

## **Report on Town Hall Meeting 10-27-19 to discuss the Name Change**

### **I. Opening**

Linda welcomed everyone and re-capped what we've done so far and where we are:

- Board appointed committee Fall 2017
- Committee met for a year to study the issue and wrote a report (Fall of 2017 to Fall of 2018)
- Submitted a report and made a presentation to the Board in December of 2018. The Board and the Committee made a plan for moving the conversation forward with the congregation.
- Members of the committee spoke at Worship Service—Jan. 2019
- The committee shared the report with the Congregation—Jan. 2019
- Two prior Town Hall meetings—February and May of 2019
- Held a listening session for people of color –June 2019
- Conducted a Congregational Survey—Feb/March. 2019
- The congregation has expressed its support for considering a new name, one that would appeal to a broad range of people, and communicate something about who we, what we believe, and what we aspire to.
- All of the names that have been suggested in the survey are in a database.
- Several members and attenders expressed their discomfort with the words “Church” and “Restoration.”
- We are now at the point where we would like to talk about different types of names, and elements of names.

Objective to this meeting was to get a sense of the congregation on two important aspects of a congregational name: the type of name, and the identifier. This will help us as we move toward specific names.

There were approximately 45 people in attendance at the start of the meeting.

### **II. Discussion of Types of Names**

Suzanne presented the three different types of names: a name which includes the name of an historical figure, whether a UU or broader figure like MLK, Jr.; a name that includes a place or geographical location/feature; and an aspirational name that speaks to who and what we aspire to be and do in the world. The following handout with examples of each type of name was given to everyone.

## Types of Congregational Names: Actual Examples from Around the U.S.

**A person's name**      **Existing Examples:** Thomas Paine Unitarian Universalist Fellowship; Michael Servetus Unitarian Society; James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation; Dorothea Dix Unitarian Universalist Community; Margaret Moseley House

**A place-based name**      **Existing Examples:** Two Rivers Unitarian Universalist; Skylands Unitarian Universalist Fellowship; First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany; Red River Unitarian Universalists; Unitarian Universalists of the Blue Ridge; Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Chautauqua; Sierra Foothills Unitarian Universalists

**An aspirational name**      **Existing Examples:** Tree of Life UU Congregation; Open Door UU Fellowship; Gaia Community; Mosaic Unitarian Universalist Congregation; Sacred Fire Unitarian Universalist; Harmony Unitarian Universalist Church; Sacred Journey Fellowship; Open Circle Unitarian Universalist Fellowship New Hope, A UU Congregation; Spirit of Life Unitarian Universalist Church; Harbor Unitarian Universalist Congregation

Jim led a discussion of these in which the group was asked to share what they see as the pros and cons of each type of name. The responses were:

### A person's name

#### Pros

Could be inspiring

#### Cons

Risk of new info emerging about that person  
Not best use of limited space in name  
Name not necessarily known to outsiders

### A place-based name

#### Pros

Could be easier to agree upon  
Google-worthy  
Identifies our location  
Less potential baggage vs. other name types  
Shows commitment to community  
Mt. Airy = "Inclusive"

#### Cons

Doesn't reflect our full geographical diversity  
Could be seen as limiting/exclusionary  
Possible confusion with USG  
  
We could move in the future  
"Mt. Airy" not known by all  
Not global  
Doesn't speak to what we offer

## An aspirational name

### Pros

Tells who we are  
Can help cast a wider net  
Can reflect what we do here  
Not territorial or limiting

### Cons

Open-ended meanings  
Could sound “cultish”

- It was noted that a name could include more than one of these elements, especially if a tag line is used.

A straw vote was taken of those present as to which of these options people liked. People could vote for more than one. There were 25 people present at the time of the vote. The vote tally was:

An aspirational name	19
A place-based name	14
A person's name	2

## III. Discussion of the “Identifier”

Len explained that an important part of the name is the “identifier,” what we call ourselves and how we present ourselves to the wider world. Brenda led a discussion of 11 options for an “identifier” words in which the group was asked to share what they see as the pros and cons of each. Responses were:

### 1. “Society”

#### Pros

Neutral

#### Cons

Small  
“Clubby”  
Implies secular  
Doesn't have any “sell”  
Doesn't speak to what we do  
Potential negative meaning-“snobby”  
“Society” is related to Quakers, (“Society of Friends”) and “Ethical Culture Society”

## 2. “Community”

### Pros

Warmth—connotes welcome  
in a group, but not exclusive  
Associated with Beloved Community  
Place of comfort  
Includes the concept of  
“common”  
Feeling of strength  
Openness  
Strong spiritual connotation  
Very embracing (there was mention of  
other communities to which people  
belong—gay, Latino, deaf, etc.)

### Cons

# of syllables—it’s a long word  
Presumptuous  
Refers to land  
May conjure up boundary

## 3. “Gathering” (Not discussed)

## 4. “Church”

### Pros

### Cons

Too limiting—historically Christian

## 5. “Congregation” (Not discussed)

## 6. “Unitarian Universalists” (in place of a noun)

### Pros

Implies openness  
  
Google-able

### Cons

Doesn’t tell anyone anything (e.g. to the  
uninitiated)

- There was an additional comment that the name should not start with “Unitarian Universalist” --it’s too cumbersome. Could come at the end.

## 7. “Fellowship”

### Pros

### Cons

Word is Sexist  
Historically, in broader UU context  
associated with lay-led congregation.

## 8. “Assembly”

### Pros

### Cons

Associated with Christian churches

## 9. Sanctuary (not discussed)

## 10. Meeting House (not discussed)

## 11. Place (not discussed)

A straw vote was taken of those present as to which of these options people liked. People could vote for more than one. There were 25 people present at the time of the vote. The vote tally was:

Unitarian Universalists	21
Community	19
Congregation	19
Sanctuary	10
Meeting House	4
Church	4
Fellowship	3
Society	2
Place	1
Gathering	1
Assembly	0

Based on this straw vote, there was a clear preference for three of the options: Unitarian Universalists, Community, or Congregation.

- One person spoke against changing the name, but the vast majority of congregants seemed enthusiastic about the possibility, given the right name/names to consider.
- The question was raised about what we would call the building if the name didn't include the word “Church”. Several options were mentioned, including sanctuary, congregation, and the option to still call the building “church” even if it is not in the name.

**IV. Next steps:** Based on the information gathered from this Town Hall, the committee will work with Board to design a process whereby the congregation will consider a specific names or names.

