

# Accessibility Questionnaire Responses & Conversations--March 20, 2023

**We appreciate all of your responses and comments at the Accessibility Conversations! It is quite a learning process to understand how we are and aren't an accessible community.** Included in this summary are responses from the questionnaire and conversations that were shared by more than one person or that represented a new perspective for accessibility consideration. (70 completed the form; 25 participated in one of the conversations.) There were many commonalities; there were a few differing perspectives as well. We have tried to capture both in this summary.

Here is one of your guiding responses:

*" It is a balancing act between historic preservation and the spirit of ADA/accessibility. We need to figure out creative ways to improve accessibility while preserving the beauty and history and craftsmanship of the space. "*

## **#1: What are the Current CHALLENGES that limit full participation in services, congregation life and/or community use of the building?** (for yourself, others, community)

*These are in order of frequency mentioned.*

1. Pews--limited accessibility; No welcoming place for people in wheelchairs or those who can't negotiate getting into the box pews (size, shape or mobility challenges). Pew door latches can be difficult to operate.
2. Chancel (raised area in the front) is not physically accessible for anyone who can't navigate 5 stairs. Limits worship leadership.
3. Hearing/Audio--Limited # of working headsets. Headsets are old, compromised quality and not compatible with current hearing aids. Parish hall sound reverberates making it difficult to follow conversations in there.
4. Remote Services (Zoom) -- not reliable, want greater consistency in sound & streaming
5. Restrooms--no main floor accessible restroom; signage lacking
6. High pulpit--not accessible, blocks visibility, outdated function, hierarchical
7. Visual--Need larger screen for service viewing (hymn words, song videos, closed caption usage); better location
8. Doors
  - a. door from sanctuary to parish hallway is offset-- difficult to maneuver for those using mobility assists or for event crowds
  - b. Door at base of stairs blocks elevator when open; door needs to open out (fire safety) and not block stairs
  - c. no push button operated doors for easy access
  - d. knobs are difficult compared with levers
9. Other
  - a. Front entrance steps railing insufficient for support and safety--railing is not centered near door and does not come all the way to top step/door
  - b. Parking--only 1 accessible space. Not enough.
  - c. Lighting--insufficient for evening use in numerous places throughout the building
  - d. Large print hymnals good but need more; need large print Order of Service
  - e. Balcony is not accessible; stairs are safety concerns especially in evening as not well lit.
  - f. Accessible rear entrance--Signage not visible (*note: this has been corrected*)

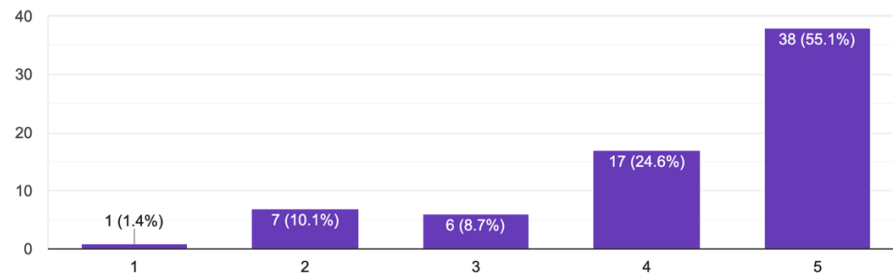
## **#2 How IMPORTANT is it to you (as part of our community) to address these challenges?**

->80% of questionnaire respondents (70) said that it is Important or Very Important to address these accessibility challenges

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2. On a 1-5 scale, how important is it to you (as part of our UU community) to reduce or remove these obstacles over the next few years? (pick the number)

69 responses



### #3 SANCTUARY: What historic features do you notice and most appreciate?

- the windows and arches over the windows
- woodwork, columns, white wood panels
- high ceilings with open feel and brightness
- high pulpit

These features evoked these feelings:

- *"You know you are in a historic and special place"*
- *sense of awe and worship atmosphere*
- *"precious, spiritual space"*

### How can we preserve the historic beauty AND serve our mission today?

- keep sanctuary as it is; don't change things (24% of respondents said this)
- remove front pews for more room and wheelchair accessibility
- remove pew doors and/or change latches
- lower, relocate or remove the high pulpit and sounding board
- keep the high pulpit and sounding board
- install lift or ramp to chancel

*"While our building is beautiful and historic, I don't feel that the sanctuary meets the needs of the community today. I appreciate the task force taking on this important issue, and I realize that for many people making major changes to our building will be problematic."*

### #4: COMMUNITY INSPIRATION: How can we make our historic building a place to "inspire the local and global community through social action and the arts?"

- reconfigure chancel for accessibility
- make area to the right of chancel accessible and usable (choir loft)
- seating modification in sanctuary for attendees and their families
- remove pew doors
- remove row of front pews
- offer actual stage and/or riser space up front

## Accessibility Questionnaire Responses & Conversations--March 20, 2023

- increase accessible parking
- get better sound system for hearing assistance in the parish hall and sanctuary
- improve heating system
- install cooling (air conditioning)--summer use
- offer/use of RE rooms for classes/intimate groups
- keep the historic nature of the sanctuary
- enlarge hallway between sanctuary and parish hall
- ensure door to sanctuary from parish hallway is large enough for wheelchair access (*note: this door is not ADA compliant*)
- use front lawn for more events
- have display space for visual art
- update electrical system

### #5 What TECHNOLOGY additions or changes might we make to improve accessibility?

#### Consensus:

1. \*\*\*The video and audio technology installed & developed during the pandemic provides a service that was not available before, and is now considered essential-- and is here to stay.
  - Remote access to the Sunday service (currently via Zoom) allows participation from home or other location and is especially appreciated for health reasons, travel, weather or other concerns.
  - Continue to work on developing technology, to provide consistently reliable service with the proper equipment and a skilled tech team.
2. \*\*\*Invest in all needed equipment, speakers and screens to ensure sound and sight accessibility throughout the sanctuary and in support of remote capabilities .

#### **Specific Technology Improvements Recommended to Provide More Reliability for Streaming Sunday services**

- Update hearing assistance; take advantage of modern systems (e.g. loop)
- Make use of portable microphones (e.g. joys and concerns)
- Mount speakers (2) and screens (2) to provide audio/visual access to all in the sanctuary and retain the historic sanctuary features.
- Remote displays and sanctuary screen should have closed caption and larger print options.
- Explore switch to Fiber Optics internet for faster upload speed, greater reliability & reduced cost
- Expand cohort of trained & knowledgeable tech volunteers. Consider hiring professional tech team to reduce burden on the PUUC volunteers.
- Upgrade electrical wiring to accommodate mix of hardware and power outlet needs.

### #6 YOUR ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

1. PUUC is our spiritual home, first and foremost
2. "Walking our talk" in the community is important
3. Need to consider LCHIP\* restrictions in place until July 2024 (LCHIP: Land & Community Heritage Investment Program--provided funding for restoration of window fan over front doors in 2019, with 5 year monitoring requirement).

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4. It is critical that we examine how to grow the congregation and make it appealing again to young families
5. From the Lyceum Committee: "We would want the sanctuary and hall to be accessible to our audiences, and the chancel to be accessible to speakers and moderators. The podium at which they speak would need to be adjustable for a speaker using a wheelchair."
6. Outdoor spaces (flower beds) have been neglected; need new ideas and care
7. Seek more programming and overall use of ALL of the PUUC facilities. Bring in the community!
8. Consider fund-raising efforts as well as Building Endowment
9. Need AED (Automated External Defibrillator)
10. Replace gas stove in kitchen for health and safety
11. Thank you Accessibility Task Force for your important work
12. We can do this!!

### Accessibility Task Force Members

Peggy Brown [peggy.brown252@gmail.com](mailto:peggy.brown252@gmail.com)

Carol Hamilton [chamiltonorganist@gmail.com](mailto:chamiltonorganist@gmail.com)

Rick Miller [rmpm342@comcast.net](mailto:rmpm342@comcast.net)

Chase Wilson Roeper [chaseq72@gmail.com](mailto:chaseq72@gmail.com)

Susan Stanbury [sstanbury@comcast.net](mailto:sstanbury@comcast.net)