

Small Talk

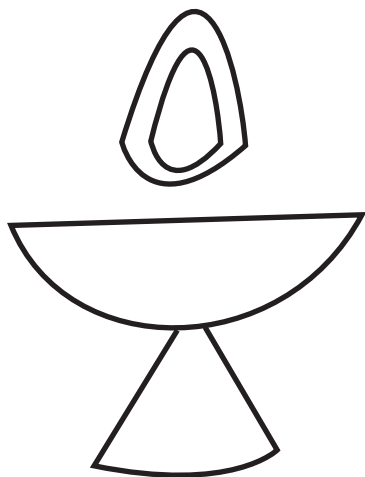
strengthening the small
Unitarian Universalist
congregation

October 2004

"We are at the front edges of the greatest transformation of the church that has occurred for 1600 years. It is by far the greatest challenge that the church has ever experienced in America; it may eventually make the transformation of the Reformation look like a ripple in a pond."

—Loren Mead,

THE ONCE AND FUTURE CHURCH



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The Small Church of the Future

by the Rev. Jane Dwinell, Small Church Specialist

OK, you're probably busy thinking about your small church, here and now – the canvass, the Religious Education program, who's going to do what and where the money is going to come from. But what about the future? Ten, twenty, thirty, one hundred years from now? What of the small church then?

For some of you, your small church has already been around many years, maybe up to one, or even, two hundred years. For others, your congregation has been around five, ten, maybe thirty years. But whoever started your religious community (and when), they had a vision, they had a desire, to see a Unitarian and/or Universalist congregation continue, and thrive, in your town or city. Whoever, and whenever, your congregation started, the inaugural members probably had no idea what world you would be living in today. Yet, they believed. What will you do for the future?

Here's what one church consultant sees for the future:

The church will be "unrecognizable," it will "draw on sources we have not considered." There will be "no steeples, pews or organs" but congregations will meet in "warehouses and commercial sites." The congregants will be of all ages, the worship participatory and the music of all kinds, live and professional, the theology "multi-faceted." Worship will not only be on Sunday, but at other times, convenient times, for the people who will meet together, sometimes even in living rooms.

This will be a "high demand faith" with a "significant commitment of time and money," civic-minded, and mission-centered. People will want to be involved, and this church will "change their lives in some fundamental way."

*Church of the Future
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,
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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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Here's what another church consultant has to say about the future:

The church will be "more experimental and experiential and less conventional" and will "meet in places that don't look like 'churches.'" It will be "mission-driven," "counter-cultural," and "community-centered." The "churches which have not adapted will have withered and died." There will be "greater church diversity in personality, form, and function."

Large church, small church – what is your vision?

Similar vision, these two – a different church, a dynamic church, an experimental and experiential church – something we may not yet have seen.

Yet, consultant #1 sees the future church as large churches... churches that, when they reach 900 members or more, divide in two – and that some of these large UU churches will eventually reach 2500 members plus. That vision belongs to Mike Durall, Unitarian Universalist and author of *THE ALMOST CHURCH* and *BEYOND THE COLLECTION PLATE*.

} **What is your vision of the small church in general, and your small church in particular? What will your congregation look like in twenty, fifty, one hundred years?**

Consultant #2 is David Ray, United Church of Christ Associate in Small Church Development and author of *THE INDISPENSABLE GUIDE FOR SMALLER CHURCHES*. He sees the future of the church in the small church, many and varied, of all religions, and working together with interfaith cooperation.

What is your vision of the small church in general, and your small church in particular? Can you imagine what the founders of your congregation wanted and believed? Do you know how they worshipped, how they sought out new members, how they acted out their faith in the larger world? Do you believe, as these two men believe, that whatever you're doing now will need to change and evolve for your church to survive, and thrive? What will your congregation look like in twenty, fifty, one hundred years?

The power of the small church to change

I am a firm believer in the power, intimacy and strength of the small congregation. A small group can experiment with worship,

can include their children in everything they do, can care for one another in times of need, can push one another to spiritual growth, and can find a mission that will make a difference in their community. They don't need to move through layers of bureaucracy to implement change. They don't need to wait for the staff to come up with new ideas.

Change can come from within, from the laity, or from the minister, if you have one. There aren't multi-levels to wade through. Everyone has a voice.

Change is hard. It's scary. It's different. What would the Unitarians or Universalists of fifty or one hundred years ago have thought of our commitment to the rights of bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender people? Our concern about the environment and our consideration what kind of light bulbs to have and where our Social Hour coffee comes from? What would they thought of Our Whole Lives, or of any kind of sex education for our children?

I am a firm believer in the power, intimacy and strength of the small congregation.

We have changed, and we will continue to change. Where do you and your congregation fit into this picture of the future that lies ahead? Ready to experiment, or stuck in old ways? Saving some meaningful rituals, and, at the same time, creating new ones? Trying something new and challenging, or doing the same old thing?

The Notice Board

Resources, announcements, things to know.



Join the smalltalk email chat list!

An 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>.

A Musical Resource

The Kingston (Ontario) Unitarian Fellowship is pleased to announce publication of *Now Let Us Sing!*: a songbook for children's services, for intergenerational worship, and for musical pleasure. We believe that this book provides strong musical resource material for any Unitarian Universalist Religious Education program.

- ◎ 61 hymns & songs with sections based on a children's version of our UU Principles and Sources
- ◎ Simple arrangements for keyboard and voice, with chords for guitar or autoharp
- ◎ Spiral-bound. 108 pp., including title and first line index

The book is available directly from the Kingston Unitarian Fellowship website kuf.ca/songbook.htm, the UUA Bookstore www.uua.org/bookstore, and Uni-Uniques www.uniuniques.com/.

All proceeds from the sale of Now Let Us Sing! will be used in the development and enhancement of the music program at the Kingston Unitarian Fellowship.

What's Happening... in October, November and December!

Northeast District Events

When?	What?	Where?
October 16 th	Fall District Meeting	Sanford
November 12 th -13 th	NED Board Retreat	China Lake



Small Church Specialist's Calendar

When?	What?	Where?
October 12 th -13 th	North Atlantic District Staff Retreat	Connecticut
October 16 th	Fall District Meeting	Sanford
October 17 th	Leading Worship	Westbrook
November 12 th -13 th	NED Board Retreat	China Lake
November 14 th	Leading Worship	Dexter
December 1 st -6 th	Big Complex Meeting	Boston, MA



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

Just give her a call at 802.229.4008, or send her an e-mail at sky@vtlink.net.

**Tell your story. Voice your concerns. Share
your wild ideas. Let your voice be heard.**

Contribute to *Small Talk*! Let me know if you have stories or concerns to share for future issues of *Small Talk*. Email at sky@vtlink.net, or snail mail to 1 Liberty St. Montpelier, VT 05602.

