FUS Triennial Review of Ministry

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1: What We Did and Why

A. Purpose and Scope of this Review

The FUS Board of Trustees has a policy that calls for a committee to conduct a “Review of Called Ministers” every three years. The specifics of that policy appear below for reference:

Evaluation of Called Ministers- Ministerial Responsibilities

Once every three years, all Called Ministers of FUS will be simultaneously evaluated using a process designed to achieve the following goals:

* Call the congregation’s attention to the mutual, relational nature of ministry and the respective responsibilities of all who contribute to its success.

* Help the Ministers remain motivated, creative, and flexible.

* Provide the Ministers and Board with information needed to correct any existing problems and maintain an effective partnership in the future.

The Board and Senior Minister shall together appoint an evaluation committee of three persons held in high esteem by the congregation and mutually acceptable to the Board and the Minister being evaluated. The committee shall conduct an evaluation of the Ministers’ performance, gathering data from the congregation and other sources, and produce a written report for the Board.

The members of the committee that were selected include (note that we ultimately included four members to better facilitate our data collection and analysis):

Jake Blasczyk (FUS member for 26 years). Jake’s involvement at FUS includes serving as a COA elder, designing and co-leading the COA parent group, Membership Committee member, Ministerial Relations team member and Ministerial Search committee member. Jake has also designed and conducted surveys for broad FUS membership and the Religious Education committee.

Brian Hellmer (FUS member for 19 years). Brian has been an RE teacher, FUS Foundation Board member, Treasurer, FUS Board Member, Governance Task Force member, and Ministerial Relations ministry team member during that time.

Pamela Johnson (FUS member for 13 years). Pamela is co-facilitator of the FUS Centering Prayer group, is a former Quest participant and member of the Lay Worship committee and is currently serving as a Quest spiritual companion.

Julie Swanson (FUS member for 15 years). Julie has been a children’s RE teacher, RE committee member, RE council member, Quest participant and Quest spiritual companion.

It should be noted that both Jake and Pamela have a professional background in doing qualitative assessments, which provided significant help given that this is the first review that has been completed since this policy was adopted.

While the scope of this review initially appeared to focus on reviewing the ministerial responsibilities of our Called Ministers, our committee observed that the first goal of this review listed under the Board’s policy would be difficult to achieve without a broader focus. We concluded that only a comprehensive discussion about the full scope of the FUS Ministry with all of the major stakeholders could achieve the
Board’s goal of “calling attention to the mutual, relational nature of ministry and the respective responsibilities of all who contribute to its success”.

Once the decision was made to broaden the scope of our focus to meet the Board’s goal, we began referring to this review as a “Review of FUS Ministry” rather than as an “Evaluation of Called Ministers”. We believe this title more accurately captures what is necessary to do to meet the goals of the Board’s policy. Ultimately, we recommend that the FUS Board of Trustees either amend their policy by formally changing the title of this required review or by narrowing the goals of this review to focus specifically on just the Called Ministers.

Importantly, we also concluded that an evaluation of the FUS ministry could not be effectively done by establishing objective criteria and measuring how well we are meeting each objective. We believed that an attempt to use that approach would run the risk of establishing too few or incomplete objectives.

Instead, we tried to take a much more open-ended approach that gave all the major stakeholders in the FUS ministry an opportunity to discuss their experiences and offer suggestions for improvement. Our goal was to ask questions focused on the ministry, listen and capture what people told us, and look for insights and themes that came from this process. **While the end result of this process is a somewhat non-traditional review, we believe it represents the best way to comprehensively gather the information needed to evaluate how well the FUS ministry is working, potential ways to improve, and the questions we need to be asking ourselves as we move forward.**

### B. Methodology & Data Analysis

Once the purpose and scope of the review was established, we used the following approach to gather observations and suggestions from key stakeholders in the FUS ministry:

- **Conduct small group interviews with a cross section of FUS Members** using questions designed to invite members to share with us their observations and experiences related to their personal interaction with the FUS ministry and our community. We also asked members to identify specific opportunities to improve the FUS ministry based on their experiences. Members were informed that their comments would be shared but their names would remain anonymous. Each interviewee granted us permission to share their responses.

- **Distribute a questionnaire to both of our Called Ministers** that focused on questions related to their responsibilities, resource constraints, job satisfaction, and concerns/opportunities they see. Each Called Minister granted permission to share their responses and to attribute their names to their responses.

- **Distribute a questionnaire to Staff Members who volunteered to participate** that focused on questions related to their responsibilities, resource constraints, job satisfaction and concerns/opportunities they see. Staff members who chose to participate were assured that their responses would be kept anonymous. They granted us permission to share their responses.
Our committee performed an in-depth study of the feedback we received with the aim of discovering meaningful insights and expressing them as “themes.” Our intent in identifying themes was to summarize and communicate what we learned regarding the FUS ministry (What We Heard).

Importantly, themes are not necessarily statements of consensus. They may cover points of view of a majority, points of view of subgroups only, or even the point of view of a solitary individual.

Our committee took advantage of the significant experience in qualitative analysis of two of our members to develop a rigorous and consistent process to identify these themes. Once we obtained the transcripts from our member interviews, all team members were trained to use a specific five-step analytical process to identify themes.

When the training was complete, our theme-identification process began with each committee member individually identifying tentative themes from the interviews they co-facilitated. Next the two co-facilitators met to compare results and reach agreement regarding themes from interviews they conducted. The process culminated with all four committee members reviewing the work and finalizing the themes. Data from the Called Minister and Staff Member questionnaires was analyzed following the same steps used in analysis of small group FUS Member interviews.

Throughout the preparation of this final review, we constantly returned to our data sources and cross checked our final report to ensure that our summary themes were reflective of the data. Given this process, we feel very comfortable that our summary of what we learned about FUS ministry is consistent with what we heard during interviews and what was stated in written questionnaires.

C. Details of Data Collection

Small Group FUS Member Interviews

In order to construct our invitation list for the small group interviews, we cross referenced a list of FUS members with data that indicated participation in a variety of aspects of our community, including:

- Attendance at worship services
- Attendance at parish meetings
- Participation in Adult RE
- Participation on the Board or some type of lay leadership role
- Member of a Ministry Team
- Participation in Chalice group or other small group
- Participation in community events like Cabaret or service projects
- Choir member
- Teacher in children’s RE program

In addition to these factors, we tried to randomly select members that represented a cross section of ages, length of membership, and balanced gender representation.

To accomplish our goal of talking to roughly 40 members during 8-10 interview sessions, we created a list of 55 members and sent them personalized email invitations offering multiple interview dates and times. If we got no response, we followed up twice over the course of three weeks before concluding that the member was not interested.
Ultimately we had 31 members agree to participate and held 7 interview sessions in March and April of this year. To understand more about who we talked to, summary statistics appear below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Membership</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>&lt;2</td>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>11-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participants</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
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The analysis shows that the members who participated in the group interviews skewed towards older members with many years of membership. One of our goals for future reviews of this type would be to find ways to engage members from all age groups in a more representative way.

Collectively the members we interviewed have experience with almost every aspect of the FUS community, and their depth of engagement and years of membership produced thoughtful interviews that we believe served the goals of our review very well.

A full list of the questions asked and the major themes that emerged from our members (including select supporting quotes is summarized in Section 2 of this review (What We Heard). The complete summary of what we heard from FUS Members is found in Appendix A.

**Called Ministers Questionnaire**

The committee developed a list of questions that was sent to each of our two Called Ministers in April 2016. Each graciously responded with rich and detailed answers to our questions.

The responses to our questions are summarized in Section 2 of this review (What We Heard), along with some selected supporting quotes. A full recap of the questions we asked and the responses we received is found in Appendix B.
Staff Questionnaire

The committee developed a similar list of questions that was sent to all of our staff in April 2016. Staff members were offered the opportunity to participate in this process if they would like, but not required to. Four staff members responded by providing detailed responses to our questions.

The responses to our questions are summarized in Section 2 of this review (What We Heard), along with some selected supporting quotes. A full recap of the questions we asked and anonymous highlights of responses we received is found in Appendix C.

D. Structure of this Review

We did not approach this review by establishing criteria for success and looking to provide an evaluation of how we are doing relative to those objectives. Instead, our main goal is to provide the reader with a faithful report of what we heard. This review is a window into how our stakeholders experience the FUS ministry and what they are thinking relative to the challenges and opportunities we have.

In keeping with this goal, the body of our report (Section 2) provides a summary of what we heard from the three groups of stakeholders we interacted with. We have attempted to identify the key themes in a concise and readable format, supported by selected quotes from our interviews and questionnaires. We have also attached a more comprehensive list of the themes and supporting quotes from each of our main stakeholders in the three attached appendices. While we believe the major insights and themes from our Review of Ministry are captured in the body of the report, we strongly encourage you to read the three appendices as well to gain a deeper understanding of what we heard.

For anyone hoping that this review would produce a list of suggestions to improve the FUS Ministry, note that there are numerous ideas offered in the body of the report in response to questions about how we can improve various aspects of our shared ministry. We wanted to let specific suggestions for improvement come directly from the stakeholders we listened to, and not be overly filtered or prioritized by our small committee.

The one aspect of analysis we have provided in this report is a list of high level observations related to the work we did, and questions related to those observations that we encourage the Board (and FUS community) to discuss. Those observations and questions comprise Section 3 of our report.

E. Acknowledgements

The committee that worked on this review would like to thank the Board for their patience and understanding as we took the time necessary to complete this review. While it took longer than we expected to complete, we believe this review includes significant insights into our shared ministry, including many ideas for how we can improve. We would also like to thank our Called Ministers and all of the FUS members and staff who contributed to this process. We greatly appreciate their time, insights, and suggestions.

Finally, we want to acknowledge that the process of working together on this Review has been a very satisfying experience that allowed us to strengthen our connections to each other and to FUS in a very meaningful way. We are grateful for the opportunity overseeing this Review provided to serve our community in a way that enriched our lives.
2: What We Heard - Key Themes

Our goal in this section is to provide a summary of “what we heard”. We provide observations and questions for the community to discuss in a later section.

While we have worked hard to identify key themes and highlight selected supporting quotes in the body of the report, it is unquestionably true that our summary loses some of the depth, diversity, and emotional impact of reading all of the questions and responses. **We urge you to read Appendices A, B and C to more fully appreciate the depth and richness of all of the member, minister and staff quotes for each theme.**

A. Member Interviews Summary

Methodology

Over the course of two months, thirty-one FUS members participated in seven 90-minute-long small group interviews. Interviews covered thirteen questions that focused on seven aspects of the FUS ministry:

i. Their current perception of FUS Ministry.
ii. Impact of FUS on the growth of their mind and spirit.
iii. How well FUS helps create connections between and among FUS members.
iv. How well FUS provides care and support during significant life events (illness, marriage, divorce, etc.).
v. How children and youth impact the ministry at FUS.
vi. The role of our Called Ministers.
vii. Anything else they wanted to share about FUS.

Interview participants were asked to talk about each of these seven aspects of our ministry and to make suggestions for improvements. Interviews were audio taped and transcribed to facilitate analysis. What follows is a summary of what was heard about our FUS ministry from our members.

i. Perception of FUS Ministry

Interviewees were asked what readily comes to mind, when they hear the term “FUS ministry”.

- Many FUS members tended to view the FUS ministry as how Called Ministers, lay ministers, staff and programs impact the lives of FUS members.
- Some members viewed the FUS ministry as everything that is done as a community to impact FUS members and the broader community.
- Some interviewees viewed the FUS ministry as a shared responsibility in which members, along with Called Ministers and staff, collectively serve one another.

Quotes from Interviews

“Ministers are the guiding spirit of the whole congregation.”

“FUS ministry has two kinds of tracks. One is what the ministers do at the pulpit and in their leadership roles for the congregation. And the other is, what members of the congregation do, serving and supporting each other in all kinds of ways as we journey together.”
ii. Impact of FUS on the Growth of their Mind and Spirit

All interviewed FUS members reported that in their experience FUS frequently nourishes growth of their mind and spirit. Contributing to nourishing the growth of mind and spirit were:

- Interactions with other members
- Worship services
- Called Ministers and staff
- Active involvement in FUS, including:
  - Being a religious education teacher including Coming of Age
  - Lay ministry
  - Choir membership or other participation in the music program
  - Participating in Quest
  - Small group ministry (notably Chalice groups)
  - Participating in FUS social justice programs
  - Adult religious education classes and retreats
  - Helping FUS on specific projects, such as the new building addition, and ongoing tasks (for example, ushering)

Some interviewed FUS members stated that they felt belonging to the FUS community changed their lives and gave them a new and deeper experience of the religious and/or the spiritual aspect of life.

Some members experience FUS as a valuable bridge between faith traditions and spiritual practices for couples raised in different faith traditions, for those practicing meditation, or for those who are interested in earth-based practices. For example, a wedding ceremony that bridged faith traditions was especially valued by one interviewee.

Quotes from Interviews

“I wouldn’t be the person I am today without it, without FUS. It’s kind of the center of my world. “

“I walked into the First Unitarian Society. . . and I was at home. It’s become integral in so many ways, not only what has been given to me but what I’ve been allowed to also give.”

“My involvement with First Unitarian Universalism, I discovered what religion could be.”

“The choir feeds my soul greatly.”

“The Quest program has been the largest transformative experience that I have had.”
Ideas for Improving How We Nurture Growth in Mind and Spirit

Members suggested numerous changes that might provide more opportunities to nourish growth of mind and spirit:

• Attempt to make services “more worshipful”, (i.e., more contemplative).
• Welcome people where they are at (i.e., congregational openness to accepting people anywhere along their journey).
• Integrate people into the FUS community more quickly.
• Demystify how to become involved in FUS Board committees.
• Improve how FUS supports those who are less likely to reach out or ask for support.
• Consider how to nurture the mind and spirit of teachers who, while teaching, may feel disconnected from the congregation.
• Provide more opportunities to explore other religions.
• Offer more “drop-in” activities that don’t require a long-term commitment
• Continue to grow Chalice groups.
• Offer more programing targeted at the elderly.
• Having more, varied, and deeper interactions that are less issue oriented.
• Feature more pulpit exchanges.
• Offer more congregation-wide social justice initiatives and outreach activities.
• Practice more balance between “head” and “heart” - live what we believe vs. just talking about it.
• Revitalize the Alliance.

Quotes from Interviews

“I can’t give details but I would like the worship services to be more worshipful. . . . the way the gathering starts does not lead me into the kind of state I would like to be in.”

“How can we make this a place that welcomes . . . not just joy and people that are all together and happy but a place that could truly hold, nurture and support . . . I want to make this a place that really welcomes me wherever I’m at.”

“I think we do a reasonable job for people who reach out and ask for help but I don’t know how we reach out to the people who haven’t figured out how to reach out.”

“The ethos of First Unitarian has always been very ‘head’ and not so much ‘heart’. It can be frustrating because you get the sense that we talk a good line but how do we do living it? People will go on and on about how we need to be more generous . . . but when it comes down to sitting across the table from someone and letting them have half your sandwich, you know, that’s a different thing.”
iii. How well FUS Helps Create Connections Between and Among FUS Members

All interviewees reported that they felt connected to FUS and to other FUS members.

- Some members stated that their connections with other FUS members are the heart of their social lives.
- Meaningful connections among FUS members resulted from:
  - Working with other members on issues, programs, projects, and/or tasks of common interests
  - Teaching in the CRE Program
  - Putting yourself out there, i.e., taking the initiative to get involved
  - Belonging to small groups (Quest, choir, Chalice groups and neighborhood groups)
- Despite having made connections, members also stated that the process can sometimes be challenging; in part due to the size of the community and also because of church cultural norms about welcoming and including strangers.
- There was concern that making connections may be difficult for FUS members who are “introverts.”
- It was observed that opportunities for making connections tend to focus on the needs of individual members rather than involving service to others.

Quotes from Interviews

“It’s easy to throw stones from the outside and say there is nothing available. Sometimes you have to dip your foot in.”

“One thing that fostered connections for me is being involved in task oriented projects, working with people to get something done and in the process, getting to know them and appreciate them.”

“I feel like I work hard at being as connected as I am but I’m not as connected as I’d like to be.”

Ideas for Improving How We Build Deeper Connections

Interviewees made the following eleven suggestions for building deeper connections among members.

- Make “reaching out” a community-wide commitment as well as carefully follow-up when interest in volunteering or personal needs are expressed.
- Be more “welcoming” and practice “radical hospitality.”
- Help members identify their needs and interests while improving processes (including web site and social media) for informing members of available programs and resources — then link the two.
- Improve the social gathering space; i.e., the Commons.
- Increase the number and/or visibility of Chalice groups and lay ministers.

Quotes from Interviews

“I kind of see FUS as a ‘reach in’ organization. When I have reached in, I have found something, but I don’t feel like it’s as much of a ‘reach out’ organization as I would like it to be.”
• Create an environment where people could tell personal stories.
• Create a Mentor Match Program for new members.
• Have a “connections/volunteer fair” annually.
• Create opportunities for RE parent groups to interact.
• Have more short-term opportunities and/or events focused on “fun.”
• Foster greater understanding of ministry teams.
• Create connections between Saturday service people and Sunday service people.
• Keep in mind that FUS members differ regarding needs or preferences for connections with others, as well as specific types of connections they find beneficial.

iv. Support During Significant Life Events

Most interviewees reported receiving what they considered as meaningful support as they faced life changing events while those who have not yet received support anticipated being a recipient. Members reported receiving support for:

- Illnesses
- Retirement
- Birth of a baby
- Death of a loved one
- Weddings
- Divorce
- Family turmoil
- Terminating a pregnancy

Support came from a variety of sources including:

- Called ministers
- Lay ministers
- Staff members
- Small groups of members (specifically choir, Quest and Chalice groups)
- Other FUS members.

Those who had children were grateful for the support in raising them.

A few interviewees reported they did not receive the support they desired or expected.

Quotes from Interviews

“We don’t do a good job of integrating new people who just show up. We are very friendly when they first do - Jeanne does a wonderful job of saying hello. But we don’t seem to have a structure in place to keep following up on that.”

“...the's going through stuff with his family and yet, you know, he was able to come and give support and just be there.”

“Well for me, it was when my husband died . . . . My chalice group was the most supportive. They were just awesome. Hugely involved. I don't know how I would have gotten through.”
Ideas for Improving How We Offer Support

While most interviewees felt satisfied with support received, they still made the following seven suggestions for how FUS could do a better job providing support during life changing events.

- Recruit specialized lay ministers and make the lay ministry program more visible.
- Build a culture where it is desired/expected that you will ask for what you need, and that respects the individual’s choice about receiving support.
- Keep the practice of sharing Joys and Concerns at services.
- Create a clear and accessible communication process to inform the community of hospitalizations, illness, and need.
- Create a “pay it forward” option for volunteering FUS members expertise.
- Form a ministry of elders to elders.
- Identify or create more ways for long-term support.

v. Role of Children and Youth within Our Ministry

Interviewees were asked how children and youth of FUS contribute to their experiences as a member of FUS. Responses indicate that children and youth impact the FUS Ministry in many ways:

- Children contribute enjoyment, enlivenment, hope, and energy via their presence at services, by providing opportunities for intergenerational engagement and by adding a sense of family to the congregation.
- Generally positive about how children participate in worship services.
- Children are a key reason that many members originally joined FUS and we should work to retain these members.
- The children’s RE program is one of FUS’ strongest programs and is highly regarded.
- Children contribute to adult reflection and spiritual growth.
- Youth contribute to FUS’ social justice initiatives.

Quotes from Interviews

“I think the lay ministry is another thing that to me is a bit of an enigma. I think I know a couple of them. But in terms of, like, who are these people? Is there a training that goes into this? What is their job?”

“I wish there was a way that you could just pop in when the need is there. And then connected to that is for us to have a ‘pay it forward’ process so if you have been the recipient of some sort of support or help, that you have a way of paying it forward or paying it back. I don’t think we have a way of doing that.”

“Kids being involved is the ’gateway drug’ to having people join.”
Ideas for Improving the Role of Children and Youth within Our Ministry

Interviewees were asked if they had any ideas for changing the way children and youth participate in FUS that could enhance experiences of FUS members, the youth, or both. The following ideas were mentioned:

- Create more opportunities for interaction between the generations.
- Create more opportunities for FUS teens and young adults to interact and connect.
- More involvement of children and youth in worship services; for example, delivering readings.
- Be more welcoming to children during services; for example, deemphasize how children may be disruptive when referring to use of the quiet room/baby haven.
- Make RE program more integrated into the life of the congregation, more visible to all FUS members and remind members that teaching is a growth opportunity.
- More use of social media as a way of staying connected to our youth.
- Give parents of 7th & 8th grade youth information about the youth group.

Quotes from Interviews

“I like the idea of having the kids involved. Even in our traditional service, why can’t they do a reading?”

“You can come and go on a Sunday morning and have no idea that there are over 500 kids enrolled. I don’t know what the solution is but I would like it to be more physically visible that this education program is happening every week.”

vi. Role of Called Ministers within Our Ministry

Rev. Michael Schuler

Members stated that Michael contributes to FUS ministry in multiple ways including:

- Contributes intellectual stimulation and sermons people want to hear.
- Contributes through his deep caring about and involvement in FUS.
- Has demonstrated growth during his time at FUS.
- Models spiritual practice and growth.
- Contributes leadership in the congregation and the wider Madison community.
- Challenges us to strive for excellence in a respectful and supportive manner.
- Provides an open door to express concerns.
- Contributes institutional memory to current issues facing FUS.
- Makes things fun (for example during Quest retreat).

A few interviewees expressed a desire to see Michael display more consistent “warmth”.

Quotes from Interviews

“He (Michael) is multifaceted. I can’t think of anything that goes on here that he is really not in touch with or heavily involved in.”

“I feel like he’s my spiritual guide”

“In the years that I have been here, Michael has demonstrated for all of us to see, growth. Human growth, human potential, in a sense some vulnerability. And some embracing of spiritual practice. ... it has really been inspiring to see the changes that someone with that much responsibility and everything that’s happened, continue to grow, you know, that helps.”
Rev. Kelly Crocker

Members reported that Kelly contributes to the FUS ministry in multiple ways, including:

- Joy, energy, enthusiasm, and a sweetness of soul.
- Sermons that are relatable, warm, and joyful - they are a draw for members.
- Drawing new members to FUS and creating connections to youth and families.
- Experiencing a sense of real presence when talking with her.
- Providing guidance that children and youth relate to.
- Allowing herself to be vulnerable.
- Being an open-minded team player.
- Being approachable for members experiencing issues.
- Kelly and Michael are seen as having complementary skills and together provide FUS with a balanced ministry.

Several interviewees noted that Kelly has shown growth since joining FUS and contributes significant leadership within the FUS community.

A few interviewees expressed concern about the ability for our two ministers to fulfill the incremental demands of the FUS community created by the loss of our third full-time minister.

Recommendations for the Called Ministers and the FUS Community

Several interviewees felt no need to make recommendations regarding Kelly’s and Michael’s ministry; for example, one member’s advice was to “Keep doing what they’re doing. They both do it very well.”

Several interviewees expressed that it was time for FUS leaders and members to talk about Michael’s retirement and this upcoming leadership transition. His retirement is viewed as both a challenge and an opportunity for growth and change.

Other recommendations that were for both Michael and Kelly or the FUS Community as a whole include:

Quotes from Interviews

“Kelly has the preaching chops and the heart and the joy. I guess that’s what I love, she always conveys that there is no place in the world she would rather be than where she is.”

“I watched Kelly grow over the years. It has been incredible. I’ve seen her take a real leadership role in many areas, the religious education but also with the Quest Program, with the ministry.”

“They [Kelly and Michael] are stretched thin ... I hope that most everyone realizes that.

Quotes from Interviews

“Keep doing what they’re doing. They both do it very well.”

“They need to delegate more I think, both of them. And then what they can’t delegate, they need the resources to support them.”
• The called ministers should try to delegate more and communicate more aggressively if FUS needs more resources to support them – work to avoid burning out.

• The community should be more proactive in providing more help and/or resources.

• It would be good for the community if one or both ministers could play a larger role in societal and local issues.

• Greater transparency from called ministers regarding what they do would help the community understand their needs as called ministers more clearly.

• Some members would like to see Michael and Kelly “team up” more for special services.

• Find new ways to make the lay leadership more visible as a way to improve understanding of their roles, create new connection opportunities, and show gratitude for their efforts.

• Look for more opportunities to educate members on the historic and environmental significance of our buildings.

Specific recommendations members had for Michael included:

• Continue to be more self-revealing (i.e., use personal stories) in sermons.

• If possible, take on a larger role in the Madison community.

• Strive to make the children’s messages more consistently child centered.

• Try to have more fun.

Specific recommendations members had for Kelly included:

• Look for opportunities to take on responsibility.

• Be mindful of time management to avoid burning out.

Quotes from Interviews

“I have one wish and I guess I could make it as a recommendation. In all the years that Michael has been here, I don’t have the sense of really knowing him deeply. I would like more self-revelation in his sermons.”

“[Kelly] probably needs to keep pushing herself and pushing the boundaries of what she can do because she’s a very capable and educated person that could probably do a whole lot more than she thinks.”

“If our church ever gets to the point again that we could afford to have a third minister because we’re getting so large I think that would be great because people look for different things.”

“I wish Michael could have more fun.”

“I wonder if there isn’t a larger role for Michael in working with outside community organizations.”
vii. Anything Else to Share about Your Experience at FUS

Interviewees shared the following in response to the prompt of “Is there anything else you want to tell us about your experience at FUS?”

• Several expressed gratitude for the impact FUS had on their lives.
• The FUS community is more open to different views and beliefs than in the past.
• The FUS community has changed and is more welcoming than in the past.
• The congregation may not adequately acknowledge the hard work of former Board presidents once their terms expires.
• Called ministers should express more gratitude to congregants for their service to the congregation.
• Congregational social justice activities should be more publicized and celebrated.
• Strengthen and expand the congregation’s use of social media.
• Make the congregation’s staff more visible to the whole congregation.
• Concern that growth will lead to more fragmentation and a lack of focus was expressed.
• There are legitimate “boundaries” between FUS members and ministers.

Interviewed participants also expressed their gratitude for being asked to participate in the small group interviews. Some said this was the first time they had been asked to share their experiences regarding FUS.
B. Called Minister Questionnaires Summary

Senior Minister Michael Schuler and Community Life Minister Kelly Crocker completed a written questionnaire sent to them by the Ministry Review Team. Six questions were organized into three broad categories:

i. Core ministerial responsibilities and resource availability
ii. Professional satisfaction from the role
iii. Challenges and opportunities to improve

What follows is a summary of each of the three categories.

i. Core Ministerial Responsibilities and Resource Availability

Core Responsibilities - Michael Schuler

- Serves as the “head of the staff.”
  - Works with the church Business Administrator on matters related to the budget, fundraising, capital needs, personnel and hiring issues. Provides direct supervision of some staff.

- Provides accountability to the Board of Trustees.
  - Works closely with the society president to prepare Board agendas and Parish Meetings.
  - Attends monthly Board meetings and serves on the Board committees on personnel, governance and finance.
  - Keeps the Trustees aware of the FUS vision of ministry.

- Oversees worship services, conducts classes, writes for FUS publications, and works with the Quest program.

- Coordinates many of the memorial services for FUS members, as well as a few weddings and child dedications each year.

- Conducts monthly programs at Capitol Lakes and Oakwood retirement communities, which provide a key communication link with elderly FUS members. Many non-UU’s attend these monthly gatherings.

- Serves as “institutional memory” by providing history on issues and FUS’s future direction during discussions with the FUS Board and other key congregational leaders.

- Spokesperson and being the public face of FUS including participating in community forums and demonstrations and communicating with local media and community leaders.

“Quotes from the Questionnaire

“I serve currently as head of staff and as such, work closely with the Church Business Administrator on a variety of institutional matters including budget building and monitoring, fundraising, capital needs & priorities, personnel and hiring issues.”

“As the congregation has grown and evolved, I’ve increasingly found myself functioning as our institutional memory, able to describe ‘the way we were’ and to provide a historical context for discussions bearing on FUS’s future direction.”

“I am normally the public face and spokesperson for FUS, communicating with local media and community leaders, participating in forums, demonstrations and as a presence in organizations whose principles align with our own.”
Core Responsibilities - Kelly Crocker

- Serves as Community Life Minister - creates community and helps facilitate connections within and across the congregation, with an emphasis on creating and supporting large and small groups.
- Oversees the small group ministry initiative involving Chalice groups, neighborhood groups, spiritual practice groups, and other small groups.
- Leads the Lay Ministry program.
- Oversees the Quest program.
- Serves as the FUS Youth Group minister.
- Provides pastoral care, including rites of passage.
- Regularly contributes to worship services.
- Oversees the Partner Church program, teaches adult education classes, and contributes to staff meetings and supervision.

Comments on Resources

The responses indicated that Michael's and Kelly’s ministries are being impacted to various degrees by resource limitations. Impacts of limited resources that were cited include:

- Lack of time to fully develop additional programs or implement ideas that could help build the community and foster connections.
- Difficulty in maintaining a balance between professional responsibilities and personal life.
- Limited time spent on high-level reflection which could contribute to better strategic planning and visioning.
- Difficulty in taking leaves or sabbaticals as specified in the ministers’ contracts.

“Quotes from the Questionnaire

“...my core ministerial responsibility is creating community in groups large and small across the generations.”

“I believe that I have changed along with the congregation and these new responsibilities feel like a wonderful expansion of work that I love.”

“I have many opportunities to do what feels like weaving people together into community.”

“Quotes from the Questionnaire

“A couple of additional staff positions would certainly help, most notably a third minister or its equivalent “

“Some larger congregations with limited resources are now experimenting with part-time volunteer ‘staff’ to handle certain roles.”

“It never feels like one can relax and coast for a bit. The demands are pretty much unceasing.”

“(A) congregational resource that would assist me would be an ongoing, intentional Leadership Development Program.”
When asked for suggestions on ways to help achieve the mission of the FUS Ministry, Michael and Kelly provided the following ideas:

- Additional hired staff.
- Finding a way to go back to a three minister model.
- Increased volunteer involvement from FUS Members (particularly male members).
- Creating an ongoing “Leadership Development Program” involving volunteers.

ii. Personal Satisfaction

Both Called Ministers provided answers that indicate an overall high level of satisfaction with their ministries and their roles.

Kelly provided the following thoughts:

- She is pleased that she now has a ministerial role that she has, which offers an opportunity to expand beyond a sole focus on religious education.
- She finds her relationships with FUS members, the commitment of FUS members, and the collaborative relationships with staff especially satisfying aspects of her ministry.

Michael feedback including the following:

- Michael reports that he considers ministry to be a near-perfect fit with his temperament and post-graduate training. He particularly enjoys the many different roles, activities and opportunities that he works on.
- After forty years, ministry and notably opportunities to study and reflect upon topics he chooses, is still very engaging and he enjoys what he is doing.

“Quotes from the Questionnaire

“A specialist in volunteer recruitment and development would also be extremely useful.”

“I would love to create more adult education programming. There just isn’t enough time in a day.”

“Quotes from the Questionnaire

“I now have the ministerial role that I love.”

“There are two (very satisfying) things that quickly jump to mind – the relationships with our members and the relationships with our staff.”

“This is a great community and I thoroughly enjoy the people who come here.”

“I have found it a near-perfect fit with my temperament and post-graduate training.”

“Even after forty years, each week unfolds a little differently and each topic that I choose to study and reflect upon is, in its own way, engaging.”
iii. Challenges and Opportunities to Improve

Key challenges and opportunities cited by our Called Ministers include:

- Managing the transitional challenges due to the impending retirement of Michael and other key staff members. These transitions are going to create anxiety, but are also opportunities for growth.

- Finding ways to better identify and develop member volunteers to assist in the achievement of our shared ministry.

- Successfully completing a capital campaign that could provide incremental resources to address infrastructure needs and debt levels without negatively impacting our annual giving campaign.

- Finding opportunities to do more strategic planning and visioning.

“Quotes from the Questionnaire

“In the next 5 years we are going to have a big transition in our ministerial staff. This is going to require a willingness to be open to new ideas and new learnings.”

“We have had multiple conversations in many different meetings about the lack of volunteers, the need to create a culture of service and volunteerism and I think it’s time to put some great minds in a room and figure it out.”

“We cannot put such a [capital] campaign off indefinitely but serious questions around timing and the impact such a campaign might have on the operating budget (if capital commitments cause pledges to decline) need to be asked.”

“I am not sure that we spend enough time – and this applies to our lay leadership as well – engaging in the kind of generative discussions that can lead to innovation and increased relevancy.”
C. Staff Questionnaires Summary

Four of the sixteen FUS staff completed a written questionnaire sent to them by the Ministry Review Team. The questionnaire asked five questions as well as provided an opportunity for each individual, from their own perspective, to report anything else regarding ministry at FUS.

The four questions focused on the following topics:

i. Their impression of the scope of the FUS ministry
ii. An overview of how their work as staff members relates to our ministry
iii. Their view on the biggest challenges facing the FUS community
iv. The biggest opportunities FUS has to improve the work we do together in the future
v. Any other thoughts or recommendations they would like to share

What follows is a summary of their responses to each question.

i. Staff Views of FUS Ministry

Staff were asked when they hear the term “FUS ministry” what readily comes to mind.

- There was reasonable consensus among the respondents that the FUS ministry is what the ministers, staff, volunteers and FUS members do to nurture members and provide transformative growth opportunities.

- Some staff reported noticing confusion regarding the meaning or vision of FUS ministry among both staff and FUS members, as well as some negative connotations associated with the term ministry given its traditional use within more dogmatic faith communities.

- One staff member cited the need to provide more congregation-wide clarity about the vision of FUS ministry as it relates to serving the needs of members vs. efforts to impact the broader community through social justice and other efforts.

“Quotes from the Questionnaire

“Two ideas - what the ministers do (caring for members, lay ministry, life journeys, being an intentional community) and what ministry teams and staff do (transformative growth via relationships and working with the community, growing by learning to work as a team, and about spirituality as it is found in interdependence).”

“While I understand, I see puzzlement on the faces of some in our congregation as it is used. Many of those feel it is too churchy or have a reaction from a negative experience in a faith community.”

“I know that this entire denomination feels the pull between a traditional worship/spiritual education kind of member’s demands and the demands from other members, and potential members, to experience spirituality entirely through a justice lens.”
ii. Staff Relationship to the FUS Ministry

We asked staff members how their work related to the ministry of the congregation. Their responses indicate that FUS staff members make important and vital contributions to FUS ministry, such as:

- Providing opportunities for FUS member transformation through learning, inspiration, being part of a larger “whole”, and positively impacting society.
- Helping members live the UU Principles.
- Helping achieve the FUS mission and vision.
- Helping members deepen and broaden their understanding of varying human experiences.
- Creating and shaping programs and activities that carry out the vision of FUS ministry.

iii. Challenges Facing FUS and Ideas to Address Them

We asked staff members to identify challenges and share ideas on what could help address those challenges. Ideas mentioned were the following:

- Improve member communication and ease of navigation to ensure that all members (particularly new ones) feel connected and understand opportunities to get involved.
  - Electronic message board at each entry
  - Improve our online presence
  - Simplify publications
- Improve member connection to our community and mission and drive more involvement by consistently recognizing and celebrating all the work that FUS already does.
- Improve staff alignment and collaboration by being more intentional about providing opportunities for staff to share best practices and provide input to senior staff and the Board.
- Reduce the stress and workload of our Called Ministers by finding more ways to support them.
- Reduce anxiety about upcoming staff and minister transitions by using them as an opportunity to celebrate past contributions and create excitement about future opportunities facilitated by change.
- Address concerns about building and debt load by raising member awareness and conducting a new capital campaign.

“Quotes from the Questionnaire”

“Volunteers and I offer the means for greater understanding of varying human experiences to the congregation, through proximity and educational programming.”

“In my position all I do is related to ministry.”

“I see my role primarily as a leader, facilitator, and educator: to help create an atmosphere in which volunteers can learn, be inspired, and feel part of something bigger than themselves.”

“FUS is overwhelming for new members or any members with very busy lives.”

“A big area of help would be communication improvement in all its forms, which would diminish the sense of overwhelm and save a lot of staff time.”

“I don’t think that I/we lift up the good things that our ministry teams are already doing enough.”

“We need all the support we can get as staff on ways we can do our best to collaborate, share information, coordinate use of the building, etc.”

“I am concerned about not having a strong enough base of support from our “younger” generation (50 and younger) of adults to replace the support that our stalwarts have provided over the years.”
iv. Future Opportunities for Improvement

A fourth question inquired about the most exciting opportunities for the ministry of the FUS community in the next three years and ideas to act on those opportunities. Mentioned were three categories of opportunities:

- The community should look for ways to improve the level of internal collaboration and leverage the expertise and experience of the staff. For example, a series of retreats with the Board, ministers, staff and other key FUS members to study trends and analyze and reflect on what’s offered.

- The community should look for opportunities to use technology in new ways. For example, better utilizing our member database to communicate with FUS members and identify potential volunteers with skill sets matching the needs of the project.

- If resources allow, try to become a bigger part of the wider Madison community working for positive change. FUS’s current positive reputation for community involvement is a foundation for greater community involvement requiring staff and volunteer time and energy, and building space.

v. Other Recommendations

The final question encouraged staff to add any other thoughts or recommendations related to the ministry at FUS. Key feedback included:

- Expressions of appreciation for career opportunities FUS has provided.

- A recommendation to continue looking for ways of being more welcoming – particularly for members with limited physical capabilities.

- Encouragement to do the work necessary to insure lay leaders and members and staff understand how FUS works under the adopted Governance Policy model (including the role of ministry teams).

- Encouragement to re-examine our programs and consider becoming more focused on community outreach, including building our congregation’s UU identity and increasing connections with the UU movement.

“Quotes from the Questionnaire

“We could offer a series of retreats with the Board, staff and other leading members to take a look at trends, analyze what we offer and really be thoughtful about what programs we provide. We need to do this to create budgets and keep our membership alive and contemporary.”

“I’m excited about using technology in new ways to both reach our constituents and to streamline our work.”

“Many people have always known that ‘FUS does great things,’ and I think we have the opportunity to grow that.”

“Working at FUS has been the most challenging and rewarding segment of my career.”

“To be consistent with a welcoming ministry, we need to work on our disability (un)friendliness.”

“Perhaps we can more clearly define ourselves as UUs through the vehicle of community engagement and by narrowing our programs to those having a stronger UU focus.”

“Personally, I think there could be great energy and momentum around the idea of scaling back on our ‘programs’ . . . and perhaps instead shifting our focus to community outreach and growing our UU identity/denomination.”
3: What We Observed and Questions for the Community

It is common for reviews such as this to conclude with some type of an evaluation and/or suggestions for improvement. Our committee decided not to take that approach for this review. Note that we asked the key stakeholders for their own suggestions as to how the FUS Ministry could be more effective, and the report contains a long list of their ideas, which we encourage everyone to review in detail. Rather than emphasizing or prioritizing specific ideas for improvement, we will leave that task to the community as a whole to discuss.

However, our committee does have some observations that we would like to share. We have also posed questions for the FUS leadership that flow from these observations. We believe these questions might prove useful as we look to develop and refine our Vision of Ministry in the coming years.

- **Our FUS ministry appears to effectively nourishing growth of mind and spirit, with significant contributions from our Called Ministers, staff, and members themselves.** While our member interviews may not be fully representative of all members, there is no question the ministry at FUS is having a positive impact and improving lives. It is also a common theme for members to share that service to the community and interactions with other members often are paths to significant growth.

  QUESTION: How can we create more opportunities to share the impact our ministry is having with all major stakeholders and better celebrate our successes? How can we help our members realize the role that all of us play in our ministry?

- **Our Called Ministers and staff appear to be effective and are deeply appreciated.** There is a clear sense of appreciation for both of our Called Ministers, including the way they complement each other’s skill sets. Members also cite many positive interactions with our staff and the significant impact in their lives from our programs.

  QUESTION: How can we more consistently acknowledge the impact and importance of our Called Ministers and staff?

- **Nourishing mind and spirit can be as simple as making connections.** While members lives are positively impacted by the excellence of our programs and worship services and by the opportunities we provide to work together as a force for good, sometimes just connecting with each other can provide opportunities for growth.

  QUESTION: Should we put a higher priority on finding ways to connect members to each other through small shared projects and social events? Should we consider offering fewer programs, thus leaving more time and resources for other connection opportunities?
• **Some members struggle to find their place in our community.** FUS is a large and complex place, and there were frequent expressions of concern about how we welcome members and provide consistent help to all members as they seek opportunities to connect with the community.

**QUESTION:** How can we become more consistently excellent in the way we welcome new members and provide ongoing support to members looking to find ways to participate in our shared ministry?

• **Some members don’t clearly understand the roles of our staff, lay leaders and lay ministers.** There is a desire to improve the way we celebrate and publicize our staff, lay ministers, and other lay leaders.

**QUESTION:** How can we use our services, website, and emails to provide more visibility to our staff, lay leaders, and lay ministers? Are there other ways to accomplish this goal?

• **The presence of children in our community helps members grow.** Most members reported being positively impacted by the involvement of children and youth within our community.

**QUESTION:** How can we expand the involvement of children and youth in the larger FUS community in ways that will enrich our community?

• **Resource constraints may be a bigger issue than is widely appreciated.** While some of our members expressed concern about the impact of limited resources on our staff and programs, that theme was much more common among the Called Ministers and staff.

**QUESTION:** How can we create more opportunities to openly discuss resource constraints during our budgeting process? Should we call more attention to the gaps between our aspirations and our available resources? Do we need to do more strategic planning and visioning?

• **The impending retirement of Michael Schuler and other key staff members will be a focus for our community in the coming years.** There was some expressed anxiety about the upcoming retirements of our Senior Minister and other staff members and the impact it will have on the FUS community.

**QUESTION:** How well prepared are we for this period of grieving/transition/opportunity? How can the broader community participate in this process in ways that strengthen the community and allow us practice our UU principles?

• **Opportunities to be heard are appreciated.** People consistently expressed appreciation for the opportunity to share their views.

**QUESTION:** How can we create more opportunities to listen to our community and allow people to provide input on a consistent basis?
Appendix A

Member Interviews: Questions, Themes and Quotes

Interviews conducted during Spring 2016

1. When you hear the term, FUS Ministry, what readily comes to mind?

Responses to this question fall into three broad categories:

Q1 Theme: Called ministers, lay ministers, staff, and programs comprise the FUS ministry.

“[Ministers are the] guiding spirit of the whole congregation. Although it is complex and made up of many individuals, the ministers actually set the tone of a congregation and are the most important individuals.”

“[I think of] lay ministers.”

“I think of programs mostly.”

“Parish ministers. That’s the first thing I wrote down”

“I was looking at it as the decision makers. Kind of like “the buck stops here” kind of thing.”

“Dan and Linda are very important as part of that ministry with the music program. All of the members of the staff are . . . it’s a huge team effort. I just wanted to include them . . . as an affirmation.”

“I also think of the social justice ministry teams which are, I think, very important.”

Q1 Theme: FUS ministry is everything we do as a community to impact our members and the broader community.

“FUS Ministry is pretty much everything that goes on here that ties me to this place and ties others to this place.”

“I think of it as taking care of the inside and the outside, internally – our community, and the larger community around us.”
Q1 Theme: FUS ministry is a shared ministry in which members serve one another.

“. . . two kinds of tracks. One is what the ministers do at the pulpit and in their leadership roles for the congregation. And the other is, what members of the congregation do, serving and supporting each other in all kinds of ways as we journey together.”

“It’s all of us reaching out.”

“And my answer is aided by when you say ‘pops into your mind.’ What pops into my mind is Michael and Kelly and ministers. However, after spending three years on the Board, what quickly replaced that in my mind is that FUS ministry is basically everything that we do as a congregation and as an institution, a community. So that’s what I now think. Both being present as part of that process, present on the Board, and reading some of the books/bibles attached to that governance process, shifted my thinking. In any case, they made it very clear that every person in the church was a minister and doing ministry. Every individual.”

“We minister to each other if we’re listening to each other.”

“. . . it's the FUS community as a whole, providing support to one another.”

2. In your experience, has your involvement at FUS nourished growth of your mind and spirit, and if so, what or who has contributed to your growth?

The following four themes tell how involvement at FUS nourishes growth of the minds and spirits of FUS members and what contributes to that growth and nourishment.

Q2 Theme: Involvement in FUS is reported to nourish the growth of mind and spirit by all interviewees. They cite four major contributors to that growth:

A. Other members of the FUS community.

“It’s the people that keep us here.”

“If the people weren’t as special as they are, it would be just another church. What makes FUS unique for me is the people. “

“I kind of see it as multilevel. And I think that’s what makes it so special for me, you get so many needs met. Spiritual, emotional, many, many needs met in this one community.”

“The sense of recognition that other people are struggling with the same questions that I struggle with, and in some instances reach similar answers. Other people are reaching answers that are reasonable and of interest to me.”

B. Participation and deep involvement in the following eight programs, projects, and activities:

- Teaching Children’s Religious Education Classes

“. . . the first thing that nourished the growth of my mind and spirit was teaching children’s religious education.”
“I had a little bit more strength to dive in and do the Coming of Age with teenagers, knowing that my two had just gone through that. It was nothing but a very pleasant experience, getting involved not only with the adults in question and with the teenagers in COA. It is something that on a personal level I’m going to continue to do because I know I get almost as much out of the COA program as the teenagers do. “

“Once I did get involved with the COA, it was definitely a growing period for me because I had to be prepared to try to facilitate or help the teenagers in the COA come up with what they thought and what their values were and what their spiritual growth was. To be prepared, I had to figure out what mine was. It’s a good way for me to review the same things they were reviewing. So in that sense, what the youth brought to me, was a self-reevaluation. “

“So we taught [our children’s RE] classes. The class I loved teaching the most was *Neighboring Faiths* - the one that you visited all the churches in the community. That was just wonderful . . . with all the kids. That was a huge growth experience because I was learning about things, about religions that I didn’t know about and then having to share them with young kids.”

“My daughter went through the RE program here and I was a teacher so I learned what that curriculum was like and what we’re teaching our kids in this community of faith.”

“I’ve been a teacher here. Didn’t always feel nourished. But that’s because I’m a teacher in my regular, weekly life . . . So it was a bit of a challenge to be a teacher on a Sunday or Saturday as well as a teacher during the week. But it was important work. It’s not that I wasn’t nourished but it’s a different kind of a thing. It’s still helped me be connected to people here and helped me get to know other people. It wasn’t a downer . . . maybe it challenged me in a different way.”

“. . . the committees and the ministry teams that I’ve been on, teaching, getting to know people through my children. That all contributes so much to that nourishment. Both my kids went all the way through the RE program and I taught several times. I’ve gotten a lot out of it, being a part of the program, both through the curriculum and then just interaction with the kids and the other teachers and the RE staff.”

“One of the really valuable experiences for me has been teaching in church school for the first time, really, ever . . . I thought it was a good way to have contact with kids of that age who I miss because mine are well past that age. And yet, the other aspect of that experience that has been really valuable is that the first year we covered the Seven UU Principles, which I never looked at in any depth or thought about significantly. You were to prepare for the class, you had to do that. So I learned through that and now I’m teaching Bible. My knowledge of the Bible was even more limited than it is now because I’ve learned a fair amount as I’ve been trying to teach kids.”

**Lay Ministry**

“. . . my lay ministry role. I became a lay minister a few years ago and what I do that’s the most useful and I think the most helpful is to work with other caregivers . . . [it] has provided me something special here at FUS that I wouldn’t have at other places. “
“I’ve been a lay minister since the beginning of the program which allowed me to take my personal and professional experiences and really turn them into a ministry to other people.”

- **Choir Membership**
  “I’ve spent most of my time here in the music program, in the choir. I’ve formed a lot of friendships.”
  “We’re part of the choir but that’s for my benefit. I like singing.”
  “Singing in the choir because I love to sing”
  “The choir has been a huge thing for me too. I don’t know anything you could do to change that to make them better. Unless we get another choir.”
  “I’m also in the choir and just thinking about nourishing and growth. . . . I find it nourishing to just have the opportunity to sing.”

- **Quest**
  “Personal connections aside, participating in Quest. That has been meaningful.”
  “I did a two-year Quest program. That was phenomenal. That was wonderful.”
  “The Quest program has been the largest transformative experience that I have had.”
  “. . . being involved from the beginning in the Quest Program for the last ten years.”

- **Small Group Ministry and Especially Chalice Groups**
  “That’s another way that the group that meets every month for a long time now, I think two-three years. You get to know each other. It’s a small ministry concept.”
  “I think of the small group interactions is where I touch base with other people in the congregation. My writing group is all Unitarians. We meet occasionally for art.”
  “First is my Chalice group. I’ve been involved with this for about four years. It’s a group of about 11 people now. And we meet twice a month. It really has become one of the most important sets of relationships that I have in my life. We are a diverse group of people so that’s been one cornerstone of FUS for me.”
  “I’m a member of a Chalice group and I just started another Chalice group, so I’m feeling very nourished by both of those groups.”
  “I’d say it was through my involvement in the spiritual book group. . . . That to me was as much the essence of a religious experience as I can get here.”

- **Social Justice Programs**
  “We haven’t had any contact with FUS or any organized religion for a long, long time. We were interested in participating in a community of people that we thought were interested in social issues and improvement of society locally, whether it’s environment or whatever.”
“. . . nourished deeply for an extended period of time, primarily through social action programs and the part that I played in that . . .”

“. . . currently, social justice stuff. I was on the microfinance ministry team and I’m leading the women and family homeless shelter ministry team.”

**Musical Program**

“The choir feeds my soul greatly.”

“The music always pulls me to this place as does the excellence of the services and the messages.”

“The music is phenomenal. It’s just very, very heart opening.”

“Oh, and the music . . . sometimes I have difficulty not crying at times in the services.”

“We now primarily come for all the music Sundays or special performances being done.”

**Adult Education and Retreats**

“All the adult education classes I’ve taken”

“And I’ve gone to a few of the women’s retreats and really grown in those places, or from those places.”

“I went to a parenting class that Ruth Gibson [past Educational Minister] taught that I found very useful.”

**Projects and Ongoing Tasks**

“The peak experience was . . . being part of the building project. I have said this many times before, contrary to what people at FUS say about themselves, I’ve never done anything where I received so much spontaneous gratitude. People coming up out of the blue and thanking me. People saying, ‘Oh, I’m so glad you’re doing this.’”

“I’ve been taking care of green plants for 25 years. Green plants and I are bonded together through church. I brought in the plants in the Landmark years and years ago. Now I’m part of the group that waters the plants down in the atrium. We started when Ellsworth was here and we had to water Ellsworth’s plants. So the plants have been part of my FUS experience . . . and nourishment, for them and me.”

“. . . we believe if we are going to be part of it [FUS community], then we have to participate. So we participate in a lot of activities. We handle the counting of the money. We’re on the personnel committee.”

“Soon after, within a year of getting here, we were asked to help organize the grand opening weekend for the new building. So that was a chunk of trust that was laid on us very quickly. That was nice. That was great. We got to know a great many people quickly. Otherwise it would have taken years to meet that many different people.”
C. Worship Services.

“. . . the excellence of the services and the messages. I never look at who is speaking. I just come. I feel good when I’m here, and well.”

“The thing that I think of first is coming into individual services with not a blank mind but with a mind that is going in one direction. Then at the end of the service, typically, it’s going in a much better direction.”

“I think that my mind has probably been nourished through sermons or reflections that come from the pulpit. Those are usually timely. They are current and they help me think through things that are happening in the world. I mean, it seems more like an NPR broadcast rather than, you know, reading from the Bible or something. . . “

“I look forward to the services.”

D. Called Ministers and the staff.

“When I looked at this question, I thought one thing that has really challenged my mind, really, has been Michael’s message whenever he speaks. I can’t believe how much knowledge that man has but it really has challenged my mind. That’s something that . . . I’ve talked to other members about and to my husband when we discuss it every time we attended a service that he’s led. The spirit part of it is Kelly as far as I’m concerned. She’s really the heart of this congregation, leading the congregation. She just has that ability as far as I’m concerned. But Janet Swanson and Jeanne Sears are really two people who continue to draw me in. Janet was very active with our Quest group and I appreciate that. Jeanne was my first contact with the congregation when I sent an email and I got this ‘Hi neighbor. I’ll see you on Sunday if you’re there.’ And it was really sweet. Ever since then, I have felt that closeness, that bond. It’s the people.”

“I would say, definitely, it’s spiritual, growth of mind and spirit, being active here . . . what or who has contributed? For sure Kelly, Janet Swanson, for sure Michael. I talk more frequently with Kelly or Janet than I do with Michael but I definitely feel a connection with him as well. “

“Michael’s sermons had a very strong impact initially as many of them are about ethics, and business ethics every now and then. I learned a lot.”

Q2 Theme: Three interviewees who taught religious education class found teaching to be less nourishing compared to other activities and two felt isolated from the congregation while teaching.

“. . . the two years that I spent teaching I felt like I wasn’t a part of the congregation. I wasn’t in church. I wasn’t seeing people. Go a whole year without seeing anybody because you’re over doing Sunday school. So it feels like you’re separate. I felt separated from the congregation.”
[Facilitator asks another teacher: “you felt the same way?” and the response is: ]
“Yes, even though, I felt very supported by Leslie. I felt very supported by the wonderful volunteer/teacher dinner at the end of the year. Very supported in that way but probably spiritually, for my own self, it was . . . it was hard. “

“It’s been quite some time now but I taught Sunday school two different years and acknowledge that . . . I always related more to the, it says more about me than the church or the community, but more to the kind of an academic model. But I feel most enriched by or that I relate to best or learned more from, is the sermon, the adult education, the opportunity to listen and engage in music, choral music particularly. Learn and grow and feel enriched from those experiences. “

Q2 Theme: Nourishment and growth comes from a deep sense of belonging to the FUS community that has changed lives and given individuals a new and deeper experience of the religious and the spiritual.

“I wouldn’t be the person I am today without it, without FUS. It’s kind of the center of my world for education, growth, entertainment, a chance to sing in the choir, social justice, service . . . It’s just where I put my time and energy and I am sure I wouldn’t be the same without it.”

“But as Karen [former Associate Minister] used to say when teaching new UU, you come to meet your immediate initial needs and then you start doing, what I think she calls, selfish service. Things like singing in the choir because I love to sing. Then you start doing . . . I don’t remember what she called it. Unselfish service, like organizing the ushers because it’s something that needs to be done, not because you’re dying to organize ushers. Then UU becomes your identity.”

“My involvement with First Unitarian Society . . . has changed the whole course of my life once I became involved here. When I discovered Unitarian Universalism, I discovered what religion could be.”

“I walked into the First Unitarian Society . . . and I was at home. It was like I was home, which was a big surprise to me given my background and my running away from believing that there was anything . . . spiritual I needed to consider. It’s become integral in so many ways, not only what has been given to me but what I’ve been allowed to also give.”

“It’s the feeling of family that draws me back here. This human family we are. It’s made up of individuals and a larger family feeling.”

“Life is changing and this community, this congregation is still my touchstone.”

“. . . home away from home.”

“I have found this a transformative community because of some of the things I have intentionally taken part in.”

“I don’t have any lists and when I read this question, I had just a flood of memories. So it was like . . . being presented with a shawl at the hospital or being at [husband’s] burial and having Michael there, and filling in the grave. Or working on Quest in small groups or the comradery that I feel with some of the lay ministers and the staff, like Jeanne. So to me, it doesn’t list out. It is more of 26 years, I guess, of feeling held by so much.”
“I will likewise express my appreciation. I think I told Michael that . . . he gave a sermon approximately three years ago about what is important to have in your job and what makes it worthwhile. I was going through the stage of my life wondering whether I should continue to work in unpleasant circumstances or not. It was very timely. It really helped me so . . . It’s a very tangible consequence.“

Q2 Theme: FUS is a Bridge between Faith Traditions and Spiritual Practices

“It was a challenge to find a marriage ceremony that was true and honest for us, our family and friends - and Michael nailed it.”

“By God I was going to find a place where my Jewish husband and I could feel comfortable.”

“Michael’s embodiment of understanding meditation and spiritual practice in an intimate setting.”

“It’s also hard for me to separate my connection with the meditation community [includes Madison Insight Mediation Group] because they are slightly different but equally important in my life. The fact that FUS supports the practice here is really important to me and it really helps with the connection.” [FUS provides free of charge space for the Madison Insight Meditation Group]

3. What changes do you believe might provide more opportunities to nourish growth of your mind and spirit?

Q3 Theme: Interviewees suggested many changes they believed might provide more opportunities to nourish growth of their minds and spirits.

- Changes in worship that would make the service “more worshipful”.
  “I can’t give details but I would like the worship services to be more worshipful. . . . the way the gathering starts does not lead me into the kind of state I would like to be in. If the announcements were first and then the silence, a little bit of meditation and a little bit of singing together. . . I would get more if the services themselves were a little bit more, I don’t know, contemplative or worshipful.”

  “. . . starting services with ten minutes of announcements is not a great way to start off a worship service. . . . I think the worship service should just be a worship service.”

- Welcome people where they are at.
  “How can we make this a place that welcomes . . . not just joy and people that are all together and happy but a place that could truly hold, nurture and support . . . I want to make this a place that really welcomes me wherever I’m at. I think that would be an area we could continue to work on.”

- Integrate people into the FUS community more quickly.

  “We don’t do a good job of integrating new people, who just show up, who are very friendly when they first do. Jeanne does a wonderful job of saying hello but we don’t seem to have a structure in place to keep following up on that. . . . Thomas Jefferson Church UU in Boulder,
Colorado, they had this amazing system set up where they not only integrated people but we got them to participate by breaking down tasks to small parts. They were kind of the model for volunteer coordination.”

“The new UU class, I really liked that but then it was over, I just sort of felt like I was on my own. And so again, I don’t know what that looks like, whether there’s some kind of buddy system. I don’t know what but . . . I felt it was hard to meet people. I still kind of do. “

“I think my husband and I joined two years ago. I still don’t know what’s available. I remember stumbling on something so if there was just a way to make things known a little more clearly than they are. I know in our new UU class, Jeanne did a great job of talking about various opportunities which led me to sign up for various things and get involved. That has helped but I’m wondering . . . something like a follow up to the New UU. ‘You’ve been here a while. Let’s get together and talk about what opportunities are available.’”

- **Demystify how to become involved in FUS Board Committees.**

  “. . . a little bit of a mystery as to how one participates in the administrative functions of the church, whether it’s the finance committee, the various committees that are established that sort of oversee or run the church. It’s not very clear how to get involved in those. So then the question is, do you want to be able to fold in new people as they come to refresh the leadership and have more opening in terms of how things operate, and are there ways to improve it or change it for the better. I think there is a tendency . . . it’s a pretty close knit group is what I found . . . that actually runs the place. They aren’t necessarily widely enthusiastic about bringing in more people to do internal work, kind of thing.”

- **“Improve how FUS supports those who are less likely to reach out or ask for support.”**

  “I think we do a reasonable job for people who reach out and ask for help but I don’t know how we reach out to the people who haven’t figured out how to reach out. I know one of the things I find that I really have to work on is making social connections so I do that by sending out notes to the members of the choir, ‘Anybody want to join me going to this play’ or that musical thing or whatever. Sometimes I get takers and sometimes I don’t. Nurturing leadership and connection is always a challenge in a place this big.”

  “I am aware that I’m connected. So I just think there are people here who are maybe in more pain, maybe are more introverted, aren’t sure how to reach out to people for what they need. So I’m thinking about how do we do that – without being in people’s faces. “

  “I think it was Kelly’s concept of reaching out to people who, during the holidays, are depressed -- a blue Christmas. I think that was a wonderful idea.”

- **Consider how to nurture the mind and spirit of religious education teachers who, while teaching, may feel disconnected from the congregation.**

  “. . . It’s like the sacrifice is. . . to teach school for a year, which means basically you step away from church. That’s how it felt. So tending to our . . . teachers.”
• **Provide opportunities to explore other religions.**

“I would certainly like to learn more about various other, other than Judeo-Christian, religions. That is a change I would like.”

• **Offer more “drop-in” activities that don’t require a long-term commitment.**

“My schedule tends to be unpredictable sometimes and I would appreciate more opportunities for activities where you kind of drop in... It’s more invitational for newer folks or folks who are less involved to have some opportunities that are just kind of more ad hoc where you can just kind of drop in. “

“I think it would be nice, but not necessarily on a weekly basis, if there was opportunity after the service for those who wanted to, to talk about what was just mentioned [in the service]. I know there’s a social hour but that’s not it. For me, it would have to be why this group is gathering. If you would like to join us and share or have further questions . . .”

• **Continue to grow Chalice groups.**

“I’ve known about the Chalice groups for a long time but I never joined one until the last year. Then this fall, I think they put out a kind of a call for, well, ‘Would you like to be in a Chalice group?’ or, ‘Do you have ideas for that?’ I’ve seen a lot in the Red Floors this year about Chalice groups so... continuing to put that out there, that people can start them. . . . I joined one which is Women on a Journey. Any topic we want to talk about, basically, we talk about. Then the one that I started is for parents and teens. So we don’t necessarily focus on teen issues, although last night we did.”

• **More programing targeted at the elderly.**

“More attention to issues facing the elderly... I think the needs and interests of the elderly have been short [changed]. I think Michael goes to Capital Lakes and Oakwood once a month. That’s fine. It’s basically a talk, an informal talk. But I think programmatically, as long as I’ve been here, which is 35 years, there has been virtually no attention to that population. “

“I couldn’t agree more [referring to individual quoted above]. I really see the lay ministry where we end up talking about each individual with certain needs but we never talk about how we bring folks together. Can we have a meeting that is broader based, like a social group for example? It would be great if we [elderly] could be meeting others, joining together. “

“We talked a long time in lay ministry of how to do more outreach to people who can’t get to church any more [reference to older/elderly].”

• **Having more, varied, and deeper interactions that are less issue oriented.**

“There aren’t that many opportunities if you’re just looking to connect with others. Most everyone is issue oriented. If those don’t appeal to you for some reason, you may think, ‘I’m so glad that FUS does this, but it doesn’t speak to me.’ Then what do you do? I think that’s a problem. “
“One of the events in my normal week that is valuable and provides a sense of community is to meet Wednesday mornings for coffee with a group that ranges from 5 to 12 people or so. I rely on that as sort of a social outlet at that point. I’m wondering whether something like that for people where it wouldn’t be at the church. It would be outside and relatively informal and you’re not expected to be there all the time. “

“I would enjoy more depth. I’ve gone to a lot of the adult parties and spent a couple of nights over a couple of weeks, maybe a Saturday afternoon or maybe a full weekend at a retreat or something. To me, it seems like sometimes it just kind of skims the very top and doesn’t really draw me into the depth of it.”

“The other thing I have thought about quite a great deal is a common gathering time during the week. I particularly think about Wednesday nights. I know that there are some cultures, church cultures, who do that. There’s just a potluck every Wednesday night or the minister makes a big bowl, a big huge thing of soup.”

• More pulpit exchanges

“I think it would be nice if we would have more exchange minister programs for the diversity of experiences. “

• More congregation-wide social justice and outreach initiatives and activities

“I admire all the things that have been done with MOSES and all of those activities. I just wish it was even more.”

“Exchanges where we could go out and about in a more facilitated way rather than having to do it [outreach activities] as individuals.”

• Practice more balance between “head” and “heart” - live what we believe vs. just talking about it.

“The ethos of First Unitarian has always been very ‘head’ and not so much ‘heart’. It can be frustrating because you get the sense that we talk a good line but how do we do living it? . . . People will go on and on about how we need to be more generous . . . but when it comes down to sitting across the table from someone and letting them have half your sandwich, you know, that’s a different thing. “

“I’m talking a good line about I want to see dark faces in the congregation but am I prepared for people who have a different style of worship? Am I prepared to accept them in their totality as opposed to wanting to accept them as a documentation that I’m a liberal person.”

“. . . what I hate about this congregation is that ‘somebody ought to . . . wouldn’t it be great if somebody. . .’. But somehow to foster more of a pastoral spirit within the congregation. I’m not sure you can ever do enough to take care of each other.”

“Doing things and again, it’s kind of moving out of the head. For me, the most valuable connections I’ve made have been tangential. Building benches with a bunch of guys and kids on All Work Sunday.”

• Revitalize the Alliance.

“That leads me to think about the Women’s Alliance which is all the old ladies. And it’s open to men now, you know, a few come but not many. But, you know, I think it would help a lot if we
could have people sent to us who are older people. It’s anybody from, oh, probably 60 and up. Nobody wants to be old so nobody wants to join the Alliance because they think it’s just old ladies, which it is, but eventually you get to the point where, oh, I guess I’m old. I’m 80 now. . . . So we’re looking for an infusion of younger people. We’ve sort of been shoved off into the corner somehow. I don’t know how to make it sound like a good thing to do.”

4. **In your experience, how has your involvement at FUS contributed to building deeper connections with other members?**

The first five themes tell how interviewees’ characterized the ability to make connections with other FUS members, how involvement at FUS contributed to their own connections with other FUS members and what factors create connections. The sixth and last theme characterizes participation in neighborhood groups and their leadership.

Q4 Theme: Some interviewees view FUS as a community in which making connections with other members can be challenging, in part due to church size and culture.

“I feel I have a lot of support in my personal life. I have a lot of friends and a lot of neighbors. I feel very supported and connected. . . . I felt connected here, but it’s kind of amazing to me how disconnected you could feel here.”

“When we moved to Madison, they said, ‘Oh you’re going to hate First Unitarian, it’s so big. You’ll never get acquainted and it’ll be awful.’ So it was harder in the beginning and I think we’ve offered more opportunities but I think we have to continue to look at that.”

“It is not a welcoming church. People don’t reach out. I agree with that. I was thinking when I passed Highpoint the other day, wondering . . . I think I’m going to go there and see how they do it. I think they do it through music and they do it through lots of back patting and warmth and I’ve heard this. People are included right away, but as God’s frozen people, we don’t do things like that. And I think we have a lot to learn. They have a different style.”

“Yeah, I mean, the only other period where you really interact with one another is between services and that tends to be kind of . . . you know, it’s a little bit of a glancing . . . we don’t really connect that much.”

“I feel like I work hard at being as connected as I am but I’m not as connected as I’d like to be. I had hoped that I would make more long-term connections through Quest than I did. I feel like many of the connections that I have to people here are because I am making an effort to make sure that they feel connected as opposed to feeding my own need for connection. So it’s more like work.”

“I do have a neighborhood group. They tend to gather at times that don’t work for our family. There may be something about having children and having a full time job, you know. . . I’m at a different time of my life right now, so we’ll see.”

Q4 Theme: Making connections may be difficult for FUS members who are “introverts”.

“Both of us are extroverts and we find, I think I find it very easy to get my needs met because I can talk to anybody and verbalize what I need. I think that for people who are not extroverts, it’s very difficult to make that connection and to put themselves on the line. So I think a lot of it is personality traits. If you’re an introvert, I don’t know how you engage those people.”
“I agree with you [referring to individual quoted above]. I just want to thank you too because I’m not an extrovert and so I think there are a lot of people who aren’t extroverts. So that is an issue. I’m not going to charge out in a group of strangers and say that I need this. I need my needs met. That’s not going to happen. But I was lucky when I came in because the lay minister who helped me sign the book kind of became a friend. And she helped me out.”

“I think that it’s personality driven. I think that some people are aggressive and they don’t either go out and rattle around until they find something that they want or create it themselves. A lot of people aren’t going to, are not that outgoing so it’s kind of like you said before, you kind of need an outreach kind of group too that basically wants people to come to greet them and help them to connect. I don’t think that’s something that occurs.”

“When I need something, I reach out. My experience has been if I reach out, I can usually get my needs met. But I do hear a lot of complaints about people not being able to do that. Therefore, not finding a niche. But when I confront those people about the niche that they want, they don’t really know what niche it is. You can offer something that it seems like it might work and they don’t follow through. But I do know that if you find a niche and you have a need, the answer is there. I’ve not found anything that I’ve looked for that I haven’t found.”

Q4 Theme: Connections with other FUS members, for some interviewees, are the heart of their social lives.

“But it [FUS] is the center of our social life as well as our religious life. People we know best are the people we know here. So it certainly has been effective in my case.”

“It’s actually the only place I have connections. When they say, ‘Invite your friends’ my friends all come here.”

Q4 Theme: Connection-making opportunities are mostly in service of ourselves.

“You don’t want to really get involved, with those individuals [incarcerated] particularly. You don’t want to go to the jail and help people get health insurance or whatever. So I find that tendency, whether it’s book clubs or whatever. There’s a lot of stuff. But they tend to be, you know, talking to ourselves. Our services are for ourselves, not necessarily trying to help people in the larger community.”

“I think the other thing for me is kind of interesting. Most of the activities are internal. In other words, we’re benefiting ourselves. One of the things I’ve always been interested in. . . . How do you connect with the larger community and help?”

Q4 Theme: Factors contributing to making meaningful connections among FUS members fall into four categories.

1. Working with other members on issues, programs, projects, and/or tasks of common interests.

“Finding like-minded people by getting involved in areas that you care deeply about. . . . Working with new people and new ideas and generating new directions, and finding people who are interested in the same thing. I don’t think that someone coming to this church can find a spot unless they find an area that they care deeply about and meet other people who care deeply about the same area.”
"One thing that fostered connections for me is being involved in task oriented projects, working with people to get something done and in the process, getting to know them and appreciate them. . . . Doing things with people, not just coming here to church and going home but doing things. Meeting them."

"It’s the extracurricular activities, if you will, that lead to the strong connections."

"Opportunity to do one-on-one connections as a lay minister."

"I’ve been on the Board and I’ve gotten fairly close to several Board members, or gotten to know them to the point where after service I’ll gravitate to some of those people. “

2. **Teaching in the CRE Program.**

"I know I get almost as much out of teaching the COA program as the teenagers do."

"It happened on a really deep level with the first CRE committee that I was involved in. For some reason we still, outside of church, see each other. I don’t know what it was about that group. We just all connected."

"I think for me teaching has definitely been one way to build deeper connections with other members."

"I would say the strongest connections that I have are through the co-teachers in RE."

"I’ve been a teacher and we’ve had strong friendships made with people who had kids our kids’ ages and have those connections yet today 40 years later."

3. **Putting yourself out.**

"The other thing that has been fun for me over the course of the last several months is when I had front door duty and basically decided that it would be a good idea to open the door for people when they arrived for the service. I found that that was a lot of just plain fun to see people and you’d see them on a regular basis."

"It’s easy to throw stones from the outside and say there is nothing available. Sometimes you have to dip your foot in."

4. **Small groups: Quest, choir, Chalice groups and neighborhood groups.**

"I think the small groups, not necessarily committees, but it could be a committee. Because the congregation is so big, it’s about the only way that you really connect with people."

"I guess it’s the small groups that one gets involved with, whether it’s the chorus or Quest or you know, a ministry group, a ministry team. “

"FUS has such great strengths in terms of its programs and so on, but socially . . . it’s not that it’s asocial. The interactions in a congregation of 100, where you could almost sit down and name 80% or more of the people that you see on a Sunday morning, that’s powerful. It’s a family. And that cannot be true here. So committees are perhaps social gatherings or whatever you call them afterwards. There’s a certain way to do it and committees help the church. Committees are necessary in a church this size. “
“. . . to be part of a group like the society choir, just being a part of that somewhat smaller community automatically makes you a part of a group working toward a common goal with a real necessity deep in connection because you are contributing to the service.”

“I just recently, this year, joined one of the choirs which has felt very welcoming. There’s a very good feel about joining the choirs. But there’s also the feeling of clearly being the new kid on the block. There’s that as well. So I’ll see if that provides the outreach for personal connection other than with the folks that I sit next to at choir.”

“Once I took the plunge and got involved in Quest, I was extremely surprised as to the connections, not only for my own personal growth, but the connections we made in that group.”

“And it was fun to meet other east siders because the east side [neighborhood] group comprised all of the east side and Monona, one group. We met at homes and restaurants. We alternated between homes and restaurants. It was a small enough group, maybe 10-12. That’s our potluck size. You don’t want much bigger.”

“One of the things that was interesting about a neighborhood group is [they were] folks that I might not have met otherwise. And I liked that it was another way of gathering together that wasn’t based on age or topic.”

“In our Chalice group people have actually brought in additional people that they had as friends that we socialize with. We go to all the Forward Theatre Plays. So there are six of us. Four of us were in the Chalice group and two are new members of the Chalice group and were friends before that.”

Q4 Theme: Participation in neighborhood groups is fluid with frequent changes in leaders.

“I’ve been a member of a couple of neighborhood groups and neither was really very functional. I’ve also been a member of a potluck group for about 20 some years. It works and its spread all over and people have come and gone. There’s no leader. Any one person can lead . . . . It’s almost a problem in keeping it small enough so a dinner conversation is practical. So I’m not sure neighborhood groups is the way to go.”

"My husband and I just joined a neighborhood group and it’s quite large. It’s on the far west side. One thought is that it’s too big, but somehow I’ve been delegated to be in charge of it. All I said was my husband and I can help set up tables. All of a sudden it was announced that we were taking it over as our new duties. But it’s fine. So we’ll see how that plays out. It’s a potluck and people come to a community center at one of the condos.”

“I have tried three different times to get my neighborhood group to gel.” [talks about efforts to reorganize and focus group and says] “We managed to meet twice.”

5. What changes or new opportunities do you believe would allow you to build deeper connections to other members?

The following themes show how interviewees view connection among members as well as their suggested changes or new opportunities that would allow deeper connections among FUS members.
Q5 Theme: Make “reaching out” a community-wide commitment. Carefully follow-up when interest in volunteering or personal needs are expressed.

“I kind of see FUS as a ‘reach in’ organization. When I have reached in, I have found something, but I don’t feel like it’s as much of a ‘reach out’ organization as I would like it to be.”

“There’s like a little insulation for us. We can come in, go to the service. Have coffee. Say hi to our friends and then skedaddle. And not be worse off for it. But if you want more, it’s there. But you have to reach in. You have to do that.”

“It’s a large organization, with lots of people. But I think it would be simple just to say that the ministers or the staff or whatever should reach out more. That’s probably not a good suggestion. But it’s more cultural, I think. So how would the organization and the lay aspects of it infuse into the culture, reaching out to other people, asking them to come to an event. Or to join a team or to participate in some way. I really do think that for me, that’s important.”

“[We need] not just a [communication] process but an attitude of, ‘Gee, that person’s interested! That’s great! Let’s go add that person and connect them.’”

“[I asked] how do you become a lay minister? And she really didn’t answer. I guess my feeling on that kind of situation would be she would take that and give it to somebody who would then come back and say, ‘I understand that you’re interested in becoming a lay minister. We’d like to welcome you. Why don’t you come next Thursday to the group?’”

“We don’t do a good job of integrating new people, who just show up, we are very friendly when they first do. Jeanne does a wonderful job of saying hello but we don’t seem to have a structure in place to keep following up on that.”

“I’m wondering if there isn’t a better way for people to get themselves into that first step out of New UU into something or that first step beyond approaching someone with a teal mug, because some people just won’t approach.”

Q5 Theme: Be more “welcoming” or practice “radical hospitality.”

“There are different cultures in churches and on the Board we talked about radical hospitality and there are a million solutions that are very simple. It just takes ‘a’ person, just one person, to take the initiative to do that.”

“What I really like is the teal mugs. You know how in the announcements, they say, ‘For newcomers, look for the people with teal mugs and they’ll be happy to talk to you.’ I think that’s a great solution for what I’m just going to bring up. I’m not sure how welcoming we are to newcomers. Or even to people who have been here a long time.”

“We might be on to something. If everyone gets a teal mug everyone would be talking to everyone. Are there that many teal mugs in the world? Or we should turn it around. Maybe everyone who is coming for the first time is handed a teal mug and everyone who has a teal mug, grab them.”

“We worked for years in lay ministry to establish a sense of presence and welcoming when we’re there as lay ministers. Maybe we could have a broader group of people doing that kind of thing.”
Q5 Theme: Help members identify their needs and interests while improving processes (including website and social media) for informing members of available programs and resources — then link the two.

“I thought of this, being fairly new to the congregation, I think my husband and I joined two years ago. I still don’t know what’s available. I remember stumbling on something so if there was just a way to make things known a little more clearly than they are. I know in our New UU class, Jeanne did a great job of talking about various opportunities which led me to sign up for various things and get involved. That has helped but I’m wondering . . . something like a follow up to the UU. You’ve been here a while. Let’s get together and talk about what opportunities are available. My husband likes to sing, he’s pretty good, but he’s always afraid of the choir because he thought you had to try out and I said, ‘no, no, no.’ That kind of thing. We stumbled upon it so maybe something like the ‘old new UU’.”

“But communication in this place is very bad. Communication within. Communication within groups. There’s no one sort of cohesive place or oracle that you can go to other than Jeanne, who is pretty close, where you can actually find out where you need to go.”

“I feel that we aren’t utilizing social media enough. I get updates on my Facebook all the time and I check the blog all the time and I wonder if we’re not utilizing that for our younger members as much as we could, or even email.”

“I’m hoping that the website can be improved. That’s a big deal for me. Maybe we should have a website ministry team.”

Q5 Theme: Improve the social gathering space.

“One thing I personally have difficulties with . . . is where we meet after services. It’s crowded. It’s really noisy . . . I wish there were a gathering place that is a real gathering place. “

“Though the coffee in our new space is much improved over the Loggia, it still has its challenges as far as being able to stand and discuss and have interactions that might lead to something deeper.”

“I’m really not sure what the coffee hour is supposed to be. It may need a strong structure or some kind of structure like a discussion. I’d love a discussion group of the message that day. Something that you could hook to.”

“We moved here without knowing a soul. But it’s overwhelming if you come in and you don’t know anyone in the city. You’re definitely not going to know anyone at FUS. Kind of the way that [the new building is set up] physically, it doesn’t encourage participation. It’s sort of this long hallway, people get out and then they leave. It’s hard to foster communication with other people. In my role as being a lay minister, I hear that from others too.”

Q5 Theme: Increase the number and/or visibility of Chalice groups and lay ministers.

“The other thing is to expand the Chalice groups. There are just too few of them. I hear all the time, ‘How do I get into one?’ Ours hasn’t been open in years. We just need to have more. We need to have more emphasis on them. Because you’ll find a way to the bigger space if you can
find your way into a little space. I think that’s what is really missing and that’s what helped me find my way here and I think it would help others too.”

“There are so many people that would be great at lay ministry. That’s a wonderful way to bring people into the inner workings of the church as well as giving them responsibility. So that’s a possible route.”

“I sort of understand Chalice groups, but they seem closed and it’s hard to know how to enter into one of those groups.”

Q5 Theme: Create an environment where people could tell personal stories.

“I think it’s good to encourage personal testimonies within the conversations about realistic topics.”

“Creating an environment where it’s ok to share your personal story - it’s good for people to tell their stories as people learn about themselves and you learn about them by hearing their stories.”

Q5 Theme: Create a Mentor Match Program for new members.

“I was lucky when I came in because the lay minister who helped me sign the book kind of became a friend. And she helped me out. We have tea once a month. We talk. We have a good relationship. It makes me realize if we had some kind of a mentor program where every time a new person came in, we could match them up with a member. That would be a really good way to do that.”

“One of the things I tried in the late 90s was a buddy system of volunteering. Try to set up a list of where everybody in FUS who volunteers in the community, where they volunteer. And then if they volunteer somewhere, let’s say they volunteer at a low income neighborhood community center. Would they be willing to invite another church member to go with them?”

Q5 Theme: Have a “connections/volunteer fair” annually.

“We talked, I think, at that meeting about a volunteer fair. We had them in the past where all the groups got together. If the whole place was lined up with here are the neighborhood groups, here are the Chalice groups, the social justice group. These are all things that you can partake in. It would be sort of an interesting event. I think that would be sort of fun.”

Q5 Theme: Create opportunities for RE parent groups to interact.

“We [teacher of COA] do see parents stop coming to services after their kids go through Coming of Age. So I thought that if they got to know each other, ‘hey, that’s why I want to come, I want to see [a COA friend].’ [Facilitator: So that’s your experience. That they drop out after the kids complete the COA?] [Response continues] Yes, that’s where this came from. ‘Now that my kids are done, there’s no need to come any more and I don’t feel very connected with anyone anyway.’ I’m sure that that’s true of other Coming of Age [experiences].”
“One of the things that I always thought would be cool is to have the parents of Coming of Age have a similar parallel program through that year.”

“Deepening connections between the parents as we’re going through the children’s RE experience. Classroom coordinator, one of their roles is to coordinate a couple of potlucks, class potlucks, which I don’t know if that’s still happening, but I thought that was a really good way to facilitate that.”

Q5 Theme: Have more short-term opportunities and/or events focused on “fun.”

“I think [name of another interviewee] mentioned it earlier, just a café. A way to not make a year-long commitment or a semester long commitment but we’re doing this thing. I enjoyed the dances and stuff like that where we come together and we’re not committing to something but you can just have some fun.”

“So just hanging out. That’s why I think about doing something on Wednesday night, just a time to hang out. Saturday potlucks. The happy dance. When the kids were little, hanging out on the playground after service.”

“Having more short term opportunities. Just a couple of weeks at a time, if that makes sense. Short so that there’s the opportunity to go and if you want to do more, then you can. That would be, that would be useful for me.”

Q5 Theme: Understand the deep meaning of ministry teams.

“As I think about it, I think that also means really promulgating the deep meaning of ministry teams. It’s different than a committee. It’s a real connection around a specific issue or problem.”

Q 5 Theme: Create connections between Saturday service people and Sunday service people.

“I have been concerned that there is very little communication between the Saturday service people and the Sunday service people. I’m always trying to figure out ways to improve that. I feel they are two separate congregations. I try to alleviate the problem on Sunday by showing up as a lay minister at the end of the 9 o’clock service to socialize with those people before the 11 o’clock service. That helps me a little bit personally but I don’t ever get to see the Saturday service people. So I wondered if we could institute a sort of buddy system where the Saturday people and the Sunday people would buddy up with families, one-on-one, kind of borrowing from my Girl Scout days probably . . . where you adopt, kind of cousin-like, a family, each of you, for a year or something.”

Q5 Theme: FUS members differ regarding needs or preferences for connections with others, as well as specific types of connections they find beneficial.

“Initially I was feeling kind of burnt out. I came here and the last thing I want to do is get involved. I just want to stand by myself and look at the crowd and do nothing and just show up for services.”
“And it’s also like, even though I said earlier how do we connect? How do we help people who maybe want to be more connected? I think that’s still something to think about, but at the same time, we can’t assume that everybody who walks through the door wants to have all these things.”

“Well, I answer these cautiously as I did other questions, all because it’s more about me. It’s not about the church. I’m not the best candidate for engaging and deepening relationships because I can be cordial, social but I’m not necessarily looking for or available for . . . deepening relationships. That could shift over time.”

“I do not particularly like cabaret. When I come to cabaret, I feel lonely. I feel out of it. I frequently leave in tears, so I just don’t go any more. That’s not to say it’s not a good thing but “select to connect” is a lot less pressure.”

“Surprising but . . . despite all the people I know who have died, I never needed support. At Oakwood, when you go away for a while and you come back, you don’t ask ‘what happened?’ You ask, ‘Who died?’ It’s ok. That’s part of life. After a death of a family member with lots of troubles, we said, ‘Thank God he found peace.’ So . . . we did not need support.”

6. Have you experienced support from the FUS community during a significant life event? If so, please share one example of that support.

Four themes emerged, about how interviewees experienced support from FUS during a significant life event.

Q6 Theme: Most interviewees stated they received meaningful support as they faced life changing events such as:

**Illness**

“I’ve felt really supported 18 years ago when I had a cancer diagnosis. I announced over in the old auditorium during a sharing of joys and concerns. I was just overwhelmed. Not just then but throughout the treatments and recovery time. I felt helped.”

“My husband got a card when he hurt his arm. People have gone out of their way to reach out to us and we haven’t been here that long as members of the congregation.”

“I was hospitalized and received a shawl from shawl ministry. I appreciated what they provide in the way of hospitality and support.”

**Retirement**

“I am amazed... I got a card for my retirement. “

**Birth of a Baby**

“When my daughter was born, some people from FUS made food for me”

**Death/Memorials**
“The big thing, of course, was when my husband died. They were . . . you know . . . took care of everything. Very good, I thought the way the lay ministers, especially, had helped with that. Following up years later, not just today but all the way through. Dan, the music, everything. Everybody is in there."

“... an example of support would be upon the death of my mother and Karen’s involvement in developing a service that was not held here but elsewhere. I found that to be extremely helpful and very well done.”

“I have attended several memorial services here and they have all been so moving and well done.”

“I recently received a lot of support for the loss of my aunt and cousin. Just little things like notes from the staff.”

Weddings

“We had two weddings here which were wonderful. Such a joyous thing that’s happened.”

“Michael was helpful in putting together the wedding we really wanted.”

Terminating a pregnancy

“I terminated a pregnancy . . . so I filled out the card that they have us fill out and I reached out that I needed some help. So it connected me to a lay minister. She was very good. It was the day after and I needed to talk to someone from here. Then they connected me with a minister.”

Several life changing events

“I think I have too many to list them. My mom’s death, [husband’s] death, their continuing decline. I felt support. My broken hip, cancer, I’ve had a lot of health care problems over the last five years. I have three shawls.”

Q6 Theme: Support came from a variety of sources such as:

Called Ministers and Lay Ministers

“I got a divorce lawyer recommendation from a lay minister when it just became impossible. Showing up here the day I finally filed, I got a hug from Michael.”

“The one that sticks out the most in my mind is when our son was less than a year old and he got pneumonia. He was in the hospital and we didn’t know what was going to happen. Michael came to the hospital and he came another time. That was actually when Trina was going through some health issues . . . I mean, it just struck me . . . he’s going through stuff with his family and yet, you know, he was able to come and give support and just be there. Yeah, so that was wonderful and that one just stays with me.”
“... when my daughter was hospitalized ... Kelly visited her and my daughter was like, whoa! In walks Kelly and it’s just this amazing visit. It just was so supportive and so fabulous.”

“Michael and Kelly are wonderful. I told Michael that I thought he should let me give one of these talks about giving. I didn’t want to talk about what things I have done but things that touched my heart. Certainly his participation both at the grave site services and at the memorial services was outstanding support for me.”

“So when I had this surgery they helped with food and I got a card from the ministers. I was like, oh, that is so cool. It’s just these little things. And I remember I was in the hospital for a tonsillectomy or something and I got a call from one of the lay ministers here.”

“A lay minister did just an amazing job handling the memorial service for my mother.”

**Staff Members**

“I honestly think part of it is Jeanne [Sears] because people talk to her and she’s got this little notebook in her pocket. She takes it out and writes it down and the next week, you get a card in the mail. It’s unbelievable. She’s like a lynch pin, king pin, some kind of pin. Yeah, she’s really special.”

“I had a lot going on. And so, yeah, I could cry just thinking about it. So I was talking with Janet Swanson one day and, you know, she didn’t know all of the things. She knew about the divorce so she was very helpful with my older daughter. And just again ... having distance but presence. Just beautifully ... and I said, ‘You know Janet? I think I need to reach out. I need some help.’ So she was great. She said, ‘I want to think about who to connect you with. I want to get the right person for you.’ And so she thought about it and she got back to me very quickly and connected me with somebody who is a lay minister here and that person was fabulous.”

“My mother arranged with Eva Wright [former Assistant Music Director] to hold a surprise birthday party for me at choir. I had just filed for divorce, life was complicated, my mother was doing chemotherapy, my dad had been diagnosed with cancer as well ... Oh that was an awful year ... but it was such a wonderful surprise to get a surprise birthday party at choir.”

“I’ll give one short example. I’m over in the ER, trying to protect [my husband] from falling. I fall and break my hip. Someone has to get [husband’s] car back because he can’t drive. My car is in the emergency room and Harry [retired Communication Director] comes and gets the keys from me and somehow manages to get my car back to my house, feed the cats, so the staff, I mean, they are always supportive.”

**Small Groups within the Congregation: Choir, Quest and Chalice Groups**

“When my husband died, I was a member of the choir and basically, they were my family.”

“There was someone in the choir that was very active in the church who died recently from cancer. There was a lot of support.”
“I was diagnosed with cancer about half way through Quest. My integration group was great.”

“Well for me, it was when my husband died. And then having been a caregiver for a long time, then he died, so in the levels of who was the most supportive and who was the least supportive? My Chalice group was the most supportive. They were just awesome. And even at the memorial service, I had, because we lived all over the place, I had my friends send letters. So different members of my Chalice group read letters about us at the memorial service. Hugely involved. I don’t know how I would have gotten through.”

FUS Members

“I had a very unexpected operation too. It left me in the hospital across the street, two different times, for a total of 22 days. I had lots of visitors so it was very nice. Other times people have brought food all the way out to our house, several times.”

“. . . the opportunity to say something, sharing our sorrows and people come up to you. So there’s that sense of ‘you’re not alone’ that I think FUS is good at that.”

Q6 Theme: Members received support in raising their children.

“In terms of the community support in a very abstract way . . . raising our kids. We have two kids and for about ten years, just about, having that network of parents that knew who they were and would then look after them.”

“It was in the middle of the Reagan years and I wanted my kids to see that liberalism wasn’t a disease that just infected their parents. I wanted them to meet elderly liberals and to see that this is a trans-generational spirit.”

Q6 Theme: A few interviewees reported they did not receive the support they desired.

“. . . there was no reaching out [after a death in the family and a memorial service that was considered less than satisfactory]. There was nothing. I got virtually nothing from the church. So I won’t say it was a negative response but it was a nonresponse. There was no warmth.”

“But I have to say that . . . and I adore Michael’s sermons and I think he is a wonderful minster, but when I talked to him, [after a death in the family] he said, ‘Read these six books. This will help.’ So it’s kind of, you know what I mean. It’s kind of missing that compassion, that personal warmth and compassion. But I think institutionally, that part was missing in my experience.”

7. What changes do you believe would help the FUS community do a better job of offering support?

Seven themes, based on interviewees’ responses, summarize suggested changes that would help the FUS community do a better job of offering support.

Q7 Theme: Build a culture where it is desired/expected that you will ask for what you need, and that respects the individual’s choice about receiving support.
“I really want to try to figure out how to make sure that our community fosters the ability to ask for help. I think we suck at that.”

“. . . did you let someone know? The community as a whole, I think, needs to know that they need to communicate with the community so that their needs can be addressed. There are people there that can address them.”

“. . . shortly after we first started [lay ministry], we publicized the thing to death and our major problem was having people tell us they could use some support of some sort. We seem to have the idea that we kind of take care of ourselves. We don’t want you to know that we need something. I don’t know how you change that in the large group but I think that still prevails to some extent.”

“People, I think, are sometimes reluctant to ask for help. “

“The ability to ask is as important as having the resources to give.”

“I’m ok asking for certain things, but not others.”

“I know there are a lot of avenues of support here at FUS, but it was a personal choice that I didn't seek support.”

“When my husband died, I thought, you know . . . I was just inundated with people wanting to counsel me and ‘Don’t you want to join a grief group’ and so forth. It was the last thing I wanted to do. This is what happens. . . . Leave me alone. I’m fine.”

“I got a call from lay ministry. They wanted to come over but I fought them off.”

“I’m still kind of going through a mind adjustment in the world, living a different life with the death of my wife. I see FUS being available and offering. You know, it’s me, when I’m available.”

Q7 Theme: Keep the practice of sharing Joys and Concerns at services.

“I’m always surprised at the service when we have caring and support and . . . Joys and Concerns. I’ve never gotten up, but I’m just amazed at how people seem supported by standing up there. I think it is truly an important part of the ministry.”

“I think we should bring that back [more frequent Joys and Concerns given directly by individuals rather than ministers reading the reported events] . . . I think that would introduce some emotionality that is missing.”

Q7 Theme: Create a clear and accessible communication process to inform the community of hospitalizations, illness, and need.

“. . . with the HIPPA thing where they can’t tell you anything about anybody, you can’t get information about people in the hospitals any more. Unless someone tells you that there’s someone there, then you never know that they’re there.”
“So you can set up a system in which you could say to people, if you want this kind of help, if you want this kind of relief fill out this form and it will facilitate us if a crisis comes up.”

“There should be one number to call to provide information or ask a question no matter what it is.”

Q7 Theme: Recruit specialized lay ministers and make the lay ministry program more visible.

“There must be at least half a dozen retired social workers at this church who want to get involved more, or nurses or mental health counselors who want to get involved, who want to make a difference. There is a focus for the lay ministers.”

“I work with kids with disabilities and I’ve often wished there was a way in my own church I could help families that have kids with disabilities. I don’t know how to connect that to that . . . or if a kid had a serious hospitalization. I work with a lot of those families. I’m a trained social worker. I’d be happy to volunteer my time to any member of my congregation who needed that support.”

“If anything, add more lay ministers. They seem to be training them beautifully and they know what to do and how far to go. They don’t push too hard but they push enough. They’re just there and I think it’s beautifully done. Whoever does the training does a good job . . . or picks good people or something.”

“To me it doesn’t seem like the lay ministry is well publicized. Make it more obvious that these people will help you with lots of different things. It’s not something I think about doing when I’m in trouble. That might be useful.”

“I think the lay ministry is another thing that to me is a bit of an enigma. I think I know a couple of them. But in terms of, like, who are these people? Is there a training that goes into this? What is their job?”

“Has there ever been some kind of event or a service where the lay ministers were introduced?”

“Give lay ministers a role in the services to help us better connect with them.”

“Lay ministers should be listed on a separate page of the website.”

Q7 Theme: Create a “pay it forward” option for volunteering FUS members expertise.

“I wish there was a way that you could just pop in when the need is there. And then connected to that is for us to have a ‘pay it forward’ process so if you have been the recipient of some sort of support or help, that you have a way of paying it forward or paying it back. I don’t think we have a way of doing that. I think sometimes, again, it’s too grandiose. ‘The only way you can help is being a lay minister.’ I think we have some folks in our community who would like to pay back.”
Q7 Theme: Form a ministry of elders to elders.

“I think one of the issues is that we have a young ministry. Kelly is 40 or 42, whatever she is. She has young children. Michael is 64 or whatever. I think the focus on senior issues just doesn’t occur so much because they are where they are in their lives. They look at FUS from their perspective and that’s how they see it. I think that’s a natural way that it occurs. I think the fact that we lost Karen, that we don’t have a minister that is older, that has that perspective, is a problem for us. There should be a way to get spiritual elders who are involved where they can make these connections. They make huge contributions. From my perspective, people want to do this. They want to make these kinds of contributions but I don’t think we provide a vehicle for that because I don’t think that’s how we think.”

“Obviously during that phase [elderly] of our lives, you’re going to have major illnesses and deaths and so forth which are unique to that group particularly. I’m not saying it never happens but generally, when it happens much younger, there was a lot of support. I don’t necessarily see the same thing when someone is 85. A woman who was part of our group when we first came in to the church passed away kind of surprisingly. Her husband had just passed away when she joined the church but I don’t think the same connection was there. I think that would be very helpful for the church to think about meeting that group’s [elderly] needs and figuring out how to structure that.”

Q7 Theme: Identify or create more ways for long-term support.

“I see crisis intervention as being our strong suit. Long term support is much more difficult to maintain as a community, either because of resources or people get burned out. So I know there’s a caregivers group and there’s a group for people with chronic health problems. All of us have expressed that during the immediate crisis we get a lot of support. When the immediate crisis becomes sort of a long term issue, is there any way an institution like this could continue to support people? I don’t know.”

“Caring Bridge web site that we used with Patricia Leonardi seemed to work for what was that, 8-10 months.”

8. How do the children and youth of FUS contribute to your experience as a member?

Six themes express how children and youth of FUS contribute to the experiences of the interviewed FUS members.

Q8 Theme: Children contribute enjoyment, enlivenment, hope, and energy in the following two ways.

Via their presence at services

“I enjoy watching the little children sing and I love the parades at Halloween.”

“I absolutely love the fact that the children are in the service. I love the children’s messages. I love seeing them go to the classes. I love any amount of chaos they bring, which isn’t much.”

“Children and the youth make the events in the community more alive.”
“I’m happy to say I always make an effort to come to the Coming of Age service because that to me is a bright starry eyed group of kids. It gives me hope that what I’m seeing around me right now might possibly improve with these bright starry eyed kids. I love them.”

I thoroughly enjoy the COA service - it's one of the best of the year.”

“I don’t come to ‘Coming of age’ very often or I haven’t because parents are here. But I think they [youth] add to the community and they’re going to carry on when we’re gone. “

“I feel that the interplay of the youth and adult time in the services work better here than just about anywhere else that I’ve been. I really feel that it enhances our services and it enhances the experiences of both the kids and the adults in the community.”

“Personally it does my heart good to see the kids in there because I think at least they’re being exposed to some of our values and the Seven Principles.”

“it’s a thrill and a blessing . . . to see the web of life. To see the kids every week and see them grow up.”

“Heather deserves tremendous praise. When we joined, my son is tone deaf but he joined the children’s choir and Heather is just an angel. I’m just totally amazed with what Heather has been able to do and the impact she has. The positive memories she leaves in all the kids.”

By providing opportunities for inter-generational engagement and a sense of family

“The other way I do engage with the older kids that’s very reinforcing and that I enjoy is when they’re selling me something in the commons. So it’s entertaining, it’s fun. You get to interact with them. They feel really positive because they don’t have to walk past me in the commons and, you know, how do you read or do you even pay attention to older people? But when they’re selling something, they’re focused and they’re positive and their smiling and enthusiastic. So I can buy cookies or I can buy the chalice Christmas ornament.”

“It’s only one class and I don’t remember which class it is, I want to say Compass Points, that does this survey about what happens after you die, with the checkmarks. I was really glad when I saw that starting to happen. I would encourage more of that, where we see them exploring their beliefs and their thoughts and their values with other members of the congregation.”

“I think they’re the future. I love having their bright little energies around personally.”

“I like all the activity on Wednesday nights. The meeting house chorus. The adult choir singing for an hour and a half. And then during that time, various kids’ choirs come and go. There’s a parent holding area in the commons. I grew up in a big church and it feels more like a family setting. Where you have people coming and going. It’s just a very nice family environment.”

Q8 Theme: FUS members are generally positive about how children participate in worship services.

“I’m 78 years old and I love to see these little kids come and listen to Michael, just love to see them come in, interact, and I thought at the beginning, some of the older people would say, ‘Oh,
you know, those kids are talking... ‘this or that. I think the way they have it structured now is really good. They are there for a while and then they leave. I really enjoy them.’

“They are our future and I just love seeing them and seeing how comfortable they are, being a part of our congregation. Even when they do their silly joys and concerns. That’s great that they can learn at this age that there’s value in voicing your heartfelt things.”

“I like the present form of the kids which are really invisible except for the story and that’s fun for everybody. Then they leave. I’m not comfortable, in particular, with kids coming out during show and tell and saying, ‘I got an Easter bunny.’ That does, I think, shut off more serious discussion. That’s great that they can learn at this age that there’s value in voicing your heartfelt things.”

Q8 Theme: Children are a key reason that many members originally joined FUS and we should work to retain these members.

“Kids being involved is the ‘gateway drug’ to having people join.”

“I do think there’s a challenge, which I’ve raised before at Board meetings of keeping people attached to church after their kids grow up. I think there’s a natural fall off of an awful lot of people who are connected to the church because they have their kids here in the program. Then the kids age out and the parents leave, don’t stay connected. It’s a big issue that I’ve raised. I’ve been confirmed by people on the Board saying ‘Yes, that’s when we lose a lot of people.’”

“. . . the kids age out [of the RE program] and the parents leave, don’t stay connected. There is a need to make a special effort as to how we connect with those people and keep them attached to the church so we don’t lose them.”

“You know, definitely that’s [children] what got me here and then that’s what I think has kept me here for as long and then, you know, the next steps, we’ll see.”

“Well, when we had kids in RE, I was much better in attendance. Yeah, right, because you got to be there. And when you don’t have to be there, well, I’ll go next week. So my attendance isn’t what it was when they were here. [My kids were] a big part of why I wanted to join the church when we moved here because they were just early elementary, to have them be a part of that. So it’s really hard for me to kind of delink it. Even though they’re not in it anymore, I’m still interested in teaching because it’s just the one area where I guess I have been able to connect and really get something out of it other than just for myself.”

Q8 Theme: The children’s RE program is one of FUS’ strongest programs and is highly regarded.

“I think it’s [RE program] one of the strongest programs at First Unitarian Society, if not THE strongest.”

“I think it’s a great program. I love their curriculum. And I think they really do a great job of making it easy for the teachers so it’s not burdensome team teaching and it’s every other week. I’ve just really enjoyed that aspect of it.”

“They [children] are not very obvious except during the story for all ages. But I think practically everyone in the congregation is very aware of the excellence of the RE program.”
“We started here in 1963, a very long time ago. By the time, I don’t know how old the kids were, middle school somewhere, they decided they didn’t want any part of this anymore. And my husband really didn’t either. So everybody quit going to church. So that went on until the kids were old enough where I didn’t feel like I had to stay around and I thought I really miss choir, so I’m going to come back and join the choir. I go to Coming of Age and I think, oh I wish my kids had stuck with it and would have been getting this. I hear what they’re learning and I think, oh, they developed so many really good programs. I wish they’d been through it.”

Q8 Theme: Children contribute to adult reflection and spiritual growth.

“Both my kids went all the way through the RE program and I taught several times and probably will again. You know, just being a part of that. I think that’s a real great part of what this organization does, and not for the kids but I’ve gotten a lot out of it, being a part of the program, both through the curriculum and then just interaction with the kids and the other teachers and the RE staff. It’s definitely kind of helped me wrestle with my own terms, with the bigger pictures, or the bigger questions in life. I really can’t think of another environment that would facilitate that.”

“I’m teaching the children’s RE program and that has added a great deal to my own experience as I indicated before.”

“Once I did get involved with the COA, it was definitely a growing period for myself because I had to be prepared to try to facilitate or help the teenagers in the COA to try to come up with what they thought and what their values were and what their spiritual growth was. To be prepared, I had to figure out what mine was. It’s a good way for me to review the same things they were reviewing. So in essence that’s what the youth has brought to me, a self-re-evaluation.”

“Teaching the sexuality course was a huge blessing to me. As a parent, to be with a group of teenagers and feel absolutely no responsibility for what they said, to be freed up. This is something I better crack down on. Just let it go kids. It’s your time. That was a great freeing experience.”

Q8 Theme: Youth contribute to FUS’ social justice initiatives.

“That youth group [teenager group] was extremely important to my 19 year old. They do the partner dinner and they’re raising money for kids, a student, in the Philippines and for our partner church. And that is all done by the kids and that is such a great time. It’s so professionally done. The kids get so much out of doing it. I wish the congregation could see that happen more. And also that the youth group, like Kelly was saying today, how they want to fix everything. They hear about homelessness and they want to do something about it right then. So I think we as a congregation could hear a lot more from the youth group in terms of what they’re doing because they are doing some pretty cool stuff.”

9. What changes in the way our children and youth participate in the FUS community might enhance the experiences of our members, the youth, or both?
Eight themes express suggested changes in the way children and youth participate in the FUS community so the experiences of members, the youth, or both might be enhanced.

Q9 Theme: Create more opportunities for interaction between the generations.

“We could have a lot more opportunities for interactions of the oldsters and the youngsters not in worship but for example, we could have talent shows and drama club. A game night, things like that just to bring families and kids and oldsters together.”

“Well, in my previous church, the one that had a choir director also liked theater so she just spontaneously had us do a play with 52 parts. She invited people of all ages to do it. It was quite a marvelous experience. We spent several months preparing it. It was great fun.”

“I was thinking of sort of a foster grandparent sort of program where a family that shows up at First Unitarian Society and he might be asked, ‘would you like to be matched with somebody in your general geographic area who has been here longer?’”

“I do think that kind of intergenerational things would be really helpful, too, for the young, especially for people who don’t really know what the RE program is about or haven’t had much exposure with it. I think it would be good for the kids too.”

“More opportunities for, I don’t know, the kids to kind of get engaged in membership. I know one of the classes, I think it’s Compass Points, that does this survey and COA involves elders. I think they really enjoy that. I think that’s good for the congregation too.”

“... more of those social events that are specifically geared for the entire family.”

Q9 Theme: Create more opportunities for FUS teens and young adults to interact and connect.

“There are a lot of young adult groups and youth churches around the country who do something like a ‘soulful sundown’ or a ‘wonderful Wednesday.’ That’s a much more participatory service.”

“... more opportunities for the kids to connect outside of, you know, two hours every Sunday or Saturday.”

“I definitely would think it would enhance our community if we were able to keep or encourage more of the young people who are done with Coming of Age to attend service, to become a part of the community, to become interested in continuing in the community, whether it is through social justice or through something that they are interested in through the youth group.”

“I do think that one thing that is lacking is a strong tradition of a youth group after classes end. Could there be some transition between youth group and campus ministry?”

Q9 Theme: More involvement of children and youth in worship services.

“I like the idea of having the kids involved. Even in our traditional service, why can’t they do a reading?”
“Involving children, probably teenagers at least, in the after service events. Like, let them make and serve the coffee. Let them be involved.”

“I would still like to see the kids involved even more in the services.”

“Is there another time of the year when younger children could perform one little part of the service so that they feel, number one, a part of the service and number two, we get to see them involved in the service?”

Q9 Theme: Be more welcoming to children during services.

“I do not like our standard introduction to the service. And the same words are said every single Sunday and I’m really bored with it. And I particularly resent when . . . ‘Take that kid that’s making all that noise out of this sacred space. ‘ Well, that kid is the sacred space.”

“And I think we’ve done it somewhat under Kelly’s ministry and particularly what came out of her sabbatical and looking at this as a multigenerational congregation . . . having a higher comfort level with children being around us. I still think that is something that makes me feel like I can get more out of being in the community. My kids are older now, but that’s something I would like us to . . . I would like to see as a congregation because it’s not just that we want kids around us who are well behaved, sitting on the ground. But that we’re ok if the kids are talking and we’re ok if kids are participating.”

Q9 Theme: Make RE program more integrated into the life of the congregation, more visible to all FUS members and remind members that teaching is a growth opportunity.

“You can come and go on a Sunday morning and have no idea that there are over 500 kids enrolled. I don’t know what the solution is but I would like it to be more physically visible that this education program is happening every week. Even just financially. I haven’t been involved enough in the committees of the church to know how the budget is structured, but it’s remarkable to me that we’re struggling when we’re offering wonderful religious education programs for several hundred families. I think there is a lot of disconnection there and I don’t have solutions. But I would like things to be somehow more integrated.”

“Both my husband and I were amazed at the number of volunteer teachers there were. When we saw that sheet, it just blew me away. It is a huge program. Wow.”

“But I think it’s also helpful to be deliberate about inviting adults who don’t have kids to participate in the RE program. That was one of the reasons I wanted to teach RE, the year that I did that. It was an opportunity to get to know a bunch of 14 year olds and I don’t normally interact with 14 year olds. It was a wonderful experience, it was fascinating. All interesting people.”

Q9 Theme: Use social media more as a way of staying connected to our youth.

“[my daughter] had emailed Kelly from Ecuador that she had seen Facebook posts about the Unitarian shirts that they were selling. So the reason I’m telling the story is that she feels so connected, even as far away as she was this year, with Kelly and with the youth group. So social media for sure, that needs to continue. Social media, because that’s how she found out about it. She just looked at Facebook, so Kelly continues to follow up after kids leave and go to college or
wherever. . . . My daughter feels connected enough to Kelly to say, ‘Hey can I get one of these T-shirts?’

Q9 Theme: Give parents of 7th & 8th grade youth information about the youth group.

“. . . giving a head’s up to 7th and 8th grade parents, you know, that there’s this opportunity for your kids and also telling the kids, hey, there’s some cool things that our youth group is doing . . . because I think in 7th and 8th grade, they’re looking up to the high school kids.”

10. In your experience, how does Michael contribute to ministry at FUS?

Ten themes summarize the views of interviewed FUS members regarding how Senior Minister Michael Schuler contributes to ministry at FUS.

Q10 Theme: Michael contributes intellectual stimulation and sermons people want to hear.

“I think he’s sort of the touch stone. I think people who belong to the church, they come to church because of Michael . . . the intellectual stimulation that Michael brings. “

“He gives very intelligent sermons that most people want to hear. People tend to show up more when he’s at the pulpit. I think that’s . . . I don’t know what that is but I think it’s an authority thing.”

“He maybe sets, which is hugely important, the tone of at least the Sunday services and I think the Sunday services are the backbone of any congregation. The thoughtfulness that he provides, intellectual stimulation he provides. He sets the tone here which is rather different than other Unitarian churches.”

“I really commend his thoughtfulness and insights that he regularly and eloquently conveys during the services.”

“He is a superb intellect, great knowledge of the Book of Literature, the humanities.”

“I think he attracts our intellectual curiosity.”

“Michael is the big draw. I think he brings people in.”

“He’s such a good speaker and such a good communicator.”

“I find his reflections very thought provoking.”

“Although Michael certainly sets the intellectual emphasis of the congregation today, this was far, far more true of Max Gaebler, [previous senior minister]. Max gave really challenging sermons. You had to actually think during the service. Well, Max was chosen because he reflected the Harvard Divinity School for years. Max is something else again that Michael isn’t, shouldn’t and doesn’t need to be. That’s not a problem, but it’s a very, very different style and level of intellectual activity it requires. Michael’s [style] is quite different too.”

Q10 Theme: Michael contributes through his deep caring about and involvement in FUS.
“He obviously cares about the place a lot.”

“He is multifaceted. I can’t think of anything that goes on here that he is really not in touch with or heavily involved in.”

“It’s very important to have that presence here of welcome from the congregation. One of our first impressions of Michael, we were very new to the congregation, someone else was preaching that day. Michael was at the front door as a very cheerful greeter. We were impressed that he was willing to do something like that on a Sunday morning, to just be there and say hello.”

Q 10 Theme: Michael has demonstrated growth during his time at FUS.

“I have enjoyed watching his growth and I don’t think he was a proponent of the children’s story, the message for all ages, for starters but he’s doing so much better with it.”

“In the years that I have been here, Michael has demonstrated for all of us to see, growth. Human growth, human potential, in a sense some vulnerability. And some embracing of spiritual practice. That sounds patronizing when I would say, ‘watching his growth,’ but it has really been inspiring to see the changes that someone with that much responsibility and everything that’s happened, continue to grow, you know, that helps.”

“I always appreciated his intellectualism but sometimes I go to service and say, ‘There’s more spiritualism that I needed today and I didn’t get it because it was too intellectual.’ And I feel like over the past few years, that’s changed, the way that his reflections are. I don’t think it’s me changing. I think that, I feel like there’s a more . . . well, he’s always been human. He’s always been great that way, but he’s more accessible. I feel like there’s spiritual and intellectualism being blended more than it was in the past.”

Q 10 Theme: Michael models spiritual practice and growth.

“He models spiritual practice and teaches that.”

“I feel like he's my spiritual guide.”

Q10 Theme: Michael contributes leadership in the congregation and the wider Madison community.

“. . . leadership, sometimes, behind the scenes and sometimes in the scene of the various committees he works with. He demonstrates leadership and fosters the growth of leadership among volunteers.”

“. . . community leadership, both that he speaks at Oakwood and Capital Lakes on occasion and that he is involved in various social justice things, [such as] signing the letter about treating Muslims in our community with compassion.”

“I do agree [he is a] very central presence as a leader and just because of that fact, I’ve been very impressed when I see Michael in supportive roles where he’s at events, does a very deliberate introduction, being there as the senior minister, and then steps back to let the event unfold. I think that can be very important, especially when you have a community event where
all kinds of folks are present. It’s very important to have that presence here of welcome from
the congregation.”

“And I, of course, also very much appreciate his initiative and his status in our broader
community. He has a voice reflecting both the faith community, this faith community, but also
beyond that. Being able to contribute to conversations on issues of the day that we’re all
confronted with and confronting as a larger community of people. So I appreciate that.”

“He has been reaching out to the older generations by coming to Oakwood and Capital Lakes.
We meet once a month. We’ve ended up with bringing in people who are not Unitarians who
hear about it and come. So I think he’s done a really good job at that.”

“I think Michael is remarkable in the various roles he has been asked to play.”

**Q10 Theme: Michael challenges us to strive for excellence in a respectful and supportive manner.**

“. . . it’s neat to watch how he comes to appreciate the different interns. He’s not, ‘well, you
have to do it my way.’ He’s being very careful to say, ‘You can do it your way but let’s talk about
making it more effective’.”

“I appreciate that he challenges us but in a respectful way. Like he might give an example of a
belief he has or a way of living but it’s not something you’d go, ‘Oh God, I’d never ever do that.
That’s too hard.’ Maybe it is hard, but it’s not an example that is to make people feel badly
about the fact that they’re not doing that.”

“He’s got a curious side and he’s open to experimenting with things.”

“I find that he’s not only an intellect that engages me but I actually think he’s a pretty warm guy.
I like the way he speaks from his own experiences as well, whether it’s about approaching
retirement or as a parent or whatever.”

**Q10 Theme: Michael provides an open door to just talk or express concerns.**

“If I’m worried about something or concerned, I know that he has an open door. I’ve talked to
him about personal stuff or issues, but I’ve also talked to him about organizational system stuff.
He’s just open . . . “

**Q10 Theme: Michael contributes institutional memory to current issues facing FUS.**

“. . . on the Board it became very clear that his institutional memory and tenure now [is
important]. Being here over 25 years is very important. That won’t be an asset in another few
years when he’s gone.”

“[At Alliance meetings] or any issue that comes up, he immediately can add some historical
context and perspective to help relate to it and to see whether or how it is an issue we should
be paying attention to.”

“I see Michael as more of an administrative decision maker with the experience.”
“I think he has been extremely good because he’s been here for so long so there’s a level of continuity.”

Q10 Theme: Michael makes things fun.

“I have taken his movie adult ed thing and that was great fun. It was nice to see him in a different setting.”

“I’m just thinking back to our last Quest retreat, where Michael was present. He scared me half to death because we were in a dormitory situation and I came out of my room and this man dressed all in black with a black skull cap on, came out of his room at the end. And I thought, ‘Oh my goodness. Is there a ninja present during this time?’ I did a double take. Yeah, he was great at that because he just became part of our group. It was such fun to talk to him. He’s still very stimulating but he was very human in different settings that we were experiencing with him. It was a different side of him.”

Q10 Theme: A few interviewees were dissatisfied with Michael’s pastoral care style.

“I think he has very interesting views on things but he is not a warm person. When I was in so much pain and distress, I could have used just a hug from a minister or something and he can’t provide that because that’s not the way he is, constitutionally. I respect him for the way he is but that’s missing. I think it’s missing here otherwise.”

“I’ve known Michael for 35 years. We were here before Michael came, so we’ve known him a very long time. I think that Michael is a very smart man. I think he is getting wiser every year. I agree with his attitudes and his viewpoint on probably everything, but he is not someone that . . . let me say this in a positive way. . . . if I had a problem, I would not come to him. I think Michael does what he does brilliantly but it’s a small part I would say, in the role of ministry.”

11. In your experience, how does Kelly contribute to ministry at FUS?

Eleven themes summarize the views of interviewed FUS members regarding how Community Life Minister Kelly Crocker contributes to ministry at FUS.

Q11 Theme: Kelly contributes joy, energy, welcome, and enthusiasm to the ministry at FUS.

“The outgoing personality she brings. She helps to liven up the place. I like the personal approach to the sermon her energy, her enthusiasm. Well, and her energy energizes the whole religious education program too. She is the source of energy at the center of that but kind of radiates out, I think, through everyone involved.”

“I love her stories. I love her warmth. I love her energy.”

“Kelly, I think she must know everybody’s name in the congregation. It’s amazing.”

“. . . she’s always friendly to everybody. She’s always very welcoming.”
Q11 Theme: Kelly’s sermons are relatable, warm, joyful and they are the center of the worship service.

“Kelly has the preaching chops and the heart and the joy. I guess that’s what I love, she always conveys that there is no place in the world she would rather be than where she is.”

“I think she has become a spectacular minister at the pulpit. “

“She has a great deal of warmth. She always tells stories in order to make her sermon work and I appreciate that a lot. She does that very well. I’m just hearing a family story and it becomes the sermon. It works very well for me.”

“Kelly always provides a sermon with spiritual meaning to it and it’s always just very, very professionally done, very carefully done. I don’t think I’ve ever been to a service where the sermon wasn’t really the glue and center of things for the worship service.”

“I specifically remember going to services where she is preaching. Her drawing from her own day to day experiences with her family, I really like that. “

Q11 Theme: Kelly contributes to the ministry by drawing new members to FUS and creating connections to youth and families.

“I think she definitely has a very close connection with the youth and makes sure that the RE programs are well run and taken care of. “

“She has been a draw for new members who had families themselves. Those two pages she writes every month are very constructive for them. “

“She provides us with examples of how to bring up a family.”

“She’s doing a wonderful job with the kids. She’s great and it’s essential for the church. Half of the people in church – 500 children.”

“Her pages in the Monthly Unitarian are valuable.”

Q11 Theme: Kelly contributes a sense of real presence when talking with others.

“I think the focus of her reflection, the focus of the reflections on being present, which we hear a lot about. But it was something about the way she approached it and the way she was responding to people following it, made me appreciate that she does a better job than most people I know of being present in an interaction with another person. “

“She’s got so much of a presence and I think she’s doing a great job. I like her take on things and the way she approaches things.”

Q11 Theme: Kelly provides guidance that kids relate to.

“My kids feel very connected to her. She knows how to guide kids without being in their face. So she knows how to step in and step back and kind of be at the right place at the right time.”
“She has a wonderfully strong voice. She would come when I taught religious education classes a couple of years ago. She would just say something and the kids would just [pay attention] because she’s got those vocal cords that resonate. It gets people’s attention.”

“I think Kelly does a wonderful job with the youth.”

Q11 Theme: Kelly contributes to the congregation by allowing herself to be vulnerable.

“She allows herself to be vulnerable, which is something we have trouble with as a congregation. She allows herself to be vulnerable in a way that is not too vulnerable. You don’t feel like you have to take care of her which would be kind of over the edge. She allows herself to be vulnerable. I think that’s just a wonderful contribution from her to the congregation. “

“Kelly is certainly much more outgoing and very self-deprecating which encourages people to identify with her. She’s just out there and talks about her kids like . . . well, just like they’re part of a big family. It’s great.”

Q11 Theme: Kelly contributes to ministry at FUS by being an open-minded team player.

“I think she’s a team player. She welcomes input”

Q11 Theme: Kelly has shown growth and contributes significant leadership and openness to a diversity of ideas within the FUS community.

“I watched Kelly grow over the years. It has been incredible. I’ve seen her take a real leadership role in many areas, the religious education but also with the Quest program, with the ministry.”

“Her sermons have gotten better and more in-depth.”

“Kelly has grown in her delivery of her reflections.”

“She just stepped into our lay ministry and helped - more organized, things written down.”

“Kelly brings to the congregation the ability to look at paganism, to break out of a strict humanist tradition.”

Q11 Theme: Kelly is approachable for members experiencing issues.

“I see Kelly as being approachable if you are having an issue.”

Q11 Theme: Kelly and Michael are seen to have complementary skills and together provide FUS with balanced ministry.

“I see Michael as in the leadership position. I think he, for the whole congregation, is the senior, the leader, the, you know, final sayer of all things. I don’t know if he is, but that’s how I kind of see him. I see Kelly as the community builder. Her sermons tend to be more real, day-to-day stories that I can relate to more. Whereas Michael’s are more focusing on the mind and intellectual. That’s how I think of the two of them.”
“Michael gives the intellectual focus to the worship services and Kelly gives the warmth and the spark and holding us all together kind of thing.”

“I think it’s great that we have two ministers and I think it’s great that they each bring their own thing to it.”

“I’m glad we have male/female as leadership. I think that’s very, very important so both genders feel represented.”

“They balance. Kelly has that feeling of family and Michael has that intellect. Wow, when we lose him, we’re going to really suffer.”

“He is a little bit more distant in personal relationships than Kelly. Kelly is the warm hug person whereas Michael is the intellectual. But they balance each other. So they need each other and I think the staff must assign, when a congregant has a problem, whether it’s Kelly or Michael who will respond to a certain situation or problem. Who is better suited to it. They have their strengths and their weaknesses personally and professionally.”

**Q11 Theme: Two interviewees expressed concern about Kelly’s capacity to fulfill demands of her expanded ministry which now include programs once led by Associate Minister Karen Gustafson.**

“I think Kelly does a wonderful job with the youth. I think she’s very good with that and she’s taken on lay ministry. I think she’s trying very hard with that. And she is a very upbeat person, a very outgoing person. I think, and this is not her fault, she does not have the compassion with age and with experience and with tragedy. She’s not there yet. That doesn’t mean she won’t be there, but she needs time to develop. And it’s not fair, I think, to try to have her take on these other roles where she really is not in a place to do that. Maybe she’s aware of it and that can’t be a very happy place to be. It has to be uncomfortable. So I have compassion for her.”

“I think she’s a wonderful human being and I think she tries. She’s giving it as much as she can give in terms of where she is her life right now, with little children and a life. I think we’re fortunate to have her but we’re missing the heart right now. I think it’s very demanding already and she does a great job with that but I don’t think there’s enough energy time and probably positioning because life positioning is very important, at least this group [those being interviewed who were mainly senior and older FUS members] can relate to it. You know? It changes over time, later in life, that’s all.”

“But we’re still missing that warm fuzzy maternal because Kelly, she is trying to take it on. As a result, what I’m seeing, and I have to preface this with the fact that I come from a ministerial family. So I know how ministers work behind the scenes and what they’re called on to do. She has all the stuff that Karen took on. She’s being dumped on. And she’s trying to do it and she can’t. There’s not enough of her to do it. And she’s doing the RE stuff. They need help with the day-to-day demands, is my assessment. There is that sort of missing hole.”
12. What recommendations do you have regarding Michael’s and Kelly’s ministry at FUS?

Four themes state or imply recommendations regarding Michael’s and Kelly’s ministry at FUS. Five additional themes make recommendations for the congregation.

RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING MICHAEL AND KELLY

Q12 Theme: Recommendations were stated or implied regarding Michael on the following:

- **His demeanor: More approachable**
  
  “I know there are some people who think Michael is very approachable. I guess I don’t see that.”

- **Wishes for happiness and more fun**
  
  “I wish he seemed happier.”

  “I wish Michael could have more fun.”

- **More self-revelations in sermons**
  
  “I have one wish and I guess I could make it as a recommendation. In all the years that Michael has been here, I don’t have the sense of really knowing him deeply. I would like more self-revelation in his sermons.”

  “Sermons are already less intellectual with more personal revelations. He does do more revelations, personal revelations than he used to. I mean, he’s nowhere near Kelly’s level.”

- **His workload or responsibilities: “overworked”**
  
  “My sense is that Michael is overworked. He does too much.”

- **Delivering “Children’s Messages” during services: more child centered**
  
  “Michael should try to tailor his ‘children’s messages ‘more to the children.”

  “Michael has a serious deficiency in presenting the children’s message. It just needs to be fixed. We really can’t keep going on with that. Some of the talks are actually not ok for kids and I think it comes from an interest in imparting lessons and stuff, but they don’t work. And there have been a couple of times where it was not good for a child to hear.”

- **Use fewer words during guided meditation**
  
  I would like Michael to use less words when he does the guided meditation. I mean, all of his words are wonderful words, but I just get lost if there are too many words.

- **His role in the Madison community: maybe a larger one**
“I wonder if there isn’t a larger role for Michael in working with outside community organizations.”

Q12 Theme: Recommendations were stated or implied regarding Kelly on the following:

- **Keep growing because she is very capable and educated**
  “She probably needs to keep pushing herself and pushing the boundaries of what she can do because she’s a very capable and educated person that could probably do a whole lot more than she thinks.”

- **Watch for burnout**
  I’m concerned that Kelly brings tirelessness to the congregation that could burn her out."
  “Well Kelly has a lot on her plate and she really didn’t start out to be a preaching minister. That wasn’t her original position. So this is a time of transition for her. At the same time, she’s the minister for Quest which is a tremendous amount on her plate.”
  “It’s okay to sit sometimes - she should know she’s not responsible for all of us. She doesn’t have to take that on.”

Q12 Theme: Recommendations stated or implied for both Kelly and Michael on the following:

- **Delegate more. If can’t delegate then request resources to support them**
  “They need to delegate more I think, both of them. And then what they can’t delegate, they need the resources to support them.”
  “I think this is one more example where lay ministers could play a larger role. I think someone like [name of lay minister] who has done this for many years. Such a capable person. Many people like her, who could step in.”
  “I wish they had more help.”
  “They are stretched thin. I think . . . I hope that most everyone realizes that. But I do.”

- **Take a larger role in societal and local issues**
  “I just wonder if there isn’t more of a role in some of these larger conversations [referring to societal and local issues] . . . that our ministers could participate in.”

- **Changes in services**
  “It would be nice if they sort of teamed up once in a while and be a little more risk taking as far as topics and structure of the service.”
  “I would like the ministers to go to the back of church and greet people instead of hanging out in the front and who is the most assertive goes up and talks to them. “
  “I think in the beginning of worship service they should just switch the singing with the silence. Because when you have the silent moment at the beginning, everybody is still
coming in. The kids are talking in the back. If they started with the singing piece, and then put the silence one, you’d get a whole lot more silence.”

• Greater transparency regarding what they do

“I would like more transparency on what the ministers do.”

Q12 Theme: Recommendations that state or imply no needed changes in Kelly’s and Michael’s ministry.

“Keep doing what they’re doing. They both do it very well.”

“Can’t think of anything [recommendations] in particular.”

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CONGREGATION TO CONSIDER

Q12 Theme: Recommendation to form a group to nurture Kelly and Michael.

“And, you know, I suppose it’s possible that we could form a little group of people that are quite smart. I don’t know who that would play out with. I know that to nurture, nurture the ministers because they’re putting their whole out right there in their own ways.”

Q12 Theme: Hire a part time or full time third minister.

“If we have the money to bring in a part time minister that might be a senior and might be able to work with seniors, I think there are ministers in our state who don’t really have a home right now. I’m thinking of Ray Sweet up in Door County who does stuff down there from time to time.”

“If our church ever gets to the point again that we could afford to have a third minister because we’re getting so large, I think that would be great because people look for different things.”

“The church can afford it now [hire a third minister]. It’s not a big deal. The church is in great shape once they refinanced the mortgage. Soon afterwards, once refinancing was done, it changed everything because we were basically, literally, in the hole with not enough income coming in. Once the mortgage was refinanced, we are in very good shape right now.”

Q12 Theme: FUS leaders and members need to talk about Michael’s retirement and the upcoming leadership transition.

“I’m concerned about what happens during the eventual transition from Michael to whomever is next. When I was a kid, I watched a church pull itself to shreds over that. That experience worries me.”
“I don’t know at what point the church, the leadership, where Michael leads to confront it but we know he’ll be leaving soon. I know he will be very responsible and I know he probably has a plan. It seems like it’s time for that to be said out loud and talked about rather than people like me saying it’s inevitable and it’s going to be soon . . . to have the congregation start to confront, cope, adjust and deal with it.”

Q12 Theme: Make lay leadership more visible.

“Those leaders that we have need to be more visible because I think people don’t know who they are. And I’ve twisted so many arms to stand up on that podium on a Sunday morning to give announcements. I don’t know how to do it any better and that is the place they should be. I think we should require that the church leaders do that job on a rotating basis. I’m thinking all of the Board, and I’ve talked to all of the Board members about this and some of them don’t want to do it. But if it were required as a Board requisite, then they’d do it.”

Q12 Theme: Educate about the historic meeting house.

“. . . what’s interesting about the meeting house thing is there’s no real exposure to it. When you’re a new member, you don’t take a tour of the church. They don’t talk about the history of the church. There’s an assumption somehow, mysteriously again, that you know about it.”

“I really think that [meeting house guides] should be included so people are aware of it. Nobody stands up before the whole congregation once or twice a year, trying to recruit new guides, and says, ‘I’m that person and this is what goes on and so on.’ That’s important because they raise a fair amount of money and it’s, again, a huge connection to the public who come in and tour the place all the time. It means a lot. But not having any of that history . . . and there’s an assumption that we all know it. And we don’t. We have a huge amount of people now who don’t know.”

13. Is there anything else you want to tell us about your experience at FUS?

The opportunity to say anything else about interviewee’s experiences at FUS resulted in the following eleven themes.

Q13 Theme: The congregation may not adequately acknowledge the hard work of former Board presidents once their terms expires.

“The church does not know how to acknowledge. They don’t know how to say thank you. When people are deeply involved and give their heart and soul and time and treasure. . . . My husband was a past president. No one ever said to him, ‘Thank you for doing what you did.’ When he stepped down as being past president, it was as if he never existed here. No one acknowledged him or did anything. No one said ‘thank you’. He wasn’t hurt. I was hurt for him. So this lack of attention to the kindness that we show each other as friends and congregants doesn’t come from the top down, I don’t think.”
Q13 Theme: Called ministers should express more gratitude to congregants for their service to the congregation.

“I think there is a lack of gratitude on the part of the called ministers when dealing with the congregants. . . . It encourages more bickering between people and not that gratitude, that. . . ‘Wow, you’re a busy person. You’re spending all this time here. I really appreciate your service.’ And I think that’s a problem. I do. I think at orientation, we could just tweak it a little bit and be so thankful for what so many people do on their off hours.”

Q13 Theme: Congregational social justice activities should be more publicized and celebrated.

“And there have been a number of people who have said, ‘We have no idea what’s happening in social justice’ because they’re not doing any of it. We don’t know what it means. Even though there are programs about it and things like that. I happen to go to Salvation Army early in the morning, 6 o’clock in the morning. So I was mentioning that to someone. They said, ‘Golly, if I knew those things were going on I would pledge more because I think that’s something the church should be doing, but I don’t know the church is doing those things.’”

Q13 Theme: Strengthen and expand the congregation’s use of social media.

“I have appreciated the recent effort to use technology more, social media. Most of my life revolves around it. I keep my calendar electronically. When figuring out what I’m doing next, I’m looking at calendars, that sort of thing. And again on the note of kind of doing things, having opportunities to participate that don’t require long commitments and a lot of planning. That’s another thing that technology is useful for. Just reminders of what’s going on right before it happens. Invitations to participate. Calls for volunteers. That sort of thing. When people have a lot of choices on what to do, it’s very helpful to have both invitations and announcements done frequently and close to the time of the event.”

Q13 Theme: Make the congregation’s staff more visible to the whole congregation.

“. . . there’s another issue which is there are so many new staff that we don’t know. And we saw them at the Olbrich thing but then you don’t see them. Monica has been down a couple of times at one of the services but you don’t ever see them. That’s too bad.”

Q13 Theme: Members expressed gratitude for the impact FUS has had on their lives.

“I wouldn’t be the person I am today without it, without FUS. It’s kind of the center of my world for education, growth, entertainment, a chance to sing in the choir, social justice, service. It’s just where I put my time and energy and I am sure I wouldn’t be the same without it.”

“I will likewise express my appreciation. Michael gave a sermon approximately three years ago about what is important to have in your job and what makes it worthwhile. I was going through the stage of my life wondering whether I should continue to work in unpleasant circumstances or not. It was very timely. It really helped me.”

“I’m glad we joined and it’s been good for us. It’s been good for our kids.”
“FUS is a really special place in terms of what it is and what it represents. Who the members are and certainly who the ministers are. I do think it’s on us, as members, as a congregation we have the majority of the responsibility for making that known.”

Q13 Theme: The FUS community is more open to different views and beliefs than in the past.

“I think the congregation is much more open to theism whereas it’s not ‘there must be something wrong with you . . . you haven’t accepted atheism yet.’ And now it’s whatever you believe in, it’s ok.”

“I think of Unitarianism as a questioning religion. It’s a place for questions. I don’t come for the answers, I come for the questions.”

Q13 Theme: The FUS Community has changed and is more welcoming than in the past.

“So I can say what’s changed. My wife and I would often comment on it when we started attending. We would experience people as we came in. We were well acquainted with people but we would encounter people as we passed them, looking at our nametag. Not at us but at our nametags. And if they didn’t recognize the name, I mean, if you weren’t on the faculty at the UW and you didn’t have a name that was known in the community, you weren’t worth talking to. And that’s different. So, I think it’s definitely improved.”

Q13 Theme: There is concern that growth will lead to more fragmentation and a lack of focus.

“I hear comments of wanting to grow the congregations but at the same point, it really feels like there’s a limit to what the size can be to be able to accommodate that.”

“I sometimes wonder if we don’t fragment ourselves too much, to try to be everything to everyone. It just seems like sometimes we should focus more.”

Q13 Theme: The “boundaries” between FUS members and ministers.

“When we moved to Madison one of the reasons we chose Madison was because it had a reputation as a liberal city and it had a very large Unitarian church. All my previous years of church doing were with small to medium sized churches. We did church night and day if you wanted it to function like a church should be. It’s a different experience for me. At our previous church, my wife and I were best buds with the minister and her husband so they weren’t really our ministers because we were best buds so . . . we would go to the theater with them, went to concerts. Went to dinner with them all the time. It was a very close relationship. That relationship I don’t have here with any of the ministers. It’s very different. It’s ok but not the same, I feel.”

“I’m reminded of Karen’s sermon where she talked about how the relationship between a minister and a congregant has to have different limits. The congregant can tell the minister anything but the minister can’t tell the congregant anything.”

“The thing is it’s an important thing. There are boundaries. They’re important because if you end up feeling like you’re apt to take care of the minister, it ceases to be a healthy community so there’s opening yourself up, like, you know, but not too much. It’s a hard boundary.”
Q13 Theme: Interview participants were grateful to be asked to participate in the small group interviews.

“I appreciate being a part of it. I think it’s great.”

“What you two have done, it’s amazing with the questions.”

I’m glad you’re doing this. Thank you.”

“This is a wonderful format.”

“I've been a member since 2007 and I've never before been asked for my thoughts.”
Appendix B
Called Minister Questions, Themes and Quotes

The following six questions were created by the Ministry Review Team and sent to the called ministers, Michael and Kelly, with a request that they respond in writing. They did so graciously. The themes identified below are written by the Ministry Review Team and the words and phrases under each question are quoted from each minister’s written response to each question.

1: What do you believe your core ministerial responsibilities are within the FUS faith community?

**Michael Schuler’s Responses to Q1**

Q1 Theme: Michael’s “top of the mind” ministerial responsibilities are hands-on managerial and supervisory tasks.

- “head of staff”
- “supervise the work of both the Administrator and the Social Justice Coordinator”
- “strong collaborative relationship with other members of the Senior Staff”
- “personnel and hiring issues”

Q1 Theme: Michael takes responsibility for highest level financial planning and execution.

- “budget building and monitoring, fundraising, capital needs & priorities”

Q1 Theme: Michael is a key presence who shapes agendas on the Board of Trustees and all its committees.

- “accountable to the Board of Trustees”
- “create monthly Board agendas, as well as plan for periodic Parish Meetings and Town Halls”
- “I sit on the Board-appointed committees – Personnel, Governance, and Finance”

Q1 Theme: Programmatically Michael works in the areas of worship and adult education/spiritual enrichment.

- “overseeing and monitoring the worship life of the congregation”
- “coordinate most of the memorial services for members, as well as a few weddings and child dedications each year”
- “conducting classes, writing for FUS publications, and working with the QUEST program”

Q1 Theme: Pastorally Michael offers programs to the elderly in retirement villages.

- “I offer monthly programs at both Capitol Lakes and Oakwood Retirement communities”
Q1 Theme: Michael contributes historical memory and context to discussions of future directions for the congregation.

- “functioning as our institutional memory, able to describe ‘the way we were’ and to provide a historical context for discussions bearing on FUS’s future direction”

Q1 Theme: Michael is the public face and spokesperson for FUS.

- “public face and spokesperson for FUS, communicating with local media and community leaders participating in forums, demonstrations, and as a presence in organizations whose principles align with our own.”

Q1 Theme: Michael takes responsibility for being the keeper of the Vision of Ministry.

- “I have assumed primary responsibility for keeping the Trustees aware of our Vision of Ministry and the process that should be followed in establishing, re-visiting and assessing same.”

**Kelly Crocker’s Responses to Q1**

Q1 Theme: Kelly sees her ministry as being centered on creating community, large and small and across generations.

- “As you know my responsibilities have changed of late. Whereas before I would have easily answered “religious education” now I would have to say my core ministerial responsibility is creating community in groups large and small across the generations.”
- “Between small groups and lay ministry, more presence in worship, Quest and youth group, I have many opportunities to do what feels like weaving people together into community.”
- “All of these on the list are ways to create community and make connections in this large and lively place which is how I see my role in the organization at this moment.”

Q1 Theme: Kelly’s ministerial responsibilities have changed in the last year and she loves what she is now doing.

- “The other day I found myself saying ‘I now have the ministerial role that I love.’”
- “these new responsibilities feel like a wonderful expansion of work that I love.”

Q1 Theme: Under her new leadership, Kelly cites the lay ministers program as an area of successful renewal.

- “The lay ministry group is functioning now at a very high level and they see themselves as agents of transformative relationship in our congregation. They are responding to needs, reaching out to new and long-time members and making real connections.”

Q1 Theme: Kelly is co-creating and co-leading new programs including a Coming of Age Parent Connections Group and a grief support group.

- “the recent addition of the Coming of Age parent groups that I have been co-leading is work that feels deeply meaningful and very impactful in the lives of our members.”
- (including running a newly forming grief support group)
Q1 Theme: Kelly has supervisory responsibility for four staff members and oversees staff meetings.

- “Staff Supervision (Leslie, Janet, Jeanne, Lynda) including overseeing weekly staff meetings”

2: Discuss the resources you have been provided to meet those responsibilities, and identify additional resources that would allow you to better fulfill your core ministerial responsibilities.

**Kelly Crocker’s Responses to Q2**

Q2 Theme: Kelly has been assisted by a 10 hour per week youth assistant and feels that adding hours to that job description would be helpful.

- “The addition of a part time Youth Program Coordinator (10 hours per week) has been extremely helpful. Lynda McAfee fills that position and her presence has allowed me to not worry about the administrative pieces of youth programming. Additional hours in that position to increase youth presence in the congregation and also to work with our Campus Ministry program would be extremely helpful.”

Q2 Theme: Kelly cites an ongoing Leadership Development Program for community members as being important for the future.

- “Another congregational resource that would assist me would be an ongoing, intentional Leadership Development Program.”

**Michael Schuler’s Responses to Q2**

Q2 Theme: Physical resources of space and equipment are serviceable.

- “private office – small but serviceable – and a working computer”

Q2 Theme: Human resources of additional clerical assistance are not present and not deemed necessary.

- “Clerical and administrative staff does a commendable job of supporting the institution generally, but I do not now, nor have I ever had a dedicated staff person to whom I could assign work such as copying, making appointments, composing letters or proofing documents.”

- “I haven’t lobbied for a personal assistant and at this point doubt that I could utilize such a person effectively.”

Q2 Theme: Division of responsibilities and overall workload and work hours are not burdensome.
• “Splitting responsibilities among one or more ministerial colleagues has been invaluable, and my ability to manage my own core functions has been enabled by talented and dedicated ministers and, more recently, interns, who have taken up the slack in other areas. I do not feel ‘pulled in all directions’ like some ministers that I know.”
• “I’m used to performing routine tasks and don’t resent it, and have grown so accustomed to a six-day work schedule that it doesn’t seem burdensome.”

3. What do you find most satisfying about being a called minister at FUS?

**Michael Schuler’s Responses to Q3**

**Q3 Theme:** The people of FUS and the positive community spirit make ministry at FUS enjoyable.

• “This is a great community and I thoroughly enjoy the people who come here”
• “I very much enjoy member interactions and the positive spirit that characterizes life at FUS.”

**Q3 Theme:** Michael does not socialize with members or staff because he needs time to himself.

• “I rarely socialize with members or staff because the professional role is so people-oriented that I need to stay as unencumbered as possible during my off-hours.”

**Q3 Theme:** Michael finds his profession a perfect fit for his temperament and education.

• “I have found it a near-perfect fit with my temperament and post-graduate training”

**Q3 Theme:** Michael says he is not experiencing “profession burnout” and finds the work engaging and enjoyable even after 40 years in ministry.

• “it [ministry]affords a minister the opportunity to wear multiple hats, engage in any number of interesting activities and inquire into many different fields of knowledge. Even after forty years, each week unfolds a little differently and each topic that I choose to study and reflect upon is, in its own way, engaging.”

**Q3 Theme:** Michael is experiencing some diminishment of stamina for 12-hour work days and multiple evening meetings.

• “Even though I don’t have the stamina I used to for 12 hour days or the mental acuity for a succession of evening meetings, I don’t feel stagnant and on most days enjoy what I’m doing.”

**Kelly Crocker’s Responses to Q3**

**Q3 Theme:** Kelly finds human relationships to be the most satisfying aspect of her ministry.

• “Starting with staff – each day I am amazed that I am able to work with this highly talented, committed, innovative group of people.”
• “Seeing the commitment and the devotion of our members is also extremely satisfying. They enjoy being here, they get involved in making it happen and they care deeply about the future of this place.”

Q3 Theme: Kelly sees the staff workstyle as being collaborative and fun.

• “We enjoy being together, we work in a highly collaborative setting, we do good work and we have fun. It’s a wonderful mix that makes this a fantastic place to work.”

Q3 Theme: Kelly finds her work meaningful, a privilege to be part of, and nurturing of her own spirit.

• “It is extremely satisfying to hear how my work changes people’s lives in deep ways. Being able to celebrate someone’s life at their memorial, learning about what was important to them and how they chose to spend their precious time is a gift. Celebrating the birth of new children, welcoming them into our community and joining with couples on their wedding days, these are all wonderful moments that I graciously am allowed to share with our families.”
• “We started these (COA parent groups) in part because we were worried about the number of parents who stopped attending FUS after their children finished COA. What we discovered was that for many of these parents they are in need of a group to look at their own journeys and discover what could be next for them. This is a missing piece of their lives and we are able to provide that space for them. It is so satisfying to hear them share openly and deeply about their struggles, fears and worries and also what brings them joy. This is one example of community that not only brings people together but feeds their spirits and my spirit as well in the process.”

4. What do you find most challenging about being a called minister at FUS?

Kelly Crocker’s Responses to Q4

Q4 Theme: Kelly sees need and has more good ideas to build community than she has time in the workday to address the needs or execute the good ideas.

• “Not being able to do all the things I feel the community needs to have happen”
• “There just isn’t enough time in a day”
• “It’s the having good ideas and knowing you can’t follow through because of current responsibilities that is a challenge.”

Michael Schuler’s Responses to Q4

Q4 Theme: The demands of work are unceasing with no “down time” to relax.

• “It never feels like one can relax and coast for a bit. The demands are pretty much unceasing.”
• “The ongoing, daily and weekly chores have meant that in my 28 years here I have very seldom taken advantage of the month of study leave stipulated in my contract. Nor have I taken my allotted four weeks of vacation most years.”

Q4 Theme: It feels to Michael like there is not enough time to study and do research for preaching and teaching.
“Often it is very hard to squeeze in sufficient research and study time – which is essential for the kind of teaching and preaching ministry I pursue.”

Q4 Theme: The demands of work have taken a personal toll on Michael, leaving him wondering if he has missed something in his personal life outside work and outside FUS.

“I love my work but am also aware that its intensity has at times taken its toll. Except for the time I’ve set aside for family (including my 90+ parents at this point), I have very little life outside of FUS. Sometimes I wonder what I might have missed.”

Q4 Theme: Michael and the whole FUS organization experienced great stress when issues of authority and administrative functions arose.

“At certain periods of my tenure at FUS congregational politics and conflicted relationships with administrators/COO’s have been very stressful. Things were especially dicey at times when the supervisory authority for certain staff positions was vested in lay leaders and administrative functions were assumed by Board members or their designated representatives.”

Q4 Theme: There has been a decline in organizational tension since the movement to a policy governance model.

“Fortunately, the shift to policy governance has made life considerably easier, and although it has resulted in more responsibilities on my part, there has also been a significant reduction in organizational tension.”

Q4 Theme: Michael feels comfortable in a CEO role and credits capable (and sometimes authority assuming) administrators with making it work.

“At least some of my colleagues in large churches have not prospered in the role of CEO or Chief of Staff and felt overburdened by managerial duties. I have not found that to be the case, thanks to some very capable (if somewhat imperious) administrators.”

Q4 Theme: Michael feels that staff issues have been resolved well and he feels supported by the Board.

“With respect to our past administrators, I am grateful we’ve been able to manage transitions in that position smoothly and with minimal disruption of our operations. Generally, the Board of Trustees has been both understanding of my concerns and supportive of my decisions.”

5. What suggestions do you have that would allow the ministry at FUS to be more effective in realizing its mission? Note that this could include changes to aspects of your role, other staff roles, the physical plant, the way we have set priorities, member involvement/culture and the programs we pursue.

Michael Schuler’s Responses to Q5

Q5 Theme: Realization of mission would be enhanced by adding a third minister and a specialist in volunteer recruitment /development to the staff.
• “A couple of additional staff positions would certainly help, most notably a third minister or its equivalent (while our recent interns have done a commendable job we don’t enjoy the continuity a dedicated ministerial position would provide). A specialist in volunteer recruitment and development would also be extremely useful. But both of these are big-ticket items.”

Q5 Theme: More volunteer “staff” could enhance mission.

• “Some larger congregations with limited resources are now experimenting with part-time volunteer “staff” to handle certain of these roles. Our large church in Atlanta has six volunteer “coordinators” who each work 10 hours a week.”

Q5 Theme: Current staff is a well-oiled, self-motivated machine and changes in priorities are not needed.

• “I do not really feel that a major shift in emphasis and/or priorities is in order for any current staff. We are a pretty well-oiled machine. Staff members know what’s expected of them, know what works and are self-motivated.”

Q5 Theme: Changes to the physical campus are not needed to enhance mission.

• “Generally speaking, I think we are in good shape with respect to our physical campus and the opportunities it affords.”

Q5 Theme: More serious visioning for mission and more strategic planning would enhance realization of current and future mission.

• “I am not sure that we spend enough time – and this applies to our lay leadership as well – engaging in the kind of generative discussions that can lead to innovation and increased relevancy. There has been a dearth of strategic planning and serious ‘visioning ‘in recent years, which means that we may be falling behind the cultural curve in certain respects. While staff and the ministerial team are committed to excellence, we can’t afford to be complacent about current trends and future possibilities.”

Q5 Theme: Programmatic changes that attract men to be involved in the mission are needed.

• “. . . programmatic changes that might induce our male members and associates to become more involved. So many classes, social justice gatherings and other FUS events that I attend have few, if any, men present. We do better than many congregations in bringing men to our weekly services, but most seem to be only marginally active. What might we do to change that picture? I’m not sure, but it’s certainly worth exploring.”

Kelly Crocker’s Responses to Q5

Q5 Theme: Realization of ministry would be enhanced by adding a third full-time minister.

• “The easiest answer (and the most unrealistic one) is to go back to three ministers!”

Q5 Theme: Realization of ministry would be enhanced by assistance with youth and campus ministry.

• “more time [hours or personnel] could be devoted to youth programming and campus ministry. That would be the biggest asset for me.”

Q5 Theme: Creating a community-wide culture of service and volunteerism would enhance ministry realization.
We have had multiple conversations in many different meetings about the lack of volunteers, the need to create a culture of service and volunteerism and I think it’s time to put some great minds in a room and figure it out. It does seem like a cultural shift but it seems like one we could do with time and energy devoted to it.”

6. Looking ahead over the next 5 years, what do you think are the biggest challenges FUS faces in fulfilling its ministerial mission? What suggestions do you have to help FUS overcome those challenges?

Kelly Crocker’s Responses to Q6

Q6 Theme: Kelly sees the change of ministerial staff as the main challenge.

• “In the next 5 years we are going to have a big transition in our ministerial staff.”

Q6 Theme: Kelly is committed to FUS during and after the ministerial staff change.

• “At this point I am committed to staying here through this transition and beyond, knowing that there are many variables that could change that plan.”

Q6 Theme: Kelly sees the change of ministerial staff as an opportunity that will require two things: openness to new ideas and excellent communication among members of the congregation, the search committee, and staff.

• “This is going to require a willingness to be open to new ideas and new learnings.”
• “In that time, which I think is more of an opportunity than a challenge, we will need to focus on clear and transparent communication between the search committee and the membership and staff.”

Michael Schuler’s Responses to Q6

Q6 Theme: The community is staff-driven and experiencing a declining number of volunteers who will do work in the community. This trend threatens mission realization.

• “A decline in the number of members who are willing and able to fill important volunteer holes. We need to make a stronger case for the ongoing importance of volunteers in what has become a staff-driven operation.”

Q6 Theme: Quest generates deeper connections to the community and a motivation to volunteer.

• “QUEST program has certainly helped in this respect, strengthening participants’ connection to the institution and motivating them to do more.”

Q6 Theme: Michael has a concern that expenses will or already are exceeding income.

• “Flat pledging and a decline in the number of individuals and families affiliating with FUS in recent years.”

Q6 Theme: Imminent retirements of Michael and Dan will challenge the community.

• “Preparing the congregation for these changes and tailoring the message so that it feels more like an opportunity than a loss will be important.”
Q6 Theme: Addressing infrastructure and debt issues is challenging the community.

- “Planning for a capital campaign to address infrastructure and debt issues. We cannot put such a campaign off indefinitely but serious questions around timing and the impact such a campaign might have on the operating budget (if capital commitments cause pledges to decline) need to be asked.”
Appendix C
FUS Staff Questions, Themes and Quotes

1. When you hear the term, FUS Ministry, what readily comes to mind?

Q1 Theme: It is what the ministers, staff, volunteers and [FUS members] do to nurture FUS members and provide transformative growth opportunities.

“Two ideas - what the ministers do (caring for members, lay ministry, life journeys, being an intentional community) and what ministry teams and staff do (transformative growth via relationships and working with the community, growing by learning to work as a team, and about spirituality as it is found in interdependence.”

“FUS programs that ‘minister’ to the needs of the members along with the staff and volunteers who implement the programs.”

“Our purpose! I think about the multitude of ways that we minister to the people who walk through our doors—members and non-members—and to the community beyond our walls. Our ministry nurtures people—mind, body and soul. It is the umbrella under which everything we do rests—our worship services, our educational opportunities, our small groups, our music . . . the whole shebang!”

Q1 Theme: The term “ministry” can be confusing for both staff and members, and can even have negative connotations.

“When I first heard the term as we began the Policy Governance Process, I had a negative reaction. I was reacting to the noun, as I was not a minister. And then I understood it as a verb—‘attends to the needs and wants of others’ and I understood more of what we were about.”

“While I understand, I see puzzlement on the faces of some in our congregation as it is used. Many of those feel it is too churchy or have a reaction from a negative experience in a faith community.”

“What is ministry? At first, I thought that you were asking me about ‘what the ministers do,’ and I don’t feel at all in a place to talk about that kind of ministry. Then I thought of the Vision of Ministry . . . I don’t think my uncertainty is unique to me. I know that this entire denomination feels the pull between a traditional worship/spiritual education kind of member’s demands and the demands from other members, and potential members, to experience spirituality entirely through a justice lens. I think there exists the challenge and the opportunity for leadership and clergy to bring clarity to those questions, to bring the congregation together in the answers.”
2. How is your work at FUS related to the ministry of FUS?

Q2 Theme: FUS staff have an important role in the ministry of FUS. Their work:

A. Provides opportunities for member transformation through learning, inspiration, being part of a larger “whole”, and positively impacting society.

“[The] program is grounded in this goal of opportunities for transformation through learning, doing things, and building community relationships as well as the goal of effectively helping society.”

“I see my role primarily as a leader, facilitator, and educator: to help create an atmosphere in which volunteers can learn, be inspired, and feel part of something bigger than themselves.”

“CRE profoundly ministers to adults as well, providing ways to connect with their own UU identity, to ‘give back’ and/or positively nurture the next generation, and to develop relationships with other adults through teaching or coordinating other events for the program.”

B. Helps members live the UU Principles.

“I coordinate teams that are living UU principles out in the community through service, advocacy and building relationships.”

C. Helps members deepen and broaden their understanding of varying human experiences.

“[Our work] helps our kids to better understand and appreciate the world around them . . . and the value of being in a supportive community.”

“Volunteers and I offer the means for greater understanding of varying human experiences to the congregation, through proximity and educational programming.”

D. Provides an opportunity to offer individual member support/care.

“Doing the work in teams involves a lot of the kind of personal member ministry as well, which is integral to the volunteer coordinator part of my job, as well as the day-to-day of being staff in the building.”

E. Creates and shapes programs and activities that carry out the Vision of Ministry.

“In my position all I do is related to ministry. In my connecting people to resources, meeting visitors, managing New UU classes, and as a staff member to the lay ministers, I do my best to carry out the mission and the vision of First Unitarian Society.”
“We have an opportunity to analyze and create programs that engage our congregation. We can offer spiritual deepening in a way other organizations cannot. We have a collaborative staff that is wonderful to work with and experts in their fields. Using these strengths for our congregation is a win-win situation for all. We enjoy working together and great ideas come from this!”

“How are we interacting with the Vision of Ministry? Is it changing too often? How does staff give input? As in any profession, staff regularly have ideas about how to do this better.”

3. What are the greatest challenges facing the FUS community over the next three years, and do you have ideas on what could help the ministers/staff/members address those challenges?

Q3 Theme: FUS can be overwhelming for new or busy members. There is a need to focus on improving communication.

“FUS is overwhelming for new members or any members with very busy lives. It can feel like a large university with departments. Inspired and active members often want it to feel like a very small church, where things might be decided in one evening that affect everyone, and where the whole congregation might more readily focus on just one area or issue at a time. At the same time, many members just feel like it’s difficult to stay on top of anything, without reading all our publications, showing up weekly and belonging to at least a couple of smaller groups/activities.”

“A big area of help would be communication improvement in all its forms, which would diminish the sense of overwhelm and save a lot of staff time. From obvious signage outside, to an electronic message board monitor at each entry, to simplified publications and online presences . . . these practical things matter to how friendly and usable we feel. That, in turn, will make it easier for us to focus on, and for members to be a part of, ministry.”

Q3 Theme: We need to get better at celebrating all that we already do so that members will feel inspired by what the community is accomplishing and connected to the mission.

“I don’t think that I/we lift up the good things that our ministry teams are already doing enough. With the advent of our next Communications Coordinator and a new website, as well as increased social media presence, I think we can improve on that.”
Q3 Theme: We need to make sure the staff share best practices, collaborate and have an opportunity to provide input to senior staff and the Board.

“We need all the support we can get as staff on ways we can do our best to collaborate, share information, coordinate use of the building, etc."

“Our technology systems need to be kept updated and adequate for our daily communication and financial needs.”

Q3 Theme: The ministers seem challenged by the workload and could use more support.

“It seems like the reduction to 2 ministers has been a loss.”

“I believe the size of our congregation needs to have three ministers reinstated. I have seen both of our ministers run ragged these last two years and it is not sustainable. Providing an internship experience is great, but the added work and supervision is a concern to our minister’s workload, in my opinion.”

Q3 Theme: Upcoming staff transitions will pose a challenge to the community while providing opportunities for change and improvement.

“There will be the challenge of seeking the replacement for a long-tenured Senior Pastor and soon after, a well-established Music Director. In my opinion, these searches will be crucial to the future of ministry/membership at FUS and should necessitate national searches by top notch committees who have gone through a visioning process to determine what ministry, worship and music, should look like in the future.”

“These [Senior Minister and Music Director] transitions provide opportunity as much as grieving and I think we need to be very intentional about questioning how and why we do things and how we want to move forward. I hope that we’ll challenge ourselves to think outside of the box, to be creative, and to seek significant ways to engage our FUS community in the process.”

“I think the above mentioned retirement of the Senior Pastor and Music Director will provide an exciting opportunity, as well as an important challenge for re-visioning the worship and music life of FUS. “

Q3 Theme: Concerns about membership numbers, support, and participation in programs.

“. . . the aging of the adult choirs and declining participation in our youth and teen choirs. The declining support for education within the state, and the reduction of music programs in our schools are contributing factors.”

“Membership. How do we sustain our numbers? Should we broaden our concept of membership and in what way? How do we know when we are successful in engaging and providing for our congregation?”
“I am concerned about not having a strong enough base of support from our ‘younger’ generation (50 and younger) of adults to replace the support that our stalwarts have provided over the years.”

“I would like to see us serve more as a community church and shed a bit of our reputation as a church for the ‘academic elite.’”

Q3 Theme: Concerns about limited resources.

“(We need a) way of addressing our facility replacement and repair funds so that when a furnace or heating system goes out, the funds are available.”

Q3 Theme: We need to continue to look for ways for staff and FUS members to collaborate more effectively and frequently.

“I would love to see a breakdown, or at least a diminishing, of the hierarchy we have here and of the staff/member dichotomy and move more toward a collaborative approach that includes both staff and membership.”

“The more that we can empower these [social justice] teams to keep going, the better. We can do this by helping staff to collaborate as well as connecting these teams justice work into the fabric of the congregation, across departments.”

4. From your perspective as a staff member, what are the most exciting opportunities for the ministry of the FUS community in the next three years? Do you have ideas on what could help the called ministers/staff/members act on those opportunities?

Q4 Theme: We have an opportunity to continue to look for ways to improve the level of internal collaboration and leverage the expertise and experience of the staff.

“We could offer a series of retreats with Board, staff, and other leading members to take a look at trends, analyze what we offer and really be thoughtful about what programs we provide. We need to do this to create budgets and keep our membership alive and contemporary.”

“I think we have some really wonderful, uber-competent, and creative new people on our team and I’d really like to see ministers use this as an opportunity to change the culture of how we all work together.”

Q4 Theme: We have an opportunity to use technology in new ways.

“I’m excited about using technology in new ways to both reach our constituents and to streamline our work.”

“Our new website (once it’s launched!) will provide for some additional ways to connect/engage members and seekers. A new database can offer great opportunities for how we track, find, and communicate with our members.”
Q4 Theme: We have an opportunity to become a bigger part of the community, but it may require additional resources.

“In my area, the opportunities for FUS to be a live and responsive member of the community just keep growing.”

“Many people have always known that ‘FUS does great things,’ and I think we have the opportunity to grow that.”

“We also do this best when we can be responsive to what is going on, which means that we have to leave some staff and volunteer time and energy and building space for what comes up. If we are too burdened with the same set of ‘annual events’ it’s hard to do this.”

5. Is there anything else you would like to tell us about ministry at FUS from your perspective?

Q5 Theme: Continue to look for ways of being more welcoming to those with disabilities.

“To be consistent with a welcoming ministry, we need to work on our disability (un)friendliness. I was told this by members when I arrived 4 years ago, and it was reinforced by my own use of a knee-scooter, and sometimes wheelchair, over the last year.”

Q5 Theme: Work harder to help our members understand how FUS works.

“Most members that I talk to don’t know what “Policy Governance” is; members and staff struggle with how exactly ministry teams are supposed to work with respect to ministry.”

Q5 Theme: Re-examine our programs and consider being more focused.

“We have struggled with program participation for quite a while now and it might be a ripe time to think outside of the box. Personally, I think there could be great energy and momentum around the idea of scaling back on our ‘programs’ (Madison is so incredibly rich in educational, spiritual, and enrichment opportunities) and perhaps instead shifting our focus to community outreach and growing our UU identity/denomination.”

Q5 Theme: Focus more on building our UU identity and connections.

“Perhaps we can more clearly define ourselves as UUs through the vehicle of community engagement and by narrowing our programs to those having a stronger UU focus.”

“Keep in the stream of the national UUA movement. Our wider perspective of the world will serve us well.”
“Encourage FUS to offer programs in Mid-America Regional Assembly and our UUA General Assembly to share what we know and how it works.”

Q5 Theme: Expressed appreciation for the opportunities FUS has provided.

“Working at FUS has been the most challenging and rewarding segment of my career.”