

First Unitarian Church of Victoria



Report of Capital Campaign Feasibility Study

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Background

Prior to the COVID19 pandemic, the congregation was dealing with ongoing issues related to our use of technology for services and events. The sound system in the sanctuary was unreliable and provided inconsistent coverage; livestreaming of services through Facebook was accomplished using a security camera and frequently failed; images projected onto the screen in the sanctuary were often washed out by bright ambient light.

During the pandemic when we switched over to Zoom services, we found technology was embraced by most members. Sunday morning attendance at services increased, and while some who regularly attended in-person services did not sign in, others who in the past were not able to get to the Church, were able to join in the service and participate.

A study of the audio-visual needs of the church was begun by Gary Theal in 2019 and continued into 2021. The findings and recommendations are summarised in the 23-minute video “AmpifyUU – The Movie” available along with much more detailed information at www.victoriaunitarian.ca/amplifyuu. The overriding objective of the project is inclusion.

A project team was established by the Board on the recommendation of the Finance Committee, to implement the recommendations. It was determined a capital campaign would be required to fund a major part of the project. The total cost of the project is currently estimated at \$200,000 and a very minimum of \$120,000, and preferably more, would need to be financed by the Capital Campaign. This feasibility study was established to gauge current knowledge and interest in the project and the likelihood that a Capital Campaign would succeed.

Methodology

The financial feasibility study included confidential interviews with a sample of 70 pledge units (i.e., pledges to the Annual Budget Campaign) from 67 households representing 36% of those who pledged to the 2020/21 Annual Budget Campaign, in order to estimate potential gifts from the entire congregation. In a few cases an online questionnaire was used instead of a telephone interview. Those participating did not represent a true cross-section of the congregation since the sample included most of those involved with Audio Visual (A-V) services in the congregation as well as a greater proportion of larger donors, since these individuals are often major contributors to a capital campaign. Overall, the households interviewed contributed 60% of the pledge amount for the 2020/21 Annual Budget Campaign.

Participants were asked a standard set of questions to determine current level of engagement with the congregation, their knowledge of AmplifyUU, how they learned what they know, and aspects of the project they find especially relevant or which they feel might be a barrier to potential donors. They were asked to rate the importance of the project on a scale of one to ten and to indicate their level of financial support for a capital campaign, as well as whether they would assist with the campaign or with A-V support.

Data from the interviews was analyzed to determine the level of emotional and intellectual support for the project, and the financial data was used to project the amount of money that may be raised in a capital campaign.

Findings

Almost all of those interviewed have attended some Zoom services as well as other church events. Most had at least some knowledge of AmplifyUU and 71% had watched the 23-minute video including 54% who attended one of two information sessions offered in March.

Most people identified elements of the project of special importance to them. About half indicated the visual capabilities were of great importance to them with many mentioning the ability to continue with Zoom services once we are back in the sanctuary. About the same number indicated improved audio as being of special importance, including many who mentioned closed captioning. A smaller but significant number indicated the importance of high-quality projection for those in the sanctuary so that virtual guest speakers, choir videos, and rites of passage participants could be seen and heard in the sanctuary. Several people mentioned outreach and community events as priorities as well as potential rental opportunities. Others mentioned our A-V volunteers and the need to support them through improved equipment and professional assistance.

Concerns about the project were also expressed. More than one-third mentioned the cost, some saying it was too high, others questioning whether we could raise sufficient money, and some suggesting the timing may be wrong. About 10% of the sample said money would be better spent on social or environmental causes. Smaller numbers mentioned concerns about the ongoing costs, aesthetics, the sound booth, and the need to keep services simple. Others were concerned about the need for the choir to see what is projected and two expressed doubt that sound problems in the sanctuary would be improved since past attempts were unsuccessful.

The complete list of questions and comments can be seen [HERE](#) and the same comments sorted into categories can be seen [HERE](#).

Participants were asked how important AmplfyUU is to our congregation on a scale of 1 to 10. The average score was 7.6.

Participants were reminded that a capital campaign would likely ask for donations to be made between now and June 2023, in addition to the annual pledges to fund our annual operating budget. They were asked how much in total they might be willing to contribute. 60 households indicated they might pledge a total of \$134,100, one said they were not yet ready to suggest an amount, 5 were unwilling or unable to pledge at all, and one did not respond. A breakdown of responses appears in the following table.

| Gift Range | Number of Households | Indicated Amount |
|------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| \$10,000 | 5 | \$50,000 |
| \$5,000-\$9,999 | 5 | \$26,000 |
| \$3,000-\$4,999 | 4 | \$12,000 |
| \$1,000-\$2,999 | 29 | \$38,350 |
| Up to \$999 | 17 | \$7,750 |
| Not at this time | 1 | \$0 |
| Will not Pledge | 5 | \$0 |
| Total | 66 | \$134,100 |

In projecting a total amount to be pledged in a campaign we have taken into consideration that our sample was weighted, and a larger proportion of the sample group attended an information session where they received a more detailed understanding of the project. We estimate that a capital campaign will yield a pledge range of \$155,000 to \$175,000.

Of the \$134,100 identified, 54% of those amounts would be given in 2021, 36% in 2022, and 10% by June 2023.

Other sources of funding for AmplifyUU include a potential grant from the Canadian Unitarian Council Sharing Our Faith fund up to \$5,000, and a \$5,000 donation from Greg and Mark Van Alstyne in memory of their father, Bob. Greg and Mark have asked that others give to the fund in memory of Bob in lieu of flowers or other charitable gifts.

Volunteer Support

Participants were asked whether they were willing to assist with the Capital Campaign or with ongoing A-V support. 17 offered to assist with the Capital Campaign and 21 with ongoing A-V support. Names were taken!

Recommendations

There is clearly strong emotional, intellectual, and financial support for AmplifyUU.

- We recommend that the congregation approve a Capital Campaign with a target of \$160,000
- Total funding for the project might be as follows:

| | |
|------------------------|-----------|
| Capital Campaign | \$160,000 |
| Van Alstyne Memorial | \$ 5,000 |
| CUC Sharing Our Faith | \$ 5,000 |
| General Operating Fund | \$ 30,000 |
| TOTAL | \$200,000 |

- Bridge funding will be required to cover pledges to be received after Fall 2021 and this should come from the General Operating Fund as far as possible, and from cash reserves of the Endowment Fund if necessary (with approval from the congregation).
- During the study, concerns came to light about the logistics of increasing rentals for space that is already heavily used by long-term renters. The project needs to focus on the goal of inclusion for the existing congregation and outreach (membership growth). Increased rentals are not a major objective and do not provide the justification for the project.
- Several participants expressed concern about spending a large amount of money on things rather than on social or environmental causes. Similar concerns were expressed in previous capital campaigns. The congregation has severely underspent on A-V equipment over the past 25 years and in addition, the pandemic has taught us that there are ways to allow members who cannot attend at the sanctuary to participate. Over the past several years the congregation has contributed many thousands of dollars to social causes through refugee projects, share the plate, HOW, disaster relief, Lifeline, and Foundation grants, etc. It would be useful to track and highlight this fact to the congregation on a regular basis.

Our congregation serves members, friends, and visitors from Sidney to Sooke, Salt Spring, Lady Smith and beyond, as well as residents who are physically unable to drive to our rural sanctuary. The pandemic has brought about a cultural shift in video viewing and participation, and the ability to serve those participants through a virtual sanctuary. Unlike many other charitable causes, only members and friends of our congregation can successfully fund this project - a project for inclusion, that leaves a legacy for the wider community and future generations.