

UCE STRATEGIC PLAN UPDATE RESEARCH

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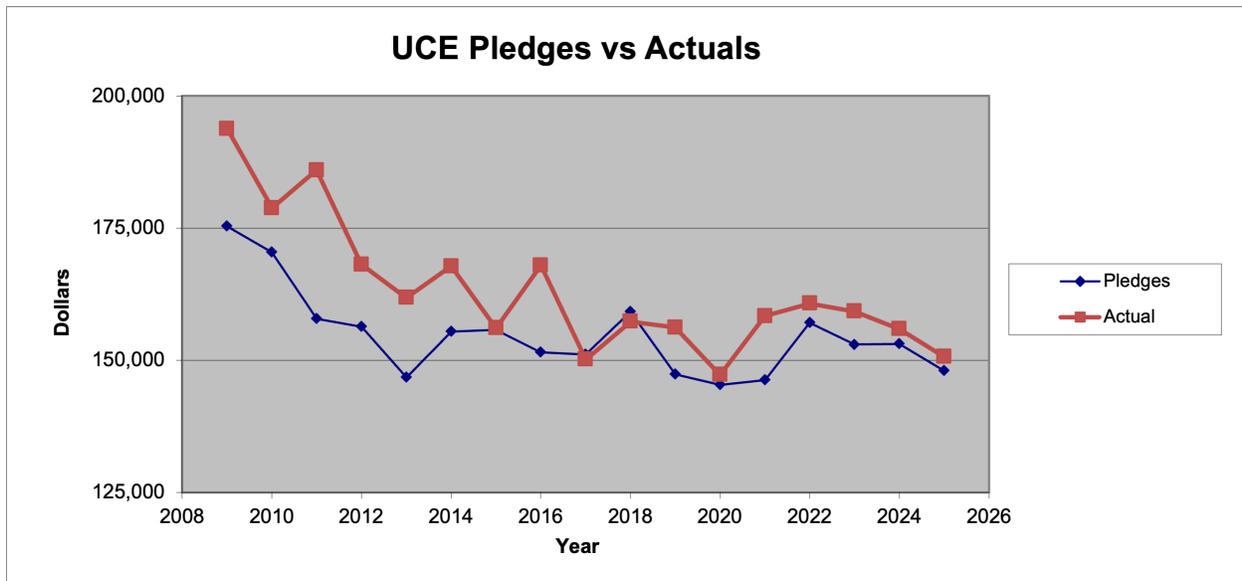
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INTERNAL RESEARCH

CONGREGATION SNAPSHOT COMPARISON

	2016	2026
Membership	182 members*	110 members
Average Sunday service attendance	77	60
Minister	Full time	Full time
Office administrator	20 hours/week	24 hours/week
Director of Religious Exploration	20 hours/week	10 hours/month
Bookkeeper	Contract	Contract
Cleaners	Contract; 3 times/week	Contract; 3 times/week
Total budget	\$300,527 (\$89,400 from full-time renters)	\$331,500 (\$108,000 from full-time renters)

*This figure may have been inflated as it was taken before the database was cleaned.



KEY EVENTS IN CONGREGATION OPERATIONS SINCE 2016

- 2018 – End of Lauren Kaye’s term as Director of Religious Education
- 2018 to 2021 – William Adair served as Director of Religious Education
- 2020 (January) – Rev. Brian Kiely retired after 22 years at UCE
- 2020 (February to August) – Lay-lead services; search committee seeks interim minister
- 2020 (March) – COVID-19; pivoted to online services only
- 2020 (August) to 2021 (May) – Interim minister Lee Anne Washington served UCE
- 2021 (January) to present – resumed in-person Sunday services, with livestreaming
- 2021 (September) to present – Rev. Rosemary Morrison serves UCE (on contract initially; congregation voted to install as settled minister in March 2023)
- 2022 (January) to 2024 (June) – Oksana Atwood served as Director of Religious Exploration
- 2022 (November) - Adopted new Vision and Mission statements and a Covenant of Right Relations

ACTIONS FROM THE 2016 STRATEGIC PLAN

The Strategic Planning team aligned the actions recommended by the various topic-specific Action Teams by the four vision elements: searching, learning, connecting, serving. Following is the list of actions and an indicator of completion.

Searching for spiritual meaning in our lives

Activity	Completed?
Review all elements and rituals of Sunday Services	YES
Review special services (e.g., Blue Christmas, Flower Communion)	YES
Sing a familiar hymn early in each service that is meaningful for all ages	YES
Use “Story for All Ages” in the orders of service	YES
Integrate children more fully into services	YES
Revitalize groups such as Chalice Circles	YES

Learning
to understand ourselves and others

Activity	Completed?
Research new adult RE curricula	YES
Revitalize Adult RE Committee	NO
Offer seminars on different world religions	YES
Review and possibly revise Religious Exploration funding model	YES
Review Director of Religious Exploration job description and funding	YES
Offer Our Whole Lives for adults regularly	PARTIAL*
Offer more adult courses for our own community and as outreach	YES*
Host special programs for youth	YES*
Host needs/interest-based seniors' programs	YES*

*Offered between 2016 and 2019; not continued post-COVID

Connecting
to build fair, just, caring communities

Activity	Completed?
Welcome new attendees	YES
Welcome new members and integrate their skills	YES
Mention highlights from Care and Connections book during services	YES
Form a standing committee for communication and promotion	YES
Develop communications goals and plan(s) to help UCE achieve these goals	YES
Host monthly intergenerational programs – movie nights, game nights, etc.	YES*
Host interest- and activity-based small group social/community gatherings to increase fellowship	YES**

*A variety of events were tried, but “critical mass” was never obtained so planning was discontinued

**Both informal (hosted suppers, crafts nights) and more formal (Chalice Circles, Soul Matters) were introduced, with varying degrees of success

Serving
each other and our communities near and far

Activity	Completed?
Develop strong financial commitment to church programs	YES
Review UCE pet policy	YES
Clarify procedure for reporting maintenance or operation needs*	YES
Usher training	YES
Greeter training	YES
Recruit and train service leaders	YES
Schedule annual board retreat/training session	YES
Explore establishing a Care and Connection Coordinator to coordinate pastoral care (based on Westwood model)	YES
Clarify policy regarding non-UCE UU work by the minister	YES
Clarify minister's role relating to church programs (e.g., Adult RE programming)	YES
Revitalize Ways and Mean Committee	NO
Review and clarify roles of all staff	YES
Acknowledge volunteers and share the load	PARTIAL*
Invite newcomers into easy-to-do starter working roles	YES
Implement longer-term financial plan for UCE	YES
Review and clarify roles of board members, committee chairs	YES
Establish measurement tools for board and committee work	YES
Improve orientation and training of board members and volunteers	YES
Put in place recruitment, training and succession planning for volunteer leaders	PARTIAL**
Increase building and grounds reserve	YES***

*More formal acknowledgement of volunteers began (e.g., acknowledgement in services, a volunteer tea, a hosted meal). The acknowledgement in services have continued for service volunteers, but other formal recognition has not continued.

**The plan was written into the Terms of Reference for the Leadership Committee (formerly known as the nominating committee) but has not been implemented.

***Reserves were built up but had to be used when the furnace quit and the resulting water damage from the sprinklers and roof leak had to be repaired.

NOTE: People were so enthused with the ideas suggested by the Action Groups in 2016 that they couldn't wait until the strategic plan was formally presented to begin diving in. Here are the suggestions that were put into action prior to April 2016:

- Finance and Building and Grounds committees were appointed
- The church administrator is sorted through and organized all administrative and policy files and documents
- The board approved a conflict of interest policy and a volunteer confidentiality agreement.
- Church Services tried different ways of letting people know services are beginning.
- Brian recruited people to choose music for services.
- A new church database (PowerChurch) was installed.
- Music information (title, artist, arranger, etc.) was included in orders of service.
- Announcements were moved to the end of services.
- A display with information about the charity of the month was created.
- The Social Justice group hosted visits to the Food Bank and iHuman.
- News about UCE members and friends was compiled and included in the newsletter.

KEY ACTIONS TAKEN IN ADDITION TO THOSE IN THE STRATEGIC PLAN

- Implemented three major policies: Destructive Behaviour Policy, Safe and Caring Conditions Policy and Conflict Resolution Policy
- Established Right Relations Team to foster healthy relations
- Established a Membership Team to enhance individuals' experience within the walls of UCE
- Established a Communications and Marketing Team to amplify UCE's message beyond its walls and create better communication with members and those who may be seeking a spiritual home
- Board approved an HR manual in June 2024
- "All hands on deck" effort and "Raise the Roof" fundraiser following furnace/sprinkler system freeze in January 2024
- Twice yearly meetings of committee/team leads are taking place to enhance planning and communication

SWOT Analysis*

Strengths

Principles and Values
Welcoming Community
Variety of skills and experience
Chorealis
Transparency with finances
Strong sense of community and home

Strongly committed members
Open to new ideas
Great talents and capabilities
Flexible building
Full-time minister
Historical legacies, partners

Weaknesses

Insecurity about our future
Limited member involvement
Limited Adult Ed opportunities
Unpredictability of services
Culture of scarcity, not abundance

Not good at record keeping
Communication/marketing
Few families or children
Little diversity in membership
Lack of parking

Opportunities

We're the boss of us (don't have to get permission from or follow dictates of higher authority)
Have values and philosophy that are needed in today's world

Can use our space for lots of activities- programs
Use of internet and social media
Outreach to non-churchgoing religious liberals

Threats

Current volunteers aging out and/or burning out
Other groups duplicating our offerings- social justice, spiritual exploration
Heavy reliance on renters for \$\$
Limited music styles and selection
Declining canvass contributions
Cliques
Losing key senior people

**SWOT adapted from 2016 Strategic Plan;
to be updated by GAT*

OVERVIEW OF CONGREGATIONAL INPUT REGARDING THEIR VISIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Takeaways From June 29, 2025 Congregational Conversation

1. Name of Church: The term *church* is off-putting to some and a barrier to being seen as forward thinking or unique.
2. The exterior of the church is not welcoming and needs to be beautified.
3. Greeters were viewed as having a key role, with suggestions that this role be rotated among all the congregation, with at least two greeters on deck so one could guide newcomers on a tour and step away from the front.
4. There were many suggestions for Sunday services to become more diverse with guest speakers, guest choirs, with ideas to introduce new topics into the mix. An idea was raised to have discussion groups after services.
5. Communication needs to improve, and an elevator speech would help. Congregants would be comfortable with a short, quick blurb they could "recite". Our friends do not know who we are, and there were many ideas to raise our profile.
6. We need to ramp up the social aspects of UCE in a predictable (once a month?) way. This is more than the occasional "Soup Sunday"; it is a whole agenda around our essence.

Takeaways From December 2024 Communications Survey

The Communications survey was open from Dec. 5 to 31, 2024, with 37 individuals responding. Answers related to strategic planning are shown below.

3 Words That Describe UCE Now (the larger the word, the more times it was mentioned)

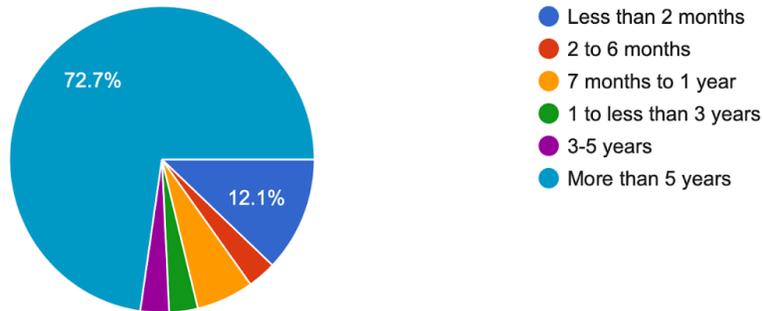


3 Words That Describe the UCE You Would Like Us To Aspire to Be (the larger the word, the more times it was mentioned)



How long have you been connected to UCE?

33 responses



Thoughts on Staffing

63 members and friends responded to the Human Resources Committee’s survey at the end of November 2024. The survey asked what might best serve UCE needs if we could hire another part-time staff member. People were asked to mark 3 preferred choices, understanding that a combination of options might also be considered. Results are shown below.

Director of Lifespan Learning	22%
Events Coordinator	22%
Membership Coordinator	15%
Publicity/Marketing Coordinator	15%
Director of Religious Exploration	11%
Volunteer Coordinator	8%
Technology Assistance	6%

CURRENT BUILDING USAGE by REGULAR RENTERS

DAY	DAYTIME USE				EVENING USE			
	Sanctuary	Boardroom	Classroom	Kitchen	Sanctuary	Boardroom	Classroom	Kitchen
Monday					✓			
Tuesday		✓			✓			
Wednesday	✓				✓			
Thursday	✓				UCE	✓		
Friday							✓	
Saturday								
Sunday	UCE		UCE	UCE				

Other regular rentals:

- Wednesday evenings – Food Bank depot in Keeler Hall
- Second Saturday evening of each month – Dragging Youth in the Sanctuary
- Three groups rent the building once per month each, one Sunday afternoon/evening, one Saturday evening and one Sunday evening (not always on the same weekend)

Open Doors Learning Services Ltd. leases all the classrooms and office space along the east side of the building.

EXTERNAL RESEARCH

EDMONTON POPULATION AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Edmonton and Area Population and Demographics

- In 2024, Edmonton had a population of 1.2 million with a year-over-year increase of 5.73%. The 5-year population growth rate was 15.97%, among the highest in Alberta.¹
- The median family income in Edmonton was \$112,000 compared to the Alberta median of \$96,000.
- With higher proportions of residents aged 20-45 and children, Edmonton's population is slightly younger than the Canadian population. In 2021, the median age of Edmonton residents was 36.8 compared to 41.6 for Canadian residents.²
- In Edmonton, the 2021 federal census showed that 29.1% of census respondents lived in one-person households while 26.5% of respondents lived in one-family households consisting of couples with children. 21.1% of respondents lived in one-family households consisting of couples without children.³
- Edmonton Metropolitan Region (EMR)⁴ population was 1.5 million in 2023, up 4.18% from 2022.
- While much of the growth was concentrated in the city of Edmonton, surrounding communities like Beaumont (19.7% increase, third highest in the province) and Fort Saskatchewan (12.1% increase) were also increasing.⁵
- The population of Alberta was 4.26 million in 2021, an increase of 4.8% from 2016 (4.07 million).⁶ Following a surge in population growth in 2024, Alberta is tracking at a lower growth rate in 2025: forecast to be 2.4%. The estimated provincial population in Q3 2025 is 5.03 million. Growth is expected to slow again in 2026 (forecast at 1.3%) as immigration slows due to federal policies.^{7,8}
- As of Q2 2025, Alberta had the largest net gain from interprovincial migration for the 12th quarter in a row with most in-migrants coming from Ontario. In Q2 2025, Alberta saw a net population increase of 19,268 +0.4% (all migrants).⁹

Ethnic & Cultural Diversity

- From the 2021 federal census, 40% of Edmonton's population identified as a visible minority, 4th highest in the province. This was a 10.8% increase from 2016. The most selected visible minority populations included South Asian (26.7% of visible minority population), Black (17.5%), Filipino (17.5%), Chinese (13.6%), and Arab (6.9%).¹⁰

- 32.5% of Edmonton’s population indicated they were born outside of Canada whereas 23.2% of Alberta’s population indicated they were immigrants. Of Edmonton’s immigrant population, 21.0% arrived between 2016 and 2021.
- The top five countries of birth for immigrants living in Edmonton in 2021 were the Philippines (14.7%), India (12.6%), China (6.4%), the United Kingdom (5.5%), and Vietnam (3.4%).
- In 2021, 62.6% of Edmonton’s population listed English as their mother tongue although 80.3% indicated they spoke English most often at home. 1.6% of respondents listed French as their mother tongue, although 1.1% spoke French most often at home.¹¹
- Non-official languages spoken at home most often or regularly as indicated on the 2021 federal census include: Tagalog (48,300 responses), Punjabi (45,365), Arabic (27,900), Mandarin (23,675), Yue (Cantonese; 23,300).¹²
- Edmonton is home to the largest number of Indigenous people in Alberta. In 2021, Edmonton had 58,165 people who identified as Indigenous, an increase of 15.7% since 2016. This represented 5.84% of the general population of Edmonton in 2021, an increase of 8.25% in the last five years.
- In the Edmonton Metropolitan Region (EMR), the Indigenous population was 83,245, an increase of 17.1% in the last five years. This represented 6.01% of the general population of EMR, an increase of 0.57% since 2016.

2SLGBTQ+ Diversity

- About 4% (226,900) of the population of the Prairie provinces identified as 2SLGBTQ+ on the 2021 federal census. 91.5% of the population lived in a population centre.¹³ 12.7% of 2SLGBTQ+ populations identified as Indigenous compared to 6.1% of non-2SLGBTQ+ populations.¹⁴
- 2SLGBTQ+ populations over age 25 are more likely to never have been married (42.9%) compared to non-2SLGBTQ+ populations (15.1%).
- 2SLGBTQ+ populations are less likely to live in a household with at least one child under 12 (14.2%) compared to non-2SLGBTQ+ populations (25.7%).
- About 12% of Canada’s non-binary and transgender populations live in Alberta. On the 2021 federal census, 5,170 Albertans aged 15 or older in a private household indicated they were non-binary. 42.7% (2,210) of the non-binary population in the province lives in the Edmonton census metropolitan area (CMA). 3,885 respondents indicated they were transgender women and 3,420 indicated they were transgender men in Alberta. Of these populations, 35% (1,360) of transgender women and 39% (1,335) of transgender men live in the Edmonton CMA.¹⁵

Disability & Inclusion

- In 2022, 27.5% (906,100) of Albertans aged 15 and older had at least one disability, an increase from 2017 (21.7%, +6%). Youth (15-24) had the largest increase at 9%. Seniors (65+) continue to be the group with the largest proportion of persons with disabilities (44.6%). In all age groups, women experience a higher rate of disability compared to men.
- Disabilities related to pain (61.3%), mental health-related (40.4%), and flexibility (38.0%) are most reported. The largest increases between 2017 and 2022 were in mental health-related, seeing, and learning disabilities.¹⁶
- Seven out of ten people with disabilities experienced barriers within the past year. In 2022, Alberta had the highest share of people with disabilities who experienced at least one barrier to accessibility: 74%.
- The most commonly experienced barriers included: outdoor space barriers like entrances exits or sidewalks (58.9%), accessing programs or services (50.9%), and barriers related to communication (48.4%).¹⁷

1 "Regional Dashboard: Edmonton," Government of Alberta, accessed October 2, 2025.

<https://regionaldashboard.alberta.ca/region/edmonton/#/>.

2 "Age Pyramids," Statistics Canada, last updated June 26, 2024, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/dv-vd/pyramid/index-eng.cfm>.

3 "Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census of Population," Statistics Canada, last updated December 16, 2022,

<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogsspg/page.cfm?topic=4&lang=E&dguid=2021A00054811061>.

4 EMR includes the following communities and regions: Edmonton, Strathcona County, St. Albert, Spruce Grove, Leduc, Parkland County, Fort Saskatchewan, Beaumont, Sturgeon County, Stony Plain, Leduc County, Morinville, Devon, Gibbons, and Bon Accord.

5 Statistics Canada, "Focus on Geography Series."

6 "Census Profile, 2021 Census of Population," Statistics Canada, last updated August 2, 2024, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&SearchText=Alberta&DGUIDlist=2021A000248&GENDERlist=1,2,3&STATISTIClist=1,4&HEADERlist=0>

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7 "Budget: Economic outlook," Government of Alberta, accessed October 15, 2025, <https://www.alberta.ca/economic-outlook>

8 "Population estimates, quarterly," Statistics Canada, accessed October 15, 2025,

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710000901>.

9 "Canada's population estimates: Age and gender, July 1, 2025," Statistics Canada, accessed October 15, 2025,

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250924/dq250924a-eng.htm>.

10 <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/fogs-spg/page.cfm?lang=E&topic=10&dguid=2021A00054811061>

11 Statistics Canada, "Focus on Geography."

12 Statistics Canada, "Focus on Geography."

13 Population centre is defined as a continuously built up area with a population of 1,000+ and a population density of 400+ persons per square kilometer.

14 "Socioeconomic characteristics of the 2SLGBTQ+ population, 2019 to 2021," Statistics Canada, released January 25, 2024,

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1310087401&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.5&pickMembers%5B1%5D=3.1&pickMembers%5B2%5D=4.1>.

15 "Canada's Transgender and Non-Binary Data Visualization Tool," Statistics Canada, updated February 23, 2024,

<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/71-607-x/71-607-x2022021-eng.htm>.

16 "2022 Canadian Survey of Disability," Government of Alberta, accessed October 16, 2025, <https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/f7335a01-6feb-43d8-9621-93b936562a81/resource/31f2b555-a13f-4fe8-965d-aa0f3ae253ad/download/tbf-canadian-survey-of-disability-2022.pdf>.

17 "Canada Survey on Disability, 2017 to 2022," Statistics Canada, released December 1, 2023, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/231201/dq231201b-eng.htm>.

CANADIAN SOCIAL AND CULTURAL SHIFTS FROM 2016 TO 2026

From 2016 to 2026, Canada has shifted toward "Conscious Individualism," combining a desire for self-expression with high expectations for corporate and social responsibility. This era is marked by increased digital saturation, a return to physical/personal, marketing, heightened political polarization, and a focus on sustainability, economic resilience, and reconciliation.

Key social and cultural shifts include:

- **Conscious Individualism & Values:** Consumers are moving away from status branding, prioritizing brands that are authentic, accountable, and aligned with modern Canadian values (e.g., sustainability, inclusivity).
- **Return to Physical & Personal:** After years of digital-first, AI-driven, and virtual-first approaches, 2026 is seeing a return to physical, personal, and purpose-driven marketing and experiences, including in-person events and personalized, mail.
- **Digital Saturation & Hybrid Life:** While digital, engagement remains high—YouTube is the dominant, platform—there is a growing awareness of the need for balance.
- **Increased Polarization:** Canadian society has experienced significant social polarization, particularly around political and social issues.
- **Demographic & Social Change:** Canada's population is aging. Increased focus is being placed on Indigenous reconciliation and culturally appropriate healthcare.
- **Economic Pressures & Security:** High cost-of-living concerns are present in many households.

These shifts reflect a more intentional form, of living in Canada, balancing personal autonomy with collective responsibility.

NAMING CONVENTIONS IN CANADA

Key identifier (total)	Locations
Church (8)	Unitarian Church of Edmonton Beacon Unitarian Church North Shore Unitarian Church First Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg (<i>note: board approved using just “Unitarian Universalists” for signage/public banners in Dec. 2024</i>) First Unitarian Church of Hamilton Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda Unitarian Church of Montreal Unitarian Universalist Church of North Hatley
Community (3)	Westwood Unitarian Community Unitarian Universalist Community of Victoria Universalist Unitarian Community of Halifax
Congregation (11)	Capital Unitarian Universalist Congregation Unitarian Congregation of Guelph Unitarian Congregation of Niagara First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Durham Don Heights Unitarian Congregation Neighbourhood Unitarian Universalist Congregation Unitarian Congregation in Mississauga First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto Grand River Unitarian Congregation Lakeshore Unitarian Universalist Congregation
Unitarian(s) (5)	Calgary Unitarians Kelowna Unitarians South Fraser Unitarian Vancouver Unitarians Saskatoon Unitarians
Other (2)	Nelson Unitarian Spiritual Centre Unitarian Universalists of the Salish Sea

Note: There are also 13 Fellowships: Comox Valley Unitarian Fellowship, First Unitarian Fellowship of Nanaimo, Unitarian Fellowship of Salt Spring Island, Unitarian Fellowship of Fredericton, Huronia Unitarian Fellowship, Kingston Unitarian Fellowship, Unitarian Fellowship of London, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ottawa, Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
Unitarian Fellowship of Sarnia-Port Huron, Lakehead Unitarian Fellowship, Unitarian Fellowship of Northwest Toronto, Unitarian Fellowship of Regina

Use of Unitarian and Universalist (not including Fellowships)

Unitarian only	19
Unitarian Universalist	9
Universalist Unitarian	1

Use of Unitarian and Universalist (including Fellowships)

Unitarian only	31
Unitarian Universalist	10
Universalist Unitarian	1

CHURCHGOING TRENDS IN CANADA

Recent Canadian statistics indicate a long-term decline in traditional churchgoing, with significant shifts driven by generational changes, regional differences, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. While roughly two-thirds of Canadians still report a religious affiliation, active participation in group services is much lower, though some studies suggest a potential "return to faith" among younger generations in specific contexts.

Key Churchgoing Statistics (2019–2024)

- **Affiliation vs. Attendance:** In 2019, 68% of Canadians reported a religious affiliation, but only 23% attended group religious activities at least once a month.
- **The "Nones":** In 2021, nearly 35% of Canadians reported having no religious affiliation, up from roughly 29% a decade earlier.
- **Weekly Attendance:** By 2021-2022, estimated weekly church attendance fell to approximately 5% to 9% of the population.
- **COVID-19 Impact:** The pandemic accelerated decline, with monthly attendance dropping from 23% in 2019 to 19% in fall 2020.
- **Denominational Trends:** Major denominations have seen steep declines. Between 2011 and 2021, the United Church of Canada lost 40% of its affiliates, and Catholics dropped from 12.8 million to 10.8 million.

Emerging Trends and Nuances

- **The "Return" of Gen Z/Younger Adults:** Contrary to long-term trends, some recent studies suggest Gen Z is becoming the second most frequent church-attending group (16% monthly in some reports), driven by a search for community and a, sometimes, increased interest in spirituality or mental health support.
- **Evangelical Growth:** While most denominations are shrinking, some segments, such as Evangelical Baptists, have shown growth in church plants over the last five years.
- **Immigration's Impact:** Immigrants are more likely than Canadian-born residents to report religious affiliation and to participate in group religious activities (28% vs. 13% for monthly attendance).

- **Digital and Hybrid Church:** The pandemic prompted a shift to online worship, which many congregations have maintained to connect with members. (Note: this makes tracking active attendance more complex.)
- **Rebounding Attendance:** Some churches reported a slight "bounceback" in 2023-2024, with Easter and Christmas attendance in some denominations increasing, suggesting a potential leveling off of the rapid decline seen in 2020-2021.

Key Findings on Belief and Practice

- **Importance of Belief:** As of 2019, 54% of Canadians said their spiritual beliefs were somewhat or very important to them, a decrease from 71% in 2003.
- **Private vs. Public:** More Canadians engage in private religious activities (e.g., prayer, meditation) at least once a month (37%) than attend group services (23%).
- **The "Spiritually Uncertain":** The group of Canadians who are "spiritually uncertain" (identifying with a faith but not actively practicing) has grown to nearly half (47%) of the population in 2022.

Generated by Google Gemini, January 21, 2026.

RETURN TO FAITH: ATTENDANCE INCREASING FOR FIRST TIME IN DECADES, ONE CHURCH LEADER SAYS

CTV, Nov. 10, 2025 – <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/article/return-to-faith-church-attendance-increasing-for-first-time-in-decades/>

According to the most recent data from Statistics Canada’s 2022 General Social Survey, 22 per cent of Canadians ages 15-24 attended religious services at least once a month. This marked a significant increase compared to Canadians ages 25 to 64 whose monthly religious service rates varied between 15 per cent and 17 per cent.

Data collected by the Angus Reid Institute, between 2023 to 2025, found the overall view on religion by Generation Z adults grew from 35 to 40 per cent, however views from every other generation significantly decreased.

Ngozi attributes this sudden interest in faith and organized religion to a desire for authenticity.

“Gen Z is craving something real in a world that often feels filtered, performative, and transactional,” she says. “They’re growing up in a time when ‘community’ can mean group

chats and comment sections — so organized religion offers something screens can't: shared values, physical presence, and deeper purpose.”

One of the most surprising religious attendance trends lies in the reported gender gap particularly in the U.S. A recent study by the [Barna Group](#), a U.S. religious research organization with a focus on Christianity found young men are outpacing young women by 7 percentage points when it comes to church attendance. This marks a significant reversal since [historically women, particularly Christians are considered more religious than men.](#)

Michel believes this in large part due to a crisis of masculinity.

“We don't have a culture that provides young men with positive male role models. There's very much a vacuum of positive, healthy talk of masculinity,” he says. “But you go to a church and you're part of a community that has wonderful church leaders. You have older men that are really able to model what it means to be just a virtuous person or a virtuous man.”

Melissa Deckman, CEO of the Public Religion Research Institute in Washington, D.C. suggests the shift between men and women is more likely due to young women leaving religion at a faster rate in the U.S.

[A recent survey conducted by the Public Religion Research Institute](#) found that the proportion of young American women aged eighteen to twenty-nine who did not consider themselves religiously affiliated grew from 29 per cent in 2013 to 40 per cent in 2024. In comparison, the percentage of men within the same age group increased by one percentage point between 2013 and 2024.

Deckman says her research finds [more gen Z women identify as progressive](#) and have expressed concerns over the treatment of LGBTQ2S+ individuals in some Christian denominations, citing that as a main reason for leaving.

“I think they've (young women) just become disillusioned with, not just the treatment of many LGBTQ2S+ individuals in churches but the patriarchal vision of many conservative churches,” says Deckman.

Sarah Wilkins-LaFlamme, associate professor of Sociology and Legal Studies at the University of Waterloo, says the narrowing of the gender gap has also been felt in Canada though the shift is not as large.

“For more and more women, some find religion meaningful but some have left or they've become a bit less religious and haven't necessarily raised their kids as religiously as maybe you've seen in the past.”

Life-cycle effect

Wilkins-LaFlamme is also cautious to assume the increase in religious attendance will continue to grow and says the trend could be attributed to a life-cycle effect.

“When a new generation arrived on the scene, back in the day, gen X or millennials, when they were younger, their rates of religious attendance were also a bit higher because they looked a lot like their parents since they were still living at home,” says Wilkins-LaFlamme.

“Most of gen z hasn’t left their original parental household yet and what we have seen with prior generations is once they leave that parental household either to go for higher education, or to start a career or to just move and create their new household, we’ve then seen the religiosity levels drop a bit.”

Ngozi however, points out that many generation Z adults are choosing religion despite their parental beliefs and traditions.

“We are seeing a lot more free will, people are leaning into it, even if their families don’t believe in it,” she says.

“Faith, at its best, gives language to hope — something many young people are desperate for. Religion can offer rhythm, community, and comfort when the world feels chaotic.”

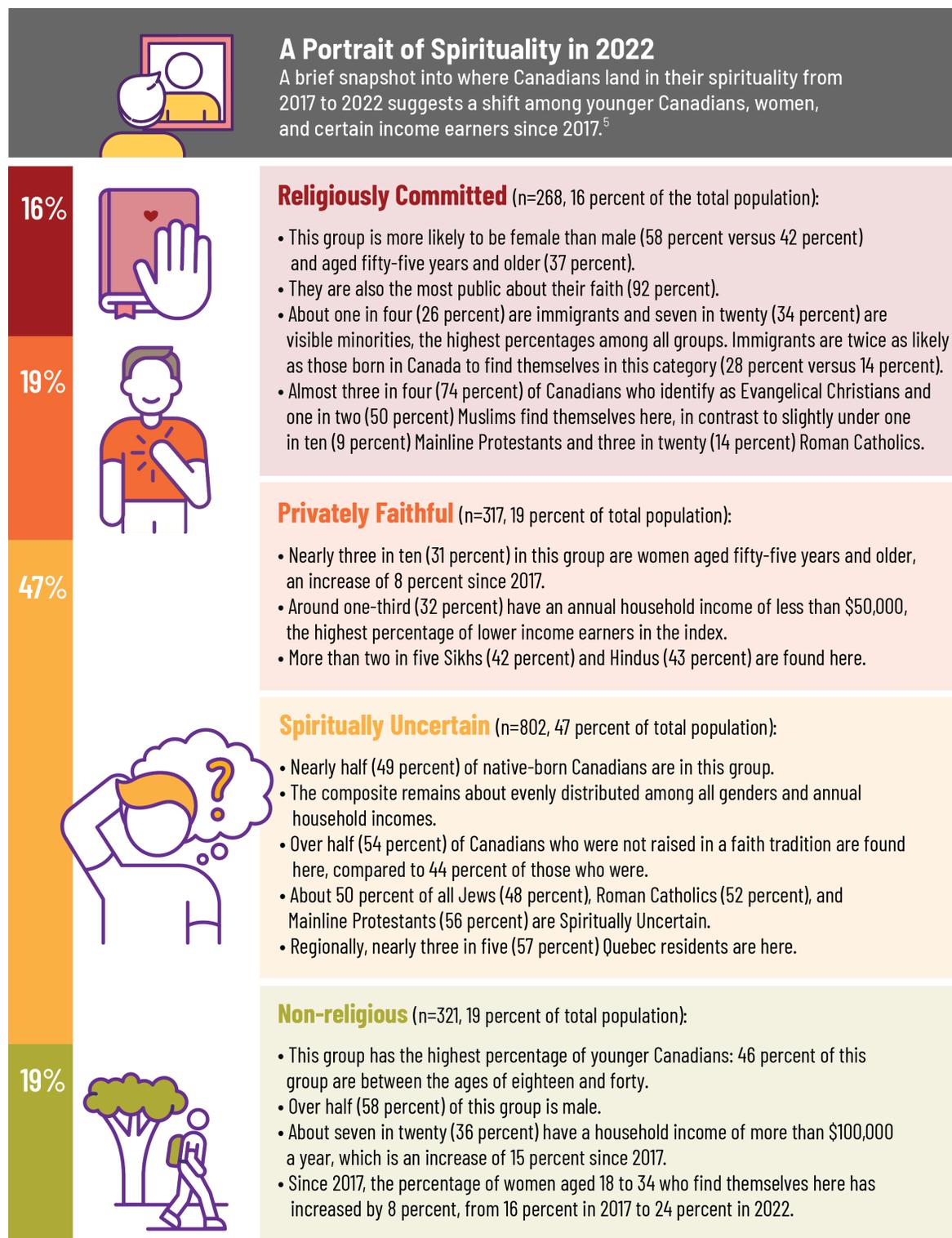
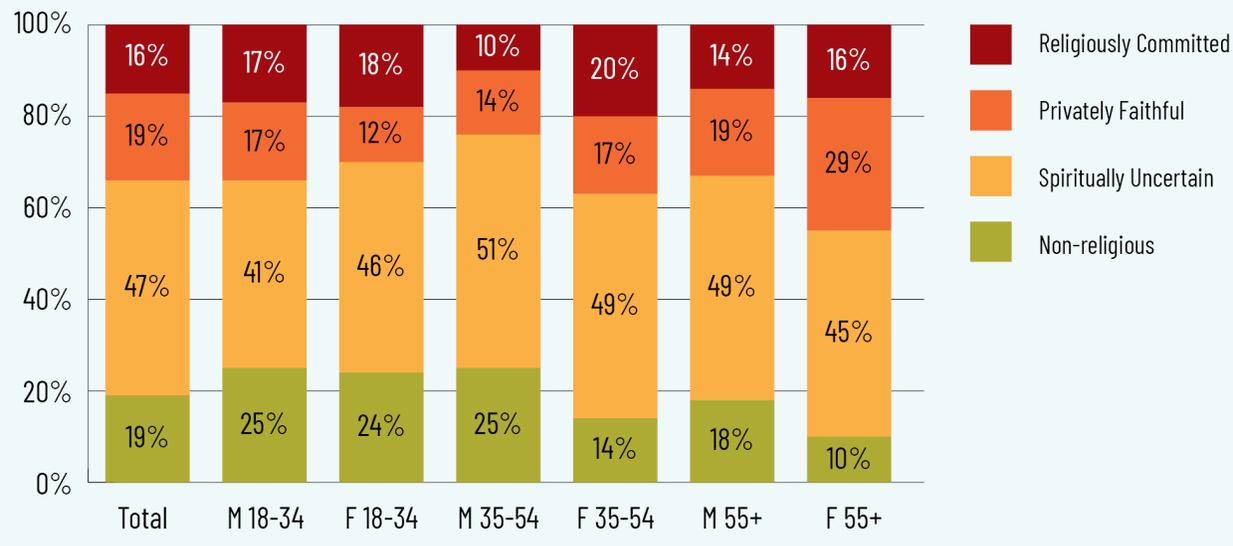


Figure 6: Spectrum of Spirituality by Age and Gender, 2022



CONCLUSION

Over the past five years, there has been a considerable shift in Canadians’ spirituality and their relationship to faith communities and their opinions about the public square. The most obvious finding to emerge is the “shrinking middle”: more Canadians find themselves in the Spiritually Uncertain category, rather than in the Religiously Committed or Non-religious groups. Since 2017, even the number of Canadians who find themselves as Privately Faithful—those who tend to practice religion more individually or hold private spiritual beliefs—is declining. This trend holds overall for many faith groups, including Roman Catholics and Mainline Protestants. For faith leaders, the decline in Canadians who score higher on the religious continuum presents a challenge to the future of faith communities as social institutions.

While there are several explanations relating to these changes, a broader theme of authenticity is apparent throughout Canadians’ journey of faith, particularly among younger generations, the immigrant population, and those who convert to a new faith. As Canadians under forty years of age replace the boomer generation, it appears that faith is no longer a civic virtue that one can identify with but not engage

with. The younger generation and immigrants choose to either meaningfully engage with their faith or not, but they are honest with themselves and live in a space where they search for answers to life's deepest questions and have enough social licence to follow those answers. The faith groups surveyed are seeing a large number of converts from those who are not raised in a religious tradition. This influx also speaks to authenticity and the courage of Canadians who join a new religion, as opposed to faith signalling or virtue signalling. These three groups present an opportunity for faith leaders to welcome their contributions to faith communities and develop a better vocabulary that relates to their diversity and authenticity.

Overall, those who identify as religiously unaffiliated increasingly hold an unfavourable view of religion in public life and its benefits to Canada and Canadian society. While immigrants and the younger generation are more inclined to see religion as positive to the public square, a growing number of Canadians who are religious also tend to view faiths other than their own as damaging to Canada. This negative association with faith seems to emphasize that faith communities are not telling their story well, which extends to a language problem and narrative problem when it comes to conversations between faith communities and the broader public. In the April 2022 survey, 65 percent of the Canadians surveyed believed in God or a higher power, which may suggest that the majority of Canadians have a worldview that includes a sense of the transcendent and that a minority of Canadians do not. Although certain elements of the transcendent may not be translatable to those who are religiously unaffiliated, these findings present a challenge to faith communities to communicate their faith more comprehensibly to others and emphasize their positive contributions to Canadian society.

By tracing Canadians' journey of faith and their relationship to faith communities and public life over five years, our research highlights the complexities of how Canadians relate to these three entities but also emphasizes hope in the future of

faith in Canada among the emerging generations and immigrant population, and presents an opportunity for faith leaders to be better equipped in engaging their local communities, congregants, and Canadian society.

Trends: UUA - Part of [Widening the Circle of Concern](#)

The world around us is different than it was a decade ago. Or even five years ago. The question is, how will our “living tradition” keep up with the times? What choices will we make—or fail to make—and how will that affect the relevancy and the survival of our faith?

Here are some of the realities in which our faith exists as we enter into 2020:

- Our nation is moving away from institutional religion. According to the Pew Research Center:
 - Fewer people are participating in religious communities.
 - Emerging generations report higher rates of people not affiliated with institutional forms of religion, especially Christianity (those known as the nones because they have checked the “none” box when asked about religious affiliation). [1]
 - Increasingly, younger generations are the ones exiting religious institutions. While Unitarian Universalists often look at the slightly increasing number of people who identify as atheists and those who identify as not religious as an opportunity for us, some of the reasons appear to be tied to the nature of religious institutions as much as changing beliefs.
- Unitarian Universalism is not immune: we too are losing congregations and have many teetering on the edge of collapse. While we typically refer to 1,000 congregations, in truth we now have 819 congregations that would meet the standard to become a congregation today.
- As institutional religion declines, more who enter our doors are not refugees from other faiths but are experiencing faith communities for the first time through our faith and are seeking spiritual ground.
- The demographics of our nation have changed, and with them expectations around cultural competency:
 - We have seen an increase in the percentage of the population that is non-white. In California, Hawaii, Nevada, New Mexico, and Texas, white people

are already not the majority. A US Bureau of the Census report that showed non-Hispanic white people as a minority by the year 2044 has been thought to lead to a dramatic political reaction. [2]

- A growing number of people marry outside of their racial group, so the percentage of people who are multiracial is expected to increase significantly by the next Census count.
- The globalization of economies and these demographic trends means more people are exposed to cultural competency expectations in schools and in the workplace, with many seeing competency as a necessary part of doing business in the twenty-first century. [3]
- New generations face a much bleaker future than those who are now at the end of their careers or in retirement:
 - Lack of opportunity is felt most by new generations, and this trend will be exacerbated by disinvestment in schools, rising cost of health care, etc.
 - Income inequality affects younger people disproportionately. New generations no longer expect to achieve a higher quality of life than those before them.
 - A new level of despair caused by climate change, increased awareness of the problems of the world, the opioid addiction epidemic, and other trends brings more people into our congregations and communities who are seeking a sustaining faith.

In the face of these trends, we face some critical divides among us:

- Since the mid-twentieth century, more Unitarian Universalists are “come-inners” than birthright Unitarian Universalists. Many of those who came in during the 1960s-1980s were interested in getting away from religious practices that they felt were nonrational, demeaning, or illogical. The attraction of our faith was what it was not—non-creedal, non-hierarchical—and the emphasis was on personal freedom. In recent decades, more of those entering our doors have been attracted by our beliefs and their interest has been in the tenets of our faith.
- Some among us believe we can continue the practices that have been most prevalent in Unitarian Universalism without change. Others feel it is critical for us to change; many of these tend to be younger or identify as Black, Indigenous, or people of color or hold other identities that are marginalized in UU community, such as gender-expansive.

- Some believe that work to promote equity, inclusion, and diversity is optional and tangential to our faith. Others believe it is a form of spiritual practice among us necessary to live out our faith.

What puts extra pressure on these divides? A number of factors increase the tension and division:

- Since the early decades of the twentieth century, we have not invested in developing the theological resources that could have allowed us to have a vocabulary of faith to meet these troubling times.
- Our faith, as with almost all institutions in our nation, rests on a culture whose economic structures depend on the annihilation of Indigenous peoples and the enslavement of Africans forcibly relocated and enslaved.
- Despite periodic and episodic attempts to address this legacy and to address personal bias, we have not sustained these efforts and now find many of our congregational practices lacking in the standards of multicultural competency found in many workplaces.
- Our emphasis on hyper-individualism and the legacy of the consolidation of Unitarian and Universalism have led to a culture of mistrust that is augmented when difference is in play. Women and gay, lesbian, bisexual, gender-expansive, and disabled adults have all struggled as have Black people, Indigenous people, and people of color who have sought to lend their gifts.
- We do not have effective ways of dealing with conflict, tending to avoid it until it explodes. These explosions are often then covered up. This conflict-avoidant culture is now dangerous in an age of new interpersonal norms and the magnifying impacts of social media.

In consideration of these trends, we say,

- In a world where people can understand more about one another because of the way the Internet allows us to enter one another's lives, cultural competency is increasingly expected. Our theological legacy has long put us on the forefront of advocacy and prophetic action to widen the circle of concern for marginalized groups, and yet without a focus on addressing today's issues of inclusion, we are woefully unprepared to live our values.
- We have spent time comparing our religious wounds rather than healing them. As a result, we have often operated from a least-common-denominator approach rather than one linked to our highest values as a people of faith. Our time as a haven or social club for those disaffected by other religions has passed. In these searing times of political division, climate change, economic polarization, and global strife, people need a sustaining faith.

- Economic and demographic trends alone would require us to look anew at efforts to promote equity, inclusion, and diversity—and we also have a theological imperative to do so.
- We continue to attract a greater diversity of people and to retain a very small percentage of those who do not match the resourced, white, aging majority within our congregation.
- We witness a growing and cavernous gap between generations exacerbated by lack of investment in technologies and methodologies that can help us understand and better comprehend generational differences.
- As with other predominantly white institutions, we have failed to acknowledge the extent to which the resources that have built our institutions were amassed at the expense of people of color, especially Indigenous and Black people.
- The unfinished—and interrupted—work on race within Unitarian Universalism has marred our ability to move forward at a time when accountability, multicultural awareness, and inclusive language are becoming the new normal in the larger world.
- Engagement in this type of development is deep spiritual and faithful work that allows for growth and change.
- We need change at the personal and interpersonal levels, and most of all we need to make systemic changes that can be ongoing and lasting.
- The newer generations in our nation are increasingly at risk according to many reports, including the 2019 World Happiness Report, which singled out a dramatic and disturbing decline in health and happiness, especially for younger US citizens. [4]

1. [“In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace: An Update on America’s Changing Religious Landscape,”](#) Pew Research Center (October 17, 2019).
2. Sabrina Tavernise, [“Why the Announcement of a Looming White Minority Makes Demographers Nervous,”](#) *New York Times* (November 22, 2018).
3. Melissa Lamson, [“10 Tips to Develop Your Firm’s Cultural Competence: In today’s global marketplace your team’s cultural competence is an invaluable asset,”](#) *Inc.* (July 3, 2018).
4. J. Helliwell, R. Layard, and J. Sachs, [World Happiness Report](#) Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2019).