

# Multicultural Welcome: A Resource for Greeters

**in Unitarian Universalist Congregations**



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## Origins of this Resource

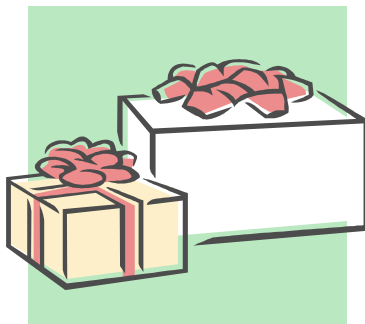
In 2010 at the Unitarian Universalist Association's General Assembly, Janice Marie Johnson, Alicia Forde, Susanna Whitman, and India McKnight co-led a workshop called "Multicultural Membership Journey." This program intentionally linked the congregational growth areas of multiculturalism and membership, two areas that are often programmatically separated in our Unitarian Universalist (UU) congregations. In this workshop we four leaders explored what it means to welcome people of various identities, embodying true multicultural inclusion. From this workshop came a plan to produce a lasting and concise resource to assist congregational greeters in welcoming all who come through the doors of our UU congregations. Toward that end, this resource is partly background reading, partly encouragement to action, and partly a workshop which can be held for the greeters in your congregation. For more information please email [multicultural@uua.org](mailto:multicultural@uua.org) or call (617) 948-6461.

This resource focuses on ways of welcoming people of various identities, through learning and doing. First, we will explore together who might be coming to our congregations and then we will practice greeting them, through suggestions for role play scenarios. Through this experiential learning, we aim to help greeters to better anticipate the needs and wishes of guests by staying open to hearing them. In addition, we hope to acknowledge our assumptions and become better accustomed to putting those preconceived notions on hold in favor of authentic listening and acceptance.

The welcome we give others—and the way others receive it—is based primarily on our social interactions, but it can also entail accommodations we can make before we welcome guests to our sanctuaries. These accommodations can include programmatic, physical plant, and accessories that can assist our guests in feeling more welcome. Examples of these three types of accommodations include asking ourselves questions about the variety of cultures included in worship and religious education programs; installing an elevator; and providing assistive listening devices during worship and meetings.

## Let Us Introduce Ourselves

At the start of our discussion of greeting people at our congregations, we would like to offer you two gifts. The first one is *invitation* and the second one is *listening*. Like love itself, these are two gifts that you can both keep and give away.



Invitation is given to you so that you may continue to invite others to join you and invite others to join in congregational activities, be they for fun or for service.

The gift of listening is given to you to let others tell you who they are. It allows you to listen first, before your mind tries to fill in the blanks

about people you meet at your congregation. We all make assumptions when we meet people. We do it before we realize we have done it. Part of the purpose of this resource is to interrupt that



process and make it conscious. Once we are conscious of our assumptions we can set them aside, invite the other person to tell us about themselves, and then listen to them in order to truly get to know them.

In this resource, we will explore many ways to invite and to listen.

When difficult issues come up in our congregational life together, invitation will still be an important tool, because it is vital to treat one another well—especially during difficult conversations—in order to stay in healthy relationship. Be tough on the problem, not on the person.

And listening—*really* listening—will always be important, in both difficult times and in good times.

### **Theological Grounding of Multicultural Greeting**

Relationships and connections are important in our lives and are what make up much of our lives. Our senses of connectedness to ourselves, and to community, and with the holy—or with what is larger than us and important to us—embody our theology. We would like to tell you our theological understanding of the importance of greeting in our congregations. We invite you to think about this for yourself and even to put it into words in a brief and meaningful statement if you choose to do so.

*Each* of us is accountable to *all* of us. We need to see our reflections in each other's lives, in each other's eyes. Articulations of the heart call us to build bridges of community with empathy and compassion. They call us to love boldly knowing that such living leaves its indelible footprint in the lives of others for grace-filled generations to come.

Each of us brings a collection of life-affirming stories. Together, we are creating, learning, and telling stories that will inform the generations. We are called to learn each other's stories, to honor the wellspring from which they come. Each story strikes an indelible chord. Each story adds to our collective story. As we create and share faith-filled stories, we affirm being integral to the interdependent web of all existence. —**Janice Marie Johnson**

In our covenantal faith, we abide not by creeds, but by negotiated and renegotiated bonds that hold us together in relationship. We attend deeply to the question: How are we together? We ask: How do we behave toward ourselves and others in ways that demonstrate our commitment to affirming the inherent worth and the inherent dignity of each of us?

We, who believe that revelation is not sealed, are writing sacred texts with our lives, with our smallest actions. Our willingness to be invitational contributes volumes to this sacred, living text. Our willingness to extend welcome—seeing the humanity and divinity in another, honoring their culture, identities, stories, and deeply held truths—is part of what it means to embody this faith.

In our hands is the power to craft a compelling narrative of extraordinary respect...of welcome and transformational community for our Unitarian Universalist present and future.

Come, Come, Whoever You Are...the doors are open. May we affirm that truth with our acts of hospitality. And, in our midst, may there always be room for one more. —**Rev. Alicia Forde**

In my work in congregations—be it as a member of staff or as a volunteer—I have always been inspired by the affirmations that many of us recite during our worship services. These affirmations vary slightly from one congregation to another, but generally contain: love being our doctrine, the quest for truth being our sacrament, and service being our prayer. We show our love for one another by inviting and listening. Repeatedly, we invite one another to join in spiritual refreshment. We renew our invitations and listening each time we return to be together. Greeting incorporates all of our aspirations stated in the affirmation. Greeting also never ends, because we continue to greet one another throughout life-long friendships. Greeting is an ongoing part of the whole, in the meaning of membership. —**Susanna Whitman**

We are. We are constantly evolving. We define who we are. We are always redefining who we are. In welcoming newcomers to our congregations let us move beyond inclusion. Whenever someone new walks through our doors, we are presented with a unique opportunity to redefine who we are. Being in relationship allows us to enter into the lives of one another, to listen and to be transformed by stories, experiences, tears, and prayer. In community we all share the amazing responsibility to create space that is a haven in which the marginalized and forgotten can be seen, heard, and affirmed. Moreover the space makes acts as hands on a potter's wheel—thoughtful, healing, and taking shape to fulfill our purpose. As you welcome others into your spiritual home consider that they all have gifts to share, gifts that might lead our communities through radical transformation. Let us engage in this transformation with an open, curious spirit! —**India McKnight**

If you are offering a greeter workshop at your congregation we invite you to begin your session with a story of welcoming. You may have one in mind, or you may wish to look in the resources we list below or in other sources. Inviting participants to engage in some theological grounding is a wonderful way to begin your workshop. You might even invite participants to write a short paragraph such as the ones above.



## Multicultural Greeting: Some Definitions

Please see the list below for how we define various terms throughout this resource. Others may use these words differently, or mean different things by them.

In this resource we use the definition of the terms “multicultural” and “multiculturalism” prepared for the Unitarian Universalist Association’s (UUA) *Strategic Review of Professional Ministry Report*, which reads as follows:

**Multiculturalism** means nurturing a religious community where people of all races, ethnicities, and cultures see their cultural identities reflected and affirmed in every aspect of congregational life—worship, fellowship, leadership, governance, religious education, social justice, etc. Multiculturalism means that we create religious homes where encounters between people of different cultural identities intersect with Unitarian Universalism to create a fully inclusive community where, in the words of a vision statement adopted by the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Leadership Council, “all people are welcomed as blessings and the human family lives whole and reconciled.”

Multiculturalism means that one cultural identity does not dominate all other identities; that people are able to participate in their faith community without denying or hiding their cultural identities, that the role of cultural identity is part of pastoral and prophetic ministry, and that leaders have the competency to understand how their multiple identities and socialization influence their values, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and interactions with others.

The following definitions were used in our workshop delivered at the UUA’s General Assembly in 2010:

- **Welcoming.** The practices and behaviors, the skills and competencies, that make new and continuing people feel welcomed and included.
- **Hospitality**, and especially “**Radical Hospitality.**” This term is of Roman Catholic, Benedictine origin. The book *Radical Hospitality: Benedict’s Way of Love* is on the resources list below. Radical hospitality refers to the conscious and intentional generosity of spirit that exists in people’s behaviors and attitudes, conveying that all are truly welcome.
- **Identity and Welcome.** When we meet a new person on Sunday we remember to greet them and ask open-ended questions to let them reveal to us what they will of themselves. In this way they will identify themselves as they feel comfortable to do so. This process is both about letting them share their identity, as they are comfortable in doing so, and about that invitation being welcoming.
- **Linked Identities.** Each person has multiple identities, due to our social roles and due to the groups we belong to, which can be either self-identified or imposed by others. Let us not label

individuals and mentally put them in groups, but instead form a relationship with each person and let them reveal to us who they are as they are willing. A person can be both a parent and a lesbian, Latino and a young adult, a person of color and gay, and a Unitarian Universalist and Jewish.

- **Membership.** Belonging to a congregation and feeling that you belong, being considered a member, having “signed the book” and feeling a sense of commitment which is expressed in giving of our time, our talents, and our treasure. This is our congregation and let’s prepare for who is not yet here. It can become their congregation, too.
- **Multigenerational.** A way of doing church, of building intentional community. Including people of various age groups, or cohorts, who have common cultural experiences within their cohort, due to when they grew up (examples are WWII, Woodstock, dot.com), but the age group or cohort may not have a common culture.
- **Mono-cultural** (in a group, system, or organization). A place that looks at other cultures as existing outside of the norm, strange, and foreign. A place where one culture is clearly dominant and dictates how things are done, and often where other ways of doing things are perceived as “wrong.” Unitarian Universalist congregations are multicultural though not all of them recognize this. Some operate in a mono-cultural fashion.
- **Power.** The sources of forces. Power is vested or taken. Power comes from leadership, love, difference, allegiance, and cooperation, as well as from many other sources in people in our congregation. When we work well together we have power with one another and benefit one another and the system in which we operate. When we have power over others, we are more likely operating as a mono-cultural organization and are not making room for the actual multiculturalism that is present.

### Questions for Reflection

As you use this resource and think about what we are discussing, here are some questions you might like to pose to yourself. These could be about what is said, how it is said, or other reflections on your learning.

- What was new or innovative about what I just read?
- What new questions do I now have?
- What actions might I take, in my congregation or in my community, based on what I just read?



## Core Assumptions and Questions

We invite you to reflect on the following core thoughts and questions and to listen to related discussions that arise in your congregation:

Membership requires the engagement of the whole congregation. It is a great idea to have greeters and to train them, and it is also the case that the whole congregation needs to learn how to greet to be multiculturally friendly and open.

In order to be whole, it is our work as Unitarian Universalists to welcome *all*, from the first visit until the end of the course of belonging to our religious communities.

How can we make a bridge so that working with people outside of our walls is less daunting?

Could the people we work with out in the community join our congregation in worship and feel welcome?

## Introduction to Greeting

We invite you to consider four questions in relation to greeting guests that come to your congregation:

- Who are we?
- What are we doing as greeters?
- Who is our neighbor?
- What are we called to do?

## Who Are We?

We are already a multicultural group of people. We are a congregation comprising at least several cultures. Among our cultural identities may be people from various international cultures of the world; various sub-cultures within the United States; of various colors and ethnic backgrounds; with various gender identities and sexual orientations; people who are deaf and others who have visible and hidden disabilities; people dependent on substances or processes and those recovering from these dependencies; and people who claim various combinations of these cultures. Some cultural differences are obvious and some are less so. Everyone has a culture and is included. Please refer to the definition of “multicultural” on page 5.

## What Are We Doing as Greeters?

We are:

- Unitarian Universalists representing our faith in our community;
- Creating and finding community in our congregation, and being “in community” in an ongoing way by welcoming everyone who comes to worship. Not everyone will feel at home at

our congregation due to personal preferences, and yet they can receive a warm welcome when they attend;

- Standing at the doorway of possibility for others who could join us. If you were a visitor to your congregation, imagine if someone made you feel that you could come in and be saved. Unitarian Universalism emphasizes saving in this life, no matter a person's beliefs about another life than this one. The term "saving" can be literal or can be saving by finding a religious path or a religious community that gives life meaning, and thus saving it from otherwise being a less meaningful life. Put another way, there is no prerequisite to join in the life of the congregation. You are welcome as you are.
- Making it possible for people to find the grace they seek, be it from a source that is spiritual, human, or both.

### **Who Is Our Neighbor?**

In the case of our congregation, we are speaking of people who are not currently involved as either members or friends. Our neighbor is someone who lives within such a reasonable distance that they would consider attending regularly. They could live very near to the site of the congregation, or a little further away. And in the case of greeting, our neighbors are people known and unknown to us with whom we can be in relationship. Our neighbors may have a similar range of cultures to those in our congregation, or not.

In saying more about cultural differences, people whose culture differs from our own may differ from us in their use of language or concepts of terminology, be of various racial and ethnic origins, have a range of levels of education, be of a different social class, identify with a diversity of faith, have a variety of gender expressions and identities, and hail from a variety of places of origin within the United States and around the world. We may share a common set of values or we may have some values in common and others that differ.

We can find out about our neighbors by contacting them and talking with them, and also by demographic research from our local chamber of commerce or [demographic information from the UUA](#). What we learn from this interpersonal and demographic research can enable us to better prepare for and serve our neighbors.

### **What Are We Called to Do?**

Quite simply as greeters we are called to be welcoming, and to provide a welcome to all who come to our congregation. Whether we feel called by our community or by God, this is our purpose. In order to welcome people from various cultures we need to be culturally literate. This means that we need to be open to our guests showing us who they are themselves, and not to guess who they are. This is where the gifts of "invitation" and "listening" you were given on page 2 are so useful. We need to be ready to learn from others about who they are and about their culture.

Greeting is a calling, and a moral obligation. We are like human doorways, like portals, to Unitarian Universalism for those who come to our congregations. Greeting is also a practice that will infinitely enrich our lives and the life of our congregation. We invite you to join us in the art of greeting in your congregation. Be they guests or those we have known for a long time, let us make them welcome.

## **Role Play Scenarios**

You might like to try these role play scenarios to further develop your multicultural competencies of welcoming.

Try practicing these in groups, with different people playing the roles to see more facets of what can happen in these situations in which we all at times find ourselves.

How does it look, how is it, to be welcoming to people who:

- Interrupt during fellowship/coffee hour;
- Are blind, or deaf, or use a wheelchair, or have a visible or hidden disability;
- Have a strong foreign accent;
- Didn't complete high school, or didn't go to college;
- Have a different class identity than our own;
- Make us feel uncomfortable about our beliefs;
- Wear a cross on their necklace;
- Are children;
- Have children that look significantly different from them;
- Have difficulty with spatial issues;
- Have an ambiguous gender identity;
- Do not make eye contact with you;
- Are different from you in some way, when your tendency might be to assume that this newcomer wants to meet persons similar to them. For example, making the assumption that young adults are single and only want to meet other single young adults.



Some of these facets of individual experience aren't immediately apparent when a newcomer walks through the door. Instead of trying to spot individuals who may claim a particular identity, try to use these role-plays to think about how you can welcome people's full selves--whether they've disclosed a particular identity to you or not.

We invite you to think of more examples of role play scenarios.

As you look at these case studies, can you imagine them happening at your congregation?

As members of the community, we all make mistakes from time to time. Let us learn from each other. Let us give ourselves the gift of being gentle with ourselves and each other. Let us forgive each other and begin again, held in the love of community.

## Tips and Techniques

When you role play, and when you greet people on Sunday, there are some useful things to think of, and you may already have thought of some. Here are a few below, and you will likely think of more.

- Enjoy the gifts of invitation and listening.
- Greet everyone who comes through the doorway. Everyone includes members, friends, visitors from out of town, and local guests. Only greeting local new people can have the dual negative effect of making new people feel too important to you and can leave them wondering if you care anything for your friends and acquaintances at your congregation. New people want to find a place where people value one another.
- When starting a conversation, try asking open-ended questions. For example, instead of asking, “Do you live in Your Town?” instead ask, “Do you live locally?” or “Do you live nearby?”
- Try asking questions that allow your guest to tell you something in a way that they choose. For example, if they are wearing an interesting item of jewelry you could say, “What a lovely necklace. Is there a story connected with it?” Or perhaps, “How did you hear about us?” asking how they came to your congregation’s doors. If you are inclined to, you could even tell them they have a nice or a lovely name, if it is a less usual one.
- Let the guest take the lead in conversation sometimes.
- Allow people not to answer your questions. Sometimes each of us asks questions that others may choose not to respond to, for a variety of reasons.
- When we meet new people, guests at our congregation, let’s leave the theological door open. Let others tell you their theology, rather than anticipating it.
- Putting yourself in others’ shoes is helpful, and with people of cultural identities other than your own, this may be of limited use. This is because there are parameters that you might be unaware of. As you greet people, you will likely find that taking your cues from them will make them feel most comfortable.

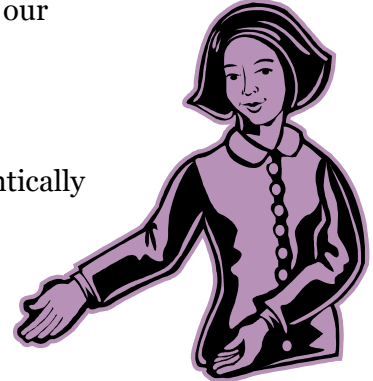
## Behavioral Change in Your Congregation

Here is a note about how you actually make a change in behavior in your congregation.

At the very least in using this resource, we are trying to become more authentically welcoming. At most we are trying to be multiculturally inclusive. So, how do we make our new welcoming practices into a habit? How do we make the new behaviors part of the culture of our congregation?

We do this by:

- Practicing our new welcoming techniques until they feel authentically part of our behavior;
- Committing to make this change widespread, by voicing the commitment repeatedly so that it becomes habit and more widespread; and
- Holding one another accountable for making the change, together, recognizing that we all make mistakes and that we will try our best.



Another way of engaging others in your congregation in joining your multicultural greeting is to invite them to respond to these questions below. Listen to their responses and tell them yours.

Thinking about life in our Unitarian Universalist congregations:

- What does being welcomed mean to you?
- How do you know when you are welcomed?
- How do you know when you have made someone feel welcome?

Talk about how important it is to new people, and also to continuing members and friends, to be greeted warmly and to have a feeling of belonging.

To help this process of change you will find, on page 12, resources useful in creating a wider, deeper welcome.

## Creating Safe Congregations

It is important for us to create safe congregations, so we'd like to ask you to think about how you can be accountable to your congregation.

Welcoming all does not mean putting anyone's safety in jeopardy. Although we are welcoming to all, there are behaviors that jeopardize the safety and health of others in our congregation and we recommend some [resources from the UUA's office of Congregational Ethics and Safety](#) to deal with these issues and to handle relationships with people whose behavior does jeopardize the safety of others.

# List of Resources for Building and Sustaining Multicultural Congregations

## **Books**

Dragt, Gordon. *One Foot Planted in the Center the Other Dangling off the Edge*. Salt Lake City: American book Publishing, 2009.

Homan, Daniel, and Lonni Collins Pratt. *Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love*. Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2005. Available from the [UUA Bookstore](#).

Lewis, Jacqueline. *The Power of Stories: A Guide for leading Multi-racial and Multi-cultural Congregations*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008.

## **Article**

Peggy McIntosh. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"  
[www.case.edu/president/aaction/UnpackingTheKnapsack.pdf](http://www.case.edu/president/aaction/UnpackingTheKnapsack.pdf)

## **DVD**

[UU University 2009](#) DVD: includes Multicultural and Multigenerational tracks

## **Program**

### **Building the World We Dream About**

<http://bit.ly/mgwbuilding>

A Unitarian Universalist program that seeks to interrupt the workings of racism and transform how people from different racial/ethnic groups understand and relate to one another. It consists of 24 two-hour workshops, with Taking It Home activities, reflections, and readings to be done between workshops. The program creates opportunities for participants to practice dreaming our world otherwise, and then commit to new, intentional ways of being. As Unitarian Universalists, we hope developing anti-racist, anti-oppressive, and multicultural habits and skills will lead us to build the multicultural world of beloved community we dream about.

Please note: includes Workshop 8, Handout 1: Mapping Power and Authority

### **Even More Resources for Welcoming:**

**Young Adults:** [www.uua.org/religiouseducation/youngadults](http://www.uua.org/religiouseducation/youngadults) is the UUA's general page and is a good place to start. Also see the [Guide to Young Adult Ministry](#), which contains a number of testimonials and diverse viewpoints on how to welcome young adults.

Recommended non-UU resources on this topic:

- *Tribal Church* by Carol H. Merritt—specifically focuses on welcoming and attending to the spiritual needs of emerging adults.

- *The Multigenerational Congregation* by Gil Rendle—talks about generational cohort differences and welcoming folks of all ages.
- *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* by Sharon D. Parks—outstanding academic analysis of faith identity development in young adults and the corresponding needs/wants that grow out of that development.

**Families:** The UUA's top picks for Faith Formation in Families is at [www.uua.org/religiouseducation/families/index.shtml](http://www.uua.org/religiouseducation/families/index.shtml)

In particular, Aisha Hauser, Children and Families Programs Director at the UUA, [families@uua.org](mailto:families@uua.org), recommends the resources below.

- [Tapestry of Faith](#)  
The UUA has created the first ever online lifespan curriculum for our congregations.
- [Family Pages](#) in the *UU World*  
The four-page insert in *UU World's* centerfold draws from the stories, activities, and faith development guidance in Tapestry of Faith programs.
- [Supporting Children in the Face of Disaster or Trauma](#)  
This resource by Tracey L. Hurd, Ph.D., gives families and congregations a process of worship and activity to support children in the face of a national disaster and offers families an opportunity to draw strength from our faith in times of tragedy. Designed for multigenerational groups in the home or congregation.
- [LGBT Families](#)  
This page offers resources, books and videos about lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues.
- *The Gift of Faith: Tending the Spiritual Lives of Children*, a book by Jeanne Harrison Nieuwejaar. This very accessible and inspiring book shows that religious community is vital to addressing a child's natural need for spiritual growth and religious grounding. Nieuwejaar points to the crucial role of parents as the primary religious educators of children and explores ways to foster spiritual awareness in the home.

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**Susanna Whitman**, former Growth Services Program Manager at the UUA. Susanna recommends contacting Stefan Jonasson, Director, Office of Strategic Growth, UUA, [sjonasson@uua.org](mailto:sjonasson@uua.org)

**India McKnight**, Director of Religious Education at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Queens and former Youth Program Specialist at the UUA. For support in welcoming young adults, India recommends contacting Carey McDonald, Director, Youth and Young Adult Ministries, UUA, [cmcdonald@uua.org](mailto:cmcdonald@uua.org)