



With courageous love and a sense of wonder,
we cultivate our spiritual, emotional, and intellectual strength,
to create a world more compassionate, sustainable, and just.

Handout 1A:

Respectful Communication Guidelines

R – take responsibility for what you say and feel without blaming others

E – use empathetic listening

S – be sensitive to differences in learning styles

P – ponder what you hear and feel before you speak

E – examine your own assumptions and perceptions

C – keep confidentiality

T – trust ambiguity because we are not here to debate who is right or wrong

1.1 The changing religious landscape

1. How do these trends match what you are seeing or experiencing?
2. In what ways has the congregation responded or adapted to these trends?
3. How else could you imagine our congregation responding and adapting?

1.2 Join our cause, not join our club

1. If you did not grow up in this congregation, what drew you initially?
2. What are the key things someone can expect to get out of participating in our congregation (the “what” and “why”)?
3. How could our congregation describe the “why” and the “what,” rather than just the “who” in the way we talk about ourselves?

2.1 Who we are – our congregation

Think of times when you experienced this congregation at its best, when you felt most inspired and connected.

What are some of the words you would use to describe those experiences?

Write each word on a sticky note.

Handout 1B:

Join our cause, not our club

Growing Unitarian Universalism blog – September 23, 2015



We know that religion is changing in America, but in those changes there's a hidden trend. Did you know that what attracts people to a congregation or religious community and what keeps them there are different things? What attracts people is the opportunity for meaning-

making, and what retains them as members is the community and friendships they build. People don't come because they are in search of friends or a community, per se, they come looking for spiritual deepening for themselves and their family and only then may they find a community which enriches the meaning-based experience and makes them want to come back.

This is clearly demonstrated through research. In his book "[American Grace](#)," sociologist Robert Putnam digs through mountains of data to identify some key trends in American religious practice. Here's a quote from his book: "Americans may select their congregations primarily because of theology and worship, but the social investment made within that congregation appears to be what keeps them there." (pg 174).

You can see this dynamic at play within Unitarian Universalism, most recently in the multicultural ministries Sharing Project. This survey of UUs from marginalized groups (gender identity, race, ability, etc.) asked why respondents first decided to attend their congregation and then why they continued to attend.

The top response for the decision to attend was “I wanted to deepen my spiritual life,” and the top response for staying was “I love the community of people” (page 15, or the 23rd page of the PDF).

Ok, you say, fascinating point, but what am I supposed to do about it? Simple: when you talk about what your congregation offers, think “join our cause” instead of “join our club.” Show what your congregation does, how it helps people live better lives and make a better world, instead of only talking about what a great community you offer. If I had a dollar for every time I heard a congregation say “all are welcome” (including UU, UCC, Catholic, even conservative evangelical!), well, I’d have a lot of dollars but no idea what I would be welcome to spend them on. It’s great that you’re not turning people away, but what are you actually offering them? Seriously, “all are welcome” at the movie theater, but I’m still not going to the movies unless I know what’s playing.

The key to successful outreach amid the changing religious landscape, particularly with the unaffiliated or Spiritual But Not Religious sets, will likely be to speak to why people would want to show up in the first place, not just what can keep them there year after year. Describe what we offer for learning, yearning, and working for our values. We can’t assume people are already looking for a church on Sunday mornings, because in fact we’re competing for their time and attention against sleeping in, talking a walk, soccer practice, Facebook and brunch. We have to focus on what we DO as UUs, not just who we are.

To help you think “cause” over “club,” check out the values of the UU brand identity – boldness, compassion, reverence – that are geared towards the most active and authentic spiritual elements of our faith. They’re a departure from the pastoral, supportive, caring community connection values that we’ve often described in the past, but they’re well-positioned to help you get to the heart of our faith movement’s drive to advance our values in the world.

Handout 2A:

We Are Unitarian Universalists

Adapted from an exercise developed by Rev. Renee Ruchotzke, with quotes from the UUA Brand Report below.

Imagine you are on the leadership team planting a new UU congregation in our region.

1. How would you articulate your core purpose to the broader community, who may not know anything about UUism (in 3 action words or a “portable” phrase)?
2. What actions (programs, services, etc.) would you offer in the broader community to “walk the talk” of that core purpose?

We are Unitarian Universalists.

- *We are brave, curious, and compassionate thinkers and doers. We are believers in what is good, what is right, and what is just.*
- *We are diverse in faith, ethnicity, history and spirituality, but aligned in our desire to practice our faith and beliefs in tangible ways. We foster a respectful community hallmarked by action, love, and acceptance of all people.*
- *We are the original conscientious objectors, radical thinkers, and self-motivated spiritual peoples throughout history. We have a track record of standing on the side of people, love, justice, and peace.*
- *We have roots in radical thinking and compassion. Our faith has always been motivated by a desire to contribute to the greater good.*
- *We are a house without walls, a congregation without spiritual boundaries, and a movement towards a more action-oriented faith in yourself, your god, and your beliefs.*
- *Simply put, we are a guided path towards a better you and a better world.*

Unitarian Universalism is a BIG faith and we have a big message—that there is one Spirit of Life that moves within and between us and calls us to care for each other. Our faith celebrates the beauty, diversity, and goodness of all creation—all life. We believe in love and compassion for all—and in using our best learning to make the best choices we can.

—Rev. Natalie Maxwell Fenimore, Manhasset, New York

At its best, Unitarian Universalism is a religion of people who covenant to treat one another well, care for the earth, and protect the beautiful tapestry of cultures and communities that make up the people of the world. Love is the core value from which we build.

—Rev. Sunshine Jeremiah Wolfe, Syracuse, New York

*Unitarian Universalists believe:
It's a blessing you were born.
It matters what you do with your life.
What you know about god is a piece of the truth.
You do not have to do it alone.*

—Laila Ibrahim, Berkeley, California

Both Unitarianism and Universalism sprang from liberal Christianity. Unitarianism speaks to the nature of God as One: Holy, Transcendent, Immanent, Whole, Mystery. Universalism speaks to the nature of our relationships—with the Divine, with ourselves, with each other, and with the planet which we call home.

—Rev. Michelle Buhite, Cheektowaga, New York

Unitarian Universalists have different religious beliefs but share a common faith. We know there's something sacred about life. And we're committed to finding it, together, even if it takes us our whole lives.

—Rev. Erik Martínez Resly, Washington D.C.

Our faith is not interested in saving your soul—we're here to help you unfold the awesome soul you already have.

—Andrea Lerner, Breinigsville, Pennsylvania

Handout 2C:

Opportunities Abound

How are Unitarian Universalists actually perceived in the world? With a little help from Proverb Consulting in 2013, these assets, challenges, opportunities, and pitfalls were identified in order to help Unitarian Universalists to think about our faith's potential.



Assets to build on:

- Strong reputation for being progressive and inclusive
- UU beliefs resonate with emerging cultural values
- UU organizations are willing to make change and take risks

Challenges to consider:

- Traditionalist trappings
- “Silly” or “wacky” reputation
- Aging/declining membership lacks diversity
- Shrinking traditional funding base
- Lack of clarity to outsiders about beliefs
- Lack of consistency in being involved with congregations/communities
- Unclear “ask” and “promise” of what it means to be a UU

Opportunities we can take advantage of to spread our values:

- Rise of “spiritual but not religious” meshes with UU identity and beliefs
- Public desire for meaningful lives is high, even as more people are distrustful of or uninterested in traditional religion
- Untapped millennial audience is largest, most progressive and engaged, spiritually risk-taking generation ever
- New technologies allow us to reach more people than ever before

Potential Pitfalls – these could actively work against us in trying to reach new people:

- Openness to belief instead becomes “believe whatever you want”
- Trying to please all members all the time
- The nuanced, distinct UU point of view is lost in the 24/7 media culture
- Academic and cerebral tone
- Hesitance to push to action, more comfortable with just talking

Questions

- Which of these assets, challenges, opportunities and potential pitfalls have you heard before? Which are new?
- Are these also our congregation’s assets, challenges, opportunities, and potential pitfalls?
- Putting on your “outreach glasses”, what might first-time visitors assume through what they observe on our congregation’s website, through social media, in the building, at coffee hour, etc.?

Handout 3A:

Throop UU Church Case Study

By Rev. Tera Little

Throop Unitarian Universalist Church is an historic Universalist Church, founded in 1886. Their traditional church building sits on a busy street corner in downtown Pasadena, CA. Like many congregations of all denominations, we went through a period of decline for many years. The community hit a low point a few years ago. Struggling with rapidly declining membership and a beautiful building in need of much repair, with weeds quickly taking over the outside, the leaders considered closing the doors. Neighbors thought the church was abandoned.

During this time, one of the church members who was also active with a community group called “Transition Pasadena,” encouraged the Board to try something different. Transition Pasadena - a group dedicated to ending dependence on oil and encouraging local resiliency - needed a place to install a Learning Garden, based on permaculture principles. They thought Throop Church - with its 8000 square feet of thirsty lawn - would be the perfect canvas. The Board took a leap of faith that day. They voted YES to starting this project. To tearing out all that grass, living with mud and dirt for months, and trusting the consensus-based, collaborative process of the Transition group.



Three years later - and that decision has paid off. What was once a quiet corner is now alive and bustling - a fragrant, verdant piece of Eden in the midst of the urban core. There is a fruit tree guild, raised vegetable beds, herb gardens, native plants, and a swale that helps with storm water percolation. Plans are in process to create a Rainwater Harvesting Learning Project.

The garden planted seeds of new life for this historic church. Two years ago they hired a part-time minister. With the guidance of a Methodist minister whose profession was new-start churches, she conducted one-on-one interviews with city leaders, like the mayor, city council person, director

of department of health, and more. It was important for the city to understand that there was new leadership and new direction at the church, and the church was reclaiming their investment in the City of Pasadena.

She asked three questions of these leaders:

1. What are three areas of tension in Pasadena?
2. What are your three hopes or goals for Pasadena?
3. Who are three people I should talk with, and will you make the introduction?

These conversations sparked on-going relationships. The congregation offers free space for neighborhood meetings. The Mayor has spoken twice at large events sponsored by the church.

Throop is increasingly being seen as a go-to partner in the areas of sustainability and eco-spirituality. We are also part of an emerging clergy leadership group around the area of worker justice and living wage in Pasadena. Last year, Throop won a Green Award from the City of Pasadena, for our Learning Garden.

We strive to be a multi-generational congregation. Things we pay special attention to on Sunday morning:

- Preaching a shorter sermon, about 12-13 minutes
- Intentionally engaging younger people in worship leadership
- Leading the congregation in body prayer, involving movement
- Including five songs – diverse instruments, genres and styles of music
- Having a family-friendly corner in the sanctuary where kids can move around.

We continually look for inspiration and guidance from the surrounding neighborhood. Our goal is for our ministries and programs to arise out of and respond to the needs of our neighbors. Our garden and eco-spirituality programs draw a wide range of people who are looking to meld their inner heart-work with their outward actions and activism.

Find out more in this UU World article: 'Learning Garden' sows connections between church and community

Handout 3B:

Where is UUCM's Sweet Spot?

