

Small Talk

strengthening the small
Unitarian Universalist
congregation

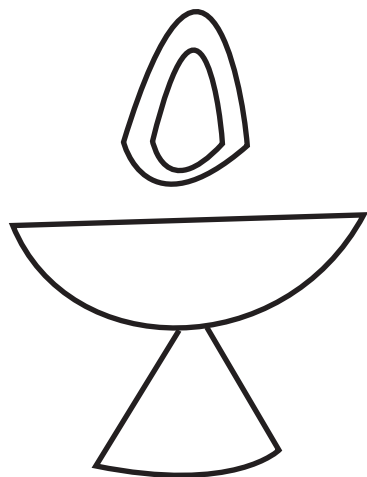
February 2004

Let's Do the Numbers!

by the Rev. Jane Dwinell, Small Church Specialist

“Opportunity
is missed by most
people because it is
dressed in overalls
and looks like work.”

–Thomas Edison



Did you know that it's important to keep track of all kinds of numbers in your congregation? Every church keeps track of their finances through their bank accounts and financial statements. A treasurer diligently (we hope) pays the bills and prepares a report for the governing group. Every congregation should have an outside audit at least every 3-5 years, or whenever your treasurer changes

But, I'm not talking just money here – I'm talking other kinds of numbers as well.

What statistics should your society keep?

- ⊙ *Attendance at Sunday worship (adults and children separately)*
- ⊙ *Total number of children enrolled in religious education programs*
- ⊙ *Number of adults participating in religious education or small group ministry programs*
- ⊙ *The average pledge and the median pledge*
- ⊙ *The number of pledging “units” (per person, not per household)*
- ⊙ *Active membership, and active friends*
- ⊙ *Inactive membership (if you have such a category)*
- ⊙ *Number of one-time visitors per year*
- ⊙ *Number of returning visitors per year*
- ⊙ *Total number on your mailing list*
- ⊙ *Number of rites of passage per year (weddings, memorial services, etc)*

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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

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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 in What's Happening...

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

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Why should you keep these figures? To have another way to look at the health and energy of your congregation. It's all too easy to say that membership is up or worship attendance is down, but if you're not keeping track, you don't really know.

## **But I hate numbers!**

Keeping track of numbers and statistics is not for everyone. Find one or two people in your group that enjoy doing this. Make sure there is a designated person every Sunday to count the number in worship – be sure to include religious education leaders who may be in the building but not in worship. Have a small book available where this figure can be easily written down.

Once a year, add all the worship numbers together (leaving out the highest and the lowest figures if you like), and divide by the number of worship services to find out your average worship attendance. Then, gather all the different kinds of figures in one place – a permanent book for these records, a report in your annual report, or an oral report that gets into the governing group's minutes. This will give you a snapshot of the year, and just another picture of life in your congregation.

**Keeping track of numbers and statistics is not for everyone. Find one or two people in your group that enjoy doing this.**

## **Who is a member?**

Each society has to grapple with this question. Different places have different definitions. For most, "signing the book" initiates the process. (Make sure it's the membership book, not the visitor book!) Some congregations have specific rules about making a financial donation "of record" (one that the financial people know about, not just an anonymous contribution in the offering basket). Others have additional rules about also contributing of one's self to the life and work of the church through volunteering in some capacity. Most have no rules at all.

Some congregations limit the age of membership to 18. Others allow, and even encourage, teens to join, with or without specific training or consideration such as a Coming of Age program. Some congregation keep an "inactive" membership list – primarily elders, and young people off at college – those who want to still stay connected to the congregation but are not in a position to support

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it financially.

Each set of congregational bylaws should have a clause about the process of removing people from membership. That can range from the very specific to the very general. Some congregations have a clause about removing people from membership who exhibit dangerous or inappropriate behaviors; others simply have a “if we haven’t seen or heard from you in X number of years, we’ll take your name off our list. Please let us know.”

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## Feedback from our readers...

### **“Do you really mean to say that a congregation should hire an administrator/coordinator over a minister?” [Dec. 2003]**

Well, yes and no. Professional religious leadership in the form of a consulting or part time minister is vital to the health and well-being of a small congregation, whether that person serves one-quarter, one-third or one-half time. While lay leaders and members can handle almost all the work of a church themselves, the gifts and knowledge a minister brings cannot be denied. A minister has been trained in many areas, can provide pastoral care, has kept up on current literature and ideas for church growth and programs, and can be a centering presence at worship and at meetings.

What small congregations need to avoid is treating their minister as the church administrator. Many small congregations, in looking to save money, expect the minister to create and print up the order of service and newsletter, pick up the mail and phone messages, buy the toilet paper, mow the lawn, and shovel the snow. And, oh yes – put on the coffee and bake the cookies! These tasks should not be done by the minister, but by the laity. And if a congregation finds that these, and other administrative, tasks are not getting done on a consistent or quality basis, they should consider hiring someone (other than the minister) to do them.

Both ministerial leadership and consistent follow-through on basic administrative tasks is vital to the health and well-being of any size congregation. How you choose to do it is up to you. The important thing is to have clarity about what specific services your individual congregation needs, and job descriptions for hired staff that reflect that.

### **Small Church Development in the Twenty-First Century**

#### **Featuring Keynote Speakers...**

- ✂ the Rev. Dr. David R. Ray – *The Church in 2030*
- ✂ the Rev. Marcelle Dotson – *How To Get There From Here*

**February 28<sup>th</sup>, 2004**  
**9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.**

**Bangor Theological Seminary**  
**Wellman Commons**

✂ Registration Fee: \$20.00 per person  
Includes lunch and all printed materials

✂ Registration deadline is Friday, February 20<sup>th</sup>

✂ For more information, or to register, please contact the Rev. Sue Davenport at 1.800.287.6781, Ext. #124 or [sdavenport@bts.edu](mailto:sdavenport@bts.edu)




# What's Happening... in February, March, and April!

## Northeast District Events

| When?                                       | What?                            | Where?                 |
|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|
| February 13 <sup>th</sup> -15 <sup>th</sup> | UU ski weekend                   | Sangerville            |
| March 12 <sup>th</sup> -14 <sup>th</sup>    | Youth Con                        | Portland, First Parish |
| March 20 <sup>th</sup>                      | Spring REnewal                   | Ferry Beach            |
| March 27 <sup>th</sup>                      | Northeast District Board Meeting | Ferry Beach            |
| April 30 <sup>th</sup> -May 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Youth Con and Bridging Ceremony  | Ferry Beach            |
| (and looking ahead...)                      |                                  |                        |
| June 25 <sup>th</sup> -28 <sup>th</sup>     | Mini General Assembly            | Ferry Beach            |



## Small Church Specialist's Calendar

| When?                                                                                                                       | What?                                        | Where?            |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------|
|  February 9 <sup>th</sup>                 | Meeting with Belfast leadership              | Belfast           |
| March 13 <sup>th</sup>                                                                                                      | Board Retreat                                | Norway            |
|  March 14 <sup>th</sup>                  | Leading Worship                              | Pittsfield        |
| March 27 <sup>th</sup>                                                                                                      | Northeast District Board Meeting             | Ferry Beach       |
| April 6 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup>                                                                                      | North Atlantic Region District Staff Retreat | Senexet House, CT |
|  April 23 <sup>rd</sup> -25 <sup>th</sup> | Leadership 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](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!*

