



Envisioning Our Meeting House in the 21st Century



The Envisioning Our Meeting House in the 21st Century Task Force

Our Team

1. Elaine Bryant
2. Catherine Cullen
3. Jim Hamilton
4. Caroline Mitchell
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6. Carol Robison
7. Emily Simeone
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Our Task

The Envisioning Our Meeting House in the 21st Century Task Force will establish and conduct a process whereby the entire church membership can engage in discernment about the appearance of the Meeting House interior, focusing on the area behind the pulpit. Included will be consideration of the two large tablets mounted on the wall behind the pulpit, the wooden cornice which has text on it, and the possible incorporation of Unitarian Universalist religious symbols. The Task Force will identify and work with an appropriate professional who will consult and facilitate the process. To afford ample time for conversations and considerations, this process will take place over at least two church years.

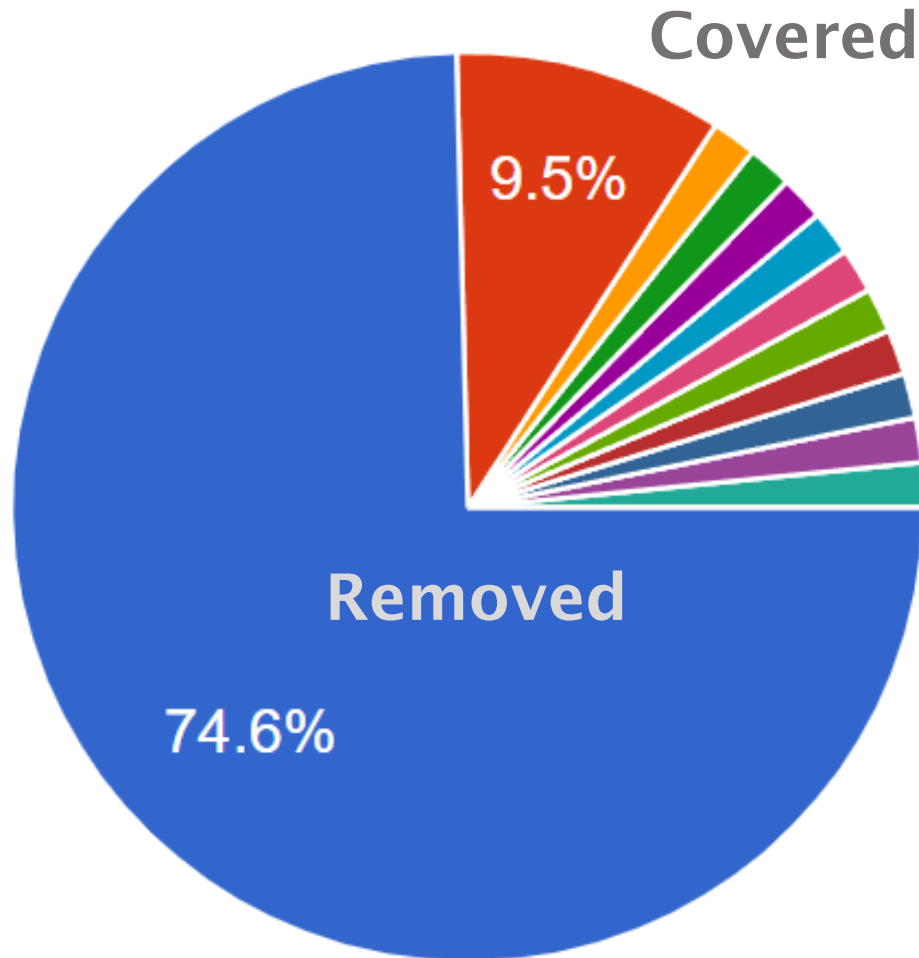
Envisioning Our Meeting House in the 21st Century Task Force Timeline

- **October 2019**
 - The Governing Board creates the Envisioning Our Meeting House in the 21st Century Task Force
- **Winter/Spring 2020**
 - The task force members are chosen and begin meeting
 - We select a consultant, Scott Tayler, but suspend our activities due to the pandemic
- **January 2021**
 - The task force resumes its activities
 - Scott meets virtually with the task force to create a covenant, identify our guiding assumptions, and plan our next steps
- **Summer 2021**
 - Plan design & review with Scott Tayler
- **Fall 2021**
 - Congregational engagement in October and November
 - Onsite visit by Scott Tayler on November 6-7
- **Early 2022**
 - Congregational survey
 - Proposal development
- **May 2022**
 - Congregational vote on the proposal

Survey Overview

- The survey's focus was on our historic tablets and the wording on the crown molding above the pulpit
- Based on our workshop with consultant Scott Tayler in November, there was a clear consensus that the historic tablets should be moved or covered
- With the survey questions we wanted to get a sense of what people would like to see next
- 63 people responded to the survey

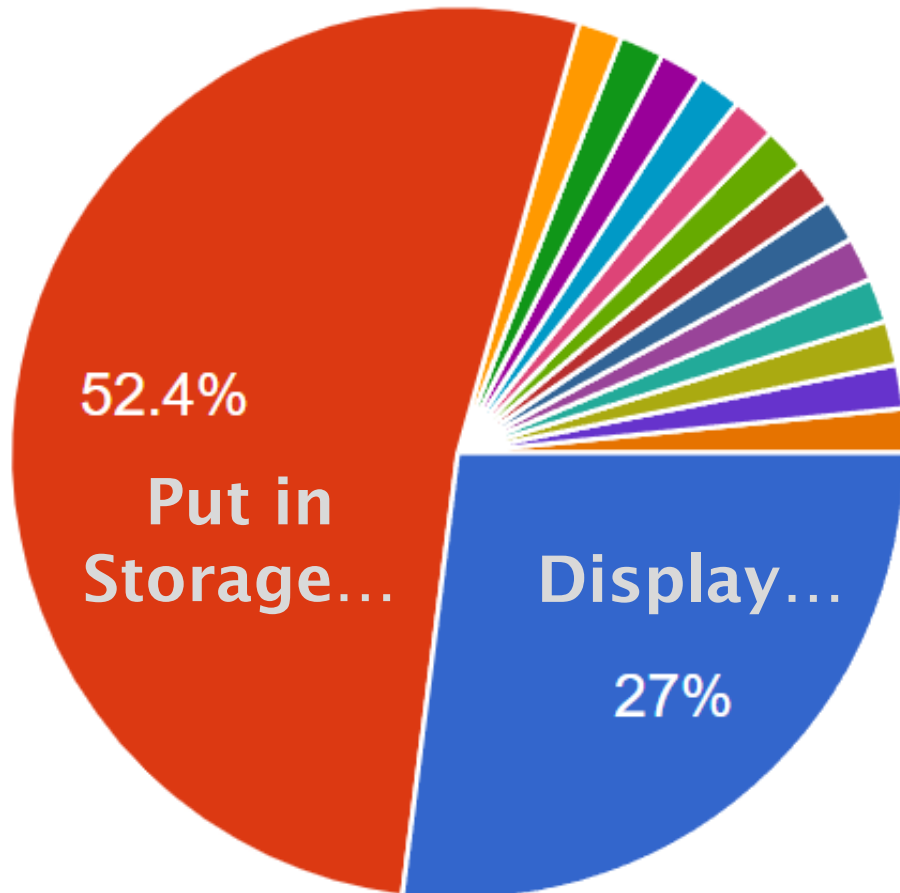
Question 1: *The Tablets Should Be...*



- Nearly three quarters of respondents wanted the tablets removed
- A little less than ten percent wanted them covered
- Smaller numbers either wanted the tablets to remain, but with the wording changed, or, nothing to be done at all

Question 2:

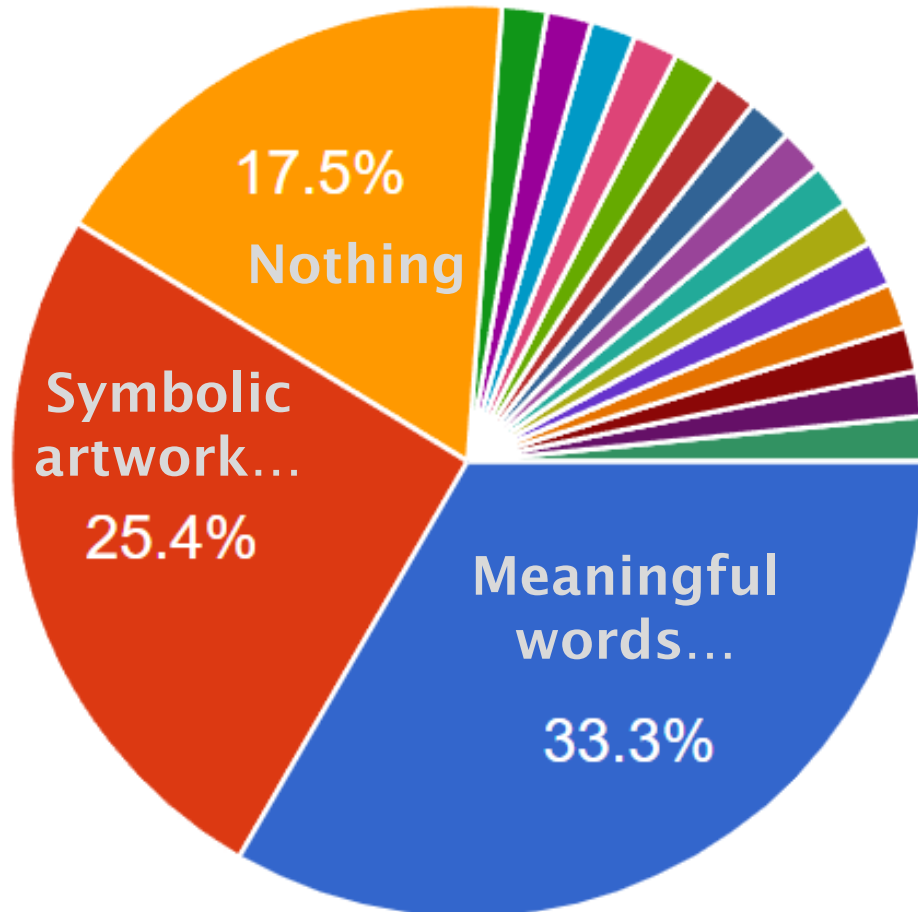
If we move the tablets, where should they go?



- More than half wanted the tablets to be put in storage while we consider a more permanent solution
- 27% would like to see them displayed somewhere on church property
- Other suggestions include displaying them elsewhere with labeling that describes their historical context

Question 3:

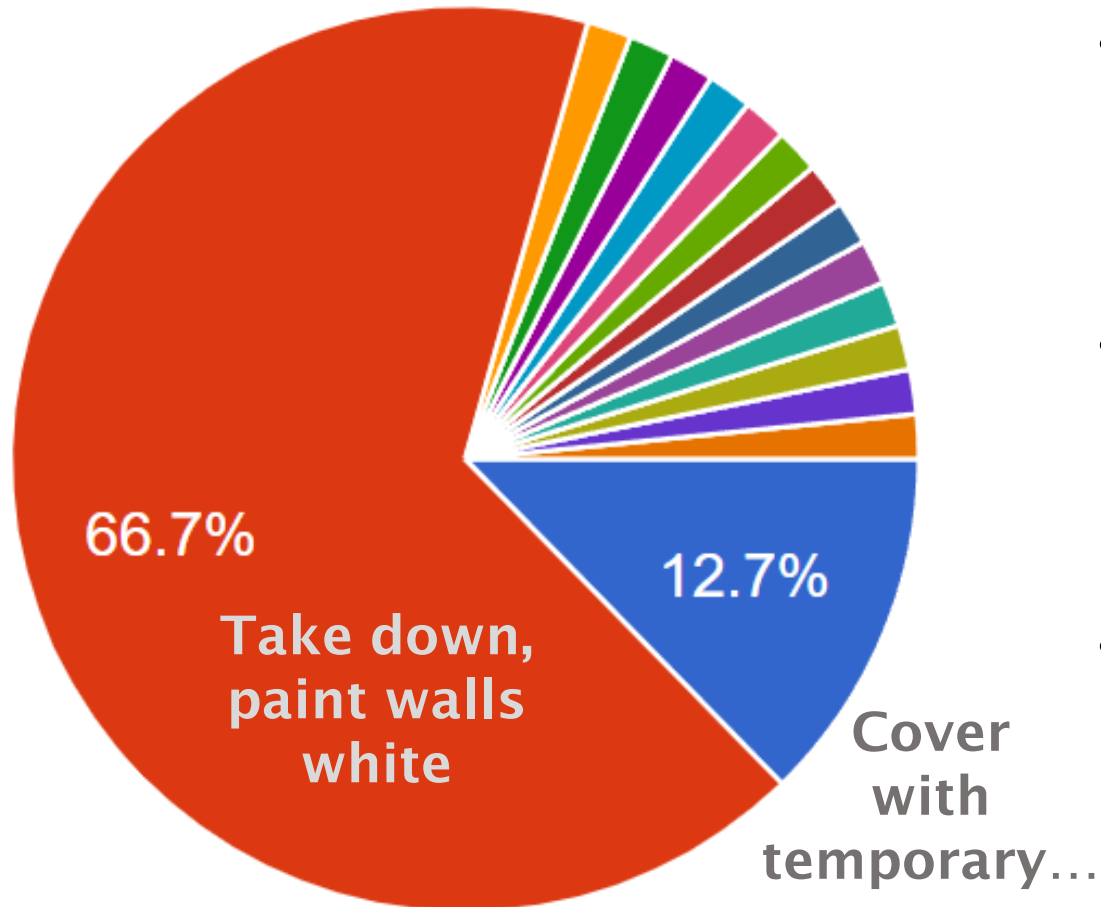
If we cover the tablets (or if we put something else in their place), what should it be?



- A third of respondents thought it should be meaningful words or phrases from the UU tradition
- About a quarter preferred symbolic artwork such as a chalice
- Nearly 18% suggested nothing be put in their place
- Other suggestions included using UU Principles and Sources

Question 4:

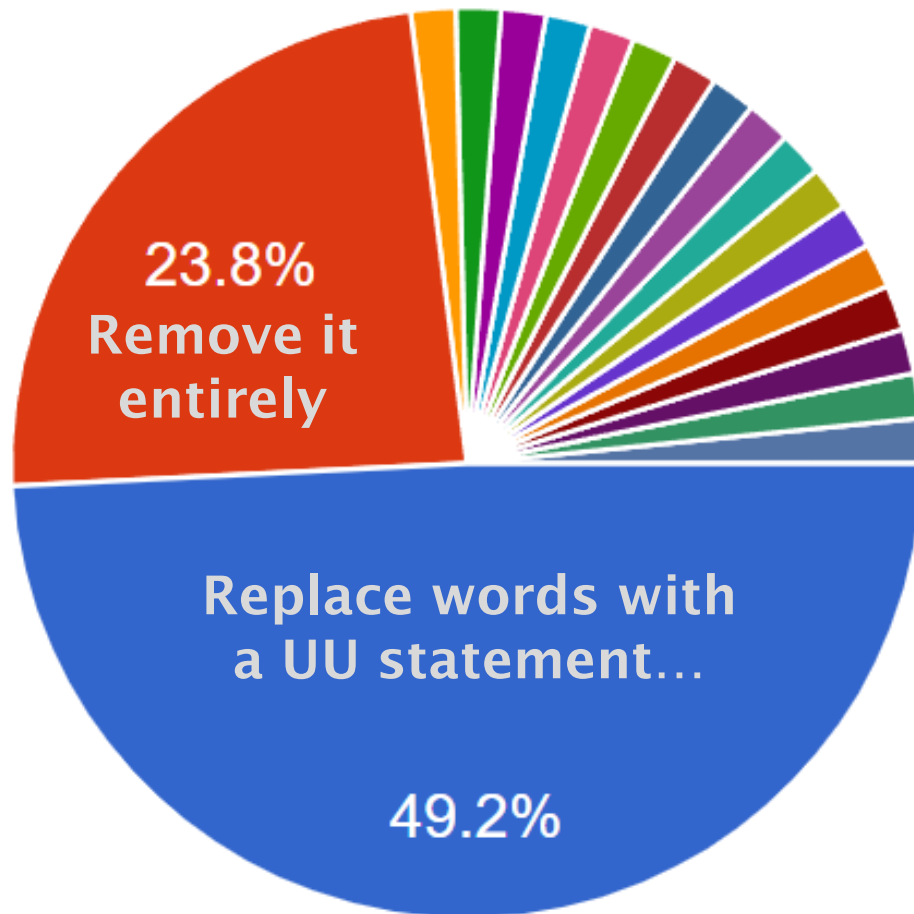
Should we decide to put something in their place, the congregation will need the help of a professional designer or artist. While we determine what should go up, what should we do in the meantime?



- Two thirds wanted to take the tablets down and paint the walls white, leaving them blank in the interim
- A little less than thirteen percent wanted to see them covered with a temporary piece of drapery or artwork
- Some wished to have them remain in place until a replacement was determined

Question 5:

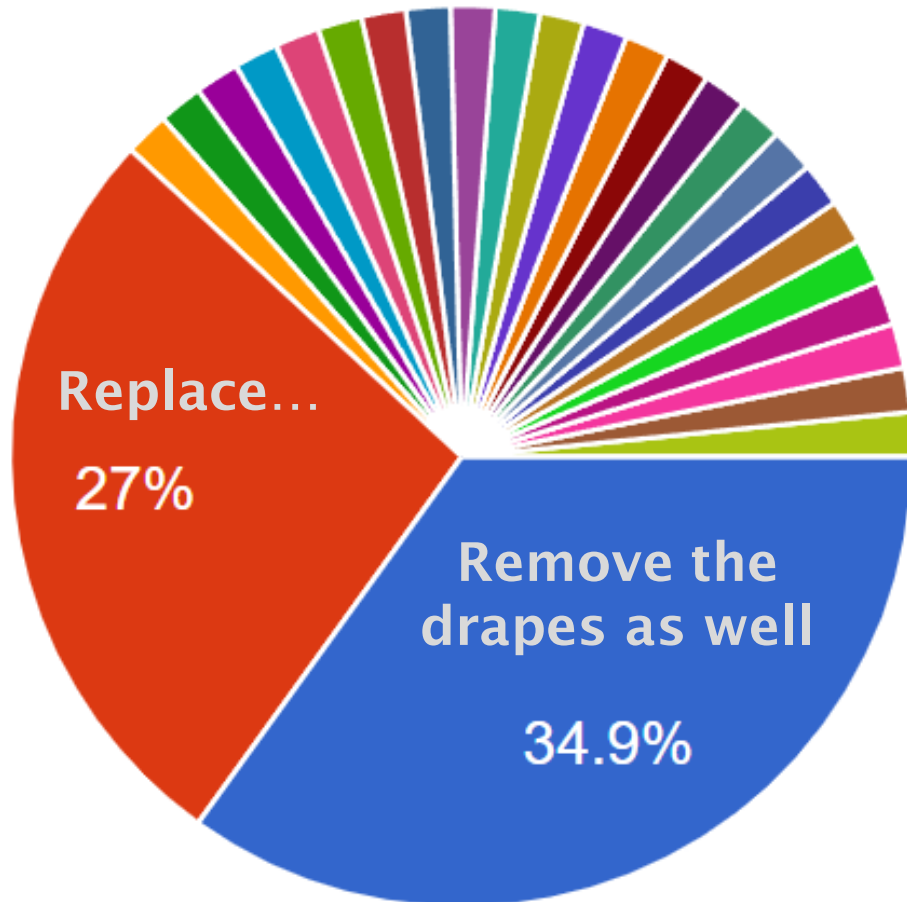
What should we do about the crown molding above the pulpit with the words “Holiness Becometh Thine House, O Lord, Forever” on it?



- Nearly half wanted to replace the words with a UU statement of welcome or spirituality
- About 24% thought we should remove the crown molding entirely
- Others supported keeping the molding, but with different wording

Question 6:

If the crown molding and its words are removed, what should be done with the drapes?



- Nearly 35% thought that the drapes should be removed as well
- 27% wanted to see them replaced with something else
- A small contingent wanted to see the drapes left in place, while others made suggestions for improvement (i.e., "make them blue")

Question 7:

Is there anything else you would like to share about this project?

- Some express joy or relief
 - So glad this is happening!
 - The message these tablets display does not reflect our faith and turns people away. I'm in tears of joy thinking that they might finally come down!
- Suggestions to consider the back wall as a whole
 - I like the idea of moving to a "clean slate" and sitting with it for at least a year.
 - We need to think holistically about the entire wall and the integration of technology
 - The entire wall needs to be considered as a whole and would best be addressed in two stages...
 - I would go slowly. Remove tablets, crown molding and red drapes. Replace drapes with a neutral color like gray for noise reduction. Then wait and see what we think needs to be done next. Sit with it a while.
- Some focus on inclusivity and UU principles
 - Should be inclusive of all worshippers.
 - I think that every decision should be made with the next generation in mind. How do we make this a welcoming place for everyone young that walks through the door as they are our future. Clean, simple, youthful.
 - Keep the simplicity and sacredness with updating UU philosophies!
 - I strongly feel we should move into the 21st century but not erase artifacts reflecting the church's history. We are an important part of this town's history and we have a duty of stewardship to it. At the same time, we must reflect the contemporary relevance of Unitarian Universalism.

Question 7 (continued):

Is there anything else you would like to share about this project?

- Some express frustration
 - This survey is overly slanted toward removal of the plaques...sounds like the working group has already made the decision...
 - This [process] has taken way too long...By the time the decision is made, there will be nobody left to enjoy the sanctuary...
 - As we steadily chip away at the various features of the architecture to please our fleeting tastes, soon little will be left to represent the original structure.
 - It is clear from this survey that the committee has not understood what the essential problem or issue is: The words on the tablets are the issue, not the tablets themselves.
- Some express respect for the sanctuary's simplicity
 - The sanctuary is fairly perfect as is – simple and unadorned, clean lines, with wonderful soaring windows. Don't mess with the windows. Just keep up with periodic maintenance.
 - I hope we retain the majesty and clean lines of the sanctuary.
 - Respect the architecture and history of this beautiful space!
- Some offer new suggestions
 - Remove the pews to the right and left of the pulpit and build a permanent elevated area.

Next Steps

- The working group will develop a draft proposal
- The working group will circulate that draft proposal for feedback
- The working group will finalize that proposal and bring it as a motion to be voted on at a special meeting of the parish to take place early in May