

## **Board Bits Newsletter Article for December 2007 Edition**

### **2007 Survey Results – The VUU Board Appreciates You and Your Opinions**

Thanks to all of you who responded to the 2007 annual VUU Congregational Survey that we conducted during October and early November. We administered the survey via the internet, with hard copies mailed to about 60 VUU members and friends who do not list an e-mail address. Overall, the results are very good, as they have been for the past two years. Everyone should be pleased that VUU is viewed so positively by an overwhelming majority of members and friends. There are areas with concerns and places where our energies already are being focused.

The purposes of the survey are to assess the overall health of the VUU community. Thus the survey includes questions about members' and friends' personal connection and engagement with VUU, sense of belonging, assessment of VUU governance and administration, and VUU as a place of peace, spirituality, and search for meaning. The information gained from the survey is important in the Board's initiatives for the coming year, but it is not used to evaluate any specific VUU program.

#### **Who responded to the survey?**

- 155 people, 141 members and 14 friends of VUU
- Members average 8.4 years of membership
- One-third have children in the religious education program
- One-third are males
- The average age is 52
- On the average, people live 19 minutes from VUU (one way)
- Forty-three percent attend weekly and 29% more than once a month
- Thirty-four percent attend some other VUU activity or meeting more than once a month

#### **What do the scores mean?**

- Most of the questions are scored using a 1-5 scale where a score of 5 is the most positive (e.g., strongly agree) and a 1 is the most negative (e.g., strongly disagree). A score of 3 means the respondent found it "hard to decide" and could not really give a positive response, but also did not want to give a negative one.
- We are reporting the results in terms of means (higher mean scores are better), as well as percentages (e.g., % who "strongly agree" or % who "agree or strongly agree.")

#### **What did you say are VUU's most positive attributes?**

- The overwhelming majority of you agree or strongly agree that VUU is doing very well in providing a spiritual home. More than 85% of you agreed or strongly agreed that VUU is a welcoming community (87%), creates a place of peace and celebration (88%), is a place of compassion and fellowship (87%), offers a message of hope and love (87%), and nurtures each person's lifelong spiritual journey (85%). All of these "spirituality" questions have means of 4.2 or higher

on the 1 to 5 scale. We view these as very positive responses to one of VUU's most central responsibilities.

- Even more highly rated, however, are your responses about your connections with VUU. The question with the highest mean among all questions (4.36) is your likelihood of continuing to be a member or friend (89% agree or strongly agree). In addition, more than 90% of you agree or strongly agree that you feel accepted at VUU (90%) and that VUU treats you with respect (92%). Other highly rated attributes (with means of 4.2 or better or 85% or more agreeing or strongly agreeing) are feeling proud to be a member, and opportunities to volunteer, learn and grow.
- VUU's striving for social justice and environmental responsibility showed the largest increase over previous years (from a rank of 13<sup>th</sup> out of 29 in 2005 to 4<sup>th</sup> in 2007). This question also tied for the highest percentage saying that the "agree or strongly agree" (92%.) Thanks to all who have participated in the "green sanctuary" movement, the anti-war movement, and the many other VUU contributions to social justice.
- Other areas showing noticeable improvement (in terms of ranks) over 2005 are that VUU "welcomes newcomers warmly and immediately when they step inside the door" (from 26<sup>th</sup> out of 29 to 16<sup>th</sup>); and VUU being a place of compassion and fellowship (from 18<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup>).

#### **What Are People Concerned About?**

- The overall scores are outstanding, but the means on most questions are not as positive as in 2005 or 2006. Of the 29 questions, 20 had lower "agree or strongly agree" responses in 2007 than in 2006 and nine were higher. If we just look at the percentage who "strongly agree," all questions in 2007 had lower responses – with 15 to 20% shifting from "strongly agree" to "agree" on many questions.
- There were two questions that prompted about half of the respondents to *not* provide a positive response. These were: "At VUU conflicts are resolved with candor and in ways that allow people to maintain integrity and respect," and "If a problem arises, I can always count on VUU to reach a fair and satisfactory resolution. These two questions had also garnered low ratings in the past with 30 to 35% not being in agreement.
- The other lower-rated attributes in 2007 also focused on governance or administration. This is reflected in responses to questions about whether one's opinions seem to count, being able to count on VUU, and keeping people informed. These questions, however, also were the lower rated in 2005 and 2006.
- What do the differences between 2006 and 2007 mean? There may be many interpretations or explanations, but one is that the shift is from "strongly agree" to "agree" and the shift to more negative responses about solving problems and resolving conflicts are at least partly a reflection of the unfortunate incident involving a VUU member last year and the resulting conflict over how the issue should be handled. Some of it may be the natural growing pains as we move toward a larger congregation. Many of you may be completely unaware of the conflict last year, but there was a short write-up in the July newsletter and an informational meeting was held about it in August. We continue to work on healing this conflict together with our minister and to better understand (and

respect) all of the points of view, including those with which we may disagree. This was a very complicated issue and well-intended people may have handled it in quite different ways – with each thinking that they were doing what was best for VUU as a whole.

#### **How is the balance among the many things VUU does?**

- This year, for the first time, the survey contained questions about what you would like to have less of, more of, and what is “just right.”
- Adult religious education, social action / environmental activism, and opportunities for community outreach lead the initiatives with the most votes for “more of.” Nothing has any significant votes for “less of,” and the bulk of the responses are “just right.”

#### **What else did you tell us through the survey?**

- As in the past, we included open-ended questions where you could tell us what things you like especially about VUU and what you would like to see improved. Over 100 of you left thoughtful, heart-warming comments about how VUU is your “home;” the sense of community you feel at VUU; the joy and inspiration you gain from the music; how much the religious education programs mean for your children; how you embrace VUU values; and how much you value the sermons, social events, social justice opportunities, and diversity of beliefs, etc.
- In terms of improvement, you ask for more social action; more depth and meaningfulness in the Sunday services and sermons; more discussion groups, improved communication, and improved processes for resolving conflicts.

#### **How will the results be used?**

- The open-ended responses helped considerably in understanding the results of the survey. These, along with the responses to the questions, are being used to guide future initiatives. We will post results soon on the VUU home page.
  - We will hold an “informational meeting” to present the results of the survey and hear your interpretations and ideas. This is scheduled for Sunday, December 9, about 12:30 right after the café and the “neighborhood meetings.”
  - The minister and the board have already committed to focusing on **improving communication, building trust, expanding leadership, and intensifying our efforts to have an open, transparent, consultative style of leadership.**
  - In addition, we will work diligently with many of you to continue with the **outstanding Sunday morning services**, our inspiring **music** and **religious education**, the tremendous momentum we have in **social and environmental activism**, and add additional opportunities to (re)-inspire ourselves in our commitment to VUU and in our own personal spiritual journeys.

Submitted by Anne L. Schneider, Board member.