

Summary of UBC's Community Conversations 2021

This document summarizes the responses of the 81 people who participated in this conversation process. We've consolidated the responses and grouped similar themes together, providing direct quotes on some questions. However, in an attempt to make the material easier to digest, this document is not exhaustive. If you'd like to read the full notes of the conversations, a link to this raw data is forthcoming.

1. What do you think organized religion will look like in the future?

What does UBC look like in 5, 10, & 20 years?

- We don't know (very common answer)
- Change. The future will look different, and we must make changes.
 - *"We have a responsibility to try every way possible to reach people."*
 - *"My hope is, as a result of going through COVID and zoom, the congregation will be more receptive to change."*
 - *"The church itself and what we believe won't change. The way we worship and how we win people to Christ will change."*
- Combination of in-person and online participation
 - Various perspectives:
 - *"Primary goal should be in-person worship"*
 - *"I think churches in the future will be online."*
 - *"The church of the future will have a streaming option but that shouldn't be our emphasis."*
 - Worry that not everyone will return to in-person worship
 - Intentional use of technology to draw people in
 - During pandemic, online church has been a lifesaver
 - Meetings may remain online
 - Less geographically centralized; people can join from anywhere
- Important to have close-knit community, small group attachment
 - *"The future is community"*
- Must reach out to new people; must expand inclusiveness
 - More diversity
 - More visible, active in community (making a difference)
 - Reaching out to university students and faculty
- Consider expanding worship style (or providing options of worship styles)
- More opportunities for inter-generational interaction
 - Need balance between old and young members
 - *"We need to target young people, but don't leave our seniors behind"*
- Finding ways to utilize our building
 - Location gives us unique opportunity to thrive
- Be clear about our identity
 - Open and inclusive, progressive congregation
- Challenging landscape of organized religion
 - Widespread statistical decline
 - Societal lack of interest (but desire for community and volunteering)

- Organized religion has challenge connecting with young people
- Future may be smaller
- UBC faces difficult obstacles and expenses, must reverse decline
- *"I don't know if the church has a big future or not."*
- Hope
 - *"I'd like to see the balcony full."*
 - *"I can't imagine a world without church."*

2. What is God saying to us right now? What are we learning?

- Patience. Be still. Listen. Slow down and pay attention.
 - (many, many variations on this answer)
- Value of human connection, hugs.
 - *"We need each other."*
- Support and care for others. Love one another.
- Learning to be flexible. We need to be nimble. Adapt.
- Appreciating our blessings
- We need to change.
 - *"We can't go the same way we were going in the last 10-15 years."*
 - *"If we don't take action, UBC as an organization will die."*
- Be positive. Keep going forward. Perseverance.
 - *"We are stronger and more capable than we think we are. We have been through a storm and we have survived."*
- Put God first. Dependence on God.
 - *"God's saying, 'You can do this. I am here. I am with you.'"*
- Role of the church to provide moral leadership
- Reconsider busyness
- Think outside the church and include the community, especially those who don't always feel welcome
- How to magnify our ministry through digital resources
- We can worship wherever we are, not just in the building.

3. What changes do we need to make?

- **What has the pandemic freed us to do?**
- **Is there anything we did before the pandemic that we don't need to do in the future?**

Pandemic has freed us to:

- Worship from anywhere; can worship with other churches too
- Spend more time with our thoughts; mindfulness
- Incorporate people outside of Charlottesville

Things we no longer need to do:

- Passing the collection plate
- In-person committee meetings - Zoom has worked well
- Sunday morning meetings - use Zoom, and *"make Sunday more about worship"*

Changes we should make:

- Using technology:
 - Continue live-stream of worship
 - Church Conferences and other meetings not limited to in-person attendance
 - Hybrid gatherings: include people via Zoom (but don't exclude those without Zoom access)
 - Continue the online Bible study option
- Connecting with others:
 - Build or rebuild small groups
 - Provide various groups/clubs as entry points
 - How can we serve the many baby boomers retiring every day?
 - Make church even more welcoming; notice visitors
 - Coffee Fellowship outside in UniBap Park
 - Connect with chaplaincy department at the hospital
 - Engage more with the town: draw them in, do more for them
 - Partner with other churches
 - More emphasis on youth and college students
 - Need younger people to be the future leaders of the church
- Screens currently in the sanctuary
 - *"I hope that has helped some of our folks get over the fear of screens in the sanctuary."*
 - *"I like the screens" - allows participation of those not in sanctuary*
 - Don't like the screens: they *"compromise the beauty of the sanctuary"*
 - *"The screens don't have to be all-or-nothing. We can use them or remove them."*
- Utilizing physical space in church building:
 - *"Can we use it for the community?"*
- Ideas about worship: [note: many varied perspectives here!]
 - *"I enjoyed the summer without the formality of the robes. Growing up at UBC, there wasn't a lot of robe-wearing."*
 - Don't like "dirge" hymns
 - *"I think about more praise music in worship. That doesn't necessarily mean a rock band, but that's a possibility too."*
 - Mysticism, mystery, liturgy, routines: "I'm comforted by reciting things."
 - Fewer hymns
 - Longer sermons with more theology [this wasn't Matt's comment, we promise!]
 - *"I'd love for Alba to sing a solo every week."*
 - *"Don't change much in the worship order."*
- Be intentional about change: "Don't change something for the sake of changing it."

4. What needs to remain the same? (What have you been missing?)

- Just being together
 - *"Hugs"*
 - Sunday school in person
 - Singing together in worship
 - Sense of community when we are together

- Wednesday night dinners
 - Or fellowship meals at a different time
 - *"We could have a potluck once a month"*
- Music and worship:
 - Strong music program (choir, organ, piano, strings, etc.)
 - Sanctuary Choir singing in person
 - Keep using videos in worship
 - Traditional music
 - Formal worship
 - *"I would like to be able to return to a point when worship feels the way it did last February."*
 - *"Walking in the church and feeling God's presence."*
- Interacting with different age groups
 - Having a place for kids to go and be cared for
 - Interacting with children, teenagers, Jubilate
- PACEM, OIAM, service projects
- Continue radio program
- Social gatherings (meals, softball, fun events)

5. How can we prepare for what's next? What steps bring us closer to God's dream for UBC?

In response to ideas of opening our sanctuary during the week, hosting piano concerts, distributing free ice cream & coffee:

- Love it! (the overwhelming majority)
- Make sure these aren't just staff; get congregants ready to help
- Not sure if coffee will bring people in, but we need to do something
- Include piano concerts by Barbara and other pianists in congregation
- This is a cultural shift for us: an outreach mentality
- This helps us reach out to the physically and emotionally exhausted people across the street (UVA Hospital)
- Provide devotional books, Bibles, prayer prompts
- Be cautious about security and germs (provide hand sanitizer)
- *"Every person who walks through the church door is a victory in some way."*
- *"We need to keep this 'why not?' attitude."*

Various ideas:

- Outward focus
 - Connect visitors with someone in the church
 - How well are we greeting homeless people or those who don't look like "us"
 - Doing something for those in need in our community
 - Mission trips (or virtual mission trips)
- Engaging with social issues
 - More community conversations, discussing current issues
 - *"What are we going to do about climate change, BLM, gun control, growth in the downtown area?"*

- *“Is there any possibility to build an apartment building in our parking lot? Can we do something about housing?”*
- Having designated space for university students
- Clarify our identity: how do we market ourselves?
- Use name tags on Sundays
- Staff hold “office hours” on the sidewalk
- Get new people involved, bring new people into leadership roles
- When we gather have “before and after” picture of how kids have grown during the pandemic

6. Do you want UBC to grow?

- Yes [virtually everyone]
- Additional comments:
 - “Depending on what it looks like”
 - “It’s got to happen”
 - “I don’t want us to grow for the sake of numbers. I want us to grow because we can reach out to the neighbors and the people around us.”
 - “I’d like to see growth where we’re bursting at the seams. I’m comfortable with change.”
 - “Growth is a good problem to have. Growth brings opportunities.”
 - “If we’re growing the church, there will be some discomfort and that’s okay.”
 - “As long as the growth is both internal and external.”
 - “I don’t want to be a megachurch, but I’d like to see us get to where we were 10 years ago.”
 - “I’d like us to remain a Baptist Church; I don’t want us to become a Community Crosswalk Church.”
 - “God did not put us in the middle of UVA for no reason.”
 - “It depends. I’m not a fan of growth for growth’s sake. I’d rather have 250 eager, committed members than 500 empty vessels. Quality over quantity.”
 - “Walking into a sanctuary and being unable to find a seat is exciting.”
 - “as long as we are growing in the direction God is calling us”
 - “Yes, if uniformity is not required”
 - “Growth for growth’s sake is unnecessary. Growth is fine as long it doesn’t change who we are.”