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# Small Talk

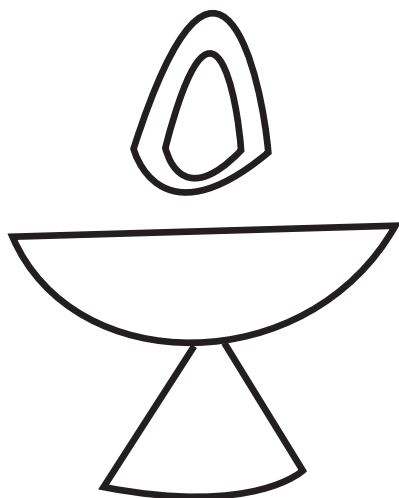
strengthening the small  
Unitarian Universalist  
congregation

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March 2005

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"I have good news

and bad news. The good news is that we have the money to accomplish our goals. The bad news is that it's still in your pockets."

—Anonymous



## The Core of the Congregation: The Annual Canvass

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

It's that time of year again! It seems that most congregations gear up for their annual canvass in the spring. And what a way to celebrate the bursting of new life than with that classic substance of life's energy – money. The annual canvass can be fun and exciting, an important milestone in the life of a congregation of any size. But it is especially important to the small congregation as it is a chance for everyone to show up and commit, once again, to their religious community.

You do have an annual canvass, don't you? It is vital to ask people every year for their financial commitment. The canvass doesn't have to be time consuming, or always done door-to-door, one-on-one. There are many ways to hold a canvass – the important thing is to have one, and to choose three ways to canvass that work for your congregation and do them in rotation. That way no one gets tired of the same old thing, yet you don't have to reinvent the wheel every year either. Two or three people can easily organize all these events – and if you rotate what kind of canvass you have, the organizers can also rotate so that everyone can have a chance to participate.

### Here are some ideas for your annual canvass:

◎ **A pledge dinner and special event** some Saturday evening. You announce the dinner with a letter, an article in the newsletter, and announcements on Sunday morning. Don't have a potluck – have a catered meal. This doesn't have to be pricey. You probably have a small restaurant or person who loves to cook for a group in your area. Ask them to put on something simple and inexpensive – lasagna, Mexican food, a turkey dinner. People should be able to come to the dinner and relax. During dessert, make your pitch and pass out the pledge cards. After dinner do something fun – a

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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 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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If you would like to receive Small Talk electronically, please e-mail [sky@vtlink.net](mailto:sky@vtlink.net).

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talent show, a sing-along, a play – whatever would appeal to your group. Follow up on Sunday morning with a pledge-themed worship service, and plan to collect the pledge cards then. Mail cards and a letter to those not in attendance, and follow-up with a phone call if the cards aren't returned in a timely fashion.

◎ **Home visits.** These visits can be handled by the governing board or a group of volunteers. See to it that no one has to canvass more than 4 families. You can choose a day – a Sunday afternoon, for example – when everyone makes their calls, or people can choose to set up visits during a period of a week. A fun way to handle this is for people to be willing to do this as a “round robin,” in that parishioner A visits parishioner B who then calls on parishioner C, and so on. You can set up several “teams” by neighborhood, and obviously take into consideration anyone who would be physically unable to do this. You can also plan to do one-on-one visits after social hour on Sunday morning. The visits can be done by a single person, or a team. Some people are more comfortable working in a team, others are happy to do it alone. During the visit, people have an opportunity to talk about the congregation, what it means to them, what changes they would like to see, what dreams they hold for the future. Have pledge cards available at the visit.

◎ **“Miracle Sunday.”** The whole canvass happens one Sunday morning, with appropriate notice via letter, newsletter, and pulpit announcements. People are asked to bring their pledge cards to worship. Through whatever kind of worship service works for your congregation, you can share your hopes and dreams with one another through a sermon, different people giving a short talk, a play, small group discussion, or whatever might be meaningful to people. You then give people some quiet time to fill out their card if they haven't already (with some peaceful music) and then send the ushers around with your collection plates or baskets to pick up everyone's cards. The total can be quickly tallied by your treasurer or other money official, and the amount announced to the congregation. Follow up with those who aren't there that week.

◎ **A letter.** A simple, one-page letter, signed by the the governing board, can be plenty. Enclose a pledge card and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Make the letter lively, upbeat, and about mission, not about paying the electric bill. Here's a nice paragraph from a pledge letter I recently received: “*Spring, then, is the right time to look at the possibilities we at First UU can bring to [our area] and, through a rippling out from us and a joining with each individual UU group, we will make those possibilities realities. Reality requires us to exist. For that we need each person's gifts of time and money.*” And here's another: “*Because we believe you share many of our hopes for*

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[our church] and future generations, we're hoping that you will want to help us thrive and grow. We know that not everyone can send a big amount – but as Senator Everett Dirksen once remarked about government spending, 'A billion dollars here and a billion dollars there – pretty soon it adds up to real money.'" Humor is always a good idea! No whining or begging, please.

## Inspiring information

In your build-up to the canvass, be sure to have information available to people. I'm not talking about a detailed budget – people prefer to give to mission and vision, not to pay the rent – but some facts and figures that will help people get excited and be generous. Talk about recent successful programs and how much they cost per member, and talk about programs planned for the future with their expected cost. Create graphs or charts that show how many pledges you need of certain amounts (so many \$4,000 pledges, \$3,000 pledges, and so on down to \$100 pledges). You have people of every income range in your congregation, so be sure your material speaks to everyone. Be clear about how much Sunday morning costs – worship, religious education, social hour, music, utilities, and insurance – folks may be surprised.

The point is to be upfront and upbeat. The congregation needs money to exist – differing amounts for differing needs, hopes, and dreams. No one will give unless asked – and most people are flattered to be asked, and happy to give. Make it meaningful for them, and fun. Break the spell of secrecy and uncomfortableness. Money is a fact of life, and although some people were raised to believe that it's not proper to discuss it in public, just take a look at the Hebrew and Christian Bibles. Those books are loaded with references about money! And where else but in our religious communities can we be in sacred, safe space where we can discuss the big topics of life?

## The essential "Thank You!"

And don't forget to thank people! A hand-written note from the governing board leader, the treasurer, and/or canvass chair to everyone who pledged is in order. Make sure your congregation has some nice note cards, perhaps with the church building or flaming chalice on the front, to use for this – and other – occasions. The treasurer (or whoever is the "keeper of the pledge records") in your congregation should also send out an "official" notice with the amount pledged on it so that people can make sure their intentions are read correctly, and can have the letter for their records. Quarterly pledge statements should also

be sent out, indicating how much someone has paid, and what is yet owed on their pledge.

It is a gift to be able to support our religious communities. But we

need to be asked, to be able give that gift and "give until it helps." There's exciting work being done out there – and our annual canvasses support all that we need and want to do. Think of your annual canvass as a high point in the year – and don't forget to have fun!

**No one will give unless asked – and most people are flattered to be asked, and happy to give. Make it meaningful and fun. Break the spell of secrecy and uncomfortableness.**

## Books about Money and Canvasses

*Beyond the Collection Plate: Overcoming Obstacles to Faithful Giving*

Michael Durall, Abingdon Press, 2003

*Creating Congregations of Generous People*

Michael Durall, The Alban Institute, 1999

*Churchworks: A Well-Body Book for Congregations*

Anne Heller, Skinner House, 1999

*Ministry and Money: A Guide for Clergy and Their Friends*

Dan Hotchkiss, The Alban Institute, 2002

*Budgets with a Mission*

Jerald King, available through the UUA Bookstore

*The Congregational Handbook*

Unitarian Universalist Association

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# The Issue Index

Go to [www.nhvt.uua.org/publications.htm](http://www.nhvt.uua.org/publications.htm) to download these back issues of *Small Talk!*

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<b>What is a Small Congregation?</b>	December 2003
<b>Governance Structure</b>	January 2004
<b>Numbers (statistics to keep)</b>	February 2004
<b>Social Action</b>	March 2004
<b>Growth: Part One</b>	April 2004

<b>Growth: Part Two</b>	May 2004
<b>A Roadmap to Change</b>	June 2004
<b>Small is Beautiful Report</b>	September 2004
<b>The Small Church of the Future</b>	October 2004
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<b>Publications: Part two (content)</b>	December 2004
<b>Conflict</b>	January 2005
<b>Creative Worship</b>	February 2005
<b>The Annual Canvass</b>	March 2005

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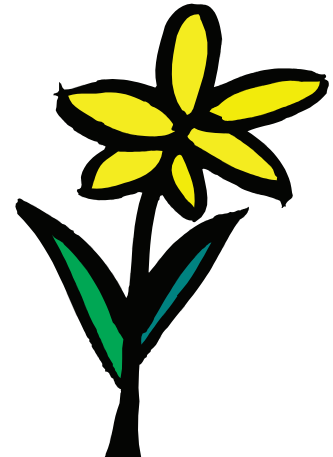
## Small Church Specialist's Calendar

<b>When?</b>	<b>What?</b>	<b>Where?</b>
April 8 <sup>th</sup>	Board Retreat	Norway, ME
April 11 <sup>th</sup> -13 <sup>th</sup>	UUMA Retreat	Breton Woods, NH
April 14 <sup>th</sup> -15 <sup>th</sup>	North Atlantic District Staff Retreat	Senexet House, CT
April 24 <sup>th</sup>	Leading Worship and Meeting	West Paris, ME
May 6 <sup>th</sup> -7 <sup>th</sup>	Northeast District Spring Meeting	Auburn, ME
May 21 <sup>st</sup>	Small Congregation Conference	New York City, NY

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**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](mailto:sky@vtlink.net).



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## *Small is Beautiful!*

### **Resources and Networking for Small Congregations**

August 26-28, 2005 ✧ Ferry Beach Camp and Conference Center ✧ Saco, ME

Small is Beautiful is open to anyone from a small congregation (less than 150 members) from anywhere in the world.

Put this conference on your calendar – last summer's *Small is Beautiful!* was fun, mellow, and a learning experience for all. Next summer will be even better!

There will be more information in future issues of *SMALL TALK*.

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