

Small Talk

strengthening the small
Unitarian Universalist
congregation

September 2005

“Take courage friends.

The way is often hard, the path is never clear, and the stakes are very high. Take courage. For deep down, there is another truth: you are not alone.”

—Wayne B. Arnason,
Unitarian Universalist

Small Congregations Speak Up at GA

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

This year, for the first time, there was a booth in the Exhibit Hall at General Assembly (GA) with information and support for small congregations! As part of the District Staff booth, I had the wonderful opportunity to connect with people from small congregations all over the country – and all over the world! A map of the U.S. gradually had more and more pins added as you marked your congregation’s home town. By the end of GA, when I removed all 225 pins, I was pleased to see that every part of the country was represented. And who knew there were so many small congregations in Texas! It was a delight to meet everyone.

At the booth, I had a sign-in sheet for people to leave their name, their congregation’s name and size, and to indicate “If the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) could do one thing for your congregation, what would it be?”

Here are the top five things that you want help with:

1. Growth
2. Acquiring, raising money for, or repairing your building
3. Lay leadership development
4. Religious Education resources of all kinds
5. Advertising

The good news is that there already is some help available for all five topics! First, and foremost, head to your District staff for assistance in these areas, or any other areas not mentioned. Each District has different resources, but the staff should be able to send you in the right direction, which may include another District or the Boston-based UUA staff.

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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.

the Rev. Jane Dwinell,
Content Editor

Dana Dwinell-Yardley,
Layout and Design Artist

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If you have questions, comments, or ideas for future issues of Small Talk... if you'd like to publicize your small church's events... or if you'd just like to chat about small congregations...

Please contact  
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Sign up to receive Small Talk via email (as a PDF) at <http://lists.uua.org/mailman/listinfo/small-talknewsletter>.
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## 1. Growth

How to grow, should we grow, what will growth mean to our congregation? These are big and important questions. Some Districts have growth consultants, others have growth workshops, or growth teams. You can attend a workshop on growth in your District (sponsored by your District staff) or a workshop at General Assembly, or you can request an individual consultation. The “breakthrough” congregations being highlighted at General Assembly each year each have a story to tell that may inspire you. Back issues of Small Talk also address growth (see page 4 for the Issue Index). Check out the UUA website at [www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org), and look under “growth” and “breakthrough congregations” for more information.

## 2. A Building

How to get one, how to care for one, how to raise money for one, how to cope with one destroyed by natural, and unnatural forces. We all want a sacred space in which to gather and be together. But, as we all know, buildings cost money, and continue to cost money. Here's a couple of options: for those who do not yet have a building, and need advice about capital campaigns, mortgages and loan programs, contact the Congregational Fundraising Services folks at the UUA. For those with a building that may need repair or renovation, contact the Accessibilities Program at the UUA if you want info in that area. If you want to have a greater understanding of how your building can help fulfill your congregation's mission, contact the New Dollars/New Partners program at Partners for Sacred Places in Philadelphia (215.567.3234 or [www.sacredplaces.org](http://www.sacredplaces.org)). The ND/NP program helps congregations look at the gifts of their historic building, and assists with visioning and ideas for grants and fundraising. You can also find out if your District has a building loan program or capital campaign training.

## 3. Lay Leadership Development

Many Districts have Leadership Schools where you can go for in-depth training – contact your District office for more information. There are also shorter workshops available at District events –and at General Assembly – on specific topics such as nominating committees, how to run a board meeting, etc. Many of the Unitarian Universalist (UU) Camps and Conference Centers offer lay leadership trainings of different kinds. And don't forget the seminaries if you have one near you. They often offer lay leadership classes, both online and in person. There is also the Interconnections Resources for Lay Leaders on the UUA website. Check it out – there are listings of books, articles, and websites that can be of use to lay leaders. And if

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you haven't listened to the Drive Time Essays CD put out by the UUA, contact your District office for a copy. It's free, and loaded with information in the form of 21 3-4 minute spoken essays by various UUA staff and laity.

#### 4. Religious Education

Step one – your District Program Consultant or Religious Education Specialist! She or he will have

ideas, sample curricula, support, and connections for you. Try partnering with other small congregations to do Our Whole Lives (OWL – sexuality curricula for all ages) or youth group activities as a whole weekend project. Or partner

with larger congregations near you who can provide the same kind of religious education (RE) support. Every small congregation should have a copy of the book *Starting From Scratch* (available from the UUA Bookstore) on how to start an RE program in a small congregation. And don't forget the Church of the Larger Fellowship – they are loaded with RE resources for all ages (see page 4 for a new curriculum from CLF). And remember that the small congregation is the perfect intergenerational congregation. Religious education happens all the time between UUs of all ages, in formal and informal settings. You don't have to be set up with a full roster of classes and teachers to provide religious education for one another.

#### 5. Advertising

Those of you who asked for this are aware of the Uncommon Denomination advertising resources available through Congregational Services at the UUA. What you wanted was financial help with advertising. This is another great

opportunity for partnership between congregations in a media service area. Talk to other congregations in your metropolitan area, your state, your neck-of-the-woods – whatever geographical breakdown works best in your area. You can go in together on a newspaper supplement, direct mail, radio spots, or whatever kind of advertising you choose. If you feel you don't have any money in your budget for this, consider asking for a Chalice Lighter Grant for

advertising as part of an overall growth strategy. Contact your District office for more information on your District's Chalice Lighter program as they are all run a bit differently. You may also find that by combining forces with other congregations that your share of the tab is within reach

for your congregation, and will be money well spent. Remember to have your hospitality program well in hand before advertising... you have to do know what to do with all those guests when they do show up!

#### It's all about connection

Thanks to everyone for stopping by the booth and making your wishes known. I wrote a report of all the comments and passed it on to all the District staff, so feel free to ask them specifically for what you want. And if you and your congregation have been successful in one of these areas, let me and your District staff know so that we can connect

you with another congregation in need of help and support. It seems to me that much of what we need and want to know is out there and has already been done well by someone, somewhere – we just have to find one another. It's all about connection, and the importance of knowing we are not alone.

**If you and your congregation have been successful in one of these areas, let me and your District staff know so that we can connect you with another congregation in need of help and support. Much of what we need and want to know is out there and has already been done well...**



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## New Coming of Age curriculum available for families and small congregations

The CLF (Church of the Larger Fellowship) is pleased to announce a new curriculum available online for families or small groups who are interested in doing a Coming of Age program with one or several youth aged (approximately) 13-16.

The Coming of Age (COA) program is designed to honor the passage from childhood toward adulthood within our Unitarian Universalist (UU) tradition. The program includes exploration of UU heritage, leadership, social action, theology and ethical beliefs, and spiritual practices.

Important pieces of the program include a vision quest and a closing worship service, which the youth plans as part of the unit on worship, and at which the youth shares a statement of beliefs developed over the course of the program. Although designed for individual families, this program can be easily adapted for use by small (or larger) groups. The curriculum is designed for maximum flexibility, and can be adapted to run for varying lengths of time, from seven weeks to seven months. Families and congregations (whether or not they are members of the CLF) can access the CLF's new COA materials, at [www.clfuu.org/re/coa](http://www.clfuu.org/re/coa).

The Church of the Larger Fellowship is a member supported UU congregation and a global spiritual community that welcomes your visit at [www.clfuu.org](http://www.clfuu.org).

## Small congregation handouts now online!

If you stopped by the Small Congregations booth at General Assembly, you may have picked up one or more of the handouts written by the Rev. Jane Dwinell, Small Church Specialist, on many different topics pertaining to small congregations.

Now all of these handouts are available online in PDF format at [www.uumetrony.org/misc/materials.htm](http://www.uumetrony.org/misc/materials.htm). Many thanks to Andrea Lerner for getting them online! Feel free to copy as many as you need and distribute to your congregation's leadership – just make sure that all content and formatting is unchanged.

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## The Issue Index

Go to [www.nhvt.uua.org/publications.htm](http://www.nhvt.uua.org/publications.htm) to download back issues of SMALL TALK!



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