

SPIRITUALITY SNAPSHOT SURVEY RESULTS

Transition Team Presentation

January 21, 2024



First Church in Salem, Unitarian Universalist



Agenda for Meeting

Welcome

Introduction of Transition Team

Reading

Survey Overview

Questions

Closing Reading



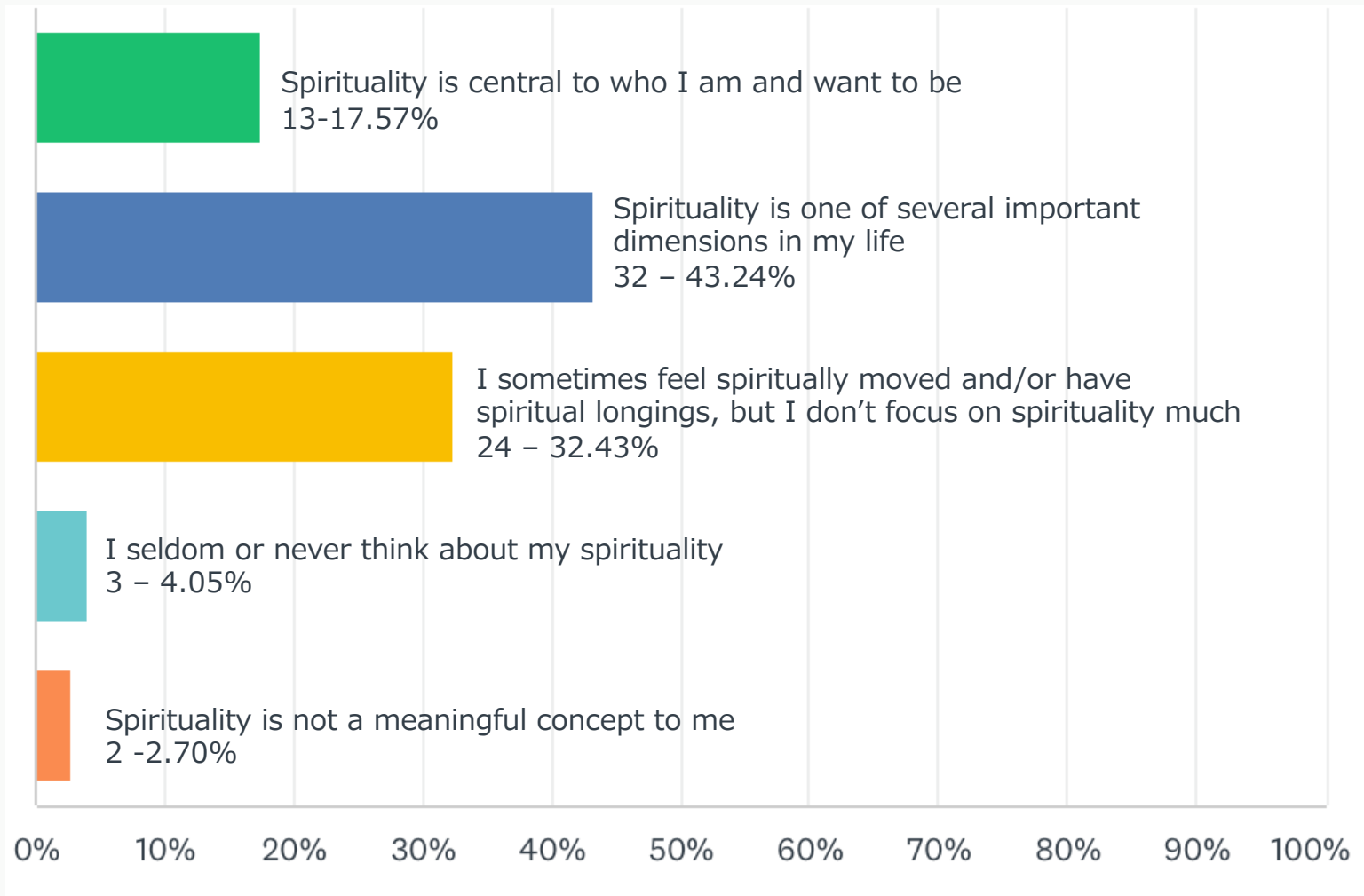


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Q1

Which Statement comes closest to describing the role of spirituality in your life?

74 Responses



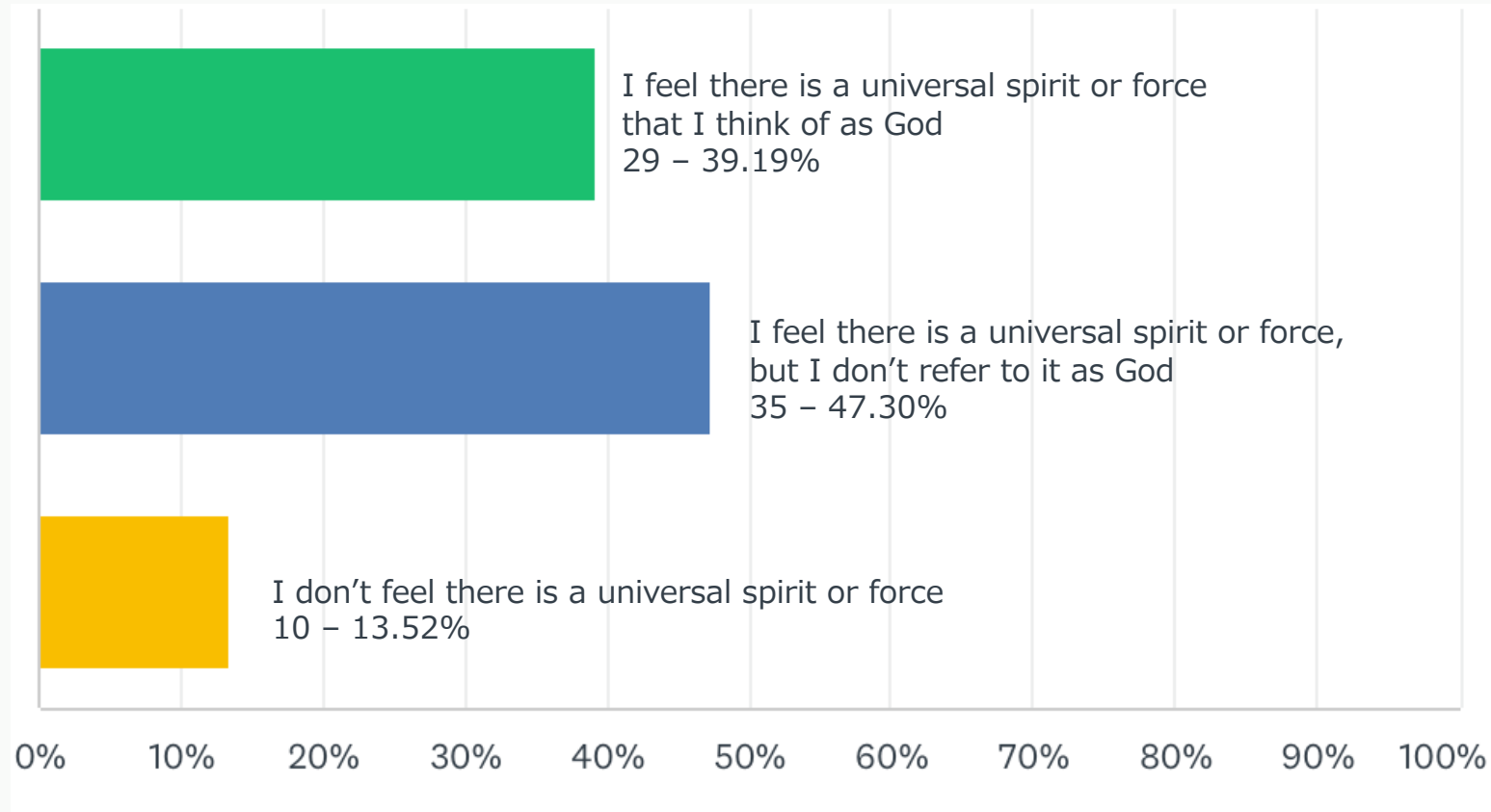


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Q2

Do you feel that there is a universal spirit or force, whether you refer to it as God or by some other name?

74 responses



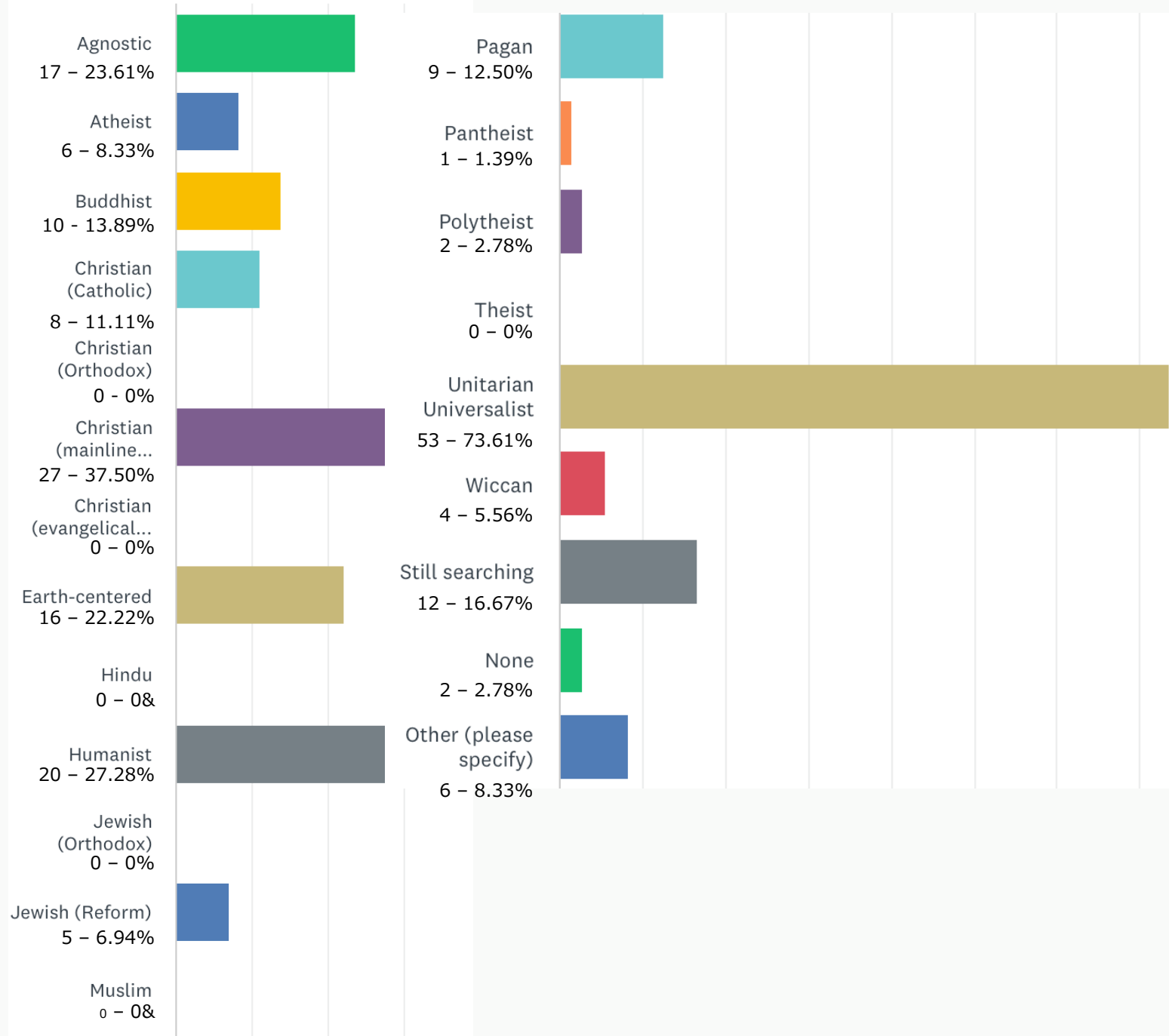


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Q3

Are there any spiritual or religious traditions that you identify with (choose as many as apply)?

72 responses



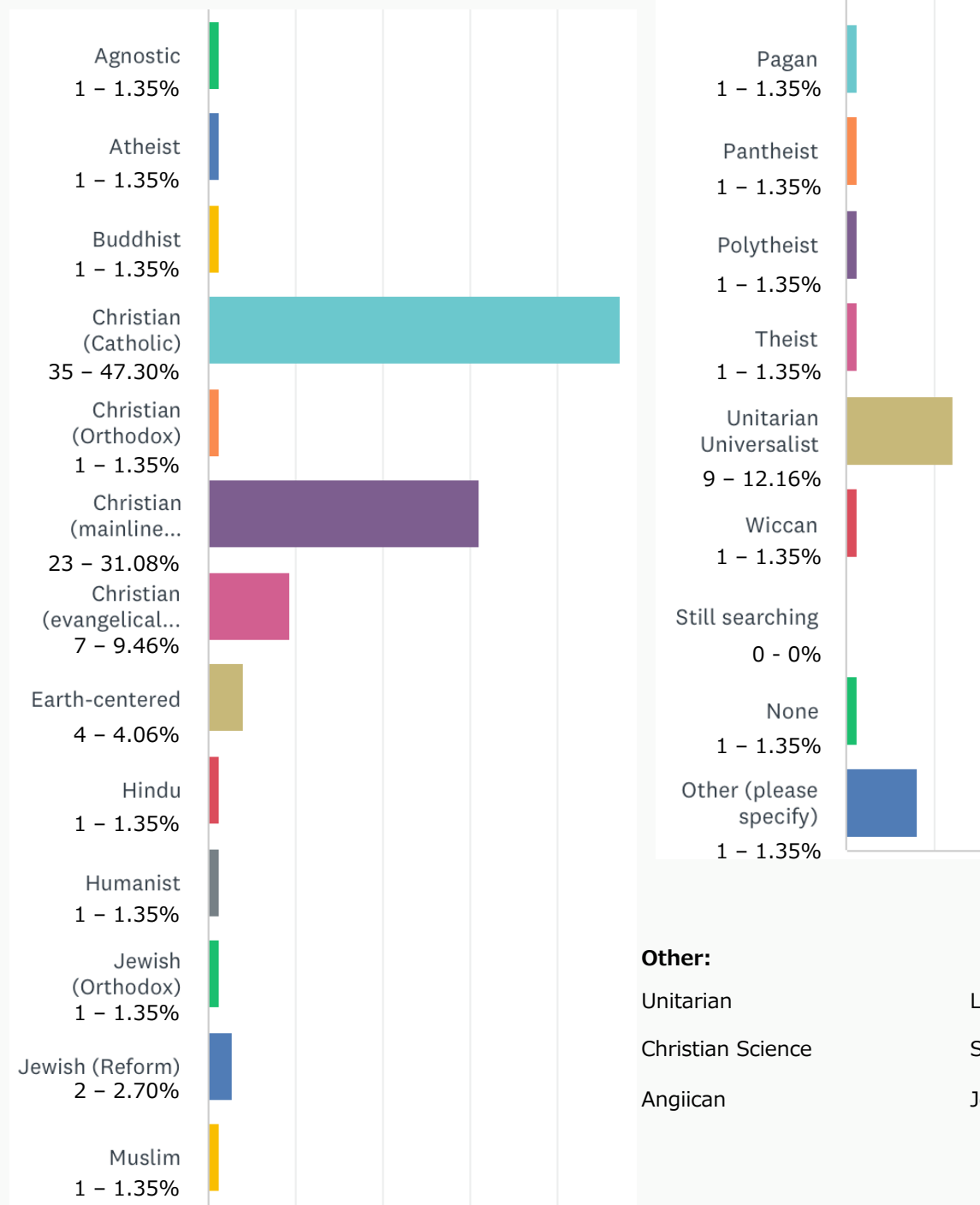


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Q4

What was the main religious tradition in which you were raised?

74 responses



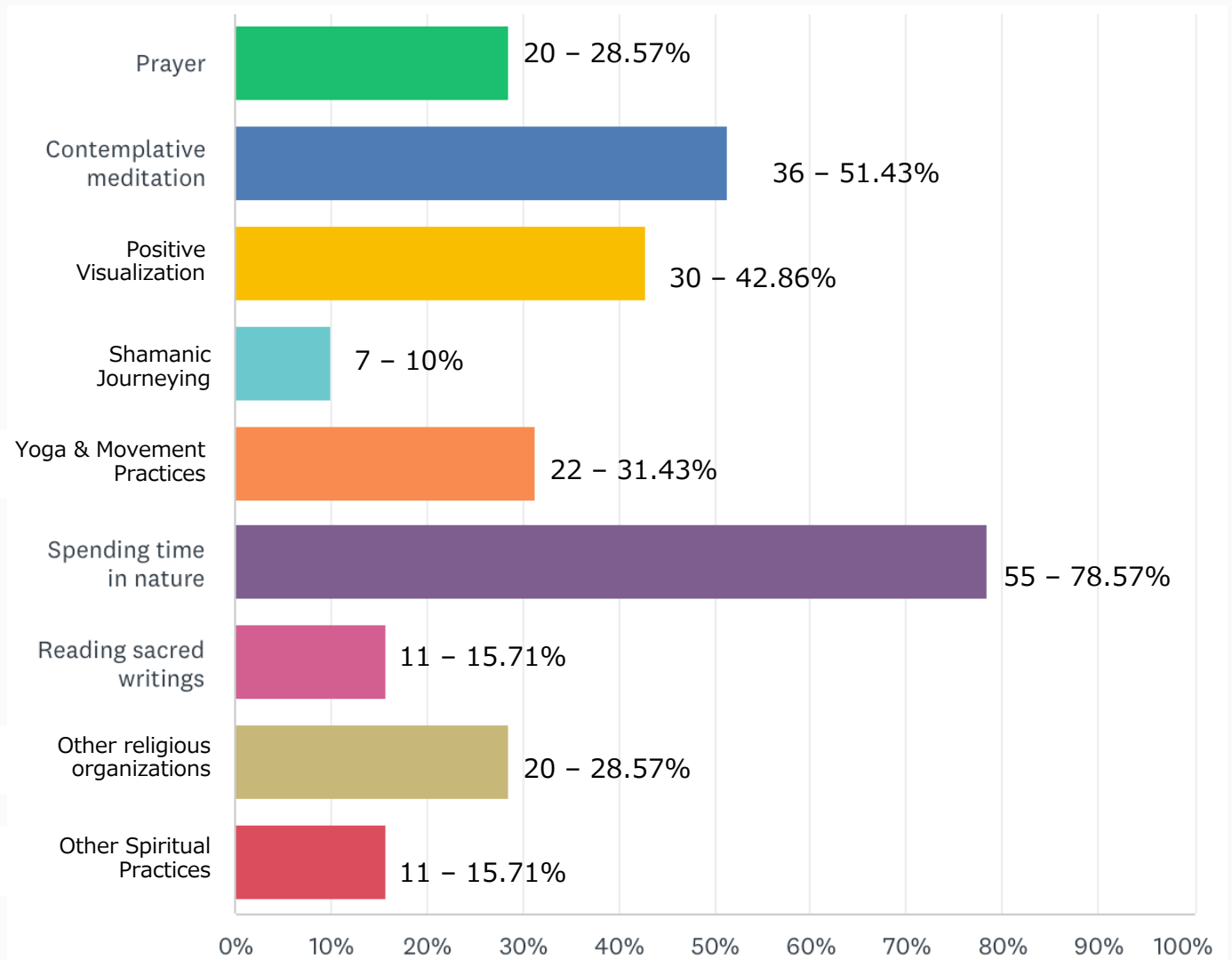


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Q5

Are there any practices or activities apart from Sunday services that you engage in that enrich your soul and/or spirit (choose as many as apply)?

70 responses. 4 skipped.



Other:

Psi/Transformational/Occult Practices

Tarot

Poetry

Journaling

Volunteering

Singing Together

Transformational Courses

Fellowshipping with Church Friends

Reading philosophical or humanist prose and poetry

Engaging with Interfaith Colleagues

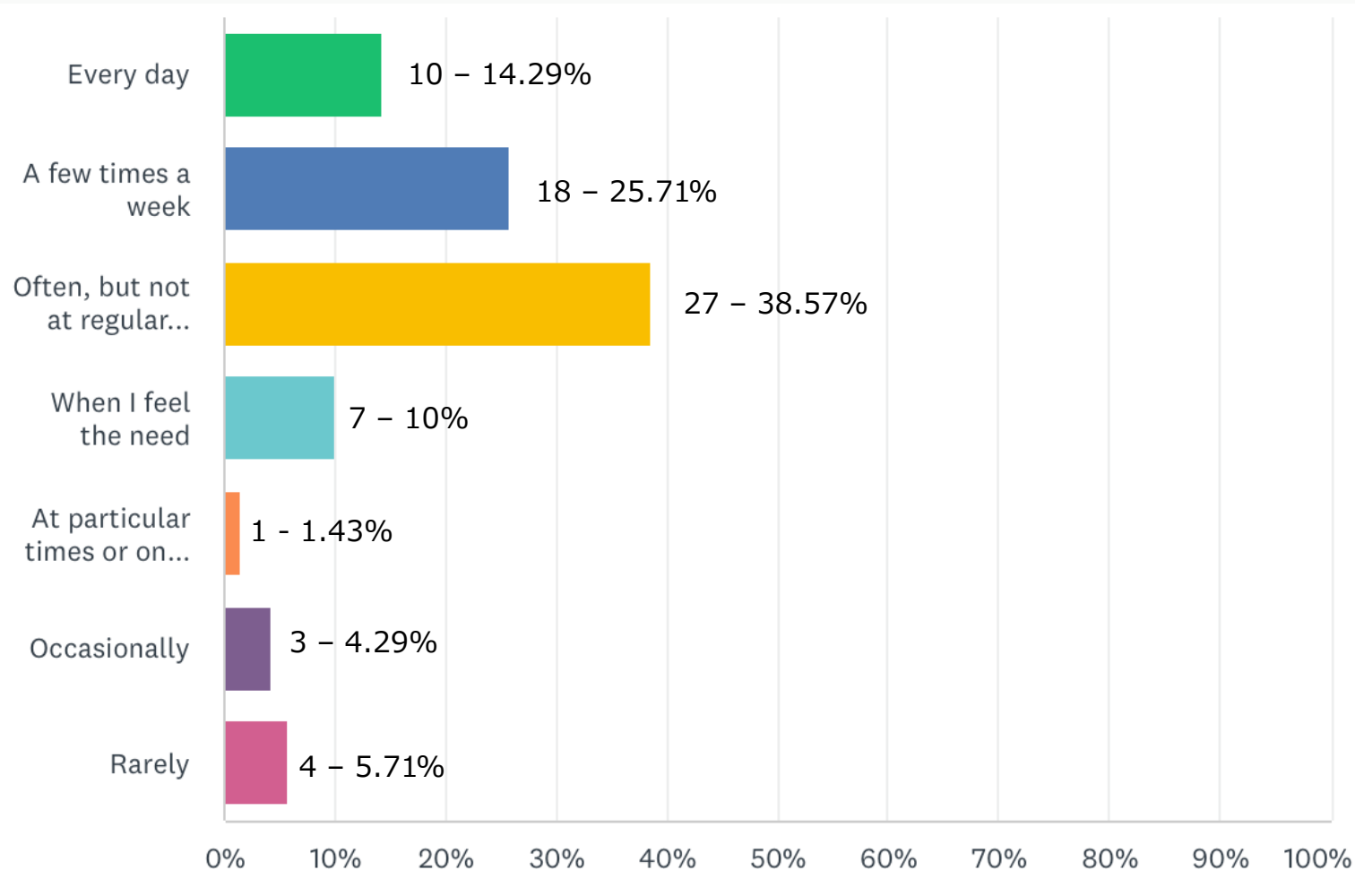


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Q6

If you engage in spiritual practices other than Sunday services, how often do you engage in them?

70 responses. 4 skipped.



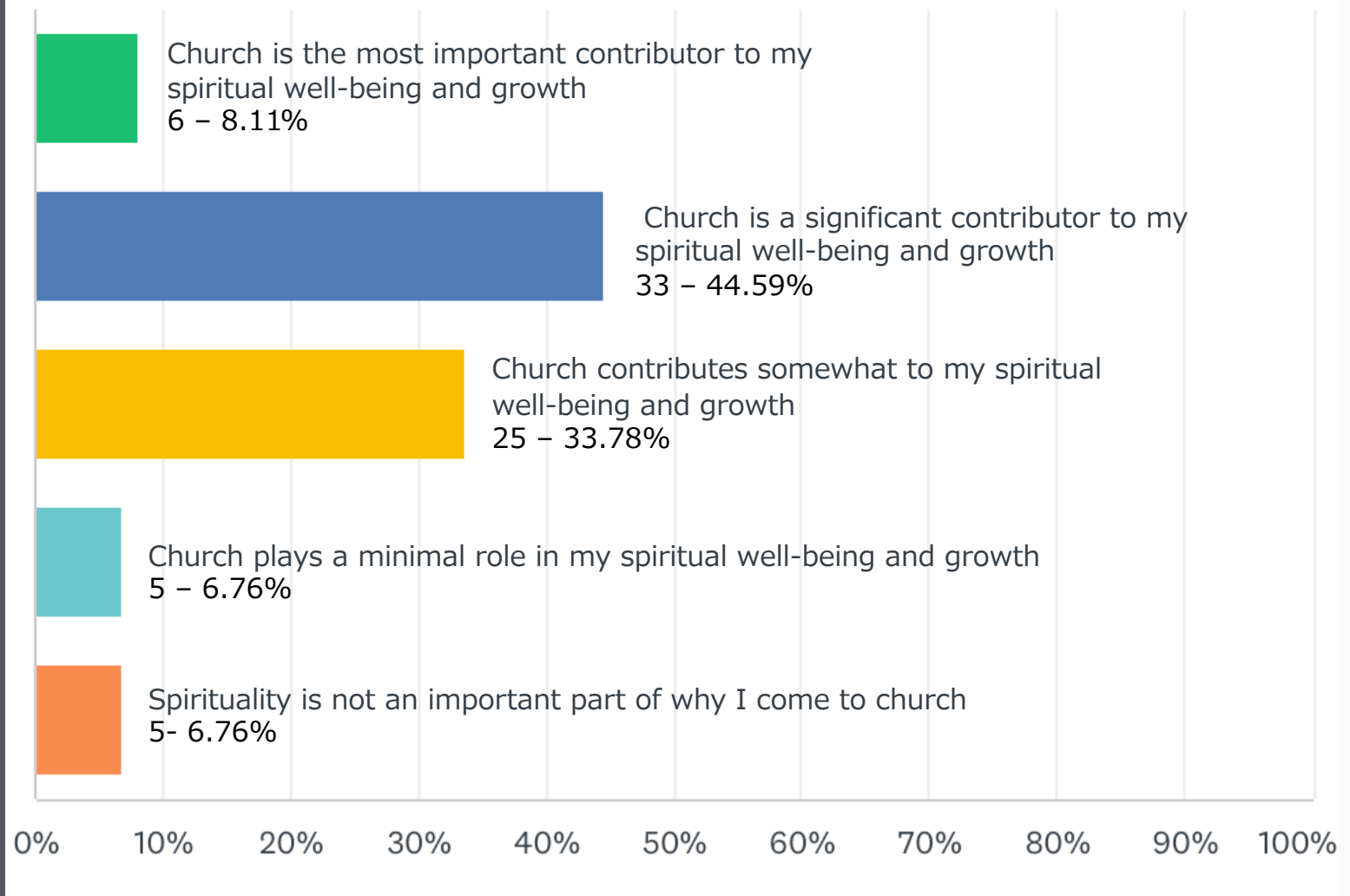


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Q7

Which statement comes closest to describing the role that church plays in your spiritual life?

74 responses





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Q8

What else would you like to say about spirituality in your life? What moves your soul that we have not touched on?

46 Responses. 28 Skipped.

Our responses to spirituality may change over time. Here is a list of some of the responses we received to Question 8. See if some of them resonate with you.

- Listening to and playing music
- Singing
- Being in nature
- Creating visual art
- Volunteering to help others and serving the community
- Listening to thoughtful and thought-provoking sermons
- Reading and discussing literature
- Reading and discussing works by mystics from various spiritual traditions
- Viewing and discussing works of art
- Nourishing faith as opposed to practicing religion
- Cultivating personal relationships
- Spending time with family and friends
- Feeling supported by the church and congregation as one part of my spiritual life
- Not believing in God, & taking responsibility for my deeds & misdeeds, and crediting luck
- Seeing the interconnected web of existence as essential to spirituality
- Working for social change
- Working for climate justice
- Needing a safe place to express what feeds my spirit
- Learning about other religious traditions
- Participating in nature-centered rituals
- Participating in a sweat lodge and other experiential forms of spirituality
- Sitting in church watching the sun illuminate the stained-glass windows
- Reading and listening to the sayings of Jesus
- Watching a group of people interacting in positive, uplifting ways
- Talking with others during fellowship
- Participating in progressive initiatives apart from the church

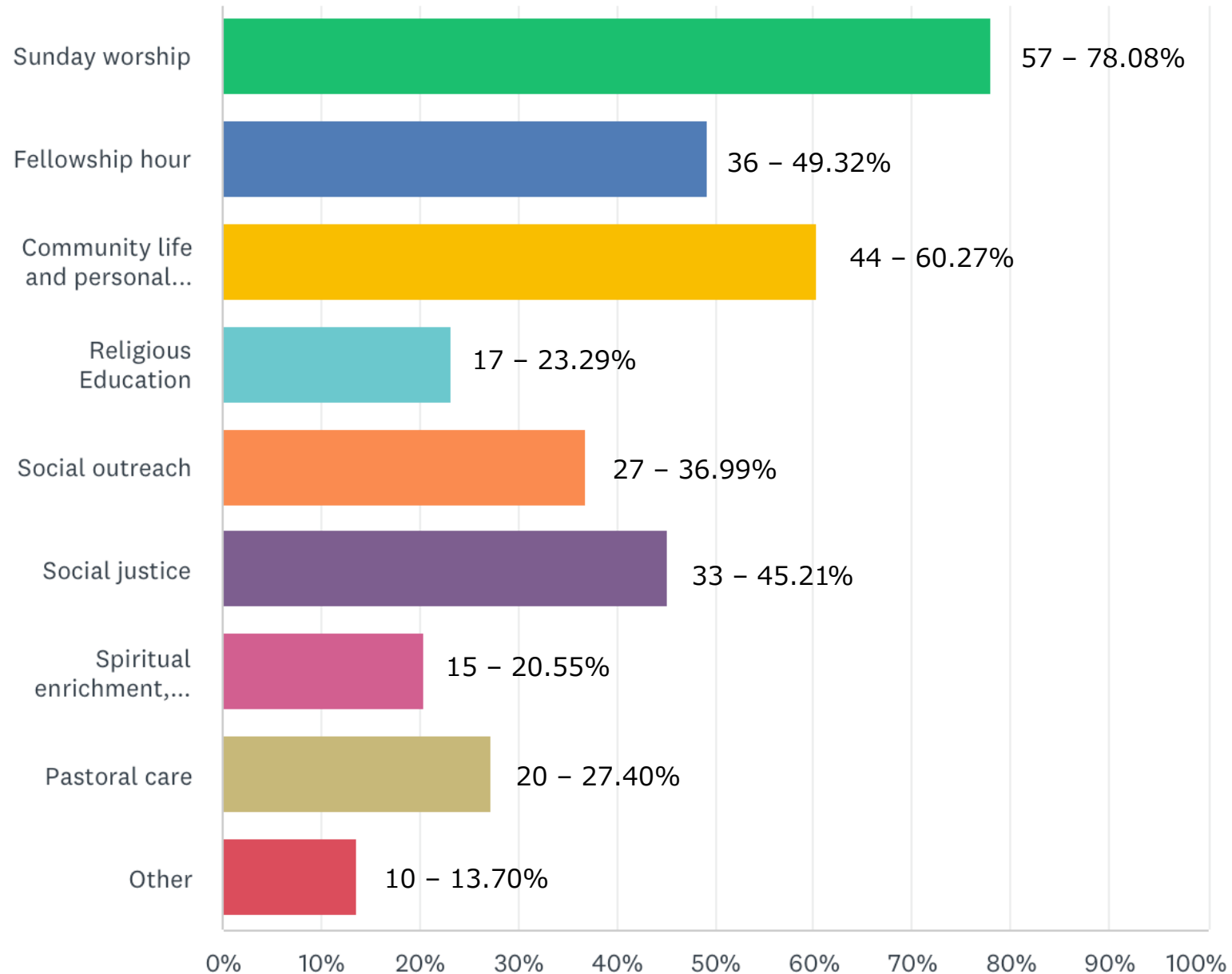


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Q9

What aspects of First Church in Salem UU are most meaningful to you (choose as many as apply)?

73 Responses. 1 Skipped.



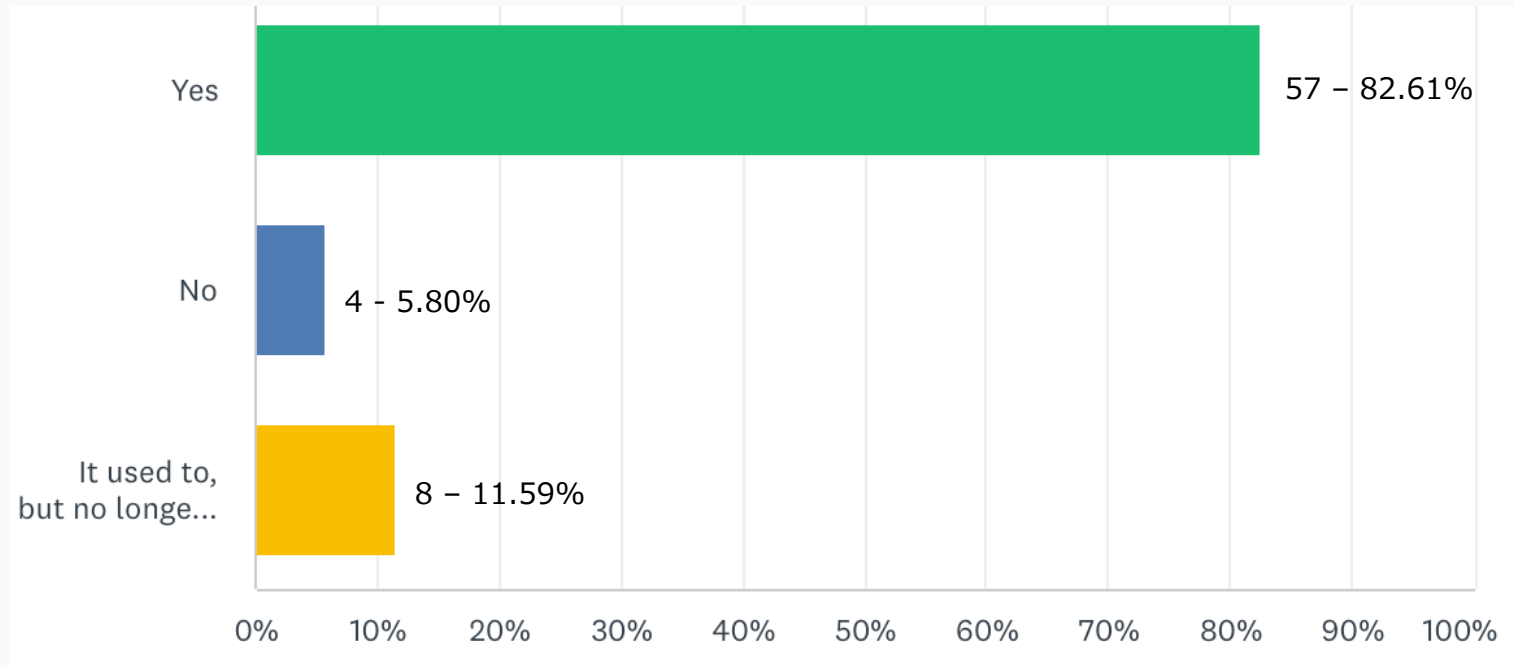


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Q10

First Church in Salem UU describes itself as a UU church “in the liberal Christian tradition”. Do you think that is accurate?

69 Responses. 5 Skipped.



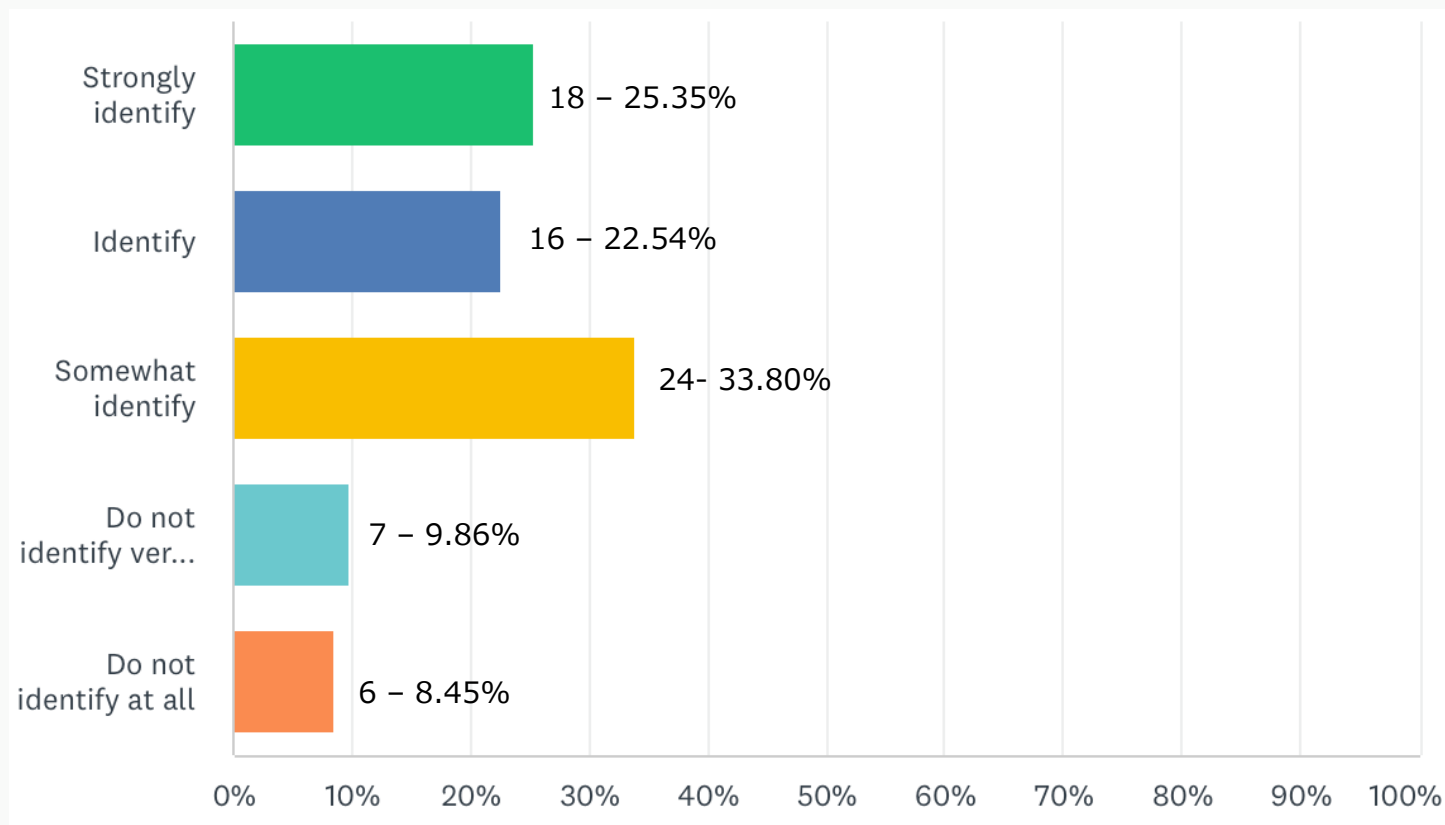


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Q11

To what degree do you identify with that description?

71 Responses. 3 Skipped.



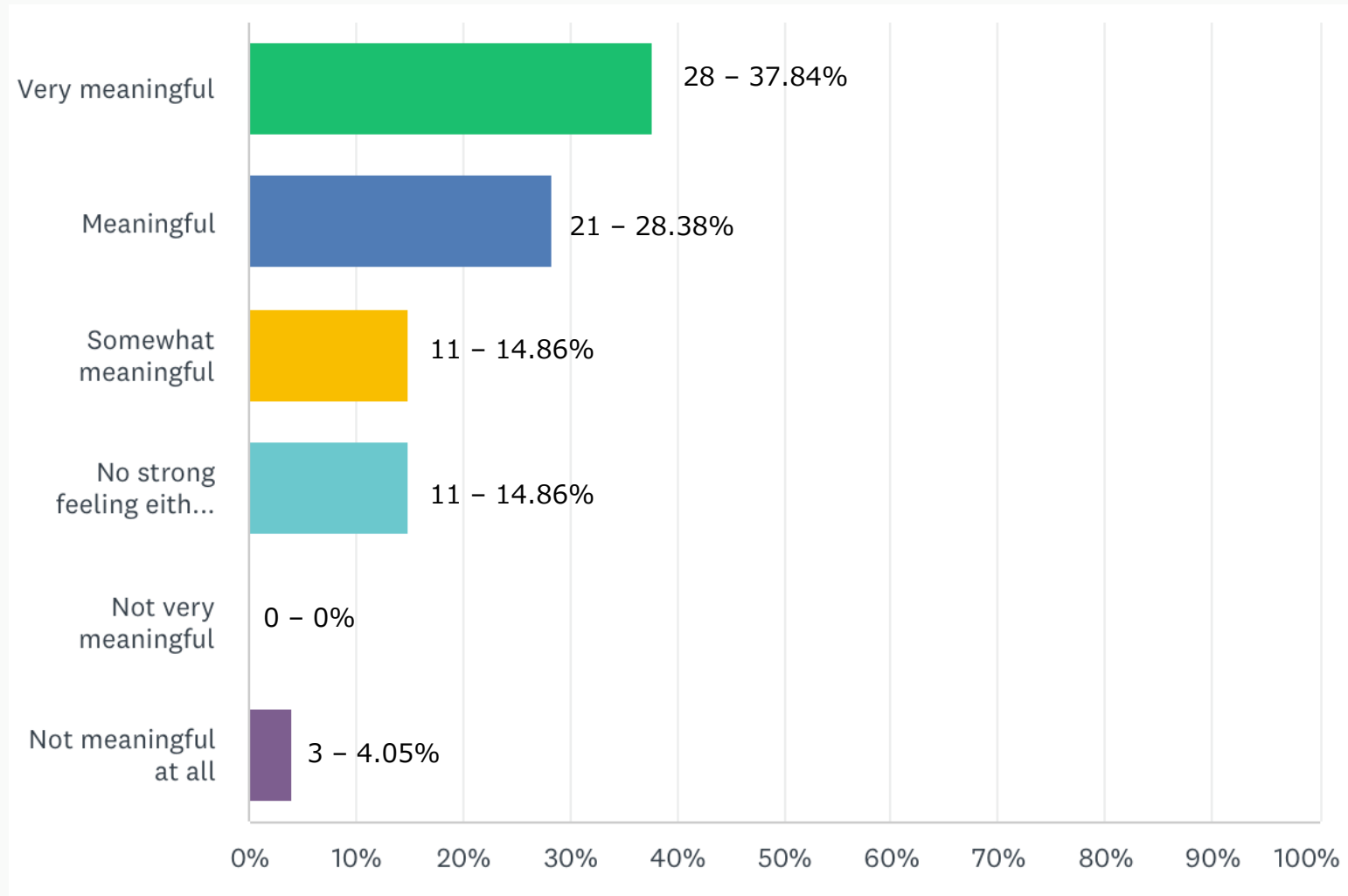


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Q12

Sunday worship at First Church in Salem UU includes a period of silent prayer and meditation. To what degree is communal prayer or meditation a meaningful practice for you?

74 Responses.



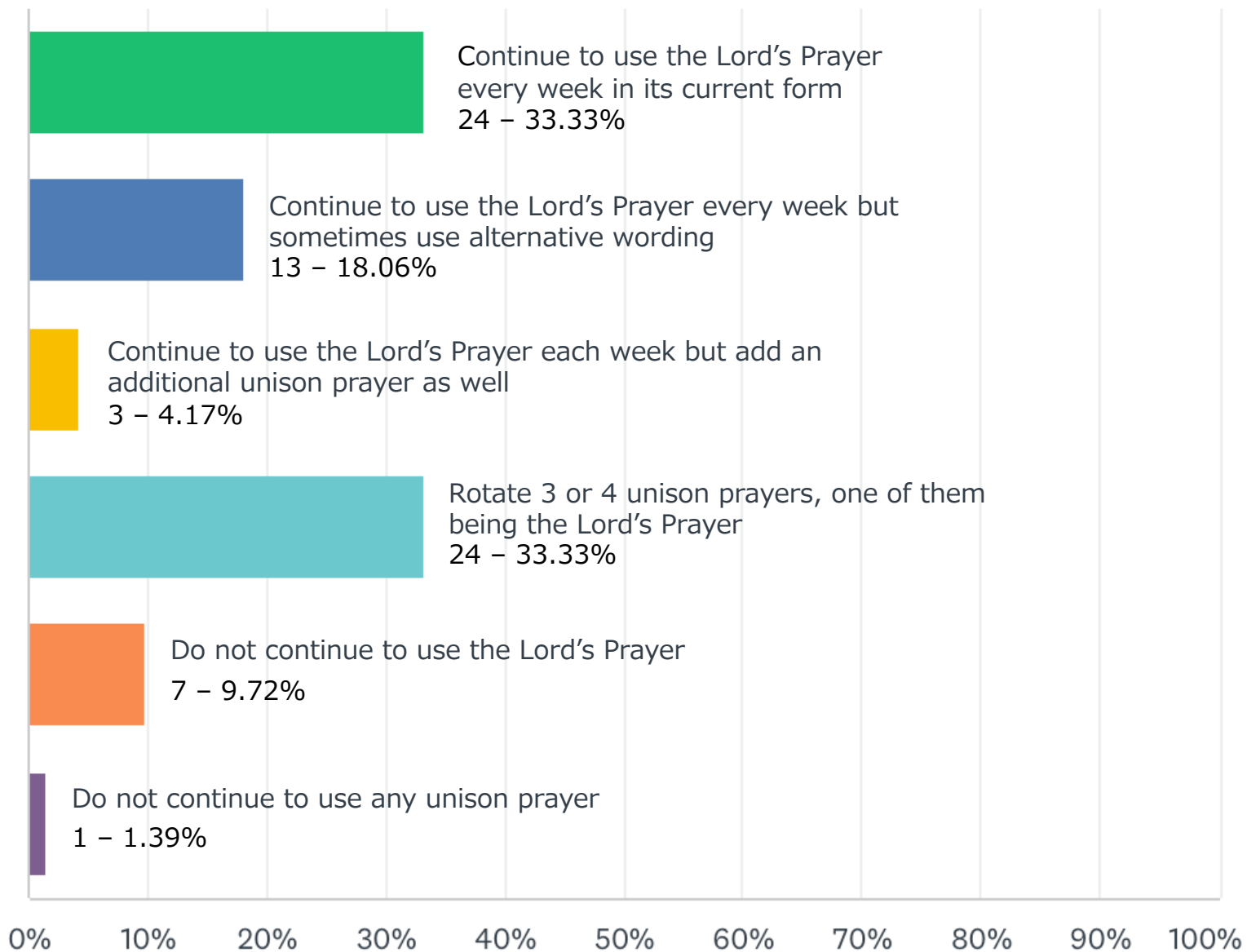


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Q13

Sunday worship at First Church in Salem UU includes the Lord's Prayer. When you consider the Lord's Prayer, would you like to:

72 Responses. 2 Skipped.





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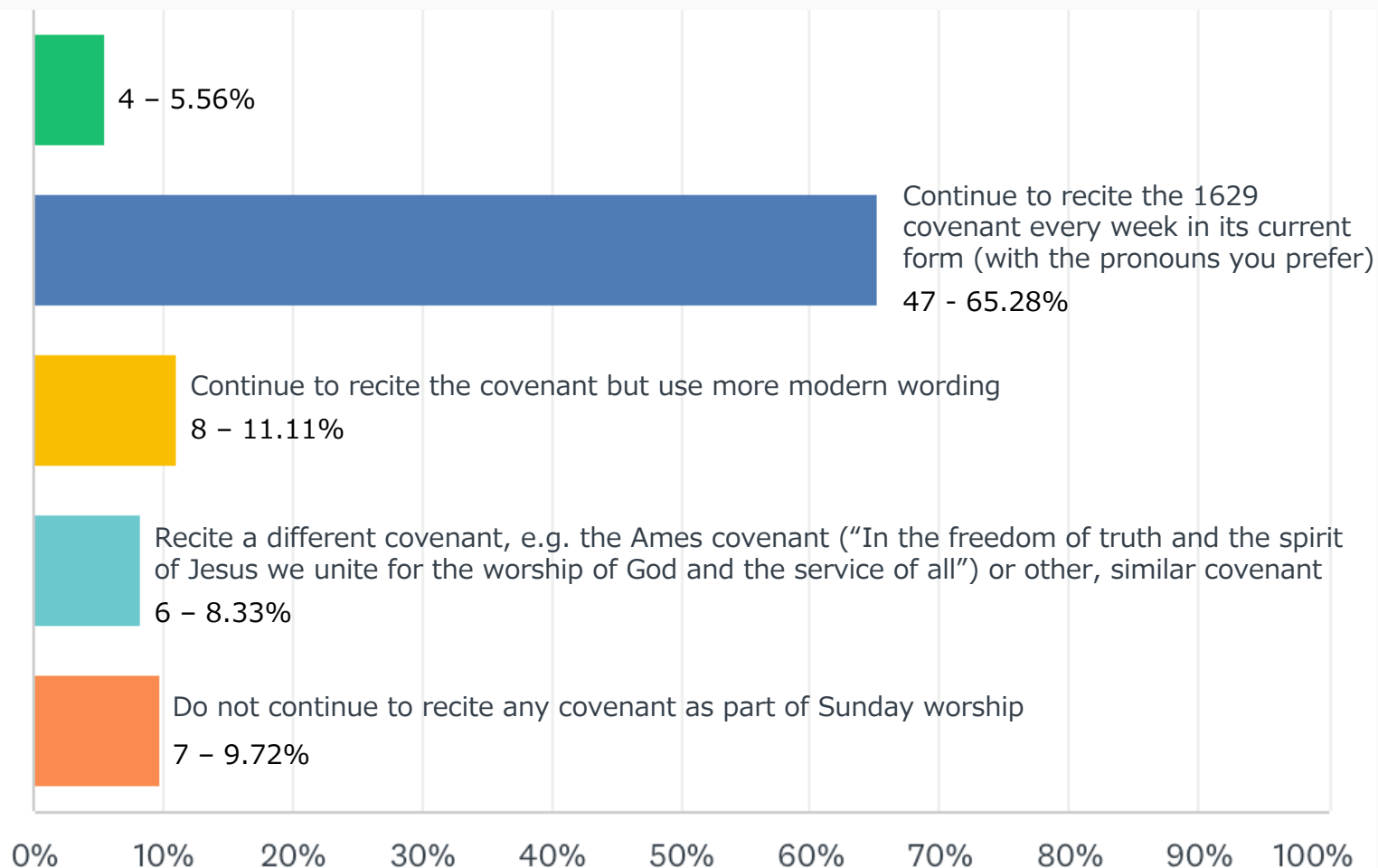
Q14

Sunday worship at First Church in Salem UU includes a recitation of the 1629 covenant:

"We covenant with the Lord, and one with another, and do bind ourselves in the presence of God to walk together in all His ways, according as he is pleased to reveal himself to us in his blessed word of truth"

When you consider the 1629 covenant, would you like to:

72 Responses. 2 Skipped.



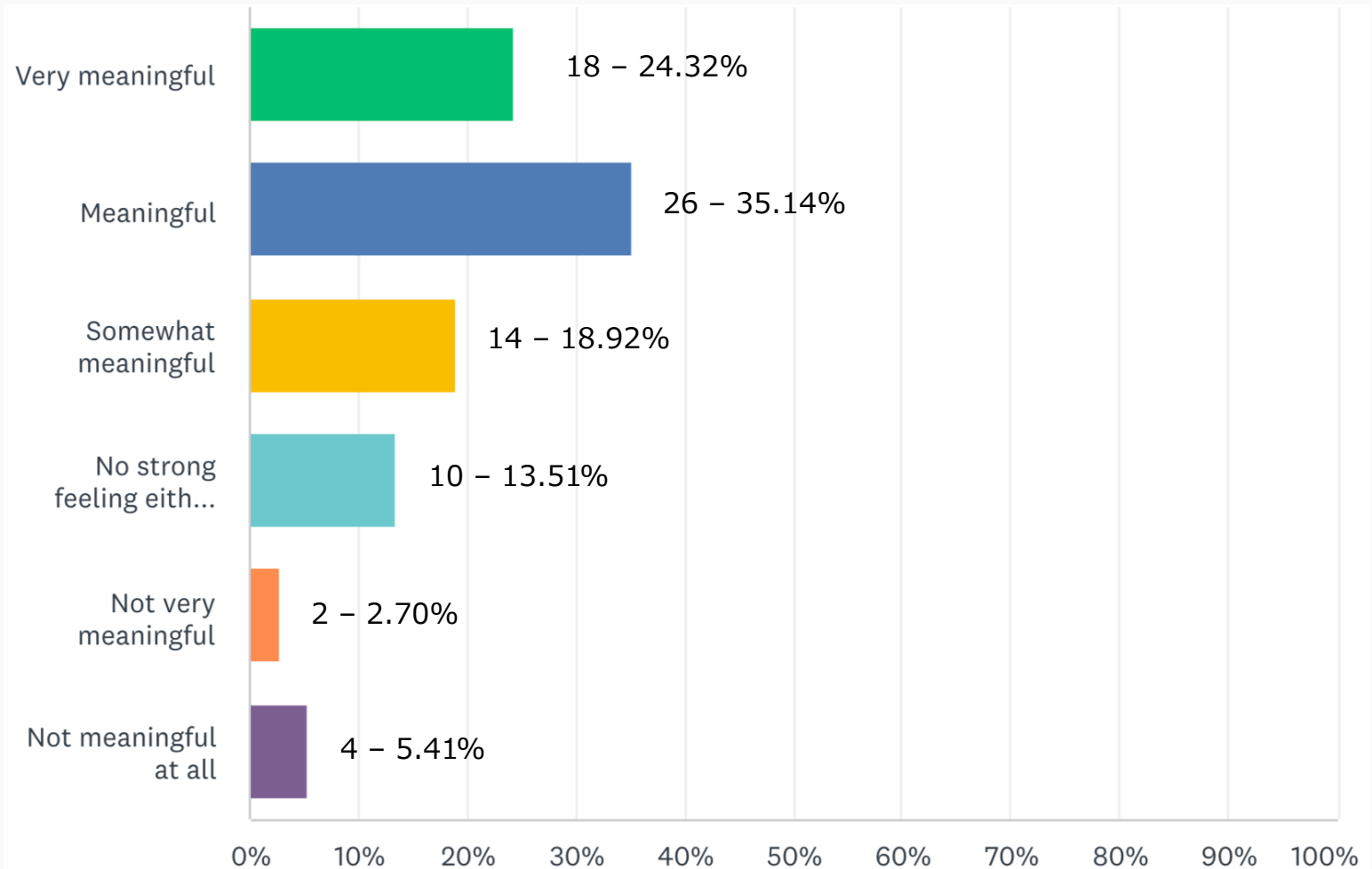


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Q15

First Church in Salem UU has a traditional Sunday worship style. To what degree is that meaningful to you?

74 Responses.



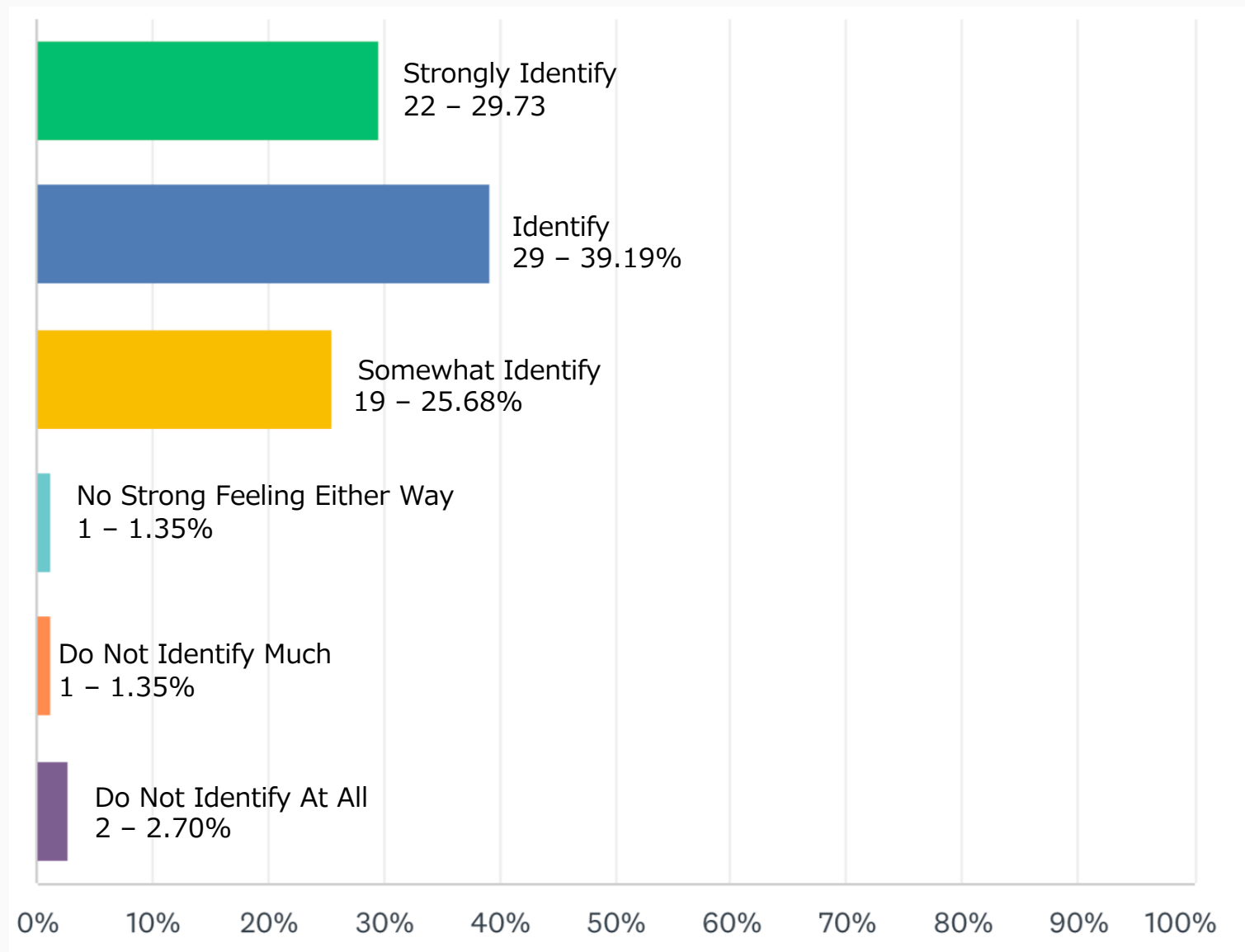


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Q16

First Church in Salem UU is a Unitarian Universalist congregation. Do you identify with Unitarian Universalism?

74 Responses.





First Church in Salem, Unitarian Universalist

Q17

What if anything do you feel is unique about First Church in Salem UU, among other churches in our area (including other UU churches)?

56 Responses. 18 Skipped.

Here are some ways in which respondents feel First Church in Salem UU is unique.

- The principle that everyone is welcome is put into practice here. Many respondents find this church welcoming but another respondent found that it felt unwelcoming, formal and elitist.
- Congregants engage in introspective analysis of what organized religion can offer.
- We follow a democratic process that allows us to balance change and tradition.
- Here there is room for both faith and science.
- We welcome contributions from extant faith traditions outside of Christianity.
- We have the humility to acknowledge other religions can also be right.
- The minister and congregants that help with worship are genuine people and demonstrate that there is a place for organized religion in our largely secular New England culture.
- Many respondents remarked on the history of this church which is long and complex with its dark side as well as its accomplishments.
- The history and beauty of our building.
- Sermons that are spiritual, offer illuminating insights into history, socially relevant, and grounded in current events.
- This church incorporates elements of liberal Christianity. Several respondents find our Christian orientation grounding and appealing. But another remarks that the church is not welcoming to humanists because of this. One respondent likes that while being welcoming and very liberal services here feel churchlike. Another likes the balance of liberal Christianity and social justice work here.
- We have some pagan and Wiccan members.
- We have a strong work ethic and sense of keeping our promises to each other, which has broken down somewhat and it would be good to rebuild this.
- We have a culture of intellectual inquiry which is important to those who approach questions with an open mind and intellectual rigor.
- There is a strong bond among congregants.
- As a suburban church in an urban environment, we are uniquely capable of addressing the concerns of the wider community.



First Church in Salem, Unitarian Universalist

Q18

Are your reasons for coming to First Church in Salem UU being satisfied? Which of your needs are being met? Which are not?

62 Responses. 12 Skipped.

Here are how people's reasons for coming to First Church in Salem UU are and are not being satisfied.

Areas of Satisfaction

- Social interaction with others.
- Appreciation for this as a community of people who are not overly pious and dogmatic and focused on doing good in the community.
- Appreciation for sermons that are enlightening and inspirational.
- Appreciation for services that are well put together and have engaging sermons.
- Appreciation of the church as a place to worship and be in community with others with similar beliefs and thoughts.
- Enjoyment of stories about the past which are inspirational.
- Sustenance is drawn from services and recommended readings.
- Appreciation of being part of an open-minded, accepting, spiritual community with opportunities to participate in spiritually centered, small-group activities.
- Involvement in the church strengthens my sense of my needs being met. The more I give the more I receive.
- Satisfaction comes from doing collective social justice work.
- Satisfaction comes from finding community through crafting, book club, and Community Coffee.
- Appreciation for the small group discussions held by Transition Team and efforts to resolves conflicts around Rev. Ide's tenure.
- Appreciation for the consistency and community the church provides.
- Appreciation for Rev. Jenny's sermons.
- Satisfaction that their needs are being met is expressed by a number of respondents.
- Satisfaction for one respondent is highly dependent on the content the minister brings to the congregation. The substance of what a minister brings to the congregation outweighs the personality of the minister.



First Church in Salem, Unitarian Universalist

Q18

Are your reasons for coming to First Church in Salem UU being satisfied? Which of your needs are being met? Which are not?

62 Responses. 12 Skipped.

Areas of Dissatisfaction

- Dissatisfaction when not enough thought has gone into Sunday worship service. This happens about 50% of the time.
- Dissatisfaction with very strong LGBTQ+ messaging which includes flying the Pride flag at times other than Pride Month and replacement of MA flag with progressive Pride Rainbow flag in the Meeting House.
- Difficulty in getting back into the routine of attending church in person and so am attending infrequently.
- Inability to commit to church until I see how things go with the next settled minister.
- Desire to see a greater variety of music beyond the piano and organ.
- Dislike of the words of explanation before the hymns and other music which I find distracting and find impede the flow of the worship. Better to include explanatory notes in the OOS.
- Difficulty in getting to church even though it meets my needs because my family members have little interest in it.
- Dislike of talking that occurs near the entrance of the church once the music has started.
- Dislike of the “churning” of pulpit personnel. This respondent likes the same pastor every Sunday and finds it difficult to accept a change once a month and more than that is too much.
- Dissatisfaction with the number of community activities sponsored by the church and would like to see more.
- Dissatisfaction with the perception that the church is insular and not welcoming or understanding.
- Discomfort over the lingering signs of resentment among some parishioners over events that happened during Rev. Ide’s tenure.
- Dissatisfaction that needs are not being met and that the church has not felt like a spiritual home since the departure of Rev. Barz-Snell. They experience a sense of alienation from other parishioners who were strong supporters of Rev. Ide.



First Church in Salem, Unitarian Universalist

Q18

Are your reasons for coming to First Church in Salem UU being satisfied? Which of your needs are being met? Which are not?

62 Responses. 12 Skipped.

Areas of Dissatisfaction Continued

- Dissatisfaction because of personal issues, physical difficulties, and worry about Covid and other illnesses make it difficult to participate in the church. They experience a sense of disconnection from the church.
- Dissatisfaction because they need more support in their personal life but people are too busy.
- Dissatisfaction because of feelings of sadness and shock they experienced over what happened with Rev. Ide make it difficult to participate in church.
- Dissatisfaction because the structure of the service is too rigid.
- Dissatisfaction because they did not feel welcomed by others in the church. Nobody seemed to notice or care that they left. Committees were hard to work on because they are cliquy.
- Reluctance to join the church out of fear that it may move to a more secular and non-Christian form of worship.
- Reluctance to join the church because of uncertainty about how the community resolves the “witch hunt” that occurred during Covid with Rev. Ide as a focal point.
- Dissatisfaction with movement away from spirituality and faith and toward social justice and politics. Reason for attending church is to renew awareness of the presence of God in my life and the world; and, it’s not so much about changing the world but letting myself be changed.
- Discouraged by conflicts around Rev. Ide’s tenure and dysfunctional conduct of the congregation in dealing with them. Uncertain if the church is going to work for them in the long term.



First Church in Salem, Unitarian Universalist

Q19

Is there anything else you would like to add or bring to our attention?

47 Responses. 27 Skipped.

Anything to add or bring to our attention.

- Toning down the ultra-progressive ideology and woke liberal agenda may help increase faltering attendance.
- Nice to bring back to game nights and other pre-pandemic forms of social interaction.
- Reciting the Lord's Prayer and the Covenant is not something I participate in but because they are important to many other people, they should stay in the service.
- Giving praise and thanks to the Transition Team and previous Search Committee. There has been a lot of focus on unexpected negative outcomes and not enough recognition of the hard, dedicated work that has been done.
- Focusing on what the future can look like. It should not be like the past. More activities and openness are needed. The First Church facility is underutilized for size and location.
- Revitalize congregation worn-out by pandemic challenges and a challenging ministry.
- Revitalizing the Meeting House. It looks tattered and worn, make inviting and welcoming.
- Figuring out how to bring about change. Rev. Jenny and the Transition Team are working hard but not much is changing. There is little volunteerism. It would be good to see more camaraderie among the congregation and people doing things together.
- Recognizing and welcoming new members by doing a write-up in the Herald of the names of new members with a short bio and what drew them to our church.
- Breaking the pattern of having an "in-group" and "out-group" in this church. The "in-group" serves on all the committees and gets burnt out and the "out-group" instead of taking the initiative waits for the "in-group" to do things.
- It is hard to explain our current relationship to the phrase "liberal Christian church." We have moved away from some aspects of Christian practice over the years but nevertheless offer a unique spiritual home with a UU expression of major Christian holidays and practices. We are somewhere in between being Liberal Christian and UU.
- It is important to offer more opportunities for members of the community to engage with one another by discussing things that matter to us a community. This can include discussions of local and world issues: homelessness, housing, natural landscaping, political issues, war and peace. We should be able to learn how to speak with each other about difficult topics without taking words personally. Opinions when articulated should help us understand one another, not divide us.
- It would be good to have a clearer understanding of the committees and their function.



First Church in Salem, Unitarian Universalist

Questions to Engage in

With your partner share reactions to the Spirituality Snapshot Survey by considering these questions:

- What surprised you about the survey results?
- What didn't surprise you about the survey results?
- What concerned you about the survey results?
- What encouraged you about the survey results?



First Church in Salem, Unitarian Universalist

Thank you for your participation in the survey and today's meeting!



Melody Lee
Co-Chair



Russell Lane
Co-Chair



Deb Greel



Eric Kenney



Jerrie Hildebrand

First Church Salem UU Transition Team

“To take a stand for the future is to bring forth an opportunity not born of the path we’ve taken in the past, but born of a vision which we would create for ourselves.”

Werner Erhardt

