



Practicing an Outward Orientation

by Rev. Kim D. Wilson, former Coordinator for the UUA Clearinghouse

A few years ago I attended a weekend workshop called, “Planning for Growth and Vitality for Small Congregations.” I came away inspired, and bubbling with ideas and information. The workshop affirmed what I had heard before. That the most effective way to bring new members into a congregation is for us to invite our friends and acquaintances. But here’s something I did not know: According to a survey, Unitarian Universalists invite someone to come to church, on average, every 27 years!! I think we can do a *little* better than that!

But if inviting people were the only thing we needed to know about growing our congregations, it would’ve been a very short workshop. Obviously, there’s more to it. After that weekend, I came to the conclusion that we need to think beyond increasing the membership rolls and focus more on developing what the workshop leaders called an “outward orientation.” Now, an outward orientation doesn’t mean you’re secretly trying to get people to join your congregation. It simply means you’re open and enthusiastic about your Unitarian Universalism. Here’s a list of some of the ways we can practice an open orientation. How many of these things are you already doing? Which ones might you be willing to try?

1. Bring someone to a Sunday service.
2. Talk with someone you don’t know during coffee hour.
3. Wear your nametag at every Sunday service.
4. Tell a return guest that you’re glad they came back.
5. Intentionally sit beside a newcomer at a Sunday service.
6. Put a UU decal on the window of your car or home.
7. Wear UU jewelry and clothing.

8. Use a UU coffee mug at work.
9. Practice your response to the question, "What is Unitarian Universalism?"
10. Write an article for a local newspaper about a church project in which you're involved.
11. Host a party to which you invite both members and nonmembers.
12. Participate in a community event that reflects UU principles.
13. Link your favorite social justice cause to the congregation.
14. Talk to nonmembers about your congregation.
15. Tell a nonmember about an adult program.
16. Invite a nonmember to a small group, adult program or social event within your congregation.
17. Pick up a copy of a UU sermon you liked and give it to a nonmember.
18. Display our Seven Principles at home or work.
19. Carry Seven Principles cards and give them to people when they ask about Unitarian Universalism.
20. Promote your congregation's rental space to individuals and groups you know.
21. Visit other UU congregations.
22. Give a nonmember a copy of the *UU World* or other UU publication.
23. Attend a UU service when you're on vacation.
24. Attend a District meeting.
25. Attend the UUA's General Assembly.
26. If you are on a list serve or e-mail group, send a post mentioning an upcoming sermon or event at your congregation that would be of interest to other subscribers.
27. Let nonmembers know about the wonderful Religious Education programs you have for children and adults.
28. Tell someone about a provocative thought you heard at church.

Unitarian Universalism has such an important message to offer the world today; let's give others the opportunity to hear it!

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