

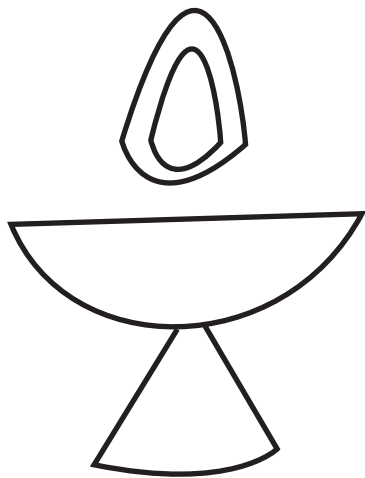
Small Talk

strengthening the small
Unitarian Universalist
congregation

June 2004

“The character of the community, the relationship between the congregation and its community, the nature of the congregation’s understanding of its primary mission – all these and more are a part of what we mean by growth.”

–Loren B. Mead



Inside...

About Small Talk.....pg 2

Religious Education...pg 3

Small is Beautiful!.....pg 4

A Roadmap to Change

by the Rev. Jane Dwinell, Small Church Specialist

Your congregation has met and agreed that growth is what you want. You have determined via demographics just what size you can be. You don’t want to grow too fast, as that can be disruptive and even more challenging to a church community. Ten percent per year is less stressful, and a good number to aim at. That means that if you’re a thirty member congregation and you figure that fifty is your goal, at ten percent growth per year, you can reach your goal in six years. Same as if you’re currently 80 members and can be 150. You also need to know what kind of folks you expect to draw to your church based on both your gifts, and your community’s needs.

Who will walk through your doors?

Your demographics may point to a growth in numbers of families with young children, or perhaps young adults, or retirees. Some rural areas are seeing an increase in the numbers of city dwellers looking for the peace and quiet of the country. Perhaps you are in a college town and are looking toward students and faculty to be part of your growth. Your church may be in a city that is experiencing revitalization of formerly run-down areas. You just need to be aware of who may walk through your doors, and how your facility and programs will appeal to them.

Here’s The Roadmap to Change:

- ❶ Determine what size you can be, how long it will take you to get there, and who you will attract.
- ❷ Make sure your Sunday morning program – worship, music and religious education for children – is strong, interesting, and spiritually relevant.
- ❸ Clean up any old conflicts or ten-

The Roadmap

continued on page 2...

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.

the Rev. Jane Dwinell,
Content Editor

Dana Dwinell-Yardley,
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If you have questions, comments, or good ideas for future issues...

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

Or if you'd like more information...

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sions that may drive away newcomers. (Seek out help on this if you don't think you can do it yourselves. Conflict is a tricky business.)

④ **Have a "welcoming" plan.** Check your appearance, parking, signage, order of service, newsletter, and visitor information. Create a greeting and follow-up protocol.

⑤ **Develop an organizational structure that will be the best one for the size you expect to be, and change your bylaws to reflect that.**

⑥ **Through assessing your gifts, and the community's needs, create a social action project that will express your faith, and bring your congregation into the life of your local community.**

Don't rush the Roadmap!

So, at this point, you just need to take it one step at a time, Determining the demographics and potential size is a short and simple exercise. You may want to consider taking each of the next five steps one year at a time. If you have no conflicts and tensions to deal with, then that frees up a year. If your Sunday morning programming is already vital and heart-felt, and have no underlying tensions, then you can skip right to #4. Maybe you already have a great social action project, but your Sunday morning programming is inconsistent. Each congregation is in a different place in each of these areas. Don't rush it by trying to do too much at once.

} **You may find that visiting other congregations with similar demographics will inspire you - every congregation is the same, yet often very different.**

Take a good hard look at yourselves. You may want to ask for some outside help from your District staff, or from some folks from a neighboring congregation - and you can do the same for them. It is often hard to see our own flaws and weaknesses! This is a great way to learn from each other as well. You may find that visiting other congregations with similar demographics will inspire you - every congregation is the same, yet often very different.

One step at a time, and by working together, we can create heaven on earth.

Religious Education without a Program

by the Rev. Helen Zidowecki, Northeast District Religious Education/Youth Specialist, and Religious Educator for the Church of the Larger Fellowship

“We have no children,” was the cry from a small congregation. On further discussion, I discovered that the church building was used by Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts and various other community groups. Religious education outside the box!

What do people see when they come into the building? Announcements of things that are going on within Unitarian Universalism? Pictures of people of diverse backgrounds, ages and abilities? Heterosexual and homosexual families? Copies of publications, such as the *UU World*, *uu&me* (children’s publication), and *Small Talk*? This is our explicit and implicit curriculum. And we don’t need to have organized ‘sessions’ to educate about our faith community. Educate by how we take care of and decorate our space. Take every opportunity to educate ourselves, our community, and the visitor!

“I want to have something for my grandchildren when they visit,” is another frequently heard comment. So let’s start by taking the idea above.

What are the items in your household, and in your life that are part of Unitarian Universalism? Do you have a special place in your home for a chalice, or UU publications? Inviting children to attend a service with you is inviting them to share an important part of your life. Have you told them why being a Unitarian Universalist is important to you? If they also attend a UU church, this gives you common ground. If they do not attend a UU church, invite them to see what is the same and what is different in your church from the one that they attend. And be sure to talk with them. It can be fun to discover how people who visit see us! You are their connection with Unitarian Universalism. You are a religious educator.

Some congregations have materials for children to use during the parts of the service where they may not be actively participating. Certainly children can sing – or sing along – with the hymns, even the very young who may sing their own words rather than those in the hymnal. Some services include children in lighting the chalice or in Joys and Sorrows or in taking the offering. And changing a Time for Children to a Time for All Ages allows storytelling, whether children are present or not (children of all ages like stories). Things that might be available are coloring books of chalices and other symbols. One church I know has pictures of the stained glass windows in their sanctuary for the children to color. This is a way to introduce children into the worship setting, and educating for worship is part of the “curriculum of the church.”

} You are [a child’s] connection with Unitarian Universalism.
} You are a religious educator.

Join the smalltalk email chat list!

A new 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>.**

Note

Small Talk will be going on vacation for the summer. The next issue will be published in September.

What would you like to see in future issues? Contact Rev. Jane Dwinell with your ideas at sky@vtlink.net.

Small is Beautiful!

Resources and Networking for Small Congregations

Are you a member of a **small congregation** (less than 100 members)?

Would you like to learn how to **strengthen** your congregation, and share the **joys** and **challenges** of being part of a small congregation, with **like-minded** souls?



Then come to Ferry Beach for the first ever
Small is Beautiful
small church conference,
August 29th-31st, 2004!

There will be time to...

walk on the **beach** & see old **friends** and make new ones
gather in **worship** & **learn**

have fun with others like yourself as we celebrate the small congregation!

For information on registration and prices,
contact Ferry Beach at:

5 Morris Avenue, Saco, ME 04072

Phone 207.284.8612

Fax 207.283.4465

send queries to craig@ferrybeach.org

Register on the web:

www.ferrybeach.org

Small Church Specialist's Calendar



When?	What?	Where?
June 22 nd -28 th	General Assembly	Long Beach, CA
July 25 th	Board Retreat	Westbrook
July 31 st	Board Retreat	Pittsfield
August 1 st	Leading Worship	Castine
August 29 th	Leading Worship	1 st Parish, Portland
August 29 th -31 st	Small is Beautiful conference	Ferry Beach

**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.