Discussion Guide: Congregations and Beyond

September 2012

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Introduction

In February 2012, UUA President Peter Morales asked congregations to reflect on the changing nature of religion in contemporary society. He noted that there are growing numbers of people who are "spiritual but not religious" or who identify as Unitarian Universalist but do not participate in a congregation. Social media allows for ever-more sophisticated ways for people to connect with one other, forming virtual communities that are woven into the fabric of day-to-day life. People have responded to these changes by "doing church" in creative and innovative ways, including creating ministries that open the doors of the congregation, lower the walls of the congregation, and flow out into the community in a variety of ways, both virtual and face-to-face.

Congregations and Beyond is an initiative that helps Unitarian Universalist congregations and groups develop capacities and position themselves to respond to these changes by shifting and broadening the way in which we view our faith and our ministries. Congregations and Beyond calls us to think of Unitarian Universalism as a religious and spiritual movement and not simply as an association of congregations, and to figure out how we might meet the challenges and opportunities of our own time.

Unitarian Universalism has always been a living religion – able to grow to meet the needs of the current world. To meet the needs of our own time, we must first have a clear picture of the world around us. Then we may ask ourselves:

- What role do I play in responding to new challenges and opportunities?
- What role should my congregation play?
- How is my congregation or group already meeting the challenges and opportunities of our time?
- How can we develop and support more effective responses to those challenges and opportunities?
- How can I increase the transformational capacity for love and justice in the world through my faithful actions?

Congregations and Beyond seeks to renew our consideration of what it means to be Unitarian Universalist in the 21st century and to bring that renewal to our congregations

and our communities through a wide variety approaches to religious life, within congregations, among congregations, and in the communities beyond the walls of congregations.

This discussion guide comprises plans for three 60-minute sessions to facilitate conversations about the Congregations and Beyond initiative. It invites not just a passive "discussion" about the initiative, but also plans for formulating next steps in your congregation or group. Session 1, which introduces the initiative, can be used alone, and might possibly be used multiple times in your congregational or group setting, so that as many people as possible can take part. Session 2 focuses on possibilities for greater connection through new technologies for communication. Session 3 explores ways to increase connection through creative ministry within and beyond the walls of the congregation.

Session 1: Introducing the Congregations and Beyond Initiative

Time: 60 minutes

Purpose

This session introduces participants to the basic concepts of Congregations and Beyond. It is the foundation for future sessions.

Objectives

- Create a covenant
- Discuss Peter Morales' white paper, "Congregations and Beyond"
- Understand what the Congregations and Beyond initiative calls upon us to do.

Materials

- Chalice, candle, and matches, or LED/battery-operated candle
- Rev. Peter Morales' white paper, "Congregations and Beyond"
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Pens and/or pencils

Preparation

- Review the materials for the session.
- Print copies of Rev. Peter Morales' white paper.
- Write on newsprint and post:
 - We agree to speak from our own experiences and perspectives.
 - We agree to listen respectfully to the experiences and perspectives of other people.
 - We agree to pay attention to the group process, making sure that everyone has the opportunity to speak and to listen.
 - We agree to make this is a space for discussion, rather than for advancing a particular agenda.

- Write on newsprint and do not post:
 - Did you find any of Rev. Morales' observations about contemporary religious life surprising? Which ones and why?
 - Rev. Morales advocates for Unitarian Universalists to think of ourselves as part of a religious movement instead of members of an association of congregations. What does this new way of thinking mean to you?
 - If your congregation has a mission statement, how does that mission statement intersect with what is suggested in the white paper?
 - o What else strikes you about Morales' paper?
 - What excites you about Congregations and Beyond and why?
 - o What makes you uncomfortable and why?

Description of Session

Opening (5 minutes)

Welcome participants to the Introduction to the Congregations and Beyond Initiative. Say, "The Congregations and Beyond initiative is not a prescribed set of actions or a road map for what your congregation must or should do. It is, rather, a new way of looking at our faith, our congregations, and our own identity as Unitarian Universalists." Light the chalice and read the chalice lighting words by UUA President Rev. Peter Morales:

I am convinced that any organization—whether a committee, a congregation, or an entire national association—will thrive to the extent that it uses the energy, the skill, the creativity and the passion of its people.

We are doing some exciting and wonderful things. What is even more important is that we are doing them together. When we UUs work together toward a common vision, we are something beautiful to behold.

Introductions (10 minutes)

Invite participants to introduce themselves by name and name one reason they are attending this workshop.

Creating a Covenant (10 minutes)

Point out the covenant points you have written on newsprint. Propose them as guidelines. Ask if any points need to be clarified, added, or amended. Note changes on newsprint. When the covenant is complete, invite participants to voice or signal agreement.

Introduction to the Congregations and Beyond Initiative (30 minutes)

Distribute Peter Morales' white paper and invite people to read it over, making notes at as they read points or sections that particularly strike them. Post the questions you have written on newsprint. Divide into small groups for discussion, using the questions as prompts. After 15 minutes or when conversation dwindles, reconvene the large group and invite small groups to share what they found meaningful in their discussions.

Lead a large group conversation, asking:

- Do you know someone who identifies as "spiritual but not religious"? Someone
 who identifies as Unitarian Universalist (or perhaps was raised Unitarian
 Universalist) that does not participate in a congregation?
- Do you know someone who currently connects religiously in groups other than traditional congregations (e.g. camps and conferences, campus ministry, etc.)
- What would our churches look like if they were attractive to people in this group?

Close the discussion using these or similar words:

There have always been people not interested in joining a congregation, for one reason or another, including many people who identify themselves as Unitarian Universalist. Many others share our values and way of being in the world. Rev. Morales proposes a two-part strategy to reach out to these individuals. In his vision, strong congregations remain at the base of Unitarian Universalism *and* we focus energy on creating a movement beyond congregational walls.

Rev. Terasa Cooley, Director of Congregational Life at the Unitarian Universalist Association, states: "a core purpose of our faith is to help people grow in spirit

and in service. We believe that our faith provides a path for each of us to unlock our transformational capacity to serve the world with love. We want to expand our faith not so that we can claim greater numbers of Unitarian Universalists, but so that we can better achieve this transformational purpose." The both/and approach of the Congregations and Beyond initiative calls upon us to connect more people both within and beyond congregations, increasing the transformational capacities of individual Unitarian Universalists, of congregations and groups, and of our broader Unitarian Universalist movement.

If you are going on to lead the second and third sessions in this series, explain that in the follow-up sessions, participants will explore concrete ways to engage with the Congregations and Beyond initiative.

Closing (5 minutes)

Remind participants of the date and time of the next session. Read these closing words from Rev. Morales' white paper and extinguish the chalice:

The central conviction driving [Congregations and Beyond] is that our core values appeal to far more people than are attracted to (or likely to be attracted to) our congregations. We have always treated this as a problem to be solved by devising ways to get people to become members of our congregations. But the reality of today's world is that not everyone who shares our core values will want to become part of a traditional congregation. The fact that so many share our values is an enormous opportunity, not a problem. The future relevance of our faith may well depend on whether we can create a religious movement beyond, as well as within, the parish. I am confident that together we can seize this historic opportunity for our faith.

Session 2: Connecting Through New Technologies

Time: 60 minutes

Purpose

Sessions 2 and 3 provide opportunities for participants to design specific action plans to

implement their own creative ideas of how to increase opportunities to connect to

people in congregations and beyond. In this session, participants explore ways to use

technologies for communication, particularly social media, to connect in new ways.

Objectives

Identify current technologies for social media and communication and explore

how they might be used by your congregation or group

Decide upon one action which utilizes current technology to increase connection

to people in the congregation and/or beyond it

Learn of resources for participating in broader conversations about

Congregations and Beyond.

Materials

Chalice, candle, and matches, or LED/battery-operated candle

Computer with Internet access, projector or large computer monitor and speakers

Leader Resource 1, Social Media Reverse Quiz Game

Leader Resource 2, Contemporary Religiosity Facts: Technology

Leader Resource 3, Find Out More

Newsprint, markers, and tape

Scissors

Optional: Prizes, such as small bottles of bubbles or containers of modeling clay,

enough for each participant

Optional: Smartphone

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Preparation

- Review the materials for the session.
- Choose an opening reading OR download and install the Illuminations app
 (<u>information here</u>) on a Smartphone or Ipad OR prepare to show <u>video of a Peter</u>
 Mayer song.
- Print Leader Resources 1 and 2. Cut Leader Resource 2 into strips, one fact per strip.
- Make copies of Leader Resource 3, Find Out More.
- If you will not have Internet access during the workshop, print out a screen shot
 of <u>Unitarian Universalists Exploring Congregations and Beyond Facebook page</u>
 and <u>Vision for Unitarian Universalism: Congregations and Beyond</u>. For
 instructions on how to take a screenshot, search in the "help" topics in your
 computer's main menu. You might also visit take-a-screenshot.org.
- Set-up A/V equipment and make sure it is operational.
- Write on newsprint:
 - How does your congregation communicate to the congregation and beyond? How might the social media tools that we have identified facilitate communication in your congregation? Outside the congregation?
 - What presence does your congregation have on the Internet? How might the congregation make better use of your Internet resources—website,
 Facebook page, etc. – to reach out to seekers and others in the community?
 - What one action could the congregation take using current technology to attract more people to the congregation, bring members of the congregation closer together, or inform the community of congregational activities they might find interesting?

Description of Session

Opening (5 minutes)

Welcome participants. Light the chalice and read the chalice lighting words of your choosing. Note: Since this session is about technology, consider lighting the chalice

using the Illuminations app on a smartphone or showing the video of Peter Mayer's song, "Holy Now," on the welcome page of the Church of the Larger Fellowship's website, Quest for Meaning. If you choose one of these options, take a little time to show participants the app or the Quest for Meaning web page.

Invite participants to share any reflections from the previous session. Review the covenant created in Session 1. Does anything need to be added, changed, or deleted?

Social Media Reverse Quiz Game (15 minutes)

Break group into teams for Social Media Reverse Quiz Game! Have the teams face off by reading the descriptions in turn to each group, and seeing which team is first to come up with a question to match (Example: Description-vanilla, chocolate and strawberry. Response-What are ice cream flavors?). Write each correct response on newsprint (e.g. What is Facebook?). Optional: Give the winning team prizes. Ask them if they would like to for everyone to receive a prize. After they say yes, distribute prizes to everyone.

Read through the list of answers and ask for a show of hands to indicate users of each technology or program and willingness to share knowledge with others after the workshop. Note volunteers as you read the list. Ask if there are other social media sites people use in their everyday lives, such as Skype, and add them to the list.

A Changing World (30 minutes)

Distribute slips from Leader Resource 2 to volunteers and ask them to read the facts aloud. Discuss, using the following questions:

- What conclusions might one draw from these facts?
- What additional trends in the technological world might have an impact on our faith?

Point out the questions you have written on newsprint. Ask participants to divide into small groups of four or five and discuss the questions. Give each group newsprint and a

marker and tell them they will have 15 minutes to discuss the questions and prepare to report back their responses to the large group.

Ask each group to display their newsprint and report back to the group, paying special attention to their responses to the third question: What one action could the congregation take using current technology to attract more people to the congregation, bring members of the congregation closer together, or inform the community of congregational activities they might find interesting?

Use consensus to decide upon one action that congregation can take. Solicit and record names of volunteers willing to help complete the action and names of others from the congregation who might be asked to help. Ask the volunteers to meet after the workshop for five minutes to schedule a meeting to start work on the action.

The Role of the UUA (5 minutes)

Display the <u>Vision for the Unitarian Universalism</u> page on uua.org or the screen shot you have created. Note the resources that are available on the page. Say, "The UUA staff want to facilitate your congregation's participation in Congregations and Beyond by acting as a hub for ideas and activities." Ask participants to suggest ways the UUA staff might support your faith community's Congregations and Beyond efforts.

If you have Internet access, follow the Facebook link at the bottom of the page. If not, display the screen shot you have prepared. Read aloud some of the posts from Unitarian Universalists Exploring Congregations and Beyond. Invite your group to come up with a message to add to the discussion group wall. What does Congregations and Beyond mean to your congregation? What would you like ask the broader Unitarian Universalist community? What action have you decided upon to make better use of social media? If you are viewing the page via screenshot rather than live, decide who will post to the Facebook page later on.

Distribute copies of Leader Resource 3, Find Out More and/or collect email addresses

and distribute it electronically.

Closing (5 minutes)

Remind participants of the date and time of the next workshop. Read these closing words, written by UUA Intern Stefani Ruper, and extinguish the chalice:

The Congregations and Beyond initiative is, when it comes down to it, the simple endeavor to explore UU spirituality beyond congregational walls, however that might be appropriate to each individual's life, spirit, and mission. This may be through new forms of UU connectivity. It may also be through new forms of connecting with the wider world. Or it may even more likely be (based on the bold aspirations and life and love of Unitarian Universalists the world over) a synergistic endeavor to engage and to live faithfully both.

Session 3: Connecting by Lowering Congregational Walls

Time: 60 minutes

Purpose

Participants will explore the ways in which creative ministry can connect our Unitarian Universalist movement to more people in congregations and beyond.

Objectives

- Discover creative ministry techniques used by three sample congregations
- Identify possibilities for growing ministries that currently exist in the congregation as well as new ministries the congregation might undertake
- Decide upon one action that will increase connections between the congregation's ministry and people in Unitarian Universalist congregations and beyond.

Materials

- Chalice, candle, and matches, or LED/battery-operated candle
- Covenant from Session 1
- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Leader Resource 4, Contemporary Religiosity Facts: Innovative Ministry
- Computer with Internet access, speakers, projector, or large computer monitor

Preparation

- Review the materials for the session.
- If you will not have Internet access, download the case study videos and save to your computer:
 - Cluster on the Cutting Edge
 - A Passionate Commitment to Young Adults

- o Ogden UUs Reach Out to BGLT Youth
- Set up and test A/V equipment.
- Write on newsprint and post:
 - o How does this example embody the spirit of Congregations and Beyond?
 - o How might your congregation learn from this example?

Description of Session:

Opening (5 minutes) Welcome participants. Light the chalice and read the chalice lighting words, which are excerpted from a post written by Rev. Dr. Terasa Cooley, UUA Director for Congregational Life, in her blog, *Learning Out Loud:*

For me it begins not with the question of "is there a place for me" but with the question "is there a place for thee?" By this I mean how much are we focused on creating spiritual communities that speak to basic human need, rather than to meet my particular needs.

How I apply this to my work in our institutional structure is to take the institution out of the center of our ministry. As much as I would like to think I am essential to the work of Unitarian Universalism — I am not. My role, and I believe the role of all of our staff and institutional structures is to create a structural way for ministries to connect to one another, not to create it and then hand it out to others to implement.

When institutions find themselves thinking about how to serve constituencies, they fall into the kind of materialistic, consumeristic mentality that creates [an] inward, empty focus...

It requires a certain kind of spiritual discipline to resist the seduction of "please make me happy by providing this service for me." Turning aside these requests can feel like laziness or ineptitude. But by saying, "how can we help you achieve this ministry?" we are achieving something much more important.

Invite participants to share any reflections from the previous session. Review the covenant created in Session One. Does anything need to be added, changed, or deleted?

Case Studies (45 minutes)

Share the facts printed in Leader Resource 4 or invite volunteers to help you do so. Tell participants that the UUA staff have produced a video series, *A Religion for Our Time*, which highlights congregations involved in creative and innovative ministry. Explain that the large group will watch three videos about three different congregations and then move into three teams, each one discussing one of the three videos using the questions posted on newsprint. Divide the group into three teams and assign a case study to each, suggesting that they may want to take notes during the showing of their assigned case study.

Play the three videos. Give teams 10 minutes to discuss the videos. Ask, "What excites or inspires you? What possibilities for lowering congregational walls can you envision?" Gather the large group and have teams report back, keeping their report to a minute or two.

Facilitate a large group discussion using some of these questions: Growing Our Current Ministry

- What work is our congregation currently involved in that is in keeping with the spirit of Congregations and Beyond? How might we share that work with other congregations? How might we grow the work of our congregation to encompass the Congregation and Beyond initiative?
- What resources does our congregation have—music, sermons, videos of worship services, etc.—that could be shared with the broader Unitarian Universalist community? How can we share these resources?
- Is our current worship style adaptable enough to encompass traditional and contemporary worship? How might we explore different worship styles?

Opening Our Doors to the Community

- How is our congregation working "beyond" the borders of our building? Are we
 engaged in social justice work as a faith community? How might that work be
 expanded?
- Can we list some needs that exist in our community? How might we go about cultivating partnerships with groups in our community who are already working to address some of those needs?
- What groups of people from the community might be interested in participating in an event at our congregation? How might we invite them to an event? Would better use of social media help?
- What innovative uses of our building can we imagine? How can we serve our community by using our space differently?

After discussion, use consensus to agree upon one action the congregation can take to expand its ministry to those beyond the current congregation. It may be:

- an action of connecting to another Unitarian Universalist congregation or Unitarian Universalist community (such as a camp and conference center, a campus ministry group, or a district, cluster or region)
- an action that opens doors to the community (such as sponsoring a community event)
- a social justice project that brings you into accountable partnership with others in your community.

If your congregation is already involved in "beyond the congregation" activities, your commitment could be to increase what you are already doing or to do it in a way that invites more people to participate (For example, you might decide to offer *Our Whole Lives* programs to the community). Record names of volunteers to help complete the action, with the help of others in the congregation. Ask the volunteers to meet after the workshop for five minutes to schedule a meeting to start work on the action. Ask someone to post about your work on the Congregations and Beyond Facebook page.

Closing (10 minutes)

Thank participants for their work in all the sessions. Invite everyone to share one benefit – to their own faith development, to the congregation, to the community, or to Unitarian Universalism – they foresee in engaging with the Congregations and Beyond Initiative. Read these closing words, by Rev. Morales: "We have long defined ourselves as an association of congregations. We need to think of ourselves as a religious movement. The difference is potentially huge." Extinguish the chalice.

RESOURCES

Leader Resource 1: Social Media Reverse Quiz Game

1. A: This new and fast-growing site allows users to "pin" images from around the Internet. Q: What is Pinterest? 2. A: This site has 800 million active users. I wish I had that many pals! Q: What is Facebook? 3. A: You might not hear birds, but you might get a celebrity update in 140 characters. Q: What is Twitter? 4. A: Every gmail user is familiar with this site that offers spaces for you to "hang out." Q: What is Google+? 5. A: Personalized streams of square, vintage photos which are instantly uploaded from your phone. Q: What is Instagram? 6. A: Reblog, reblog! Posts rapidly make the rounds of this site! Q: What is Tumblr? 7. A: A site for storing and sharing high-quality images. Q: What is Flickr? (could also be What is Picasa? Or What is Photobucket?)

8.	A: Originally they were personal online diaries—now they come in a variety of
	forms—some are for text, some for photos, some for news.

Q: What is a blog?

9. A: Professionals go here to meet and greet!

Q: What is Linkedin?

10. A: A space dedicated to selling hand-made or vintage items.

Q: What is Etsy?

Leader Resource 2: Contemporary Religiosity Facts: Technology

Sources: "A Decade of Change in American Congregations 2000-2010," by David A. Roozen, and "Virtually Religious: Technology and Internet Use in American Congregations," by Scott Thumma, both published by Faith Communities Today.

By 2010 over 90% of congregations used email; seven in ten had websites, and four in ten had Facebook pages. The website is functionally a congregation's front door; visiting the website is how people decide if they want to visit in person.

Congregations with significant numbers of young adults are roughly twice as likely as older congregations to be heavy users of electronic technology.

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In 2010 40% of congregations said they use Facebook. This is a staggering rate of adoption since the general public use of Facebook was only 4 years old in 2010.

Seven percent of congregations are on Facebook but do not have a web presence. This may well signal a shift and even a positive trend in the use of technology by religious groups. Currently, few congregational websites are interactive or updated regularly. On the other hand, Facebook pages have a dynamic interactive quality; they are easily updated and offer timely, relevant information to a faith community's "friends." One distinct drawback of this strategy, however, is that few congregational Facebook pages contain relevant contact information in case outsiders come knocking. Facebook is great for congregational insiders, but may well be less functional as a yellow-pages ad for those shopping for a new faith community home.

The most critical reason for awakening to the necessity of technology in congregational life is the realization that the social context has changed. Congregations must change with this social shift in order to keep their presentation of faith relevant. Increased use of tech is strongly related to the congregation being characterized by willingness to change to meet new challenges.

Leader Resource 3: Find Out More

Information about Faith Communities Today

 Faith Communities Today Survey: A Decade of Change in American Congregations 2000-2010

http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/faithcommunitiestoday.org/files/Decade%20of%20Change%20Final 0.pdf

 Faith Communities Today Survey: Virtually Religious: Technology and Internet Use in American Congregations

http://faithcommunitiestoday.org/sites/faithcommunitiestoday.org/files/Technology-Internet-Use.pdf

Information about the Congregations and Beyond Initiative

- Vision for the UUA http://www.uua.org/vision/beyond/index.shtml
- Congregations and Beyond at the UUA
 http://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/officers/president/moralespeter/192145.shtml
- Blogs about Congregations and Beyond
 http://uupdates.net/index.php?q=congregations%20and%20beyond
- Unitarians Exploring Congregations and Beyond on Facebook https://www.facebook.com/groups/334403263248852/
- Congregations and Beyond Wikispace http://congregationsandbeyond.wikispaces.com/

Tools and Information on UUA.org

- Websites: Our New Front Door http://www.uua.org/communications/websites/101249.shtml
- Creating a congregation website http://www.uua.org/communications/websites/index.shtml
- Using blogs for Unitarian Universalist Congregations http://www.uua.org/communications/blogs/index.shtml
- Facebook for Unitarian Universalist congregations http://www.uua.org/communications/facebook/index.shtml

Leader Resource 4: Contemporary Religiosity Facts: Innovative Ministry

Source of the first five facts: "A Decade of Change in American Congregations 2000-2010," by David A. Roozen, published by Faith Communities Today.

- 25.2% of oldline protestant congregations always or often use drums and electric guitar in worship.
- 60.4% of the congregations with rapid attendance growth are offering both innovative and contemporary worship.
- Between 2000 and 2010 the number of ethnic/racial minority congregations has risen from 23% - 30%
- The "nones" or those who have no religious preference are the fastest growing religious segment of the American population and number more than any American denomination except Roman Catholic.
- The prominence of mega-church images notwithstanding, more than 1 in 4
 American congregations had fewer than 50 people in worship in 2010, and just under half had fewer than 100 people.
- The Church of the Larger Fellowship, with approximately 3000 members, is the largest congregation in the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.
- There are 80 active Unitarian Universalist campus ministry groups.