

## Summary Findings of Search Committee Outreach

In the fall of 2017, the DFF [formerly DRE] Search Committee reached out to Follen members and friends to seek feedback that would inform our work. We developed and distributed an on-line survey, held two Listening Sessions open to the full community, and included a question insert in the Order of Service over several weeks which congregants returned while leaving. The purpose of the outreach efforts was to gather input regarding the community's needs and desires for the future leadership of religious education at the church.

Here is a brief synopsis of the findings.

Follenites see the church's youth ministry as playing the primary role in educating children about UU values and in providing a strong foundation from which youth clarify and develop their own spiritual beliefs. Follen members and friends see RE programs as a means for building community among children and youth as well as connecting them to adults and the life of the church. Programs for youth and children at Follen enable them to become their best selves by providing a safe, welcoming place where kids can be kids and where this comfort enables them to stretch themselves. RE programs play a primary role in exposing children and youth to other faith traditions and to the importance of supporting social justice in the community and beyond.

Below is a sampling of comments from you, the congregation, regarding the role of RE.

What do you see as the primary role of RE in fulfilling the mission of Follen?	What is [has been] most important about RE for you and your family?
<p><i>Building community among the children, teaching them UU values, educating them on the wider world of different religions and their beliefs.</i></p> <p><i>To nurture the growth of Follen youth into kind, aware, and courageous adults.</i></p> <p><i>To make friends and have fun, belong to a community of people who share your same values and to explore those values in a deliberate way.</i></p> <p><i>Providing a safe, nurturing environment for children of all ages to explore issues of spirituality, morality, social justice and UU values.</i></p> <p><i>Creating an intergenerational community where the mission can be put into practice.</i></p> <p><i>RE should give the children a sense of wonder about the world and should teach them about service to others. Above all it should eventually lead our young people into their own search for truth and meaning.</i></p> <p><i>Building a loving, supportive, thought provoking, fun community that is not based in family, school, or sport.</i></p>	<p><i>It is most important that our kids feel included, welcome and have some ownership at Follen. I am much more interested in the community aspect than the actual curriculum but I think good curriculum draws kids in and keeps them coming.</i></p> <p><i>Music as a form of spiritual expression and community. Exposure to religious history as an important part of cultural development.</i></p> <p><i>Our child is still welcome, even though she doesn't immerse herself in many facets of Follen.</i></p> <p><i>RE gave our family many things, a way for us, as adults, to be involved, friends for our children and for us, ways to address important things with our children in life and the world.</i></p> <p><i>Raising a new generation of children at Follen who deeply, unflinchingly understand racism for what it is, reject it, and refuse to support it is so exciting to me</i></p> <p><i>For me, that my kids get to talk about spiritual and social issues with people who don't always agree with them, but will keep talking even when they disagree.</i></p> <p><i>Reflection of the lessons at RE have given us an opportunity to discuss our values as a family and what we believe are important/ worthy causes to embrace.</i></p>

## What Follenites Consider Foundational Credentials for Our Future DFF

*The most important credential is not a credential after all, but a demonstrated ability to relate to children and youth and to channel an openness that makes them feel they can/ could reach out if need be.*

*A genuine love and appreciation for youth, the ability and desire to listen to their needs and dreams, as well as those of the adult community.*

*Front line experience with a wide range, and a large number, of kids and an essential enjoyment of kids. Experience creates more sensitivity to special needs, and makes a leader less judgmental of families and kids, as one accepts the difference between theory and practice.*

*Someone who has an ability to form connections with youth. Since youth are less likely to work around deficits in the RE leader, I'd rank this as most important.*

*The DRE/ MRE is a leader among leaders. They need to value collaboration.*

*The new leader of RE must first work to understand what is important to Follen, and why, before she or he jumps to changing things up.*

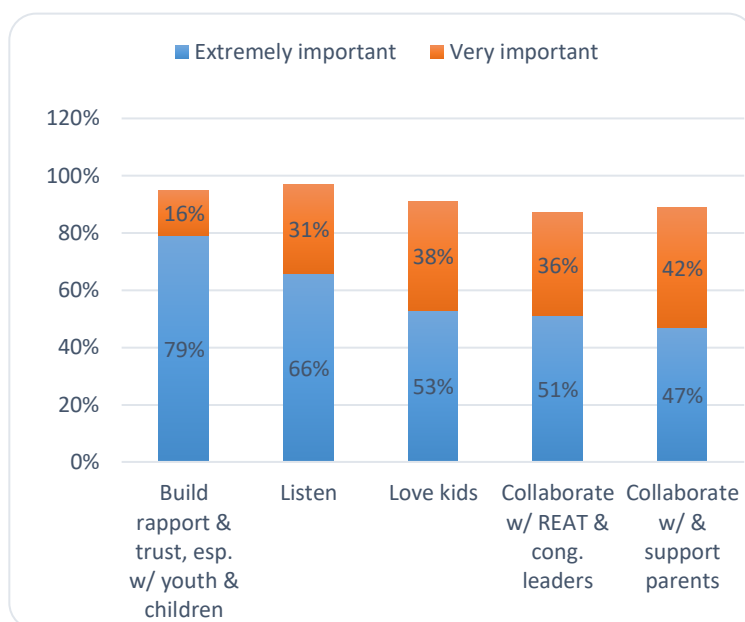
*Some traditions are important, however, we should be open to change, not afraid to try new ideas, and not throw the baby out with the bath water.*

## Connection and Collaboration Are Critical

The Follen community identified particular characteristics and skills as paramount for the professional who will lead the church's youth and family ministry forward. The most critical were identified as:

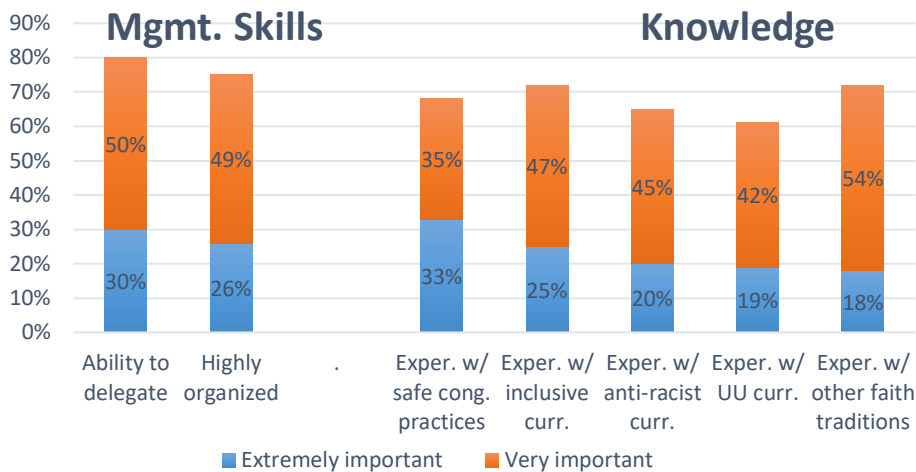
- ✚ An ability to listen deeply and a deep fondness for children and youth, with an ability to develop trust and rapport with them

- ✚ The ability to collaborate effectively with the REAT and other congregational leadership and with parents [survey respondents also highlighted the desire for the DFF to be supportive of Follen parents]



The congregation highlighted the value of the future DFF being able to provide a long-term vision, with 3/4's of respondents indicating this was extremely or very important. Experience with religious education, classified by nearly 4 in 5 Follenites as extremely/ very important, was seen as highly desirable for our future leader of youth ministry.

The vast majority of Follenites [nearly 90%] hope the DFF will bring a fresh eye to reviewing RE programming as well as balance honoring tradition with leaving room for growth and change.



### Combining Management Skills and an Educational Focus

Beyond the foundational interpersonal strengths identified, Follen members and friends highlighted both management skills and knowledge of particular curriculum and practices as important qualifications for Follen’s future DFF. In particular,

- Management skills, especially the ability to delegate and organize the array of people and programs encompassed within Follen’s robust RE programming
- Knowledge of a variety of curriculums – for example inclusive and anti-racist - as well as familiarity with safe congregational practices and other faith traditions

In comparing the survey responses for those who did have a child in or entering RE [slightly less than half] and those who did not, the data trended along the same lines as the aggregate data for all congregants.

#### Follenites Weigh In on Skills and Experiences

*The new RE leader should have a proven capacity to deal with details of running a program with many people and children. Specific experience in UU and RE could be secondary if the candidate cares about education, has a passion for Follen/ RE, and has a proven ability to organize, meet deadlines, and delegate.*

*We need a person who is all in for raising anti-racist children. This is a whole church job and having strong leadership in RE is critical.*

*Knowledge of emerging gender redefinition youth movement.*

*Most successful DREs at other churches have strong administrative skills and an educator’s focus.*

*I look to a DRE to lead our families in supporting our children to find courage and compassion through a well-organized, crafted program. A DRE needs to be listening, loving, responsive, and organized.*

*RE Director is such an important position. You won’t be able to check all the boxes. My advice would be to choose someone who genuinely likes and respects children and youth and has a good rapport with them. Many of the other skills can be acquired through training and experience and administrative support.*

*Don’t hire based on the past, base it on aspirations for the future*

It was evident that RE has great value for Follenites broadly. In the survey, a Follenite wrote, **Investing resources in RE is a great investment for the future.** The deep commitment to RE was evidenced by a full 86% of respondents having direct experience teaching at Follen.

## **Supporting Teachers**

In response to the question, 'What support do you/ would you want as an RE teacher?' Follenites highlighted:

- Well-chosen curriculum
- Training and preparation for teaching RE classes
- Ideas and resources with regard to adapting lessons, for example for special needs, at risk and high energy children

In anticipating future directions for RE and considering potential adaptations in Follen's approach, congregants identified what they would like to see explored and changed. Several people would be interested in having greater connectivity between children/ youth and weekly church services, perhaps returning to a children's service as in the past. There is interest in potentially exploring more experiential options for RE and for revamping programs for younger children at the church.

There is a clear interest in assessing Follen's coop model which requires RE parents to teach and/or support RE programming in other ways. Related to that concern is the perceived need for more professional support staff.

## **Conclusion**

The Search Committee thanks you for spending the time to provide in depth, thoughtful input. It has been foundational in informing our thinking. We are excited to identify a future leader of RE who can help us honor our traditions and lay leadership involvement while simultaneously challenging us, educating us, and helping to move us into the next stage of our journey, actively ministering to children and youth at Follen. Engaging our children and youth has long been, and we know will continue to be, something very special about our church.