

Spiritual Snapshot: The First Parish in Lincoln Family Portrait

When the Transition Team announced the opening of the Spiritual Snapshot survey in November, we had one concern: would anyone actually answer questions about their own spirituality? The result amazed and delighted us. By the month's end, 194 people had responded, not just by checking multiple-choice boxes, but with extensive, insightful, often beautiful comments.

We characterized the survey as a "family portrait of our spiritual community," and that turned out to be pretty appropriate. Think of a snapshot of a large family gathering, maybe your own family. There are the tall people and the short ones; those eager to get in the front row and those who'd prefer to be somewhere else entirely; the smilers and the scowlers and the ones looking away from the camera. Yet there they all are, gathered, and you can almost hear the stories and feel the family ties.

Respondents to the survey provided a bounty of thoughtful reflections on their own spirituality and on First Parish. A few examples:

Spirituality for me is a quality of relationship beginning with the gracious life and death dealing mystery which for lack of a word big enough we call "God." Jesus is the embodiment of that Spirit for me and my central relationship which is inclusive of all people and all creation.

It is important to me to gather with others to consider life from a spiritual standpoint supported by a variety of intellectual, societal, and cultural perspectives. It takes me beyond my own day-to-day and orients me to the wider community and world.

I have found church to be a spiritual home for me, but not at First Parish Lincoln. Too "dead-white-male," 19th C. For me, FPL is the community, the bond of caring for each other and of sharing desire to support good work in the world. But I wouldn't say that is spiritual. My spiritual growth is supported by reading and walking in nature, at the ocean, and in cities.

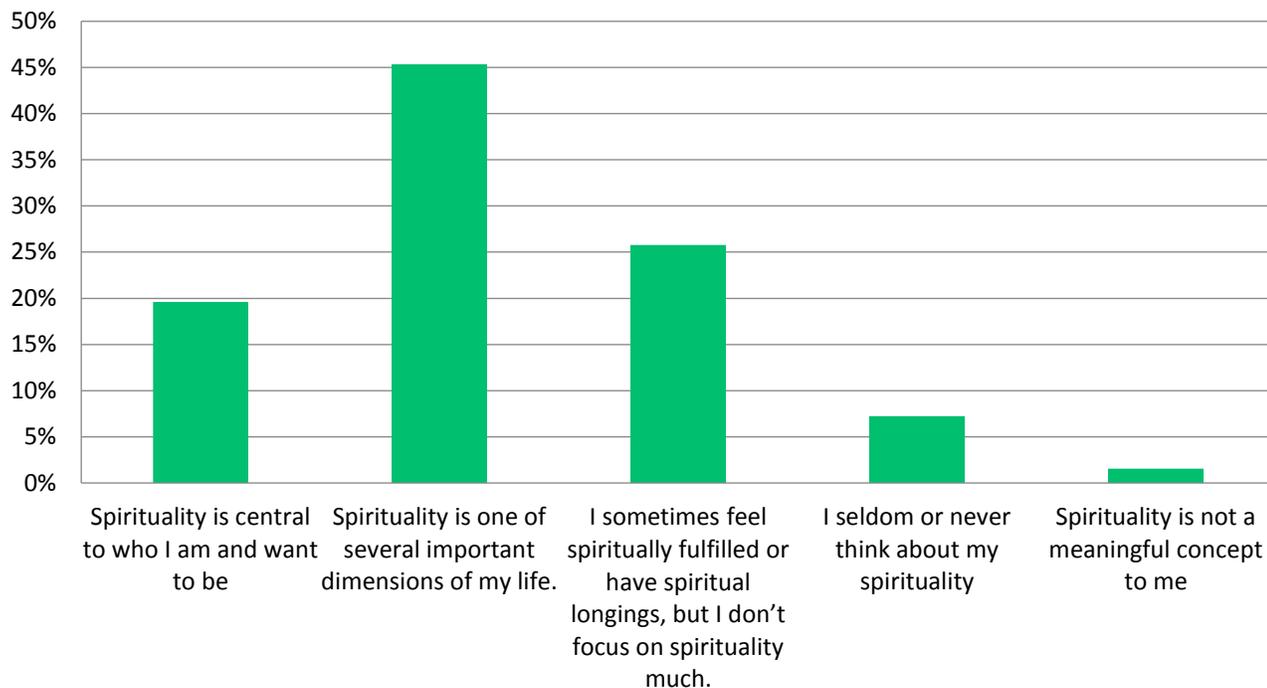
Spirituality is mostly about love for me -- love the congregation, the experience of the holy in the beloved FPL.

This document contains all of the survey responses: no editing, no redacting, not even "improvements" of spelling or punctuation.

Read on to see more of your fellow parishioners' richly varied thinking and often divergent points of view. Read slowly – each thought deserves a bit of reflection. And notice not only the many points on which we disagree, but also the deep strain of affection for FPL that runs throughout the pages.

*The Transition Team: Becca Fasciano, Gina Halsted (co-chair), Chris Hamilton, Kathy Huber, Ken Hurd, R.L. Smith (co-chair), Liz Wilkinson.
January, 2020*

1. Which statement comes closest to describing the role of spirituality in your life?



Say more about your answer here, if you wish:

Spirituality is central to who I am and want to be.

Ah, but what is "spirituality?" I'll define it as "what I come to church for"

I come to church for God

Now that I am a nonagenarian, I think about spirituality all the time.

My spiritual life is an integral part of who I am. I read books on spiritual topics, mystics, attend lectures, all to help me articulate my faith to myself which then informs how I spend my time & financial resources.

The First Parish formed me supported me over so many years.

For me: spirituality sits at the intersection of my relationship with myself and other people and sentient beings.

Spirituality for me is a quality of relationship beginning with the gracious life and death dealing mystery which for lack of a word big enough we all "God." Jesus is the embodiment of that Spirit for me and my central relationship which is inclusive of all people and all creation.

Spirituality has been an intrinsic part of my life from the time I was quite young and didn't realize there was such a word to describe my feelings. I have always been in awe of the vastness of the universe and how I, as an infinitely small being, was a part of this cosmos. In the past 30 -40 years of my life looking for meaning in my existence, understanding my own true nature and becoming "awake" are of paramount importance to me.

I experience God as an infinitely loving presence and when I am awake enough to feel this presence, God guides me in ways that are truly profound.

Spirituality is one of several important dimensions in my life.

But, if broadly defined, spirituality would cover all important dimensions.

I don't come to church often but it's existence is important. I enjoy going.

I define spirituality as anything that elicits kindness, empathy, and compassion for others--I do NOT associate it with any particular religion

Church is important to me PRINCIPALLY for this reason--not community or music or justice work, all of which I do on my own; I hope that OUR church is what makes spirituality one step MORE important to me!

I feel that spirituality is important to me, or should be, but that I don't fully know what it is. It's a capacity I'd like to improve.

as I enter retirement, spirituality becomes increasingly center stage in my life

I sometimes struggle to define it, to draw a distinction between my psychology (psyche?) and spirit. But I think spirituality is too often conflated with emotion, and that there's more to it than "peace and well-being."

I am figuring out what spirituality actually involves

spirituality, creativity, curiosity, nature and love are core dimensions for me

Spirituality underlies everything but it is not the only thing in my life so I chose the 2nd response.

I sometimes feel spiritually fulfilled or have spiritual longings, but I don't focus on spirituality much.

time in nature is a spiritual experience. I also meditate, which provides a connection to myself.

In addition to my response to Question 16 would add that meaningful to me is the fact that Dr. Francis Collins who lead the Human Genome project is also a deeply spiritual person. He had written a book, which I haven't read yet: " The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief". i also revel in the miracle that 36 TRILLION cells in the average human body somehow work in concert most of the time..

I no longer believe in a personal God, but believe there is some power outside of ourselves that we are drawn to.

I value spiritual engagement, but do not have a personal practice or approach to life that provides many openings.

I identify most as a Humanist. Raised Unitarian.

I seldom or never think about my spirituality

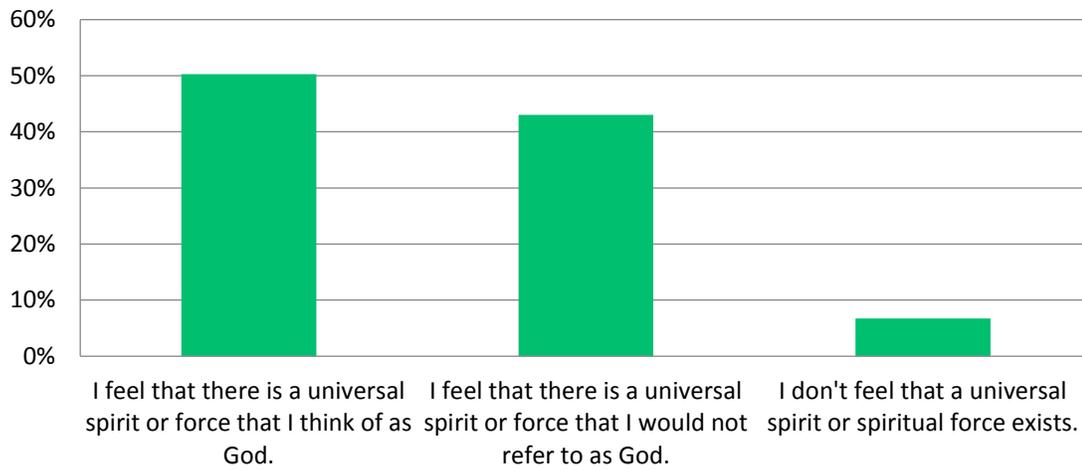
It's not a concept I think a lot about, but because this survey asks about it, it needs some definition or all the answers would be blank. Let's say it's the connectedness of our souls.

But I wish I did

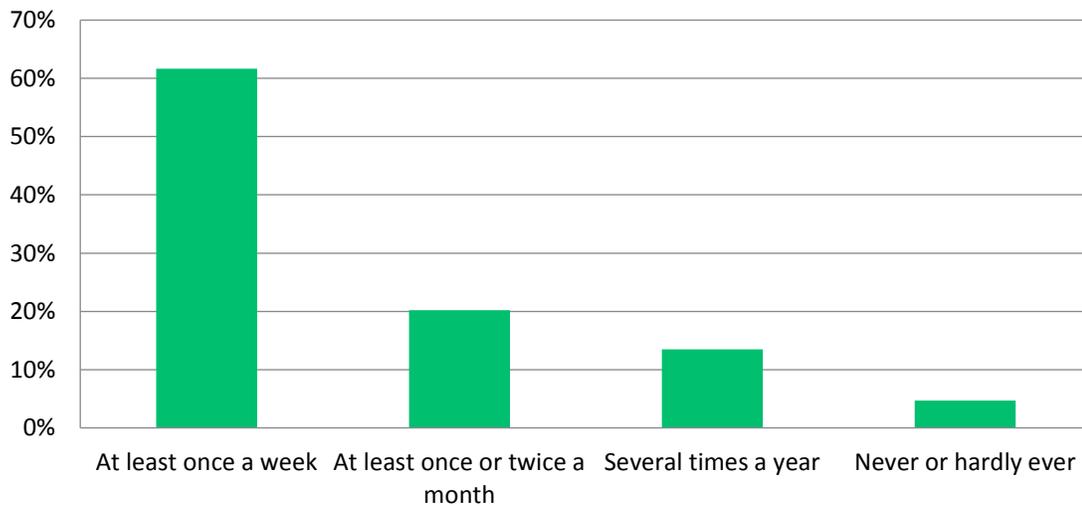
Spirituality is not a meaningful concept to me

Self-awareness and thoughtfulness are constant with me, but I don't think of these phenomena as "spirituality," as in being in contact with a Great Spirit, or God.

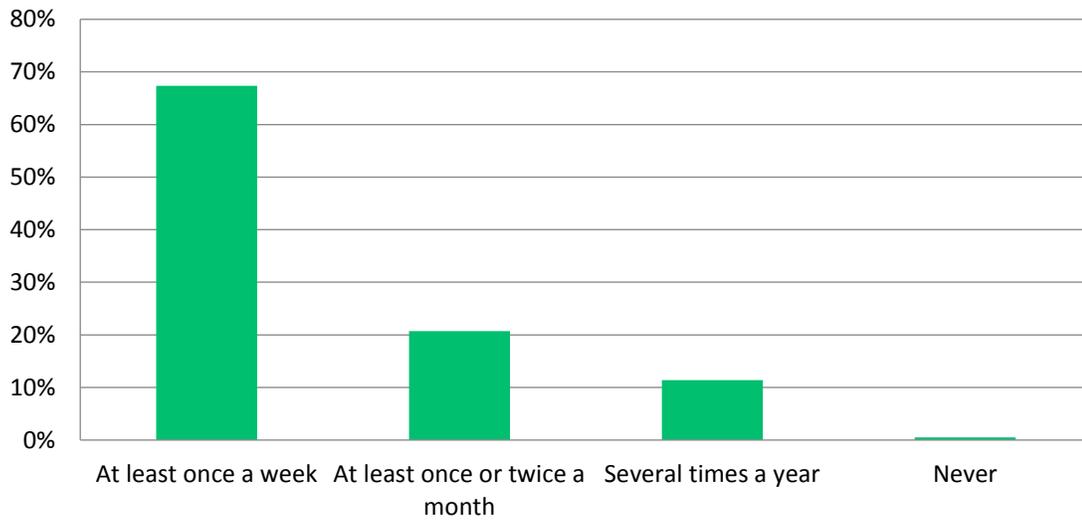
2. Do you feel that there is a universal spirit or force, whether you refer to it as God or by some other name?



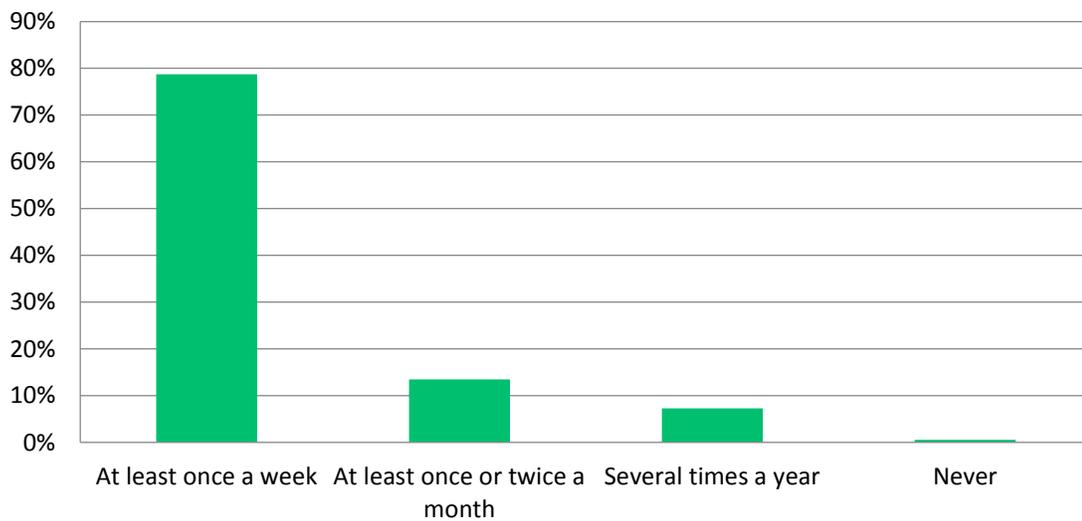
3. How often do you feel a sense of spiritual peace and well-being?



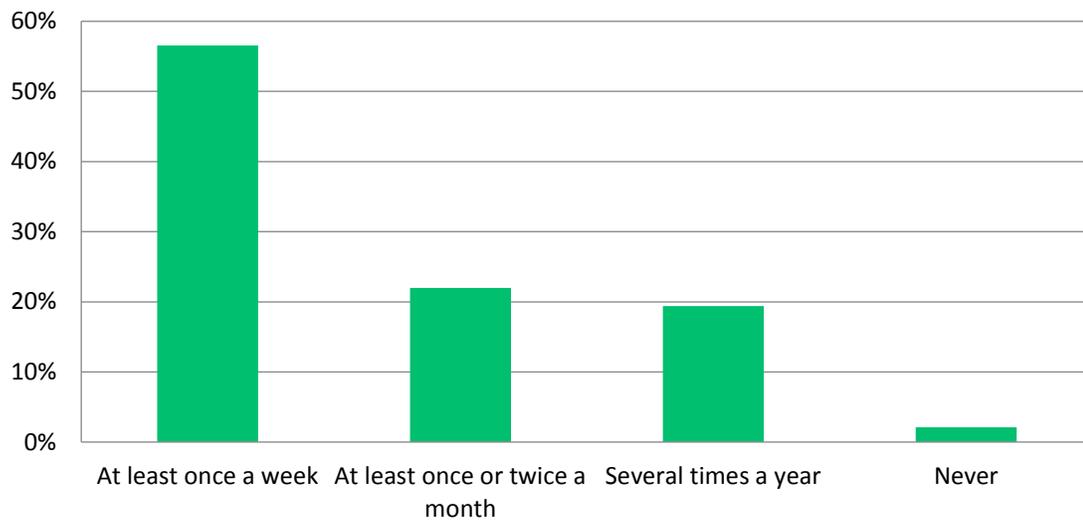
4. How often do you feel a sense of wonder about the universe?



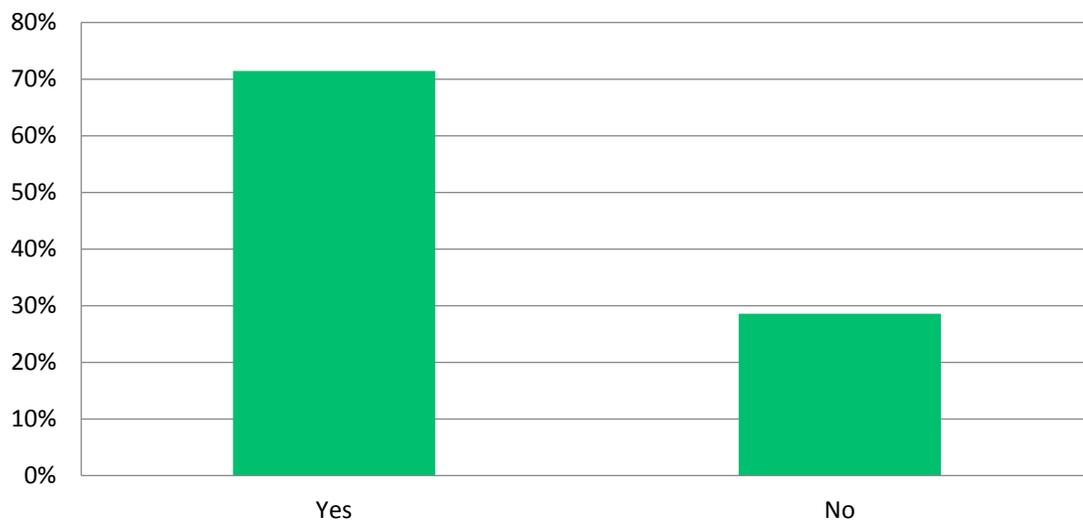
5. How often do you feel a strong sense of gratitude or thankfulness?



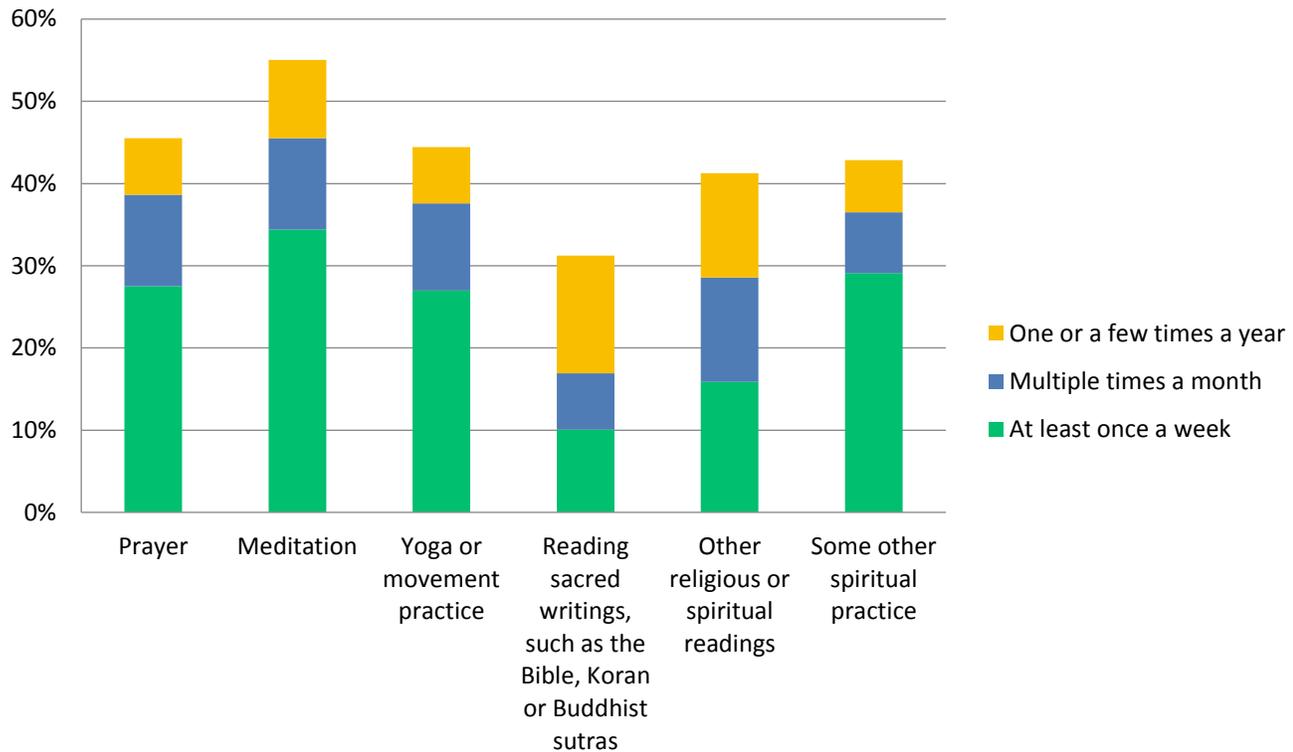
6. How often do you think about the meaning and purpose of life?



7. Do you have a regular or occasional spiritual practice apart from the Sunday church service?



8. If you have spiritual practice apart from the Sunday morning service, what does it involve and how often do you do it?



If you chose "other spiritual readings" or "other practice" in the question above, please elaborate:

I teach at a Catholic School.

Deliberate encounters with nature, gardening, walks

I take walks in nature ! But recently I have gotten a lot of ticks so this is now a challenge!

various readings or meditation websites.

Writings of mystics from the Christian and Sufi traditions. Literature that expands my awareness and understanding of human experiences beyond my own; Embodied prayer. Mantras/Zikr/concentrations on sacred phrases/aspects of the divine that hold meaning for me; breath work; feeding people; listening/paying attention; participation in social justice actions; self care

Bhakta Hindu spiritual practice

Sermon and words of wisdom

spiritual natural energy related readings, walking meditation, connection with animals,

"a walk in the woods"...ie time in nature, wherever that may be

Occasionally I like to go back to good sermons and pastoral prayers

I would like to develop one.

A walk in the woods, connecting with the earth through work with soil.

Anything that leads to God.

Humanism

I read a lot of religious/spiritual writings by medieval and Renaissance writers. My other practice includes listening to, practicing, performing music. Also time spent outside in the natural world.

The Natural World, Mountains and Sky

My "Some other spiritual practice" is that I think about, in a meditational sort of way, loved ones that have passed. I don't think of it as meditation, but that is the best way to describe it.

Once a year, multi-day silent retreat. Small group spiritual group. Up until recently, regular spiritual direction once a month.

Walking outside in the woods/fields/mountains/beaches

Since I am an energetic person, activity has spiritual aspects, like walking, gardening, taking care of grandchildren, traveling with my husband, watching sunsets and moonrises, being happy.

Being outside, in-nature.

Twelve step meetings and related literature, which is spiritual because it centers around trusting and turning your life over to your concept of a higher power (which could include the program/sponsor/fellows, God/spirit of the universe, your inner/higher/best self, or whatever other concept works)

Service as prayer - ritual service daily. Focus on natural world.

I go to other churches when our service is not going to be a religious/spiritual ones

Daily online spiritual readings. Singing.

Books containing writings/lives of spiritual masters.

Observe my Sabbath (Sun.) reading writing (Journal and Poems) silence WALKING in Nature -- Tree breathing hiking, walking

Walks in nature; an act of kindness toward someone; an expression of gratitude each week

I think contemplating our purpose in life, our relationships in community and in the world is a spiritual practice. Mine often take the form of reflecting on and practicing anti-racism and social justice efforts. I appreciate Bryan Stevenson's quote: "the opposite of poverty is not wealth, it is justice" and to me, the practice of mindfulness is to ask about the suffering of others as well as my treatment, view, and hidden bias that leads to judgement about others. That is a spiritual practice well articulated in our covenant and call to ministry.

Walking in the woods being very mindful

walking in the woods. being present to the natural world.

Exploring ideas about how people and ideas are connected through reading about many subjects. My other practice takes the form of long hikes through the outdoors without other people.

writing to connect me to people who are no longer alive

Walking, canoeing, watching nature

I don't read religious texts, but I do read other texts that are spiritual in nature, that focus on concepts of detachment, compassion, gratitude, nature.

Readings and Poems of Nature Writers, listening to and playing music

poetry

Walking our dog in the beauty of our environment

Riding a horse Running Skiing Hiking

Various Buddhist authors; attention to nature.

Tai Chi

walking in nature

Walking or skiing in nature.

Reiki

Isolated time with self in evening (preferably outside), strictly without distraction, to contemplate.

Singing in the choir

Daily - meditation, Qi Gong (just starting), meditations from Eileen Caddy and blessings from John O'Donohugh

Several times a month fellowship: one group focused on scripture reading as a prompt (St Anne's) and an other as FPL small group.

I read morning prayer from Catholic or Episcopalian sources.

small groups that share honestly and spiritually

I read books (not the traditional sacred ones referenced above)

Walking reading thought provoking books

walking in nature at least once a week

Walk the labyrinth

Running or otherwise moving through the natural world is a spiritual practice I do three or more times per week. This could be categorized under yoga.

I enjoy reading the writings of others I consider to be deeply spiritual, whether they be poets or philosophers, or members of religious disciplines other than Christianity.

My spiritual practice has to do with communing with natural, so I have lots of opportunities.

Books such as "The Book of Joy", capturing conversations between the Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu.

inquiry and contemplation as a practice

I meditate usually twice a day. TM.

I have many favorite books i read

walking in the woods every day/ hiking

walking in the woods

I get out on walks, bike, run, yoga, stretch. They all help keep me centered and calm, which in their own way is a type of spiritual practice.

Writings on yoga, ancient Egyptian religion, Power of Now, I Ching, Spiritual practice of writing in journals.

Walking in and spending time in nature.

I occasionally attend Catholic Mass with a family member. I think of readings like Thich Nhat Han's books as "other" spiritual works. I read spiritually-oriented poetry on occasion. And I read letters from friends who share my questions and curiosity about existence.

Spending intentional time out in nature

I read books on spiritual experiences of others

Meditative movement incorporating walking & reflection to create & bind an energy field

Outdoor activity with renewal as the goal, rather than recreation per se, or physical exercise.

I meditate while being active training/exercising...I race a lot of triathlons, running cycling swimming...I'm in nature and breathing...

walking for me is a spiritual meditation practice which I do almost every day. sometimes around the garden in a ritualistic way. Also watching and talking to the birds when I fill the feeder is communicating with spirits.

Transcendental Meditation (of Thoreau / Emerson's type, not TM) in nature, in quiet, in peace.

Buddhist retreat or days of mindfulness

Books by Thich Nhat Hanh, the Dalai Lama, Brother David Steindl-Rast, Karen Armstrong, Huston Smith, Martin Buber, Alan Watts and many others, such as *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, *Tales from the Land of the Sufis*, *Diamond Heart* by A. H. Almaas, a translation of the *Tao Te Ching* and other books by Stephen Mitchell; also spiritual poetry by Rumi, Mary Oliver. Other spiritual practice includes study of the Enneagram as a means of better understanding my true nature.

In those moments when I am spiritually awake, I seek God's guidance. I feel that God can point me in the right directions, but I have to do the difficult work of making things happen.

free form contemplation journal writing

Walking my dogs in the woods is exhilarating and brings balance to my otherwise busy life.

Life and living is an everyday practical spiritual practice.

"nature bathing"--setting aside time for complete absorption in natural surroundings

It ranges from Rilke to Mary Oliver to Thich Nhat Hanh to Kahlil Gibran to Theodore Parker Ferris to Al-Anon's teachings. I think of these readings as Christian in orientation, but not directly either Biblical or religious, except for Ferris.

I love reading about mystics, near-death experiences, healers and those with psychic abilities.

MUSIC

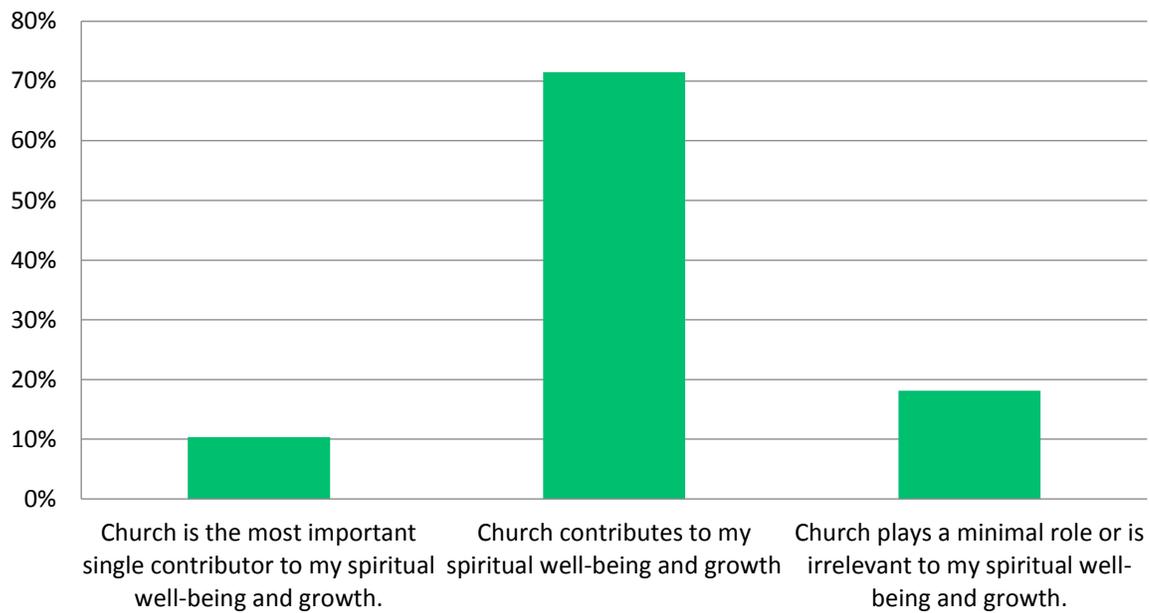
I am interested in eastern philosophy and meditation. several times a year, I will take a day or two to visit a monastery to reflect.

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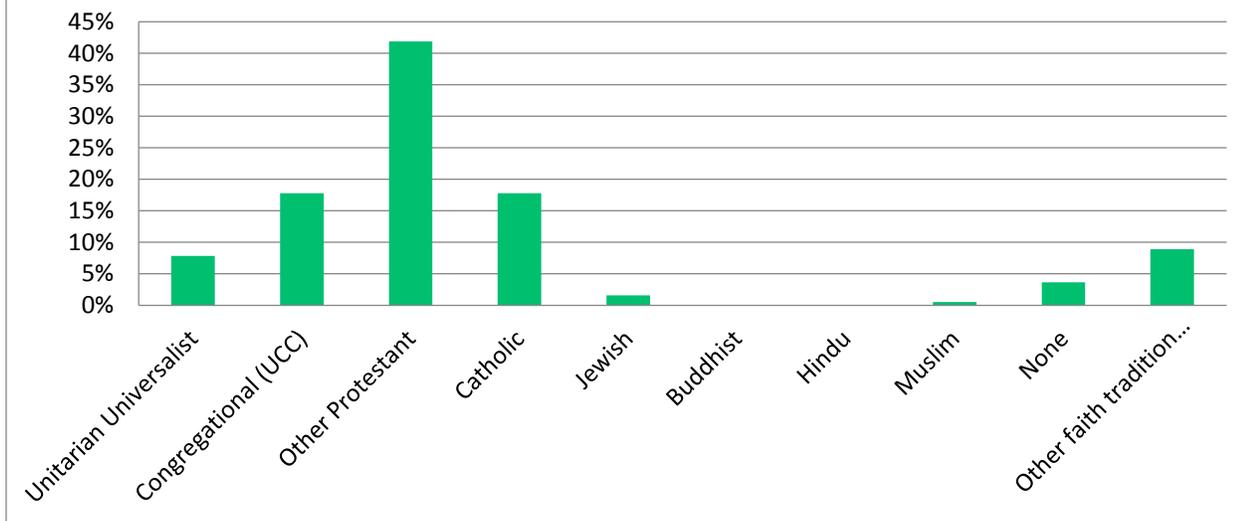
Daily Guideposts magazine

I practice gratitude in several different ways. At this point in my life it is a nearly daily practice that I fall into naturally.

9. Which statement comes closest to describing the role that church plays in your spiritual life?



10. What was the main religious tradition in which you were raised? (check one)



Other faith tradition (please specify)

Christian Scientist

Church of the Brethren (Ohio/midwest)

Greek Orthodox

[R checked both UU and Congregational. Commented in margin, entered as response to Q22]

Budhist and Protestant

Unitarian, Congregational, Other Protestant, Quaker, Christian Scientist

Unitarian, Congregational, Episcopal, Catholic (convent), Jewish (Theology School), Buddhist (studied).

Episcopalian

Lutheran

FPL

Protestant for me was Presbyterianism and I had to work to recover from the rigidity and control I had experienced.

Episcopal

Eastern Orthodox

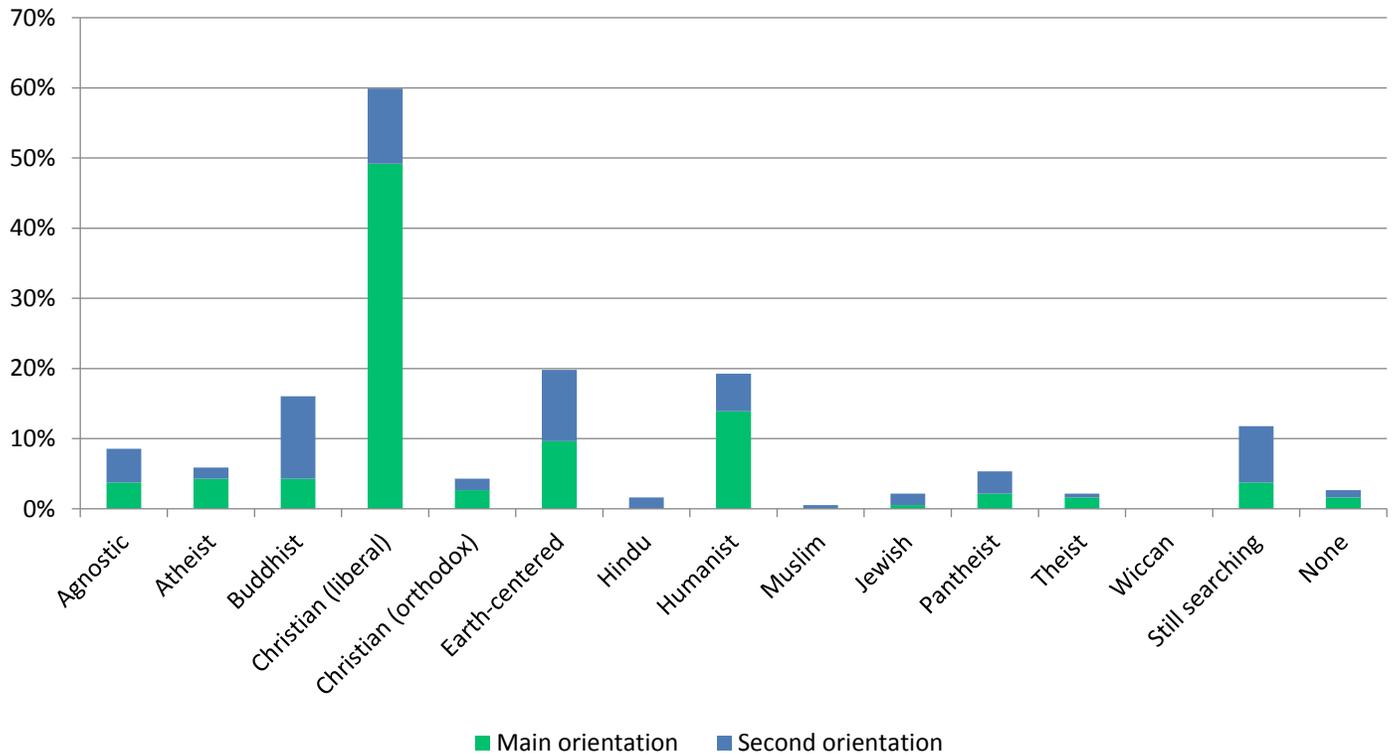
Unitarianism. I think there is a significant difference between the two. UU seems to adhere to more rules than Universalism which seems much more quietly accepting of people and their beliefs

orthodox catholic

New Age philosophies and Catholic at early age and through family background.

Atheism in my home, Cultural judaism around me, more traditional exposure via grandparents next to whom we lived

11. How would you describe your current religious tradition or orientation? Indicate your primary orientation in the first column. If you have an affinity with any other faith traditions, indicate the most important one of these in the second column.



Other faith tradition (please specify)

Buddhist

Only two choices? Come now!

I was a member of a Sufi community for over ten years, and teachings, practices, and awarenesses I gained during that time continue to inform my experience.

Transcendentalism

I'm sorry to say that I don't know enough about some of these labels to really be able to identify with them.

Also Buddhist

Also Christian and humanist

Note that if I had to identify a specific or traditional religious affiliation it would be Christian, but I have a hard time with some elements of the religion. I believe in God and I feel most close to God in nature, which is why I selected these.

[R checked several as "second": orthodox Christian; humanist; Jewish; pantheist]

I don't know what some of the above words mean, but I feel close to the world through nature and the people and animals around me.

I don't know what most of those words mean. I don't know the different between a liberal and orthodox christian, nor what a humanist, theist, pantheist or etc. is.

Quaker

Unitarian

I believe in the strength of community

I have always liked the Quaker tradition, but have not pursued a congregation.

Unitarian

Growing up in First Parish, none of those labels fit.

Yoga, Huna (ancient Hawaiian), Theosophy.

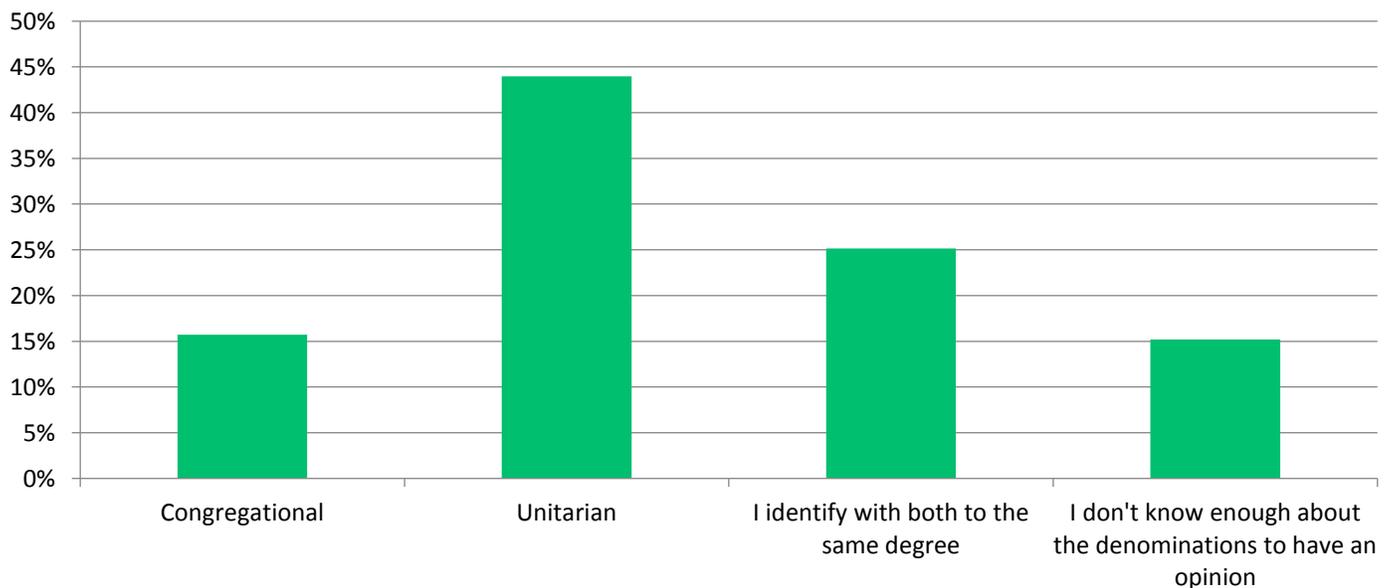
Lots of (westernized) Zen influence.

Unitarian Universalist, if anything

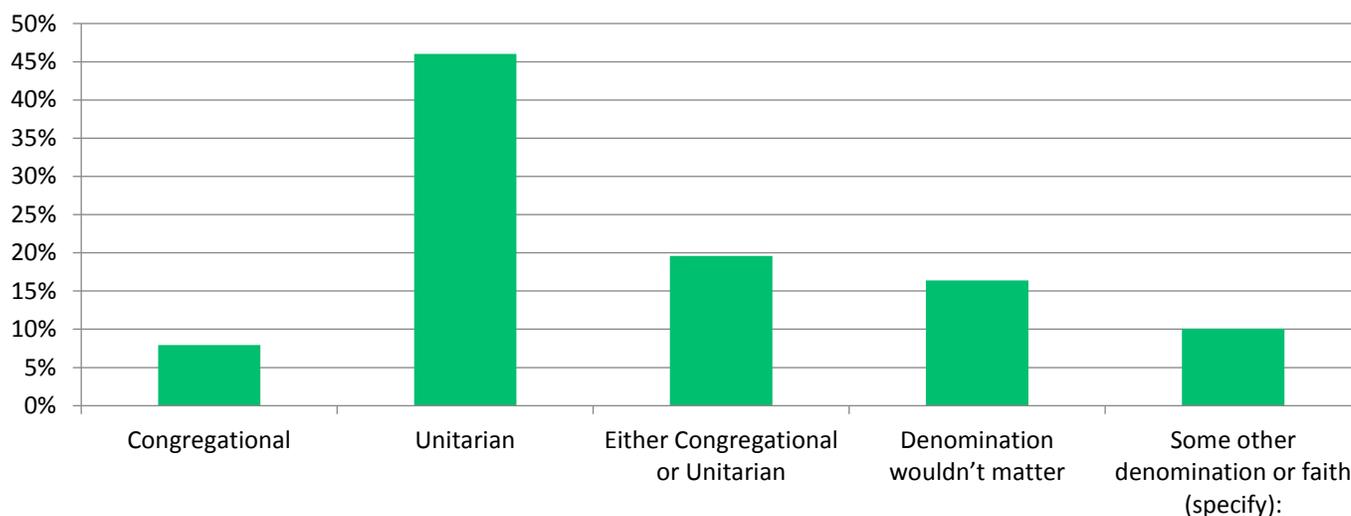
Pantheistic -- See Katharine Preston's book

Unitarian-Universalist. I don't consider it Christian because not believe in trinity. Christ not God which I think is definition of Christianity.

12. Lincoln's Congregational and Unitarian churches joined together in 1942 to form the First Parish in Lincoln, and we continue our institutional affiliation with both denominations. Which of these two denominations do you identify more closely with?



13.If you were seeking a new church, what denomination would you look for first?



Some other denomination or faith (specify):

It would really depend on the current leadership of the Church, I'm afraid.

Having done precisely this—actively shopped for congregations—I’ll speak from experience. Outside of my membership at FPL, for a year I was an active guest at a small UCC parish that was dedicated to social justice. I was very moved by how the teachings of Christ were actively manifest in the outward actions of the parishioners. This was a community that literally practiced what it preached-sweating its prayers through loving action. As much as I appreciated this expression of devotion, I was uncomfortable pledging my faith solely to Christ, and so I didn’t stay. I was also an active guest in Episcopal parishes for a number of years. I took this as an opportunity to return to the faith tradition of my youth and explore it as an adult. I appreciated that the Episcopal tradition has often been called a thinking person’s religious practice. The liturgy follows an regimented order and readings are determined by a strict calendar applying to all congregations. It’s not a practice of convenience. Nonetheless, there’s ample room for doubt, questions, and interpretation. There is also something moving about the fact that every Episcopal congregation is encountering the same lessons at the same time, each within its own context. For me, this created a bridge across differences and distances that I found to be moving—whether I connected with a reading or not, there was a kind of solidarity in this formality. I also appreciated that the Episcopal Church ordains women and gay ministers and also celebrates same sex marriages. Along with that, I appreciate how this tradition continues to wrestle with social issues so that it can continue to grow into its teachings. Having been an adult guest in two Episcopal parishes, I also know how leadership can make a big difference. Again, however, when I find myself in a setting that prioritizes making Christ my Lord and Savior, above all else, I become uncomfortable. Finally, I’ve also been an active guest at two other UU parishes. The first one I didn’t last that long at because the focus of its ministry, above all else and quite explicitly, was LGBTQIAA rights and concerns. While I consider myself an ally, I felt like something of an interloper in this congregation. Meanwhile, in another UU parish, while a guest over the course of a couple years, I was struck by a statement of faith that echoed through the religious Ed program as well as the services: I am a Unitarian Universalist. This statement of identity was very explicit, and to my ear, there was a tribalism about it that also left me feeling uncomfortable. I kept thinking, “show me what you do—don’t tell me who you are.” In the end, what attracts me is a community that embraces the teachings, not the teacher. And while I’ve studied and practiced Sufism, have Catholic in-laws, am aunt to three orthodox rabbis, and have spent time with Buddhist teachings and teachers, I am culturally a Christian—I celebrate Christian holidays, Christian hymns make me cry, and among all the masters, saints, and prophets, I have a soft spot for Jesus and Mary. Spiritual credos as evidence of membership, however, make me uncomfortable.

Catholic

I might seek a Quaker meeting or a Buddhist sitting

Anglican

FP convinces me that church as an institution is unworkable: people just don't care about community even if they say they do.

I really don't know. Having grown up in FPL, I really don't know what UUA or UCC is -- because it was always FPL and we didn't spend time trying to delineate differences -- until recently.

Episcopal, or First Parish

Quaker

Humanist

Episcopal

Buddhist

Congregational believes in God more than I do

Quaker

I am not certain. I happen to love First Parish and it is the people that matter the most to me.

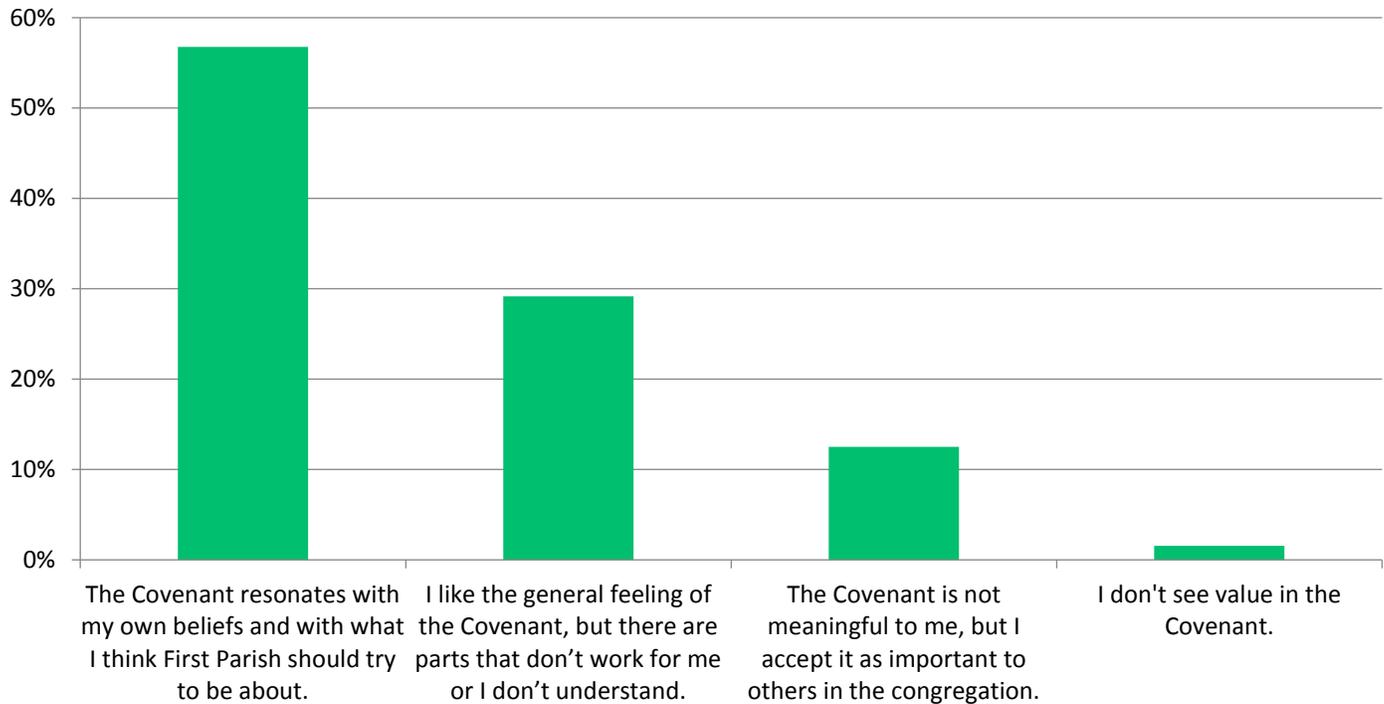
one just like fpl

First Parish is unique in that it really is it's own place, that doesn't operate within the denominational construct. To answer question #12, I would answer neither if given that option.

Truthfully, I would probably go back to the Roman Catholics, because I think they need me!

Episcopal - my faith of upbringing.

14. Each Sunday's service at First Parish includes our Covenant: "In the love of truth and the spirit of Jesus, we unite for the worship of God and the service of all." Which of the following statements comes closest to describing how you experience the Covenant.



Say more about your answer here, if you wish:

The Covenant resonates with my own beliefs and with what I think First Parish should try to be about.

God = spirit of life. I'm really OK with God but not sure our worship service really focuses on "the worship of God" per se. On second thought, God (or another name) loves me as I am and cares for me, comforts me like a warm blanket. This message comes from FPL.

For me, God is a good word for universal spirit or force which I feel can be used interchangeably but may not mean the same thing to everyone.

I find it very useful to maintain a focus on an idealized way of being human (= Jesus)

Love the covenant. Simple, straightforward.

--Of the 2 UCC phrases and 2 UUA phrases that we settled on, I heart is strongly with ONE OF EACH!!! "Spirit of Jesus" and "service of all"!

I feel this is the link between our two sides of the coin and it is the foundation of what the FP is and to which we should aim our activities.

... except for "the worship of God". However, I'm quite comfortable with "the spirit of Jesus".

It works for me, though I may interpret it differently from others.

for me "God" means the part of my brain/being that grounds me, surrounds me with love, and connects me to other beings and to nature

Does well in combining Congregational and Unitarian.

while I am completely comfortable with the wording, I am aware that some may balk at the words Jesus and God and I would hope that that would not deter them; I can't think of a different phrasing that would carry the content that I feel is important in the Covenant.

I accept our Covenant but I am not entirely sure how one can define "truth" or if everyone in our congregation would agree on what "truth" is. I sometimes question if the "truth" in our Covenant reflects a particular version that came from the Yankee forefathers of these two churches but may no longer apply to the present time (e.g., would the forefathers have agreed that the truth is that all people are created equal, including those of different skin color or sexual identity?)

I'd be very sorry to see the Covenant messed with. If it were scrapped, I'd seriously consider exiting. The 2 most important clauses for me are "the spirit of Jesus" and "the service of all."

I think it is dangerous, if not offensive, to take a statement that took years to craft and negotiate and reduce it into a multiple choice question.

"Truth" and "Jesus" have equal footing. I consider both to be of paramount importance to my spiritual practice. "Spirit" of Jesus welcomes us to engage with the New Testament without being born-again. As a congregation we are invited to "Unite," which feels very appropriate. "Worship of God" and "Service of All" are on equal footing. The idea that our two jobs on Sunday is to worship and serve feels right to me.

I like the general feeling of the Covenant, but there are parts that don't work for me or I don't understand

"Worship of God" implies a kind of god I don't subscribe to

I like calling in sacred space and asking in the Divine. Perhaps it could be less specific and more general by calling in the Christ Light. Divine White Light (can ad "of the highest God Vibration"). (then the question is if there are higher Divine Vibrations then God but we won't go there)

Would not word it "don't work for me or I don't understand." For me, I am in a different place in my spiritual journey.

I can't relate to "we unite for the worship of God", and what does "in the love of truth" mean? I like "the service of all" and I'm okay with the "spirit of Jesus", but I would prefer that it not be in there.

I don't know that my interpretation and the interpretation of others are the same, so not sure I could choose top choice and communicate accurately with whoever is interpreting this survey.

I believe we should try to outgrow the need for worship of a sentient, all-powerful God, though understand the value of the concept

I think of the spirit of Jesus as eliciting the qualities of kindness, compassion.etc that I mentioned above.

Given the diversity in the church, it's unfortunate to include "in the spirit of Jesus".

The Covenant in my opinion should refer to the universality of humanity and NOT to God

I'm not that into Jesus but I tolerate his presence

worship of God does not resonate for me. It leaves little room for my interpretation of the sacred. The other three statements I feel committed to.

Reference to Jesus is unfortunate and offensive.

I don't think of worship as relating to God

I don't really resonate with "worship of God" but the rest is fine

I would change "in the spirit of Jesus" to something less Christian with an emphasis on multiple prophets and great humanitarians - not just Jesus.

I don't believe in god and don't see why "the spirit of Jesus" should be limited to that one person. There are many other leaders who could and should be cited.

I am fine with the spirit of Jesus, and very fine with the service of all. God is my issue. I simply more like I am worshipping the universe, and whatever it took to create the human race

Mention of Jesus and worship of God do not work for me.

We could talk a lot more about "truth" and what that means to us. The rest of it is pretty clear to me. I don't personify God so much, but I think creation is awesome, so maybe that is equivalent to worshipping its Creator.

I struggle with "the spirit of Jesus" and would rather say in the "spirit of God". To me, Jesus was a holy man, but not at the same level with God and I do; 'nt believe he was the son of God.

I like Covenant just fine and I have to translate God as Spirit.

What is the spirit of Jesus? What is God? Why love of truth? In the love of the light which each of us has, we unite to share and grow our light with each other and bring it to bear in the service of others.

I am uncomfortable with the mention of Jesus, as I have trouble with the concept of a God

Do we actually "worship God"? Maybe in hymns. I don't quite connect to "worshipping God".

The Covenant is not meaningful to me, but I accept it as important to others in the congregation.

I resonate with 'the service of all'

I personally do not believe God is one being nor have a strong belief in Jesus.

I feel it is always a FPL struggle to figure out "where to fit Jesus in" I've accepted it as important to others, but it has never worked for me spiritually. I am grounded much more in the themes of community, nature, gratitude, compassion and humility.

Covenant feels restrictive & pedantic, especially "Jesus" and "God"

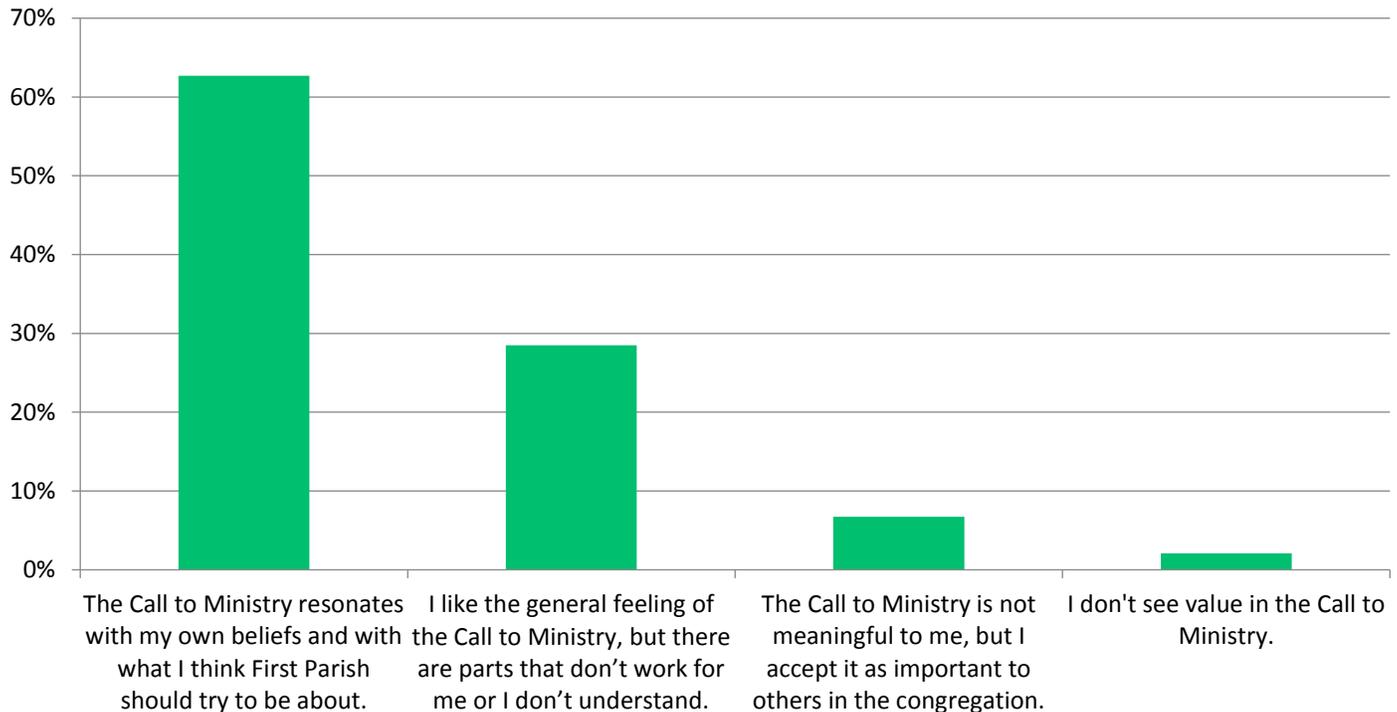
I think it's important to some, but I don't see our services as being oriented to "the worship of God", frankly.

I don't unite to worship God. I don't believe in God. I unite because I believe in the collective good of Humans.

I don't see value in the Covenant.

The covenant does not speak to me as I don't feel connected to Jesus/ Christianity and don't see the Unitarian part represented in it

15. Each Sunday's service includes our Call to Ministry: "We go forth from the worship of God to be faithful to the vision of Jesus, to affirm each person's dignity, and to cherish the living earth." Which of the following statements best describes how you experience the Call to Ministry.



Say more about your answer here, if you wish:

The Call to Ministry resonates with my own beliefs and with what I think First Parish should try to be about.

In order, from most important to me to least important to me are (1) cherish the living earth (2) affirm each person's dignity (3) to be faithful to the vision of Jesus and (4) worship of God.

Faithful is a very strong word for me and make me feel a bit pressured. I like to think that I exercise my faith by upholding many of Jesus' teachings in my day to day life.

Again the worship of God is about recognizing a universal spirit or force although it may not mean the same thing to everyone.

Continuously challenging (=good)

It is a tradition and seems fine with me.

"The vision of Jesus" isn't central to me beliefs but it no problem for me that it is in the Call.

I love it!

Yeah -- "spirit of Jesus" and "affirm each person's dignity" . . . I'm ALL IN on those.

This is the result of a Congregational process that started off as a change of the Covenant, but ended up as a call to ministry. I like it.

... except for "the worship of God". However, I'm quite comfortable with "the vision of Jesus".

I'm in between 1 and 2...the hedge is what Ministry means exactly...slight twinge of "you must minister" . that feels a little like you must...versus choice...

I still have to translate God as spirit, but i love last 3 lines

I'd also be very sorry to see the Call to Ministry messed with.

"Vision of Jesus" - again - Jesus is at the center of my spiritual practice so this feels appropriate. And "vision" feels right because I have a picture in my head of Jesus and that is all I can base my spiritual worship on. Plus, it steers away from a resurrection focus. Affirming dignity and cherishing the earth are also fundamental tenets of my spiritual practice.

Still a little reservation about "worshipping God". Love all the rest.

I like the general feeling of the Call to Ministry, but there are parts that don't work for me or I don't understand

To affirm each person's dignity, and to cherish the living earth resonates with me. I do not believe in being faithful to the vision of Jesus.

You can see I am working on God. It is an adventure, a spiritual journey full of surprises.

Today I am more in tune with Native American spirituality -- am learning new vocabulary to express my life journey and seeking.

I like saying the last two parts i.e., "to affirm each person's dignity and to cherish the living earth", but I can't relate at all to the first part. I like First Parish Concord's Benediction. "Go out into the world in peace Have courage. Hold onto what is good. Return to no person evil for evil. Strengthen the fainthearted. Support the weak. Help the suffering. Honor all beings."

See above comment [I believe we should try to outgrow the need for worship of a sentient, all-powerful God, though understand the value of the concept]

again, the Jesus stuff does not resonate. I Like the last part...to affirm each person's dignity and to cherish the living earth.

Again I feel it is very unfortunate to include "...to be faithful to the vision of Jesus"....that alienates me!

I consider attending the Sunday service an expression of our love of humanity but NOT worship

Affirm each person's dignity and Cherish the living earth are very important to me. I like stating those words out loud.

Again Christianity shouldn't be the central message.

Again it is the God word. Doesn't mean anything to me

same as prior answer [I don't really resonate with "worship of God" but the rest is fine]

My preference would be to take out the mention of Jesus in the Call to Ministry.

Same as above. [I don't believe in god and don't see why "the spirit of Jesus" should be limited to that one person. There are many other leaders who could and should be cited.]

Same issue re God, but the rest is fine, especially each person's dignity and cherish the living earth

Mention of Jesus and worship of God do not work for me.

The "worship of God" part is fuzzy to me, but I'm not bothered by it. The vision, affirmation and cherishing is all good!

see above [I struggle with "the spirit of Jesus" and would rather say in the "spirit of God". To me, Jesus was a holy man, but not at the same level with God and I do;'nt believe he was the son of God.]

Truthfully, being "faithful to the vision of Jesus" doesn't particularly resonate with me, but I love the rest.

Are we worshiping God? What is the vision of Jesus? We go forth from this moment together to be faithful to the light in our souls, to affirm the dignity and light of other people and the living earth which sustains us all.

The last two parts resonate with me.

Ditto [I am uncomfortable with the mention of Jesus, as I have trouble with the concept of a God]

The Call to Ministry is not meaningful to me, but I accept it as important to others in the congregation.

As previous I find this quite limiting.

Concord UU's is meaningful to me: "Go out into the world in peace, Have courage, Hold on to what is good, Strengthen The faint-hearted, Support the weak, Help the suffering, Honor all beings."

I like the ritual of repeating the call of ministry.

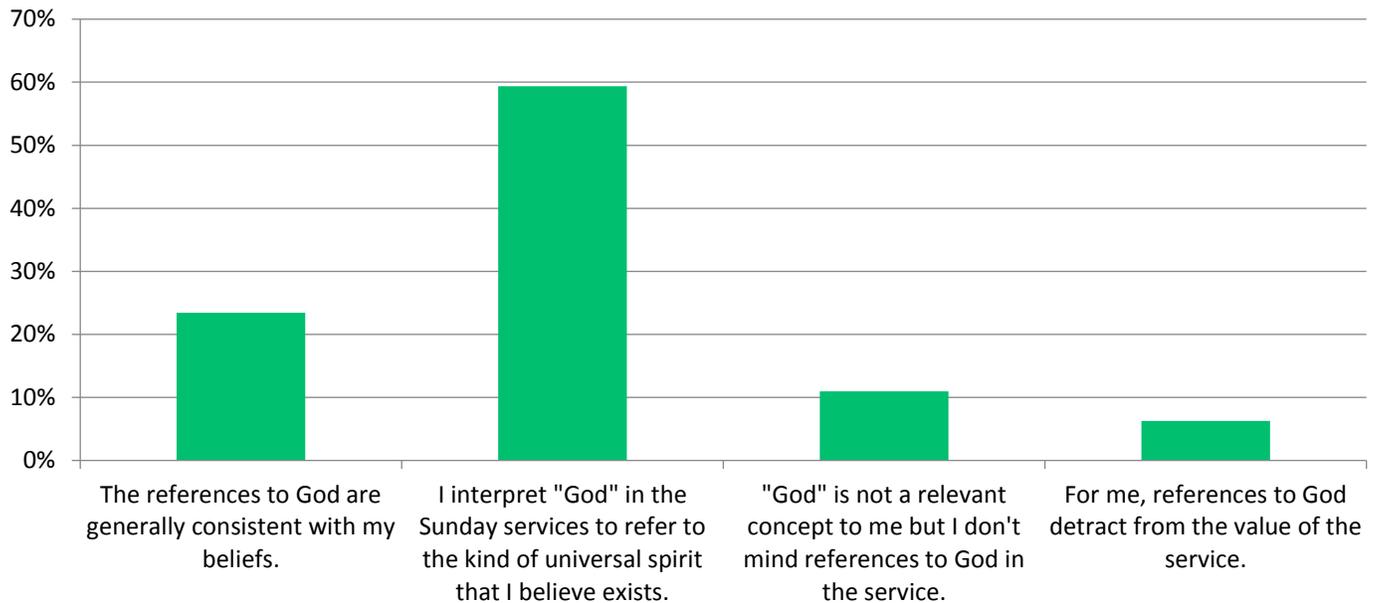
Call to Ministry feels restrictive & pedantic, especially "Jesus" and "God"

I don't see value in the Call to Ministry.

As mentioned above, the reference to Jesus does not work for me

Note: If a respondent said something like "same as prior comment," the prior comment is included in brackets.

16. The Sunday service often refers to "God." How do you feel about this?



Say more about your answer here, if you wish:

The references to God are generally consistent with my beliefs.

I see the use of the word "God" as a way for people to refer to the nature of reality as a whole.

For context, the use of gender archetypes in reference to God is more concerning to me than the concept of God itself. Perhaps that's why I gravitate to FPL's reverence for nature as a surrogate mother. But patriarchal references to God are not enough to dissuade my spiritual experience at FPL.

In sermons, prayers, etc., God is usually referenced in terms that make sense for me. The references in red-book hymns don't always work for me, but I like singing them anyway.

I think of God as a form of cosmic consciousness which exists in a realm beyond human understanding. My interpretation of this consciousness is that it manifests as benevolence and love. I believe it is possible for us to connect with this spirit in prayer, and to find solace in times of spiritual need.

I interpret "God" in the Sunday services to refer to the kind of universal spirit that I believe exists.

What comes immediately to mind when thinking about a universal spirit is the Appeal to the Great Spirit is a statue by Cyrus Dallin, located in front of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. It portrays a Native American on horseback facing skyward, his arms spread wide in a spiritual request to the Great Spirit.

In my experience, God is a generally accepted term for an almighty force, whether we believe it as Mother Earth, or anything else.

I equate "God" with sacred. I experience nature as sacred. Beauty as sacred. Great Art, literature reveal what is sacred and spiritually uplifting. Kindness and compassion are sacred acts. Justice is a sacrament.

I believe in a near-miraculous order to the real world, but not attributable to a God as prime mover, and sympathize with others' interpretations

God is everywhere and everything in my world view.

see previous answer, I think the feeling of a connection to God is wired into the human brain, like the love of music, dance, art. God is created by and inherent in the human experience

I don't think everyone in the congregation need share the same conception of God, but I would love more opportunities to hear about others' conceptions. I think there are many mysteries in the universe, but also feel that creation is fundamentally meaningful and intentional, not simply random or an accident.

I experience God as a loving force that is present everywhere in the universe.

We can't do without God terms--although it should be noted that God or Spirit or whatever should be understood as verbs, rather than nouns. I guess we could get rid of the G- word itself, but if we did I suspect our rhetoric would become tepid and forced.

I use "God" when talking with orthodox friends even though I'm quite certain their interpretation (one, all knowing, white robed, bearded, man) and mine (universal spirit) are different. "God" gets us on the same page. It's fine with me.

“God” is not a relevant concept to me but I don’t mind references to God in the service.

Increasingly I'm moving away from the concept of God, whether one or many. Perhaps God stories are simply manmade wish stories. To me they are attempts at explaining/defining the "good" in people.

"God" and "worship of God" have very little meaning to me -- BUT I know the spirit in which they are intended, so accept it easily.

I am on the fence between the answer I checked off and the one before it, re the kind of universal spirit

It wonder about using such an ambiguous term so apparently unambiguously. I feel bad when people use the term to justify ill purposes or force their beliefs on others. I'd rather there was another way but don't have a good suggestion. So I accept that for our purposes, it kind of means, "How I net out my answer to question 2." Because there are different answers for so many, I wouldn't want the God/no God distinction to become a barrier to coming together with others who ultimately have similar values and beliefs about their own spiritual journeys.

For me, references to God detract from the value of the service.

The Divine would be easier For me it becomes a problem when God is used in the context of a man on a throne in heaven. If it would be understood by all to be a crystalline field that we are all part of/connected to, then it would create a totally different energy in the room. Having to consciously block out the reference to God the man is work. It really prohibits getting to the essence of things.

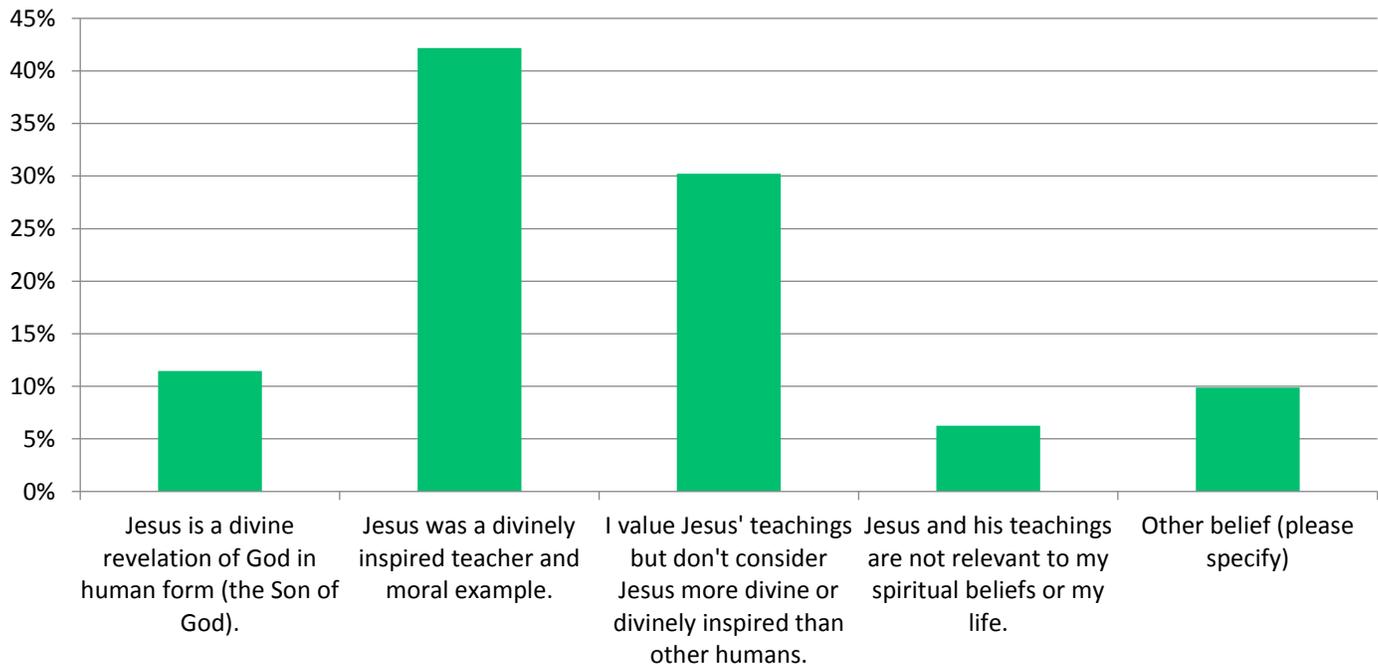
For me, it's not about God. It's about treating others with kindness and compassion, about forgiving and loving.

I am okay with „God“ if a higher existence and non Christian God is included

If by God we mean universal spirit, then simply say universal spirit.

Am particularly turned off by reciting of the Our Father during Sunday Service, even only on occasion - Fed this perspective back during era of a previous minister, and was told emphatically that that prayer was just part of our tradition (with implication that it would not be changed)

17. Which statement comes closest to your belief about Jesus?



Other belief (please specify)

I struggle with this--Raised Catholic, I see Jesus as the Son of God who lived a good life and led by example...but I don't quite understand/feel a sense of his "moral" example

I see religious belief as having evolved over millennia, and as having progressively become less "out there" or "up there" and more focused now on our present reality of the human experience.

I like Jesus but do not believe he is the son of God. Prophet like Buddha or Mohammad

Jesus' teachings are a moral guide to how to live. It is a wonderful guide. We should all live up the example.

Perhaps Jesus was more inspired than most others of his time, but not (in reality) "divinely" inspired by a God.

Believe this strongly, strongly -- AND thus can readily subscribe to the "vision of Jesus."

There are many Jesus's in our history and I hope in our future. I follow the teachings of Jesus - not Christ.

I don't believe Jesus was the son of God, nor do I think people's steadfast belief in this over the millennia has on balance helped the world more than hurt.

I believe Jesus is more than just an "inspired teacher," but not quite the literal "Son of God." Maybe a small "s" "son of God."

On the fence between answer #3, which I would have checked, and answer #2

all the above a different times

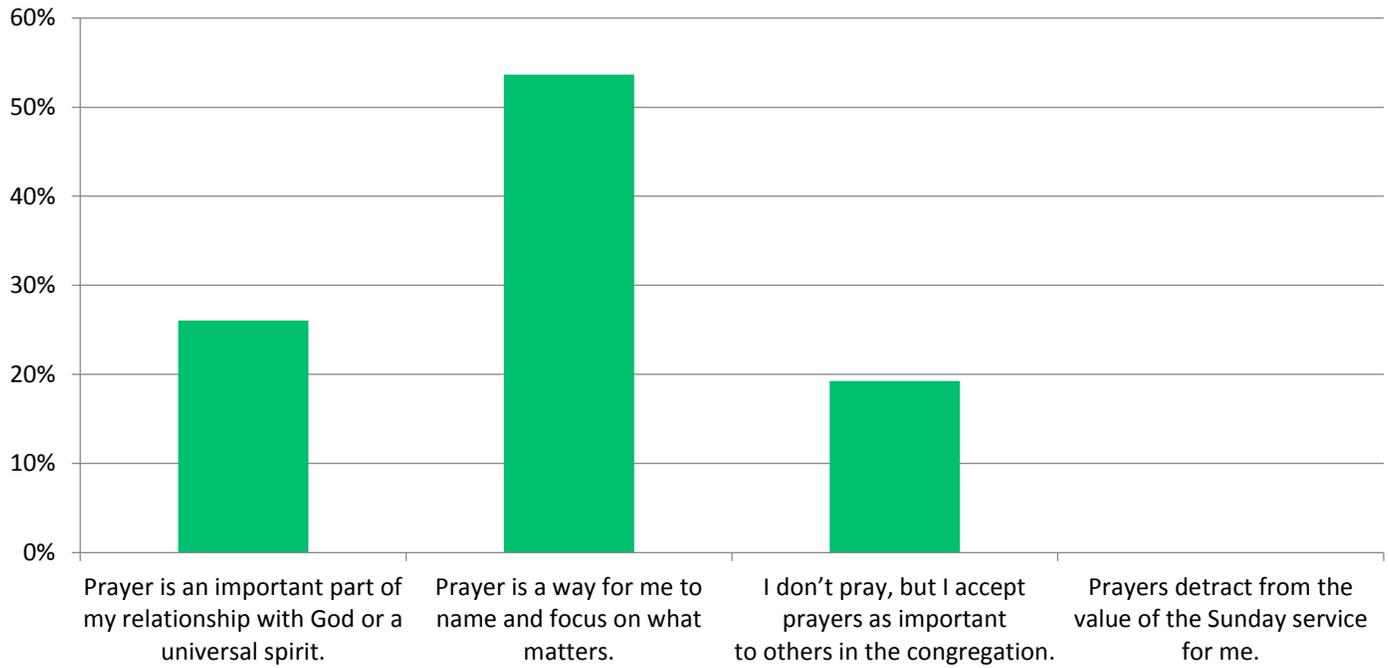
This turned out to be the toughest question, because I don't know what "divine" means. I waffled between the 2nd and 3rd options. I think about Jesus often, and have read/studied a lot of biblical and New Testament history in an effort to imagine what his thought and life were like. I do believe he was a human being like the rest of us, but what inspired him and his followers is one of those mysteries.

I believe that Jesus, Muhammad, Abraham, and Buddha are likely to have existed and contributed much to human spiritual development much as great philosophers or scientists have contributed to human development over time. I believe it helps to study their work and learn from it. In the case of Jesus, there is much that is relevant to me so I could not choose #4. Perhaps they were all divinely inspired. I reject using their work as the basis for forcing the resulting beliefs in their work onto the beliefs of others. As this has sadly been human practice for centuries, I prefer to avoid the whole concept about belief in Jesus.

I want to check both 2nd and 3rd responses. I think we are all divine, but maybe not all so divinely inspired.

I oscillate back and forth between one and two.

18. The Sunday service includes several types of prayers. Which of the following statements comes closest to your feeling about prayer in the Sunday service?



Say more about your answer here, if you wish:

Prayer is an important part of my relationship with God or a universal spirit.

I think prayer is very important. I think we all forgot how to really pray. It would be interesting to do a major focus on what prayer really is. The process naming, understanding, thanking the pain or an experience, then letting it go, then call in (not ask) that what you pray. Prayer is feeling. I think we lost that. This process is universal. And what a beautiful process. It's the moment between ending and beginning that holds the space for creation/prayer. I'm pretty sure most people are not aware of that. The entire religious year is based on that. The Buddhist focus on the moment between the in breath and out breath, same thing. Endings and beginnings big or small.

Sharing prayers - like sharing stories - gifts a part of ourselves to each other.

I would check the first two sentences if the program allowed.

My personal meditative reflections regarding spirit, the universe, and meta-connectivity could be considered personal prayerfulness - The concept of God is not something that resonates for me personally

I also resonate with the second choice.

Prayer and meditation are inter-related for me.

Prayer is a way for me to name and focus on what matters.

Grace before family meals is a cherished tradition: all hold hands, contributions from all attendees welcome. Focus on gratitude.

Open prayer time is a moving moment where individuals share their humanity and heartfelt concerns, and tears. V. powerful. The spoken prayers from the pulpit are amazing and speak to the depth of our members. It takes courage to put words to paper and get up in front of our community. I love to read those prayers and also know the person who delivered them. The Lenten Booklet is an amazing effort & for me, anticipated each year. Each contribution is a gift and so very much appreciated.

Prayer helps me focus on my spiritual needs and those of others.

I love the time of open prayer. It helps me to understand the struggles that people are going through. It helps the congregation come together. I love the Unison Prayer. It's very powerful to say out loud with everyone significant words. I love the lay leader's prayers. They are usually beautiful and poetic and focuses us the good in the world.

I love the Jane Goodall prayer. and the one by st. francis of asissi .

I am pretty horrified by what the Deacons/LayLeaders consider a worthy lay prayer (from the pulpit) these days. At best they might be an interesting rhetorical musing (with actual literary citations!!!); at worst they are personal vainglory and self-satisfying cameos. Really cringeworthy in a church; any church. --Can the Minister pls give a class, or at least a single training session on "leading the congregation in prayer"???

Removing the words "I, Me, Mine" from EVERYTHING?????

For me, it's very much like meditation.

I often am unsure whether I'm praying in conversation with a universal spirit or praying to remind myself of how I'd like to be.

I like minister and lay prayers. I love St. Francis and Jane Goodall. And prayers in Grey hymnal. Would like more variety in the unison prayer. Lords prayer still confusing. Our father who art in heaven especially.

When people in our congregation ask God to heal their sick nephew, I want to say "God can't make things happen, but God can suggest ways that you can support your sick nephew."

Both the silent and spoken parts of the prayer time are meaningful to me.

I do think a lot about the concept of prayer and what it means to me. Perhaps it's a way of getting in touch with my soul and its purpose. I'd like to further develop my thoughts on this.

My chosen response is a tie with the first choice.

I don't pray, but I accept prayers as important to others in the congregation.

I think prayer is useful for people to focus their minds and emotions, in community--a way of communicating with themselves and with each other.

Perhaps in some ways I sometimes pray, but not to a God.

I like hearing the prayers and they move me.

I like the silent meditation.

I think prayer is useful for people to focus their minds and emotions, in community--a way of communicating with themselves and with each other.

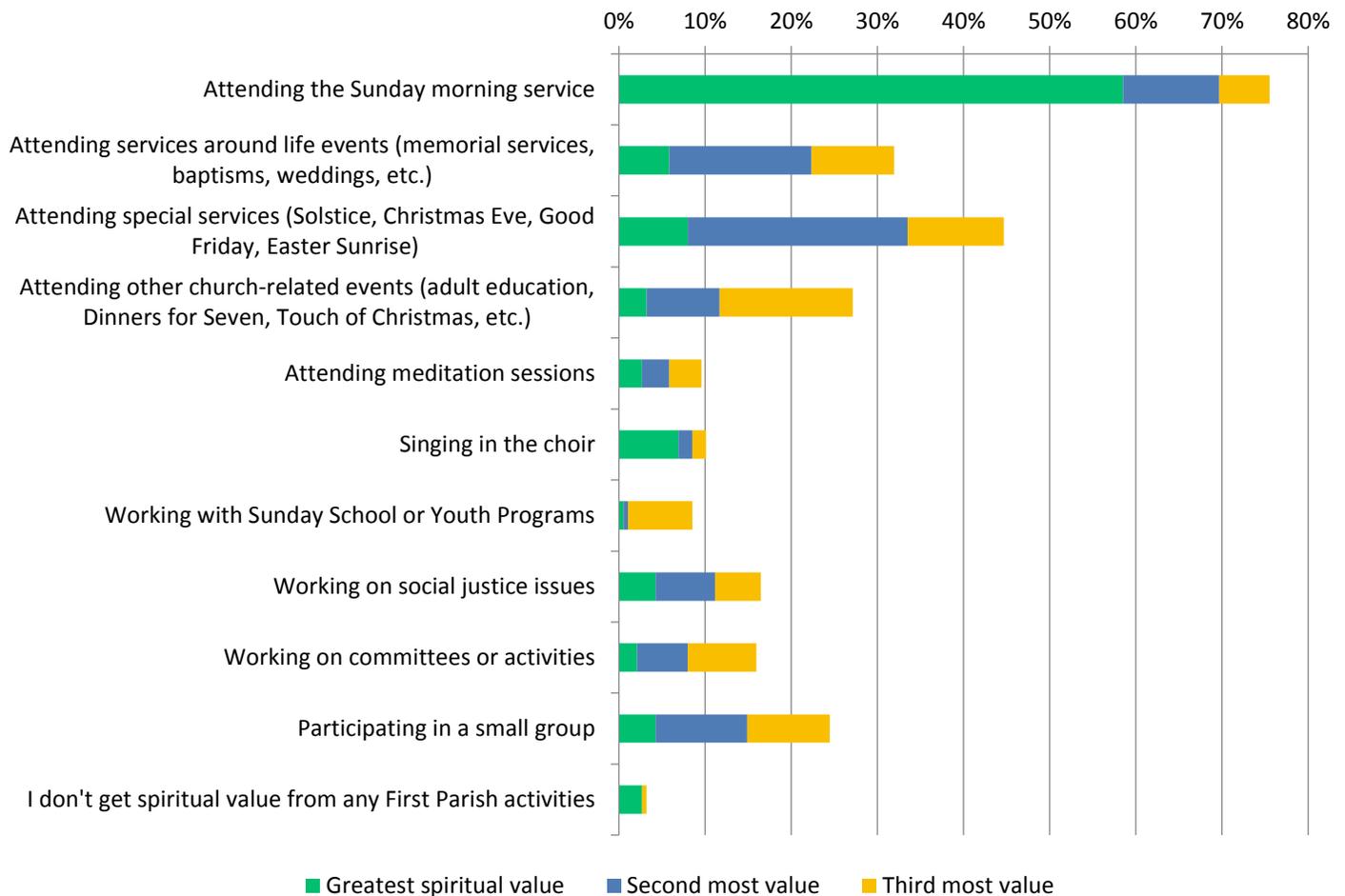
Perhaps in some ways I sometimes pray, but not to a God.

I like hearing the prayers and they move me.

I like the silent meditation.

Prayers detract from the value of the Sunday service for me (no comments)

19. Which one of the following First Parish activities has the most spiritual value for you? Which has the second most value for you? Third most?



Say more about your answer here, if you wish:

I've been absent from FP for quite some time but when I attended most regularly I enjoyed the sermons and the sense of community on Sunday mornings

I have been so busy these last two years I have not had time to attend church but hope to get back in the new year!

Life is very busy now and I attend church irregularly.

I think human community is important, and value the human community at First Parish, in most all of its manifestations.

Attending services is an intentional time set aside to come together in community. It provides a reset button. It fills my tank. It gives me things to think about outside of my daily, practical concerns. Though I "do just fine" on my own and I have a rich inner world, I recognize the value of practicing in community, listening, sharing, giving voice to, celebrating, grieving, wrestling with what it is to be human—in the company of others

I'm too shy, working on it.

I look to FPL as a spiritual guide helping me to look deeply at issues I may need to unpack -- i.e., conversations about racism. FPL is also a place where I can grow in so many new directions. It is not always easy to break in and share my voice - it can be an intimidating crowd sometimes.

I also feel spiritual value in adult and children's programs as well as social justice and other activities.

Given my young children (under 1 year and 4 years old) and the younger one's morning nap, both my spouse and I working full time, having no close family around to help us, and some other commitments that support our well-being, we have been unable to come to Sunday services recently and have not been as involved in the church as we would like to be. We are interested in other activities but there is simply not enough time right now.

I also value the Sunday services, but they are not a regular part of my life now.

I am ALWAYS looking for MORE spiritual value in Sunday services -- it's just 1 HOUR A WEEK, could be more intensely religious/spiritual?!

The available spirituality of the minister is the most valuable for me after the choir.

I used to be a part of almost all of these activities for many years -- now am unable but would still like to have Parish News - news about Church.

Since Manish left I have only been to church twice

I stepped away from First Parish for a personal reason, but I can say the Small Group has been a very important resource for me, and I have missed the sermons, being in a sacred space, prayers, silent time, and music of the Sunday services.

Not enough focus on role of Jesus as Christ and the Trinity

Ian's organ playing is very special to me.

Since the last minister left to whom we felt connected an interracial family with two colored adopted children we stopped going. We did not feel welcome and it seemed too non-diverse and narrow minded to us. Too white Christian if you want to put it that way...

this is not my way of thinking all aspects of services as the whole make up my enjoyment of our church

Sunday service is about it. I might say "social-justice work" too, except that valuable spiritual experience is of my own making, not FPL's.....

The section of social justice issues most important to me are environmental.

I like knowing FPL is there every Sunday morning, sometimes I attend regularly and sometimes I have family commitments on Sunday mornings. I like volunteering for short stints like May Market or Touch of Christmas.

The format only allows three choices, but I enjoy several others in no particular hierarchy.

The most spiritually rewarding parts of the Sunday service is a good sermon that challenges me to see or understand something differently and the music that we currently enjoy with Ian Watson at the helm.

I attend church more for the sense of community, so my answer really amounts to which three items give me the most "social value," not spiritual value.

Attending special services, church events and Small Group are all of equal spiritual value. To pick one over another would not reflect the value I hold for them all.

When children were younger, Youth Programs were the most important, and I volunteered and taught.

Regular, weekly practices have been very helpful for me. As I only recently joined a small group, I might have chosen another 3rd option, but I look forward to those meetings right now.

Touch of Christmas Fair is the most impactful FP connection for me and my family - Also enjoy volunteering and contributing to Fifty Families, as well as to the May Market

Men's group...nice connections, readings etc.

I'd like to also check Small Group and Meditation sessions as well as very important to my connection to the church

The Community of FPL (and the Town) is manna for my spirituality

Social justice is very important, but I ran out of dots.

I find the Christmas and Easter services to be very boring because they are based upon the same ritual stories, repeated over and over again--And the stories aren't even true!!!

By "social justice issues" I mean Outreach in a much more comprehensive sense than this questionnaire's excessively restrictive language implies--that is, charitable giving and volunteer work as well as social activism.

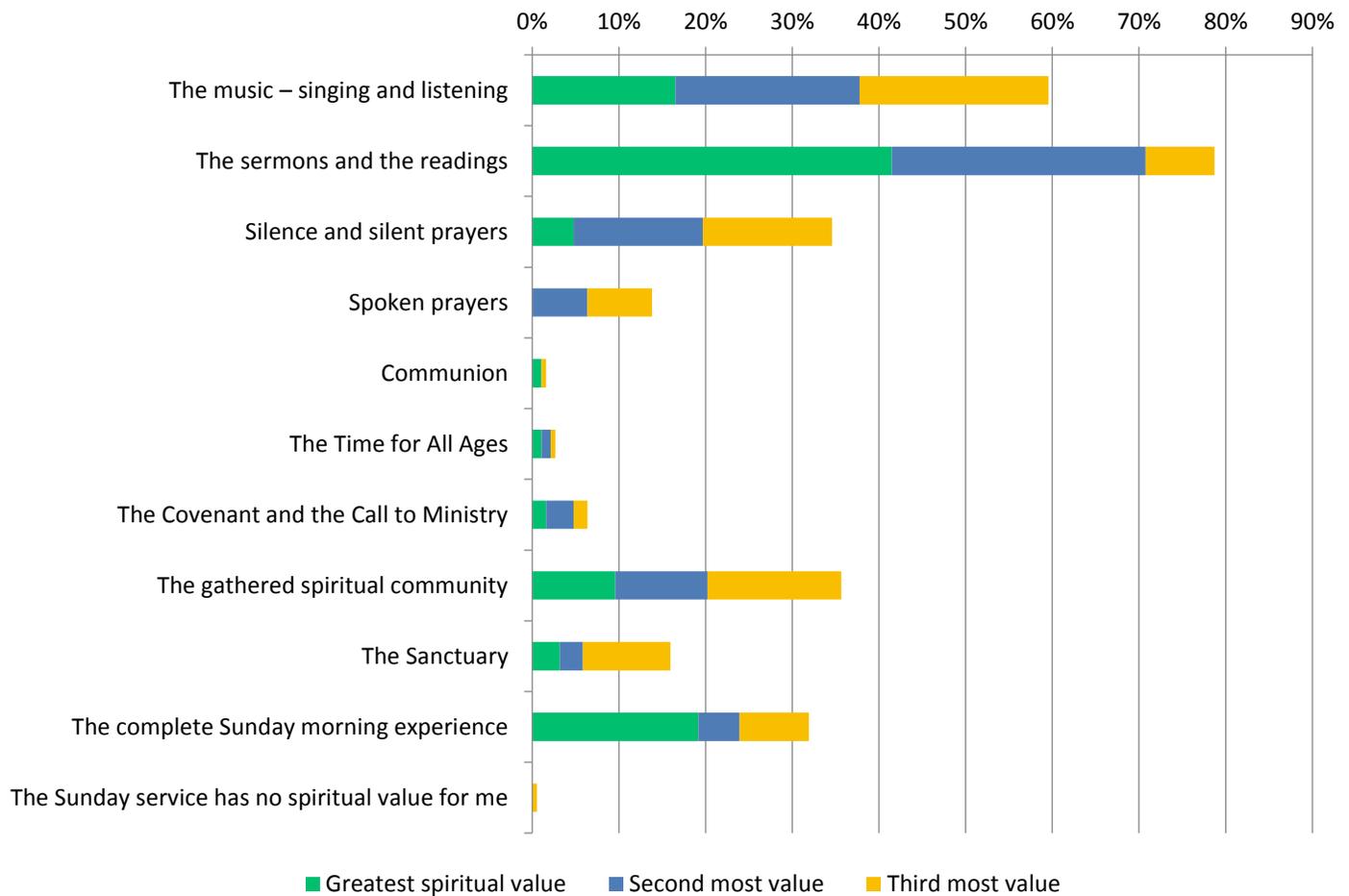
I like small group book discussions.

This question sets up, and forces, a false series of choices. I find almost all of these activities to be deeply meaningful at various times.

My kids have aged out of FPL, but I still feel my time in the Youth Programs was very spiritually rewarding.

Listening to the choir, the organ and singing hymns together is my second most valuable spiritual activity

20. Which one of the following elements of the Sunday morning service has the most spiritual value for you? Which has the second most spiritual value for you? Third most?



Say more about your answer here, if you wish:

These don't fit into a linear order for me

This was a difficult choice. Community is tied for 2nd.

giving to local charities programs that help.... homeless, drug addiction, mentoring programs for example see above [I'm too shy, working on it.]

I often struggle to attend church when I know there is communion, it is not my thing. A good sermon that makes me think really fulfills me. I treasure the three minutes of silence. Aside from analyzing through a critical lens to understand I do not get much out of religious readings.

I don't care for communion

I also feel spiritual during the prayer times and communion.

As you can see, so much of our service is meaningful to me.

4th would be the beauty of the sanctuary; 5th would be silence; 6th would be the gathered community.

I very much appreciate hearing from the many volunteers who invite others to join them. I don't often have the time but appreciate the value of giving that embodies the church community.

This is tough. Haven't been to many services since Roger left because Manish seemed to be a selfish nut. Used to like Roger's services generally.

The Sunday morning service and setting affirms the church as a gathered community so that "The complete Sunday morning experience " may best encompass my feelings. Sometimes it is music, sometimes a specific prayer, sometimes watching the mosaic of color behind the lectern from sun shining through the glass in the window.

I enjoy the complete Sunday Service and am glad that all the elements are included, but don't think of everything as spiritual.

These items are difficult to rank as they are all important and contribute to the overall spiritual value of the service

The church has less value to me than it has in the past, perhaps because it feels somewhat "lost" to me. I very much appreciated Manisch and his message, "we are all one".

spiritual community

It means a lot that there is silence within the service. Our world is so loud and rushed, we rarely sit with others in such a lovely space in silence.

I wonder if citing examples of others living out our covenant would be inspiring. We would notice but not be bragging!

"The complete Sunday morning experience" really says that all these individual pieces make up the important whole.

Same comment as question 20. For me the sanctuary and the members in the pews are very important ...

the whole Sunday experience is very valuable, can't really rank it to just three things

It depends on the week, of course! Sometimes I get impatient with others' spoken prayers, but then remind myself to be more open and less judgmental. I do like to sing along with hymns, but sometimes feel that the emphasis on musical performance values is a bit heavy, and I worry that it intimidates some members.

Community is as important as number 1 and 2. Communion is probably last.

The prayer time, the sanctuary with the clear windows bringing nature and rainbows into our worship service, and the gathered spiritual community are all very important parts of my spiritual experience.

The announcements at the start of the service are very informative, and when prayers from the congregation are especially heartfelt, this connects all of us in a special way.

All the listed elements are important to me in some degree.

The lengthy announcements detract from the service. Glad they're not on this list.

This is another question that forces a false and misleading series of choices.

Communion has no value to me in this form. The announcements are repeats of what is in the bulletin and they took 15 minutes today and most days. People left the service early because of the time pressure. can this change?

Music is equally as important as second and third choices.

21. What might enhance First Parish's spiritual value to you?

More summer services.

I really love everything about our Church....somehow if we could integrate the children in our church lives on Sunday this would add spiritual value. Maybe we could integrate their prayers in our Sunday morning as well?

Services later in the day.

not sure--Roger created something special that we/I was eager to experience; the minister who followed turned me off greatly; I've been uncomfortable returning since then and now so much time has passed I feel a little bit embarrassed about my delinquency...I also fear that I am not as liberal or politically left as I understand the community to have become and I wonder about whether my more moderate viewpoints will limit the feeling of being welcomed again.

Announcements are far too long... I come to church to feel moved and to take some time to feel, meditate and connect to my higher power (God) and it makes me so upset to have 10 people make announcements that are in the bulletin. Takes so much time away from the reason for attending.

If everyone as the service closes, would either move along to the Stearns room to socialize, or sit down and listen to Ian Watson's beautiful brilliant music!!! What a spiritual gift he brings! This is one of my major complaints of our service. Quiet has happened a few times and what a joy!

Less anxiety about the future wellbeing of the institution.

I love the Minister's sermons that focus on our history, roots, community issues, and our connections to the larger world we live in.

If FPL can continue to place an emphasis on the teachings, not the teacher—on actions versus status or title—on really living the words of the covenant—On encouraging self reflection —on making a spiritual life manifest through standing for justice and kindness and celebrating beauty in its many forms—I think that would be good.

Ministers who seek to provoke reflection on ethical dilemmas. Reference to sacred texts as well as other insights into spiritual concerns. Citing the wisdom of the sages of all religions and other ethical and spiritual writings. I read news and professional journals and novels -- I count on the sermon to provide insights of texts and thoughts I don't read on my own.

More activities around issues of the day where focus by FPL might make a difference.

for me it's sticking to the message of God, spirituality and being charitable (thinking of others). Please no references to local or national politics, topics such as climate change. It make me uncomfortable and takes me out of the zone. any other time great but not from 10:00 to 11:15 on Sundays, it my time off!

Bible reading Classes

To the extent the church seems like an extension of the Lincoln community, it pushes me away (as a non Lincoln person). To the extent it speaks to me and includes me as a member of the larger community, the spiritual values can be experienced more fully.

Greater diversity in our congregation--racially and socioeconomically

A more spiritual beginning to the Sunday service less of the town meeting announcement chatter.

For the ministers to describe the elements along their spiritual path... as Jenny has done. And come back to them from time to time. And to hear about paths other ministers have taken.

Turning to our neighbor during the service and wishing them peace.

I love Jenny. For me the most important element is the Minister.

More giving back, standing up, getting outside activities. Social justice work and volunteering.

Less is more

I continue to hope for a growing active commitment to social justice and peace. More genuine outreach that involves interaction with people from more diverse communities. In terms of Sunday mornings, I place a high value on our classical church music tradition, but I have loved other musics (gospel, bluegrass, American songbook) that seem to engage members more fully.

Pictures of members & their families with names. New name tags -- they are a bit tired.

If it becomes more of a gathering place that truly hold sacred space and that it is seen and used by all as that. Sacred space that includes but goes beyond the teachings of Jesus. Perhaps more universal. By calling in the Christ light it would already be less specific and broader

Recognition of my presence by professional ministerial leaders.

I am also a 50 year member of the Wellesley Congregational church. Though my faith is in motion, I value both churches.

Additional short-term, small-group justice projects/activities

A less LAY exercise . . . cut completely the lay leader prayers, which are now lectures, essays, stories, personal stories with readings! Ugh, ugh, ugh! Make all prayers actual prayers, keep personalities OUT.

If I could have some communication.

If the power base were opened up and a new set of folks were listened to, heard, and respected.

I would enjoy ways to get together with other working women who would like to have a part in the church. I feel guilty when I can't join activities due to work commitments. This is a tough one because part of the reason we don't volunteer is time constraints and part is needing to recharge in our free time! But I genuinely love our church and am thinking more and more that I would like to seek ways to be a part, even if modestly. Some of the volunteers are so generous and kind that it seems a bit overwhelming to give only tiny doses of time!

I think it is a lot to ask the Minister to preach every Sunday. I am fine with having guest preachers - lay people or ordained people. But sermons are the most important element of our church time . A time to reflect on the world around us - making sense of the world and injustice and to be buoyed by writings and perspectives that help us make meaning and progress. I love Jenny's sermons as much as Roger's because they touch on what is troubling today. They connect us to the world, offer us food for thought, beauty, and the words of poets.

Once the kids are a little older I'd like to attend more adult ed

Clear focus on, guidance and commitment to Christian values and leadership rooted in those values

Members sending their children to public schools instead of private schools. Congregational was also about community, but buying your children and yourselves education and other experiences outside of the community is not spiritual or community focused. This one aspect alienated us as much as Manish's egomania.

The First Parish is a wonderful church, and it was great when my children went to Sunday school there. Unfortunately, on Sunday's I am away or have other commitments, liking hiking or skiing.

I would like to engage more in understanding spiritual teachings. This is an offering that I have not taken advantage of -- I'm glad that we have things like this now.

Less overtly Christian content

Small group discussions on readings with a spiritual focus or faith issues. Sunday morning service.

Classes about spiritual writings.

Right now it is fine. There have been difficult times in the past when I or my family could have used more outreach or pastoral care. There was little effort to connect. I do not feel that way at the present.

Occasional varied worship services either on Sunday or at another time. eg. service like the Alt-worship that RL and others held several times a few years ago. Or an all buddhist or hindu service, or muslim service. Or a group visit to a muslim service. Occasional discussions of different kinds of spirituality, led by minister or interns.

Fewer long announcements from the floor in the Sunday service!

Hard to improve - so many good things already, more than I can take advantage of.

I'm not sure.

Not sure. The experience works very well for me. Maybe a few more guest sermonists?

A new Minister, focusing more on Unitarian aspects, become more modern and inclusive

I love some of the new programming that offers more opportunities for someone who is gone on weekends or does not have daylight hours to sit in a pew.

More use of readings from other spiritual models: Mohammed, Ghandi, Dalai Lama ...

good sermons

Eliminate announcements...it is long and very distracting. I want to enter the sanctuary and have my experience be ONLY about spirituality. Announcements should be in the bulletin, or made afterwards during coffee hour.

I'm not really sure

More spirit. A LOT more. All spirit, all the time, for just an hour on Sunday!!!

More community involvement by the whole congregation. The focus should not be on "me", but on the community, the nation, and especially the world around us!

Possibly discussions/sermons by notable humanists

Create/offer more options to align with peoples time/ schedule and attention.

I would like to see more family/intergenerational experiences and more hands on justice activities.

a mid week service

Don't have any ideas

Neighboring faiths should be for all members, not just children.

If I were able to participate more often than I do. I intend to make that happen over time.

I enjoy very much and feel comfortable about what the church does. I like the multi cultural and faith parts of it and the focus on nature.

Less focus on Jesus; more on all the world's religions.

More opportunities to discuss and share topics of spirituality, perhaps facilitated, perhaps not. Although I enjoy getting to know others in the congregation so we can share our experiences, I become less interested when it feels more like a social club than a community that is truly on a spiritual journey. Remember those conversations in college?

It's important to me to have a spiritual sangha of like-minded people who want to do deep work through reading and discussing books written by contemporary teachers writing on spirituality, death and dying, enlightenment, practicing presence etc.

I have no idea!

More "Adult education"

Great sermons. Roger did them. Jenny is doing them. Manish fell short.

Not so much pressure to volunteer. More music.

I'm extremely satisfied...its my home

I'd like some more direct exploration of what spirituality is, as distinct from religious doctrine. How do humans experience and nurture their spirituality? Sermons, adult ed, perhaps other activities might explore this./

looking forward to attending more group discussions and discussions with the minister as have started this year, new adult ed program is a big plus, also very much enjoy the meditation sessions

Shorter introduction and announcements.

I find that the combined Congregational and Unitarian denominations bifurcate the experience for me. I would much prefer that we be exclusively a Unitarian church.

Perhaps, more opportunity to discuss personal moral dilemmas with fellow parishioners. I would like to better understand the values that fellow parishioners hold, and how they think they are living them (or living up to them). The questions raised in Listening Circles felt like a start on that, but could go further.

More services in Summer

Less inclusion and reference to God, Jesus, and readings from the Bible during all Services - Less reference to prescriptive religious traditions and language in general, including some of the more traditional hymns

The thoughtfulness and challenges of the sermons are of greatest value to me.

More obvious mission in, and engagement with the community outside FPL.

Consider alternate time for worship...when younger can attend

i'm happy with my experience as is

Maximize the Community spirit and curb the growing Clubiness

I love the First Parish.

I wish that we had a group to discuss our profound questions and mysteries of the human spirit. Jenny has given some sermons recently that have touched me deeply and opened some of these issues, such as belonging, coming together with open acceptance of all human beings, no matter what their class, their burdens, skin color or outward personalities may be.

Our call to ministry includes the words "cherish the living earth". With the effects of global warming, our "living earth" is facing a crisis. I am hoping that when we call a new minister, that he or she will have as the highest priority "saving our living earth". We need an activist minister who can lead this crusade.

More opportunity for meditation

A brainy, compassionate, committed settled minister. Such a person will be way more important in congealing our collective identity than umpteen preparatory discussions of our identity etc.

I would be happy to see more intentional efforts to understand the ways in which we can take our faith into our homes and workplaces--how can we lead lives that better reflect our best selves?

A minister who gives good sermons. A church community that figures out creative ways to connect its congregants with each other in some kind of a spiritual dialogue.

I value a minister with a deep spiritual commitment including a belief that our human spirit lives on after death, that miracles can and do happen, and that we are each born with a divine spark that connects us to each other and in fact to all of life.

Increased number of young families present. Greater connection to the life of the town.

More adult education on various religious traditions, the historical Bible, the life of Jesus and other figures in the Bible like saints and prophets,

I'd like to be challenged, inspired. I feel burdened, not comforted by the weight of tradition. Too much 19th century. Too much old German music or post Civil War hymns. Occasionally it's pleasant to revisit the old ways and sing the old

songs - on Christmas Eve or Easter maybe. I feel nostalgia for my small-town grandparents, but it doesn't enhance my spirituality or my relationship to Life, the Earth, the Universe, to Time.

Finding ways to incorporate the ideas into more transportable pieces - podcasts to listen to, music, poetry, etc.

22. What else would you like to say about spirituality in your life? What moves your soul that we haven't touched on?

quiet reflection and peaceful enjoyment of being within a community of caring souls...perhaps it's meditation or a period of quiet among others to rebalance our lives together in a hectic and violent world...this is what I miss about attending service on Sunday mornings

I think of religion as a human creation to acknowledge what we share in common as human beings and members of a human community--in a way that's universal, that transcends families and individual and work communities. It's an important part of being human, being in touch with others, and open to others, and concerned about others.

Thank you for putting this survey together. Hopefully, we can all benefit from our soulful communication! God bless.

FPL is fantastic under Roger in the past and Jenny in the present. My dilemma is determining why our services do not fulfill the spiritual longings of the next generation. I am willing to alter FPL's services to attract the young, to allow survival of this noble institution.

The challenge for me is self doubt, and finding places where I might pitch in and make a difference. To me indifference and apathy are the greatest of sins.

My greatest feeling of connection is through the East Indian religious sculpture that I study and collect in photos. It thrills me.

Fasting and quietness of the spirit

Giving to others

The basic human need to create fictive stories to explain and comfort the our daily angst.

Each family is different but in mine, as a child, my father came to my bedside each night to say my prayers. But he hardly ever went to church.

Being able to have a place in my life where spirituality is accepted.

Doing moves my soul. It is harder to move my soul sitting within the confines of four walls.

Nature

Nature and animals.

As I once said to Terry when she asked me this question, it's hard to think of an area of life that is not touched by spirituality. Though my spiritual practice is not systematic, my soul is very frequently moved -- by nature, by music, by stirring ideas and words, by interaction with others (sharing joys and cares), by the beauty of animals and children, by the awed sense of being a tiny part of it all.

Being in nature.

Grew up with parents from both traditions. Didn't talk much about exactly what being a Unitarian or Congregationalist MEANT -- they modeled what being part of a church community meant. Action spoke louder than words. "Church" was, however, big conversation around table -- whatever issues were of the day.

As a community with lots of scientists it would be interesting to find a common ground between science and the Divine. Studies done on mediation, exploration of quantum field etc. Also focus on the feminine more. What if Maria was really a very educated very spiritual and enlightened person.... What if she was a high priestess. The voice of the feminine was likely silenced by the Romans.

Children are a gift of God (or universal force). They have been undervalued (particularly by the ministers) during the decades that I've been a member of this church. There is no long term recognition of the children, especially as they transition through the stages of life.

Small group use of ritual to honor what needs to be healed and where each individual is in their life at that time.

Since my wife died about 4 years ago, I have a new partner and we are working out how to address this.

-Regular reading of significant works of poetry -Reading aloud with family and friends -Communion ritual at church
Thank you for this well-constructed survey. Hope it yields --

Please LAY IT ON on Sundays; we ARE a church! 60 minutes a week won't kill anyone!

An opportunity to make meaningful contact with people whose lives I care about over time.

Nothing more to add.

I like learning stories of other parishioners- Tucker's sip and share last spring was a real highlight. In a short time we learned so much about each other. By the way- Tucker is simply amazing!

I do love the choir and Ian Watson's extraordinary talent (even though it is not among my most important priorities. I cannot imagine not having the talent we have come to with Ian.

Beach walks, or on the mountains skiing.

Community is so important. The way that a community can care for those in need even when they don't know that person well. I value that so much.

What "moves my soul" is the commitment to "affirm each person's dignity and to cherish the living earth." While we all may falter in these efforts, the First Parish is really trying to work towards those goals, and that means a lot to me.

Poetry and nature move my soul. As one of the aging boomers, I think we are reluctant to think and talk about spirituality since it brings us face to face with our mortality. And why focus on that a lot ? ...!

This survey is quite thorough - nothing to add.

My "soul" is awake and alive. People, nature, simply being, treasuring all that "lives", that exists, the inter-connectedness of life and death, the wonder and magic of it all... the universe, the universes, the black holes. I find it "wonder-full", amazing.

Spirituality is mostly about love for me -- love the congregation, the experience of the holy in the beloved FPL.

Nature!

Amazing things in nature: the whales who know human's thoughts, leaves of each bush and tree which have their own configuration, How trees grow in different ways depending on their location, butterflies flying to Mexico, hummingbirds flying to South America, ...

being inspired by immersion with others who believe in goodness, contributing to the welfare of the community and the world, and a positive attitude about the world

I am filled with joy and gratitude for the community of this Church. So many people have given of themselves to make it the warm, welcoming loving community that it is and I would like them all to know how very much it is appreciated. In addition - how beautiful is the view from the Stearns Room.

I wish I could express my thoughts better

I am moved deeply by direct human-justice work -- hands-on, person-to-person, intervening justice work. Am NOT moved so much (or at all) by loose social service -- marches, climate work, energy conservation, food conservation, etc. To be clear: I DO all these things -- but they are not my SPIRITUAL work.

As perhaps can be surmised from my responses, the feeling of community

Allow for deeper self awareness. Through the subjective we can learn so much about our true selves and through this understanding deepen our spiritual growth in service to our own selfish needs.

Spending time in nature.

more opportunities for spiritual outdoor activities

The natural world

Spirituality is an often neglected part of my life throughout the week. I cherish the time on Sunday mornings to get re-centered and connect with our local community. I value First Parish as a community church that does outreach to connect with and help other communities but also takes care of its own local members.

People (employees and members) are very considerate and kind to each other. I would like to see the church continue its focus on the out of doors and climate change. I was deeply impressed by how the church handled the bad fit with Manish. People were honest but very respectful.

Personally, I would like to have greater connection to the natural world, human nature and the ties between them. The practice of yoga and meditation often does more for me spiritually as an individual, but I would miss being on a spiritual journey without the sense of community that we enjoy at First Parish.

I find meditation and my connection to nature very important to me.

Though my answers above would not suggest it, the music program is extremely important. I see it as greatly enhancing the community aspects of the church, which I value highly, and certainly also the spiritual aspects, which also have value for me, but just not as much.

Community is important to me. I like other people to feel happy and have a sense of belonging.

it comes and goes but doesn't disappoint me. When I need it, it is there.

Most of my personal experiences that I think of as spiritual occur in nature -- the "awe and wonder" experiences. But when I think in terms of what makes my soul happy, it's often family or community.

FPL helps me explore the language of spirituality and marvel at the big concepts: the universe exists and in us is conscious and aware of its existence, what does the human experience mean? Doing this without resorting to dogma in the presence of other people is very powerful, and I am grateful that this church exists.

Respect First Parish's non-denominational heritage.

I have a personal exploration of spirituality but enjoy hearing new perspectives and approaches to spirituality. I appreciate the combination of Unitarian and Congregational backgrounds. As I like to say, I appreciate the openness and liberalness of Unitarian and the Christian traditions of Congregational so Christmas feels like Christmas and Easter feels like Easter. Children's Christmas Eve service and the pageant are my favorite things at church. Value of religious education for children is also very important.

It is important to me to gather with others to consider life from a spiritual standpoint supported by a variety of intellectual, societal, and cultural perspectives. It takes me beyond my own day-to-day and orients me to the wider community and world.

Good questions; I will have to think about them.

Of value to me: -friendships made and nurtured at FP -sense of community and support for those within it

Nature. I am part Zoroastrian

Would be more motivated to attend Sunday Services if there was more opportunity for community connection during the service itself, as opposed to having to stay afterwards and spend more time at church - Sunday Service entails a lot of sitting and being talked at, as opposed to spiritual leaders calling up the inherent wisdom of the congregation in order to encourage and facilitate a collective learning & connecting experience for all, in the Sanctuary in real time during Sunday Service

glorious moments in the out-of-doors, lakes and mountains. an act of love, thoughtfulness, or kindness witnessed or received.

Contributing to a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world gives me spiritual sustenance.

I love the caring community, the spiritual readings, the breadth of intellectual, readings, environment, justice, traditional passages, poems, real world linkage to spirituality... bring back a young family feeder like the Lincoln nursery school... Maybe events activities for 35-59 age groups...single married other...

The universality of God and the personification of God in all natural things and places allows spirituality to be present whenever we are in Nature. FPL praises that, but it is noticeably absent in this survey. I believe that, for many in this Town, Nature IS where we find God. FPL as a community and as an institution is a place that can confirm, challenge and provide social adhesion to spirituality. Thank You for that.

About 30 years ago I had a "peak experience", a spiritual awakening that changed my life in significant ways. I yearn to have this connection with God and my own essence, to live with gratitude, awake and fully alive. For me, Brother David Steindl-Rast, a Benedictine monk that I studied with, is my inspiration. What moves my soul is to be open to small blessings... watching the changing shapes of clouds, noticing tiny red berries in the moss along a trail, hearing someone tell a touching story, opening my bedroom shade to see two swans lift their wings and fly over the pond, letting tears flow as I listen to our choir singing, giving and receiving hugs, having a deep and open conversation, sharing grief and gladness, laughing with my husband.

Jesus has been a role model for me. His teachings have inspired me to become the best person I can be.

First Parish is an important part of my spirituality. Keep up the good work.

What moves my soul, such as it is: The beauty of the historic town center with its iconic church building and surrounding fields.

family, home, companionship, nature, health (or the lack thereof), and the sense of tasks and duties faithfully performed (or not).

I am moved by tradition, not as a sense of do's and don'ts, but as a sense of continuity and inheritance.

Cherish the living earth is an important part of my spiritual life. I feel very proud of the green initiative at FPL and feel we need to continue thinking about climate change and how it is a social justice issue.

Humility in mankind that recognizes the spirituality of all things, not just people and animals, but flora as well. I myself have not quite evolved to embrace the spirit of (to me) inanimate objects such as rocks and mountains and rivers, but I aspire to get there as many Indigenous people already do. Always leave room for mystery. And Openess. There is so much we do not know!

"Spirituality" is attached to community actions and values. There is a kindness and collaboration to this church, but not enough connection to the community. I find Mary Oliver's work insipid and more frequently part of the service than I'd like.

The lay prayers are very important to me and the prayers from the minister. I love listening again to the sermons online.

The idea of community is sacred - sharing the space with others is such an important part of spirituality.