

APPENDIX 1

University Congregational United Church of Christ Internal Identity Statement

September 2019

BELIEFS

We are a Christian church seeking to practice the inclusive transformational love of Christ Jesus. We are part of the United Church of Christ (UCC), a covenantal rather than a creedal church. We are called, (relying on God's grace,) to improve our knowledge of God's call, understanding of Jesus' mission, and the actions that are our response to that knowledge and understanding while valuing our connections to ecumenical and interfaith movements.

- We are a progressive church, working to respond to the radical message of Jesus. In responding to the message of Jesus we honor the historical passion Jesus had for God and all that is of God.
- We look to the Bible for truth and guidance, but we do not read the Bible literally.
- We are bound together by a covenant that reflects our identity and invites us to seek and respond to God, to welcome everyone, to share with gratitude the gifts we are given, to live responsibly within creation, to care for and pray for each other, to promote the growth of our minds and spirits, and to promote justice, peace and reconciling love as evidenced in the gospel of Jesus.
- Through our connection to the UCC, we contribute to the global outreach of the Church. (\$294,655.00 in 2018).
- We keep in focus the concerns of social, racial and earth justice, including climate change. We recognize our need for constant challenges to step out of our comfort zone and do more to live out the message of Jesus.

VALUES

The core values of the congregation are love and justice, as exemplified by the life and teachings of Jesus. These core values are evident in highly held subordinate values:

- An open and affirming, inclusive and respectful community. We welcome everyone from any race, culture, LGBTQ+ orientation, socio-economic status, or life circumstances.
- Nurture and care for each other
- Active efforts to bring about social and economic justice
- Non-Violence
- Family and Intergenerational activities
- Faithfulness, commitment and integrity
- Environmental stewardship and active efforts to address climate change
- Active efforts to address racism

WORSHIP

Over the last thirteen years, Sunday worship services have gradually and intentionally become more inclusive and creative, with expressions of faith in a variety of theological and artistic ways. While services follow a traditional call to worship, confession, assurance, sermon, prayer, and benediction, each service is unique. The clergy develops worship themes framed by liturgical seasons, inviting congregants along to explore multiple facets of broad themes. In the Lenten Season, for example, the clergy focuses on a theme for which members read a common book. Then the theme is integrated in small group conversations as well as in sermons. Sermons come in a variety of voices from the three person clergy team, in dialogue with lay members, or delivered by visiting theologians

Children are integral to Sunday worship. They “bring in the light” (light the candles), lead our Call to Worship, and carry the light into the world at the end of worship. Children join in worship for the first fifteen minutes where they experience hymns, a time of special blessing, recital of the Lord’s Prayer, and a song. They then leave the main worship space to participate in their own Sunday morning Children’s groups. Youth (middle and high school) worship with the congregation. Their Youth Program is held prior to the Sunday Worship.

At the discretion of clergy, projection is used sparingly. Within the sanctuary, Christian symbols move freely and include a prayer wheel in the Buddhist tradition. A recent year-long congregational discussion of the size, placement, design and necessity of a cross in the sanctuary resulted in a strong consensus that a cross prominently hung in the sanctuary is important to this faith community. The congregation is open to such hard conversations and more will surely ensue regarding changes in worship, space and services.

Music at UCUC sets a banquet of welcome with an intentional mix of genres, languages and cultures. We welcome through inclusivity. Most ensembles are non-auditioned. The music director organizes “whole church” music-making experiences bringing together musicians of all ages and levels of experience. These programs span distance of traditional, folk and contemporary choral and instrumental music. A church organist supports the music program.

As part of our 2018-2019 fundraising efforts, the congregation established UCUC’s first Liturgical Arts Endowment. The congregation supports the move from a singularly auditory exploration of theology to expressions that embrace visual, kinesthetic, written and spoken-word expression. Visuals change seasonally. Dramatic story telling and dance are not uncommon in the worship service.

Before and following the Sunday service, breakfast and coffee hour is a time to greet friends and welcome visitors. Various church groups host tables in the narthex to call attention to

coming events and ways members can participate in church and the community.

OUR FAITH COMMUNITY

We welcome believers, seekers, and doubters of all ages into our community, honoring individual faith journeys. We come from varied religious backgrounds, including some who are new to Christianity or to an organized church.

a) We are mostly white and not very racially or ethnically diverse. While desiring to be more racially and ethnically diverse, there has not been a lot of progress in this area. We are seeking to be a congregation that supports racial justice and works against racism.

b) Our church membership was 797 as of the end of 2018, reflecting a membership decline of 7 percent since 2011.

c) Fellowship, engagement, and community activism are important ministries within our church.

d) We are reluctant to practice or talk about evangelism and proselytizing.

e) Our membership includes:

- A community of strong, active families with young children.
- A growing number of active and committed youth.
- Few university students.
- The median age of our membership 64 (increased from 55 in 2007).
- Most members live in neighborhoods surrounding the church; however, we also attract people from the greater Seattle area.
- A significant number of our members have gone to study in seminaries and we have a large contingent of retired clergy. Four Covenant Partners help to strengthen our congregation.
- We were an early adopter of being Open and Affirming of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender members and clergy and this is an important part of our history.
- We continue to learn about and expand inclusivity for differently-abled peoples.

f) Church members are generally college educated, employed or retired from white collar professions, and upper middle class. Our church may be wealthy compared to many other churches, but we have many members who are certainly not affluent.

STEWARDSHIP

We are blessed with abundant resources in the church community through pledged gifts, donations for building renovations, and gifts for special projects.

- a) Our middle-class, liberal background influences how we talk about money, ask for it, anticipate its availability, and conserve it.
- b) Talking about and asking for money for the ministry of the church is discomforting for some members and clergy. Stewardship moments by church members introducing the offering each week was introduced a number of years ago. This has helped

congregants talk about what the church means to them and how our monetary gifts are being used. Over the last 9 years:

- Our total annual pledge has increased by 26%
 - Our average pledge size for those who pledge has increased by 53%
 - But our number of pledging units has decreased by 17%
- c) We take pride in presenting a balanced budget each fall from our pledged donations. With few exceptions we live within that budget.
- d) Our stewardship is so much more than our operating budget. Special offerings each month and Superfluity (annual rummage sale) serve local and worldwide ministries.
- e) Our building is in excellent shape and is well used throughout the week. The church feels strongly that the building should be used in ways that align with our church values. We pride ourselves on our facility upgrades that were designed and implemented using “green” building practices (including solar panels).

CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Encouraging each other in the growth of our minds and spirits is a clear priority of this congregation. There is a depth and breadth of educational activities for all ages. By coming together to study the big questions that lead us toward meaningful lives as Christians, we learn and grow stronger in community.

1. Children participate in the beginning of the worship service and then leave for their specific programming. A child brings in the light and leads the call to worship. The sound of our children is a welcome part of worship.
2. The goal of the elementary program is for children to have an age appropriate Biblical literacy enabling them to engage in Christianity via word and deed with others, including differently thinking Christians and those of different faiths.
3. The active Youth program includes a Sunday morning gathering before the service: OWL(Our Whole Lives) class, Confirmation Class, Mission Trips for both Junior High and High Schools, Retreats and Junior/Senior High Small Group.
4. Seabeck, a week long, all church, inter-generational camp has been a vital church event over 50 years. In 2019, 200 church members attended, including 65 children and youth.
5. An endowment from long term church members enhances the quality and vibrancy of the programs for children and youth. This financial support enables the church to hire staff for leadership and collaboration with the many volunteers in these programs.
6. Short term, grass roots efforts have resulted in varied Adult Ed offerings and “adult forums” on current issues. There is a bible study group that meets regularly, Congregational members have expressed a wish for a more formal program for spiritual development. The Adult Education Committee has been on hiatus for the last 7 years.

7. The Lecture Series “Finding new light in ancient traditions,” begun in 2007, has brought 30 different prominent theologians and religious thinkers to our church, It is an important adult education program of the church and provider of outreach to the broader community.

HISTORY OF PUBLIC WITNESS

University Congregational Church, UCUCC, has served the University District of Seattle for over 125 years. During this time, we have been a progressive voice beyond the University District and across the greater Seattle region.

- A) Our senior ministers have been articulate voices across the region, maintaining witness in regular newspaper columns and in other media and making connections with civic and university groups as well as forming regular and public dialogues with leaders of other faiths.
- B) We became an Open and Affirming church in 1990. Our calling of a gay couple to share a ministerial position attracted local and national attention.
- C) We care deeply about social issues – peace, economic justice, racism, immigration, and homelessness.
 - Our voices have been raised for marriage equality and against gun violence among other issues
 - We are raising our consciousness of racism with all-church workshops and readings.
 - Our parking lot regularly hosts tent city encampments
 - Homeless youths receive a hot meal 3 times a week in our building through a local Teen Feed program.
 - Our building provides space for two childcare programs for which we also provide scholarships.
 - Our Sacred Earth Matters committee addresses environmental stewardship, leading our congregation in awareness of our environmental footprint. Solar power panels supplement our energy needs.
 - A parking lot was given up to build low income housing in the 1990’s. Housing matters have led to various projects, service opportunities and advocacy over the years.
- D) Our pastors and our members make the teachings of Jesus known in contemporary ways such as attending city council meetings, preaching at senior housing facilities and standing witness to progressive issues of justice on the street corners of our building. We see the progressive voice sidelined by the greater culture and thus our role is to make public witness to an inclusive Christianity.

CHURCH GOVERNANCE

Our church is governed by the congregation, who through congregational vote have the final word on major church issues. We manage ourselves through a system of committees,

boards, action teams, (each associated with one of the five ministries) and a church council. The council is comprised of a representative (liaison) from each ministry, two members at-large, and four church officers. The leadership staff regularly attends council meetings as non-voting members. About twenty five years ago the clergy leadership of the congregation shifted from a Senior-associate model to an “equal status” team model. This shift opened the opportunity for reflection regarding leadership, and a collegial team-ministry model for pastoral leadership has continued to emerge.

The council structure has been changed over the past few years in response to concerns that the council was too large for efficient decision making. It was during this time that membership was cut from one member from each board, to only one member from each ministry. That liaison representative is charged with collecting reports from their ministry committees, submitting them to council, and then reporting back to the ministry on the actions of council. Council summaries are also printed in the Church and Home newsletter.

- Church committees and boards still find it difficult to recruit new members.
- The clergy and church administrative leadership are capable, effective and well-loved by the congregation: however, strong leadership by the clergy tends to be met with resistance.
- Authority is dispersed among the leadership staff, without clear lines of responsibility.
- Church and mission priorities do not always receive the follow up support that is required to make them successful.
- Congregants often find it difficult or frustrating to deal with the ‘council approval’ process. This may be because they are not sure what issues require approval, or they find the process takes too long.

A tendency toward perfectionism and intellectualism by the congregation may limit our willingness to grow and truly practice the radical message of Jesus. The church’s system favors stability, rather than transformational leadership from lay members or the clergy.

September 14, 2019