

# Orchestrating the Rhythm of Worship: Annual Worship Planning



The Sunday Service Committee of  
The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of  
Athens, GA

<http://www.uuathensga.org/>

## UUFA Sunday Service Committee

The Sunday Service Committee of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens is a committee composed of UUFA members and the Music Director which meets monthly with the minister to plan and help lead the 11:00 am Sunday morning worship service. The committee also holds a yearly planning meeting to produce a calendar of services (which can be revised and modified monthly) for the upcoming program year (July 1-June 30). This process is outlined in the attached document “Orchestrating the Rhythm of Worship: The Sunday Service Planning Process.”

The committee is guided in its work by the concept of “shared ministry” in which the ministry of the congregation—and in particular the leadership of the 11:00 am Sunday morning worship service—is shared between the ordained minister and the lay members of the congregation. The committee has also developed a “Philosophy of Worship” (see below) which guides its work.

The Sunday Service Committee is responsible only for the 11:00 am Sunday morning worship service, as well as the annual Christmas Eve service. The 9:30 am Forum is directed by a Forum Committee elected by those members who regularly attend the Forum. From time to time, there are other worship services, such as a Sunday evening Meditative/Healing Service, which are planned and coordinated by other individuals or groups within UUFA.

### Sunday Service Committee’s Philosophy of Worship

Recognizing and honoring that we have come from different faith traditions, that we may struggle in our understanding of the presence or absence of the *divine*, that we are seeking individual truth as well as universal truth, acceptance, and blessing, we, the Sunday Services Committee of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, Georgia, define “worship” as “ascribing worth to something, shaping things of worth.” We use the following as guidance for planning and execution of the Eleven O’Clock Sunday Service:

1. We welcome all.
2. We seek to invoke the *sacred* through music, dance, percussion, laughter, tears, joy, sorrow, words, deeds, and silence.
3. We seek to offer a platform for the sharing of ideas and experiences of what is *sacred, mystery, and wonder*.
4. We seek to create a space that is safe for those who are searching for peace and acceptance, who are retreating from the hectic world, who are in need of shelter, and who seek to find ways to live meaningful lives in the world.
5. We recognize that because of our varying backgrounds and needs, some language and actions may seem alien to us yet must be interpreted as meaningful to others. Diversity in our services provides a space for us all to experience transformation, change, and growth.
6. We recognize that the tone or focus of our services will not please everyone every Sunday, for we seek to honor the diversity of needs of all who worship here.

**Orchestrating the Rhythm of Worship:  
Annual Worship Planning**  
*from the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA (UUFA)*

Year Round, the Sunday Service Committee (SSC):

- Meets monthly to review upcoming services and assign service coordinators.
- Rotates note taker and facilitator at each meeting.
- Keeps a list of potential topics and speakers.
- Provides cards in the pew racks for feedback on services and suggestions for speakers and topics.
- Posts ongoing notices in the monthly newsletter and weekly orders of service inviting members of the congregation to present ideas for services and to come to SSC meetings.

Two Months before Yearly Planning Meeting, the Sunday Service Committee (SSC):

- Posts a notice in the monthly newsletter, weekly order of service, and weekly e-newsletter announcing the upcoming meeting and inviting interested congregation members and friends to come to the meeting.
- Every other year gives out survey forms to members of the congregation for specific feedback about the services and suggestions for topics.

One Month Before the Meeting, the Minister or SSC Chair (in Lay-Led Congregations):

- Meets with the RE Director, Music Director, Membership Chair, Stewardship Chair, and Social Action Chair.
- Meets with the Board and Leadership Council.
- Determines their needs for events during the Sunday Service in following year.

Yearly Planning Meeting Supplies:

- Large paper flip chart and stand, or computer, projector and screen.
- Multi-colored “sticky note” notes.
- Colored markers, pencils and paper.
- Tape to post charts on wall.

Logistics:

- Plan for a four-hour meeting.
- Arrange the room (a circle works nicely).
- Plan lunch (brown bag, catered, or pot luck).

Assign Team Roles

- One person should serve as the leader and facilitator of the meeting.
- One person should serve as the scribe who lists the topics on the flip chart, including the topics from the ongoing list and from congregational suggestions as well as new topics generated by the attendees.
- Another person should print each topic on a sticky note of the appropriate color. One person should make up the grid and one should do the posting. Another should have phone duty.

Utilizing Feedback:

- Sometimes the feedback about services is negative or critical. Be mindful that we cannot please everyone all the time, and, while we value all views, the most vocal is not necessarily the most indicative of the general needs of the congregation.
- Conversely we do not discount negative feedback; One person may speak for other members who are not comfortable speaking up.

## Philosophy

- Getting the balance between the needs of various groups within the congregation is an art, and the collaborative atmosphere of the meeting encourages us to find the balance.
- This process, a collaboration between the Minister and the Sunday Service Committee, is a part of Shared Ministry. The Minister, of course, always has Freedom of the Pulpit, the ability to agree or disagree with the committee's suggestions, and the ability to change topics for the Minister's Sundays at his/her discretion.
- Be flexible. Remember that the calendar is subject to change and revision at the monthly SSC meetings and is not fixed in stone. World events, personal crises, and the needs of the congregation often dictate change as the year goes on. We can fill in also with topics from the ongoing list if the need arises. The calendar is a framework of planning, not a straightjacket.

## And Finally:

- Love and cherish one another and have fun!

## Meeting Procedure:

- Opening Words and Chalice Lighting.
- Introduction of Participants (go around the room. If group is small, have a check-in.).
- Explanation of Procedure.
- Review of feedback from suggestion cards, surveys, and letters, emails, or other communications about the services.
- Note any trends or areas of concern about service topics and formats.

## Brainstorming of Ideas for Services:

- Volunteer reads list of topics from ongoing list and from congregational input.
- Volunteer reads list of yearly "special" (traditional) services:

## Special / Traditional Services:

- Burning Bowl
- Christmas Eve
- Bulb (Remembrance) Service
- Flower Communion
- Water Communion
- Choir Performance Service(s)
- Youth/Children's Service(s)
- Stewardship Service
- Holidays of World Religions
- Others

## Brainstorming (Cont.)

- Individuals generate lists of suggested topics or speakers. (Encourage attendees to volunteer to present their own topics at services.).
- Scribe writes list of all suggested services on one or more sheets of flip chart paper. There should be more than 52. Volunteer tapes compiled lists on walls of room so all are visible.

## Lunch Break

- During the break, attendees may study the lists, add other suggestions, and discuss possibilities with each other.

### Classification of Services:

- Using group discussion, attendees classify each topic.
- Assign a color code for each Classification.
- Scribe(s) writes topic of each service on colored sticky notes according to classification.

### UUFA's Classifications

- Special / Traditional
- UU Heritage / History
- Social Action / Earth Stewardship
- Spiritual / Diverse Theology
- "Intellectual" and Current Events
- Intergenerational Services
- Other

### Producing the Calendar

- Scribe makes a grid of all 52 Sundays of the upcoming service year on one or two flip chart pages. Each square on the grid should be the size of a sticky note.
- Scribe lists holidays and special events on the appropriate dates.
- Scribe notes intergenerational services.
- Attendees schedule the special traditional services first.
- Attendees decide if there are to be any special themes or series of services, and volunteer posts them next.
- Facilitator/Leader encourages discussion of congregational needs and desires in the choice of services.
- Scribe fills in the rest of the calendar.
- Be mindful of the number of Sundays the minister or ministers will lead services, the number of paid invited outside speakers and the budget for those speakers, and the lay leaders who have offered to present services.

### Balancing the Classifications

- Attendees use the color codes to achieve the desired balance between the various classifications of services to best meet the needs of the congregation.
- Volunteer rearranges the sticky notes to get the correct balance.

### Checking Outside Speakers

- Facilitator/Leader assigns phone duty to a volunteer who will call potential service leaders who are not in the room in order to get their consent and confirm their availability on the suggested days.

### Parking Lot and Extra Topics

- Volunteer compiles a list of any unassigned topics that can serve as substitutes in case of cancellation and can be carried over to the following year.

### Closing the Meeting

- Closing words and general celebration of completing the year's calendar!

## Sunday Service Committee Planning Calendar 2008

Children's Worship 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays September-May; Choir sings 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays September-June  
 SAC Pulpit Commentary – 1<sup>st</sup> Sundays (during Welcome & Ann.); "This I Believe . . ." (TIB) – 3rd Sundays  
 Sound: 1<sup>st</sup> - John, 2<sup>nd</sup> – Doug, 3<sup>rd</sup> – Dan, 4<sup>th</sup> – Ray, 5<sup>th</sup> - ? (normally, but subject to change!)

<b>July</b>				
<b>6</b> THM: 4 <sup>th</sup> of July?  Sp: SC:	<b>13</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>20</b> THM:  Sp: TIB: SC:	<b>27</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	
<b>August</b>			Fall RE begins	
<b>3</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>10</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>17</b> THM: Water Communion Sp: TIB: SC:	<b>24</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>31</b> THM:  Sp: SC:
<b>September</b>			Rosh Hashanah 29th	
<b>7</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>14</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>21</b> THM: Stewardship Sunday Sp: TIB: SC:	<b>28</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	
<b>October</b> Yom Kippur 8th	<b>UUFA Retreat at The Mountain</b>			
<b>5</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>12</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>19</b> THM:  Sp: TIB: SC:	<b>26</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	
<b>November</b>				Thanksgiving 27th
<b>2 (DST ends)</b> THM: Bulb Service  Sp: SC:	<b>9</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>16</b> THM:  Sp: TIB: SC:	<b>23</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>30</b> THM:  Sp: SC:
<b>December</b>	Cong. Budget Meeting ?	<b>Solstice Service in PM?</b> Hanukkah 21st	<b>24-Christmas Eve Service</b>	
<b>7</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>14</b> THM: Children's Holiday Pageant? Sp: SC:	<b>21</b> THM: Choir Music Service? Sp: TIB: SC:	<b>28</b> THM: Sharing Service  Sp: SC:	

**THM** = theme; **Sp** = speaker; **SC** = service coordinator; **TIB** = This I Believe

NOTE: All service topics/speakers subject to change.

## Sunday Service Committee Planning Calendar 2009

Children's Worship 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays September-May; Choir sings 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> Sundays September-June  
 SAC Pulpit Commentary – 1<sup>st</sup> Sundays (during Welcome & Ann.); "This I Believe . . ." (TIB) – 3rd Sundays  
 Sound Engineers: 1<sup>st</sup> - John, 2<sup>nd</sup> – Doug, 3<sup>rd</sup> – Dan, 4<sup>th</sup> – Ray, 5<sup>th</sup> - ? (normally, but subject to change!)

<b>January</b>		<b>MLK</b>		
<b>4</b> THM: Burning Bowl?  Sp: SC:	<b>11</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>18</b> THM:  Sp: TIB: SC:	<b>25</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	
<b>February</b>				
<b>1</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>8</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>15</b> THM:  Sp: TIB: SC:	<b>22</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	
<b>March</b>				Baha'i New Year 21st
<b>1</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>8 (DST begins)</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>15</b> THM:  Sp: TIB: SC:	<b>22</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>29</b> THM:  Sp: SC:
<b>April</b> Passover 8th		<b>Easter</b> <b>Earth Day 22nd</b>		Congregational Meeting?
<b>5</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>12</b> THM: Flower Communion? (IG) Sp: SC:	<b>19</b> THM:  Sp: TIB: SC:	<b>26</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	
<b>May</b> MSD Ann Mtg??		<b>Mother's Day</b> <b>16<sup>th</sup>—SSC Annual Planning Retreat</b>		<b>Mem. Day wknd</b> Last Day of Spring RE  1 <sup>st</sup> day Summer RE?
<b>3</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>10</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>17</b> THM:  Sp: TIB: SC:	<b>24</b> THM: Bread Communion?  Sp: SC:	<b>31</b> THM:  Sp: SC:
<b>June</b>		<b>Father's Day</b>		<b>GA, Salt Lake City</b> <b>24th-28th</b>
<b>7</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>14</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	<b>21</b> THM:  Sp: TIB: SC:	<b>28</b> THM:  Sp: SC:	

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NOTE: All service topics/speakers subject to change