

thank you 4 asking! Project

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January 30, 2014

SUMMARY



Robin Debacker

Hello! This survey and research project (thank you 4 asking) came out of a desire to change something that wasn't working for me ~ not just the Sunday service, but my life in general. I wanted to get inspired. After my husband and I invited our pastor and his wife to lunch to tell them everything that was on our minds, I got the inspiration to ask other people what they thought~ this survey is the result.

The survey was sent out by private FB message over a period of 4 months (Sept – Dec 2013). I realized that like me, people really want to be asked what they think. Many offered to help, and almost everyone thanked me for asking, so I decided to name this survey the

‘thankyou4asking!’ project.

www.thankyou4asking.wordpress.com

Thankyou4asking! is not a private blog. I would like to make it available to any Unificationist who is interested in joining the conversations here. Feel free to share it with your friends, and if there is anything about your comment that you want removed, please let me know. I included all 352 responses, with names and identifying information removed ~except in the case of several pastors who gave their permission.

The site has a common THREADS section as well as some BEST PRACTICES, LINKS to related material, a brief report of the survey process, and a discussion page. The power point presentation is available to copy, change, or use~it is still in formation stage and way too long~ but I'd be happy if it's useful :)

www.thankyou4asking.wordpress.com

Thank you for responding to the survey and for visiting this blog. If you have any questions or get any inspirations, please post a comment.

Robin Debacker,
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THE SURVEY AND RESEARCH PROJECT

This is a survey and research project about the Sunday service ~ what people are most inspired by, and what they would like to change. After sharing with our pastor here in Belgium, I was inspired to ask other Unificationists what they thought about it~ and this survey is the result. As most of the respondents thanked me for asking, I decided to call it the ‘thankyou4asking!’ project.

A grassroots survey

This was a grassroots survey meant to take the temperature of the average Unificationist. It focused primarily on people who are not in leadership positions. After focusing first on the women around my own age (60-ish), I started asking men, and then finally 2nd gen ~ beginning with my daughter and some of her friends.

Some people suggested that I use Survey Monkey or some other online survey format, but I knew I would get more and better responses if I asked people personally and privately, one by one~ so that's what I did. After the first 100 responses, I dropped the part about format~ I was more interested in what inspires people, not how many songs or in what order. All 352 responses are filed in the drop-down menu under SURVEY RESPONSES. Thankyou4asking! is not a private blog. It is available to any Unificationist who is interested in reading it and joining the conversation.

The site also has a THREADS section, which includes the main topics respondents were interested in: the sermon, the service itself, worship (through music, praise, and prayer), community building (through fellowship, testimony, member care, and contribution), small group as a practice, and last but definitely not least, the 2nd gen. The BEST PRACTICES page lists the activities people said are working well. The remaining pages include LINKS to Facebook pages and inspirational material people shared in their responses, a brief report of the survey process and STATISTICS, and a discussion page that deals with several hot topics brought up. The power point is available for copy or use by anyone interested.

The Survey Question:

Hi _____,

This is a research question that I'm asking many Unificationists, some of whom I don't know very well or even at all. Since my husband Jean and I came back to his hometown in Belgium after living in Korea for many years, we've been thinking a lot about how to improve the Sunday service. I'm collecting ideas from people in various place/countries. This is the question I'm asking: Do you attend a service, and if so, what is the format, and what's the most inspiring part of it for you? In an ideal scenario, would you like to see any changes or additions? I hope you have time to respond. Thanks in advance for any ideas you send.

The Statistics:

The question was sent out as a private FB message to 930 people~ first to FB friends, then to friends of friends~ people I'd never met. There were 352 responses (approx 30%), which came from 195 cities around the world, 38 states in the US, and 32 countries worldwide. Out of 352 respondents, 103 were 2nd gen, most of them in their twenties. The majority of 1st gen who responded were in the 50 and over age-group.

Attendance:

Out of 352 respondents, 60 said they no longer attend service, 21 said they rarely attend, and 9 have left the movement altogether. That's 90 people who do not attend~ almost 1/4 of the total surveyed. Some reasons given for the lack of attendance: "Too far to travel, or too lazy;" "Time conflict with church visitation;" "I pulled back since IJN;" "I attend another church that's more inspiring;" "I do my own HDH at home;" "I do yoga instead;" "It's not relevant to my life;" "I prefer not to talk about it;" "God is everywhere!"

Of those who do attend, over 70% said they are uninspired and attend out of duty or for social reasons. Some responses were: "I love the music and cherish the fellowship, but I'm allergic to the sermon." (1st gen); "DP without application is so dry. I tune into Joel Osteen for inspiration." (1st gen); "I attend because I want to help out, not because it's inspiring, empowering, or educational. Only a few 2nd attend. The sermons are usually not valuable to us." (2nd gen)

There were two types of adjectives used to describe the atmosphere and the congregants:

1) Relaxing and Welcoming~ "I wouldn't change a thing!" (1st gen) OR...the opposite: 2) Monotonous and boring; not energized or uplifting ~ "We need a more interactive congregation~ not just everybody sitting there like sleeping statues." (1st gen)

Recommendations:

The changes that most people expressed a desire to see are:

Shorter sermons with uplifting and guest-friendly content and a concise takeaway;

Shorter services (with a guest-friendly format) leaving more time for fellowship afterwards;

Pair discussion after the sermon to share spiritual insights and connect;

Shared leadership ~an elected ministry committee to make decisions about the service format, sermon content, activities, etc.;

More testimony time (short, and moderated);

More time for prayer (silent, congregational, intercessory, unison...) and thanking God.

More 'live' music, with consideration for the tastes of both the young and the not so young!

More emphasis on community building activities, and bringing 1st and 2nd gen together.

More member care and more involvement and contribution from the congregation.

A few conclusions:

Hearing what people had to say about their Sunday service experience was helpful to me in several ways. I found out that I was not alone :). There are many others having the same experience as I am. It's nice to know~ a kind of 'common suffering fellowship.' I also realized that there are many things that I can do to improve my experience at church, and have begun to practice them with excellent results: talking to the 2nd something to say!), bringing my guitar and offering a song more often, reaching out more to the elders, and reporting more to my pastor. All have significantly changed the way I feel about attending.

I also discovered a few things: Humor and the social aspect of a church community is a very BIG and important part of what keeps people coming back again, not just in our church, but in ANY church. I was surprised when people told me that they haven't shared their thoughts about the service with their pastor. Why not? I would encourage them to do so. It seems like an obvious step, but I know how hard it is to express dissatisfaction with the status quo. No one wants to be labeled as a complainer. By the responses, it seems that many people think that the leader (or someone 'up there') is responsible for making any changes. I would venture that it's time to examine that kind of thinking.

Thankyou4asking! is a feminine response to addressing a perceived problem. Instead of telling someone what they should think or feel, it asks what they do think and feel. Like a mother asking her child after school: "How was it? Were the kids nice? Do you like your teacher? What did you learn today?" Thankyou4asking! is a motherly way of asking, listening, and embracing whatever the answer may be. It's comforting and healing to simply be asked and given the chance to tell. It's a 'start where you are, use what you have, and do what you can' approach.

'Getting in touch with the pulse out there' ~In America I grew up with the idea that "the customer is king." This means that it's important to get feedback from the people who buy your product. When I told her about the survey, one of my friends in Alabama said something interesting: "We can compare church (which serves spiritual food) to a restaurant (which serves physical food). Restaurants, like any other business, have to change with the times~ and stay in touch with the needs, desires, and tastes of their clients. Those who are out of touch will soon see their chairs empty. It's the same with the church. What you are doing is getting in touch with the pulse out there. People love to be heard and consulted. They feel honored. A church that honors its members builds loyalty because when the heart is touched, the body follows." So, this survey is about asking people what they think, in the hopes of touching their hearts, serving them better, and creating something that we all want to keep coming back to.

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