

# Unity of Wimberley

Congregation Priorities — What Our People Want

77 survey responses | March 22 – April 15, 2026 | Priority rankings for the minister search

*The congregation has spoken. Here is what they want, ranked.*

*77 people responded (up from 51 in 2023—50% increase in participation). 88% attend in person. 61% are 65+. 33% have been members 10+ years while 26% joined in the last 2 years. This is a representative cross-section of the church. The rankings have stabilized—the last 3 responses did not shift any positions. What follows is the definitive priority framework for evaluating candidates.*

## What the Church Should Prioritize

Respondents ranked 9 church priorities from most to least important:

Rank	Priority	Avg	Top-3	#1 by	What this means for the search
#1	<b>Pastoral care &amp; spiritual counseling</b>	3.09	64%	35%	Tied for #1 and the highest “voted #1” of any option—35% put this first. The congregation feels a real gap in hospital visits, crisis support, and spiritual guidance. The 3 newest responses reinforced this—one wrote “a grounding spiritual leader” as what they miss most.
#1	<b>Deeper engagement with existing members</b>	3.09	66%	30%	Tied for #1 with the highest top-3 percentage (66%). The congregation wants to be known and connected. They’re not asking for more programs—they’re asking to be seen.
#3	<b>Financial sustainability &amp; stewardship</b>	3.36	64%	22%	Tied for highest top-3% with pastoral care. The “handful of families” funding concern is felt broadly. A candidate must be comfortable talking about money.
#4	<b>Better youth &amp; teen programs</b>	3.47	58%	29%	Strong #4—29% voted it their #1 priority. New members feel this most acutely. Directly tied to the church’s long-term sustainability.
#5	Growth in membership	3.52	57%	21%	Important but clearly secondary to engagement and care. 3–5 year members feel this most strongly. Growth is wanted but not at the expense of depth.
#6	Renewed vision & strategic direction	3.71	58%	23%	People want direction but relationship and care come first. Vision should emerge from listening, not arrive pre-packaged.
#7	Improved staff leadership	4.32	47%	19%	New members rank this much higher—they see the leadership vacuum. One new respondent: “Include staff in the interview process since they’ll work closely with the minister.”
#8	Community outreach	4.56	38%	12%	Lower than the committee expected. The congregation wants to get their own house in order before reaching out.
#9	Online / virtual ministry	5.78	23%	5%	Dead last by a wide margin. Only 5% attend online. This congregation is physically present and wants a physically present minister.

**Key finding:** Pastoral care and engagement are now tied at #1 (both 3.09). Financial sustainability is close behind at #3. Youth is a strong #4. These top 4 are tightly clustered and a strong candidate needs to show capability across all of them.

## What They Want in a Minister

Rank	Quality	Avg	Top-3	#1 by	What this means
#1	Inspiring speaker & teacher	2.16	87%	61%	Overwhelmingly dominant. 87% ranked it top-3. 61% ranked it #1. This is non-negotiable. A candidate who doesn't light up the room on Sunday morning will not succeed here.
#2	Emotionally intelligent & collaborative	2.30	82%	55%	Nearly as strong as speaking. The Rev. John lesson encoded in data. This congregation will not accept another leader who can't navigate relationships and strong personalities with grace.
#3	Manages conflict with grace	3.03	66%	43%	Reinforces the EQ finding. This church has experienced conflict and is saying: never again.
#4	Visionary leader	3.34	64%	25%	They want direction but not at the expense of EQ and conflict skills. Younger members rank this higher.
#5	Passionate about youth & families	3.44	61%	26%	Aligns with youth as a top-4 church priority. Particularly strong among 55–64 age group.
#6	Mentor who develops leaders	3.48	57%	30%	Important for the volunteer-driven culture. The minister should grow leaders, not try to do everything.
#7	Compassionate pastoral care	3.68	60%	18%	Pastoral care is #1 as a church priority but #7 as a minister quality. The congregation sees care as a shared responsibility—but the minister is the backstop for serious needs.
#8	Community builder	3.90	43%	18%	Lowest. Take care of us first, then grow.

## Growth vs. Depth

Choice	%	n	Interpretation
Both equally important	51%	39	Majority answer, growing steadily (43% → 49% → 51%). They don't see it as either/or. Engagement-led growth is the sweet spot.
Deeply connected at current size	29%	22	Strongest among 65+ (35%) and 45–54 (33%). The established core who loves what UOW is today.
Larger with more resources	12%	9	Strongest among 35–44 (29%)—young families who want more peers and programming.
Not sure	9%	7	

## Unity Grounding & Long-Term Tenure

Question	Mean	Distribution	Bottom Line
Unity/New Thought grounding (1=must, 5=quality>tradition)	2.38	Score 1–2: 58%   Score 3: 23%   Score 4–5: 18%	<b>Strongly Unity-grounded.</b> 58% scored 1–2. 10+ year members feel most intensely (mean ~2.08). One new respondent: "We need to move back to what Unity actually is and means." Non-negotiable for the core.
Long-term tenure (1=not important, 5=extremely)	2.77	Score 1–2: 42%   Score 3: 31%   Score 4–5: 27%	<b>Moderate, no consensus.</b> Open responses clarify: "Right fit matters more than years." One respondent: "I would like a leader who is in touch with our people and is a right fit rather than long tenure!!!" Quality over quantity.

## What They Told Us in Their Own Words

Across 300+ open-ended responses, these themes emerged. Ordered by frequency:

#	Theme	Freq	What they're saying
1	<b>“Get to know us before changing anything”</b>	~35+	The dominant theme by far. “Learn who we are,” “observe before acting,” “servant’s heart not ego agenda.” Newest respondent: “Focusing on our people and how things operate here before they start making changes.” A candidate who arrives with a pre-built plan will clash.
2	<b>Youth, families, and the church’s future</b>	~25+	Specific and urgent. “Youth program needs work,” “vital for the next 20 years,” “YFM needs direction.” Multiple tied this directly to long-term financial sustainability.
3	<b>Consistency and continuity of message</b>	~20+	They appreciated guest speakers but want one voice building depth. “Multi-week series,” “settling down with a kindred spirit leader.” Newest: “Bringing the continuity back.”
4	<b>Authentic, inspiring, real</b>	~20+	“Energy, passion, delight, vulnerability, humor.” Anti-performative. They want someone real who brings joy. “Nothing feels worse than feeling not seen by the ministerial team.”
5	<b>Pastoral availability with boundaries</b>	~25+	Office hours, email responsiveness, hospital visits. But also: “not 24/7,” “respect boundaries.” Newest: “A minister with good people skills who doesn’t micromanage but trusts their team.”
6	<b>Unity teachings specifically</b>	~12+	Growing theme with latest responses. “More focused on Unity Principles and specific training.” “Need to move back to what Unity actually is.” “Cohesive Unity spiritual teachings.” The core cares deeply.
7	<b>Financial sustainability</b>	~12	“Deeply dependent on a handful of families.” Small but pointed. These are the people who write the checks. A minister comfortable with stewardship is essential.
8	<b>Team-oriented, not top-down</b>	~10+	Newest respondent: “A minister that fits in with our team-oriented culture.” “Collaborative,” “not an authoritarian director.” “Trusts their team.” Reinforces the EQ/governance findings.
9	<b>“We’re actually doing pretty well”</b>	~15+	When asked what they missed: “Nothing,” “not much,” “our board and staff run like a well-oiled machine.” This is a confident congregation—they don’t need rescuing.

## The Priority Framework: What to Look for in a Candidate

Combined quantitative rankings, scales, demographics, and 300+ open responses distilled into a ranked evaluation checklist:

Priority	Tier	Data Signal	What to look for
<b>1. Inspiring, authentic speaker</b>	MUST HAVE	87% top-3, 61% #1. Dominant by every measure across all demographics.	Watch them speak. Is it conversational, real, joyful? Do they bring energy and vulnerability or read from notes?
<b>2. Emotional intelligence &amp; conflict skills</b>	MUST HAVE	82% top-3 for EQ, 66% for conflict. The Rev. John scar runs deep.	Ask for real conflict stories. Listen for self-awareness and accountability. Team-oriented culture is explicit.
<b>3. Engagement-first, listener mindset</b>	MUST HAVE	Tied #1 church priority. 51% want both growth+depth. “Get to know us” is the dominant open-response theme.	How do they approach a new community? Do they lead with questions or answers? What does their first 90 days look like?

<b>4. Pastoral care capacity</b>	MUST HAVE	Tied #1 church priority, 35% voted it #1. But #7 as minister quality—they see it as shared with care team/chaplains.	How do they structure availability? Hospital visits? Email? What are their boundaries? Get specifics, not philosophy.
<b>5. Unity/New Thought grounding</b>	MUST HAVE	58% scored 1–2. Core members (2.08). Growing open-response emphasis: “Move back to what Unity actually is.”	How do Unity principles show up weekly? Can they teach metaphysics? Do they draw from Fillmore specifically?
<b>6. Youth &amp; family engagement</b>	HIGH	#4 church priority, 29% voted #1. New members feel it most. Tied to financial sustainability.	What have they actually done with teens? Concrete examples. What would they do in the first year here?
<b>7. Financial stewardship comfort</b>	HIGH	#3 church priority, 64% top-3. “Handful of families” concern is widely felt.	Experience broadening a financial base? Comfortable with stewardship from the platform?
<b>8. Vision &amp; direction</b>	IMPORTANT	#6 church priority, #4 quality. They want direction but after relationship. Vision should emerge from listening.	What’s their process for developing vision WITH a community, not FOR a community?
<b>9. Mentorship &amp; volunteer development</b>	IMPORTANT	#6 quality. The church runs on volunteers. Minister should grow them.	How do they develop leaders? Empower without micromanaging?
<b>10. Community outreach &amp; growth</b>	SECONDARY	#8 and #5. Congregation is inward-focused right now. Take care of us first.	Don’t overweight. A candidate obsessed with growth will feel misaligned.

## How the Data Has Stabilized: 53 → 74 → 77

Metric	53 responses	74 responses	77 responses	Trend
Church #1	Youth (3.08)	Engagement (3.12)	Pastoral/Engage tied (3.09)	Pastoral care rose to tie #1. Later respondents are more care-focused.
Minister #1	Speaker (2.36)	Speaker (2.19)	Speaker (2.16)	Getting stronger with every wave. Now at 87% top-3.
Minister #2	EQ (2.55)	EQ (2.31)	EQ (2.30)	Stabilized. 82% top-3 is near-unanimous.
Growth vs depth	Both: 43%	Both: 49%	Both: 51%	Majority now wants both. Engagement-led growth is the consensus position.
Unity grounding	2.25	2.39	2.38	Stable. Strongly Unity-grounded. Late responses reinforced this.
Tenure importance	2.85	2.81	2.77	Slowly drifting toward “fit > tenure.” No consensus. Right person matters more than years.

**The data has stabilized.** The last 3 responses did not shift any priority positions. Rankings have been consistent across all three measurement points. The committee can make decisions with confidence that these priorities reflect the congregation’s genuine voice—not a snapshot artifact. 77 responses from a 250-member church is a 31% response rate, which is strong for any survey.

*Analysis based on 77 survey responses collected March 22 – April 15, 2026 via Google Forms. Data analyzed programmatically with cross-tabulations by age, tenure, and attendance mode. Open-ended responses coded by theme across 300+ individual answers. For committee use only.*