
Small Talk

strengthening the small
Unitarian Universalist
congregation

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June 2007

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In the rush and noise of life,
as you have intervals, step
within yourselves and be still.

—William Penn

Wrapping Up the Church Year

by **The Rev. Jane Dwinell, small congregation consultant**

It's June, and the time when school lets out and congregations start to chill out for the summer. It's also the time to look over what you've done in the past year, what has worked and what hasn't—and time to plan for next year. Whether or not you hold summer services (and I hope you do!), this is still the traditional time to reflect, renew, and prepare for what comes next.

Some things to reflect on

How were your worship services? What was everyone's favorite topic; what fell flat? Who were your favorite guest speakers? How did any special holiday services go? How's the music? Did you try something new this year—a new way to do Joys and Concerns, a time of musical or silent meditation, giving away the offering to a local non-profit? How did it go? Would you like to continue it? What else might you like to try that's new? How was attendance? What's the average number of adults and children at worship?

How was your children's religious education program? Did you use curriculum or a more individual, creative approach? Did that work? Did you complete what you intended to? How did the kids like what they did? Did the children participate in worship, and other all-congregational events? How did that go? Are there better/more ways to make your congregation fully intergenerational? If you don't have a children's program, are you prepared for children if they show up?

How was the canvass or pledge drive? Did you make or exceed your goal? How did you ask for money this year—a new way, an old way, a good way, a successful way? Is there something to learn from this year's canvass? What might work next year?

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## About Small Talk

**Small Talk** is published monthly by the Rev. Jane Dwinell, small church consultant. *Small Talk* is devoted to strengthening the small Unitarian Universalist congregation through informative articles, resources, and good ideas.

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Jane is also available to consult with your small congregation.

**Sign up** to receive *Small Talk* via email (as a PDF) at <http://lists.uua.org/mailman/listinfo/smalltalknewsletter>.

**Back issues** can be downloaded for free at [www.nhvt.uua.org/publications.htm](http://www.nhvt.uua.org/publications.htm).

If technology isn't your thing, you can receive *Small Talk* as a **paper copy** by sending \$10 per year to the above address.

This is Volume Four, Issue Ten.  
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**How are your other finances—income and expenses?** Did your fundraisers go well? Is there anything to change about your investments? Did you have any unexpected expenses, or upkeep that had to happen? Are there any special expenses that are sure to come up within the next year or two?

**How is your building and worship space?** Is it working for your congregation? Is there room for everyone, or too much room? Does it need any revamping, redecorating, or reorganizing? Any expected maintenance issues?

**How are your staff?** Have they served the congregation well? Are they happy? Are they paid appropriately? Have they evaluated their work (and been evaluated) and the work of the congregation? Have you remembered to thank them?

**How are your volunteers** (governing board, committee or task force members and chairs, religious education leaders, etc.)? Have they served the congregation well? Are they happy? Have they evaluated their work and the work of the congregation? Have you remembered to thank them?

**How is your mission work?** Is your mission reflective of your congregation's gifts and your community's needs? What has been the best success of your mission this year? What has been your greatest challenge? Should this mission continue? How could it be improved next year? Do you have a mission?

**How has everyone gotten along?** Have there been any major—or minor—conflicts? Have those conflicts resolved themselves well, or do tensions linger? Do you need to address the way your congregation handles conflict?

**How well have you cared for each other?** Have people in need gotten appropriate help from the congregation? Have you checked in with people who haven't come in a while, or who have had personal problems? Have there been any memorial services this past year? Have there been any child dedications, weddings, or union services?

This may seem like a long list, but it's the vital work of the small congregation. You may be doing even more than I've listed here—evaluate those things as well. As you reflect on the past year, be sure to document your successes and failures. Your Annual Report is a perfect place to do this—take time to create a useful, complete, and attractive document. Besides being a document that will be greatly

appreciated by those who come after, a beautiful and complete Annual Report makes the good things seem even better, and may ease the pain of the rough spots.

## Time for renewal

Summer is a good time to get together in a way that allows the congregation, or the leadership, some time to move past reflection into renewal, having fun together (it's not all work!), and regaining strength and energy to plan and carry out your hopes and dreams for the future. A congregational or board retreat—with time for hanging out at a wonderful summertime location and sharing good food as well as time for reflection and planning—is perfect for the quieter summer months. You can choose whether or not to have an outside facilitator help with your retreat. Periodically, it's good to have an outsider to help you see past your blind spots, and it's essential if there's any brewing conflict or big change ahead.

**A congregational or board retreat is perfect for the quieter summer months.**

## Preparation for next year

Now is the time to plan for next year's worship services, RE program, and mission work. Summer is also a great time for any building maintenance work, painting, landscaping, reorganizing, or other messy projects. Plan a day or two for people to come together to do the work. There's always something for anyone in the congregation to do—if they're not up for physical work, they can bring food or watch the toddlers. Remember to find appropriate jobs for your children—they love to help too! Schedule two or three work days so that everyone can participate regardless of their other summer plans.

## Celebrate, celebrate, celebrate

Congratulate yourselves for another year of providing a liberal religious home to the folks in your community. Congratulate yourselves for showing up every week to sing, laugh, cry, listen, talk, eat,

and care. Congratulate yourselves for all the work that is done in the name of your spiritual community. Thank everyone, often and lavishly.

You may notice that I have not mentioned numerical growth in any of this reflection, renewal, and planning. If your numbers have grown, document and celebrate it. If they haven't, and you know

you're doing everything well, don't worry about it. Our small congregations are important, no matter the size. Each and every one of you is vital. You are providing care and support, spiritual growth, and a voice for

the downtrodden and oppressed in the world. You are working to create heaven on earth in your little corner of the planet. Congratulations on a job well done!

# HANDBOOK FOR SMALL CONGREGATIONS COMING SOON!



Jane Dwinell and Ellen Germann-Melosh have written a friendly, how-to handbook for leaders of small Unitarian Universalist congregations (in a style much like *Small Talk*). The book will be published around September 1. Preorder your copy now! E-mail Jane at [sky@vtlink.net](mailto:sky@vtlink.net) to reserve a handbook (or handbooks!) for you and your congregation.

# The Issue Index

Download these back issues of *Small Talk* for free at [www.nhvt.uua.org/publications.htm](http://www.nhvt.uua.org/publications.htm)!



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## Resources for Small Congregations

**Email discussion list**  
for leaders (lay and paid)  
of small congregation  
[lists.uua.org/mailman/listinfo/smalltalk](http://lists.uua.org/mailman/listinfo/smalltalk)

**Email list for ministers of small congregations**  
[lists.uua.org/mailman/listinfo/smallchurch-min](http://lists.uua.org/mailman/listinfo/smallchurch-min)

**Handouts by the Rev. Jane Dwinell**  
1- or 2-page handouts on change, finances, governance, leadership, publications, Small Group Ministry, welcoming, and worship  
[umetry.org/misc/materials](http://umetry.org/misc/materials)

## Need a Consultant?

*Ellen Germann-Melosh, former District Executive of the Mountain Desert District, is now available as a small congregation consultant to serve congregations west of the Mississippi.*

**Contact her at:**  
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520.529.0990.

