

# Williamsburg Unitarian Universalists

## Visioning Circles 2022

Draft Report to the Program Council

February 17, 2022



*Visioning Circles Task Force*

*Jessica O'Brien, Les Solomon, Anne Stevens, David Wilcox*

It is beautiful to dream...to cast a vision...to stretch our  
minds into the future and imagine what may be if we were to  
build a new way of being—not some day  
but beginning again today  
beginning again every day that we have breath  
taking courage with these hands and hearts  
to make real the dream of a more equitable world...  
to journey together...seeking to be transformed,  
even as we transform.

*Alicia Forde (adapted)*

## Summary

WUU held 21 Visioning Circles between January 13 and February 2. Six circles were held in person in the WUU Little Sanctuary, fifteen circles were held on zoom, and one was held in a private home. Twenty people helped lead and record the circles. A total of 102 people attended Visioning Circles and contributed 936 individual comments in response to the four questions that were asked. Documentation regarding the process is available in the Endnote.

# Visioning Circles: Building Our Future Together

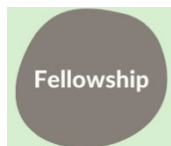
**Author: Dave Wilcox**  
**February 14, 2022**

The Visioning Circles sharing began with a checkin question asking what brought them to WUU. For those who joined recently, this was fresh on the mind. Longer-term members reflected back and shared what drew their attention to WUU. The second half of the question put the focus on the present for everyone. Each participant had up to 3 minutes to share on this question.

There were 192 separate comments recorded for this question. This was also an opportunity to share some personal history and about 30 of the comments focused on the person's journey before they found WUU. We heard from life-long UUs and those coming from other faiths. **Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas)**

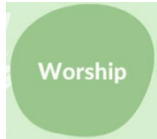
- **Charter member**, from religious background; was founding member, core participant in idea for bringing UU to Williamsburg.
- Grew up **mainline protestant**, but I lost my faith while there, then I was unchurched for a long time. **Our child brought me here.**
- Got away from **mainline protestant** churches – stopped going to church for awhile – **knew some people at WUU**, tried it out.

About 162 comments focused on the elements that attracted and keep the person at WUU. They fall primarily into five areas (Fellowship, Worship, Social Justice, Religious Education, Music, and UU Principles). Here is a sampling of the comments in these areas:



**35 percent of the focused responses dealt with Fellowship.** Respondents talked about the sense of belonging, connection, support and love that drew them to WUU and keeps them here. Sample responses include:

- Joined for a spiritual home and **friendships with like-minded people.**
- I stay because of **like-minded people** for the most part, I agree with sentiments and politics. I liked the **wonderful conversations** with people, mostly intelligent people, and you can disagree for the most part and it's okay.
- Feels sense of **belonging**, spirituality, vitality, **fellowship** – appreciates technology that has **kept us connected** in Covid.
- Got involved in choir – got engaged in **potlucks, involved with people.** Feel that **energy and activities are important.** I want a group of **people who know me and who care at the end.**
- The **people draw me** here because **we have common beliefs** and we can **grow together** morally, socially, and intellectually. The **hospitality** before and after service - **really misses it.**
- We came to WUU because **the congregation was friendly and accepting.**
- WUU has **a unique sense of community** that I hadn't seen elsewhere.



**27 percent of the focused responses dealt with Worship.** Respondents talked about finding a spiritual home, inspiration, acceptance, and welcome challenge. Sample responses include:

- Came for an **open spiritual home**, and a place for her kids to think and seek their own understanding of spiritual matters.
- I don't pray, not into rituals, but the WUU nourishes that **spiritual side of my nature** through sermons, music and being involved with small groups.
- Like **sermons** that are thought-provoking, stimulating, make me think in new ways.
- Really like the **good, inspiring sermons** and the music, and I like to be challenged.
- Worship services in total; tend not to miss any, so **ZOOM option is great.**
- Were very active in the **Pagan community** where we lived before moving to Williamsburg. Participation in WUU has been sporadic, mostly **May Day, Solstice celebrations.** Those things anchored me here.
- What keeps me here is the church, as a sanctuary, **a place to get your moral compass realigned**, nourished.
- I enjoyed the services until the last few years. **Challenging sermons** kept me here.
- Not treated as sinners (either damned or forgiven). We were gifted with a presentation that believed we were intelligent enough to **decide for ourselves** where our well-being lay.



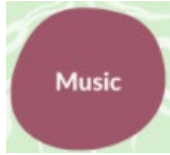
**18 percent of the focused responses dealt with Social Justice.** Respondents were drawn to WUU because of the visible and vocal work we do in the community, our inclusiveness, and how we live our faith and values. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

- A **beacon of liberal thought.** Sense of purpose keeps her. We have opportunity to express our liberal faith, hold up a light. **Live the faith** thru programs like JTA. Have a place to **serve beyond our community**, particularly the underserved.
- I want to feel a part of an organization with **high visibility in the community** – I'm proud of the WUU and its force in the community.
- Discovered WUU by way of meeting WUUs who were involved on **social justice issues in the community.**
- A congregation that is **active in the world.**
- We wanted to join a church that had strong ties to social justice and that wanted to improve the world we live in and that we would **pass on to our children.**
- **Our place in the community**—there is a sense of presence in the community, social justice is important.
- Stayed for social justice work. **Faith based on values.** Believing in worth of all people, love, brave. **More than charity.** It is our duty to **stand up and speak out.** WUU empowers us to do that.
- Interested in social justice. **Inclusiveness.**



**15 percent of the focused responses dealt with Religious Education.** Many came to WUU for their kids, looking for a religious experience lets them freely develop their spirituality. Others are drawn working with the kids and youth. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

- **Came to UU for our kids** for RE experience.
- Came for an open spiritual home, and a **place for their kids** to think and seek their own understanding of spiritual matters.
- I came here to **give kids a religious exposure.** We agreed on how to raise the kids, we sought WUU as a result.
- I like **working with and getting to know the kids.**
- Wants to create a place for children to **feel free and explore spirituality.**
- RE program kept him here—**OWL** in particular was very impressive.



**11** percent of the focused responses dealt with **Music**. Many shared their love for the choir and the vibrant music at WUU. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

- Appreciates that music connects the service and is moving. **Music has power to heal, inspire, move**. Misses the choir.
- Really enjoyed the **Friday night music events** we used to have.
- Knew I found a home because of **choir**.
- Was also drawn to the music here. Knew some W&M people and musicians, and they attend the WUU. Really **misses the beautiful music** they heard prior to Covid.
- Joined **choir** & found big connection, more than ever imagined.
- Having a hard time extracting anything from sermons, but **is attracted to music** here.



**6** percent of the focused responses dealt with **UU Principles and our shared values**. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

- **As an adult had deep and abiding belief in UU principles and that's what keeps them a UU.**
- Principles appeal to them, **no dogma**.
- My number one thing that brings me is the number one principle, "**The inherent worth and dignity of every person.**"
- Stayed because **principles align with values**, there is a place for me.
- Sense of **core values** are appreciated most.
- **Faith based on values**. Believing in worth of all people, love, brave. More than charity. It is our duty to stand up and speak out.
- WUU is **aligned with my values**; I like that I do not have to have beliefs, **can be an agnostic**.

# Visioning Circles: Building Our Future Together

**Author: Les Solomon**  
**February 15, 2022**

The heart of our Beloved Community is embodied in our work together in Worship, Religious Education, Social Justice, Small Group Ministries, and Fellowship. Our other work in such areas as Membership, Finance, Leadership Development, Board, etc. are there to support these key ministries. It is for this reason that after asking our Visioning Circle participants to briefly share their journeys to come to WUU and to find out what keeps them at WUU (Question 1), our next question was to focus on *hopes and dreams* in the context of these five areas. Each participant had up to 5 minutes to share on this question.

Participants were permitted to address these areas in a wholistic manner or to focus on one or more areas. The participants were also aware that there would be one more chance to speak about music since there was another 5-minute portion (question 3) that focused on music.

The *Hope and Dream* question generated almost 400 separate comments. Some participants came with written comments while others responded extemporaneously. One cannot read through the comments without realizing that COVID has taken a real toll on our lives together resulting in a sense of brokenness and the need for healing. Several comments were more general in nature dealing with burnout, mission, change, staffing, etc. Sample responses include:

- **I don't think we know who we are anymore.** I'm focusing on the practical and the real.
- **Please, get us back in the building.** COVID has kept us apart. We have to get past this "Virus mentality."
- Proud of seeing church family doing things in the community, but **it feels like the congregation is fractured.**
- The connections that are built through fellowship, worship, and shared deep learning make it impossible to **ignore the wounds in our community and society.**
- **WUU is good place to meet people but relationships haven't gone deeper to friendship.** Maybe because of the COVID.
- **We have exposed differences, some irreconcilable which is OK.** But we all want to do this—to move things forward.
- WUU feels like an artifact now that there are more in-person activities at other places. I'm grieving places that are no longer what they were. **My dream is to be in-person but we have to learn to work with new reality.**

More than half of the responses on Question 2 related to their focused hopes and dreams about the 5 core areas (music included with worship). Here is a sampling of the comments on these ministries:<sup>1</sup>

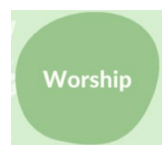


**25 percent of the focused program responses dealt with Social Justice.** More than half of these related to the importance of Social Justice and the remaining considered concerns about burnout and buy-in, especially related to the Journey to Asylum. Other comments related to expanding our focus to environmental topics and how we might use our resources more efficiently. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

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<sup>1</sup> The comments included with this question 2 summary represent less than 20 percent of the responses.

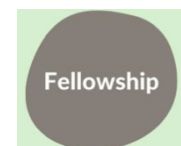
- **Social justice is amazing** - people doing something. I hope it continues; **Appreciates our Social Justice initiatives**, but we need to be more focused as he has noticed some have just fizzled out. Maybe we are spread too thin and need to concentrate on one thing at a time. **Really want to see us expand, but be focused.**
- **Climate justice needs to be addressed**, often left out because of other needs.
- **How we do social justice. Rethink how small we are.** VA Beach Social Justice see themselves as educators. They pick several themes & bring in specialists to share. Match people with existing organizations. These are the connections out in their community.
- I **support the social justice activities like marching on DC.** Hope we can continue to implement our social justice goals within what we can do based on where we are with COVID.
- It has felt like in the last couple of years that people who weren't participating in Social Justice should be banned or something. Not everything is for everybody but each part should be available. **Social Justice is okay but shouldn't be a requirement and neither should anything else.**
- Need **more communication** of Social Justice programs.
- Thinks we have a lot going on, and **some are 'vanity' projects meaningful to only a few people**; there may not be a strong enough collective decision process, and maybe there should be more buy in from full group; there seems to be a 'shaming' or guilt culture developing, in which those who aren't doing as much feel or are made to feel bad
- Very much appreciates devotion and time of the Social Justice folks, but **doesn't know if there is buy-in** by a large portion of our community.
- Would like to see Social Justice program to enlarge for more people and that could mean new people – a mission for the church – **would like to see us as a force in this community and be recognized as important to the community.**



**25 percent of the focused program responses dealt with Worship/Music.** Clearly thoughts about the ministries of Jamie and Dave came through here with more than 60 citations. Respondents talked about the importance of music as well as the spiritual and religious parts of worship though there was a recognition that, for some, worship is not an important component of their life at WUU. Work is needed to make sermons a more fulfilling experience. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key

ideas):

- Feels it is the **bedrock of our experience**, anchor for the week that brings people together; music is an important part of it.
- If lock-down continues, want the **"full personal presence"** of the minister, worship associates, other service participants, mask-less and in person
- **Worship** is not for me. I like working with and seeing people when at WUU.
- **Music** should complement the service message but not be dictated by it; Music very important—critical piece on spiritual side of church. Kind of music not important; Try to replicate what we had with Jamie and Dave, and have choir perform every other week; Vital music program with a talented director and accompaniment; While it's been great to have canned snippets as part of service, we need to have music in the Sanctuary with someone who is participating with us; Happy to have a variety of music. Hopes there will always be a choir.
- **Less use of the term "worship"** can we get away from that term? Stop using Protestant "pseudo Christian" terms in our service; I'm not spiritual in a sense, I really miss a good humanistic sermon.
- **I want to be shaken up, stirred or moved**, haven't felt it in a long time; Several comments on the worship service in general such as superficial, need to address the big spiritual questions of life, too many platitudes and moral parables, etc.; The service is too "saccharine" and doesn't really address the real world. Doesn't seem genuine; We need to have services that get us in touch with our souls instead of concentrating on "goodness and light" and "Pollyanna attitude."



**20 percent of the focused program responses dealt with Fellowship.** Respondents talked about what they miss, the impact of COVID on our ability to be together, and the relationship of Fellowship to our other ministries. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

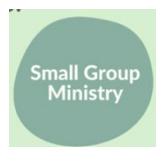
- **Connections in the post COVID world** are important and how we support those who are disconnected. We have a role to play with the ministry, small groups and Religious Education. We should **find ways and work to support those connections so we can live our values.**

- I am in my 70s, **my time is limited and I don't want to use it on things that aren't useful and purposeful**. When I look at the organizations in our community that are most vibrant, I think of places like the library and gyms – these are where people are getting friendship, enrichment of lives, being stimulate intellectually. How can we do the same here?
- **I feel so alone** here right now, and I have never felt that way before; The warmth of this community has been a central and sustaining part of our lives ... it has been a strain the last couple of years.
- I love hospitality and we **need to be reaching out and being more welcoming to new people**. We have become too oriented to small groups and become cliquish.
- I want **intimate deep relationships**. I will look wherever I have and go to get it. I want something to inspire me. I would like more opportunities to get together in person. It is time. We need that to reconnect with the building, people, church and everything to reunite; Looking for more **connection between groups**. Religious Education and Social Justice are good but they both draw upon a small group.
- Needs to be **more scope for having fun together**, something missing right now; **Potlucks, Circle dinners. Want to do socials. Watch a movie and talk about it**. I have a vision of this being an active lively community where we can show up for meditation or group drumming and get to know each other better. A place with lots of opportunities for small and large group activities.
- We need to **feel a sense of community**. I miss the fellowship, the hospitality, there are many great cooks, the food was always a big thing, potlucks, getting together over dinner. During the service, or after, you don't get to really talk much



**18** percent of the focused program responses dealt with **Religious Education**. Traditionally WUU has focused on RE for our youth, drawing upon the idea that “RE is the heart of the church, we need young families or we die.” However, there is a growing need to consider RE to include all ages. Additionally, considerations about the nature of the RE program. Responses also included kudos to Austen. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

- **Adult Ed is more than SM, or covenant groups**. Not sure which umbrella it would come under but things like book groups and more Adult RE.
- **Austen is magic**, a treasure, we have to support her.
- **Change name of “RE” to “Emotional/Ethical” Education**.
- **Dream would be a more robust program that draws kids**, with more social component, that creates fellowship for children
- Feels grief for **her kids as they are not welcomed for RE**, but hopes that her family can stay.
- Kids need to know more about **Christian values vs. UU values**. That's the world they live in. Do they explore controversial topics rather than just UU?
- **More adult education** such as ethics and emotional life, other faith traditions, OWL for over 55s.



**8** percent of the focused program responses dealt with **Small Group Ministries**. Though participants see Soul Matters at the core of the small group ministries work, it also involves other formats such as the covenant groups, and affinity group offerings. There are also comments about our communications to promote these opportunities. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

- Hopes that **small groups can grow** as many people in the WUU know each other through small group interaction. We need to encourage people to get involved with small groups. Small groups include more than just Soul Matters.
- It isn't clear now what they are beyond Soul Matters, but could be **more adult learning in different senses**.
- More small groups like the **First UU in Richmond model**. They have small groups like “Jewish UUs,” “Christian UUs,” and “Pagan UUs” which allows people to explore religious beliefs in small groups that appeal to them.
- Seconds the idea that we need more **small groups which for some are less intimidating than Sunday morning**. Small groups are also good for people coming out of a bad situation; Would like the WUU to set up a support network for people in need such as those going through a divorce, or single women, or single people, or just to fall back on when you need someone to interact with and talk to.



- Working with a number of people trying to **revive the Senior Companions** which gained many members over their 4 meetings. Started with opening topic and then broke into smaller groups to get to know each other in a more meaningful way.

**Beyond the comments on these core areas, here is a sampling of the comments about how we go from here to the future:**

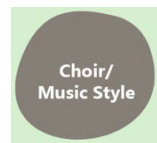
- **Golden opportunity to reinvent ourselves.** We are in a bit of an identity crisis. Concern among some that there is a threat – but clinging to past won't carry us into the future; **We need to get back to basics, reconsider how we allocate resources.** Life after COVID will not be the same as before COVID; Long range 5 years out – **WUU Staff titles are unimportant – functions are crucial** – organizing is most important – internally, increasing involvement
- **Good, solid real communication between leadership and congregants very important**—without it we will falter; **Vibrant active community** is my vision. Hope to have necessary infrastructure and communication pieces and activities that would put together a seamless whole rather than bits and pieces; **Hope is open, honest, loving communication**, keeping the goal in mind instead of I'm right and you're wrong.
- If we don't have **participation in leadership and funding, we will falter.** We need to figure out ways to get better and more participation in areas where we don't have it right now. My biggest joy and frustration-- we try to do too much, such as homeless shelter results in guilt, Journey to Asylum is another example.
- My message to the group is the **need for the discipline to get to that whole rather than just throwing stuff in;** Need to narrow down, **feel frustrated that vision is greater than capacity**, so what we do, we do better. We haven't made the connection to new group of leaders.
- Our leadership is **too concerned with physical health than spiritual health.**
- Wants us to recognize who we are: white, elderly, upper middle class. Our plans need to be open to change, and we can work toward attracting more. But **we are mostly separated little groups without sense of collective identity.** Hopes for better communication through board and members, even as honors and recognizes our leadership; Would like to see an opportunity for **brainstorming to find creative, healthy ways to express criticism.**
- We could avoid making it either/or situation. **Graciousness is important to a healthy congregation;** We have to **soften our criticism** - shouldn't get stuck thinking we are right and others are wrong.
- We have not done enough to keep the conservatives in our midst. Some have left over their treatment. **We need to be more inclusive.** Our social environment needs to be more inclusive.
- We should continue to **focus on values and principals.** We should stay true to the covenant and support our values.
- Younger families-hoping that they feel ownership at our mission, etc., there are little things that young families are doing but its limited; **our history as young families is not being repeated for our current young families**

# Visioning Circles: Building Our Future Together

## Question 3: Do you have a vision of what a vital music program would look like at the WUU. If so, what is it?

February 15, 2022

The future of the WUU music program was a major topic addressed by the Visioning Circle project. Question 3 asked about music specifically: *Do you have a vision of what a vital music program would look like at the WUU. If so, what is it?* Each participant was offered five minutes of time to answer. In addition, several participants spoke about the music program when answering the other 3 questions. These comments have been included in this report.



**32** percent of the comments addressed the choir and the style of music at WUU. Comments repeated the desire to sing as a congregation, how important is variety in music, suggestions for including the congregation in choir experiences, and there was a definite preference for singing in person. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

- **Choirs are the backbones of Protestant churches** and a big part of our culture
- **Diversity in music**—less Caucasian European music; need more lively, uplifting music
- Dreams of **music that touches every kind of musical group**—no bar to what is possible
- I don't like to be sung at—I **want to sing; Want to sing as a congregation** with variety and balance
- I would **love to see an adult choir and children's choir**; also, everybody can join something like the Tabernacle Band and Tabernacle Choir
- **Importance of choir—agreed**—always amazed at the number of people in the choir
- In person, **live music is important**
- Like those **opportunities for various skill levels to make music together**
- Liked **services that Rev. Jennifer brought in** (AA choir) in which the entire service was uplifting and inspirational music
- Loves **hymns from our hymnal**—loves us to sing
- Treasures the **variety of musical expression**; good to have a music director keeping all that organized
- Wants music as part of worship to continue and **sees participation (choir) as important for others**; I would like to see our music be **more participatory, more energetic, standing up, clapping and singing**. How about doing **sing-along events** like a gospel sing-along, a firepit sing-along, etc.; I agree that the music program should be participatory; I like the idea of the **Tabernacle Band**; I especially loved the **children's choir**
- **We definitely need a choir**; there should be a balance of providing opportunities for participation, but also bringing in professionals to stimulate new creativity; We should have a **vibrant music program that goes beyond choir, but we should have a choir**

### Other questions heard responses about the choir and style of music at WUU, such as:

- Choir needs to start again
- In-person worship and music—all elements coming together, touch each other
- The thing that draws me back is a strong music program, dynamic and with variety



**21** percent of comments were related to **music staffing**, which is a priority at this time. The call for an accomplished pianist was repeated, though some felt we should not rush into filling this and the Music Director's position during the pandemic. There was much praise for Jamie and Dave, along with fear that their equals would be very hard to find. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight

key ideas):

- Agreed that **we need a pianist** rather than someone who accompanies
- Appreciated **Dave and Jamie**; Clearly **Dave Robbins** was a huge loss
- As important as a music director is, **it doesn't seem likely that we can advertise when we are not even having church services in person**, and with a choir that can't meet.
- **Autonomy by the music committee and musicians is necessary**; now the minister tells the musicians what to play, hymns, etc.
- **Finding a choir director and pianist needs to be paramount** as we need music in our services.
- It is important to have **someone to step in who sees it as a calling and not a job**; we need **leaders with a spiritual vision**
- **Music should be a priority** because it is vital to WUU; move towards hiring new leaders and getting music going again
- Need **someone with musical collegiality in our area** who can bring in outside music resources when we need them (singers, instrumentalists)
- Really need **musical director in charge of all kinds of music** for us
- **Should not be important to say that we need a choir**; rather, give them the flexibility to work with our other programs
- Strive to **make inhouse music excellence the norm**
- Wants **talented musicians in leadership roles**
- We have a good opportunity with the current clean slate, but **it will be hard not to judge new staff against those who left**
- **We should spend extraordinary dollars** for a new director that will bring new people



**21** percent of responses spoke about **what music does at WUU**, describing how important the choir has been, music as an important part of the service, choir as small group ministry, singing brings people joy and decreases stress, that we need to get the music program going again, and love of music being closest to religious experience. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

- **A UU congregation without a choir is just a business**—need to express life, love, emotion through music
- Choir is a **small group ministry**
- **Choir is a vibrant part of a** celebration Sunday
- **Diversity in music** has been a good thing
- I'm in **support of getting a robust program going again.**
- **I want to be able to sing**
- Music **allows us to share in communal joy.** Even if not participating, they're hearing
- **Music is**
  - An **absolute necessity to my spiritual life**; WUU music has filled me and brought tears of joy to my eyes
  - **Another way of connecting**—within the congregation and with the larger community
  - **Keystone**, but we don't know what's going to be next--have to take things as they come
  - **Speaks to our soul and can lead to some transformative moments**
  - The **spirit of spirituality**
  - **To convey our values is important**
  - **Vital to the spiritual and moral health of the church**; it is important to have a strong program

**In answering other questions during the Visioning Circles, we also heard responses about what music does at WUU such as:**

- Loves music though can't sing; real road to spiritual growth, nature and principles which she believes in
- Music **helps me connect with my best self**
- **Music is a high priority; it is prized and important**—my vision goes to prayer
- Without music, not as meaningful; **music brings more than the sermons**



**6** percent of comments related to **age and generations**, with a call for more involvement of the children. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

- **Dreams of levels of music**—bringing young parents to WUU to grow a children’s choir
- Currently, **there isn’t much young blood in the choir**
- **Getting kids involved is interesting**
- I want a **multigenerational program**; we must be a creative people who understand UU principles
- Need **to find ways to tap into congregants and youth** in particular
- Want **children’s choir more often**; **Want to get more children involved**; **Would love to see a children’s choir and children’s bell choir** as well

**When answering Question 2, we also heard the following comment relating to music and the above category:**

- It is the obligation of RE and the Music Director to **make sure children learn the common songs of our UU faith**



**20** percent of the **Question 3** responses dealt with **general comments**, such as how much people love singing together, the fear that music won’t continue to be a significant a part of our experience at WUU and concern with getting the program going again, how our music program attracted new people to WUU and kept folks here, the need for new leaders, that this in-between time can be used to define what we want going forward, and repeatedly, how integral music is to the worship experience for some. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

- **Choir has been a big part of my time here** and it’s not going to be again
- **Don’t rush into defining a music program** but don’t throw aside what we’ve had and is meaningful to people
- Heard over years that our wonderful music program brought people in—**it’s quite a draw**
- Loves **singing** together
- **Music and choir were a strong draw** for me
- Music programs such a **central part of what we do**
- **We have lots of music talent and networking** in the congregation.

# Visioning Circles: Building Our Future Together

## Question 4: **What is the 1 thing you would like to see happen that would strengthen your ties to WUU?**

February 15, 2022

The Visioning Circles sharing ended with a short, direct question asking what would they like to see happen that would strengthen their ties to WUU? Each participant had up to 2 minutes to share on this question.

There were 154 separate comments recorded for this question. They fall primarily into six areas (Fellowship, Worship/music, Covenant, Leadership/volunteer, In-person, and Other). Here is a sampling of the comments in these areas:



**22** percent of the focused responses dealt with **Fellowship**. Respondents talked about missing the sense of community engendered by in-person contact impacted by COVID. The ZOOM structure was complimented as a stop gap method and that it should continue to serve a segment of the WUU population. For future consideration, people thought we should reopen the sanctuary as soon as possible to begin rebuilding friendships old and new. They felt like many opportunities for fellowship must be planned to reconnect our membership and friends. Sample responses include (bold added to

highlight key ideas):

- **Coffee and goodies** bring people together.
- Has **had a wonderful time getting to know people and learning through them with** projects (like the fence).
- I agree about **projects & learning from other people**; I've been a UU my whole life.
- I found it was awkward to build relationships with people my parents' age. **I like deep relationship work and getting vulnerable with each other.**
- I miss **social occasions introducing the older to the younger** like the potlucks, game nights, the picnic.
- I'd like a **women's retreat**.
- **Interpersonal connection**; time to just get to know people 1:1.



**22** percent of the focused responses dealt with **Leadership/Volunteers**. Respondents discussed primarily communication and treatment of each other and the congregants. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

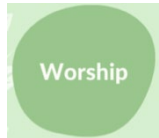
- **Better communication** so we all know what's going on with the Board and the minister.
- **Governance is a reason to strength our** ties - the Board overreached into Program Council areas. The Program Council isn't having in ways that are productive, thus **we should revisit governance and find a way to better engage people and avoid ruffled feathers.**
- I feel like my voice has been ignored during the Pandemic. I feel like I have been shut off and that everyone has to think the same way as those who make policy. It's like a "wind tunnel of thought" in which leaders are not thinking beyond their own mindset **we are focused on what we are afraid of, and not on our spiritual health.**
- I want to see the **Leadership Team coming from a place of faith.**
- My fondest hope is that when the new Board reconstitutes after the election in May, **the Board begins to rebuild trust within their ranks and with the minister.**
- There is a small autocracy here: it's my way or the highway. **Get rid of the pretend Christian things and care about each other more and stop being petty.**

- Was discouraged by the **lack of transparency** in the recent president transition.



**18 percent of the focused responses dealt with our Covenant.** Respondents were drawn to WUU because our Covenant corresponded to their own faith and values. The lack of a creed and the invitation for one's own spiritual exploration drew them to WUU. The fact that many members were out in the community living these values and sharing themselves with others inspired them. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

- Want to further **live our Green Sanctuary and our environmental values.**
- Are we living our values? **Are we making policies based on fear, or based on love?**
- Housing the **Buddhist Sangha also furthers our own UU Covenant.**
- Find **better expression of those core values.** Core values are to be together and find out what we think now after the experiences of the last 2 years.
- **Covenant is critical.**



**13 percent of the focused responses dealt with Worship/Music.** Respondents talked about finding a spiritual home with open minded, exploring people they can relate with coupled with music touching their soul. Even if not fans of the sermon/Protestant format, there was still a draw of people and the environment provided by hospitality. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

- **Choir needs to start** again.
- **End the Pandemic,** bring us back together!
- **Let go of fear.** Fear is a downward spiral. We can be cautious but this dark place is an over shadowing theme in our sermons.
- Lifespan development should be should include **commitment to all age faith development.**
- **Meaningful worship and music when you discuss the message afterwards (breakouts);** it's that compelling; I love the breakout groups after worship-the **highlight of the time, get to be together in an intimate way.**
- **More direct congregation participation in services,** Joys & Sorrows, From the Heart & member/guest speakers.
- **Restore the spiritual center.** The center is Sunday morning worship in a shared space with music and an inspirational message to take away. This creates pride, a sense of identity, and community.
- The thing that draws the speaker back is **strong music program, dynamic and with variety.**
- **Use lay-led programming** if the minister needs to stay distanced.
- **Wants to feel heart and mind moved.**



**9 percent of the focused responses dealt with In-person.** Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

- Meeting together, **in person, where the community finds collective spirit-**wants to feel it in more personal ways.
- Miss opportunities to **get together as a group.**
- The most important thing is to **be back in person.** Speaker believes there is a safe way to do that.
- **ZOOM makes me physically ill** and I know others, too - it does not replace people.



**25 percent of the focused responses dealt with Other Areas.** There are so many interesting ideas about the best way to keep people engaged. However, it was difficult to find larger common themes to these recommendations ranging from comments from the Board to governance, to communication, to treating each other kindly, to ideas for the future. Sample responses include (bold added to highlight key ideas):

- I don't know what would strengthen until we get off **ZOOM; I hate it.**
- **I resent being made to feel like I need to show up.**

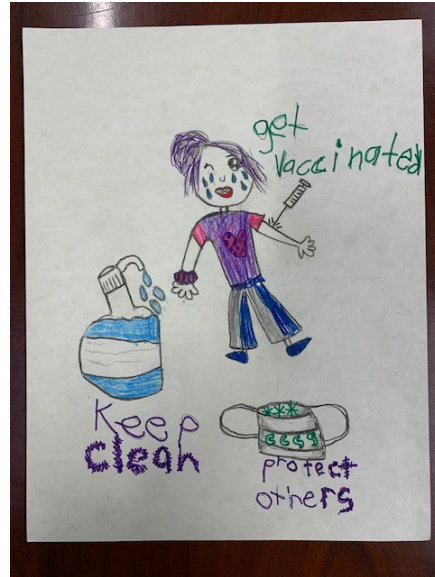
- **Social justice people are burned out because there are so few**, in VA Beach, they pair volunteers with existing programs just sponsoring maybe one in the actual congregation.
  - **We have a lot of complicated problems of restoration to tackle before embarking on new projects and policies:** Namely, restoring our music program and resuming in-person worship and small gatherings.
  - **We need**
    - **A big, hairy, audacious goal.**
    - **More diversity.** Can we do it through music; music with other congregations?
    - **More people, more leaders, more humanist teachings.**
    - **More publicity in the community** about what we're doing to get the word out about WUU.
    - **More tolerance and love just for each other now;** We have been hard on each other these last two years,
    - **To get back to basics:** so much burnout. Many are exhausted.
    - **To improve communications.**
    - **To match vision with our capacity** such as letting go of activities like the auction if there are no volunteers to run it as well as the yard sale.
    - **To stop actualizing and finger pointing,** we're all in this together.
  - **Wednesday night Vesper type service** with free dinner and adult RE topic.
  - When we lost **WALT, we lost touch with that part of the community.**
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**Authors' Note:** This process has been a labor of love. We have attempted to represent this information as representative of the range of comments shared by the Visioning Circle participants.

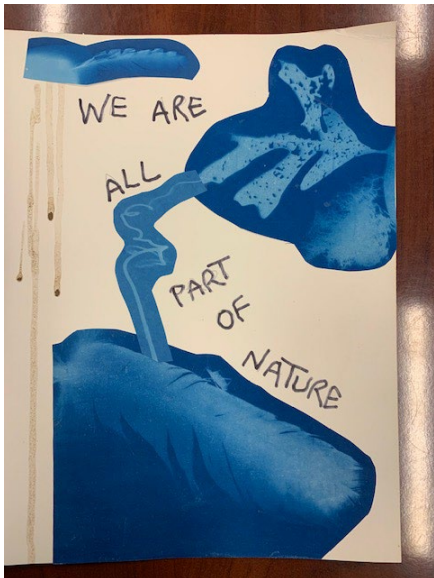
Now it is up to the Program Council and Board to decide how to use this information. With their guidance, the Visioning Circle team will be ready to release the full set of comments.

*Anne, Dave, Jess, and Les*  
Visioning Circle Team

These graphics were created and shared as part of the Religious Education Quilt Project







# ENDNOTES

## Process

The Visioning Circles were advertised in the Spiral starting on December 30, a separate email blast, on Facebook and Instagram, and with service announcements starting on January 6. Leaders recruitment started on December 28 and training began on January 13. Signup Genius was used to manage sign-ups for both leaders and participants.

In-Person and Zoom Visioning circles followed the same pattern.

## Roles

- *Host*—welcome, chalice lighting, introduce the questions, closing, manage the meeting
- *Recorder*—take notes to be reviewed and passed on to Les Solomon via electronic file
- *Zoom Technician*—Place the questions, etc. in chat, solve ZOOM issues, and possibly serve as timekeeper
- *VC Task Force* (Dave, Les, Anne, Jessica)
  - Send the welcome to the session participants with copies to the leaders
  - Send the procedure instructions to the Host.

## Circle Process

- Leaders arrive or log on about 10-15 minutes before the meeting starts
- Leader sets up a candle to light, sets up chairs and a table if in person.
- Leader welcomes participants as they log on. All participate in the pre-session
- Leader starts the session as soon as possible after the scheduled start time.
  - Welcome participants.
  - Light the chalice and read the chalice lighting

*It is beautiful to dream...to cast a vision...to stretch our*

*minds into the future and imagine what may be if we were to  
build a new way of being—not some day*

*but beginning again today*

*beginning again every day that we have breath*

*taking courage with these hands and hearts*

*to make real the dream of a more equitable world...*

*to journey together...seeking to be transformed,  
even as we transform.*

*Alicia Forde (adapted)*

- Brief statement about why we are doing these Circles

- Have a conversation about WUU in the future
  - Think about the implications of ministry, including music, community, etc. in post-covid
- Brief statement about the procedures including Confidentiality Covenant
  - Respect the privacy of group members by keeping confidentiality (all comments recorded are anonymous)
  - Practice deep listening offering each other space to share without interruption.
- Describe how you will inform them that their time is just about up.
- First Question
  - Ask Tech to post in the chat if on zoom:
  - Check-in Question. What brings you to WUU? What draws you and keeps you at WUU? (3 minutes)
  - Invite participants to respond when they are ready. Keep track of who has spoken.
  - After each person speaks, ask the Recorder if they are ready for the next person before letting the next person start. Set this pattern so that people know to wait until the Recorder is ready.
  - If no one offers to speak and some have not spoken yet, ask if anyone who hasn't spoken would like to speak. Do not call out anyone who does not want to answer a question, just move on.
- Repeat this process for the other questions
  - Tell us about your hopes and dreams for WUU (Consider SJ, RE, Fellowship, Worship, Small Group Ministry). (5 minutes)
  - Do you have a vision of what a vital music program would look like at the WUU. If so, what is it? (5 minutes)
  - What is the one thing you would like to see happen that would strengthen your ties to WUU? (2 minutes)
- At the end of the response period
  - Extinguish the chalice and read the closing
 

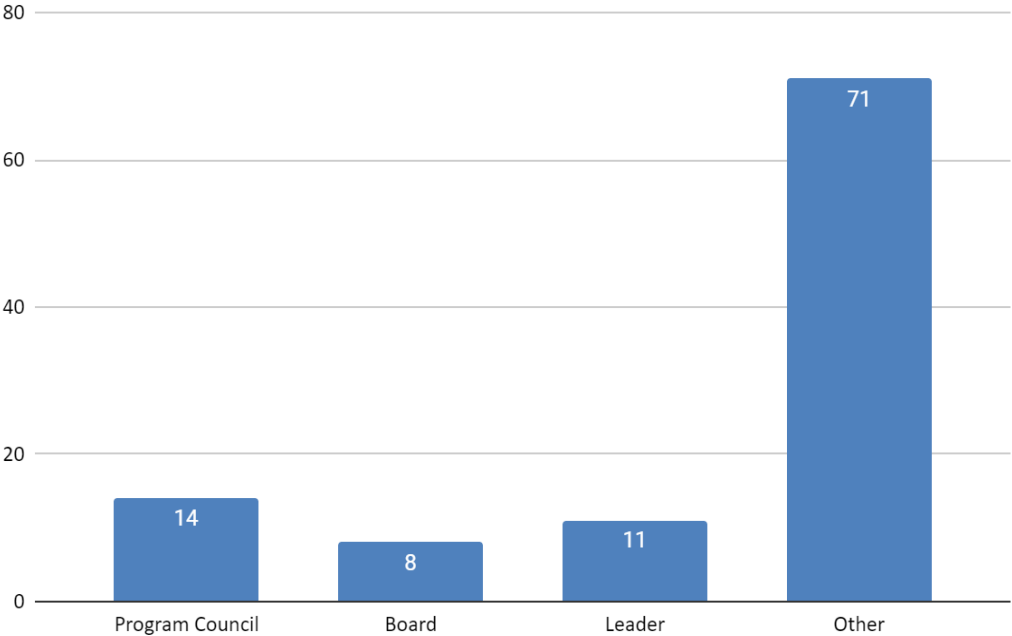
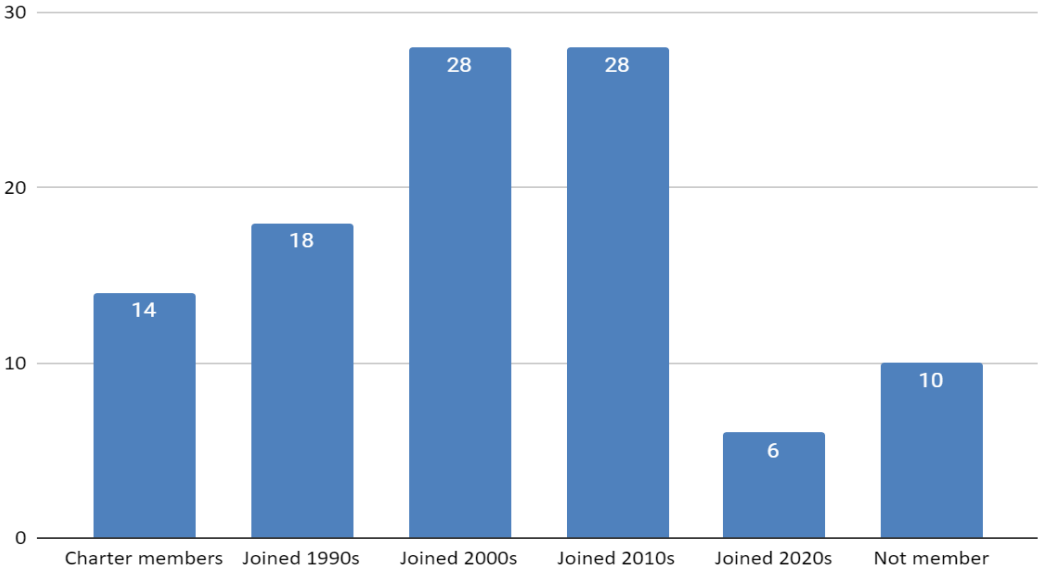
*Let us go forth into the world  
Through a door of hope for the future,  
Remembering these words by Martin Luther:*

*Even if I knew that tomorrow  
The world would go to pieces,  
I would still plant my apple tree.*
  - Thank the respondents for their participation and encourage them to stay to discuss if they wish or to move on with the rest of their day.
- Recorder
  - Write or type the responses to the best of your ability
  - After the session, review, spell check, edit the responses
  - Do not identify who was talking. These notes should be anonymous.

- Perhaps check with the leader after the session if you believe you have missed something.
- Within two days, send an email file, notes, or word file to Les
- Les will email his edited copy back to the group for any corrections.

# Results

## Who Participated?



## Vision Circles

Date	Time	Location	Leader	Recorder	Zoom Tech	Attendance
Thu, 1/13	2-4pm	WUU	Les Solomon	Anne Stevens		7
Sat, 1/15	2-4pm	WUU	Anne Stevens	Les Solomon		5
Tue, 1/18	10-noon	WUU	Lola Warren	Molly Swetnam-Burland		4
Tue, 1/18	2-4pm	WUU	Kerry Mellette	Katrina Landon		6
Wed, 1/19	6-8pm	WUU	Angela Surber	Vicki Hall		4
Wed, 1/19	6-8pm	Zoom	Jessica O'Brien	Dave Wilcox		3
Sat, 1/22	2-4pm	Zoom	Dave Wilcox	Jessica O'Brien		4
Sun, 1/23	7-8pm	Zoom - YRUU	Dave Wilcox			4
Mon, 1/24	10-noon	Zoom	Susan Fournier	Peter Mellette	Dave Banks	7
Mon, 1/24	2-4pm	Zoom	Jane Reilly	Angela Surber	Dave Banks	3
Mon, 1/24	6-8pm	Zoom	Bruce Thomas	Kirk Starr	Dave Wilcox	6
Thu, 1/27	10-noon	Zoom	Helen Hansen	Katrina Landon	Dave Banks	3
Thu, 1/27	2-4pm	Zoom	Jane Reilly	Martha Elim, Helen Hansen	Dave Banks	9
Thu, 1/27	pm	Ackleys	Les Solomon	Katrina Landon		3
Thu, 1/27	6-8pm	Zoom	Lola Warren	Kirk Starr	Dave Wilcox	2
Fri, 1/28	2-4pm	WUU	Helen Hansen	Angela Surber		6
Fri, 1/28	2-4pm	Zoom	Vicki Hall	Phoebe Kent	Dave Banks	5
Fri, 1/28	2-4pm	Zoom	Lola Warren	Nan Hart	Jessica O'Brien	5
Sat, 1/29	10-noon	Zoom	Lola Warren	Helen Hansen	Dave Banks	7
Sun, 1/30	2-4pm	Zoom	Lola Warren	Katrina Landon	Dave Wilcox	6
Wed, 2/2	6:30-7:30pm	Zoom	Peter Mellette	Katrina Landon	Dave Banks	3