

# Small Talk

strengthening the small  
Unitarian Universalist  
congregation

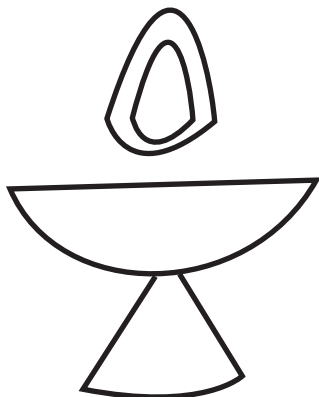
February 2005

## “To worship...

is to work with dedication and with skill; it is to pause from work and listen to a strain of music.

“To worship is to sing with the singing beauty of the earth; it is to listen through a storm to the still small voice within.”

—Jacob Trapp



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## Creative Worship in the Small Congregation

by **The Rev. Jane Dwinell**, *Small Church Specialist for the Northeast District*

**I**t seems that finding qualified, compelling worship leaders for the small congregation (without full time professional ministry services) is a challenge for everyone. Worship is central to a congregation of any size, and there's nothing worse than worship that is not meaningful or satisfying, at least for some aspect of the time together. What is good worship? What are some tricks for the folks in the small congregation whose responsibility it is to “fill the pulpit”?

Good worship contains elements that appeal to people's different interests, learning styles, and personal histories and spiritual practices. It should feature words and silence, music to be sung and music to be heard, times to sit and times to stand. There should be community elements, and private elements – but mostly, something, at some point, should touch us, teach us, and/or compel us to reflect upon our lives and move us to become better people, and help create a better world. You can never know from week-to-week, and person-to-person, what that might be. A worship service should flow from one part to the next, people should be physically comfortable, and there should be visual beauty as well. Not all aspects of every worship service will appeal to everyone – the idea is that at least some aspect will, and that people attending will find meaning and connection in some way.

### Leaders of good worship

It helps if every congregation has a group of trained lay members who are able to lead the non-sermon parts of worship (and maybe the sermon, too). These “Worship Associates,” as they are often called, understand what makes worship meaningful, and are able to deliver opening words, chalice lighting, readings, etc., announce and lead hymns, speak to the children, and offici-

**Creative Worship**  
*continued on page 2...*

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# About Small Talk

**Small Talk** is a newsletter published monthly by the Small Church Specialist of the Northeast District.

SMALL TALK is devoted to strengthening the small Unitarian Universalist congregation through informative articles, resources, and good ideas.

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If you'd like to publicize your small church's events...

Or if you'd like more information...

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*This is Volume Two, Issue Six.*

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ate joys and concerns and other particular rituals of your group. These people understand the flow of worship, know how to speak clearly, slowly, and expressively, and are able to handle potential disruptive or inappropriate behavior. Having a few Worship Associates gives a small congregation more flexibility in choosing guest speakers who may have something compelling to say, but be unfamiliar, or uncomfortable, with leading worship.

The Worship Associates can choose hymns, readings, meditations, prayers, etc. They can create an order of service. They can be host to a guest speaker. They can coordinate a service led by a group of people. They are multi-talented individuals! If you have a minister in any capacity, he or she can train the Worship Associates. If you do not have a minister, perhaps a District staff member, a minister of a nearby congregation, or a trained Worship Associate from another congregation can do a brief training for those interested.

## Looking outside (and inside) your congregation

Once you have your Worship Associates in place, you can check out these possibilities outside of your congregation for guest speakers:

- ◎ Your District Annual Program Fund Chair
- ◎ Any District lay leaders, Board members, or staff
- ◎ Interesting lay people from nearby congregations
- ◎ Retired ministers
- ◎ Part time ministers
- ◎ Community ministers
- ◎ Clergy or laity of another faith
- ◎ Pulpit exchange (your minister trades places with another minister for a Sunday)
- ◎ Staff of local non-profit agencies (battered women's shelter, food shelf, environmental group, homeless shelter, senior center, etc.)
- ◎ People who participate in international work of some kind
- ◎ College professors, or teachers of ethics, world religions, etc.
- ◎ Physicians or hospice nurses to talk about end-of-life or other health care issues
- ◎ Musicians or artists
- ◎ Authors or poets
- ◎ Therapists that specialize in an area of interest (drug or alcohol abuse, depression, suicide, etc.)
- ◎ People who do interesting and meaningful things (watch your local paper!)

You can also look inside your congregation for any of these same people.

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## Having fun with more than one!

Then there are group-led worship services. These are created and led by a small group – usually 4-6 people – and the central “sermon” part can be words spoken by 2 or 3 people, a play, or another activity, such as a discussion using the Small Group Ministry format, creating art or music of some kind, or simply being in silence. These worship services are ideal to have as an intergenerational service as well. Here are some theme ideas:

- ⊙ All men-led service
- ⊙ All women-led service
- ⊙ All youth and/or children-led service
- ⊙ Small Group Ministry (led by a SGM group or two)
- ⊙ Bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender service
- ⊙ “Holiday and Holy Day” oriented (secular or from the world’s religions)
- ⊙ All music
- ⊙ The experience of grief by people who have lost loved ones
- ⊙ Flower Communion, Water Ceremony and other UU rituals
- ⊙ Quaker-style worship
- ⊙ The meaning of home and/or country
- ⊙ Spiritual “Play” (sports and hobbies that bring meaning to our lives)
- ⊙ Experiences with serious or chronic illness
- ⊙ Multi-ethnic families, adoption, or cross-cultural issues
- ⊙ Voluntary simplicity
- ⊙ Remembering our grandparents and/or mentors

## Balancing crazy ideas with ritual

The ideas are endless! Members of the congregation can come up with subjects and areas that interest them, and the Worship Associates can bring those ideas into being through congregation-member-and-friend-led worship, or through an outside speaker. Be creative, and don’t be afraid to try something that may seem a little

} **Worship can be more creative in a small group. Take a risk, experiment, branch out... but don’t forget the “comfort food.”**

quirky. If you’re going to experiment with an unusual format or subject, it is helpful to have the first part of the worship service (chalice lighting, hymn, children’s time, offering, joys and concerns – whatever weekly rituals are important

to your group) be the same, and then be more innovative in the second half. That way, if the wild and crazy new idea falls flat or the guest speaker

turns out to be really boring, people will still feel enriched from the comfort and connectedness of the first part of the service.

## The gift of small congregation worship

One of the gifts of the small congregation is that worship can be more creative in a small group – it’s easier to do different things with 10, 20, 50, or 75 people than with several hundred. Take a risk, and experiment with rituals, music, sharing, and themes. Branch out with different speakers, and different ideas. But don’t forget the “comfort food” – unison chalice lightings, affirmations, beloved hymns, closing words, greetings – whatever is currently loved and most meaningful for your religious community.

The congregation that worships together, with relevance and meaning, develops a strong community that will be there in the good times, and the bad, and will attract new people for the warmth, love, beauty, and depth found when you come together to celebrate, remember, learn, and give thanks.

## Religious Education Resources

*Have you been to the Religious Education section at the Church of the Larger Fellowship recently? Check out the developing and expanding Religious Education Listing of resources that are available on the web – making RE material more accessible and including new material for Grades 6-12 and adults at [www.uua.org/clf/re/listings.html](http://www.uua.org/clf/re/listings.html)*

# What's Happening in February, March, and April!

## Northeast District Events

| <b>When?</b>                           | <b>What?</b>             | <b>Where?</b>                       |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| March 4 <sup>th</sup> -6 <sup>th</sup> | Youth Social Justice Con | 1 <sup>st</sup> Parish Portland, ME |
| March 12 <sup>th</sup>                 | Board Meeting            | Augusta, ME                         |
| May 6 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup>   | Spring Meeting           | Auburn, ME                          |



## Small Church Specialist's Calendar

| <b>When?</b>                           | <b>What?</b>                                     | <b>Where?</b>     |
|----------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| March 12 <sup>th</sup>                 | Board Meeting                                    | Augusta, ME       |
| March 13 <sup>th</sup>                 | Rev. Margaret Beckman's Ceremony of Relationship | Pittsfield, ME    |
| April 8 <sup>th</sup> -9 <sup>th</sup> | Board Retreat                                    | Norway, ME        |
| April 24 <sup>th</sup>                 | Leading Worship and Meeting                      | West Paris, ME    |
| May 21 <sup>st</sup>                   | Small Congregation Conference                    | New York City, NY |

**Join the smalltalk email chat list!**

An email chat list, through the UUA, has been started for lay leaders, DREs and ministers of small (less than 150 members) congregations.

If you like email conversations, and want more ideas for your small congregation, then sign up at <http://lists.uua.org/mailman/listinfo/smalltalk>.

**The Rev. Jane Dwinell, Small Church Specialist, is happy to meet with your congregation!**

Just give her a call at 802.229.4008, or send her an e-mail at [sky@vtlink.net](mailto:sky@vtlink.net).



## *Small is Beautiful!*

### **Resources and Networking for Small Congregations**

August 26-28, 2005 ✧ Ferry Beach Camp and Conference Center ✧ Saco, ME

Small is Beautiful is open to anyone from a small congregation (less than 150 members) from anywhere in the world.

Put this conference on your calendar – last summer's *Small is Beautiful!* was fun, mellow, and a learning experience for all. Next summer will be even better!

There will be more information in future issues of SMALL TALK.