



March 3, 2020

Dear First United Church Waterloo,

Attached, please find a document that we have entitled, “What we Think we Know” about First United. As you will see in the preamble to the document, it emerged as a result of what was written in 76 survey responses, 18 in-person interviews, one group interview and a Sunday morning conversation with the congregation on March 1, 2020. The purpose of the document is to establish a few statements about who First United is today. With these statements, the congregation has a clearer starting point for its renewal process. These statements also begin pointing in a direction (or multiple directions) regarding the core themes regarding which First United would like to discern a sense of vision or direction.

Please review the document and begin listening for the direction in which you sense First United being called. We will meet again on March 29, 2020 (during and after worship) to engage one another on the next step of this discernment process – listening with a spirit of prayer for how God is calling First United.

We look forward to seeing you March 29!

With best wishes,

Betty Pries & Cayla Charles
Credence & Co.





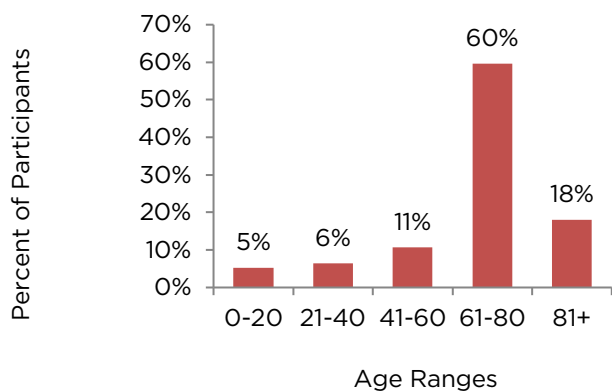
“What We Think We Know” First United Church (Waterloo)

March 4, 2020

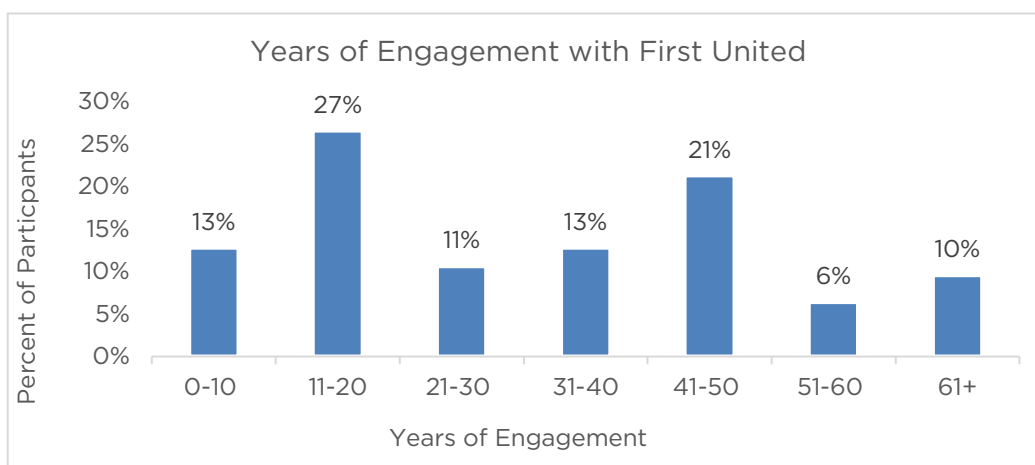
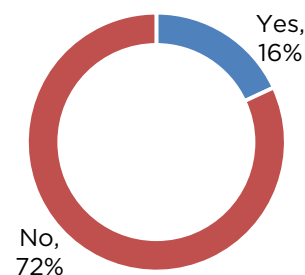
This document is based on 18 randomly selected interviews, a group interview with the Reference Group and the information found in the 76 surveys filled out (online and on paper) by members of the congregation. The document is a collation of the perspectives of the congregation, provided in aggregate fashion to ensure confidentiality. In general, comments heard only once are not included in the document.

The following diagrams are tallies of the survey and interview respondents.

Ages of Survey and Interview Participants



Participants with Children Attending First United



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Overview

We are a congregation of people who contribute to the church community – and beyond – in many important ways. We are located in a well-used building in the heart of Uptown Waterloo and enjoy being located in this hub of activity. We are an affirming congregation. Many of us deeply value the community we find at First United. The music here draws many of us in. Some of us are especially drawn to First United for spiritual nourishment and for the congregation’s community service work. We have a heart for the underserved in our community.

We regard ourselves as a welcoming congregation, though this is not felt by everyone in the same way. We do not receive many new visitors on Sunday mornings. Some are very ‘in the know’ about what’s happening, others only find out after an event has passed. Some feel very connected; others less so. There can be a feeling of an “inner and outer ring” at the church.

Demographics, Attendance & Finances

- The majority of our members are over 60 years old. We have some younger families and youth for which we are grateful.
- We have a small but engaged youth group (who enjoy the Sunday Café) and our Messy Church ministry engages younger people. We have approximately 150 active participants and many of us desire for that number to grow.
- Some of us worry about our finances; others think we are doing well financially.
 - Our financial fears are driven by our shifting demographics.
 - Many of us (though not all) are concerned about the cost of maintaining a visibly aging (and not fully accessible) building and with the supports and programming that we offer.
 - Some have concerns that, though the work of the staff is valuable, we may not be able to afford the staff we have.

Strengths, Assets, Opportunities

- We love the musical gifts that are present and are shared at First United.
- We support the outreach programs that we run in the community and appreciate that this congregation is one that is interested in these types of



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programs. Our location offers ample opportunity for community connections and outreach.

- Many offer their time, money, and talents to church programs and activities.
- Many of us feel a strong sense of fellowship and community at the church. There are many positive feelings around fellowship with, and support from, others in the congregation.
- Some of us find pastoral care and opportunities for faith development to be a strength at First United.
- Several of us wonder about exploring the idea of amalgamation with another congregation as a way of addressing questions related to sustainability.
- Some of us are deeply interested in engaging in a process of listening to where God is calling us as a congregation and of what God is calling us to let go.

Challenges and Fears

- Size and Change
 - There are fewer people attending our church than many remember from years past. This causes us to worry for our future.
 - We were once the “cathedral” or corporate church for the United Church of Canada in Waterloo. This causes some to look at us negatively. We are not a corporate church anymore. We do not have the power or influence we once had. We wonder sometimes who we are today.
 - It is hard to engage in conversations about vision and change (including letting go of old programs) because we don’t want to have conflict with one another, and we do not want to lose people. We recognise that there are differences in perspective among us. While this can be a good thing, it requires us to open ourselves to alternate voices.
- Community beyond and inside of our walls
 - Some of us feel that we are more connected to the community beyond the walls of the church than the community within the church.
 - Some of us have experienced our personal needs, as congregants, not being met by the church.
 - Some of our ministries (such as Messy Church) can be seen as disconnected from the Sunday morning congregation *or* that the congregation is disconnected from our ministries.



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- Spiritual Nourishment
 - While some feel that the church feeds them spiritually, others do not.
 - Some expressed a desire for more pastoral care for elderly members.
- Worship
 - Although many enjoy the sermons, some fear the sermons lack present-day relevance (personal and societal). Some are interested in small group gatherings for worship and spiritual conversation.
- Lay Leadership & Operations
 - Many of us are concerned about the lack of new people in lay leadership roles.
 - Some who are not in leadership roles worry that the leadership space is not open to them.
 - Those currently serving in leadership roles wish to share leadership and worry about burnout and/or fear for the future of the church as they know they cannot serve indefinitely.
 - A few expressed a concern that the Board operates with too much of a centralized decision-making model, leaving out the voices of others in the congregation.

Callings / Dreams

- Many of us feel strongly called to share God's love by continuing to reach out to the community in which we are located.
- Some of us are interested in exploring how our church can meet present-day needs for faith and community, to make sense of the time we are living in, and to leave Sunday morning services feeling inspired.
- We wonder about how to enhance our engagement with children and youth in worship and/or how to strengthen our all-ages worship services. We recognise we need more leaders for our youth. We wonder about how to enhance our programs for youth (possibly in collaboration with other congregations).
- A few of us dream about making changes to the church building to be more environmentally friendly, user friendly and accessible, including the addition of more washrooms. Some of us think about modifying our sanctuary seating (so that it is not fixed) to allow for more flexibility and to allow the building to be a stronger hub for the community.



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- With the Universities and a College nearby, we wonder about whether there is a ministry opportunity there for us (games night, food, etc.), recognising that these young adults may only be a part of us for a short time before they move away.
- Some of us long for a kinder and stronger community at First United. We wonder about how the multiple “circles” that make up First United can be brought together. We wonder about how to build trust with one another. We recognise that we would do well to strengthen the lines of communication within First United.
- A number of us long for more opportunities to talk about spirituality and to have conversations that are more vulnerable in nature.
- Many of us long for a common vision for our congregation: Who are we? Why are we here?



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