# Searching for the Future
# 2025-2029 Strategic Plan

## Executive Summary

Unitarian Universalists of Southern Delaware (UUSD) is at a pivotal point in our history. Over the past seven years we have increased our member households by 60% and our operating budget target has increased 215%. Because of this rapid growth, we have moved from a pastoral-sized congregation to a program-sized congregation. As we emerged from the pandemic, we recognized the continuing need to access our services remotely. Also, our Children's Faith Exploration program has grown substantially as our congregation has welcomed new families with children.

To guide us through this exciting yet critical time, the UUSD Board of Trustees hired a UU consultant, Mark Ewert, to guide us through a Visioning Weekend in July, 2023. Those discussions provided valuable insights into how we see ourselves as a congregation and how we consider the opportunities and challenges facing us. It also led to the development of a new vision for UUSD:

*We are a caring community dedicated to being an inclusive,*
*spiritual hub for our region that responds*
*to the needs of our changing world.*

In August 2023, the congregation commissioned the Searching for the Future Taskforce (SFTF) to carry on the work by developing a 5-year plan designed to guide us into the future. With the ongoing support of Mr. Ewert, the SFTF efforts have included:
- Reviewing in detail the Visioning Weekend information;
- Identifying themes, setting goals, and articulating initiatives based on those themes;
- Collaborating with the committees and groups who actually do the work of the church;
- Setting a plan of action for fulfilling our mission and vision.

The SFTF goals drafted on behalf of the congregation are:

**Goal 1: We will create an operational structure that enables the long-term success of the congregation**.

As we continue to grow, sustainability becomes our number one priority.  How do we meet the ongoing and developing needs of our congregation?  What staffing do we need?  What are our space requirements?  What financial resources will be required?

**Goal 2:  We will offer culturally relevant, spiritually grounded, family friendly, action oriented worship and programming.**

UUSD programming deepens our understanding of UU theology, of ourselves and others, and of the world around us.  In the context of our diverse community, how do we support the spiritual and personal growth of everyone?

**Goal 3:  We will create a community atmosphere that is accessible, inclusive, open, and affirming to all.**

We are a strong community!  In order to sustain that strength, we must recognize the diversity of interests and needs of our growing community.  What is required of us to engage and retain members, their families, and friends over the long-term?

**Goal 4:  We will become an integral part of expanding a beloved community beyond our walls.**

UUSD is a force for positive change through our social justice initiatives and expanding partnerships with groups that share our values.  How do we increase our visibility and assure that our vision, mission and values are known and appreciated in the larger, outside community?

For each of these goals, in collaboration with UUSD committees and other leadership, we have created a plan that: identifies the responsible parties; how we will measure progress toward the goal; and, to the extent possible,  the resources required.  Once the plan is adopted by the congregation, our committees and groups will implement the specific projects and tasks needed to support the initiatives.

Appendix D provides the complete information on the goals and initiatives we hope to accomplish. It details which organization within UUSD is responsible to pursue the initiative.  Finally, it shows what measures of success will measure our efforts to achieve them and, where possible, the expected timeframes and anticipated resources needed.

This plan is a "living document," meaning that it is not written in stone.  It will be reviewed annually by the various committees and groups at UUSD and revised as necessary to reflect current circumstances and available resources.  Initiatives and measures of success may change, but the direction forward to achieve our vision will not.  Each year, the responsible groups will review their progress and provide that information in their annual reports, so that all of us can celebrate their accomplishments!

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# Letter from the Minister

Dear UUSDers,

It is with great joy that we present to you this thoughtful and thorough strategic planning document with hope that it will be utilized for years to come as both a guide for our shared vision of UUSD and a major gift for those engaging in future strategic planning work. This has been a labor of love for those serving on the task force and it is their sacrifice and hard work that will serve to push our beloved congregation further along a path to success.

Within these pages you will find a wealth of knowledge about who we are and who we hope to be. As we embark on this new adventure as a congregation, it is our hope that both the committees and the leadership of UUSD will refer to this document frequently over the next five years. Without implementing the action plan that lies within, this document is merely words upon paper. It takes your effort to make it into the living document we all planned for it to be.

Over the course of the last twenty-five years, UUSD has risen to each challenge it has faced. Whether it was becoming a charter congregation, finding our first building, funding a professional minister, or engaging in a capital campaign to fund our spiritual home, the friends and members of UUSD have surpassed all expectations and continue to thrive. The congregation's success translates to the health and well-being of all people in the Southern Delaware region as we serve as a beacon of hope for progressive religious values in a largely conservative area.

I want to take a moment to give my thanks to Brenda Bouton, Dara Schumaier, Don Peterson, John Hayes, Marj Shannon, and Michele Warch who put in countless hours of writing, research, listening, discussing and analysis of data. Such a huge feat would have felt impossible without the wisdom, guidance, and generosity of our consultant, Mark Ewert, the support of our Board of Trustees, and the Committee members who participated in our SFTF meetings. It has been an honor to work with these individuals and learn from them.

As you read the following pages, I hope you can appreciate how much work and care it has taken to create this document.  I hope you feel more empowered to create the future imagined in these pages.

With Gratitude,


Rev. Heather Rion Starr

# Letter from the President of the Board

Dear Friends,

I'm excited to share with you our strategic planning document! In August of 2023, the Board of Trustees created a Strategic Planning Task Force. The folks that volunteered to spend countless hours researching, presenting their findings to committees, condensing what was discovered at those meetings and putting their findings into clear and concise language is nothing short of amazing, especially within such a short time frame.

The document is meant to be a guide to continue our growth toward the congregation that we dream to be. I expect that committees and lay and professional leaders will refer to this document often, as it lays out a path to achieve our goals.

We've come so far from our early days when we rented a storefront space for services to owners of a state-of-the art facility, and this document will help us go even further. However, a document by itself doesn't make it happen. It takes all of us working in concert to achieve our common goals, whether the goals are internal such as full-time ministry or administrative staff or external, like expanding our space to better accommodate our growing congregation and our progressive voice in the area.

I'd like to personally thank Brenda Bouton, Dara Schumaier, Don Peterson, John Hayes, Marj Shannon, and Michele Warch for this extraordinary document, and the Board of Trustees and Reverend Heather Rion Starr for their support of this work. I would be remiss if I didn't thank Mark Ewert, consultant extraordinaire.

I trust that as you read the document you will come to realize the hard work and love that was poured into it, and will use it as a guide to create an even brighter tomorrow for all of us and for the greater community.

Faithfully,


Paul Barnette
President of Board of Trustees, 2023-2024

# Plan Implementation and Annual Review of Outcomes

This five-year strategic plan aims to be an iterative, organic document, destined not to gather dust on our shelves, but to be readily at hand and referenced in our meetings and activities. It is intended as a co-created, evolving document to guide UUSD in setting annual goals, advising committee work, considering our space and asset needs, preparing budgets, and reporting accomplishments at our annual congregational meeting.

Specific ways the plan is envisioned to be used include:
- By the Board, who will reference the plan to review, assess, and pivot directions/strategies aligned with goals set forth in the plan.
- By the Board, Finance Officers, and others who will reference the plan when making decisions about budgeting and allocation of resources.
- By UUSD Committees as they plan their activities around accomplishing the goals of the strategic plan.
- By the Church Council in structuring its meetings around progress toward the goals.
- Providing structure and a basis for reports submitted for inclusion in UUSD's Annual Meeting Report to record progress on goals and outcomes set forth in the plan.

**Annual Review of Outcomes**

Preparing for the Annual Meeting and End-of-Year Report to the Congregation is a good time to reflect upon the progress we make in our work. End-of-year reviews are not about failure and success, but opportunities to review and revise as needed to assure that we maintain our intention for an organic, iterative plan and process. The SFTF suggests committee chairs and other leaders consider these questions:

● What did we learn about doing our work this year?
● Which outcomes were we able to fully accomplish? Was there progress toward, or partial success, in accomplishing others?
● Have changing circumstances caused us to consider altering some of our plans or adding new/different activities?
● Were there activities or outcomes we had to abandon? Why?
● For the coming year, how do we best use our time, energy, and resources to accomplish our goals? Do we continue the current activities and/or pivot in new directions?

# Search for the Future Plan - Fiscal Years 2025-2029

# Goals and Initiatives

| Goal | Initiative |
|---|---|
| **1. We will create an operational structure that enables the long-term success of the congregation**. | Empower a Facilities Task Force to develop and recommend comprehensive short and long term facilities scenarios to present to the Congregation<br><br>Develop both a short and a long term plan for meeting the facilities needs for the Congregation<br><br>Develop an on-going staffing plan that realistically reflects the needs of the congregation<br><br>Create Long-term Stewardship Planning and Execution Committee (LTSPEC)<br><br>Create an on-going 5-year Financial Forecast that incorporates plans for facilities, income generation, staffing, membership expansion, and programming<br><br>Create a UUSD Business Continuity/Disaster Recovery Plan |
| **2. We will offer culturally relevant, spiritually grounded, family friendly, action oriented worship and programming.** | Develop and implement a Worship Service program that represents a variety of influences and perspectives and appeals to a variety of cultures and life experiences<br><br>Enhance our capabilities for our online community |

| | |
|---|---|
| | Offer a Young Adult Affinity Group<br><br>Develop and implement an Adult Faith Exploration program that supports the spiritual growth of UUSD members and friends and the community at large<br><br>Develop and implement a program on practical day-to-day living topics of particular interest to UUSD members and friends and the community at large<br><br>Develop and sustain Adult Faith Exploration programs by providing stable leadership and infrastructure and developing impact measures<br><br>Continue to broaden the Children's Faith Exploration program that nurtures the spiritual growth of our children and serves as an invitation to other families in the community |
| **3. We will create a community atmosphere that is accessible, inclusive, open, and affirming to all.** | Develop fundraising programs that are accessible to as many as possible<br><br>Create a range of events that are engaging and welcoming to everyone of all ages and abilities and that allows all to experience community and service<br><br>Develop more opportunities to bring all of us together outside of the worship setting to build relationships, without a program or agenda. Consider timing of offerings to engage working families and those balancing many activities/schedules<br><br>Assure that all UUSD events and gatherings are engaging and welcoming to everyone of all ages and abilities<br><br>Develop and implement on-going opportunities to expand the congregation's understanding of conflict, diversity, and the nature of change |

|  |  |
|---|---|
|  | Develop and implement ways to inform the congregation with respect to diversity (by race/ethnicity and/or by age) within the context of local realities and general population trends<br><br>Continue to offer Pastoral Care support to UUSD Members |
| 4. **We will become an integral part of expanding a beloved community beyond our walls.** | Continue to refine and adapt UUSD's Resolution of Conscience to reflect the current needs of the community<br><br>Develop and implement a plan for UUSD to serve as the community organizing hub for at least one social justice issue<br><br>Develop a plan to engage more people to participate in social justice activities<br><br>Expand collaborative opportunities across Sussex County with existing social justice efforts and organizations<br><br>Develop the capacity to give members/friends opportunities to participate in hands-on service with other area nonprofits, i.e. volunteer shifts at Food Bank<br><br>Survey UUSDers regarding their roles in community organizations (what orgs to they serve/participate in) to enhance external liaison to engage in community work<br><br>Develop data and implement strategies to assure the long-term sustainability of a robust and comprehensive communication program at UUSD<br><br>Develop and implement a plan to find new ways to reach the public to expand its understanding of who we are and what we do |

| | Publish more internal and external articles, social media posts, radio advertisements, and the like of the outreach projects we do |
|---|---|

Appendix A

Creation of the Plan

The Searching for the Future Task Force (SFTF) was commissioned by UUSD to further advance the congregation-wide visioning work. In 2022, the congregation engaged in a "keep" and "let go" exercise conducted during/after an August 2022 Sunday service. And in 2023, UUSD held a Visioning Weekend, led by consultant Mark Ewert and several UUSD volunteers. The visioning (and subsequent) work results in a Five-year Plan guiding UUSD's future.

In developing the plan, the SFTF:

- Compiled and digitized all the information collected from both the exercise and the weekend;
- Organized and summarized the information collected, identifying common themes and ideas;
- Developed four DRAFT primary overarching goals, reflecting the information gathered;
- Developed DRAFT initiatives to support each goal, again reflecting participants' input;
- Identified the committees/groups that seemed most closely associated with each initiative;
- Conducted an environmental scan, capturing data (e.g., local demographics; population projections) to help UUSD contextualize the Five-year Plan;
- Submitted the goals and initiatives to the relevant committees/groups for input and feedback, measures of success, timeframes and resources required over normal operating costs;
- Finalized the plan, based on committee feedback;
- Submitted the plan to the Board of Trustees for review and approval; and,
- Provided the plan to the congregation as part of Annual Meeting information.

The SFTF seeks congregational affirmation through :

- Conducting a congregational information session prior to the Annual Meeting.
- Offering the plan to the congregation for affirmation at the Annual Meeting.

The SFTF's work concludes with the congregation's affirmation of the plan.

# Appendix B

## Definition of Terms

| Term | Definition/Examples |
|---|---|
| Strategic Planning | A thoughtful process by which we envision our desired future and identify goals, objectives, activities, and markers for attaining UUSD's vision. |
| UUSD Vision | We are a caring community dedicated to being an inclusive, spiritual hub for our region that responds to the needs of our changing world |
| UUSD Mission | Nurture Spiritual Growth; Embrace Diversity; Work for Justice; Strive for a Better World |
| Goals | Big picture statements of what we want to accomplish. A goal reflects longer-term thinking and echoes the Vision and Mission. |
| Initiative | Statements of what is to be accomplished in support of reaching a goal. There are multiple initiatives supporting a single goal. |
| Measures of Success | Method by which it can be determined if the initiative has been met. These can be tangible and intangible outcomes from the work. There are several specific measurable (quantifiable or qualitative) tasks or projects that support an initiative. Those have been defined by the relevant committees/groups. |
| Responsible Parties | The staff, committee, or group directly charged with accomplishing the work |
| Required Resources | For purposes of this plan, additional costs (including staffing costs) needed to meet the initiatives over normal operating costs. |

Appendix C

Contextual Landscape Summary

**NOTE: The complete contextual landscape appears as Appendix E. This summary document surfaces only a few of the most relevant points. Readers are strongly encouraged to reference also Appendix E.**

The context within which UUSD lives and operates lies within the larger context of the surrounding world, country, state, and local area. An understanding of that larger context helps to ground our more granular, local context.

This summary focuses on Delaware, Sussex County, and the geographic areas where the majority of UUSD's current members and friends live. It includes items drawn from each of the three broad areas of interest covered in detail in the full document: demographics, social factors (income, politics, perceived social issues), and religion.

**Demographics**
*(Sources: US Census Bureau; Delaware Population Consortium; Delaware Bioscience Association)*

*Age*

- As of July 2023, Delaware's population was estimated at just over 1 million people, with a median age of 41.5 years.
- Population growth in Delaware is driven largely by growth in central and southern Delaware, with Sussex County's growth rate (3.6 percent) being nearly three times that of Kent County's.
- The median age of Sussex Countians is 52.7 years.
- The median age of those living in the two ZIP codes where over half of UUSD's member/friends live (Lewes and Rehoboth Beach/Dewey Beach) is 10 years higher than that of Sussex County overall (62.1 and 61.6, respectively).
- The median age of those living in the two ZIP codes where the next-highest number of UUSD members/friends live is consistent with that of the county: 52.2 (Milton) and 53.4 (Millsboro).

*Race/Ethnicity*

- The population of Delaware is largely White (60 percent), about one-quarter Black, and just over 10 percent Hispanic/Latino.
- Sussex County's population is 74 percent White; just over 10 percent is Black. A large majority of the population – 88.7 percent – is non-Hispanic/Latino.
- The population in which over half of UUSD's current members/friends live is over 85 percent White.

- The population of the ZIP codes in which 76 percent of UUSD's current members/friends live is over 90 percent non-Hispanic.

**Social Factors**
*(Sources: US Census Bureau; Delaware Department of Elections; Delaware Journalism Collaborative)*

*Income*

- The median household income of Sussex Countians is just under $82,000; this is consistent with the median household income of Delaware as a whole.
- The median household income of those living in Lewes and Rehoboth Beach/Dewey Beach (i.e., over half of UUSD's current member/friend households) is significantly above that of Sussex County as a whole; the median household income of those living is Milton and Millsboro is somewhat below or significantly below.

*Politics*

- 45.6 percent of Delaware's registered voters are Democrats; 26.8 percent are Republicans.
- 39.1 percent of Sussex County's registered voters are Republicans; 34.2 percent are Democrats. This represents a shift within Sussex County: in 2010, Democrats outnumbered Republicans.

*Perceived Social Issues*

- Asked, in 2023, if the state was "headed in the right direction," just 36 percent of Sussex Countians felt that it was; 49 percent of Delawareans overall felt it was.
- Asked, in 2023, to identify the "most important problem facing Delaware," 18 percent of Delawareans identified "crime, drugs, violence, guns." Only 8 percent of Sussex Countians felt that was the most important problem, while 23 percent cited "population/urban sprawl" as the most important problem.

   While there is no corresponding data on UUSD's members'/friends' ideas of what are the "most important problems" locally, the Social & Environmental Justice Committee's areas of focus may serve as a "proxy." These areas include poverty, education, food insecurity, healthcare access, and climate change.

**Religion**
*(Sources: Pew Research Center; Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies)*

- Pew's Religious Landscape Study (to assess "how religious" each state was) ranked Delaware as 32nd. (Alabama and Mississippi ranked first.)

- The majority of Delawareans (69 percent) identified as Christian; 23 percent identified as "unaffiliated" – i.e., as "nones." (Note: Nationally, the percentage of nones is expected to increase over the coming decades, perhaps representing over 50 percent of the population by 2070.)
- The 2020 US Religion Census reported just under 1,000 congregations (totaling about 409,000 members) in Delaware. Sussex County had the highest number of congregations per 100,000 population, at 119.2.
- The largest number of congregations in the county identified as United Methodist, followed by Non-denominational Christian. Twenty congregations identified as "Black Protestant." Though there were only eight congregations that identified as Catholic, their members represented 42 percent of Sussex County's church members.

**Important Summary Points**

Over half of UUSD's current members/friends are drawn from a population that is significantly older than Sussex County's overall, which is already significantly older than that of Delaware overall. Efforts to attract younger people may need to purposefully target ZIP code areas beyond those from which members/friends have historically derived.

*Diversity*

Often, UUSD's members/friends have indicated a desire for "diversity"; typically, that has meant diversity in terms of race and ethnicity. UUSD may need to take a broader view of diversity, given:

- A high percentage of UUSD's current members/friends are drawn from geographic areas with populations that are even less diverse, in terms of race and ethnicity, than the population of the county as a whole.
- Among Sussex Countians who are church members, a relatively high percentage are members of the Catholic church.
- There are many churches in the county identifying as "Black Protestant."

UUSD is well-positioned to serve as a "liberal beacon," given Sussex County overall "leans" conservative, i.e., is older and majority Republican.

UUSD may also be well-positioned to serve as a "secular congregation," given the expanding pool of nones. Many of these individuals also may be younger than the majority of UUSD's current members/friends.

# APPENDIX D

# COMPLETE PLAN

Years noted are Fiscal Years (i.e., 2025 is Fiscal Year 2025 from July 1, 2024 thru June 30, 2025)
TBD indicates funding may be needed but is not known at this time.  Other funding amounts are estimates.
If nothing is indicated for funding, it is expected that no additional resources are needed.

| Goal 1: We will create an operational structure that enables the long-term success of the congregation. | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Initiative** | **Measures of Success** | **Committee Group** | **By When** | **Funding** |
| Empower a Facilities Task Force to develop and recommend comprehensive short and long term facilities scenarios to present to the Congregation | Develop a Charge for this Facilities Task Force and engage appropriate congregants, develop budget, etc. | BOT | FY25 | |
| Develop both a short and a long term plan for meeting the facilities needs for the Congregation | Develop and implement short term plan<br><br>Develop and implement long term plan | FTF<br><br>FTF | FY25<br><br>FY26 | TBD |
| Develop an on-going staffing plan that realistically reflects the needs of the congregation | Determine on an annual basis the staffing needs.  BOT will approve for half-time and more positions<br><br>Hire a paid staff for nursery | Minister BOT HR ET<br><br>CFE/BOT/ Minister/HR | Annually<br><br>FY25 | TBD<br><br>TBD |
| Create Long-term Stewardship Planning and Execution Committee (LTSPEC) | Develop charge<br>Appoint members | BOT | FY25 | |

| Create an on-going 5-year Financial Forecast that incorporates plans for facilities, income generation, staffing, membership expansion, and programming | Develop 5-year financial forecast | Finance LTSPEC | FY25 | |
| | Update forecast | Finance LTSPEC | Annually | |
| Create a UUSD Business Continuity/Disaster Recovery Plan | Plan is approved | Safer Congreg-ations | FY25 | TBD |

<mark>**Goal 2:  We will offer culturally relevant, spiritually grounded, family friendly, action oriented worship and programming.**</mark>

| **Initiative** | **Measures of Success** | **Committee Group** | **By When** | **Funding** |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Develop and implement a Worship Service program that represents a variety of influences and perspectives and appeals to a variety of cultures and life experiences | Find and maintain a balance between familiar and new & different services.  Expand on guest speakers and Lay Led Services. Consider  holding outdoor services, "Service in the Round." explore the possibility of creating a Visiting Clergy program | Worship | Annually | FY26/$5K FY27/$6K FY28/$7K |
| | Incorporate and expand on a variety of beliefs and religions, focusing on Jewish, Muslim, Pagan, Wiccan, Hindu, Buddhist, Native and other | Worship | Annually | $1,000 annually |
| | Conduct a congregational survey (exclusively for worship) to determine items on worship content and other desired elements | Worship | Bi-annualy | |
| | Assess the timing and cost of adding a second service when Sunday service attendance reaches 85% capacity on a regular basis | Worship | Annually | $10,000 When Imple-mented |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Enhance our capabilities for our online community | Add a Zoom host to support people watching in a UUSD Zoom Room, so they can chat, share and connect online before, during and after the service | Worship | FY25 | $5,000 Annually |
| Offer a Young Adult Affinity Group | Get group up and running | Minister Dir, CFE CFE AFE | FY25 | |
| Develop and implement an Adult Faith Exploration program that supports the spiritual growth of UUSD members and friends and the community at large | Offer UU tuneup class at least twice yearly | AFE | Annually | |
| | Explore offering other UU classes like UU history | AFE | Annually | |
| | Offer Darwin Day classes yearly and explore offering more classes on science and also the arts | AFE | Annually | $1,000 |
| | Explore programs that focus on anti-racism and anti-oppression like transgender | AFE | Annually | $1,000 |
| | Further develop a program that includes various spiritual practices with and without a deity | AFE | Annually | |
| Develop and implement a program on practical day-to-day living topics of particular interest to UUSD members and friends and the community at large | Develop programs that support adults at all stages of their lives | AFE | Annually | TBD |
| Develop and sustain AFE programs by providing stable leadership and infrastructure and developing impact measures | Explore the possibility of hiring a part time minister or lay staff to direct AFE programs and coordinate volunteers | HR BOT Minister | FY27 | $40,000 |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Develop a plan to increase the number of UUSD members and friends as well as outside attendees by 20% | AFE | FY27 | |
| | Develop partnerships with other UUSD committees, outside organizations, and churches | AFE | Annually | $1,000 |
| Continue to broaden the Children's Faith Exploration program that nurtures the spiritual growth of our children and serves as an invitation to other families in the community | Offering OWL (Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education course) to UUSD middle- and high-schoolers and local families with shared values | CFE | At least 1-2 times in the next 5 years | $5,000-8,000 |

**Goal 3: We will create a community atmosphere that is accessible, inclusive, open, and affirming to all**

| Initiative | Measures of Success | Committee Group | By When | Funding |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Develop fundraising programs that are accessible to as many as possible | Appoint new Committee leadership | FUNdraising | FY25 | |
| | Continue to offer at least two major fundraising events each year | FUNdraising | Annually | |
| | Evaluate the fundraising needs and develop plans to meet that goal, including the possibility of implementing new strategies that satisfy the initiative | FUNdraising | Annually | |
| Create a range of events that are engaging and welcoming to everyone of all ages and abilities and that allows all to experience community and service | UUSD Cares will continue to offer a range of events that enable all of us to experience community and service | UUSD Cares | On-going | |
| Develop more opportunities to bring all of | Host gatherings twice annually where new and | UUSD Cares | Annually | TBD |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| us together outside of the worship setting to build relationships, without a program or agenda.  Consider timing of offerings to engage working families and those balancing many activities/schedules | long-time members and their families can get acquainted, resulting in a better understanding of how new-comers can become more involved in the congregation | Membership | | |
| Assure that all UUSD events and gatherings are engaging and welcoming to everyone of all ages and abilities | | FUNdraising UUSD Cares | On-going | |
| Develop and implement on-going opportunities to expand the congregation's understanding of conflict, diversity, and the nature of change | Monitor potential areas of conflict within the congregation during this time of transition. | CCL | On-going | |
| | Research a workshop "Alternatives to Violence" (focuses on conflict resolution) and other speakers or workshops relevant to conflict/diversity/change | CCL | FY25 | |
| | Research groups at State level involved in economic equity with possibly a program or ongoing class on economic diversity. | CCL | FY26 | |
| | Research the psychological and organizational literature for the impact of change on groups. Use this information to encourage a congregation wide book read and discussion session and/or help plan a Sunday Service. | CCL | FY28 | |
| | Coordinate with UUSD Cares to co-sponsor a movie night. | CCL | FY28-29 | |
| Develop and implement ways to inform the congregation with respect to diversity (by race/ethnicity and/or by age) within the context of local realities and general | Review the environmental scan data and explore ideas of how to share information. | CCL | FY25 | |
| | Explore with Child/Youth Faith Exploration to help | CCL | FY27 | |

| population trends | develop a workshop on the needs of children/youth in our larger community. Help facilitate implementation of OWL program.  Organize youth program events to make posters for display around the church | CFE | | |
| | Write a piece to go either in the eNews or be part of a Sunday Service on the needs of our western Sussex ( and possibly online) congregants and/or visitors | CCL | FY28 | |
| | Coordinate with SEJ Committee,  ACLU, League of Women Voters and other non-partisan political/government groups to provide information to congregation about  challenges in our larger community during election cycles | CCL S&EJC | On-going | |
| Continue to offer Pastoral Care support to UUSD Members. | Determine the level of engagement desired by members from their lay Pastoral Care Associate (PCA) and the extent to which they rely on other sources for assistance when they have a specific need, such as a church friend, covenant group members | Pastoral Care | FY25 | |
| | Refine the current pastoral care model with great consideration to how to make this sustainable for our growing congregation | Pastoral Care | FY26 | |

**Goal 4:  We will become an integral part of expanding a beloved community beyond our walls**

| Initiative | Measures of Success | Committee Group | By When | Funding |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Continue to refine and adapt UUSD's | Annually review the resolution and submit changes to | S&EJC | Annually | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Resolution of Conscience to reflect the current needs of the community | the congregation for consideration at annual meeting | | | |
| Develop and implement a plan for UUSD to serve as the community organizing hub for at least one social justice issue | Develop a plan with Reproductive Justice as the area. Then implement the plan. The Reproductive Justice Organizing Hub will provide the opportunity for filling an unmet community need and may provide an opportunity for obtaining grants | S&EJC | FY25 | TBD |
| Develop a plan to engage more people to participate in social justice activities | Hold at least one community justice event per year

Work with Communications to highlight the monthly ASK and expedite communication via a social justice group list

UUSD Cares will collaborate with S&EJC and Membership to identify 2 social justice events which our UUSD community can work through together | UUSD Cares

S&EJC


UUSD Cares
S&EJC
Membership | Annually

FY25


FY26 | TBD


TBD |
| Expand collaborative opportunities across Sussex County with existing social justice efforts and organizations | Identify at least 1 additional organization to work with each year | S&EJC | Annually | |
| Develop the capacity to give members/friends opportunities to participate in hands on service with other area nonprofits, i.e. volunteer shifts at Food Bank | Identify at least 1 hands-on service project annually for members to work with other nonprofits in the area | S&EJC | Annually | |
| Survey UUSDers regarding their roles in community organizations (what orgs to | Work jointly to construct a survey regarding UUSDers roles in community organizations | CCL Membership | FY25 | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| they serve/participate in) to enhance external liaison to engage in community work | | LDC<br>S&EJC | | |
| | Encourage participation in the survey. Collect data and provide analysis of where in the larger community we have connections. Develop a database resource. Help other committees provide feedback to the congregation and explore opportunities for improvement | CCL<br>Membership<br>LDC<br>S&EJC | FY26 | $500 |
| | Reach out via our connections to community groups for more information about their organizations that we can share with the congregation to enhance participation. Explore possible joint projects | CCL<br>Membership<br>LDC<br>S&EJC | FY27 | $100 |
| Develop data and implement strategies to assure the long-term sustainability of a robust and comprehensive communication program at UUSD | Budget staff time (~15 hours/week @$35/hour) to prepare and publish weekly eNews, Sunday Service Reminders, and eBlasts | Comm.<br>BOT | FY25 | $27,500 |
| | Gather data related to our products and audiences, including social media demographics; Google alerts for press releases picked up; MailChimp open/click-through rates; and others | Comm | FY25 | |
| | Establish a content calendar to plan and schedule regular releases of articles, social media posts, and radio advertisements. Align content releases with key events, milestones, or awareness days | Comm | FY25 | |
| | Provide/offer training to the committee members on the latest trends and tools in digital marketing and communication | Comm | FY25 | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | In collaboration with the BOT, develop a data-based action plan ("The Plan") for the initiatives. Include money for the strategies | Comm | FY26 | |
| | Explore the possibility of hiring a paid Communications Coordinator (~30 hours/week @$35/hour) to develop and implement communications messages and serve as the project manager for all Communications products and activities including weekly digital publications, updates to website pages, social media messaging, graphic design projects, photographers' assignments, copyediting of all products | Comm BOT | FY26 | $60,000 |
| Develop and implement a plan to find new ways to reach the public to expand its understanding of who we are and what we do | Form strategic partnerships with relevant organizations, influencers, or media outlets to amplify reach. Leverage our existing relationships to expand the audience | Comm | FY26 | |
| | Determine increase in: social media reach, followers, and engagement; Number of press releases picked up by news outlets; MailChimp subscribers and open/click-through rates | Comm | FY27 and on-going | |
| | Create and launch new website | Comm | FY27 | $$$ TBD |
| Publish more internal and external articles, social media posts, radio advertisements, and the like of the outreach projects we do | Define "outreach projects" and audiences. Reach out to other UUSD Committees (SEJ, UUSD Cares, etc.) to identify outreach projects and events for publicity | Comm | FY25 | |
| | Gather data related to published information about outreach projects, where published, Google alerts for press releases picked up, attendance at events open to the public, etc. | Comm | FY25 | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Identify community platforms with increased outreach potential | Comm | FY25 | |
| | Develop a data-based action plan ("The Outreach Project Plan") to expand media outlets | Comm | FY26 | |
| | Implement The Outreach Project Plan, gather and analyze data, and adjust plan as needed | Comm | FY27 and beyond | |

# Appendix E
## Contextual Landscape
## Full Report

The context within which UUSD lives and operates of course lies within the larger context of the surrounding world, country, state, and local area. A snapshot of those larger contexts helps to ground our more granular, local context.

Given a comprehensive look at "context" is impossibly broad, we have narrowed the one we provide here to those areas we felt particularly relevant in this time and to this place and purpose:

- Demographics – simply, the "how many," "how big," "how fluid" kinds of data. What's happening, population-wise?
- Social Factors, such as income, politics, and things that people have perceived as "social issues"
- Religion – what are the trends?

In the spirit of "drilling down," we begin with a relatively superficial look at the global and national levels, then go increasingly deep as we narrow down to Delaware, Sussex County, and even the ZIP codes from which the majority of UUSD's members/friends derive. We include a few UUSD-specific observations and trends drawn from internal data sources, e.g., the 2024 Congregational Survey.

It is our hope that examining the context within which UUSD "lives" and works will help to inform our efforts as we move forward with implementing the Five-Year Plan.

**Global**

*Demographics*

The US Census Bureau (census.gov) has estimated that as of late-September 2023, the world's population reached 8.0 billion people; it is projected to reach 9.0 billion in about 14 years (2037). This represents a slowing of the population growth rate: it took just 12.5 years to go from 7.0 billion to 8.0 billion. This slowdown is expected to continue, with it taking 16.5 years for the world's population to grow from 9.0 billion to 10.0 billion.

The slowdown is attributed to a declining fertility rate: in 74 percent of countries, the fertility rate is at or below "replacement-level" (2.1 births per woman). Of course, lower fertility means proportionally fewer younger people. Currently, it is estimated that ~32 percent of people are age 19 or younger; that percentage is expected to slip to 26 percent by 2060.

Given there are fewer younger people, it follows that continued population growth comes chiefly from longer life expectancies – which means that older people compose a larger

proportion of the population. About 10 percent of the world's current population is age 65 or older; that percentage is expect to double – to 20 percent - by 2060.

*Social Factors*

On January 4, 2024, the Council on Foreign Relations published (cfr.org/report/conflicts-watch-2024) the results of its most recent annual Prevention Priorities Survey (PPS), conducted in November 2023. The 2023 survey was the first in which domestic – as well as overseas or foreign-sourced - risks to US interests were included. Their inclusion derived from concerns raised during public solicitations for topics to be included in the survey.

The survey (totaling 30 "contingencies" – i.e., possible scenarios) was fielded to 15,000 US Government officials, foreign policy experts, and academics; about 550 responded. Each respondent estimated both the impact of each contingency on US interests, and its likelihood of occurrence. The estimates then were compiled to identify those felt to be of high, moderate, or low likelihood, and high, moderate, or low impact. ("High" is defined as "probable," "moderate" as "50-50," and "low" as "improbable.) Contingencies were then assigned to Tiers (I, II and III), with Tier I representing those most likely to have significant impact on US interests, and to be highly or moderately likely to occur.

Among Tier I contingences, the one ranking highest overall (high likelihood/high impact) was the possibility of domestic terrorism and acts of political violence in the US, especially around the time of the 2024 election. Other high/high contingencies included an escalation of the Israel-Hamas war and a surge of migration to the southwest US border. The remaining Tier I contingencies - ranked as moderate likelihood but high impact – included various geopolitical conflicts (Ukraine/Russia; China/Taiwan; Iran/Israel; North Korea) and a highly disruptive attack (from within the US or from outside) on US critical infrastructure – including electoral systems.

Tier II contingencies included numerous other geopolitical conflicts, e.g., in the Middle East, and along the China-India border. Tier III contingencies focused on potential governmental collapses as stabilizing efforts fail or governance weakens, repressive actions in countries such as Afghanistan, and escalating conflicts in areas such as the Democratic Republic of Congo.

*Religion*

In December 2022, the Pew Research Center (pewresearch.org) published its Key Findings from the Global Religious Futures (GRF) Project. Findings include:

- People are becoming less religious. This trend has been evident for several decades in Western Europe and continues there; similar declines are observed in other economically advanced countries, including Australia and New Zealand.

- Population growth is faster in highly religious countries, and religion is very important to people in these countries, which include the countries of Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Latin America. As a result, the percentage of the religiously unaffiliated is

   projected to shrink in the future, as population growth in areas where religion is very important will vastly outpace population growth in areas where fewer people report affiliation.
- It is projected that – by 2050 – the percentage of the global population identifying as Muslim (29.7%) will nearly equal that identifying as Christian, the world's current largest religious group (31.4%).
- People in many areas of the world, including the US (58%), Canada (64%), Europe (52%), and Australia (63%), report that religion plays a less important role today than it did 20 years ago.

**United States**

*Demographics*

As of July 2023, the US Census Bureau (census.gov) estimated that the US population was 334,914,895. Women composed 50.4 percent of that population; people age 65+ composed 17.3 percent. Three-quarters (75.5 percent) of the population identified as White; 13.6 percent identified as Black/African American. Nearly one-fifth (19.1 percent) identified as Hispanic/Latino.

In November 2023, the Census Bureau released its most recent population projections; the most recent prior projections were published in 2017. The 2023 projections take into consideration factors such as the impact of COVID-19 and the population data collected during the 2020 census. Some trends observed in the data – like the increases in mortality due to COVID-19 – are expected to be short-term; others, such as declining fertility – which already have been in place for decades – are expected to continue.

Overall, population growth is expected to slow in the coming decades. It is also expected that immigration – not births – will become the largest contributor to population growth.

Continued declines in fertility are projected to shift the age structure of the US population, resulting (by around 2028-2030) in more adults age 65+ in the population than children under age 18. By 2100, it is projected that 29.1 percent of the population will be 65 years or older, and just 16.4 percent under age 18. The median age of the total population in 2022 was 38.9; by 2100, it is projected the median age will be between 46.5 and 53.6.

The three main racial/ethnic groups in the US – non-Hispanic White (58.9 percent in 2022), Hispanic (19 percent) and non-Hispanic Black (12.6 percent) - are projected to remain the most prevalent for at least the next few decades. A gradual decline in the non-Hispanic White population and increase in the Hispanic population will push those segments of the population

to ~46 percent and ~26 percent, respectively. The non-Hispanic Black population is projected to remain at ~13 percent.

*Social Factors*

*Income*

The median household income in the US in 2022 was $74,580.

*Politics*

In 2020, the Pew Research Center (pewresearch.org) reported that about 33 percent of registered voters in the US identifying as Democrats, about 29 percent as Republicans, and 34 percent as Independents. As most independents "lean" toward one of the two major parties, Democrats represented about 49 percent of all registered voters (including Independents who lean Democrat), and Republicans, 44 percent (including Independents who lean Republican).

*Perceived Social Issues*

On June 21, 2023, the Pew Research Center (pewresearch.org) released its report on the American public's list of the top problems facing the US. To compile the list, the Center conducted a survey in June 2023 among the 5,115 members of the Center's nationally representative American Trends Panel. Respondents ranked each of 16 issues on a four-point scale, ranging from "not a problem at all" to "a very big problem."

Among those topping the list were inflation, health care affordability, drug addiction, and gun violence. Notably, the (in)ability of Republicans and Democrats to work together ranked third on the list, with 62 percent of respondents saying it is a very big problem. (It is the only of the 16 items for which there is no partisan divide – both Republicans and Democrats see it as a very big problem.)

There were partisan divides on a number of issues: the top concern among Republicans was inflation (cited by 77 percent); the state of the country's moral values, illegal immigration, and the budget deficit also were seen as big problems by at least two-thirds of Republicans. Among Democrats, gun violence was the top concern (cited by 81 percent); the affordability of health care ranked second at 73 percent.

Democrats were more than four times as likely as Republicans to say climate change is a big problem for the country (64 percent v. 14 percent). Democrats are also more likely to cite gun violence and racism as big problems.

Republicans were more than twice as likely as Democrats (70 percent v. 25 percent) to say that illegal immigration is a big problem, and about 30 percentage points more likely to say the state of moral values and the budget deficit are big problems.

There also were differences by age group: 65 percent of adults age 65+ feel illegal immigration is a very big problem, while only 22 percent of adults age 18-29 feel that is the case. Conversely,

48 percent of adults age 18-29 feel climate change is a very big problem; only 38 percent of adults age 30 or older see it that way.

The general public says they agree with the Democratic Party on several issues, including abortion policy, health care policy and climate change policy. On the other hand, they are more likely to agree with the Republican Party on economic policy, crime, and immigration.

*Religion*

The Pew Research Center's 2022 Key Findings from the Global Religious Futures (GRF) Project (pewresearch.org) reported that approximately 30 percent of US adults are religiously unaffiliated. Religious affiliation has been dropping in the US for at least the past few decades and is projected to continue.

In September 2022, the Pew Research Center released its report on Modeling the Future of Religion in America. The models were developed using historic religious affiliation data and existing trend data, and projected religious affiliation from 2020 through 2070. Estimates for 2020 showed that 64 percent of Americans (including children) were Christian; people who were unaffiliated (the "nones") composed 30 percent of Americans. Those who affiliated with other religions – e.g., Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists – composed 6 percent. That 64 percent figure for 2020 shows a steep decline from 1972, when about 90 percent of Americans identified as Christian.

That steep decline results from the trend – starting in the 1990s and accelerating over the subsequent decades – where large numbers of people – especially people under the age of 30 – left Christianity and joined the ranks of those Americans identifying as nones (atheist, agnostic, or "nothing in particular"). The models developed by the Pew Research Center take into account various scenarios and demographic shifts, such as migration and birth/death rates.

If recent trends continue, it is projected that the percentage of Americans identifying as Christian will fall to less than 50 percent by 2070, ranging from 35 percent to 46 percent depending upon the model. Even in the very unlikely scenario that no one switched from Christian to none from 2020 forward, the percentage of the population identifying as Christian would decline to 54 percent by 2070, as older people (who currently are more likely to identify as religiously affiliated) die.

Meanwhile, the modeling indicates the percentage of nones will rise over the coming decades, representing 41 to 52 percent of the population by 2070. The percentage of those affiliating

with religions other than Christianity will rise, by 2070 representing 12-13 percent of the population (double the current figure).

There is additional evidence that the percentage of nones is trending upward. In an October 2023 post (graphsaboutreligion.com) by Ryan Burge, examining the number of nones identified in the 2022 Cooperative Election Study, the percentage of nones in each state almost always

was higher than had been reported in the 2008 version of the same study. In 2008, only six states reported the percentage of nones *at or above* 35 percent. By 2022, only nine states (mostly in the South) reported percentages of nones *under* 35 percent.

Similarly, the 2022 PRRI Census of American Religion (prri.org) found that 26.8 percent of all Americans identified as nones. Interestingly, the percentage identifying as nones is much higher among those identifying as Democrats (31 percent) than those identifying as Republican (12 percent).

Interestingly, even as there has been a rise in the number of nones, so too has there been a rise in the number of secular congregations – sometimes called "atheist churches." Jacqui Frost, Assistant Professor of Sociology at Purdue University, has studied nonreligious communities for the past 10 years, and wrote about secular congregations in the January 11, 2024, issue of The Conversation (theconversation.com). Secular congregations vary widely, from psychedelic churches and organizations that espouse cryonic preservation and Earthly immortality, to humanist and ethical communities. Frost includes Unitarian Universalism – with no imposed creed and with teachings drawn from both religious and nonreligious sources -   as a secular congregation.

Frost has found that secular congregations serve many of the same purposes as religious churches. For example, they often mimic practices of religious congregations, such as collective singing, reading inspirational texts, silent reflection or meditation, and collection of donations. There are also notable differences, including the lack of a hierarchy and the absence of a minister. Current research offers evidence that secular congregations can provide the benefits more traditional religious organizations provide: building community, shared rituals, and a sense of well-being. Additionally, they can help buffer atheists (or other nones) from any stigma or discrimination resulting from their lack of a conventional faith tradition or set of beliefs.

**Delaware**

*Demographics*

The US Census Bureau (census.gov) estimated that the population of Delaware as of July 2023 was 1,031,890, with women composing 51.4 percent of the population. People age 65+ and people under 18 years of age were estimated to compose nearly equal percentages of the population: 20.8 percent and 20.4 percent, respectively. Sixty percent of the population identified as White, 23.8 percent as Black, and 10.3 percent as Hispanic/Latino. Those identifying as other races, e.g., Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, or as multiple races,

composed the remaining 5.8 percent. In 2024, Delaware placed eighth when states were ranked by the proportion of their populations identifying as Black (worldpopulationreview.com).

In a report released in December of 2023, the Bureau ranked Delaware as eighth among the "top 10" states by percent growth between 2022 and 2023, with a 1.2 percent growth rate across those years. Growth resulted from two main factors: a decline in the mortality rates seen during the initial years of the pandemic, and a return to pre-pandemic migration patterns (both between states and internationally).

A January 2023 report by Delaware BioScience Association (delawarebio.org) noted that growth between 2021 and 2022 was driven largely by growth in central and southern Delaware, with Sussex County seeing 3.6 percent growth, compared to Kent County's 1.3 percent and New Castle County's 0.2 percent. Factors likely contributing to Delaware's population gains include low property taxes, no sales tax, and lower tax rates for retirees.

In October 2023, the Delaware Population Consortium (stateplanning.delaware.gov) published its most recent population projections for the state. These estimates place the 2023 population at 1,030,233 and estimate that the total population of the state will increase 10 percent by 2040, to over 1.1 million people.

The Consortium projects that the portion of the state's population that is White will decrease by about 7 percent by 2040; meanwhile, the percentage that is Hispanic is projected to increase by about 6 percent. The percentages of Delaware's population that identify as Black, or as other races, are expected to stay about the same.

Per the Consortium's 2022 report, the most significant increases are expected in the older age groups, with the population of those 65+ projected to grow by more than 41 percent. In contrast, the population of those age 25 to 54 is projected to grow at just 6 percent, and no population growth at all is projected for those age 24 or under.

*Social Factors*

*Income*

In 2022, the median household income in Delaware was $79,325. This is 6.4 percent above the 2022 median household income of the US as a whole.

*Politics*

As of March 1, 2024, Delaware's Department of Elections (elections.delaware.gov) reported the state had 772,284 registered voters. The largest percentage are registered as Democrats (45.6 percent), followed by Republicans (26.8 percent) and "no party" (22.1 percent). The remaining 5.5 percent of registered voters are registered across more than a dozen parties.

Though the state leans Democratic, there are differences across its three counties. A large proportion (52.3 percent) of New Castle County's voters are registered Democrats; the next-largest percentage are no party, at 22.0 percent. Registered Republicans account for just 20.4 percent of the county's registered voters. Kent County also leans – though less heavily – Democratic, with 41.4 percent of voters registered as Democrats, 28.8 percent as Republicans, and 23.7 percent no party.

In contrast, the largest proportion of Sussex County's voters (39.1 percent) are registered Republicans; just over one-third (34.2 percent) are registered Democrats, and 21.4 percent are registered as no party.

This differences in party affiliation among the counties may derive – at least in part – from the differences in the ages of their populations: the median age of Sussex Countians is 52.7 years, which is 10 years higher than that of the state (41.5), 14 years higher than that of New Castle Countians (38.7 years), and nearly 15 years higher than that of Kent Countians (38.1 years).

*Perceived Social Issues*

On May 12, 2023, Delaware Public Media (delawarepublic.org) published the results of a survey commissioned by the Delaware Journalism Collaborative and conducted by staff of the Center for Opinion Research at Franklin & Marshall College. More than 500 Delaware adults, selected to be representative of the state's population, were asked 50 questions, ranging from their feelings about whether the state was "headed in the right direction," to what they felt were the most important problems facing Delaware.

The results revealed widely divergent views across counties, ages, and political affiliations. For example, while 49 percent of participants said the state was headed in the right direction, 41 percent felt it was not. But that overall statistic masks major differences:
- 36 percent of Sussex Countians felt the state was headed in the right direction, while 56 percent of New Castle Countians did.
- 74 percent of those younger than 35 felt the state was headed in the right direction – but only 39 percent of those over 55 did.
- 75 percent of Democrats felt the state was headed in the right direction, v. 19 percent of Republicans.

Overall, asked about most important problem facing Delaware, the largest segment of respondents (18 percent) identified "crime, drugs, violence, guns." More than 20 other "most important" problems were identified, including education/schools, healthcare/insurance, the economy, and immigration/immigrants/refugees.

The problems identified varied widely across counties: only 8 percent of Sussex Countians identified crime/drugs/violence/guns as the state's biggest concern. Rather, they pointed to population/urban sprawl, with 23 percent identifying it as the most important problem. By way

of contrast, only 4 percent of New Castle Countians and 3 percent of Kent Countians identified this as a problem.

One area of agreement: half of respondents overall felt the Delaware State House and Senate did not make decisions based on the best interests of their communities. This level of dissatisfaction with the legislature held even when the data were parsed by factors such as county, age, race, or gender.

Another area of some agreement: looking at spending, 73 percent of Democrats and 67 percent of independents feel the state is not spending enough on the education system. While a lower percentage (50 percent) of Republicans agree, that still is closer agreement than on many other issues.

*Religion*

The Pew Research Center's 2014 Religious Landscapes Study (pewresearch.org; published 2016) attempted to answer the question, "How religious is each state?" by looking at four measures of religiosity:

- Religious attendance
- Frequency of prayer
- Belief in God
- Self-assessment of the importance of religion.

Based on these measures, Alabama and Mississippi were the states identified as the "most religious," with a composite "score" of 77 percent, respectively. The New England states of Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire ranked as the least religious, with scores of 33 or 34 percent.

Delaware, with a score of 52 percent, placed 32nd. Looking at each question individually, Delaware's results were: 34 percent reported attending religious services at least weekly; 49 percent reported praying daily; 61 percent reported believing in God; and 46 percent reported that religion was very important in their lives.

Looking more closely at Delawareans, the study found that 69 percent identified as Christian, 23 percent were unaffiliated (nones), and 6 percent identified as being of a non-Christian faith. Among those identifying as Christian, 22 percent were Catholic, and 21 percent were Mainline Protestant. Fifteen percent were Evangelical Protestant, and 10 percent were Historically Black Protestant. Other groups, such as Orthodox Christian, Mormon, or Jehovah's Witness composed no more than one percent (each) of those identifying as Christian.

The same study delved also into various religious practices. The majority (59 percent) reported they seldom/never participated in religious education groups; a slim majority (51 percent)

seldom/never meditated, but over one-third (35 percent) reported meditating at least once per week. Fifty-one percent reported feeling spiritual peace and well-being at least weekly, and 37 percent experienced feelings of wonder about the universe at least weekly. (Only 29 percent reported seldom/never experiencing these feelings of wonder.)
Fifty-one percent of Delawareans reported that their source of guidance on right and wrong was "common sense"; 30 percent reported "religion" as their source. A clear majority of Delawareans – 69 percent – felt right or wrong was situational; just 30 percent felt there were clear standards.

This same study also asked political and social questions. Over half of respondents (55 percent) reported they were (or "leaned") Democratic; 40 percent described their ideology as "moderate." (About one-quarter reported being conservative; another one-quarter reported being liberal.) A small majority (55 percent) felt abortion should be legal in all/most cases. A large majority (67 percent) felt homosexuality should be accepted, and 59 percent favored same-sex marriage.

**Sussex County**

*Demographics*

Sussex County is the largest of Delaware's three counties by area (936.1 square miles) but has a population (237,378) that is less than half that of the state's most populous – though geographically smallest – county, New Castle. The median age of Sussex Countians is 52.7 – well above the state's median age of 41.5. Nearly a third (30.9 percent) of Sussex Countians are age 65 or older. Approximately one-fifth of Sussex Countians (19.9 percent) are under the age of 20.

Sussex County is predominantly White and non-Hispanic: 74.1 percent of residents identify as White, and 88.7 percent identify as non-Hispanic/Latino. Just 10.7 percent of Sussex Countians identify as Black or African American. The remaining 15 percent identify as two or more races (7.2 percent), "other" race (6.0 percent), or American Indian/Alaska Native, Asian, or Native Hawaiian/other Pacific Islander.

The annual median income of Sussex Countians is just under $82,000, which is consistent with that of Delaware as a whole. Just over one-third of Sussex Countians (36.3 percent) hold a bachelor's degree or higher; this, too, mirrors educational attainment for Delawareans as a whole. The rate of home ownership in Sussex County is significantly higher than that of Delaware as a whole: 83.3 percent v. 74.1 percent; this may reflect the county's older population.

*Social Factors*

*Income*

The 2022 median household income for Sussex County was $81,792.

*Politics*

As noted in the *Social Factors* section for Delaware, Sussex County differs in many ways from Kent and New Castle County; for one, the largest proportion of registered voters are registered as Republicans (39.1 percent). This was not always the case (elections.delaware.gov). In December 2010, Democrats outnumbered Republicans by ~1,500 registered voters; by December 2015 the Democratic majority had shrunk to ~500. By December 2020, Republicans

outnumbered Democrats by ~7,500 registered voters. In-migration likely has contributed heavily to the shift.

Further, registered Republicans have been more likely to vote than registered Democrats, e.g., in the 2022 General Election, 58.2 percent of Sussex County's registered Republicans voted, v. 50.2 percent of its registered Democrats. The differences are sharper among those under the age of 60, e.g., 60.1 percent of registered Republicans age 50-59 voted in that election, but only 49.6 percent of registered Democrats in that age group voted.

*Perceived Social Issues*

The Delaware Journalism Collaboration's survey found that just 36 percent of Sussex Countians felt the state was "headed in the right direction." (56 percent of New Castle Countians felt it was.) This differing perception may be driven at least in part by party affiliation, and the parties' differing ideas about what is "right." That is, Sussex County's Democrats (34.2 percent of registered voters) may well view things similarly to their Democratic counterparts to the north, while the county's Republicans may not.

The same survey found that the "most important problem" identified by Sussex Countians was population/urban sprawl, with 23 percent pointing to that issue. (Less than 5 percent of New Castle or Kent Countians identified it as a problem.) Survey results did not parse this statistic by political party, so it is not known if this 23 percent consists largely of Democrats or is composed of concerned citizens of both parties. Both entities best able to deal with the problem - the Sussex County Council and the Sussex County Planning and Zoning Commission – currently are composed solely of Republicans.

*Religion*

In 2022, the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies published the results of its 2020 US Religion Census (thearda.com). At the time of the census, Delaware's population was estimated at 989,948; a total of 996 congregations, with 409,412 adherents (i.e., members), was tallied. This yielded 97.6 Delaware congregations per 100,000 population; for purposes of comparison, Alabama had 214.1 congregations per 100,000 population; Arkansas had 246.7.

As with many things, the number of congregations and adherents differed widely across Delaware's three counties. New Castle County, despite having the largest number of

congregations and adherents, had the lowest number of congregations per 100,000 population, with just 84.8. Sussex County had the highest – 119.2 – and Kent County fell in between, with 109.4 per 100,000.

Within Sussex County, data was collected on 283 congregations/groups, representing 82,730 adherents. The largest number of congregations identified as United Methodist (75 congregations), followed by Non-denominational Christian (51 congregations). The Catholic

Church had the most adherents – 34,520, or 145.42 adherents per 1,000 population - despite having the fewest congregations (8). United Methodists had the second-highest number of adherents (76.55 per 1,000 population), and Non-denomination Christians the third highest (44.23 per 1,000 population).

Twenty congregations identified as "Black Protestant," including two African Methodist Episcopal churches, the Church of God in Christ, Church of the Living God, and the National Missionary Baptist Convention of America. Across the 19 congregations for which detailed statistics were available, adherents totaled 3,496, with adherent rates ranging from 1.27 to 9.37 per 1,000 population.

The Unitarian Universalists reported one congregation, with 245 adherents, for an adherence rate of 1.03 per 1,000 population. The size of UUSD's congregation has not changed significantly since that 2022 tally, though of course the individuals composing the number have changed, i.e., there have been both arrivals and departures.

**UUSD**

*Demographics*

As of March 28, 2024, UUSD's members and friends comprised 234 households. Over one-third (37.2 percent) were located in Lewes; nearly equal percentages were located in Rehoboth Beach (17.5 percent) or Milton (15.8 percent). An additional 5.6 percent were located in Millsboro: these four ZIP codes represent over three-quarters (76 percent) of UUSD members/friends.

Given the predominance of these ZIP codes among member/friend households, demographic data for these ZIP codes was examined to identify similarities/differences to the Sussex County data as a whole. The results are summarized in Table 1 (next page).

Table 1. Demographic comparisons, Sussex County v. select ZIP codes

| Parameter | Sussex County | Lewes | Rehoboth Beach | Milton | Millsboro |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Population | 237,378 | 27,911 | 14,348 | 13,800 | 32,520 |
| Median Age | 52.7 | 62.1 | 61.6 | 52.2 | 53.4 |
| Race – White | 74.1% | 86.4% | 87.4% | 82.2% | 75.8% |
| Ethnicity – Not Hispanic/Latino | 88.7% | 94.7% | 94.7% | 93.3% | 91.0% |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Median Household Income | $81,792 | $90,772 | $101,181 | $77,454 | $71,577 |

Briefly:

- The median age of residents in these ZIP codes is at least as high as that of Sussex County (which is significantly above that of the state of Delaware). The median age of residents in the two ZIP codes from which over half of UUSD's members/friends derive is approximately 10 years greater than that of Sussex County.
- The level of racial/ethnic diversity is less within each of these ZIP codes than for Sussex County as a whole with the exception of Millsboro, which is about three-quarters White (as is Sussex County). Each of the other ZIP code areas is over 80 percent White, with two approaching 90 percent.
- Over 90 percent of the residents of each of these ZIP codes are non-Hispanic/ Latino.

Perhaps the most significant points arising from these comparisons are that:

- A large portion of UUSD's membership is drawn from a population that is older than Sussex County's overall—and that population already is significantly older than Delaware's population overall.
- UUSD's membership also is drawn from populations that are less diverse, in terms of race and ethnicity, than the population of the county as a whole.

Both of these factors may be important to consider as decisions are reached and priorities established. For example, a desire for "diversity" may need to focus on diversities other than those of race or ethnicity: not only are there few racial/ethnic minorities represented among the ZIP codes from which most UUSD members/friends derive, but there also are 20 self-identified "Black Protestant" congregations in Sussex County – with many adherents each – as well as eight Catholic congregations.

Given Sussex County in general – and UUSD's "catchment area" in particular – is a known retirement destination, the statistics on age are not surprising. The ongoing arrival of this older population may represent a real opportunity for UUSD: older people are more likely to be adherents to a religion than younger ones; many retirees are looking for community and for a new sense of purpose.

*Social Factors*

*Income*

The median household income for the two ZIP codes (Lewes and Rehoboth) where more than half of UUSD's current members/friends live is significantly above that of Sussex County: $90,772 and $101,181, respectively. The median household income for Milton ($77,454) is somewhat less than that of Sussex County; for Millsboro ($71,577), it is significantly less. (Median household income for Sussex County: $81,792.)

*Politics*

While Sussex County in general leans Republican, UUSD appears to lean (heavily) Democratic or Independent. This may put it somewhat at odds with the general population of the county. This can have both positive and negative effects: UUSD certainly has the opportunity to stand out among faith organizations as a "liberal beacon." But it also may appeal to a smaller "pool" of religiously-affiliated people than would a more traditional Christian church.

The political conflicts that are writ large within the country and – to a lesser extent – the state are unlikely to be writ small within UUSD. That does not mean we are unaffected or unconcerned about those conflicts; rather, that those conflicts are unlikely to play out within UUSD, as few among us embrace far-right politics.

*Perceived Social Issues*

While we do not have data on issues that UUSD congregants feel are "most important" (to compare with state- or county-level data), we can get some ideas from the organizations/efforts supported through the Social & Environmental Justice (S&EJ) Committee. Issues such as poverty, education, food insecurity, healthcare access, and climate change have all received – and continue to receive - funding and/or support, e.g., via Share the Plate or roadside/beach clean-up efforts.

*UUSD: Observations and Trends*

The Task Force also notes the following information, gleaned from sources that include the 2024 Congregational Survey, historic pledge data, and attendance data:

- A large proportion of UUSD's most active and involved members/friends are older, e.g., 80.5 percent of those completing the 2024 Congregational Survey were 65 or older.

- Over half (54 percent) of respondents were not Unitarian Universalists prior to becoming involved with UUSD.

- Asked what ONE main thing they would like to see UUSD achieve in the next 3-5 years, the two items selected by the highest percentage of respondents were: 1) a larger facility to support the growing congregation (21 percent) and 2) broad community recognition as a champion of social justice (20 percent).

- Asked what they felt was the biggest challenge facing UUSD in the next 3-5 years, 30 percent indicated it was the inability to accommodate growing needs due to a lack of physical space.

- Per UUSD's Facebook followers (as of January 31, 2024; personal communication from Communications Committee), the largest proportion (79.4 percent) are women and nearly 40 percent are women age 65 or older. Approximately 10 percent of UUSD's Facebook followers are men in the same age group.

- UUSD's internal pledge statistics place the number of member households in fiscal year 2017 (FY17) at 94. This number grew to 133 in FY19, remaining between that and 144 until FY24, when it swelled to 151. The FY24 figure represents growth of 61 percent over FY17.

- The percentage of member households pledging each year has ranged from 72 percent to 82 percent, FY17 to FY24. The mean pledge amount per pledging household has ranged from about $2,000 to $2,500 across those same years; the median pledge amount has held at $1,200 for six of those years, with medians the other two years (FY22 and FY24) exceeding that at $1,300 and $1,350, respectively.

- Pledge data for the earlier years of available statistics report the dollars pledged, but not the pledge targets. So, it is not possible to determine if the dollars pledged met, exceeded, or fell short of the dollars sought. In FY17, $160,869 were pledged; in FY24, a pledge target of $345,860 was set. This target represents a growth rate of 215 percent over dollars pledged in FY17.

Attendance figures for January 2022 through March 24 (representing average weekly attendance per month) show a general upward trend in in-person adult attendance, albeit with substantial variation over time. As of March 2024, average adult weekly attendance was hovering around 120.

Over the same period of time, livestream attendance trended downward till mid-2023, enjoyed a bit of a surge then bounced around during the winter months. As of March 2024, it was again trending downward.

The average number of children attending has been below 20 excepting a spike in October 2023; average numbers have been higher (though still below 20) since then. The average number of visitors per week has followed the same trend observed in attendance online and among children.

Figure 1. UUSD. Attendance trends January 2022-March 2024
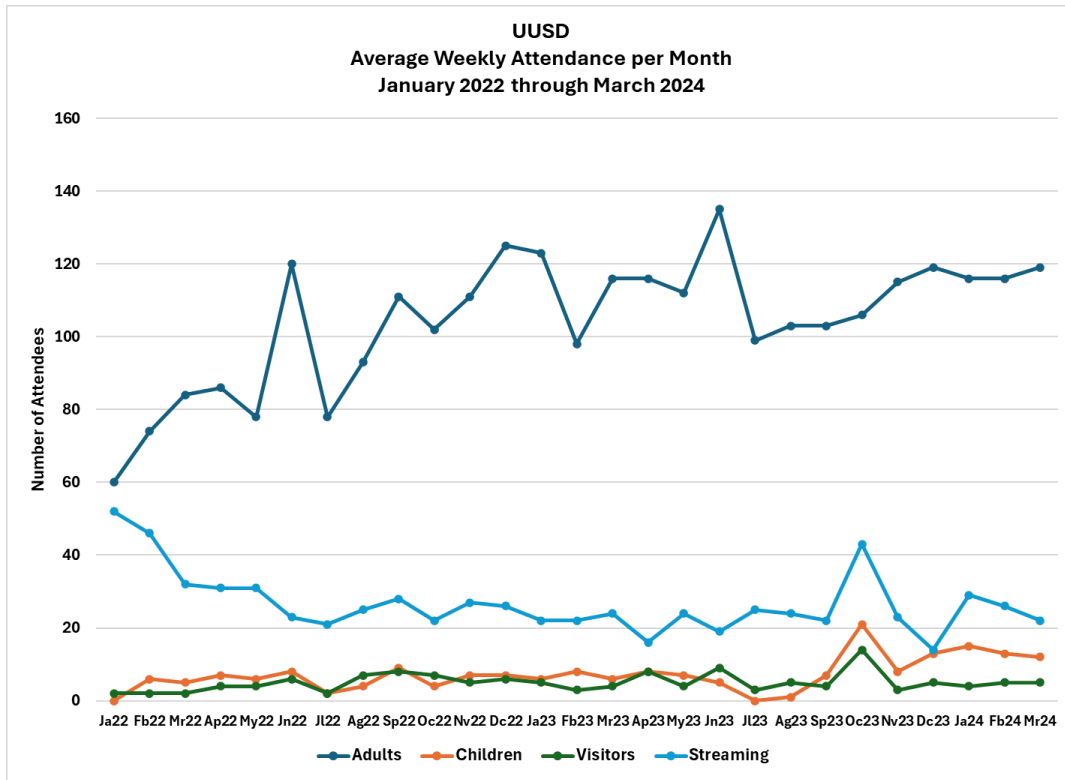
Many of UUSD's members/friends arrived in the area as retirees, had time and energy to devote to causes they wanted to support, and were looking to form connections and friendships in their new community. UUSD provided a welcoming and convenient way to do that, especially for people whose politics lean liberal, who are committed to social justice, and whose religious beliefs may not be mainstream.

While population growth in the area likely will continue to be driven largely by retirees, there also will be a smaller – but perhaps substantial - influx of younger people, as employment opportunities arise in areas such as healthcare, construction, and various service industries. The escalating number of school enrollments in the Cape Henlopen School District speak to that influx of younger families; enrollments have nearly doubled in the 20-year period from 1994 to 2023 (capehenlopenschools.com).

Among these arriving younger people there likely will be a substantial number who are religiously unaffiliated, i.e., who are nones. This is another opportunity that UUSD may be able exploit: UUSD, with its ready acceptance of a range of beliefs – or lack of belief – is well-positioned to attract those who are looking for community and ritual, but not for a particular set of traditions or beliefs. It is an established secular congregation that may well appeal to younger (as well as to older) people who are nones.