Summary of Congregation's Second Listening Session 5/18/2025

A Listening Session was held as requested to follow-up the congregation wide meeting on 4/6/25 which identified a disconnect between RE families and the rest of the congregation as the top issue facing the congregation. This session was arranged by the COM* and was facilitated by Rebecca Foster. It included Rev. Denis, Lee Cowan, Ami Pienknagura and about 45 participants (some on zoom).

Rebecca clarified that the intention of the Listening Session was not to strategize or problem solve but rather to "deepen understanding and empathy related to the relational dynamics of the RE Parents vis-a-vis both the leadership as well as the rest of the congregation." Drawing from core tenets of Non-Violent Communication (NVC), Rebecca invited participants to prioritize two key building blocks of empathy: listening for underlying feelings and unmet needs. She then split the group into four smaller groups, each of which included at least one RE parent/younger member and a representative of UUCSC leadership. The small groups began with an RE parent/younger member sharing what they were struggling with and what they were wishing for, while two members in the small group listened for their feelings and two members listened for their unmet needs. One member of the group served as the scribe. Others were then invited to share their struggles/wishes as time permitted.

These small groups then returned to the larger group and shared the feelings and unmet needs that had emerged in their smaller groups.

Note: it should be acknowledged that not everyone feels the same, and that these are the feelings and unmet needs of just some of the RE parents/younger members of the congregation.

Feelings Shared

- lonely, isolated
- vulnerable, scared, ashamed
- conflicted, frustrated
- torn (between being fully present in the Service and part of RE)
- fatigued, overwhelmed
- hopeful

Unmet needs

- To be Heard
- To be Valued ("I want to know that my voice is valued and that I have a legitimate place in this congregation.")
- To be Accepted ("I want people to be with me as I am.")
- Connection / Sense of belonging ("I want to feel more connected.")
- Affirmation, Security and Support
- Safety (especially related to voicing different views)

- To give each other Grace, Accommodation, Consideration
- Appreciation (relative to the hard work of leadership as well as that of volunteers)
- Fun & Excitement (integrated with the hard work of leadership)
- Transparency (in how the Board and Committees operate, and clear information about how to become more engaged).
- Balance between Consistency, Safety, Comfort and the need for Change when necessary.
- Accessibility (e.g., “I’m not always able to hear so I feel like I am missing important information.”)
- Consensus among the congregation

The entire Listening Session (including small groups) was just one hour long. Nevertheless, it represents a step forward towards deeper understanding and empathy for RE parents as valued & essential members of the congregation.

Next steps

The COM, in partnership with the Board and the congregation, will propose next steps when the Congregation convenes again after the summer. There is the potential for another facilitated session with Rebecca Foster.

Thanks to each of you for your participation, your deep listening and compassion.

*COM includes: Sarah Dinklage, Barbara Nowicki, Donna Caldwell, Rev. Denis