



# **First Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo Ministerial Search Survey Results**

Summer 2022

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# Survey Overview

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Members and Friends of the Fellowship were asked to complete a survey to provide guidance for the Ministerial Search Committee. The survey asks respondents about the following topics:

- Personal demographic information
- Priorities for the new minister
- Most important duties for the new minister
- The most important attributes for their continued participation at the Fellowship
- Why they came to the congregation
- Why they stay
- What they would like our congregation to have had less of in the last three years
- What they would like our congregation to have had more of in the last three years
- What they hope never changes in the congregation
- What could be improved with fresh perspective and energy

The Committee received 55 completed surveys and the results are summarized in this report. Please note that not every person answered every question and not every answer could be compiled numerically but the general themes and aggregate scores are presented here to provide a picture of the community’s over-arching views.

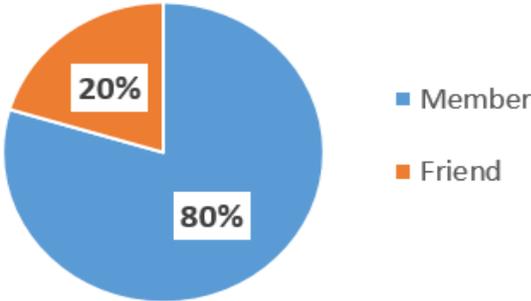
# Demographics

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Who responded? The following is a breakdown of the respondents:

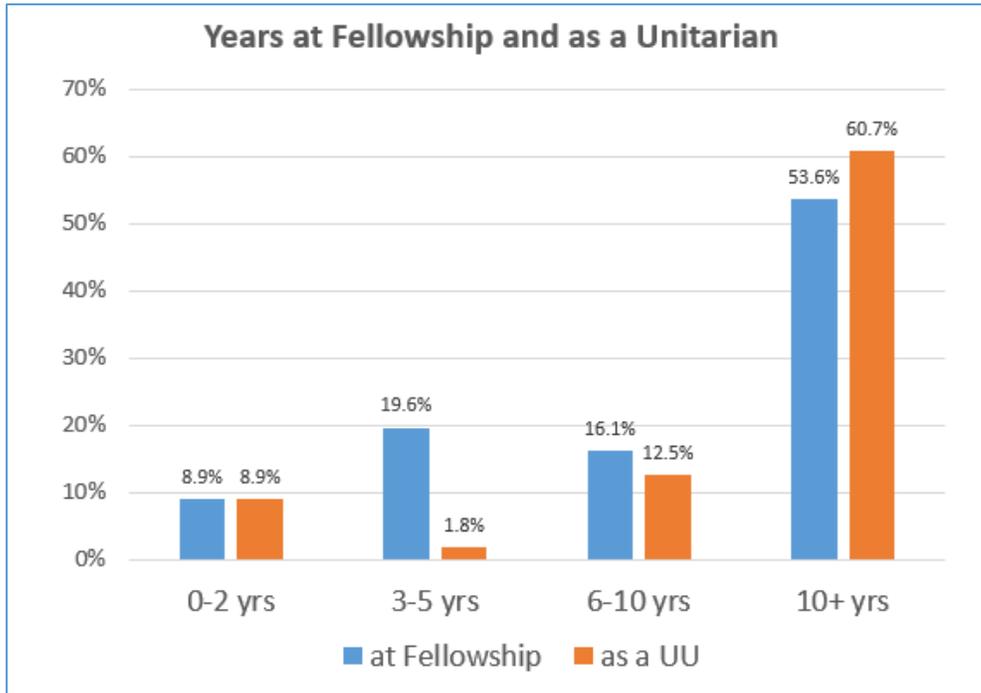
- The majority of respondents were members:

Survey Respondents

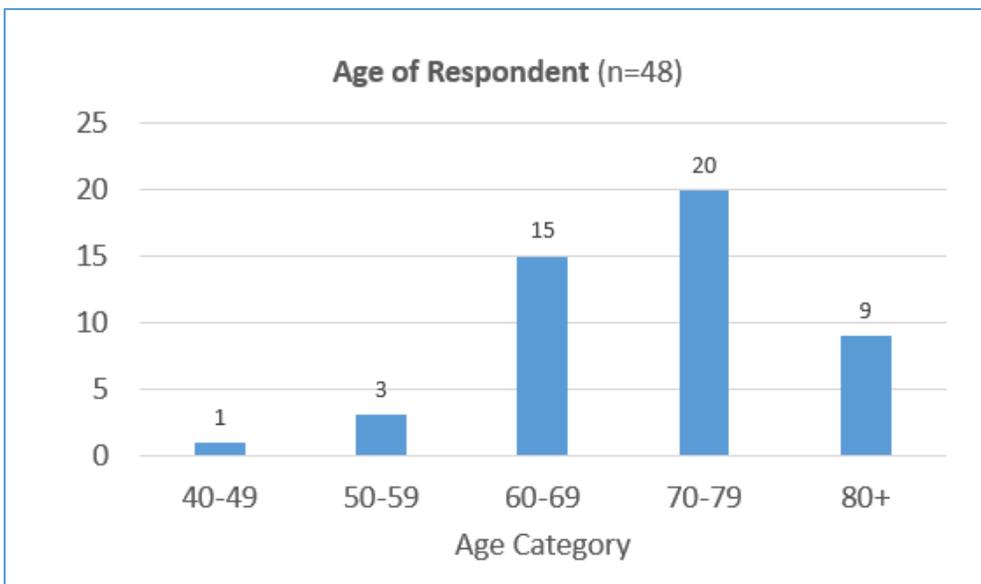


- Member n=43
- Friend n=11

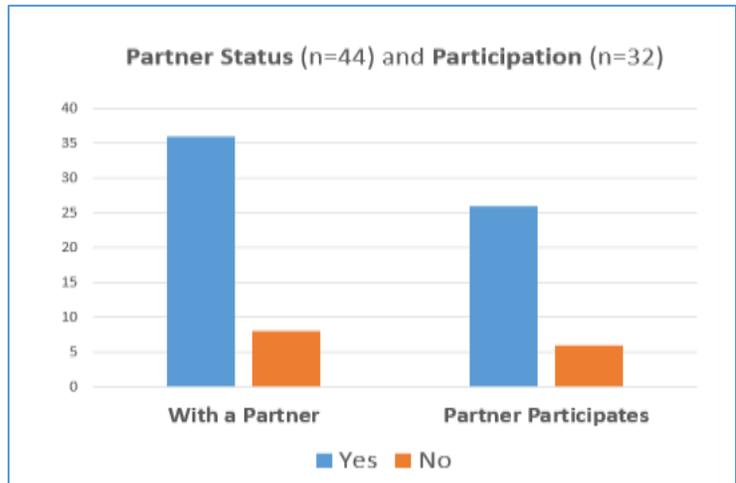
A little over half of respondents reported having been associated with other UU congregations (52%) with the median number of years at the Fellowship being 10+ years.



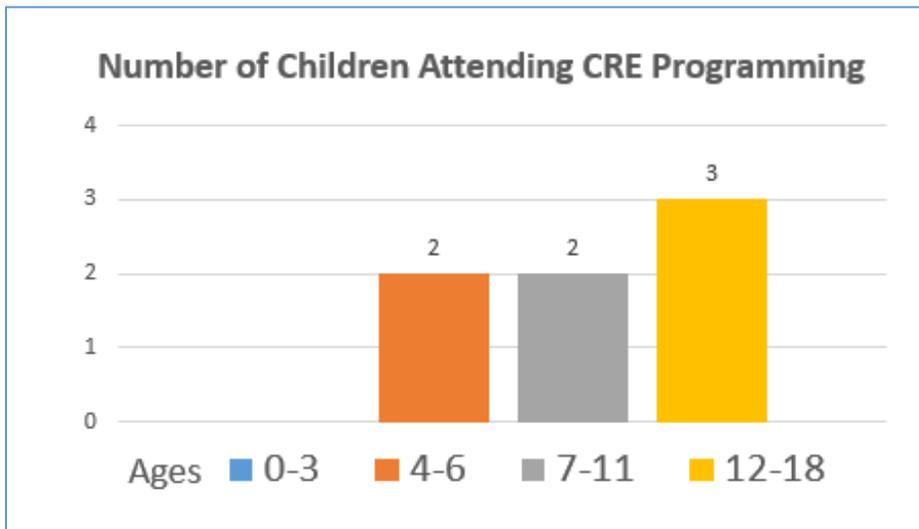
Respondents tended to be older as is reflected within the Fellowship’s demographics. There were more families involved in the Fellowship pre-COVID, but their attendance dropped off when services moved online and Messy UU Church went on hiatus.



Two other demographics included in the survey were partner status and partner participation. The majority of respondents indicated they were with a partner, and many of those partners were involved with the Fellowship, though some specified that this participation was occasional.



The final demographic gathered was about children's ages and participation in CRE programming. Only a few respondents indicated that they had young children, and some of those were grandparents whose grandchildren attend CRE programming (a couple occasionally). This mix of children and grandchildren attending CRE programming included two 4-6 year olds, two 7-11 year olds and three 12-18 year olds. It should be noted that, while



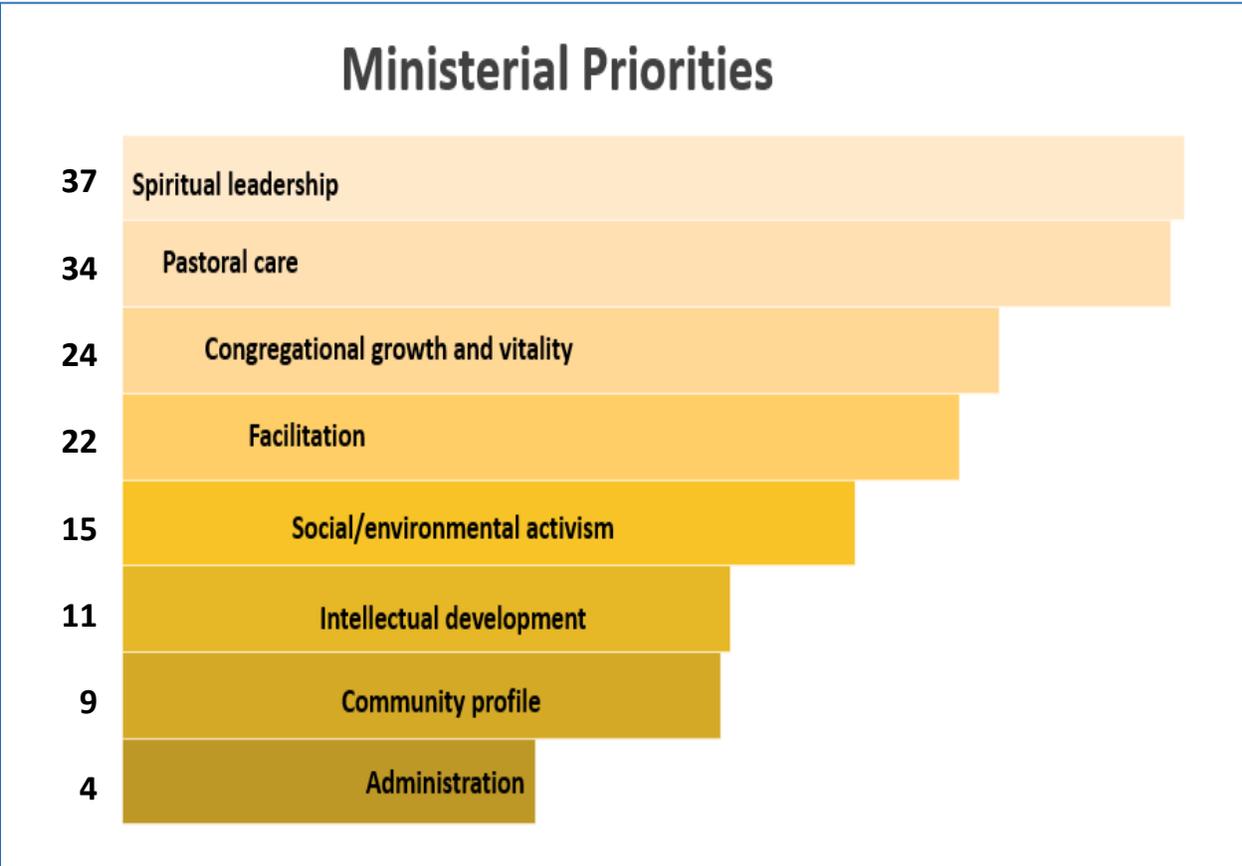
Sunday services have been running in hybrid mode (allowing both live and Zoom attendance), the children and youth programming has remained largely online and this has definitely impacted participation.

# Community Priorities and Desires

This section shares the highlights from the survey and provides information that may help the Ministerial Search Committee recommend a candidate who is a good match for the Fellowship and help candidates decide if they are interested in becoming our next minister and willing to support the Fellowship to achieve its goals.

## Priorities for the New Minister

Respondents were asked to rank (from 1 to 8) ministerial tasks as priorities for the new minister. These items were ranked by 50 of the 55 respondents. The graph below shows the number of people who ranked each priority as either 1, 2 or 3. The width of each task demonstrates its priority in comparison to other tasks, with highest priorities at the top and the lowest priorities at the bottom.

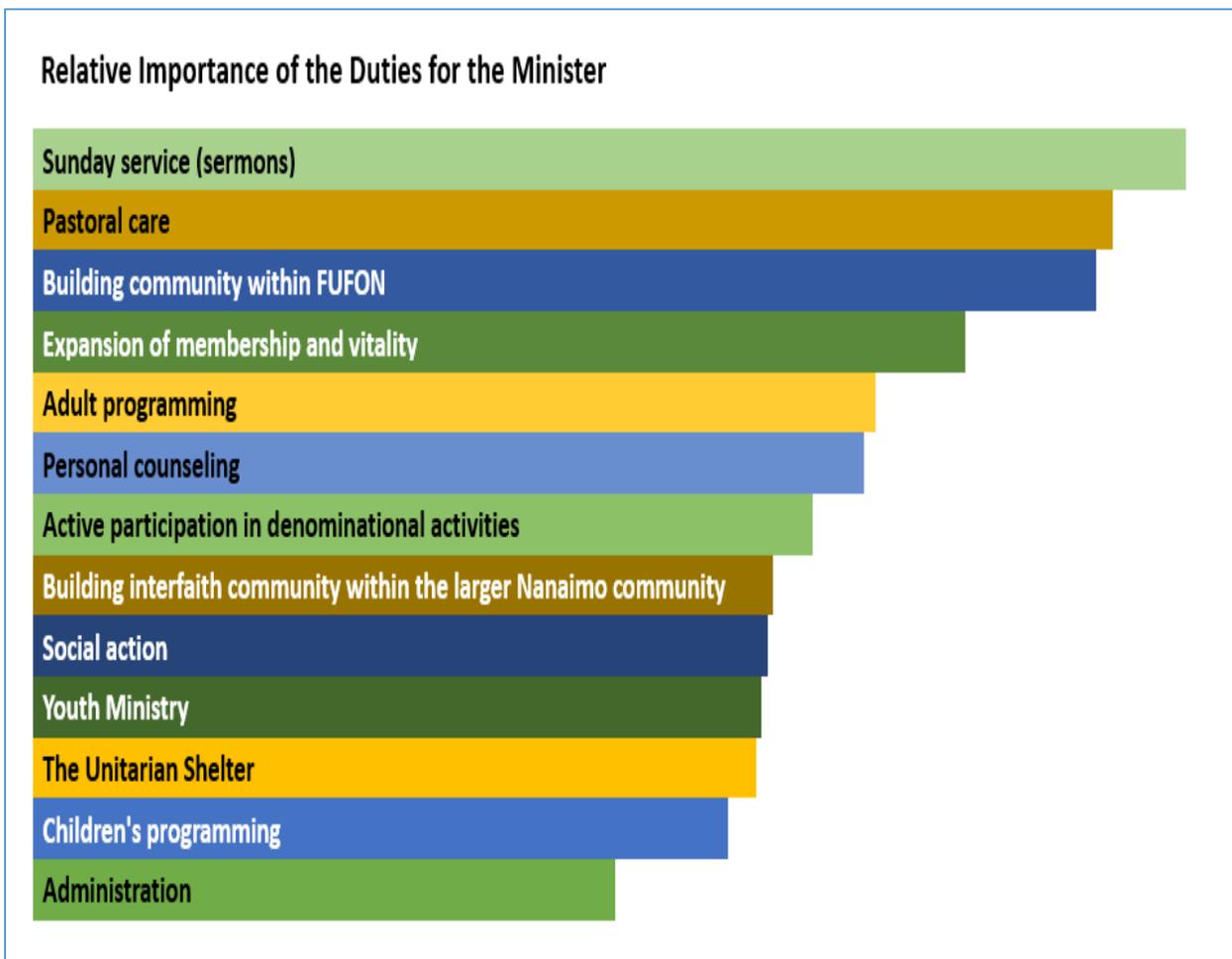


Several respondents also indicated that good or thought-provoking sermons were a priority.

## Duties for the New Minister

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of different duties for the new Minister, using a scale from very important to not important. Weighted averages were used to show the relative importance of the duties in the graph below.

The three most important duties were *Sunday service sermons*, *pastoral care* and *building community within the Fellowship*, with *expansion of membership and vitality* coming in a distant fourth. Least important duties for the minister were *administration*, *children's programming* and *the Unitarian shelter*, which is not a reflection on the importance of these duties, but more that the Fellowship has other capable staff to attend to these.



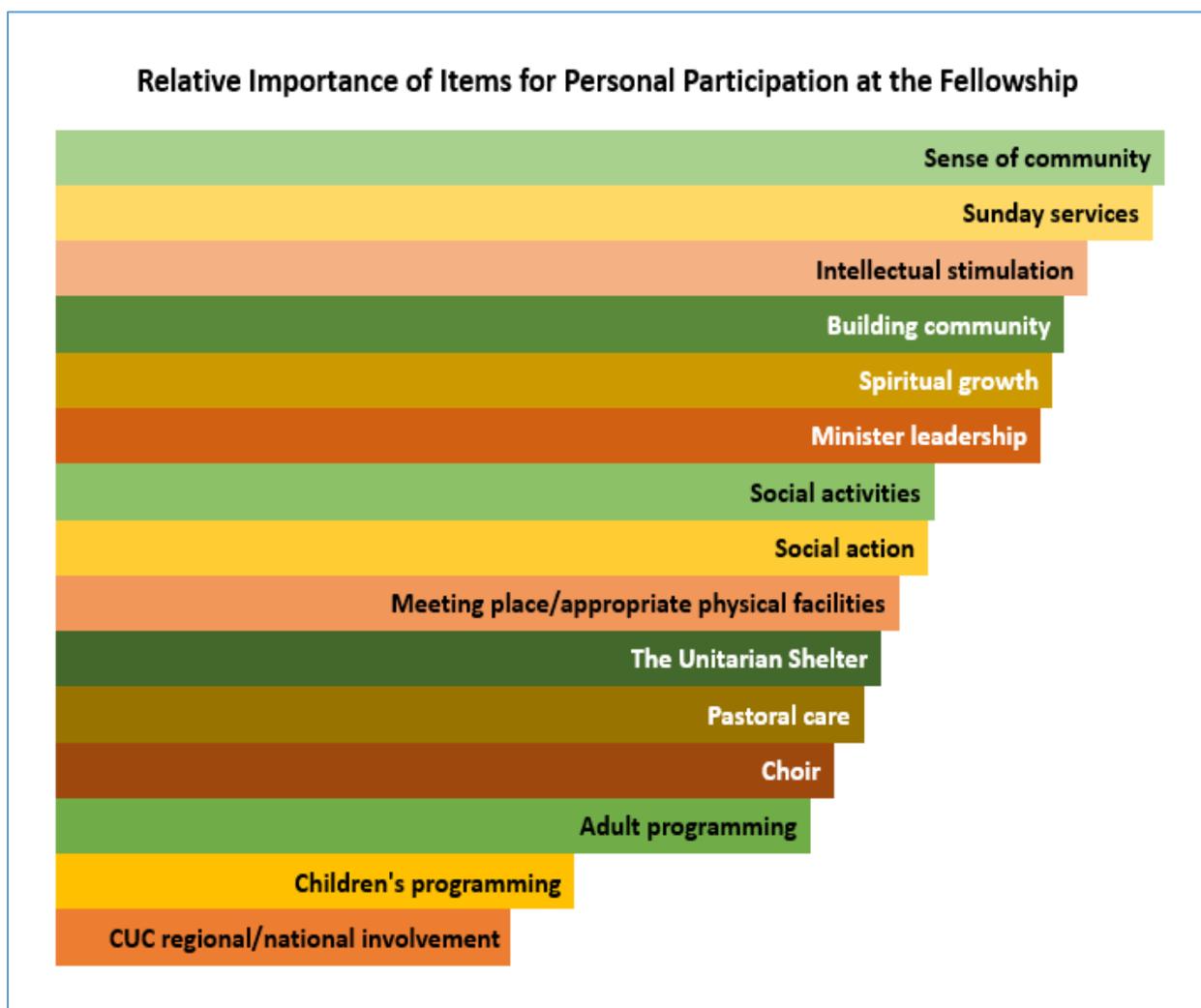
A couple of respondents suggested that the minister might also assist in building or supporting leadership, with one saying a minister can provide a “ministerial perspective to the Board and other Fellowship leadership”. There were also respondents who cautioned that the minister should not be overloaded: “The minister does not have to be superhuman. Listing tasks above does not mean the minister should do it all perfectly.”

## Important to Continued Participation at the Fellowship

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of different aspects of the Fellowship to their participation in our UU community, using a scale from very important to not important. Weighted averages were used to show the relative importance of these items in the graph below.

The top items were *sense of community* and *Sunday services*. Grouped closely behind these were *intellectual stimulation*, *building community*, *spiritual growth* and *minister leadership*. The least important areas for individuals' ongoing personal engagement with the Fellowship were *CUC regional/national involvement* and *children's programming*.

The following table presents the full results:



## Why Members and Friends Came to Our Congregation

- Spiritual interest and values
- Like-minded people and community
- Previous UU involvement
- Social activism

Members of our congregation told us they came to our Fellowship seeking new spiritual values and a community of like-minded people. Many said they had belonged to other Unitarian congregations before joining us. Others were attracted to the Nanaimo Unitarians because of our social activism, in particular, the homeless shelter. One congregant put it this way: “I like being in a room with people who are social justice warriors, all trying to be good, community-minded, and environmentally conscious citizens.” Our children’s religious education programs were another draw.

## Why Members and Friends Stay

- Community, connection
- Welcoming, friendly, accepting
- Spiritual, intellectual and emotional growth
- Varied, inspiring Sunday services
- Choir, music program
- Social justice, living our values
- Activities

Nanaimo Unitarians say that what keeps them coming back to the fellowship is our welcoming, friendly and accepting community. They love the music program, and the sense of connection that they find here. It’s also important to them that we are living our social justice values. They care deeply that the varied, inspiring Sunday services and sermons provide spiritual, intellectual and emotional growth.

## What We Wish We Had More of in the Last 3 Years

- More personal connection and social interaction in general
- More educational programming
- More activities

Over and over, congregation members expressed their longing for the personal connection that the pandemic had prevented them from enjoying. They missed the intergenerational activities, the choir, and other social events. They also wished we had been able to have more adult and children’s education programs.

However, despite this, they were also overwhelmingly grateful and happy with how the congregation continued to thrive during these difficult times, thanks to our minister, the

leadership, and the audio visual (AV) team, which produced first Zoom and then hybrid services. “It is amazing how intact and thriving our beloved community is through a pandemic!” summed up the comments of many.

## **What We Wish We Had Less of in the Last 3 Years**

- Less COVID and isolation
- Less death
- Loss of staff

The congregation has come through the pandemic relatively unscathed. Still, the last three years have taken an emotional toll: the loss of loved ones in our community and, since 2020, COVID and social distancing. Many also described how much they missed the participation of young families and their children.

Some also said the loss of staff\* was a concern, as was volunteer fatigue and the potential burnout of congregational leadership.

\* A year ago, the Music Director left (this position now filled) and the Children’s Religious Educator stepped down. In addition, the Shelter Executive Director left (this position is now also filled) and the Shelter Coordinator retired.

## **What is Hoped Never Changes in Our Congregation**

- Never lose our values and caring
- Never lose sense of community
- Never lose our music program
- Never lose quality Sunday services
- Never lose our social action
- Never lose willingness to work hard together

What Nanaimo Unitarians hope never changes is the deep sense of caring community in our congregation, our openness to one another, and the way we live our values. They also want to see the continuation of wise and hard-working lay leadership, the quality music program, concern for social and environmental justice, and most especially inspiring, stimulating services. One person commented on how pastoral care, and in particular, the newly-established Connection Callers, has “greatly helped to keep our congregation strong.”

## **What Could Be Improved with Fresh Perspective and Energy**

- Improve demographic diversification and community outreach
- Vary Sunday content
- Shake up old ways of doing things

Members of the congregation are particularly interested in diversity. They would like to see us connect with those in different demographics, particularly young adults, youth, and families with children. Having more people from different ethnic groups, people of colour, and indigenous voices is important. We could also be a home for those struggling with anxiety about the climate crisis. Varying the format of Sunday Services was important to some.

The congregation hopes that a new minister will bring a fresh perspective and energy. One comment expressed it this way: "A minister needs to come with their own gifts and style and we want to find someone simpatico enough that we can love them and appreciate the new ideas they bring and embrace the change." The comment continued, however, with an important consideration for the minister: "We want someone who can embrace who we are and nurture that as we nurture who they are and encourage their growth."

### **Other Things for the Search Committee to Keep in Mind**

- Seek stability of ministry
- Seek a partner
- Let us be challenged
- Find someone approachable
- Take the time needed to find the right minister for us

Our congregation is looking for a minister willing to serve longer than three years if possible. "Stability of ministry would be nice!", said one. Many in the congregation seek a minister who values us for who we are, has an open mind and won't try to impose their own views before getting to know us. They would like someone with big ideas, a vision for the future, and who offers us new challenges, but who is approachable, compassionate, and skilled at providing pastoral care.

They have confidence in the Ministerial Search Committee's ability to find a good candidate, but they want the committee to take time to get the right minister for our congregation.