

# Summary of Congregational Stewardship Conversations

## Stewardship Committee

### February 25, 2026

## Background and Methodology

Between mid-January through February 2026, the UU Santa Fe Stewardship Committee hosted a series of six Stewardship Conversations following Sunday services. A total of 60 participants, representing nearly 30% of our congregation joined the conversations. Included were members and friends of the congregation who responded to an email invitation or a pulpit announcement and specially identified long-term, actively involved members invited to ensure a representative sample of committed congregants.

Each session was moderated by two Stewardship Committee representatives, with a Board of Trustees member also in attendance. Moderators used a consistent discussion guide of five questions across all sessions, enabling meaningful comparison and synthesis of responses. Sessions ran approximately ninety minutes each and were designed to give participants an opportunity to reflect on their involvement with the church, share what they value most, identify areas for improvement, and articulate what stewardship means to them.

The Stewardship Committee will use findings from these conversations to identify congregational strengths and opportunities and develop messaging that resonates with the broader congregation in future Stewardship outreach.

*A note on methodology: These sessions were qualitative in nature. The findings are best understood as a source of hypotheses and insight into congregational attitudes, not as statistically representative conclusions.*

## Observations

### How We Got Here / Who We Are

***What brought you to UU Santa Fe and What activities have you been involved in? How would you describe UU Santa Fe to someone who didn't know about the church?***

UU Santa Fe draws members from a wide range of religious backgrounds—from evangelical traditions to mainstream denominations—with a small number of lifelong UUs among the congregation. Most members found their way to UU Santa Fe through word of mouth or personal discovery. Participants were nearly unanimous in describing the church as a welcoming, non-creedal community that values diversity and is free from religious dogma. The congregation's intellectually stimulating programming, drawing from many faith traditions, was seen as a distinctive and valuable characteristic among religious communities. Many participants have been actively involved in church leadership and committees and are committed to the goals of the church.

## **What We Do Well**

### ***What do you like about UU Santa Fe?***

#### **Leadership and Worship**

Support for Rev. Gail was universal and enthusiastic. Participants described her sermons as intellectually rich and transformative, and her leadership style as inclusive and collaborative. Her ability to bring people together was frequently cited as a significant strength and asset to the congregation. Several participants noted that specific elements of the worship service—joys and concerns, familiar hymns, and the closing circle—contribute meaningfully to their sense of belonging. A request was noted to have a hymn leader, post hymn numbers and have a run-through of a new hymn before singing. It was also suggested to put “Please Silence Your Cell Phones” on the slides as a reminder before service.

#### **Community and Belonging**

A strong sense of community was a consistent theme. Members specifically mentioned greeting cards, support groups, and small neighborhood gatherings as vital touchpoints in the relational fabric of the congregation. Additional small group spiritual gatherings were requested to enhance spiritual understanding for those who want to dive deeper into religious thought.

#### **Social Justice and Outreach**

The congregation is broadly aligned around social justice values, and members expressed genuine pride in the church’s outreach programs. Many indicated a desire to be more actively involved and suggested organized transportation—such as rideshares from the church parking lot—to rallies, demonstrations, and community events to facilitate attending these kind of events.

## **Areas for Opportunities**

### ***What would enhance your experience at UU Santa Fe?***

#### **Diversity and Inclusion**

While members strongly affirmed the church’s commitment to diversity, they acknowledged that the congregation’s demographics skew predominantly white and older. There is a shared desire to increase racial diversity. Participants recognized the church’s welcoming stance toward LGBTQ+ members, though some expressed interest in more targeted programming and dedicated gathering opportunities for that community.

#### **Youth, Families, and Growth**

Attracting younger families with children was a priority across all groups. The absence of Religious Education programming was a disappointment to many. Younger members are viewed as a source of energy, fresh perspectives, and a pipeline for new leadership. Participants noted this challenge reflects broader national trends compounded by Santa Fe’s local demographics.

A significant portion of Americans identify as “unchurched,” representing a meaningful potential membership source. Participants suggested an expanded digital and social media presence could raise awareness of UU Santa Fe among those seeking spiritual community without religious dogma. Exploring alternative worship times—such as Wednesday or Sunday

evenings—was also suggested to reach audiences whose schedules do not accommodate a traditional Sunday morning service.

## **Facilities**

Several participants noted opportunities to improve church facilities. Increased large meeting space to alleviate scheduling difficulties, an updated kitchen and repairs to the parking lot were the most cited capital improvement needs.

## **What Does Stewardship Mean**

### *How would you define “Stewardship” and how do you see yourself as a “Steward” of the church?*

There was near-universal agreement that all members share responsibility for the stewardship of the church. The principle of giving Time, Talent, and Treasure is well understood and supported. Participants acknowledged that as the congregation ages, the capacity to contribute naturally shifts—even as the desire to serve remains strong.

Some members expressed that stewardship can feel intimidating when the expectations around time or financial commitment are unclear. Providing clear, concrete descriptions of what specific volunteer roles require was suggested as a helpful step. Concern about volunteer burnout was raised consistently—too few members are carrying too much of the organizational load. Participants called for intentional succession planning and leadership pathways for key committee and Board positions.

Participants also acknowledged that Rev. Gail bears a significant range of responsibilities. The prompt appointment of a Board-approved Pastoral Associate was strongly encouraged as a way to provide needed pastoral support.

## **Conclusions and Recommendations**

Overall, the energy and commitment of the UUSF congregation are strong. Participants are well-aligned with the church’s direction and leadership, and satisfaction among group members reflects a deep commitment to the church’s mission and community life.

The most powerful motivators for stewardship are social justice engagement, community outreach, congregational friendship, a sense of belonging, and intellectually enriching programming—including book groups and wellness, mindfulness, and meditation offerings. These activities should be highlighted consistently and serve as the foundation for church programming and stewardship messaging. Reminding the congregation of upcoming events remains an ongoing need. A review and update of the Members Only website is recommended to make it more intuitive and accessible.

Expanding our digital and social media presence is recommended both to better serve current members and to increase the visibility of UU Santa Fe in the wider community. Members take genuine pride in seeing their church represented positively in media and on social channels.

The risk of congregational burnout is real and should be taken seriously. Structured committee organizing, clear leadership development pathways, and formal succession planning are recommended to provide relief to current volunteers and ensure continuity in Board of Trustees and officer positions.