

## Douglas UCC Search Committee: Survey Responses

### 30 Respondents

- **How would you describe our church to a friend or neighbor or family member visiting our church for the first time?**

- Welcoming. A great place to experience a church service and music in a friendly atmosphere
- Open and affirming, peace-filled, humble, worried about what matters, able to laugh and applaud, understanding, fragile, grieving, joy-giving
- Progressive and welcoming
- Open to all, question everything, learn and grow.
- Tremendous love and inclusiveness in the congregation and a church which asks for stimulating soul searching from its preaching to the congregation
- Fine, loving, and open to our church and its people.
- A church that welcomes all faiths and openly accepts All people just as they are
- Our is a church which believes in and supports diversity. We are most definitely a progressive Christian church. We respect all the major religions of the world.
- A caring community that takes a broad, inclusive approach to religious thought and engagement.
- Welcoming, inclusive, egalitarian, diverse
- An inclusive and progressive church with services I find spiritually inspiring and many opportunities for volunteering /serving. I would also say it is a close-knit community that can feel a bit closed to newcomers.
- Our church is inviting to everyone. We love and appreciate and support each other as much as possible.
- Friendly
- When speaking about my church to others, I emphasize its inclusive nature and its commitment to diversity. Our congregation embraces a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences, fostering an environment where everyone feels welcome and accepted, particularly those from the LGBTQ community. In some circles, I refer to our church as the "gay" church which often elicits a laugh but also, curiosity and intrigue. I elaborate that at our church, we're not just a few "token" gays, in fact, roughly half the congregation is gay and being a part of the LGBTQ community is not only embraced but celebrated and honored.
- Affirming, inclusive, predominantly older congregants, lovely people, masculine heavy
- Welcoming and accepting to ALL with an openness to listening and supporting
- A progressive, kind, socially active crew whose membership reflects the ethos of the villages we live in -- that is gay folk founded, gay folk in charge.

**DESCRIBE OUR CHURCH – CONTINUED:**

- Jesus Minded. A relevant, modern minded, seeker, teacher, growth, action-oriented church. Loving, compassionate, focused on the big picture of Jesus's teachings. Avoiding the pitfalls of getting caught up in tiny nuances of old fire and brimstone bible stories at odds with Jesus Teaching. Simultaneously focused on our church, local, regional, national, and global communities.
- Open and affirming, welcoming and kind-hearted.
- An open and affirming congregation that accepts people of all beliefs or even no belief
- We are a progressive in our theology, a church family/community where all are welcome. I love the way we say this each and every Sunday.
- An accepting non-judgmental community of friends
- Welcoming, non-judgmental, energetic
- Welcoming, progressive, friendly, active
- A highly engaged and participatory church that cares just as much about what goes on outside the walls as what is going on inside the walls.
- All are welcome; individual views are encouraged; members feel satisfied after services; many opportunities for involvement are offered to help not only the congregation but also

• **What is unique or special about DUCC?**

- The people that are in it. This is not just a church; it is a family. A community of givers and servers of Christ on earth.
- When the church says 'all are welcome,' they mean it. Members do not seem to be judgmental and have a feeling of wanting to help all.
- As a gay man, church was a place you couldn't be yourself, you were often condemned as a sinner. I've always been a spiritual persona and never had a church
- Open and affirming, peace-filled, humble, worried about what matters, able to laugh and applaud, understanding, fragile, grieving, joy-giving. (Same as previous answer)
- Small congregation.
- A Church that does what it says it will do; walks the walk
- The loving amongst the congregation and its preaching to the congregation.
- The congregation have excellent ideas for building diverse ideas for Sunday service, as well as inside and outside for the church itself, and tinging the community. Second, the excellent musical talent among our congregation.
- Our hearty welcome. Music. Lovely building...that magically dissolves earthly sense of direction (North, South, East, West).
- The acceptance given to all views. The social justice concerns, environmental concerns, respect for all creatures and all living things.
- My prior statement captures it. I had not been practicing religiously, but was captivated by Rev. Sapienza's sermons intellectually and personally. The rest of the Douglas UCC experience reinforced what a special - and now important to me - community it is.
- The community's commitment to serving others and protecting the environment, its very strong LGBTQ allyship and the way it thematically connects music with readings and prayer to deepen the congregations' engagement.
- The unique messages that Pastor Sal gave. I found them insightful into the deeper meaning of Scriptures. Of course, how DUCC welcomes and seeks to reach out to various marginal and needy communities is a strength of the faith community.
- We all take care of each other. Someone is in need; we are right there to help. We are all accepting and we are very comfortable being together for worship.
- They care about you and others.
- Inclusivity
- The ease with which people of different orientations and beliefs worship and work together. Also, our music director.
- The diversity of the peoples; where they are from, spiritual variety, income, sexual orientation. Very welcoming and believe what the Tibetan prayer bell represents.

**WHAT IS SPECIAL ABOUT DUCC – CONTINUED:**

- Again – that all are welcome. That we are welcoming and affirming of all genders and races and sexual orientations. We are also – through membership in the UCC – an Open and Affirming Church and a Creation Justice church I am proud of that.
- We are just one of several open and affirming churches in our small towns. The towns are unique, and we are a reflection of that.
- Growth mindset. Not in numbers of butts in the pews, rather in the heads and hearts above those butts and the legs and feet of action beneath them.
- We are a Christian Church, but we respect the wisdom teachings of other faiths
- Notably, our church consists of a vibrant community where approximately 44% of our members identify as part of the LGBTQ community, making it a haven for individuals seeking an affirming spiritual home.

One distinguishing aspect of our church's history is the leadership of an openly gay pastor. This progressive step forward has had a positive influence on our growth and development. I believe it is significant to acknowledge that over the years, our church has experienced remarkable periods of expansion and spiritual flourishing during the tenures of openly gay pastors. This demonstrates the power of authentic representation in inspiring personal connections, deepening understanding, and igniting a sense of belonging among our diverse congregation and the community at large.

By highlighting these aspects of our church, I hope to convey the essence of our unique community—a place where individuals from all walks of life, including the LGBTQ community, gather to seek spirituality, find acceptance, and engage in meaningful relationships.

- I love the diverse spiritual backgrounds and other diversity that I don't see elsewhere in West Michigan.
- Sense of community and generosity.
- The Community – diverse and welcoming.

• **Describe the experience of worship. What are the best qualities inherent in our worship service? Is there anything that you would change?**

- Hard to say currently. Joys and Concerns is a wonderful space for people to talk about needs and concerns. Passing of the peace, especially now that everybody got over doing Namaste, instead of hugs!
- What surprised me the most when I first started to attend was that the congregation was not in a hurry to leave at the end of the service. Growing up Catholic, that is not what I experienced.
- The order progresses in a method that is familiar from my previous church services. I enjoy the sermons and the ability to take the lessons to modern day. I like that the Bible and teachings are updated without the confines of old-fashioned doctrine.
- Best: Passing peace, music, weekly communion, affirming and provocative homilies.

Change: be concise with announcements, joys & concerns, say Aramaic Lord's Prayer each week, more use of the arts: all of the arts.

- More modern music
- No changes.
- It is a loving, meaningful, heartfelt service with excellent, stimulating preaching on how we need to live life.
- You can feel the energy of people who care deeply about this church and one another.
- I love all aspects of our services
- Excellence and humility in all aspects. Stimulating and engaging sermons and readings, outstanding music program in nature and performance are the two aspects that stand out most.
- I really appreciate the spiritual 'red thread' that runs through the service from the opening music, unison prayer, readings, reflection. It inspires me to reflect and take action.
- I have been involved in church music and liturgy for a larger part of my life. I did not generally relate to the service as a whole and thought the musicianship is excellent, though the music is not where I am at right now in life. I don't think that Creator needs to be worshiped. Creator wants friends and co-creators. I like to think that gratitude and thanks are more important than "worship." It's not that the service is bad in any way, it's just not what I was looking for now in life. My husband wanted to be a part and we went consistently almost up until COVID. I was not looking for a church but I did not want to see my partner join alone.
- Many church members participate in the weekly service. We have people assigned to welcome; assigned to light the candles; assigned to do the readings; and assigned to help with communion. We are involved.
- No change

**DESCRIBE THE WORSHIP EXPERIENCE – CONTINUED:**

- Music variation outside of traditional hymns, encouragement of more lay people diversity, welcoming of folks not members, as it often feels clique-y, more thinking outside of the box.
- The service is not overly ritualistic. It centers on the positive. It is very personal. (I don't need my sins forgiven! Not that our service to date has done that!)
- Love all, but would have the back-room folks to come out sooner for communion.
- The Worship Service as well as the Progressive theology attracted us. I have appreciated that messages delivered were willing to speak to current affairs and injustice. And have love the music by Peter Black. Loved, love the way we sing short choruses in a liturgical way. Love Jeff Spangler leading us in those and adding verses to expand on what we sing in response. Have appreciated and hope we continue Weekly Communion.
- I think coming together to share communion is special. This is central to who we are as a church.
- Kindness and joy. You won't find the dour, suppressive, restrictive Calvinist ethos so common in our region in this place.
- Not stuffy, new perspectives on old readings, light-hearted and fully inclusive.
- The fellowship we demonstrate and how we care for each other.
- Our worship service embodies a sense of inclusivity, vibrancy, and authenticity that sets it apart from the other seven churches in the area. It offers a space where individuals can both connect with their spirituality through progressive Christianity and feel a deep sense of community.

One of the best qualities inherent in our worship service is its celebratory and affirming atmosphere. It is a place where diversity is not only acknowledged but celebrated, fostering an environment where every person, regardless of their background or identity, can participate fully in the worship experience. This inclusivity creates a truly accepting and loving community, where individuals can bring their whole selves and find support and understanding.

- Wouldn't change a thing. The cadence of the service and content, music, etc., is all wonderful.
- Short, succinct, impactful homily that stays with you.

• **We describe ourselves as “progressive”, “inclusive”, and “open and affirming”. How central is this to our identity?**

- Essential! There are too many other places of the other kind around.
- I believe it is the core of our church. These words are what attracted me to the church. As a gay man, it is important to feel valued. Also, it is important not to be one of a few who are LGBTQ
- We open a door to those not served by other churches. I believe we should be a Gay church first, and celebrate those that are no welcome at other religious institutions
- Absolutely central, and always vulnerable.
- Extremely.
- That is the identity. Without that, the Church loses its identity and becomes just another Church.
- Very important
- These ideas are the heart of this church’s foundation.
- Necessary.
- Essential
- Central and essential.
- Absolutely central to DUCC identity.
- Absolutely who we are. I have never experienced one person degrading another.
- Good.
- Central, but could be expanded to be more racially and age diversified – reflective of the whole people of God.
- Essential
- Absolutely critically essential.
- That is who we are! So, we need to continue to practice what we preach and continue the work.
- It IS our identity. Not just central. It’s exactly who we are.
- Core.
- It’s at our heart. It’s what makes us different from many other churches.
- I think this is very central to our identity as DUCC and I would like to see that continue
- Imperative.
- Absolutely defining.

**IMPORTANCE OF 'PROGRESSIVE' AND 'OPEN AND AFFIRMING' – CONTINUED:**

- The description of our church as "progressive," "inclusive," and "open and affirming" is not just a peripheral aspect of our identity; it is at the very core of who we are as a congregation. These values serve as guiding principles that shape our beliefs, actions, and overall community ethos.

Being "progressive" means that we are committed to adapting and evolving in response to the changing needs and understanding of our world. It implies a willingness to challenge traditional norms and explore new perspectives, ensuring that our faith remains relevant and meaningful in a contemporary context. Progressivism drives us to be forward-thinking, socially engaged, and open to diverse voices and ideas and calls us to speak truth to power and speaking up and taking action against injustice.

The concept of "inclusivity" lies at the heart of our identity and goes beyond mere acceptance. It embodies a sincere embrace of the vast array of human experiences, backgrounds, and identities. Inclusivity ensures that everyone, regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or abilities, is not only welcomed but also empowered and celebrated as full members of our community. It is through inclusivity that we create a safe and nurturing space for individuals to express their authentic selves and grow spiritually.

Similarly, being "open and affirming" signifies our unconditional support and love for the LGBTQ community. It explicitly acknowledges the importance of recognizing, embracing, and celebrating sexual orientations and gender identities. By being open and affirming, we strive to counteract the discrimination and marginalization that many LGBTQ individuals have faced within religious communities. This affirmation sends a powerful message that all are valued and deserving of respect and belonging particularly within the community and world at large as we see more and more attacks upon the LGBTQ community from other communities, governments, and Christian churches.

Overall, the central place of progressivism, inclusivity, and being open and affirming in our identity fundamentally shapes and defines our church community.



• **What is important to you in a sermon or homily?**

- Practical words that can be applied for everyday situations.
- For me, the messages are timely and inclusive.
- Offering us things to ponder and create a personal growth opportunity. I like the aspect of storytelling and personal experiences. Especially from a Gay perspective.
- Warmth, fresh perception, understanding of how hard it is to be a person.
- Explaining Bible meaning not literally, but what is the message or moral.
- The most important thing, the thing that keeps me in this Church. The sermons must make me question, grow, learn, and become a better person.
- Most important is stimulating thoughts on how to live our lives in this world.
- How it makes these both qualities feel it's contemporary. We are in the stores now, really today as much is the stories, song, poems, and the sermons and homily.
- Enthusiasm. Progressive Christian thinking. Relevance to our lives.
- Relating it to everyday experiences of most people.
- Thought provoking, intellectually and emotionally meaningful.
- That it both educates me and inspires me. It educates me by citing sources and providing historical context, and inspires me by providing ideas for how I can act on the messages.
- Insight that helps me understand the Message of Yeshua better in applying that to my life
- Sal was special. His sermons were very specific. He spoke from the heart and used everyday experiences, present worldly topics, and life as we lived it every day and meshed it with the Sunday sermon. He didn't just read from and preach about what he read.
- The message.
- Love, justice and action encouragement: reflection, individually and collectively acknowledging the churches' complicity in racial, gender, indigenous, creation, feminine injustices, and erasures, etc.
- "Consistency from week to week. Continuity. Memorability. Delivery.
- I would have to say – I so appreciate a pastor who can deliver a message without notes. Not many can. But I was on a staff where we did that. So appreciated the way Sal was able to do this. Hoping the next pastor will be able to as well. Not critically essential...but it can make a difference in the feeling as we listen. Also, I appreciated that Sal was willing to address current issues of the day as I said above.
- A well-written, profound, and thought-provoking homily causes me to think, feel and act on what the message is telling me to do as a progressive Christian.
- Constant reminder that the writings in the books we collectively call the Bible are ancient storytelling, belonging to a large world-wide library of ancient storytelling and wonderful mythologies used to teach people one simple lesson – we need to treat people the way we want to be treated. The prayer bell is the embodiment of this idea. I'm here for that prayer bell.
- Growth, new perspective, insights, inspiration for action.
- I like to be challenged in my thinking. I become bored with the traditional Christian viewpoint

**WHAT IS IMPORTANT IN A HOMILY – CONTINUED:**

- 1. Personal Relevance: Messages that resonate with my own life experiences, struggles, and questions. One of the greatest gifts Sal brought to me and countless others who sought to be a part of this church community was that his 15 minutes with us on Sundays was, at times, a lifeline. Transformative homily's that helped many navigate and reconcile their Christian upbringing or faith with their sexual orientation, a core of one's identity.
- 2. Authenticity and Vulnerability: Messages where the pastor shares their own journey, vulnerabilities, and insights. Messages that embrace authenticity and vulnerability which help to create a sense of connection, empathy, and understanding. It allows you to see that your own experiences are valid and that you are not alone in your spiritual journey.
- 3. Nuanced Scriptural Interpretation: Messages that explore scripture in a nuanced and inclusive manner, offering perspectives on how it relates to today's experiences had by of all walks of life including the LGBTQ individual—such messages can help bridge the gap between one's own religious upbringing and one's sexual orientation or identity, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of faith and spirituality.
- 4. Social Relevance and Justice: I desire messages that shed light on social justice issues and the political climate, particularly in our own country. I look for messages that encourage engagement with these topics and offer a progressive Christian perspective on promoting equity, compassion, and love in society. Sermons that inspire us all to be a force for positive change and ignite a desire for involvement and action.
- 5. Hope and Inspiration: I seek messages that provide a sense of hope, encouragement, and inspiration. I look for messages that remind me of the enduring values of love, compassion, and acceptance within faith. Messages that offer hope and nurture a desire to continue the journey of reconciling past religious trauma and my Christian faith as a gay man, husband, father, son, brother, and friend.
- That it has me think about things; not to provide answers, but different viewpoints on faith. I don't think there is one solution in faith and living a good life. There must be many paths to God and a spiritual walk.
- Sense of humor
- I appreciate it when I learn something new, a shift in perspective. It's important that it relates to my own life experience.

• **Describe the work of DUCC. What is our calling?**

- A place where people are welcomed for who they truly are, not what they think they're supposed to be.
- I believe our calling is to reach out into the community and help those in need. What happens between 10:00 and 11:15 on Sundays is important, but what is more important to me is that we take that message out and live what we preach.
- To offer a safe haven for the LGBTQ+ community. We should offer support and a mentor network to gay people. This segment is continually under served.
- Opening consciousness, humility, way of being in the world, widening perception.
- Serving the community, welcoming all people.
- I'll say it this way – the work the Church is doing now should not change, it is what this Church is called to do.
- To encourage our congregation to be kind and loving to all those we come in contact with in our lives and use Jesus as our lens on how to live those lives
- God wants us to practice love, peace, be supportive of others who need help, and practice the answers that abide in the Bible to real life and avoid made-up lies to harm others who are vulnerable, harm through racism, for one example, and protect from hatred those marginalized and on the borders of society.
- To know Love.
- To administer to all who ask in the spirit of love. Promote peaceful causes, end violence, work towards equality for all people.
- Our online engagement suggests that we provide a spiritual home to thousands. For those who can be present at least sometimes, it provides an important community for stimulating our spiritual lives and using that engagement for the greater good of our physical community (services and support).
- To promote social and creation justice and make the community where live a better place.
- Way-showers. Light-workers, compassionate people who take the message of Yeshua to a higher level. This might involve activism in solidarity with those currently being harassed and persecuted simply for being. Don't forget the young, the old or the scamps and mavericks among us.
- To make DUCC the best that it can be. Each of us need to be an integral, active part of the church to make it as inviting and accepting as possible.
- To be caring and helping others.
- We are called to become the whole people of God, tending to injustices, and serving Love.
- To be an activist church for justice issues and climate issues, but also to care about those in need – supporting Christian Neighbors and other like organizations.
- I don't understand.

**WHAT IS DUCC’S CALLING – CONTINUED:**

- I think we could do a better job of reaching out beyond Douglas/Saugatuck. Can we think about ways to connect with other progressive churches in West Michigan to enhance our missions and goals together?
- To care for one another and the folks in need in our region. To sit with each other’s pain, and provide comfort as we can.
- To see beyond old paradigms to hear Jesus more clearly to be equipped and inspired to obey more accurately.
- I think we are leaders in our Community in how we care for those in our surrounding area and beyond. We routinely support worthy causes.
- I believe our calling as DUCC is to provide nourishment for our community in their faith journey and in their lives. DUCC is a place to walk together in solidarity in a spirit of accompaniment during the ups and downs in life.
- To support one another on our journeys.
- To follow the example set by Jesus.

• **What communities or causes should be the focus of our ministry and outreach?**

- Serving our community and supporting each other to support the work to be done.
- This question is tough. I believe that we do a better than average job of helping the communities we serve. That said, we need to be aware of issues that are new and important. That means reaching out to members to see what is on our minds.
- The LGBTQ community with a pastor that is from that community.
- Children's welfare, general health, food, housing, programs that invite those not part of DUCC: service, workshops, readings, concerts, art exhibits, films, etc.
- Local needs and progressive issues.
- Nothing should change.
- Caring and helping in this world to all we come in contact with.
- One of the outreaches central to our church: walking the talk.
- Any relevant focus for the good of All.
- I'm comfortable with our very broad engagement, but note that it would likely be useful to consider whether there should be any boundaries on our engagement.
- I support the causes above, but wish we would do more to support racial diversity and inclusion in our corner of SW Michigan. St. Peter's has ensured its clergy and programming help make local Latinx families welcome.
- Those who are in need, any kind of need. This faith community has over and over shown what Christian activism is, a willingness to not just talk, but do. I saw that in how the church opened their hearts to Muslims, women, Queer people, and just the local community.
- Try for some younger people.
- Justice issues, Peace issues, Climate issues, care for the least among us, honoring of all sexual orientations.
- We can do a better job of reaching out to the GAY community in this rea. How to do this? Well, I don't really know BUT, if we can talk about how to do this...I bet we'll come up with a plan! I think we should have the pews filled with Gay men and women!
- Feeding people, righting wrongs, fighting for the rights of LGBTQ+ folk and women and immigrants, and the planet
- Widows and Orphans...those in need. The least of these.
- Reaching out to diverse populations in Allegan County.

**WHAT SHOULD BE THE MINISTRY AND OUTREACH OF OUR CHURCH – CONTINUED:**

- 1. Marginalized Communities: As a church community we should continue outreach to and advocating for groups that face discrimination, inequality, and injustice. Communities such as LGBTQ+, racial and ethnic minorities, immigrants and refugees, individuals with disabilities, and the poor.
- 2. Social Justice: Centering our ministry around social justice by actively speaking up against systemic injustice, oppression, and inequality in our community. Engage in advocacy efforts, participate in grassroots movements, and collaborate with local organizations to address these issues effectively.
- 3. Inclusive and Compassionate Christianity: A key aspect of our ministry involves embodying and promoting a Christianity rooted in the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, which emphasize love, acceptance, and compassion. We offer an inclusive and non-judgmental space that welcomes diverse beliefs and perspectives, we foster a community that embraces everyone.
- 4. Interfaith Dialogue and Understanding: To bridge gaps with other Christian churches that may differ in their interpretations and practices, we must actively engage in interfaith dialogue and collaboration. Encourage open conversations, seek common ground, and work together on shared concerns, fostering mutual understanding and respect.
- 5. Education and Empowerment: Promote education and empowerment not only within our congregation but within our broader community by organizing workshops, seminars, or seminars on topics like social justice, inclusivity, and understanding diverse theological perspectives. Equip individuals with knowledge and resources to challenge harmful beliefs and practices.
- 6. Community Partnerships: Continue to forge partnerships with local organizations that share similar values and goals. Through collaborating, we can continue the work Sal Sapienza began with extending the reach and impact of our ministry. We should support initiatives that focus on community development, education, and social services to positively impact our local area.
- Social justice causes are nearest to my heart, but suspect we also need a focused variety of others
- Christian Neighbors

- **Many would describe us as a socially activist church. How important is it to you that members in our church are actively addressing and speaking out on the issues of the day?**

- Important
- This issue is an individual choice and should remain that way. If the church continues to be open about our mission, most members will be active. However, for those who can't or do not want to be that active, they should still be welcomed.
- Very
- Encourage letters to editors, participation in programs at library, history center galleries.
- Very important.
- Most important – it is who this Church is.
- I think our congregation tries to make the world a better place and speaks out on the issues that try to make the world a better place.
- Central to our church.
- Very important
- Very important
- Very important, It makes me proud of who we are.
- VERY
- We must speak truth to power, be example of people willing to follow the example of Yeshua. I remember what Sal said: If you are going to follow Yeshua, you'd better look good on wood. Speaking the truth will not make you popular. Supporting communities like the LGBTQ Community actually brings condemnation by less enlightened so-called conservative Christians.
- Very important
- We need the acknowledgment of the variety of gifts in the Body. Not everyone needs to be on the frontline activities, however wisdom rises up from all.
- Essential
- Very
- Well, we really don't do that anymore. Do we? Since COVID, not much action has taken place in terms of activism. What is going on with the Social Justice Team?? NOTHING. See what I mean!
- It's kind of the whole point, I think. Our government is a mess, and churches have always and will always have to take up the slack. It shouldn't be this way, but it just is. Church is the platform that works locally to address real needs our governments have failed to address.
- Core
- Very important. We put word into action.
- I think it is important to provide a voice for the voiceless
- Essential
- Very important.

**HOW IMPORTANT IS DUCC ACTIVISM – CONTINUED:**

- The continued commitment of our church to be a socially activist community is of utmost importance to me. It is not enough to simply hold beliefs in our hearts; we must actively address and speak out against the issues that plague our society today. By advocating for social justice and equality, we can work towards dismantling systems of oppression and creating a more inclusive and compassionate world. As members and leaders within our faith community, we have a responsibility to actively challenge and confront racism, homophobia, and other forms of discrimination that undermine the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. It is through our actions and collective voice that we can strive to create positive change, nurture empathy, and promote love and acceptance within our church and beyond. By remaining socially engaged and actively addressing these pressing issues, we not only align ourselves with the teachings of Jesus Christ but also contribute to the transformation of our world into a more just and equitable place for all.



• **Do you see our work/calling as pastor-driven or congregation-driven?**

- Definitely congregation driven
- It has to be both. Sometimes, we must depend on the pastor to guide us, but members also need to feel that they can offer direction
- A combination.
- Neither. Need to somehow get more of the individual members to do, thus widen, the work of service both to the church and community
- I believe Sal drove issues, but based on his experience and congregation needs.
- I think it takes both – the pastor should be leading and encouraging us to make the world a better place.
- Equal
- Congregation
- Used to think pastor driven, now hoping to lean to congregation driven.
- I see it as a partnership. Our congregation is very active, but pastoral leadership is important, as well.
- Both – I believe one without the other would handicap us.
- Both, you need both a leader or leaders and a communal vision, a kind of congregational consciousness that unites people and their gifts.
- Congregation driven
- Congregation driven
- How about Love driven, interwoven by all drawing out their wisdom and gift
- To date, pastor driven with a lesser degree of congregation driven
- I hope any pastor chosen will be looking to the congregation to see the Vision. Not arrive with a Vision they want to implement.
- Unfortunately, it has been pastor driven. People came for Sal. They should be coming for the missions and ministries, NOT the pastor. Why? Because they are here to GUIDE us and inspire us to get out and serve others!
- Yes. Both.
- I think it's dangerous to pose this as an either or. We don't want a church where the pastor sets our strategy in a vacuum, nor do we want a weak, lazy pastor to do our bidding. We need High Performance Collaboration and action.
- I see it as a partnership. A pastor needs to lead and listen.

**PASTOR-DRIVEN OR CONGREGATION-DRIVEN – CONTINUED:**

- Both the pastor and the congregation play vital roles in shaping the mission and direction of the church. I personally believe that the pastor serves as a spiritual guide, providing leadership, inspiration, and guidance to the congregation as whole. The pastor is entrusted with the responsibility of embodying the values and teachings of our faith, while also being a voice for justice and compassion.

However, it is equally important to recognize the agency and influence of the congregation. The congregation comprises the heart and soul of the church, bringing diverse perspectives, talents, and experiences. Their active participation, engagement, and shared responsibility contribute to the vibrant and inclusive nature of our community.

For our church to thrive and uphold its legacy, we must seek a pastor who not only exhibits visionary leadership but also values the collaboration and input of the congregation. A pastor who encourages open dialogue, listens attentively, and seeks the wisdom of the community can help foster a sense of ownership and shared purpose.

- Congregation-driven.
- Both are needed
- Congregation driven; pastor supported

• **What are all the qualities and characteristics of the pastor we are looking for? Which one is the MOST important?**

- As a person of color, I would love to see some diversity in our ministry. It is clear that we are pro Saugatuck, Douglas, LGBT community, is it possible to find clergy that could embody what we are currently doing as a church in this area as well? must be an engaging and energizing pastor. So many churches have the other kind.
- The new pastor must continue to carry on our open and affirming directions. I would like it if a new pastor had a way of bringing in some younger members, especially those with children, but I am not sure how that would happen.
- Charismatic man with empathy and energy
- Humility
- Ability to connect with all members
- Not afraid to call the Bible a book, written by men.
- We are looking for someone who is a leader, who can encourage and educate us on how to make this world better
- Passion, empathy, and compassion
- Scholar, real person, sense of humor, enthusiastic, empathic
- Someone who believes that everyone is absolutely equal in God's eyes and the eyes of humanity
- Given the power of the congregation, the pastor must be comfortable with sharing power in a way that is thoughtful, compassionate, and engaging. We must be able to trust that the pastor will lead and support us in our joint work, with intelligence, empathy, and joy.
- Inspiration example for their congregation, inclusive, lives their faith, well-educated and intelligent, collaborative with community, service oriented. Inspirational.
- Compassion, a strong leader, god teacher, humility, gender not important, BTW.
- Sincerity, kindness, inclusiveness, interest participation, openness, availability, support, self-confidence, self-awareness. The most important is self-awareness.
- Caring and knowledgeable
- Discernment and heart driven
- I would like this question asked of the candidates: What underlying theme informs your homilies? What is the one thing that unifies your messaging?

(Sal's was the inner light (namaste). It was a pervasive concept that informed all of his homilies. It afforded his homilies a degree of consistency from week to week. To do this is not a common trait among ministers; they're not taught to do this. But I feel it is very effective and would like to again have someone for whom this is a practice.)

- Warmth, genuine caring, sense of humor, not ego-centric, perspicacious
- Sense of humor

**IMPORTANT CHARASTICS OF OUR PASTOR – CONTINUED:**

- Compassion, humility, wanting to be invested here for more than just a few years. And a pastor able to step away from the pulpit to preach. Butth that is rare, I know. Compassion probably the most important.
- Someone who is open and honest, intelligent, and well-educated academically and in LIFE! A good listener who empathizes with people.
- The work we do is exhausting. Never ending. Often sad. We need lots of loving cheerleading to keep it up. Inspiration. Screwing our heads back on to face in the right direction for the week ahead. Choose your metaphor.
- Great Student and Teacher (Curious, life-long learner)
- Serious and light-hearted. (A legitimate good sense of humor) Commitment (to our church and community). Wise & Discerning. Courageous & Gracious. Strong communication & interpersonal skills & interpersonal skills. Patient & impatient. Loving & Forgiving.
- I'm looking for a real thinker, well read and possibly being an author themselves. Someone who can relate to all those in the congregation and doesn't play favorites. I'd like to see a balance between head and heart.
- Most important – a loving spirit. Also, warm and welcoming, intelligent, kind, social
- Understanding the specific demographics and needs of the congregational members is essential when considering the qualities and characteristics of our next pastor. Inclusivity and the ability to empower and inspire all members of the community, including those from the LGBTQ community, will be important factors in their leadership.

Given that a significant portion of our congregation identifies as gay, it would be beneficial that our next pastor possess sensitivity, understanding, and a commitment to creating an inclusive environment for all individuals, regardless of their sexual orientation. This includes being knowledgeable about LGBTQ issues, providing support and pastoral care to LGBTQ individuals and their families, and actively working to foster a welcoming and affirming atmosphere within the church.

The ability to lead and inspire is indeed an essential quality for any pastor, and it is particularly crucial in an environment where individuals from marginalized communities seek empowerment and inclusivity. A pastor who can effectively communicate the message of love, acceptance, and dignity for all, while also providing spiritual guidance and support, can help create a safe and nurturing space for the LGBTQ community within our congregation.

It is therefore recommended that our search for a new pastor include candidates who possess not only the spiritual qualifications (leadership skills, biblical knowledge, community engagement, effective communication, and collaborative spirit) but also a demonstrated commitment to inclusivity, empathy, and the ability to address the unique needs and concerns of the LGBTQ community.

• **If our social and theological progressivism is central to our identity, in what ways might our new pastor evidence this?**

- All he/she can do is show us what he/she has been involved with in the past. It is also up to the committee to ask these questions during interviews with candidates.
- I think this would be where the pastor engages the church community.
- Personal affirmation; incorporating various religions, standing firm against destructive churches.
- Every way
- I think we need to pick someone who agrees with the principals this congregation and has the skills to encourage us to go out in this world and live those principals
- Not sure. I guess the pastor would respond during her/his/they interviews over its length and connection, and time.
- They will be unafraid to speak out on all aforementioned issues, listen to all ideas, admit when they are weak in some areas, not be afraid to be wrong.
- Through all expressions of thought – past writings, presentations, etc.
- Example, example, example...
- By supporting and making our congregation ‘feel’ that he/she is always willing to be open and available to conversation and change as we move forward. If this new pastor is comfortable with who they are, they will have no problem being available to whatever the needs of our congregation are.
- Not taking the Bible literally
- Our groups, congregation make up
- Through messages and involvement in the larger Douglas/Saugatuck community.
- Good question...They should be well read and have EXPERIENCE in social and theological progressivism.
- Helping us to discover ways to build coalitions in our areas to get the work done. Not be competitive with other churches and organizations, but bridge building.
- Good question...I do not as yet have an answer.
- Have a history of being socially active and show they can put thought into action. If not, LGBTQ then demonstrate how they are an ally.
- We should be looking for evidence in word, deed, writings or other forms of expression
- Involved in the community and respect for other faith traditions.
- By being personally involved in the activities of the church.
- In the interpretation of the scripture

**HOW CAN PASTOR EVIDENCE SOCIAL AND THEOLOGICAL PROGRESSIVITY – CONTINUED:**

- 1. Inclusive Preaching and Teaching: Our new pastor should incorporate social and theological progressivism into their sermons and teachings, emphasizing messages of love, acceptance, social justice, and equality. They should highlight the importance of inclusivity, challenge discriminatory practices, and promote understanding across diverse identities and perspectives.
- 2. Advocacy for Social Justice: A pastor committed to social and theological progressivism may actively engage in advocacy work for social justice issues. This could involve raising awareness about systemic inequalities, empowering marginalized communities, and taking a stand against discrimination. They may encourage the congregation to participate in community initiatives, engage in activism, and support organizations that promote social justice causes.
- 3. Open Dialogue and Discussion: A pastor who evidences social and theological progressivism should create an environment that encourages open dialogue and respectful discussion on challenging issues. They should welcome diverse perspectives, fostering an atmosphere where different viewpoints can be explored and understood.
- 4. Community Engagement: Our new pastor might engage the church community in activities and initiatives that demonstrate your commitment to social and theological progressivism. This could include partnering with local organizations, participating in community projects, and offering support to vulnerable or marginalized groups.
- 5. Welcoming and Affirming Environment: It is important for our new pastor to create an environment that welcomes and affirms all individuals, regardless of their identity. This includes actively supporting and affirming LGBTQ individuals, promoting gender equality, understanding the challenges faced by racial and ethnic minorities, and embracing others from diverse backgrounds.
- 6. Ethical Stewardship: Our new pastor should demonstrate a commitment to ethical stewardship, ensuring that the church's resources are utilized to benefit the broader community. They should prioritize transparency in financial matters and allocate resources towards initiatives that promote social, economic, and environmental well-being.

• **Similarly, as an Open and Affirming church, how might our new pastor demonstrate his/her support for this?**

- The most obvious would be if the candidate is part of the LGBTQ community. But if not, we would have to go on past actions by the individual.
- By being a part of the narrative and story of being an outsider that brings us in.
- Speaking out and affirming peaceful opposition to those churches who impose on and combat those different from themselves.
- Being involved with the congregation and their needs.
- He has to believe in those principals and displayed them in his life as he has lived it.
- Must be a gay or gay friendly person who is happy, confident and inspires confidence in others.
- Again, past statements and actions.
- By continuing to create a safe space for the LGBTQ community while also expanding our inclusiveness racially or ethnically.
- Reach out, support and example, example, example!
- Be open to new ideas.
- By welcoming any and all congregants.
- Their past activities, response to all members.
- All should feel the new pastor's complete acceptance.
- Have personal and job experience.
- Always pulling people from usually un-represented populations to lead. Listening to and acting on the needs of our poorly represented folk.
- Past sermons, writings, actions (aka: Evidence)
- We should be evaluating any historical evidence that they either outwardly support this tenant or for evidence that they do not. If not, I don't think they are a good candidate for our search.
- By being actively in support LGBTQ activities, causes. By taking part.
- Verbally and perhaps attend the Aware event. Use 'she' when speaking about God.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...

**HOW CAN PASTOR EVIDENCE 'OPEN AND AFFIRMING' SUPPORT– CONTINUED:**

- As an Open and Affirming church, it is important that our new pastor actively demonstrate support for this commitment.
  1. Inclusive Language and Practices: The new pastor should use inclusive language during worship services, sermons, and in communication with the congregation. This includes using gender-neutral language when addressing God, incorporating inclusive imagery and metaphors, and ensuring that all individuals feel welcome and represented in the church's practices and traditions.
  2. Support for LGBTQ+ Community: The new pastor should actively support and advocate for the LGBTQ+ community both within the church and in the wider community. This can be done by attending LGBTQ+ events, engaging with LGBTQ+ organizations, offering support and pastoral care specifically tailored to LGBTQ+ individuals, and actively opposing discrimination and prejudice against LGBTQ+ individuals.
  3. Education and Awareness: Our new pastor can foster understanding and acceptance by providing educational opportunities within the church community. This could involve organizing workshops, guest speakers, or study groups to explore LGBTQ+ theology, history, and issues. By increasing awareness and knowledge, they can create a more informed and inclusive congregation.
  4. Pastoral Care: Ensuring that LGBTQ+ individuals in the congregation feel supported and included is pivotal. The new pastor should provide pastoral care that is sensitive to the unique needs and challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals and their families. This can be done through active listening, creating safe spaces for sharing and support, and being knowledgeable about LGBTQ+-affirming resources and support networks.
  5. Visible Support: A visible display of support is vital for the new pastor to demonstrate their commitment to being Open and Affirming. This can include wearing symbols or pins that denote support for LGBTQ+ equality, publicly affirming LGBTQ+ rights from the pulpit, visibly standing against any discrimination or prejudice, and actively championing LGBTQ+ rights within local and national contexts.
  6. Collaborative Decision-Making: The new pastor should involve members of the LGBTQ+ community and their allies in decision-making processes within the church. This can mean empowering them to hold leadership positions, seeking their input on important matters, and ensuring their voices are heard and respected throughout the church's activities and initiatives.



• **We are an active church, how important is it that our new pastor takes the lead in things we are involved in around our community?**

- It is critical that he/she be a leader. To that point, I believe that the new pastor should live in the community or close to it, so that travel is not a problem.
- Community involvement and interaction with other pastors and denominations.
- Not important. Would prefer personal affirmation than burnout from participation.
- Very.
- Everyone's leadership skill is slightly different, but our congregation needs someone who will do what he believes and not just talk about it.
- That's a central facet of the leadership and important role for the pastor's characters.
- While perhaps not always taking the lead, must support wholeheartedly the church's endeavors in the community.
- It is important. Sal's regular presence in key community activities demonstrated DUCC's leadership and engagement.
- Very.
- Very important.
- Absolutely important that the new pastor support and recognize what we as a congregation need and want.
- Very.
- Lots of ideas bubble...discernment, collaboration may be key. There is a time for everything.
- Essential.
- Maybe not the lead, but involvement.
- Very
- VERY!
- I think presence is more important than leadership. I think the pastor should encourage US to lead, and always provide moral and friendly backup with their presence.
- Core
- Very important to have the respect of the community as well as Church members.
- I don't think that a pastor needs to participate or lead all activities, but I would like to see a similar level of connection with our community; enjoying dinner or other activities with our church community. To be seen as part of the broader community and participating in activities outside the church community, as well.
- Very important
- I think both the pastor and members of the congregation should at time provide leadership, depending on the issue.
- Not at all. Participation would be helpful, but the new pastor needs to be leading the church or leading the Council to lead the church.

• **What else would you like to add that may not have fit the questions above?**

- I believe the candidate would have solid answer as to why he/she wants to be our pastor. What is attracting the individual to Douglas.
- This is a great opportunity to launch from Pastor Sal's success and become a church that continues to share our pastors with the world, a catapult to making this world a more loving place.
- Enrich congregation by bringing out individual abilities, talents, knowledge. Create program of making known individual life stories. Programs where personal life stories are shared developing a deeper understanding of one another. Right now, we are wonderfully affable, but don't deeply know one another's lives.
- I joined because the sermons from Sal made sense to me for the first time in my church history. A pastor that can deliver a personal, spiritual sermon that connects to individuals is crucial.
- He needs to understand what our congregation stands for which you are getting in these questions.
- The pastor needs to know we are a diverse group of people and all must be heard with kindness and acceptance for each voice equally.
- Sal did a great job of meeting with new members and explaining the Church's mission, history, etc. I would hope the next pastor:
  - Did more to encourage established parishioners to welcome and engage new members
  - Additionally, I would love to see more thought given to making the Thursday reflection period more helpful to those new to prayer or contemplation.
- Think outside the box, have a strong, thick skin to deal with blowback by others pastors, critics and even those of the membership. They will need wisdom, diplomacy and know how to delegate, nurture leadership in others, be open to newness, look for gifts in the faith community that may have been overlooked, encourage, and use them.
- A genuine smile and comfort about themselves will make all of us feel comfortable. All of the above statements are a challenge for the new pastor. I have every confidence that this pastoral committee will know when they find the right person. They will come with all the qualities we are looking for. Sal is a difficult act to follow. He was special, but this new pastor will be special, too.
- Our outreach through our YouTube broadcasts is essential to our mission, as well as our financial well-being. The new minister should have the ability to attract and maintain an audience of similar or greater size as Sal was able to amass. That takes a certain 'rizz' that the Selection Committee should be looking for.

**WHAT ELSE WOULD YOU LIKE TO ADD– CONTINUED:**

- Having been involved with Children's Ministries as a pastor (and wrote and designed a Montessori based curriculum for children 3 yrs. - 5th grade), I do regret there are not younger families with children. Wonder about offering a Summer Vacation Peace Camp as First Presbyterian in Holland does. Get to know those parents. Perhaps in that way helping them become interested in Douglas UCC. Wonder about making something available for children - so we are prepared to be with children and advertise that. I saw a young family one Sunday who had just moved to the area. But with nothing to offer children...how could they even consider us. But glad - that we seem to be getting some people in their late 40's and 50's
- I hope the new pastor will take time to get to know all of his/her parishioners. The last pastor did not take time to do this, even after it was suggested to him. It will take time, but they have plenty of time to do this!
- There are a lot of populations in this tiny church. It will be hard to please everybody. Probably impossible. Someone who can hold all of us cheerfully, without taking it personally, will do well here.
- I think we are a quirky, creative, passionate group of individuals thirsty for the truth. A truth that intuitively makes sense to us. We are trying to move forward with a deeper understanding of our Jesus inspired spirituality while simultaneously letting go of old paradigms about what it means (or meant) to be “good and religious.” We now know we are already all good enough in God’s eyes and seek the next level To be truly useful in this noisy, challenge-filled world. Useful to each other, our families, community, and the world.
- We love our little church. I’ve seen ministers come to new church assignments and start changing everything. I would suggest great caution in doing that. We aren’t stubborn or resistant to change – but we love things the way they are.
- New minister can be of any gender, but should have some dynamic quality. It would be nice if they had both charisma and a quiet pastoral personality. Hard to find.