career 2 (7)

Engages with seniors and understands their problems (6)

Help us live our faith (by example) (5)

Minimal "God talk" 3

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