

# SMALL GROUP CONVERSATIONS:

## UUSM Congregational Snapshot for Prospective Ministers

### Who We Are

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Santa Monica (UUSM) is a **welcoming, energetic, and intellectually curious** community with deep roots and a strong sense of purpose.

We are **progressive, compassionate, and values-driven**, known for our **commitment to lifelong learning, social justice, and spiritual exploration**.

Our community is **warm, caring, and generous**—people show up for each other.

We are also **diverse in belief** (atheist to deeply spiritual) and **united by shared principles** rather than dogma.

While our congregation **skews older**, we are welcoming an **influx of young adults and families**, creating an exciting opportunity for **intergenerational connection and renewal**.

---

### Our Strengths

- **Intellectual & spiritual depth** – strong Adult RE, engaged conversations, and thought-provoking sermons.
  - **Warm relationships** – deep love and care among members; supportive community.
  - **Vibrant programs** – outstanding music, arts, social justice, and educational opportunities.
  - **Beautiful, welcoming campus** – often the first point of connection for newcomers.
  - **Commitment to justice** – active in UU the Vote, environmental and equity work.
- 

### Our Growing Edges

- Desire to **better connect across age groups** and **integrate youth and families** into congregational life.
- Need to **bridge silos** among committees and initiatives.
- Aspiration to become **more diverse** racially, ethnically, and socioeconomically.
- Want to **balance intellect and heart**, bringing more emotional and spiritual grounding.
- Need to **develop new volunteers and lay leadership** to sustain our ministries.

---

## What We Seek in a Minister

We are looking for a **warm, collaborative, and inspiring leader** who can help us grow spiritually, relationally, and as a community.

### Key Qualities:

- **Heart-centered and authentic** – approachable, compassionate, and grounded in care.
- **Inspiring worship leader** – delivers sermons that speak to both mind and spirit.
- **Collaborative leader** – builds trust, works with the board and staff, and empowers lay leaders.
- **Excellent communicator and listener** – genuinely interested in people’s stories and experiences.
- **Emotionally intelligent and self-aware** – handles conflict with grace and curiosity.
- **Spiritually grounded** – honors diverse beliefs and connects spirituality with everyday living.
- **Community builder** – bridges generations and encourages participation and volunteerism.
- **Active in justice and outreach** – engaged in the wider community and public issues.
- **Good administrator** – organized, reliable, and respectful of staff and structures.

---

## The Role We Envision

- **Inspire us through worship** and help us connect faith with action.
  - **Be a visible, caring presence**—someone who knows our names, celebrates our joys, and supports us in times of loss.
  - **Collaborate, not command**—work alongside staff, board, and committees as a partner in shared ministry.
  - **Nurture intergenerational connection** and strengthen relationships across the congregation.
  - **Represent UUSM and Unitarian Universalism** proudly in the broader Santa Monica and Los Angeles community.
-

## Our Vision

We aspire to be a **vibrant, inclusive, and spiritually alive** congregation—one that honors its rich history while joyfully embracing change.

We seek a minister who will **walk with us** as we continue to grow into a more **connected, compassionate, and justice-centered** faith community.

## Major Themes

Here's a **summary of the notes organized by major themes** that emerge across all groups (CYRE, Cottage Conversations, and Focus Groups).

---

### 1. Congregational Identity & Culture

#### **Welcoming, intellectual, and values-driven**

- Described as *welcoming, accepting, non-judgmental, progressive, energetic, and positive*.
- *Deep commitment to learning, intellectual exploration, and social justice*.
- *Highly educated, curious, and reflective*; many are lifelong learners.

#### **Community dynamics**

- Strong *core relationships* and love among members.
- *Skews older* but with *recent growth in young families* and *multi-generational potential*.
- Some *disconnects between age groups* and a desire for more *intergenerational integration*.

#### **Strengths**

- *Music, art, and Adult RE (Religious Education)* are standout strengths.
- *Warm, supportive, and generous* community.
- *Active in social justice* (e.g., UU the Vote, marches).
- Beautiful, welcoming campus that draws visitors.

#### **Challenges**

- *Compartmentalization*—many groups and committees, but fewer all-congregation efforts.
- *Communication gaps* between groups and between adults and youth.

- Congregation is *predominantly white and older*, with limited racial/ethnic diversity.
  - Some perceive *class/wealth dynamics* as unintentionally excluding.
  - *Needs more volunteers* and leadership development.
  - Sometimes “*more head than heart*”—intellectual but less emotionally or spiritually connected.
- 

## 2. Desired Minister Qualities & Skills

### Personal Presence & Style

- *Warm, approachable, humble, genuine, compassionate, caring.*
- *High emotional intelligence* and *excellent listener.*
- *Charismatic and engaging*—draws people in naturally.
- Comfortable being *socially present* (at coffee hour, events, community gatherings).
- *Extroverted or people-oriented*, but authenticity is more important than personality type.
- *Good sense of humor* and don't take themselves too seriously.

### Spiritual & Intellectual Depth

- *Grounded in spirituality and UU principles*; able to connect head and heart.
- *Strong, inspirational preacher*—sermons that move people emotionally and spiritually, not just intellectually.
- *Able to handle life's big issues* (grief, death, purpose) with compassion.
- *Inclusive in theology*—embraces diverse beliefs and backgrounds (“big tent” approach).
- *Connects spirituality with action* (justice, nature, compassion).

### Leadership & Administration

- *Collaborative, non-hierarchical, non-defensive.*
- *Strong relationship-builder*—with staff, board, committees, and members.
- *Manages conflict well*; builds trust and respects staff boundaries.
- *Capable administrator* with good time management and organizational skills.
- *Supports and empowers lay leaders*; fosters volunteerism.
- *Understands systems and group dynamics.*

### Vision & Community Building

- *Builder and connector*—can unify diverse groups and bridge generations.
- *Visionary* but also *observant and respectful* of what's already working.

- *Encourages intergenerational connection* and deeper engagement of families and youth.
  - *Committed to social justice* and active in the broader community.
  - *Promotes anti-oppression and diversity.*
- 

### 3. Minister's Role & Responsibilities

#### **Worship & Inspiration**

- *Preaching and worship are central.* Inspiring, thoughtful, and emotionally resonant sermons are essential.
- *Great storyteller and communicator* who helps people think and feel deeply.
- *Brings spiritual grounding* and invites reflection on life's meaning.

#### **Pastoral Care**

- *Highly valued across all groups.*
- *Should know congregants personally,* provide *comfort and presence in times of loss or crisis,* and *build trust through genuine care.*

#### **Community Leadership**

- *Support what's working; integrate where there are gaps.*
- *Collaborate with the board and staff;* let the board lead governance.
- *Strengthen intergenerational and volunteer connections.*
- *Be visible and active*—not just in the pulpit, but in daily church life.
- *Represent UU values publicly* and engage with the wider Los Angeles community.

#### **Integration & Growth**

- *Unify diverse subgroups* within the congregation.
  - *Encourage younger and newer members* while honoring long-time congregants.
  - *Build an inclusive, caring, and spiritually vibrant community.*
-

## Overall Themes

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Essence</b>
<b>Head &amp; Heart Balance</b>	Desire for both intellectual depth and emotional/spiritual connection.
<b>Intergenerational Connection</b>	Need to bridge age groups and integrate youth and families into congregational life.
<b>Collaboration &amp; Trust</b>	Minister should model shared leadership and foster mutual respect.
<b>Inspiration &amp; Presence</b>	Sermons, pastoral care, and relational authenticity define effective ministry.
<b>Growth &amp; Inclusion</b>	Aim to evolve into a more diverse, connected, and community-oriented congregation.

---

---

## How Congregants Describe UUSM

### **Overall character**

- Welcoming, accepting, intellectually curious, socially engaged, and non-judgmental.
- Deeply connected to **lifelong learning**, **social justice**, and **spiritual diversity**.
- Has a **beautiful, safe, and vibrant campus** with great music and art programs.

- Members are **educated, thoughtful, and independent-minded**, sometimes strong-willed or cantankerous.
  - The congregation is **aging and skews older**, but **younger families and adults are beginning to join**.
  - **Not racially or ethnically diverse**, though open and inclusive in spirit.
  - Known for being **progressive, welcoming, and community-minded**, yet **somewhat compartmentalized** — committees and age groups sometimes work in silos.
  - **Strong programs** (Adult RE, Social Justice, Music), but **youth and RE feel somewhat separate** from the main congregation.
  - Sometimes struggles with **volunteer fatigue** and **connecting generations**.
  - Past **staff/minister conflicts** have left sensitivities around leadership style.
- 

## 🌟 Qualities & Skills Desired in a New Minister

### Core traits

- **Inspiring, charismatic, and engaging** speaker who delivers **heart-centered, relatable sermons** that balance intellect and emotion.
  - **Warm, compassionate, humble**, and **genuinely caring** toward individuals.
  - **Collaborative and non-authoritarian** leadership style — builds trust and works *with* committees, not above them.
  - **High emotional intelligence (EQ)**, **excellent listener**, and able to handle conflict constructively.
  - **Strong administrator and organizer** — able to manage staff relationships and church operations smoothly.
  - **Deeply spiritual**, grounded in UU values and religious understanding, but not overly academic or preachy.
  - **Extroverted or authentically relational** — checks in on people, remembers names, shows up at events.
  - **Builder and visionary** — helps UUSM grow authentically while honoring what already works.
  - **Committed to intergenerational connection** — finding ways to integrate children, youth, and families more fully into worship life.
  - **Sense of humor**, self-aware, approachable, and joyful.
  - **Values diversity**, supports social justice, environmental care, and anti-oppression work.
  - **Supports volunteers and emerging leaders**, nurturing a sense of shared ministry.
-



## Most Important Parts of the Minister's Job

- **Inspire through worship and preaching** — meaningful, emotionally resonant sermons are central.
  - **Provide pastoral care** — being present and genuinely caring, especially in times of grief or crisis.
  - **Foster connection** across generations and committees; strengthen the sense of shared community.
  - **Be visible and engaged** — attend social events, coffee hours, and community activities.
  - **Lead collaboratively** — empower lay leaders, respect staff, and share decision-making with the board.
  - **Model UU values** — integrity, compassion, openness, and justice.
  - **Guide the congregation's vision** while building trust and mutual respect.
  - **Connect the church to the wider community** — advocate publicly for justice and represent UU values locally.
  - **Encourage growth** (spiritual, relational, and numerical) while caring for both older and newer members.
  - **Be consistent and reliable** — show up regularly and be a steady, trusted presence.
- 



## Key Takeaways for the Search Committee

- **Ask about relationship-building:** How has the minister connected personally with congregants in the past? How do they build trust?
- **Look for balance:** head and heart, vision and practicality, inspiration and management.
- **Find someone who can unite the whole congregation** — across generations, committees, and spiritual styles — while continuing to celebrate UUSM's diversity, creativity, and social conscience.