

Unity Church of Hawaii

3608 Diamond Head Circle

Honolulu, HI 96815

Opinion Survey Report

Survey Sent Out in July, 2005

to Members and Friends

of Unity Church of Hawaii

Conducted by:

Communications Committee

For the Board of Trustees

August, 2005

Opinion Survey Summary

The opinion survey was brought up for consideration by the board because it was evident there had been a lot of transition that occurred during the past year with the minister, the staff, and the congregation itself. Even before the church knew of Rev Andersen's departure, the board wanted to determine how members were feeling, so that appropriate priorities and actions could be undertaken by the board and minister. After Reverend Andersen's decision, it became more important that the survey be conducted.

Shortly thereafter, the MMRT process was also announced, and this process also provides the opportunity for the church to be assessed. While it was anticipated that a plan of action for future development and improvement was to come out of the MMRT process, the survey provides an additional opportunity for us as a board to assess our own situation. It is significant to note that the survey findings are being presented before the MMRT report has been received.

The survey was mailed to a mailing list of some 2000 names. It included people who were members of the church (250-350) and others who may have had a more casual acquaintance with the church, but were added and maintained on the mailing list. The total return on the survey was 73, which represented about a 3.5% return on the broader mailing list, but perhaps a much higher percentage of the actual members. Of significance, some people commented that they had not received the survey form with the newsletter in the mail. Some picked up copies in the office.

It could not be determined with statistical certainty that these results can be extrapolated to the entire mailing list or to the members. It does represent the views of over 70 individuals or families who took the time to complete the survey. We requested that respondents indicate their length of affiliation with the church, so that different patterns might be detected. Over half of the respondents have been with the church more than 10 years. About a quarter have been with the church between 3 and 10 years, and less than 15% who answered have been with the church less than 3 years.

The most interested group in terms of number of responses to the survey were the longer time members of the church. Because of the small numbers, it was difficult to conclude meaningful differences between the different groups, although the data has been tabulated in this way.

There were several objectives in developing the survey format. We wanted to know several things.

- How have members opinions changed over the past year in general and in specific areas?
- How do members' views influence the degree to which they participated in church activities and how do they feel right now?
- What things would be influential in bringing them back to greater participation and support of the church?

- What should the church particularly focus its attention on during the next year?
- What are the most important attributes church members are seeking in a new minister?

Current Views of Past Year

Q.1 What are your views regarding changes that have taken place in the following areas during the past year?

Response options included “greatly improved”, “somewhat improved”, “no change”, “somewhat worse”, “”much worse”. There were 12 areas where responses were requested, including an overall view of Unity regarding all changes.

Only 2% of respondents felt that Unity had greatly improved, while 16% felt Unity had gotten much worse. About one third felt there was no change. The overall view, however, favored the worsening side, where 44% said things had gotten worse vs. 24% who said they had gotten better.

On the positive side, more favorable vs. unfavorable responses were received in the following areas:

Campus and Buildings -	64% favorable vs. 28% unfavorable
Church Friendliness -	32% favorable vs. 13% unfavorable
Community Outreach -	32% favorable vs. 27% unfavorable
Board Leadership -	33% favorable vs. 29% unfavorable

On the unfavorable side, more unfavorable vs. favorable responses were received in the following areas:

Financial Status -	66% unfavorable vs. 14% favorable
Stability of the Church -	56% unfavorable vs. 18% favorable
Ministerial Leadership -	50% unfavorable vs. 17% favorable
Church Moving Forward -	53% unfavorable vs. 27% favorable

The remaining areas were more in the middle of the opinion range as follows:

Communications -	42% unfavorable vs 27% favorable
Sunday Services -	35% unfavorable vs 18% favorable
Programs/Classes -	28% unfavorable vs. 22% favorable
Focus on Youth/Families -	22% unfavorable vs. 19% favorable

The unfavorable responses exceeded the favorable responses in 9 out of the 13 categories. It is clear that the most unfavorable areas related to the views of the individuals responding to the surveys are cornerstone areas on a church: financial status, stability, ministerial leadership, and a sense of the church moving forward.

The favorable responses tend to support signs that the church is becoming a more positive in selected areas including friendliness, campus appearance, outreach, and board leadership. This view portends that there is a lot of work to be done, but some positive signs have begun appearing.

Characteristics of Member Activity

Q2. To what extent would the following statements be true for you during the past year.

The responses that were allowed were “true”, “somewhat true”, and “not true”.

A total of 15 areas were explored relative to views or participation. The areas were broken into three categories, and the following represents just the “true” response category.

Actual Participation in Church:

Attend church more than once a month -	True – 73%
Spent time in bookstore or courtyard	True – 58%
Talk to minister on Sundays or other times	True – 41%
Attend classes of interest to me	True – 35%
Participate regularly in volunteer activities	True – 33%
Visited the church’s web site	True – 20%

Feelings about the Church or Self

Have felt very blessed this year	True – 67%
Feel my spiritual consciousness has increased	True – 40%
Feel a close association/acceptance by the church	True - 39%
Have unresolved issues at the church	True – 29%
Have stayed away from church – personal reasons	True – 19%

Other Perspectives

Looking forward to new minister	True – 91%
Have a lot of confidence in the board	True – 26%
Receive sufficient communications	True – 23%

In the first category, the findings reflect that while church attendance is relatively high in this group, regular participation in other church activities are relatively low. Attendance at classes and volunteerism reflect a lack of regular commitment to the church. The web site could be a source of much information about programs and classes, but has been only modestly visited.

In the second category, the idea that two out of three have felt blessed appears to indicate that the experience of being blessed may have come outside the church, because rarely were positive views of the church's influence expressed by such a large percentage. There is a need for healing as reflected by the indication that 29% have unresolved feeling from the minister, staff, or board at the church, and more than 20% have stayed away for personal reasons.

A very high percentage of individuals who say they are looking forward to a new minister, perhaps with the hope for change and improvements. The relative low confidence level expressed in the board reflects that there is much work to do, even though there was a positive shift toward the board in an earlier question. Communications remains an important issue for members who feel they are under communicated with.

After gaining feedback about perceptions and actions during the past year, the next question was directed at what would be most influential in increasing their positive regard and involvement in the church.

Influencing Factors:

Q3. Realistically, which of the following would be likely to influence your spiritual consciousness, church attendance, participation in church activities, or increased support of the church?

A total of 12 areas were offered in terms of influence.

The three most influencing factors as evidence by individuals saying they would be much influenced or somewhat influenced were:

	Much Influence	Some Influence
Choice of a New Minister	76%	23%
Better Sunday Services	73%	24%
Clearer Vision of the Church	53%	38%

The factors having least influence on people were:

More clarity on giving & receiving	25%	43%
More personal contact by minister or board	34%	40%
More member sharing events	37%	32%

Although lower in relative strength of their effect, nevertheless even these factors would influence between 65 and 75% of the people

The other areas of influence from most positive to least positive included:

More spiritual classes & experiences	54%	24%
Better organized committees	43%	27%
More program variety	42%	34%
More inviting campus	40%	40%
Better church communications	38%	51%

The overall result is that there is a receptivity to be influenced in directing more energy, participation and support to the church. The highest influence is in the first category, namely, the choice of the minister, the improvement of church services and the vision for the church. Put these together and there may be a powerful impetus that will allow other factors to participate and contribute to a growing and more vibrant church.

This conclusion is supported by the responses to the next question, which was:

Q4. In addition to hiring a new minister, what do you think is the single most important thing the church should accomplish in the next year.

Responses were eventually summarized into two primary categories. This question tends to get to the heart of what the survey responders think is most important, since it was open ended.

The primary category where responses were the most frequent surrounded the desire for the congregation to become what our name suggests we are, in unity together, and have a stronger sense of who we are and where we want to go. Verbatim answers to this question include:

“some unity”

“pray for a more unified congregation,no cliques”

“renewed spirit of true unity”

“promote genuine feelings of ohana among all church members”

“growth of our congregation rich in diversity, with people who put their spirituality above everything else... the rest will come”

“provide for more spiritual feeding of members”

“notice that as we pass different people, neg comments are said – we should all practice the mirror effect & remind each other to remember we are blessed every day just to wake”

“help us to feel good about ourselves as Unity Church at DH members. There has been too much negativity ...”

“with three services and some long time cliques, it is difficult for a new person to feel welcomed. I feel there was no effort made to meet the new people and those who come occasionally to encourage them to return”

“solidarity of vision, mission, and purpose of church = one voice!”

“become unified, get a clear goal and go for it. Live, love, and let go of the fear of money”

“deciding a sense of vision and purpose and staying with it. Deciding who we are as a church. For a while each time I attended and a mission statement was listed in the bulletin or brochure, it seemed to be different than the past time”

“who are we as a congregation and where are we going and why?”

The next most frequently mentioned category had to do with taking that sense of unity and vision and finding ways to increase attendance at the church and bring the members back, partly by attitude, partly by actions, and partly through the restoration of our campus.. Some of the comments here included:

“attract young people”

“greater involvement with the community”

“policies toward increasing the membership”

“encourage the return of old faith filled members”

“get people attending! Services and events and classes that get people excited about what is offered and available at Unity”

“become a welcoming committee”

“develop youth program for ages 10-14 and nursery”

“increase of attendance”

“Reassess use of campus and infrastructure, make better use of facilities and get egos out of the way”

“ Develop an improved church culture which would inspire participation, volunteering, and support for a better looking campus”

“maintain facility well – restrooms, chapel entry, etc”

“the courtyard, wellness center, bookstore area all look tacky and run down. It looked better when the bookstore was in the old location”

”improve curb appeal”

Attributes of the New Minister:

Given the importance placed on a new minister who can help bring out the desired changes, the last question requested information about the desired attributes of the new minister. So as not to inappropriately summarize the list of items identified with this question, all responses are listed below. The reader can form their own opinion about the relative importance of this collective response. In the review of this list, three important overriding characteristics appear to stand out.

- **Charismatic Leadership**
- **True To Our Unity Principles**
- **Ability To Bring The Church And People Together**

Q5. What are the three most important attributes the church should seek in our new permanent minister?

“have him/her leave his/her ego at the door”	“honesty”
“one who can establish a warm rapport with board, staff, and congregation”	“Co-operative”
“dedication”	“knowledge”
“Spiritual enlightenment”	“Understanding”
“Compassion”	
“good speaker with meaningful and powerful messages”	
“well groomed and clean personal appearance”	
“friendliness, lots of fun, warm personality”	“flexibility to possible changes”
“willingness to be open and frank”	“magnetic, eloquent”
“complete understanding and forward outlook of Unity belief”	
“willing to empower those below to make decisions”	“stand tall, take charge”
“aloha”	“ability to begin and end the service on time”
“willingness to make music an integral part of the service”	“one that can have fun”
“Someone modern, forward thinking, not so ordinary and stuffy”	“more inspirational, living the life for real”
“charisma – his ability (natural) to make members feel welcomed each Sunday”	
“great speaker with humor that captures the congregation’s attention”	
“be a professional organizer”	“warm personality”
“he should read a lot and be up to date on new things”	
“inspirational motivational speaker and good storyteller”	“innovative spiritual teacher”
“ability to exude aloha, values, and connect with people heart-to-heart”	
“enthusiasm”	“business sense to keep business end”
“diplomatic to work with a difficult board”	
“ability to present lessons in a lively, meaningful way”	
“ability to interact with all facets of the church in a dynamic, effective manner”	
“a personal warmth that shines through all actions”	“good communicator, warmth”
“deep thinker and personal practice (meditation, etc)”	
“able to convey deeper principles and encourage us to go within in a deeper way”	
“Expanded spiritual awareness and ability to communicate such enthusiasm and charisma”	
“spiritual leader”	“unifier”
“strength in dealing with negative people”	“ability to inspire, lead others”
“puts God first – always”	“a humble, spiritual, approachable person”
“understand and accepts all racial groups”	“someone who promotes working together”
“someone who takes time to listen to everyone’s concerns”	
“to appreciate the Hawaiian culture and beauty of Hawaii”	“to love people of all races and life styles”
“to love Unity principles and teaching as their chosen path”	“the desire to be here”

“well grounded in Unity principles and the Fillmore teachings”	“friendly to all attending Unity”
“doesn’t stick to a certain group or type of people, mixes with everyone”	
“understanding of Unity principles and how to convey them to the layman”	
“a charismatic personality”	“a unique presentation with a fresh perspective”
“ability to deliver a practical message that we can apply to daily life”	
“warm personality to reach out to members and be available”	
“good sense of humor, open minded, principled”	“strong leader”
“not be influenced by money and personalities”	“a total understanding of what Unity is”
“inspirational leader and team builder”	“outstanding communicator”
“approachable in times of need (prayer support, comfort)”	“congregation/member development”
“fiscal experience & integrity in spending”	“leadership”
“Knowledge”	“integrity”
“messages that help us grow spiritually”	“charisma”
“good speaker”	“positive, loving minister”
“integrity”	“strong work ethic”
“passion for ministry”	
“strengthen bonds between congregation and minister”	
“foster fellowship building among church members, staff, community”	
“strengthen spiritual beliefs and teachings”	
“grounded in Unity principles – have a family, children”	“deal with current moral dilemmas”
“incorporate current books, speakers, information”	“treat church as a business in its operations”
“be at peace”	“sociable, live aloha”
“one who will stay”	
“understand past problems that cause ministers to leave”	“willing to move past the problems”
“humor”	“knowledge of Unity principles”
“bring new ideas to grow the church”	
“understanding and application of spiritual/metaphysical principles”	“commitment”
“compassion”	“inspirational sermons”
“concern about the congregation – prayer help”	“in-depth teaching of the principles of Unity”
“a contemporary speaker”	“sense of humor”
“ who can follow unity principles and gee, perhaps the 10 commandments”	
“charisma, charisma, charisma”	“a God given power or gift”
“dedication to grow this church”	“spiritual leader”
“wisdom and open heart”	
“good grasp and communication of Unity principles”	
“good rapport with congregation; a touch of humor”	“attendance”
“outreach”	“stable finance and more support for Y.O.U.”
“the ability to offer spiritual inspiration”	“the ability to relate to a variety of people”
“the ability to make Unity at DH a vital part of the community”	
“ability to lead and to inspire leadership for others to grow”	“to know how to delegate tasks”
“ build relationships on Unity principles and insight”	“charisma, leadership”
“assist with identifying and creating a connection with the church’s vision”	
“charisma”	“feeling of ohana”
“attract top level speakers”	“dedication”
“ability to communicate Unity principles”	
“understanding of and ability to interpret the Bible”	“he should be Unity oriented”
“be able to gain people’s cooperation”	“articulate and deliver a positive message”
“learn the names of parishioners”	
“integrity, doesn’t cowtail to the few who financially give the most to keep things status quo”	
“be given more room to move by the board as long as actions = results”	
“most important, be spiritually connected and his/her #1 priority is the spiritual well being of the church”	
“someone committed to this church”	“someone people like and can identify with”
“someone who feels comfortable with all aspects of leading a church”	
“enthusiasm. Ability to inspire others”	
“ability to bring in fresh ideas or ones used successfully in other churches”	
“honesty”	“ability to articulate clearly spiritual truths”
“willingness to explore other church’s successes e.g. New Hope”	

It is important to note that this survey preceded the start of our temporary minister, Sky St. John on July 17. As such, these opinions were not and could not be influenced by his presence with us after that date. Consequently, these opinions do represent an important aspect of the congregation’s feelings for the eventual selection of our permanent minister.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions:

The results from this opinion survey are based on the opinions of 73 members and friends of Unity church out of approximately 2000 to whom the survey was sent.. They represent current views and perspectives about the immediate past, the present, and desires for the future of our church home.

Although the results were mixed, the overall view of just under half (44%) of the respondents was that things have gotten worse not better during the past year. This represents an important stepping off place for change. About one quarter (24%) feel that things have improved.

Less than 50% of those responding to the survey have been actively involved in church activities other than attending church at least once a month, and a considerable percentage of those responding do not feel a close association or acceptance by the church, and may have stayed away because of unresolved issues or personal reasons.

Respondents gave very positive feedback about the influence they would feel in support of the church if desired changes in several areas were evident, most especially through the choice of the new permanent minister, improvements in the Sunday services, and a clearer vision of the church.

Respondents also seek more unity of purpose, more togetherness, and have a desire to see the church grow, attract new members, and become more spiritually and financially stable. Despite the problems they see or have experienced at the church, the majority feel they have been blessed and have grown spiritually in the past year. They are receptive to change.

Members greatly anticipate the new minister and seek many different qualities in their new minister. Foremost among those is the desire for a charismatic leader, a minister strongly grounded in Unity principles, and one who can help bring the church closer together.

Recommendations:

The board of trustees, minister, and staff should carefully review the results of this survey, and prayerfully act to respond to the concerns and opportunities presented by

this information. A written summary of planned actions should be developed.

This report in its entirety and the board response should be made available to members and interested parties by posting it on the board bulletin board, making copies available upon request to the church office, and using other forms of communication regarding the results of the survey.

PostScript:

At the end of the survey, there was a space designated for additional comments. While there were a variety of different types of comments made, the following were selected as perhaps representative of what many members feel Unity Church of Hawaii is and can be for all of us.

“I love Unity... I have found/rediscovered my spiritual home and base. Unity is integral to my health and well being, and what I put out to the world is my gift”

“I think the core membership is loyal and enthusiastic to support the board and the new minister in bringing life back to our church. However, the church should not be dependent upon the board, the minister, or the physical space for its life – what brings life to the church is its members! We each need to take 100% responsibility for the success of Unity.”

“Our Unity teachings, when practiced in our daily lives, truly bring us joy and peace in this lifetime. Our role is to model these teachings and encourage others to learn that they too can experience this joy in their lives”

“ Ten years ago my son and I became ohana here. My richest moments have come with my affiliation to Unity at Diamond Head. It is a space of community and spiritual growth.”

With the direction and support of God our Father, may we read and utilize this information with insight, compassion, and clarity to help bring about His complete plan for our church.