

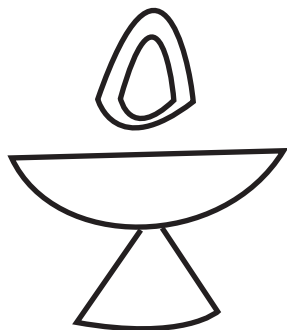
Small Talk

strengthening the small
Unitarian Universalist
congregation

January 2004

“Why not eliminate 50% of your standing committees and instead empower short term ad hoc task forces or teams? ...Build the work of the church around the gifts of members rather than a twenty-year-old committee structure. Ask new members the question: if you could give a gift of time to the church, what would that gift look like?”

– the Rev. Suzanne Meyer,
Unitarian Universalist Minister



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How to Get the Work Done... or ...Too Many Committees?

by the Rev. Jane Dwinell, Small Church Specialist

One of the biggest complaints among the leadership of small congregations is that there are not enough people to get the work done and that there is too much danger of burnout among the dedicated. Here's some tips to help your small congregation manage the things that need to be done:

Your Governing Council, Committee or Board

How big is it? How long are the terms, and how many terms can one person serve? If your governing group has more than 6 or 7 people on it, you may want to consider shrinking it. A small congregation looking for 8 or 10 or 12 people to sit on the governing board is just asking for burnout. Six people can easily make all the decisions that are needed. It helps if your officers (President or Chair, Vice President or Vice Chair, Secretary or Clerk, Treasurer) are part of the governing board, and not separate. It also helps to cut down on burnout if the terms are limited to two or three years, and that each person is limited to two consecutive terms.

Committees

Get rid of them!

Yes, that's right... get rid of them. There is no need for a small congregation to be burdened with umpteen committees. The worst example I heard of was a congregation of 20 that had 15 committees – everything from Finance and Fundraisers, to Decorating and Art. It was too much, and, funny thing, two people sat on almost every committee and did all the work. They felt burdened, resentful, and powerful – a bad combination in a small church.

A small congregation can easily run on the Task Force system.

How to Get the Work Done
continued on page 2...

About Small Talk

Small Talk is a newsletter published monthly by the Small Church Specialist of the North-east 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 have good ideas for future issues...

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

Or if you like more information or ideas....

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Task Forces are groups of people who are interested in a certain project who form a Task Force to accomplish a project, and then disband. The advantages of Task Forces are that people are willing to work hard for a short period of time and are then rewarded with accomplishing whatever it was they set out to do. Hard work and completion, and then relaxation and the satisfaction of a job well-done, plus knowing that they don't have to sit on the committee ad infinitum. A hard-to-beat combination!

So how would Task Forces handle the basic work of a congregation such as finances, worship, or building maintenance?

## **Let's look at finances, for example.**

A group of two or three could meet to create the budget, and then present it to the governing board for approval prior to the annual meeting. Another group of three or four could meet to plan the canvass, and then run it. (You do have a canvass every year, I hope... that will be the topic of another newsletter!) If your finance committee usually also looks at investments, you could have a small investment group that meets twice a year to look over the investments and make recommendations to the governing board (this group should have terms and term limits if it's the same people year after year). If you need to have a capital campaign, just put together a Task Force of three or four to plan and run the campaign.

} **Take a long, hard look at your committee structure and envision a new way. Consider Task Forces. Consider the gifts and interests of your members and friends.**

When it comes time for your annual fundraiser(s), a Task Force (of different people every year) can run the event. If you do the same special thing every year, half or one-third of the Task Force should plan to work two years in a row so that there can be consistency. If an opportunity for a special fundraiser comes up (a group asks you to put on a luncheon, or a one-time-event comes to your town), the governing board can just call for a small group of volunteers to run the event.

## **What about worship?**

It's a challenging thing for a small congregation with part time (or no) ministerial services to put together an interesting and spiritual worship calendar. In the summer, a Task Force of three or four – representing the theological diversity of your group – along with

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your minister, if you have one, can get together to plan the year's calendar. They can take into account the major holidays of the various religious traditions, any intergenerational or special services your congregation traditionally holds, the Sundays your minister will preach, and then you'll see what holes are left to be filled. The Task Force can brainstorm a list of guest speakers, and then the group can divvy up who calls whom and schedules them.

It is also nice for each congregation to have two or three people who have been trained in worship and public speaking who are available to lead worship in a pinch (in case of bad weather, illness, or a last minute cancellation by a guest speaker), who can lead the rest of the service besides the sermon (many guest speakers prefer to just do the sermon as they don't know what the rituals are of each particular congregation), or assist with an intergenerational service. I am happy to provide this training for your congregation.

### **Then there's the ongoing and everlasting challenge of building care and maintenance.**

But you don't need a committee!

First, have a Task Force of those-in-the-know about buildings to put together an annual maintenance schedule. Then the governing board can decide who does what. The fall leaf-raking and spring sprucing-up can be announced in advance and be an all-congregation fun day with potluck lunch. For tasks that need to be done on a regular basis – cleaning, lawn mowing, snow clearing, and purchasing and restocking of bathroom and kitchen supplies – it may be best to hire one or more people to be responsible for these important tasks.

Then, have an on-call list of those handy men and women in your congregation who are willing to fix leaky toilets, unthaw frozen pipes, and deal with the myriad other little things that need to be taken care of now and then. One person can take calls each month.

} **The advantages of Task Forces are that people are willing to work hard for a short period of time and are then rewarded with accomplishing whatever it was they set out to do.**

### **What about all the other committees you may have?**

Social action, membership, caring, and religious education, for example? Social action lends itself very well to the Task Force model – if there's a social action project to do, gather the interested folks and do it! As for membership and caring for one another, the entire congregation should be open and welcoming to newcomers before worship and at social hour. Everyone should look out for one another, though you may need a "point person" to organize food, rides, and other things for those who are ill, shut-in or have other personal crises.

Religious education will be covered in another newsletter... In the meantime, take a long, hard look at your committee structure and envision a new way. Consider Task Forces. Consider the gifts and interests of your members and friends. Build a way so that people will want to volunteer – to serve the individual congregation so that the liberal religious voice will be strong in your area. People need us – and we *can* create heaven on earth.

**What's Happening... in January and February!**

**Northeast District Events**

| <b>When?</b>                                | <b>What?</b>                                                                       | <b>Where?</b> |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| January 31 <sup>st</sup>                    | Northeast District Board Meeting                                                   | Brunswick     |
| February 7 <sup>th</sup>                    | "Beyond the Collection Plate: Creating Generous Congregations" with Michael Durall | Yarmouth      |
| February 13 <sup>th</sup> -15 <sup>th</sup> | UU ski weekend                                                                     | Sangerville   |



**Small Church Specialist's Calendar**



| <b>When?</b>                               | <b>What?</b>                          | <b>Where?</b> |
|--------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| January 28 <sup>th</sup> -29 <sup>th</sup> | North Atlantic Field Staff Meeting    | Connecticut   |
| January 30 <sup>th</sup>                   | In Maine                              | Portland area |
| January 31 <sup>st</sup>                   | Northeast District Board Meeting      | Brunswick     |
| February 1 <sup>st</sup>                   | Leading Worship                       | Edgecomb      |
| February 7 <sup>th</sup>                   | Michael Durall workshop               | Yarmouth      |
| February 8 <sup>th</sup>                   | Meeting with Sangerville congregation | Sangerville   |

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

Just give her a call at 802.334.8831, or send her an e-mail at [sky@vtlink.net](mailto:sky@vtlink.net).

*Don't Miss...*

*Small is Beautiful!*

Small Church Conference & August 29<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>, 2004

**Ferry Beach Conference Center**

*...Mark your calendar and stay tuned for more info!*

