

# First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto

## Sharing Circles Summary Report - November 2025

**Purpose:** To identify the strengths, challenges, and aspirations of the congregation as we prepare to welcome our next settled minister.

### Executive Summary

Toronto First Unitarian Congregation stands at a pivotal moment in its 180-year history. After several years of disruption due to COVID-19, the loss of long-serving ministers, and the absence of a permanent home, the congregation has demonstrated remarkable resilience, adaptability, and faith in its shared principles. Members describe a deeply principled, compassionate, and intellectually engaged community that values inclusivity, social justice, and meaningful connection.

The move into our new, accessible building represents a significant opportunity to reimagine congregational life—both spiritually and socially—and to renew connections within the surrounding community. However, challenges remain: an aging membership, limited diversity, volunteer fatigue, and diminished visibility following years of transition. Members express a strong desire for revitalization—welcoming younger generations, expanding outreach, modernizing worship, and strengthening relationships within and beyond the congregation.

The next minister will play a crucial role in guiding our renewal. The right leader will inspire spiritual growth, foster unity, and balance innovation with continuity. Success will be evident in a growing and diverse membership, renewed enthusiasm for congregational life, visible community engagement, and a deepened sense of belonging and shared purpose among all members.

### 1. Best Things About the Congregation

#### Resilience and Commitment

- Over 180 years of enduring history and strong identity.
- Continued strength and participation despite five years without a building or a settled minister.
- Members remain connected, optimistic, and willing to adapt to change.

#### Values and Character

- Members live by Unitarian Universalist principles and embody compassion, respect, and integrity.
- The congregation is a place of safety and emotional honesty, where questioning and open exploration are welcomed.

#### Community and Connection

- A welcoming, supportive, and multi-generational environment.
- Members work cooperatively, respect differences, and maintain unity without major conflict.

#### Leadership and Governance

- High levels of trust in leadership; transparent decision-making and inclusive consultation.
- Leaders model patience and collaboration.

### **Social Justice and Generosity**

- Strong history of involvement in social justice and refugee resettlement.
- Members are generous with both time and financial support.

### **Music and Worship**

- A highly valued, well-integrated music program with a beloved choir.
- Worship services are thoughtful, spiritually engaging, and intellectually stimulating.

### **Competence and Talent**

- Congregation benefits from the expertise of capable volunteers and professional staff.
- Well-organized and high-functioning operations.

### **New Building and Facilities**

- A beautiful, functional, and fully accessible new space.
- The building offers great potential for growth, programming, and community partnerships.

### **Inclusiveness and Diversity of Thought**

- Acceptance of varied beliefs and traditions—humanist, Buddhist, pagan, Christian, and agnostic.
- Encouragement of personal spiritual exploration and expression.

### **Children and Programs**

- Strong Religious Education (RE) program and excellent leadership.
- Children enjoy participation and connection to the community.

## **2. Most Challenging Things About the Congregation**

### **Aging and Decline**

- Many long-time members are aging; fewer young families and children participate.
- Need for younger, more diverse membership to sustain vitality.

### **Growth and Visibility**

- Limited outreach and self-promotion; congregation is a 'well-kept secret.'
- Lack of clear messaging about what UUism offers to seekers.

### **Volunteer Capacity**

- Too few volunteers carry too much responsibility.
- Risk of burnout and fatigue among core members.

### **Post-COVID Disconnection**

- Loss of continuity during years without a building or minister.
- Reduced attendance and weakened cohesion after prolonged virtual gatherings.

### **Demographics and Diversity**

- Predominantly older and white; need to increase racial, cultural, and generational diversity.

### **Technology and Engagement**

- Many members are not fluent in digital media or new communication tools.

- Need for stronger online and social media presence.

#### **Conflict Avoidance**

- Congregation tends to avoid open disagreement.
- Some tension between committees and the Board regarding priorities and decision-making.

#### **Relevance and Renewal**

- Worship services perceived by some as too predictable or traditional.
- Desire for variety, creativity, and innovation in format and content.

#### **Financial and Logistical Pressures**

- Necessity to increase membership and revenue to sustain operations and new building costs.

#### **Loss and Transition**

- Continued grief following departure of long-serving ministers.
- Emotional and relational rebuilding is still in progress.

### **3. Indicators of the Right Minister**

#### **Growth and Energy**

- Expanding membership, attendance, and participation.
- Greater age, racial, and cultural diversity.

#### **Inspirational Worship**

- Sermons that are intellectually rich, emotionally resonant, and spiritually inclusive.
- Varied service formats that foster engagement and reflection.

#### **Connection and Cohesion**

- Strengthened relationships among members, staff, and leadership.
- A congregation where all feel heard, valued, and connected.

#### **Outreach and Visibility**

- The minister actively engaged in the city and broader community.
- Visible presence in social justice work and local partnerships.

#### **Joyful Community Life**

- Growth in social activities, intergenerational gatherings, and a renewed sense of fun and fellowship.

#### **Ministerial Qualities**

- Warm, accessible, and visionary leader.
- Encourages collaboration, innovation, and spiritual depth.
- Committed to staying and building a long-term relationship with the congregation.

#### **Organizational Health**

- Financial stability and clear communication across all groups.
- Supportive, collaborative staff culture.

### **Vibrant RE and Youth Programs**

- Growth in children's and youth participation; resources aligned to support leadership and development.

### **Public Presence and Influence**

- Minister visible in civic spaces and media.
- Advocacy for UU principles in wider Toronto and beyond.

## **4. Context and Future Considerations**

- The congregation is still reconnecting and redefining self after years of transition.
- There is both caution and optimism—some are waiting to see how things unfold, while others are energized by the new building and renewed possibilities.
- Success will depend on the ability to reimagine what it means to serve both spiritual and 'spiritual but not religious' communities, reaching out in ways that reflect modern needs and values.
- The future of Toronto First will be shaped by members' willingness to experiment, collaborate, and lead with purpose, guided by a minister who can bridge vision and practicality while nurturing hope and belonging.