



## 2024 Cottage Conversation Responses

### The SUUS Mission

1. Do you feel SUUS lives up to its mission? If yes, how? If not, where does it fall short?
  - In other congregations enjoyed activities and wished we had more and that we announced activities at the Sunday Service. Response: list of announcements was too long, felt disrupted the flow. Counter: have the announcements at the beginning.
  - We have trouble focusing our energies when we don't have the staff / energy / money. Pick certain elements to focus on (sweet spot). Find the things people are willing to execute on; support with time and money. Too many ideas/threads. Pick the ven diagram. Select 2-3 things to work on.
  - We may lose peoples passion programs. Pays attn to the minster – leaves here feeling inspired, but energies are not synergized to go out to do this in community.
  - We are regrouping from pandemic, need to pick and choose. OK to try and fail (ie NPR). Feel we are in a better position now to go out. Sweet Spot workshop never moved to the narrowing down phase. We are an active community, but we are not synergized. We have a foundation happening that will allow us to branch out.
  - This comes from leadership, what the 2-3 activities should be. If it doesn't come from the congregation the board or the minister can step in as leaders to bring forward ideas or decide which ideas to move forward.
  - Sometimes follow through on ideas, can come from board or and individual or committee or the minister.
  - "Adult RE is a big contributor," Thank You Rev Craig.
  - Rev Craig's sermons are thought provoking, I feel nourished
  - RE has contributed to good values in alums. Children went on to be difference-makers.
  - Had a background in many faiths; but it was always about the **minister**
  - Now we have excellent sermons
  - Compassion, energy and community
  - We are better at environmental and soc justice actions especially through RE
  - We are showing our colors and therefore are "better known for Gay Pride and BLM"
  - I first needed to feed my soul, now it's on a high point, great guests, music.
  - Best minister in my experience He inspires calm and trust.
  - Could do much more social outreach and social justice by the whole congregation
  - Grateful for Rev Craig; but "only ¾ time minister"
  - Could do better expressing our values. Flags
  - It's been tough the last 3 years, but we are back to thriving, working for justice and out in the community. Participation is up, activities and visibility are increasing. Rev Craig is a huge addition.

- Faith Formation needs better support, like childcare.
- Need to attract more young families
- We serve our mission better than most places. In fact, most don't even have a mission.
- We're a very conflicted group, according to one member: "I left SUUS for a while because we don't live up to our mission. Someone I am friendly with was forced to leave SUUS because of a conflict with another member that no one in leadership addressed. I returned to SUUS because it still is home to me. We don't live up to our mission as we too often fail to be in covenant with each other."
- We do not meet our mission, but we're very engaging with each other and visitors.
- The services are great, especially so since Reverend Craig started with us, and we are socially active.
- We're very welcoming but it sometimes feels as if we're a private club.
- We could follow our covenant better to mediate personal conflicts.
- Yes, it does. Now with a minister we're able to better build a spiritual community.

2. In the words of the mission, does SUUS truly inspire members, friends, and our larger community to go forth and make the world a better place?

- Absolutely, from my personal point of view
- At my age, I cannot go far; but I am inspired to optimism.
- Yes, by being a better person.
- Keeping a positive attitude
- Coming here reinforces our good nature.
- Concentrate on what we do here.
- Live here, not in the hereafter.
- Inspiring that FF is doing more social justice activities, like supporting food pantry and homeless.
- Activities like UU The Vote are important since they get more members involved than just the "core social justice folks."
- We should repeat 2017 event where we spent a whole weekend trying to pick one social justice area that the entire congregation could focus on (but pandemic got in the way)
- Since SUUS is small, it's key to connect with other UU congregations like New London for more effective social justice work ("UU Connecticut Justice" has Facebook page with 10 congregations; Rev. Caitlin O'Brien is a good local asset for local outreach).
- To increase youth participation, consider connecting to Madison/Guilford Congregational Churches, who have strong youth groups (maybe offer Family World Religions class, open to public, which Hamden does).
- Inspiring that SUUS is doing more social justice activities since the pandemic, but we could do more outreach.
- Mary Strieff's gun awareness group has definitely got us to "go forth into the community."

3. Do you think SUUS is truly welcoming to visitors? How? If not, what might we do?

- Yes most people believe we are welcoming. Accessibility is a bit off, could be better.
- Want to be welcoming but not hounding people to come back.
- Greet well, introduce people, invite to coffee. Could be more subtle at fellowship.
- Improved but could do more
- Greeters go out of their way to greet and talk.

- When I came here, I felt welcomed.
- Talking to visitors as soon as they enter the Fellowship Hall, without bringing them to coffee and snacks.
- Greeting members, not just visitors
- We're very welcoming but it sometimes feels as if we're a private club.
- Yes, it is. Many greeters: Jennifer is especially great at finding visitors and making them feel welcomed.

## **Your Sense of Connection to SUUS**

### **4. How does SUUS meet your needs? Do you feel fully engaged? What keeps you coming to SUUS?**

- Likes potlucks and social events but has been hard to get off the ground. Suggests for fundraising meeting at someone's house. Wishes there were more. Doesn't want to read online wants to hear a personal invite. Auction was great.
- Important to measure scope of mission to what can be done, so that people don't burn out.
- Sunday, Choir, Amy & Nick X 5
- Struggled with last 2 ministers, was happy with Jeanne, very happy with Craig
- Faith held me here during ups and downs. All the staff. I am a UU and this is my local.
- Now love all that we are and have.
- Good sense of community.
- Ditto last two sentiments. And getting to know people. Good place to be
- Women and Mens groups.
- Children, FF, growing UU's
- The way Craig includes the children
- Women's Group and Men's Group
- Faith Formation
- Yes, I feel comfortable here; SUUS boasts openness, non-judgmental people in a safe place.
- "Good people doing good things."
- I like the religion here.
- Music is great for a small congregation.
- Staff additions have helped; FF is a big job.
- But we could do more outreach.
- Yes, SUUS meets our needs generally, but we need to promote ourselves much better and let the community know who we are.
- I feel a sense of spirituality and family. I feel engaged. I keep coming because of the minister, spiritual services, the hymns we sing, and seeing friends who are like family.

### **5. What activities and events at SUUS do you enjoy? Which ones do you not enjoy? Are there activities SUUS should be adding?**

- Game night, creative, night and movie night. Host concerts in the sanctuary. Marc Deaton will host here too.
- Small group ministry. Have an excuse to get together.
- Few people with chronic medical conditions would others want to be part of that?

- Potlucks, especially middle of the day
- Food events, auction. Like to see more involvement in public events-parades, fairs, cleanup, etc.
- Hikes & walks. Make some flat, e.g. Hammo or Chatfield Hollow
- Grounds clean ups and plantings
- More interfaith activities
- More music, maybe outdoor
- Call service, chat news, etc
- Church Fair, Tag Sale
- Enjoy
  - Food like chili cook-off
  - Game nights and pot luck dinners
  - Solstice service
  - GA Choir
  - Auction Night
- Do not enjoy
  - Hymns have old 19th century language
  - Need more variety in music (bells; other UU singers)
- Other activities to add
  - Generally we could try something new to reignite new energy, preferably focused on the Madison community we serve.
  - Join with Temple, other churches to build our visibility (pool money for scholarships)
  - Activities for LGBT youth, like Rev Craig having us sponsor upcoming LGBT youth conference.
  - Habitat for Humanity, which we did years ago
  - Local Dancing with the Stars
- I enjoy the book group and all the food gatherings.
- I like discussion groups, especially last week's "What I Believe."
- I agree about the discussion groups. We should offer more of those as well as field trips, museum trips, and the like.
- SEA does a good job of offering activities that are varied and interesting to different members.
- I enjoy the Women's Group and canasta, games night, and the auction. I do not enjoy the social action which mostly seems to be Madison-centric. It would be great to have rummage sales again—great community team building.

6. What has been challenging for you as a member of SUUS this church year?

- See above going to large, burning people out
- Persisting without a DFF
- FF in general, not enough kids, big age gap.
- Need more people
- Expectations exceed numbers and resources.
- Saying "No."
- Attracting teenagers (could try "Summer Fun & Games" for youth)
- Getting FF leadership
- Something has to be done about the announcements. It was better when someone talked

about them instead of leaving them in small print on the back of the orders of service, which no one reads.

- Why can't the announcements be projected on the whiteboard before the service begins? Everyone would see them then (general agreement by the others).
- Leadership burnout; too few members are volunteering for too many duties.
- Nothing

#### 7. What has been inspiring to you as a member of SUUS this church year?

- Finding the minister. Calming service. Sense of stability. How do we hire full time. (Vision fund). Trust him to be a good leader, lets support him.
- Wouldn't like a full time minister, enjoys lay lead services.
- Others enjoy balance of Minister and lay lead services
- New members, almost every week
- Especially young people
- Energy is back: Rev Craig is inspiring, music, new people
- Acceptance.
- Leadership
- REV CRAIG – very big deal
- More people and new faces, which we need to hold on to.
- Restarting FF classes (we should create FF brochure for new families; ask if Molly Nolan can be a Person of the Week in newspaper)
- I had an overwhelming sense of gratitude after the last town hall meeting. Everyone speaking was great, it was helpful to have multiple leaders speak, and all that was said was well-prepared. I felt confidence in the church leadership.
- Reverend Craig is very inspiring; I'm really glad we got him (echoed by the others).
- There's lots of energy here.
- Having Craig, and new Faith Fellowship director, and Jill in the office.

### **SUUS's Future**

#### 8. If there were just one thing you would want to change at SUUS, what would it be?

- Accessibility
- Dissolve half of the committees. Response: Now we have teams instead of committees. Trying to move towards focusing on specific items rather than long term committees. Scaling down – but we have a lot of the same names on all teams.
- Get off Facebook; (Good if home sick; inhibitor due to social interaction)
- Zoom would be better
- Share all the plate
- More flexible order of services.
- Share the word out about who we are.
- There are so many non's who would appreciate this.
- Make Rev Craig a Full-time Minister
- More Outreach activities
- Just keep doing what we're doing. Rev Craig can lead us through lots of the changes we face.

- We need more youth, and we must build youth programs. Host dances?
- We need to bring in the community more.
- Have more meetings and events on evenings and not before and after church services.

9. If money were not an issue, what would you want to see done at SUUS?

- Go into New Haven to help out.
- Professional staff to help organize.
- Full time minister
- Bigger sanctuary
- Improve facility
- Build new outdoor amphitheater
- Restore meditation garden
- Full time admin
- Make Rev Craig a Full-time Minister
- Solar Panels on SUUS roof
- Vegetable garden, which attracts those driving by
- New Sign, with better messaging and jokes
- First find out what community wants
- How about a speaker's bureau of liberal/theological speakers that would bring in outsiders?
- Demonstrations and classes of different things. Like demonstrations and learning about cooking vegan foods.
- More food events are needed. We enjoy them.
- Continue the "This I Believe" series.
- We should host concerts.
- Events designed to lift spirits. For example, music, dance.
- Full-time minister, take care of the building more: security, outside lighting, building improvements.

10. Pretend it is 2030 and you are writing an article about SUUS. What would the headline be? Please take a minute and write it down.

- Social justice work going strong.
- Rainbow flag every day of the week.
- Celebration of 100 year anniversary
- SUUS succeeds at fulfilling the mission. Board can stand up and share how we are living the mission through different areas of the church.
- SUUS spends last money in vision fund but gains via expanded congregation.
- "Expansion at SUUS, New FF Classrooms"
- "SUUS Offers Yoga, Violin Lessons, SAT Prep"
- "Fully Staffed, SUUS is a Beacon of Spirituality and Social Justice for the Area!"