

Small Talk

strengthening the small
Unitarian Universalist
congregation

February 2011

... **Religion, uniting us**
with all that is admirable in
human beings everywhere,
holding before our eyes a
prospect of the better life for
humankind, which each may
help to make actual.

—Vincent B. Silliman

Facebook for the Small Congregation

by **Dana Dwinell-Yardley, guest author**

Many small congregations are connecting with their members, their local community, and other Unitarian Universalists on Facebook. The popular social networking site is rapidly becoming a useful and important communication and outreach tool for UU congregations. At the same time, many congregations want to be on Facebook but aren't quite sure how to go about it. This issue of *Small Talk* will give you some basic information about how your small congregation can use Facebook.

There are two different ways an organization or congregation can be on Facebook: you can have a Page or a Group. Simply, Pages are for external communication, Groups are for internal communication. Here are the details.

Pages: publicity's two-way street

A Page is the public face of an organization. A Page is a great way to share information with members of the larger community as well as your own congregation. Anyone can connect to, or "like," your congregation's page by clicking the "like" button on the page. If they do, they will automatically see your posts in their news feed (the home page for each individual's Facebook, your news feed is a collection of recent posts by your friends and organizations you've liked). Things you can share on your congregation's page include photos from church events, links to archived sermons on your website, news articles about your congregation, publicity for your mission or other community events, news from the district or the Unitarian Universalist Association, links to interesting liberal religious news on the web, and so on.

The general advice for organizations is to have a good website first, then a Facebook page second, but you can have a Facebook page without a website. It's totally free, and it's an easy way to get basic

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About Small Talk

Small Talk is published monthly by The Rev. Jane Dwinell, small church consultant. *Small Talk* is devoted to strengthening the small Unitarian Universalist congregation through informative articles, resources, and good ideas.

the Rev. Jane Dwinell
Editor

Dana Dwinell-Yardley
Graphic Designer

If you have questions, comments, or ideas for future issues of *Small Talk*, please **contact** The Rev. Jane Dwinell at:

jane@spiritoflifepublishing.com
PO Box 243
Montpelier, VT 05601

Jane is also available to consult with your small congregation.

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information plus timely news out there. People can comment on what you post, or post comments and suggestions on your page's "wall," allowing for more interaction and dialogue than a static website. You can include your address, the time of your worship services, and a brief description of your religious community in the info section of your page (or not). Chances are members and friends of your congregation and people in your community are on Facebook — if Facebook were a country, it would be the third largest in the world! Having a Facebook account is becoming as common as having an e-mail address.

But, on the other hand (and as with many online tools), don't feel like you have to have a Facebook page just because it's possible to have one. Don't set up a page because you think you should, and then never use it. If you're going to do it, do it right — be there and be active. (Same goes for a website: don't create one and then never update it.) Show that your congregation is vibrant and alive. Nothing says "we don't really care" like an organization that posts to their Facebook page twice a year.

On the other hand, don't go nuts and post all the time. That's just annoying. A helpful Facebook guideline to remember is the 3/3/3 rule: post at least three times a week, no more than three times a day, at least three hours apart. (This was a tip I picked up in a workshop geared toward small businesses. A congregation could probably get away with posting twice a week. Look at the pages of other congregations and see what you like!)

To create a Page for your congregation, you will need a personal Facebook account if you don't already have one. Then, visit facebook.com/pages, and click the Create Page button. Facebook will guide you through the setup, asking you for basic information, a profile picture for your congregation, etc. Be advised: you cannot edit the name of your page once 100 people like it. Consider your name carefully ("UU Church"? "Unitarian Universalist Church"? "The UU Church of Pleasantville"?) and proofread what you've typed equally carefully!

Groups: talking amongst yourselves

The second way your congregation can be on Facebook is by having a Group. A group is a great way for your members to interact privately with each other on Facebook. (There are different levels of privacy you can choose to best fit your situation.) You could have a Facebook group open to all the members of your congregation for general talk about church issues. You could also have smaller Facebook groups that correspond to groups in your congregation: a board group, a

Welcoming Congregation group, etc. Members of a group are notified of anything another member posts, so it functions much like an e-mail list — but with the capability to share documents, photos and links, as well as chat (instant message) with whoever in your group is online at that moment.

Again, don't feel like you have to have a Facebook group just because it's possible to have one. Do what works best for your real-life group. If e-mail works better, do that. If

Google Docs is more suited to the work you're doing, use that. (Google Docs is a great way for multiple people to work on one document: the canvass task force drafting the canvass letter together, an RE class planning a worship service, two people writing a joint newsletter article. If you haven't done so already, check it out. It's free, looks and functions like many word-processing programs, and you don't need a Gmail account to use it.)

But if the majority of your group — congregation-wide or a four-person task force — is on Facebook, consider setting up a Facebook group. If people are already there, on Facebook, it's an easy way to connect and communicate with one another.

To set up a Group, go to facebook.com/groups and follow the prompts.

Who will do it?

With both Pages and Groups, it's important to set up some guidelines about how they will be used. Who will be the admins (both Pages and Groups can have multiple people in charge of them)? These folks can be staff or volunteers, or a combination. My advice: pick people who are reliable, web-savvy, already active on Facebook, and committed to the congregation, work well with other people, and have a strong sense of who your congregation is and how to communicate that to the community in an engaging way with no spelling errors. (I know, it's a lot to ask.) Think of your Facebook admin(s) as a different kind of newsletter editor.

What's allowed?

If you have a Page, the admins are the people allowed to post as the organization, the public voice of your congregation. What are they allowed and not allowed to post? (Are links to non-UU religious news OK? What about community news?) What's OK to post, officially, as the UU Congregation of Pleasantville? What are staff members allowed to post or not post, as themselves, on your congregation's page? What happens when someone abuses Facebook, or — more likely — just doesn't keep the page updated when they said they would? If you already have a policy regarding your newsletter or how your congregation handles e-mail communi-

cation, it's easy to add a simple policy for Facebook use. If you don't have these policies, this would be a good time to set them up.

Learning from each other

If you are on Facebook, look for other congregations in your state or district. (By typing "UU Congregation of" . . . in the search feature, you can find many pages to look at.) See what they're posting, and how they're using this fast-growing medium. There are photos of special events, announcements of what's happening each Sunday, and links to articles from other UU organizations. Learn from each other — give Facebook a try!

If you're going to do it, do it right — be there and be active. Show that your congregation is vibrant and alive.

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