

WHEN EVERYTHING YOU THOUGHT YOU KNEW ISN'T ENOUGH

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In the past, Unitarian Universalists shared reliable best practices about how to grow our faith. We now find ourselves in a rapidly changing social landscape where much of what we thought we knew is no longer sufficient. How can we share our faith and grow it in an uncharted landscape?

Some Assumptions

- We don't know (for sure) what we're doing.
- Human needs — including spiritual needs — haven't really changed much over the past generation, but the tools we have to meet these needs change almost yearly.
- Community still matters — but how communities form and maintain themselves is changing.

The Landscape

- Religious participation is declining overall.
- “Nones” are not necessarily — not even usually — “UUs who don’t know it yet.”
- Our target constituency consists of spiritual seekers more than self-declared “nones.”
- Despite the bleak outlook for religious communities in general, Unitarian Universalists can outperform the curve.

Healthy Signs

- While some UU congregations decline in numbers each year, more are plateaued and nearly one-third are growing.
- Our growth is more even across regions than other denominations.
- Our growth in worship attendance outpaces evangelicals.

Healthy Signs

- Congregations with strong leadership rotation are growing.
- Our appeal across educational categories is broadening.
- Our congregations are becoming more diverse.

A Big Question

- What three things, if your congregation stopped doing them, would contribute to its growth? (In other words, what do you do that gets in the way of your congregation pursuing its mission in the world?)

Things We Need To Leave Behind

- The idea that we're somehow in charge of the landscape, so the necessary fixes are only technical.
- The notion that we create our mission — our mission is, in fact, usually thrust upon us.

Things We Need To Leave Behind

- The notion that “demographics are destiny.”
- The belief that we come from a singular social class.
- The assumption that we only appeal to the formally educated.

Things We Need To Leave Behind

- Celebrating marginality as evidence of our being on the “cutting edge.”
- Emphasizing spiritual woundedness over spiritual health.
- Tolerating mediocrity in the name of worth and dignity.

Things We Need To Leave Behind

- Our obsession with governance and organizational structures.
- Our aversion to risk-taking and public learning.

What Do They Say About You?

- What are you known for around town?
- What or who do you show up for?
- What generates the largest turnout from your congregation?
- What brings the most joy? Or creates the loudest buzz?
- When is your congregation most obviously Unitarian Universalist?

Where Are You Called To Serve?

- What are the three most exciting places in your community?
- What three places break your heart?
- Is your congregation present in these places? If not, why not? If so, what difference are you making?

Reasons For Optimism

- Many people continue to find the need to express their spirituality in the context of a community. We meet social needs and spiritual needs at the same time.
- Our tradition is congruent with the temper of the times: more journey-driven rather than content-driven.
- At its best, our tradition acknowledges authority while empowering each spiritual seeker to judge for themselves.

BONUS! Mission Still Matters

- Congregations must discern and embrace their distinctive mission.
- Our mission is almost always thrust upon us rather than chosen by us.
- Congregations must be aware of their specific context and strive to make their mission relevant in that context.

BONUS! Social Media Helps

- Social media doesn't replace face-to-face community, but your spiritual community will be incomplete if it doesn't use social media as a tool for connecting people with one another.

BONUS! Shifting Attitudes

- From **congregation-centered** to **congregations and beyond**.
- From **club** to **way of life**.
- From **owning UUism** to **being owned** by it.
- From **growing membership** to **growing impact**.
- From **program listings** to **sweet spots**.
- From **developmental segregation** to **multigenerational**

BONUS! Back To Basics

In *Back To Zero*, Gil Rendle proposes four strategies to succeed in the new landscape:

1. A central and sustained attention to mission and purpose (vs. constituencies);
2. Shift from consumers to citizens;
3. A way to cut through the “no’s”;
4. Encouragement of “catalysts and champions” in leadership positions.