

Liminality and Soul - Congregation Survey Responses Summary by David Johnson*

Congregation members experience an authentic and loving sense of family-of-choice, friendship and belonging that welcomes and accepts them, connects them to others in the congregational community (and beyond) and provides an opportunity to practice and experience their religious life.

By being part of Fairfield United Church congregation members hope to be part of an authentic community which enriches their religious life, nurtures itself and welcomes newcomers and has an impact in the wider world that is informed by their values.

Congregation members believe we can or should let go specific conceptions of our worship space, of a belief that everyone can be fully satisfied all the time, of traditional practices and rituals that aren't infused with meaning and of traditionally privileged attitudes and perspectives.

Congregation members believe we are called to understand church to be more about experience, practice and connection than about specific conceptions of church practice or worship space. We believe we are called to be a source of religious life and care for others (and ourselves) *in Fairfield* and in the wider community. We believe we are called to keep imagining and practicing new ways of being a church.

Congregation members have "listened" to a variety of spiritual practices: reading, meditation, contemplation, prayer, singing, chanting, listening, reflecting, thinking, discerning, exploring, empathizing, sympathizing, connecting to nature, moving and making art and music. There is a *remarkable* diversity here with few common threads.

Congregation members are hearing and realizing that new rituals can be a means to find their own way to a religious life that is richer and accessible. They are realizing — or are remembering — that God is in our lives and connects us to one and another.

Congregation members have been moved to a deeper sense of meaning, a richer emotional experience, a more robust spiritual life, a greater sense of connection to others, and an energy and excitement about reaching out to the broader world.

* Any shortcomings or misinterpretations here are entirely my own. - David

Summary of Community Feedback - Todd Babick

What we experience:

- A sacred and welcoming space
- A feeling of being openly welcomed, accepted and loved - by God and the congregation.
- A general sense of a loving presence.

Our hopes:

- To be in community and actively support it.
- To help heal society's wounds (actively work toward a more socially just world).
- To deepen our spiritual lives.
- To be inspired to live more spiritually grounded and active lives.

What we should release:

- Any sense of superiority and judgement.
- Tradition:
 - We don't need to be constrained by a spirit of "this is the way it is always done".
 - We don't need to cling to conventional conceptions of what church is.
- To a degree, the need for our own building. However, there is a recognition of the value of having a space in which we can be of further service to our community.

What we are called to do:

- To love and be of service to our neighbour.
- To be a spiritual anchor and voice for the voiceless.
- To be more concerned with the needs of others than our internal challenges and concerns.
- To be honest about who the Christian Church is historically, and do what we can to reconcile with those who the Church has harmed.

- To be a positive example to other churches wishing to actively live into a new way of being.

As God is still speaking, what we are hearing/realizing:

- The need for more contemplative/meditative practices in all churches.
- That we are one. While our personal expressions may vary, we are spiritually oriented (head and heart) in the same direction.
- God/the Holy is everywhere, and this energy is amplified when we are together.

The Soul of Fairfield reflections Lent/Easter 2023

What attracts you to Fairfield United Themes

““The openness, and love that the Minister leads with and that all the other members demonstrate. Fairfield United feels like family, or what a loving family should be - a safe space where all are welcome.”

- Belonging, unconditional acceptance, within a warm, nurturing safe space
- Compassion and Love from the minister and friends who attend services.
- Opportunity for Holy and Sacred Worship together
- A community that cares for itself and the broader community
- Spiritual Growth: A place that creatively nurtures reflection, meditation, and spiritual practices in general
- A place to grow in faith as a Christian Community

What do you Hope for being part of Fairfield United Church?

“Thoughtful reflection, beautiful music, community, peace, and meditation. Being part of the congregation fills me with hope, with a broader love and understanding for others. “

Themes

- Develop and participate in a community which is, caring, inclusive and nurtures a sense of belonging .
- Staying together as a community
- Holding a spiritual presence in the Fairfield Community and the broader community
- Spiritual Growth and pathways for healing for members
- Inspiration

Note: one participant noted that a place of our own, would allow for more community engagement in the neighbourhood.

What should or could we let go of?

- Ownership of a building
- Colonizing mentality – White privilege
- Christian superiority and perfectionism
- The need to maintain all traditional workshop practices,
- Competition with other church communities

What do you feel we are called to be as a community?

“Dedicate our talents and time to personal, social or community good while being part of a Christian community”

“Focus more on spirit and soul and less on form and the physical.”

“Grow in the knowledge and direction of Christ and the attitude to express it in our lives.”

- Keep a spiritual presence in the Fairfield Neighbourhood
- Reconciliation with our Indigenous brothers and sisters
- Explore ways we might expand the social and cultural and perhaps the religious diversity in our community
- Be in community with Victoria and our world. Taking up social justice for those who experience inequity, poverty, and discrimination.
- To care for each other by being a healing presence for those who are suffering through demonstrating love and compassion as individuals and inside and outside our community of faith.

Spiritual Practices:

I think all the points should be included in the summary. Perhaps we should include these as a list of spiritual practices that have been generated and practiced within our community.

What are you hearing/ realizing? And how have you been moved.

“We are still here”

“That we are each of us enough as we are, and that we are all one family of living beings.”

“I didn't realize how much I missed having a weekly hand-out. I appreciate them. It moves me to be more active in the sermon through clearly seeing where we are”

I thought all these comments were relevant and could be included as a list to share with our members. It seems there was a general theme of wanting more contemplative practices throughout the year.

Respectfully Tricia Sanders

Luminality Project Responses

The responses clustered around themes of faith, belonging and caring, community within and outside the church, acceptance of and willingness to change, and the different ways we explore and sustain our faith.

Experience: - faith expression and exploration
- belonging and feeling cared for by and care of others

Hope for: - growing in faith in community with others
- caring for church and broader community; increasing inclusion, healing, compassion, justice, inspiration to express faith in community projects like housing and services

Letting go of: - building
- avoiding change, preserving traditions
- superiority – colonial, white, Christian, judgement, competition
- perfectionism, guilt

Our community calling: - spiritual presence in community
- demonstrate newer more open expressions of Christian worship and community involvement
- voice for the voiceless; reconciliation

Spiritual practices: - reflection- meditation, prayer, Taizé, scripture
- music - hymns, chanting
- nature, walking, art
- service to others

Realizations: - role of caring, compassion and support for community in faith
- need for reflective practices in worship and life
- releasing assumptions, working through obstacles in scripture

Been moved by: - sense of belonging, being cared for
- meditative practices,
- developing spiritual awareness, clarity, confidence, insights