



What is the mission of a particular congregation?

The mission is the proximate purpose that emerges at the intersection of Identity, Values and Context for a particular congregation.

From the work our Search Committee did in Fall 2018

(<https://www.firstuustlouis.org/first-church-online-forms/file-cabinet#overlay-context=users/yvette>).

Our Church at a Glance

- **Membership status:** 79% members, 13% pledging friends, 8% non-pledging friends
- **Membership duration:** 5 or less years (27%), 25+ years (30%)
- **Age:** 5% under 30 years, 20% are 30-49 years, 43% are 50-69 years, 32% are 70+ years
- **Gender:** 57% female, 39% male, and 4% transgender or non-binary
- **Sexual orientation:** 82% heterosexual, 6% bisexual, 6% gay or lesbian, 4% queer, 3% asexual, and 2% pansexual
- **Marital/partner status:** 70% married/partnered, 30% unmarried/un-partnered
- **Race/ethnicity:** 94% white/non-Hispanic
- **Education:** 26% hold a Bachelor's degree, 43% a Master's degree, and 28% a PhD or other advanced degree
- **Household income:** 4% < \$25K, 17% \$25-50K, 26% \$50-100K, 53% \$100K+
- **Pledge amounts:** 9% do not pledge, 24% < \$500, 30% \$500-2K, 24% \$2-5K, 13% \$5K+
- **Personal religious beliefs:** Humanist (56%), Spiritual but not religious (36%), Agnostic (35%), Earth-centered (28%), Christian (25%), Atheist (19%), Theist (18%), Buddhist (18%), Jewish (5%), Hindu (2%), Muslim (1%), and Other (13%)
- **Previous religious affiliation:** Protestant (57%), Catholic (21%), None (13%), Lifelong UU (8%), Jewish (7%)
- **Top reasons for attending church:** Sense of community/fellowship, Worship service, Common values
- **Top issues of concern:** Lack of diversity/accessibility/respect for differences, Aging population, Declining membership, Conflict within the congregation
- **Top strengths of our congregation:** People are caring and friendly, Members are committed and dedicated, Congregation is inclusive and welcoming
- **Top priorities for the next minister:** Preaching, Worship, Community building, Staff relations, Membership growth, Spiritual guidance, and Social action
- **Top goals for the future:** Grow membership, Become financially stable, Engage in outreach and advocacy in wider community and city, Bridge divides within the church, Hire and support a new minister, Become more diverse, Clarify our mission/vision

We will briefly consider if we are different now in Jan. 2021 and then go on to consider some additional aspects of who we are. We will attempt to share with each other how we describe various aspects of our personal identity such as: How do we describe where we live (urban/suburban/rural)? Single or multi-generational household? How do we describe our own personal economic status? How do we describe our individual political identities? How would we characterize our theological identities more deeply than a one-word label? How important is rationality to our understanding of the world? How important is emotional connection to our understanding of the world? How important is continuity and ritual to our sense of community? How do we live out our faith in our lives? How do we approach conversations with people we know, or suspect, are very like us? How does that differ from conversations with people we know, or suspect are different from ourselves?

Our challenge for this conversation is to speak entirely from the “I” and to stay as descriptive as possible, rather than looking for pattern or significance, or being judgmental of other’s self-characterizations.

How the session will run.

1. First 5-10 min. review of the summary chart – reminder of what we are doing, reactions/ changes we think have happened - we are not going to argue these, we are going to share our perceptions of the information.
2. Then move to the descriptions questions:
 - a. Start with the where we live sequence
 - b. Get into theological description, rational/emotional needs, living our faith questions
 - c. End with conversations across differences