

New Congregation Development



A Manual for Unitarian Universalist District Staff and Volunteers

New Congregation and Growth Resources
Congregational Services
Unitarian Universalist Association
2005



Preface

My first conversation with Linda began with her question: “We want to start a new congregation in our own town. What do we do?”

This was not the first time I had to deal with that question, so I knew how to answer. I encouraged Linda to gather as many people as possible to enable them to get to know one another and to help them define who they would become as a Unitarian Universalist congregation. “Do not,” I advised, “try to start holding services right away.”

The people Linda gathered spent about six months asking themselves questions such as “Why are we here?” and “What kind of religious service do we want?” Then they held a very exciting public meeting and soon began offering services for about eighty adults and forty-five children in religious education.

Setting the right direction at the beginning is a key role for the district and its executive. In the first six months, new congregations are very fragile; a few caring and wise words and support can change the direction of the organization for its entire lifetime. In the new congregation in Linda’s town, several things were accomplished.

First, care was taken to ensure that leadership was broadly based. There were not just one or two persons excited about getting the group going, but perhaps thirty. When active programs were needed, there were enough people to help.

Second, the group had a good sense of who they were. They knew they wanted programs to have spiritual quality, and they wanted social action to have a local focus.

Third, they recognized the importance of providing a quality program for their children—a task people often overlook in the early organizing stages.

Fourth, they realized early on that they would need to work toward having professional leadership as soon as possible. This attitude helped to overcome the hurdles faced by some long-established groups who believe that such leadership is not necessary.

And finally, the new group quickly gained an appreciation for using outside help and, concomitantly, developed a willingness to help others. They developed district and denominational orientations early on—a characteristic uncommon in many existing groups.

I view the district role as critical in the early stages. Most individuals with an initial idea of starting a new congregation are not sure how to begin. At this early stage, they are often very receptive to ideas and suggestions. Once the early decisions have been made—and momentum begun—it’s much more difficult to influence the group’s direction. Roger Comstock, Former District Executive, Thomas Jefferson District



Using This Manual

This document was written to support efforts to start new Unitarian Universalist congregations at the local level. The content will be useful for district executives, district extension or district growth committees, lay leaders, and ministers.

Although Unitarian Universalists are adept at applying sophisticated organizational strategies to develop new congregations, this manual is predicated on the need to focus foremost on why we establish new congregations in the first place: to foster appreciation of the varieties of expression of our common religious values and to create opportunities for transformation and justice making. The sense of religious community and of shared vision are the most essential things a group must work toward creating.

→ A Deliberate Approach Is Required

Decisions made in the early years of a new congregation will influence its future for years to come. An organizing approach should include the following:

- A long-term vision and understanding of purpose.
- Inspiring lay and ministerial leaders who are knowledgeable about organizing a new congregation.
- Knowledge of previous efforts and strategies known to work.
- An assessment of the geographic area, including needs of the population to be served.
- A carefully crafted plan.
- Adequate financing and resources.
- Support from the larger UU community.

Because each effort to start a congregation is unique, the content in this manual should be adapted as appropriate for the specific location and vision.



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Why and How to Start a New Congregation

Our responsibility is to share our liberal religious faith and its message of dignity, justice, spiritual growth, and respect for the interdependent web of life. Our message of faith in, and acceptance of, each individual is vital for our often troubled larger world.

When founders of a new congregation act through their own sense of personal ministry to share Unitarian Universalism with the larger community, they employ their own unique talents and gifts for the betterment of others. The years required to establish a new church are busy and event filled, and they offer the opportunity for the founders to grow individually while they establish a new congregation. Founders have stated that this effort has been a very rewarding experience—both exhilarating and exhausting! Positive motives centered on the importance of sharing our faith will inspire and enlist committed volunteers for the long term.

When the primary motive for starting a new congregation is moving away from something in the current church (an internal conflict or an unpopular staff member, for example), energy will not be sustainable through the demanding months required for the effort. Additionally, a vision created from negativity or conflict is often not motivating. When the primary motive is, instead, starting a fresh, new congregation for positive reasons, the participants will hold a sense of religious purpose combined with intense, sustained, creative efforts. They will create a new religious community and realize benefits they may not even have anticipated initially.

➔ Personal and Organizational Benefits

Consider starting a new congregation if you

- Are eager to ask and answer religious questions in the midst of a caring, encouraging congregation.
- Would like the fellowship of others for friendship and mutual support, celebration, and worship.
- Want support for your children while they develop their religious beliefs.
- Wish to preserve and extend the traditions of respect for other individuals and the search for personal religious beliefs through dialogue.
- Desire to bring your religious beliefs to life through social action taken with members of a religious community.

Our Association of Congregations has much to gain from new congregations as well:

- Members of a new congregation often have a different perspective in looking at the mission of the church than do the members of a long-established congregation. They tend to be more outwardly oriented. This new perspective can help create alternative models of worship, religious education, and social justice activities.
- New congregations represent a strategy for supporting the increasing pluralism of our society. By establishing a visible presence and new relationships with historically marginalized groups, new congregations may reach people whom established congregations might have difficulty reaching.
- Starting new congregations has a ripple effect, very often serving to renew established congregations. Established congregations, especially those with little growth in the past, often experience renewal when they reach out to sponsor new congregations.
- About 40 percent of the American population is unchurched (not having a religious affiliation), and one of the most effective strategies for reaching them is to create new congregations. Numerous studies have demonstrated that about 60 percent of new members are persons who previously have not been affiliated with any church.

➔ Support for Your Efforts

If you have decided to work toward establishing a new congregation, your first telephone call should be to your district executive for advice and support. Our Unitarian Universalist Association districts initiate and support the development of small (1 – 150 adult members) and mid-size (151 – 550 adult members) new congregations. Support may come from district staff and volunteers, other local congregations, your district Chalice Lighters, and the Unitarian Universalist Association's Congregational Services staff group.

Our Unitarian Universalist Association districts provide different types of support for new starts and may use different terms and processes from those described in this manual. Your district executive will be the best person to help you get started and use this information to your advantage.



New Congregation Models and Phases

→ Types of Start-ups

The Grassroots Model

When a group of Unitarian Universalists living in a community without a UU congregation start one, it is called a *grassroots model* start. Unitarian Universalists often start organizing the congregation on their own and may contact a neighboring congregation for encouragement, support, and advice.

A key to success for the grassroots model is the three-phase process described in this manual. Sometimes grassroots groups don't start with the planning phase and have difficulty deciding to slow down the gathering—to go back and do the necessary planning to start the congregation.

The Planter Model

One or several congregations in a district may “plant,” or start, a new congregation. A key to success for this *planter model* is the new congregation development process described in this manual. Because these starts are intentional, they usually are backed by the resources of an established congregation for the planning stage and a new congregation organizer or minister for the gathering phase.

The Spin-off Model

In the *spin-off model*, as the name implies, the new congregation is spun off from an existing congregation. The two primary kinds of spin-offs are the *planned spin-off model* and the *break-off model*.

Planned Spin-off Model. The primary congregation has grown beyond its building and land capacity. A second congregation is needed in a neighboring community, where a significant number of current members live and could provide the necessary initial “critical mass” for a new congregation.

Break-off Model. A substantial subgroup in the primary congregation is unhappy with that congregation. These people wish to leave to start a new congregation. If this new congregation is to be successful, its members will need to intentionally move through the anger that may exist because of the congregational split. A congregation needs to exist *for* something (positive) rather than *against* something (negative).

The Unitarian Universalist Association encourages existing congregations in high-potential areas to give serious thought to planning and organizing new

spin-offs or satellite congregations. Satellites may fall into several types. One is a multiple-campus model with staff offering programming and worship in several locations. In another model, the intent is for the second location to grow sufficiently to become its own separate congregation.

➔ The New Congregation Development Path

The founding of a new congregation can take from one to two years and generally encompasses the following phases and steps.

Planning Phase

The planning phase involves a systematic analysis of the feasibility of organizing a new congregation in a specific area at a specific time. People with this responsibility need skills in researching, collecting, and analyzing data, along with building a case for action.

Name a New Congregation Committee. The New Congregation Committee (NCComm) is selected by the district (usually by the district executive and the district growth committee working together) and empowered to take the responsibility for targeting and planning the new congregation. It represents the first group of people with a passion for starting the new congregation. They should be enthusiastic about their mission, willing to meet and enjoy new people, and willing to encourage others to become involved. Teamwork is important to their success.

Select the Target Area and Conduct a Feasibility Study. The NCComm examines the proposed geographic areas. They hold conversations with individuals who are knowledgeable about demographics and population growth. They determine that the community is ready for a new Unitarian Universalist congregation and that the targeted area contains people who are interested in forming a new group.

Prepare a Preliminary New Congregation Proposal. Before gathering the congregation, it is important that a preliminary proposal be written that will clarify precisely why the congregation is needed and how it will develop. The proposal should be written by the New Congregation Committee and should state the ideas of those interested in organizing the group.

Name a New Congregation Organizer. Your district executive should name someone—usually a layperson—to work with the new congregation while it is forming. This organizer should have experience starting a new congregation; skill in organizational development; and the ability to guide the planning phase by helping to facilitate initial meetings, providing consulting services, and helping with the strategic planning.

Select and Prepare Covenant Congregations and Supporting Individuals. Identify existing congregations who will covenant to support the

new group. The covenant congregations should be prepared for responsibilities of support. Select one person as the primary contact.

Gathering Phase

People come together to create and sustain a religious community of the appropriate number of people before going on to offer weekly worship services. Skills for enlisting others, building community, and incorporating the advice of others into the new congregation are required of leaders.

Form a Steering Committee. A Steering Committee should consist of interested Unitarian Universalists in the target area who intend to stay with the church in the long term. (The New Congregation Committee members can transition to the Steering Committee if appropriate.) The Steering Committee is expected to establish task-oriented committees that will assume responsibility for programs, public relations, new member recruitment, finances, meeting space, and so on. These people should be open to incorporating others in the process, be creative, and remain focused on the religious reasons for starting the new congregation.

Gather the People. Development of the outreach program should include a balance between small-group activities and large gatherings to build community and define the religious purpose of the group. Both social events and religious discussions are appropriate for growing the sense of community, but remember that in this phase, developing identity is also important. The gathered group will meet one night per month for six to twelve months just to get organized, to discuss their vision, and get a sense of who they are.

Develop a Statement of Purpose and Programs. After a sufficient number of committed adults have gathered and trust has developed, it is important that the congregation articulate its identity as a religious community. It should define the programs it proposes to offer to its members and to the wider community.

Remember that planning is extremely important to the new congregation's success. Leaders who jump too quickly into ministry and worship will experience fatigue, which will ensure that the congregation stays small.

Ministering Phase

The first public Sunday program is held, and weekly worship services begin. The new congregation is ministering to its current membership and to individuals in the wider community. In the ministering phase, people need skills in listening, communicating, teamwork, and supporting others.

Hold the First Public Sunday Program. Now that the group has developed a sense of identity, belonging, and organization, it is time to go public in a bold new way. Many congregations have waited until they have gathered at least one hundred people who will attend the first public worship. By doing this, the

congregation can move more rapidly into a program-sized church (roughly 150 – 450 people). Inviting the community to join for worship, religious education, fellowship, and outreach is appropriate, and the invitation can be publicized through the newspaper, radio announcements, and flyers. The first public Sunday program should be of high quality and in a conveniently located public place. Inviting a Unitarian Universalist minister from another church to give a sermon is a way to inspire those present and to connect with the wider Association of Congregations.

Build the Foundations. During this several-month period, the new congregation will be deepening its covenant and strengthening its sense of mission. Much of the work will generate people's commitment and will expand programs such as worship, religious education, fellowship, pastoral care, and social outreach. Worship services and a full children's religious education program will be held on a regular basis on Sunday morning. A worship committee, minister, or both will be responsible for these Sunday services.

Also during this time, the congregation is expected to establish excellent public relations, a strong leadership training and succession planning program, and a sound financial program. Appropriate physical space will be needed to meet the needs of a growing congregation. The organizational structure will evolve as the congregation expands.

Once the congregation has matured and has *at least* thirty adult members, bylaws should be written and approved. The congregation may then pick a Sunday to open the charter membership book. Charter members will sign the book at the Charter Sunday service. (Waiting to charter until the new congregation has at least one hundred members will facilitate its developing into a program-sized church.)

Become a Member Congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Becoming a member congregation is the final step in establishing a new congregation. Documents will be drawn up and forwarded, with a "Fair Share" financial contribution, to the board of trustees of the Unitarian Universalist Association and the district for approval. If approval is granted, it is recommended that a service honoring the congregation's UUA membership be conducted to formally celebrate the new congregation's joining the UUA. For information on congregational membership in the Unitarian Universalist Association, please see www.uua.org/cde/education/affiliation.html.

The phases and steps previously listed—planning, gathering, and ministering—will be explained further in subsequent sections of this document.



Leading the New Congregation

Focus on leadership is all important, because the leaders guide the formation of the new religious community. The most important quality for leaders in a new congregation is a willingness to involve others. Those with a vision, creativity, and enthusiasm also must be eager to encourage others to participate fully in the new group. Building true religious community works when every individual makes suggestions and sees those suggestions incorporated into operation.

The larger the original core of people involved in building this new community and the more diverse their views, the more leaders must be able to listen, to synthesize, and to incorporate new ideas when possible. If your church wants a diverse congregation, make sure your leaders are open to new ideas and new ways of being together. The following chart shows how typical tasks can be focused to encourage participation and commitment by many people.

Typical Tasks in Starting New Congregations

Creative Ways to Involve Others

Creating an agenda for a meeting

Create an agenda, and then email it to everyone for input. Adjust the agenda's content, where possible, to reflect the attendees' goals, as well as yours. Request that a variety of people present topics at the meeting, not just those with designated titles. Allow plenty of time for discussion and for having fun together. Getting off task is sometimes important, as it builds community through laughter. See www.uua.org/cde/education/ to learn more about holding meaningful meetings.

Writing the mission

Ask everyone involved to help with the wording of the mission statement. Even though a small core of leaders could easily write it themselves, arguing over the wording in a larger group helps everyone become invested in the product. In actuality, the process of discussion and coming to consensus is more important than the words written on the paper. Through a collaborative process, your goals and ideals will be blended. See www.uua.org/cde/education/ to learn

more about clarifying and stating the congregation's mission.

Choosing the name

Invite a group of people to a potluck supper or an after-church social meeting with the primary purpose of selecting the name for the congregation. This selection may need to occur over several meetings so many ideas can be shared and discussed. Decide the name by consensus, not by vote. All participants will express their ideas and hear them considered by others. Coming to consensus builds a strong team. (So do potluck suppers!) To find out more about using consensus processes, use a Web search engine for the topic and see the Web site of First Parish in Lexington (Massachusetts), Unitarian Universalist, at www.fplex.org/consensusintro.shtml.

Leading a meeting

Just because you're the chair, you don't have to lead the meeting. You can create the agenda (as outlined above) and then ask someone else to lead the meeting. You can step in to help when needed. This technique also allows you observe the group dynamics. Rotate other positions as well; rotating responsibilities helps everyone understand the full scope of starting the congregation. To explore further about holding useful meetings, see "Meaningful Meetings That Work," at www.uua.org/cde/education/.

Engaging each member's personal ministry

Do you have a sense of each member's personal ministry? How does the ministry of each person help the new congregation work toward achieving its vision of a more perfect world? What motivates each person? What tasks does each member love to do? What does each one *not* like to do? (See "Exercise: Defining Your Personal Ministry" in the Appendix for an exercise on determining these answers.)

Asking the right person for the right task



Volunteers have primary motivators that cause them to enjoy certain tasks more than others. Be sure you ask the right person to step in at the right time.

Achievers are motivated by achieving special, challenging tasks, and they want concrete feedback so they can succeed... more quickly! They love being creative and inventing new systems. They are usually *not* good at maintaining programs long term.

Affiliators are motivated by building relationships among people and are great for building your new community. Listen to their feedback in meetings and after social events. Incorporate their ideas to help everyone build friendships.

Influencers are motivated by persuading others to adopt their point of view. They help to influence others about new ideas and new policies. They can help influence the adoption of a new program, talk with others in the larger community, and negotiate with the local government.

Spirituality seekers are motivated through centering, meditation, and spiritual exercises. They remind us why we've gathered in a religious community. Ask them to do opening readings and to help the group evaluate the meeting process at the end. They might ask, "Did everyone get to talk enough?" or "Did everyone feel respected?" or "Were the results of our meeting in keeping with our long-term goals and religious purpose?"

➔ Leader Skills

The following skills are needed to effectively guide your congregation through growth and transition.

Building Consensus

When building a new congregation, the ability to bring people together as a community depends on your ability to build consensus among the group. People feel committed to an organization when they suggest ways of doing things and these suggestions are implemented, at least in part. Working together, blending solutions through compromise, arguing about strategies—these are all community-building techniques. In contrast, simple majority-based decision making can limit groups to oppositional thinking when questions become framed as a matter of which side is right or wrong. We use democratic decision making in our congregations, but we can also use a consensus process to make a strongly supported decision. For substantial coverage of consensus-building skills, see *The Multigenerational Congregation: Meeting the Leadership Challenge*, by Gil Rendle, published by the Alban Institute in 2002.

Working through Conflict

Working through conflict is a companion to building consensus in a congregation with diverse ages, lifestyles, preferences, and opinions. Conflict is inevitable and is a necessary step in building commitment. Leaders must be patient, supportive, and persistent. Those leaders who have a sense of personal ministry during heated discussions are better able to remain calm during conflict.

Measuring Success

To ensure success in many areas, create a culture in which volunteers expect both quality and quantity in discussions to evaluate progress. Leaders must assume that complaints will arise and are evidence that essential differences in the congregation are being negotiated. Proactively creating systems for evaluation and relating them to clearly stated goals and objectives will focus evaluation on results rather than process. Volunteers will better understand the importance of following through with responsibilities when programs are evaluated. Create a culture of continuous improvement, and remember that formal and informal recognition of successes helps people stay motivated.

Creating Missional Strategies

Missional strategies should be crafted to help define a congregation's identity through a process of spiritual discernment. Be sure to continue focusing on an understanding of the new congregation's mission, vision, and shared ministry goals. This focus will provide continuity in a growing congregation. Engaging the entire congregation in this process will foster their commitment.

Educating Others

Leaders who are educated about the dynamics of congregational vitality and growth must be able to transmit this knowledge to the new congregation. Information about group process, change and transition, navigating conflict, and covenants for right relations will help the congregation thrive. Refer to www.uua.org/cde/education/ for a resource on constructive handling of conflict.

➔ Planning for New Leaders

The leaders establishing the brand-new congregation need different skills from the second round of leaders. Founders must be very open to the following:

- Recruiting and leading others.
- Facilitating inclusive discussions.
- Building consensus to build community.
- Navigating conflict to reach decisions.
- Asking questions and allowing others to answer.
- Helping to create the collective long-term vision.
- Looking at ways institutional racism may creep into the early stages of new congregation development.

In short, the founders must be good recruiters and facilitators, as well as good salespeople!

The second-round leaders (who usually take over leadership a couple of years after the founding) need the following skills and abilities:

- Creating and implementing plans and policies.
- Recruiting and motivating people to lead programs.
- Evaluating results and redirecting when necessary.
- Focusing on the long-term vision.
- Creating missional strategies.
- Educating new leaders on antiracism/antioppression/multicultural resources.

These people should be more oriented to details—to leading others to create and implement policies and programs.

It is important to wait for a leader with the proper skills, knowledge, and attitudes before filling a position. Don't rush to get something done when the person volunteering is not the right person for the long term.

At the transition from the first- to second-round leaders, it is important to acknowledge the work done by the first group. Thank them for their contributions, and then welcome the new round of leaders.



Planning the New Congregation

Although the primary purpose of starting a new congregation is to create a religious community, this section, “Planning the New Congregation,” focuses on establishing the organizational infrastructure needed for the new church.

Planning is a major component of new congregation development. Lessons from other denominations, our own history, and contemporary church growth research lead to the conclusion that if strong, growing, new congregations are desired, careful planning is required. Yet planning takes place within a context, and our context is the Unitarian Universalist tradition. Our tradition informs the planning model in two crucial ways:

- **Planning is decentralized.** The responsibility for planning rests at the local or regional level. You and your district staff and lay leaders are key to establishing, funding, and growing the new congregation.
- **Planning is participatory.** The participatory planning involves cooperation within the Unitarian Universalist network (district staff and lay leaders, local congregations, and the Unitarian Universalist Association).

→ Estimated Time for Planning

The planning phase for the new congregation could take anywhere from six months to two years. The potential size of the new congregation, its vision, and the number of people involved will affect the length of time needed for planning.

The first section of this manual listed steps for forming the new congregation. Those topics are explained more fully in this section.

Planning Phase

1. Name a New Congregation Committee

2. Select the Target Area and Conduct a Feasibility Study

3. Prepare a Preliminary New Congregation Proposal

4. Name a New Congregation Organizer

5. Select and Prepare Covenant Congregations and Supporting Individuals

Gathering Phase

Ministering Phase

1. Name a New Congregation Committee

The New Congregation Committee (NCComm) provides a vehicle to involve concerned people early in the development of a new congregation. The committee's role is to take the responsibility for targeting and planning a new congregation. Others may be part of this team (for example, a minister or district consultant). The committee decides, based on its analysis, if a new congregation could be successfully organized at this time at this location. Over time, the NCComm will gain a commitment to the new congregation and may continue as resource people.

Although the size of a committee may vary, between five and seven people is suggested. This size is small enough to engender a sense of fellowship, yet large enough to be a good-sized working group. Major responsibilities include the following:

- Studying geographic areas and targeting the best spot for developing a new congregation.
- Communicating with surrounding congregations, individuals, and district staff to determine those who are supportive.
- Conducting a feasibility study to determine the need for a new congregation.
- Developing a preliminary new congregation proposal.
- Helping to establish the Steering Committee once the initial congregation is in place.
- Holding initial conversations about strategies for adding paid staff, such as a minister or religious education director.
- Developing a preliminary strategic plan understood and owned by the committee members. This plan should include possible ministry focus groups (or those to whom the congregation's ministry is targeted), milestone events, major tasks, and celebrations.

Skills and Knowledge Needed

If at all possible, these committee members should have the following skills and knowledge:

- A deep personal commitment to Unitarian Universalism and a concern for growth.
- Knowledge of the surrounding community, district, and UUA resources.
- Researching and interviewing skills.
- A commitment to church growth that encompasses the interaction between spiritual, organizational, and relational growth within a congregation.
- Background in demography, research, or planning.
- Previous experience in analyzing organizational systems and power relationships and in dismantling institutional racism.

Planning Phase

1. Name a New Congregation Committee
- 2. Select the Target Area and Conduct a Feasibility Study**
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Gathering Phase

Ministering Phase

2. Select the Target Area and Conduct a Feasibility Study

Determining the Target Area

A general area survey assesses a large geographic area (many neighborhoods, towns, and localities). The people conducting the survey take an overall look at the region, sometimes for the first time, with the goal of targeting a specific area for a possible new congregation. On the basis of the information collected, a strategy will emerge from the New Congregation Committee that will specify which areas are underserved and might hold potential for a new congregation or which areas are adequately served.

The following are desirable elements for your survey:

- A general demographic profile of the area surveyed, which would include such factors as population density, number, and social and physical characteristics. You can purchase demographic survey information through software that defines religious and spiritual preferences.

The Unitarian Universalist Association has contracted with a demographic research company called Percept Group, Inc., to give congregations a discounted rate on a demographic study package. Included in the package are the following data in tabular form: (1) the latest 2000 census information for the study area or areas you choose for your ministry area, (2) trends and projections for the study area or areas, (3) "U.S. Lifestyle" (a combination of information from several census fields), and (4) a guide to help you use this information. Also, you will receive six graphic representations of these data in the six InfoMaps that you select. Examples of demographic information that

you can choose are "Lifestyle Diversity," "Median Age," "Five-Year Growth," "Percentage of 2000 College Graduates," and "Number of Unitarian Universalists."

- An analysis of existing Unitarian Universalist congregations that have an impact on the area or are located in the area.
- A strategy for growth, which looks at trends in the growth of the area and the potential for Unitarian Universalist involvement in new congregation starts.

Sources of Information

A number of organizations can help provide information. For local and regional information on a state or county basis, interview the following:

- County planning commissions.
- Boards of education.
- Transportation departments.
- Health departments.
- Local university business programs that may have marketing students looking for a project to do.
- Public utilities.
- Libraries and local school districts.
- City planning organizations.
- Social service organizations.
- The Census Bureau.
- Local councils of churches or state church councils.

Determining Feasibility

The primary purpose of the feasibility study is to determine if conditions are right for a new congregation in the targeted area and the potential size of that congregation. Is there a need for the congregation? Is the time right for an immediate start?

To determine need, answer the following questions:

- How many people live in the area now?
- What are the population trends? How rapidly is growth taking place? How mobile is the community?
- Who is moving in? Are they primarily young families, middle-aged couples, elders, or singles?

- What lifestyles can be discerned? What are the racial and ethnic characteristics of the area?
- What are the income and educational trends of the area?
- What are some of the other characteristics of the targeted area that might affect a new congregation?

Continuous population growth over time is a positive sign that a new congregation may be needed. Specifying who is moving in often provides insights into what kind of congregation, what programs, and what purposes, might be most attractive. Income and educational factors are important to the traditional areas in which Unitarian Universalism has grown, but they are not determining factors.

- Is there any reason to believe that the religious preferences of the people moving into the area are different from the area in general?
- Are any other denominations organizing new congregations in the area? If so, would this hamper the start of a new Unitarian Universalist congregation?
- How close are other Unitarian Universalist congregations to the targeted area? How might they be affected by a new congregation? Are any of the present congregations attracting members from the targeted area?
- How many Unitarian Universalists residing in the targeted area might be willing to become involved in the start of a new congregation?

A second factor in the feasibility study is that of timing. An area may need a new congregation, but the timing might not be ripe. **To determine if the time is right**, factors like these may need consideration:

- The real growth of the area is not projected for the next few years.
- Movement into the area has just started, and although a new congregation may be needed later, now is not the right time.
- Local support for the new congregation is not strong.
- Leaders are not appearing to do the work.

The New Congregation Committee determines the ideal location for the church based on population trends of the area and the number of supporting Unitarian Universalists, then determines if the time is right for the new congregation in this area.

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Gathering Phase

Ministering Phase

3. Prepare a Preliminary New Congregation Proposal

A preliminary proposal should be drawn up that clarifies why a new congregation is needed and how it is to develop. The proposal outlines what the New Congregation Committee expects from the new congregation. It will guide future development by the future Steering Committee, minister, new congregation organizer, and sponsoring congregations and individuals. It is an initial statement of identity and purpose—not a final product. The proposal contains the following:

- A statement of the factors discovered in the General Area Survey and Feasibility Study that led to the decision to organize a new congregation. The statement will answer the question of why the congregation is needed.
- Numerical goals and other milestones for various points in the development process. These goals are based on the demographic assessment and include numbers estimated for the first public service and the charter service, as well as anticipated congregational membership in the Unitarian Universalist Association.
- The purpose of the new congregation within the context of a larger regional strategy. The type and size of congregation to be organized also is included.
- The kinds of leadership (organizer, minister, board) envisioned during the gathering and ministering phases. The proposal includes what that person or group's role will be in each phase.
- Staffing needed, including dates for hiring each staff member and initial role descriptions.
- Suggestions about areas in which the congregation expects to concentrate its life. How might current organizing members provide ministry to the growing larger congregation? Based on demographic

data, what programs will be developed for ministry for the external community?

- Suggested goals, and strategies for their implementation, to help the congregation build a strong institution in its first year of ministry.
- Indications of the kinds of assistance that the new congregation can expect from neighboring congregations and the district.
- Statements of financial support, including support coming from both within and outside the new congregation.
- Indication of the location and type of anticipated temporary and long-term meeting places.

Planning Phase

1. Name a New Congregation Committee
2. Select the Target Area and Conduct a Feasibility Study
3. Prepare a Preliminary New Congregation Proposal
- 4. Name a New Congregation Organizer**
5. Select and Prepare Covenant Congregations and Supporting Individuals

Gathering Phase

Ministering Phase

4. Name a New Congregation Organizer

The role of the new congregation organizer (NCO) is a liaison who will assist the New Congregation Committee in working through the various stages of setting up the new church. This person acts as a consultant, offering advice and support to the new group as it develops. The NCO is *not* from the targeted area for the new congregation but is a lay leader or minister who serves as a consultant from your district. It is recommended that the district executive appoint this person for a one- to two-year period.

The NCO will work closely with the New Congregation Committee to assist the new congregation in moving toward membership in the Unitarian Universalist Association. In this role, the person will relate to a broad spectrum of individuals. Sample tasks that the NCO may perform include

- Advising on various developmental steps.
- Organizing the Steering Committee.
- Starting the first public meeting.
- Timing the first formal fund drive.

- Electing officers and establishing bylaws.
- Communicating between the new congregation and the covenant congregations.
- Developing a process for articulating the covenant and mission for the new congregation.
- Giving advice on religious education, worship, social responsibility, new member recruitment, inclusion, fellowship, and space.
- Asking questions that provide opportunities for New Congregation Committee members to look at how they unintentionally might be creating oppressive institutional structures.

Skills and Knowledge Needed

Some qualities that are important for the NCO are the following:

- A deep personal commitment to Unitarian Universalism and a concern for growth and knowledge of local, district, and Unitarian Universalist Association resources.
- Demonstrated competence in organizing.
- A democratic, consensus-building style of leadership that empowers members of a new congregation to take part in decisions.
- A willingness to commit to work with a new congregation for up to two years.
- A capacity for vision that projects into the future and copes effectively with nonvision elements.
- An ability to create an ownership of ministry, win the commitment of the people to the vision, and facilitate a process of congregational identity.
- A knowledge of antiracism, antioppression, and multiculturalism resources.

Planning Phase

1. Name a New Congregation Committee
2. Select the Target Area and Conduct a Feasibility Study
3. Prepare a Preliminary New Congregation Proposal
4. Name a New Congregation Organizer
- 5. Select and Prepare Covenant Congregations and Supporting Individuals**

Gathering Phase

Ministering Phase

5. Select and Prepare Covenant Congregations and Supporting Individuals

Covenant congregations agree to support or mentor the development and growth of a new congregation. If you are trying to establish a good-sized new church—one that will eventually become a mid-size church (150 to 550 members, according to the Unitarian Universalist Association)—consider securing several covenant congregations for support. It is strongly suggested that the sponsoring congregations affirm support for the new congregation at their own congregational meetings.

Here are some ways covenant congregations can support a new congregation:

Equipment for the Office

Loan, donate, or provide use of the following:

- An answering machine.
- A photocopier.
- A computer, fax, and laser printer.

Finances

- Handle the books for the Steering Committee until it has found someone with bookkeeping experience.
- Provide training and support for the treasurer.
- Provide training and support for the Finance Committee.
- Accept contributions using church tax-exempt status until the new congregation sets up its own status.
- Provide training and support to the Pledge or Canvass Committee.

Gathering

- Write the covenant congregations' members and friends who are in the area of the new congregation to inform them of the effort and of whom to contact if interested.
- Give the new congregation the names, addresses, and phone numbers of members and friends in the area.
- Give the new congregation the names, addresses and phone numbers of visitors to your congregation from their area during the last year and in each new quarter.
- Publicize their public meetings, and encourage members to use them as an opportunity to introduce friends to Unitarian Universalism.
- Publicize their other events, such as fund-raisers and their first weekly worship service.

Leadership

- Provide training for new members who are new to congregational governance.
- Provide training for committee chairs, board members, and so on.
- Provide training in antiracism, antioppression, and multiculturalism.

Music

- Provide music for one or more public meetings.
- Provide music for one or more worship services.
- Lend your church choir, a pianist, or both for a special event.
- Provide instrumental music.
- Donate or loan new hymnals.

Organization

- Appoint a representative to serve on the New Congregation Committee, if requested.
- Appoint a representative to serve on the steering committee if requested.
- Form a covenanting or sponsoring committee in the covenant congregation to coordinate and build support for the new congregation.

Pastoral Care

- Encourage the minister to provide for personal care needs of members of the Steering Committee (shared if there are several sponsoring congregations).
- Provide training support for the Ministerial Care Committee.

Publicity

- Help publicize public meetings.
- Provide technical assistance to the publicity working group.
- Include a monthly column in the newsletter updating members on the progress of the partner congregation and how the covenant congregation's support is making a difference in growing our faith.

Religious Education

- Provide religious education programming for children during one or more public meetings.
- Loan religious education materials and curriculum.
- Loan religious education teachers for the first several months of weekly services.
- Invite the new congregation's youth to participate in the covenant congregation's youth programming, where appropriate.

Social Justice

- Provide technical assistance to the social justice working group.
- Invite the new congregation's social justice working group to participate in the covenant congregation's efforts.
- Co-sponsor a social justice event in their area with the covenant congregation's handling the organizing and publicity.

Supplies

- Loan or give a chalice, banners, coffee urn, cups, sugar and creamer bowls, podium, collection baskets, staplers, file cabinets, desks, chairs, and so on.
- Provide a Web page.
- Provide a host for the new congregation's Web site.

Worship

- Encourage the covenant congregation's minister to lead one or several worship services.
- Encourage the minister to train or advise the worship working group.
- Provide lay leadership assistance to the worship working group.

Financial Support

- Establish the new congregation as a growth project for the covenant congregation.
- Establish a line in the budget, or a separate account, for the new congregation so that contributions will be tax-exempt until the new congregation gets its own tax-exempt status.
- Hold a fund-raiser, and contribute all or some of the proceeds.
- Make a generous contribution from the church budget.
- Make a contribution from the endowment or other financial source.
- Include support for the new congregation in a capital campaign.
- Balance the covenant congregation's financial losses. As some members of the covenant congregation join the new congregation, the remaining covenant congregation's members will cover the resulting amount of lost pledges.
- Hold a canvass that will benefit both the covenant church and the new church.
- Hold a special collection, and donate the proceeds to the new church.
- Loan money for a land purchase or new building.

→ Outreach to Potential Sponsoring Individuals

The NCComm can work with the district and neighboring congregations to identify Unitarian Universalists in the region who have a history of generosity and commitment to sharing our Unitarian Universalist faith. These individuals should be contacted to see if they are willing to explore a covenantal relationship with the new congregation. They should be given the opportunity to financially support this effort by becoming sponsoring individuals with a multiyear pledge. Often new congregations work closely with their district staff and national Unitarian Universalist campaign staff to develop and secure large gifts. The district's Chalice Lighters committee is another means of soliciting support. Additionally, NCComm members or the district executive can make individual calls to key people.

→ Things to Remember When Planning

An important rule in planning the new congregation is to *keep it simple*; it will get complex all by itself. Given the fact that most new congregation planners are volunteers, this rule has particular merit. Although we wish to have the most reasonable, scientific plan, the single most important step we take is being clear about what needs to be done and how to help get it done.

Now that you've read this far about planning a new congregation, here are some simplified suggestions, based on the experiences of persons who have gone through the training, returned home, and actually planned a new congregation:

- Keep people enthused and involved.
- Find appropriate resource people.
- Keep communications flowing within the committee to neighboring congregations, the district extension or growth committee, and the district executive.
- Try to maintain an atmosphere of objectivity and inclusiveness; some people already believe they know where the new congregation should be. The committee should seek to remain open to what the data reveal.
- Reams of data are not necessarily good; summarize information, and try to get it displayed in ways that others not involved in the process can readily understand.
- Keep lists of names of any persons encountered in the planning who might eventually join the new congregation. Turn the list over to the NCComm or new congregation organizer.



Gathering the Congregation

The gathering phase is a time for high energy and new ideas, but also for the realization that time is limited and that cooperation gets work done efficiently. The organizing committee should function as a team, share leadership, delegate tasks among members to ensure their support, and develop the well-thought-out plan.

At this time, the New Congregation Committee should be dissolved and a Steering Committee formed.

Planning Phase

Gathering Phase

6. Form a Steering Committee

7. Gather the People

8. Develop a Statement of Purpose and Programs

Ministering Phase

6. Form a Steering Committee

This group of people who form the Steering Committee should be the most enthusiastic people who are willing to complete some of the main tasks of the new congregation. The Steering Committee focuses on defining the mission of the congregation while coordinating tasks for religious education, space, finances, worship, youth and adult programs, membership, social justice, and so on. Suggested members are the chairperson, secretary, treasurer, and persons committed to the tasks. All Steering Committee members will become members of the new church. This group should be kept small to avoid early burnout and to encourage excellence in all they do.

Leadership is the most important factor in the survival of a new group, so it is important that the beginning leaders, particularly the chairperson, be selected with care. The person who volunteers to lead a group is not always the best leader. Therefore, if there is not one person who clearly should be chairperson, it is suggested that the meeting facilitation be rotated among the chairpersons of the various committees until a qualified leader emerges.

A great deal of the work of the Steering Committee will involve basic organizing tasks, such as seeking consensus, resolving conflicts,

brainstorming, maintaining records, and developing the framework for the first committees. Generally, the Steering Committee should serve until the election of a board and officers after the bylaws have been adopted, which usually takes six to twelve months. The Steering Committee members are not necessarily those who will be on the board when it is formed, although for continuity and historical memory, it may be desirable to have one or two Steering Committee members on the board.

Members of the Steering Committee should have the following qualities, skills and knowledge:

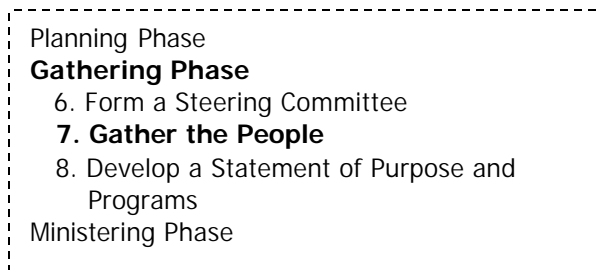
- Demonstrated competence in organizing.
- Democratic, consensus-building style of leadership that empowers members of a new congregation to take part in decisions.
- Ability to maximize existing skills and talents in a coordinated approach.
- Commitment to church growth that demonstrates the interaction among the spiritual life, the organizational infrastructure, and the relational growth within a congregation.
- Responsiveness to the surrounding community through organizing internal and external church resources to respond to community needs.
- Deep personal commitment to Unitarian Universalism and a concern for growth and knowledge of local, district, and Unitarian Universalist Association resources.
- Ability to relate to the unchurched, using a communication style that is easily understood by them, and able to move into the "personal space" of the unchurched without fear.

During the gathering phase, the Steering Committee functions as the board of trustees for the new congregation and has some organizational tasks that are unique to an emerging congregation:

- *Naming the congregation.* The committee sees that all members come to consensus and choose a name for the new group.
- *Securing tax-exempt status.* The emerging congregation should apply for tax-exempt status. Until it is granted, one of the sponsoring congregations can be asked to serve as fiscal agent for the new congregation.
- *Incorporating.* Incorporate as a nonprofit religious institution if the state allows this. This status removes liability from individuals and

puts it on the corporation. Check state and local laws pertaining to incorporation.

- *Making financial arrangements.* The emerging congregation will want to open a bank account and set up procedures for tracking money in accordance with good risk-management practices.
- *Stewardship.* A culture of generosity and self-sufficiency should be created from the start. The Steering Committee can model this behavior and create policies to encourage it.
- *Defining ministries/committees.* The program working groups (religious education, social justice, membership, finance, and so on) begin to function much as ministries or committees in an existing congregation. As mentioned earlier, when members and friends are aware of their own personal ministry—their own way to serve others with religious meaning—they will function better and longer in their roles.



7. Gather the People

The length of time between gathering the people and beginning weekly worship services will vary, but it will generally take *at least* one year. An intense effort to gather people prior to starting weekly worship is important because once the congregation's energy turns to creating weekly worship, attention and energy will be removed from gathering new people. Starting with plenty of people is important to the overall growth of the congregation. The larger the congregation, the more programs it will be able to offer; and the more programs offered, the more likely it will be that newcomers will find a program of interest.

➔ Preferences of Attendees

Wisdom gained from our Unitarian Universalist Association and from other denominations states that in the future, large congregations are going to be

the most popular size. Our society has become used to excellence in services, full-time paid professional staff, and variety in programming—and large churches, which have more resources than small ones, are better able to meet those needs.

Options are important to our members today, who sometimes behave more like “customers” of a church than like loyal supporters of the congregation. How many cable TV channels do we typically have at home? How many types of breakfast cereal are available on the grocery shelf? Members today desire variety and options in programming for themselves and their children.

Larger churches are positioned to retain members over time by being able to provide both excellence and variety in programming, as well as multiple staff members. Starting your church with the intent of becoming a larger church one day will help to

ensure adequate resources, both in people and money, to run the church. As you gather your initial members, it is highly recommended that you aim toward at least a mid-size congregation of at least 250 people. Become familiar with the multiple sizes of churches and their administrative cultures, and put systems in place now with growth in mind.

If your intent is to stay a small church, don't create a goal of producing multiple programs for your population. Instead, think of yourself as the niche market—the Italian deli on the corner that offers one service, one type of product for those attending. Trying to do more will cause burnout too quickly.

A major challenge during the gathering phase is to serve current people while continuing to hold events and programs to gather more people. You should continue to gather people until you have reached or surpassed the numerical goal set by the NCComm during start-up planning. That goal was based on the demographic assessment during the planning phase.

During the gathering phase, two important principles should be kept in mind:

- Newcomers are looking for a place where they feel at home and can participate freely—a sense of belonging.



- 86% visit for the first time because friends and family invite them.
- 14% attend for the first time because of organized outreach.
- 55% are from the same denomination, 42% from another denomination.

-Alban Institute, 2001

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- Newcomers are looking for a place where they feel a sense of identity—a place where people share certain basic intellectual and spiritual values.

The primary dynamic of the gathering stage is that of moving from a loosely knit, new group of persons into the beginnings of a new Unitarian Universalist congregation with a better sense of identity and a new sense of belonging. Meeting at least one night per month for several months, having potluck suppers, and discussing what is wanted from the congregation as it grows is very appropriate. Make your gatherings social gatherings so you can get to know one another better.

During the gathering phase, small group discussions should seek answers about whether and when to call a minister, the content for the religious education program, the eventual size of the church, and so on. Don't worry about worship services until a good, close core of people has been formed.

Reasons People Visit




- **52%** have recently moved.
- **38%** experienced a life crisis.
- **10%** have a new life partner.

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Gather through Small Groups and Whole-Congregation Events

Congregational development experts say that seekers (people visiting congregations looking for a religious community) are looking for intimacy and ultimacy." Small groups provide the opportunity for both. Many newcomers are seeking spirituality, connections, involvement, and community, and small groups provide opportunities for all these aspects. Small groups can include covenant groups (a useful resource on covenant groups—or small group ministry, as it is also known—is at www.uua.org/cde/sgm/index.html), affinity groups (men's groups, women's groups, young adult groups, and single parent groups), or program groups (religious education for children, youth, and adults and groups for worship, social action, choir, and pastoral care).

Begin creating an organizational culture of small groups. Successful large congregations pride themselves on having a small-congregation feel, often gained by having a variety of small groups for members and newcomers. As the church grows larger around them, they still have a small, intimate group that makes them feel at home.

The other challenge during the gathering stage is to provide opportunities for the gathered community to do things as a whole. Whole-congregation potluck

suppers and intergenerational events are two important ways to encourage relationships. These all-congregation events will give newcomers a sense of the whole community.

→ How to Attract Visitors

To attract visitors, first contact the most likely prospects, who could include members, friends, and visitors referred to the organizing congregation by neighboring Unitarian Universalist congregations. Host a reception for these people to present the preliminary new congregation proposal and ask for comments.

Contact individuals suggested by persons already involved in the new congregation, including people attending the reception mentioned above.

Hold meetings in homes of persons living in the area, and ask them to invite their friends and neighbors. Ask for suggestions in terms of how the new congregation could respond to community needs.

Participate in community events as an easy way to get exposure for the new congregation. Consider marching in community parades or renting a table at a community fair or flea market to provide information on the new congregation.

Next, concentrate on the ministry groups identified during the planning stage. A Responsive Program Planning Worksheet can be found in the Appendix. It will help you plan programs and activities to reach out to your particular ministry focus group. Depending on the ministry focus group and the members' creativity, the Steering Committee may organize adult education courses, lectures, a choir, or other approaches to publicize the new congregation to the ministry focus group.

Organize a team of folks to go door-to-door to get to know people and let them know about the new congregation. This is *not* an effort to convert people to Unitarian Universalism. The conversation could be as informal as the following:

"I am from the new Unitarian Universalist congregation being organized in the community. Are you involved in a religious community?"



How Often?

How often do people invite someone to attend their church?

1. Once every **6 months**
2. Once every **3 years**
3. Once every **11 years**
4. Once every **27 years** **

-Alban Institute, 2002

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If the person replies yes, say, "Great, and thank you." If the reply is no, say, "May I give you some information on the new Unitarian Universalist congregation that is being organized and invite you to (a public meeting, house meeting, first worship service, and so on). Thank you."

And, "I am from the new Unitarian Universalist congregation being organized. What do you think this community needs?" Hearing the same answers to this question repeatedly may point to community needs that frame the basis for the congregation's ultimate ministry to the community.

Direct mail can be effective if the mailing list is of good quality, which is related to the cost of the list and the quality of the publicity. A rule of thumb for direct marketing is that a customer must see the marketing five times before he or she will visit the church.

Use local media. Coverage in a local newspaper or on the radio is a great way to let people in the community know about the new congregation. News stories are better and have the advantage of being free. The challenge is building a long-term relationship with local media and keeping your congregation in their awareness by sending out regular press releases. For more information on this subject, see the "Unitarian Universalist Association Congregation Handbook," at www.uua.org/cde/handbook/conghand-17.html.

- Planning Phase
- Gathering Phase**
 - 6. Form a Steering Committee
 - 7. Gather the People
 - 8. **Develop a Statement of Purpose and Programs**
- Ministering Phase

8. Develop a Statement of Purpose and Programs

Strategically select programs to offer and individuals to lead the efforts. Religious education for adults and children is very important, as are membership programs. When starting a new congregation, don't try to develop too many small groups too quickly. Think "niche market," and seek to do one or two things well to prevent burnout of volunteers. Good ideas are plentiful, but volunteer time is limited.



During this period, the new congregation will be creating and then deepening its covenant; developing and strengthening its sense of mission; empowering people to commitment; and creating the programs of worship, religious education, fellowship, pastoral care, and social outreach.

Five-Year Strategic Plan

Once the congregation’s mission, shared ministry goals, and missional objectives have been established, developing a five-year comprehensive plan as the key element in the ministry infrastructure is recommended. A comprehensive plan includes the following:

1. Growth projections.
2. Programming themes.
3. Staffing needs to support growth projections and programming development.
4. Facilities requirements for programs and staff.
5. Financial projections for future funding needs.
 - a. Operating expenses.
 - b. Capital expenses.

Tasks and Timetable for Five-Year Strategic Plan:



At the end of each succeeding year, the new congregation members should review and revise the strategic plan as follows:

1. Evaluate the preceding year's work.
2. Examine the congregation's mission to see if it is still relevant.
3. Assess progress on shared ministry goals and mission objectives.
4. Update the remaining four years of the existing plan and add a new fifth year to the plan, again with input from the board, committees, and the congregation.
5. Present the updated plan to be ratified by the congregation.

In this way, the comprehensive plan reflects the current reality, supports the vision and mission, and remains useful in annual planning.

➔ Remember: Patience Is Important

Patience is a quality that is very important when forming a new congregation—patience in chartering, patience in hiring staff, patience in securing your first permanent building, and so on. Remember that critical steps taken too soon can form who the congregation will be for years to come. Congregations that wait until they are made up of over a hundred people at the first worship service start a culture of a mid-size congregation. Similarly, many young churches have purchased a building early on, only to have realized that it was already too small when they moved in. This mistake limits future growth.



The Ministering Congregation

The task in the making is to foster and develop a ministering congregation. This is a congregation that has a communal sense of call and knows the community that it is aiming to serve. It provides programs and processes to engage its membership in this shared ministry.

Healthy congregations have found that reaching out with ministries of service and invitation tends to enlarge the heart of the congregation. Outward-focused churches demonstrate the following:

- They have the fullest internal life, as measured by the richness and variety of programs and ministries.
- They have the fewest financial difficulties.
- They are most likely to grow in membership numbers.

Conversely, limiting concern and service to current members ultimately limits the congregation's internal life.

In vital, growing congregations, members act from a sense of personal ministry and contribute their unique talents and gifts for the betterment of others, both inside and outside the congregation. Members work in shared ministry, in community with other members.

A ministering congregation



- Is mission focused.
- Is committed to the spiritual growth and development of its membership and the congregation.
- Knows its surrounding community and is responsive to the community's needs for ministry.
- Has internal ministry groups that are a source of pastoral care, religious education, membership and ministry discernment, and leadership development.

For more information on helping others develop their personal ministry, see the portions of the Appendix entitled "Exercise: Defining Your Personal Ministry," "Responsive Program Planning," and "Questions for Defining Your Congregation's Ministry Area."

Planning Phase
Gathering Phase

Ministering Phase

9. Hold the First Public Sunday Program

- 10. Build the Foundations
- 11. Become a Member Congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Association

9. Hold the First Public Sunday Program

The first public Sunday program shows that the new congregation has entered a new stage of development. It is ready to announce to the world that it exists and is ready to receive new members.

The public service should be planned well in advance by the Steering Committee and others. Inviting a Unitarian Universalist minister from a nearby congregation to give the sermon will be educational and spiritual, and also will provide a link to the wider denomination. The service should have music, readings, and all the other features typical of a Unitarian Universalist service. The focus should be on Unitarian Universalism and the mood celebratory.

Organizers should place special emphasis on promoting the worship service through every available means and media: posters; letters; news stories; public service announcements; telephoning; and special invitations to civic, religious, and community leaders. Generally, the first public service is held in a public facility such as a high school auditorium. Cards asking if people wish to receive more information about the congregation should be prominently placed.

Planning Phase
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9. Hold the First Public Sunday Program
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Universalist Association

10. Build the Foundations

Beginning Weekly Worship Services

When the new congregation begins holding weekly services on Sunday morning (people *expect* to have church on Sunday morning), many services will be led by laypersons. It is important to have a standard sequence for the service and to teach others how to write and deliver sermons. If you don't have a pianist to accompany the singing of hymns, get a CD player and play choir songs aloud to accompany people. The critical thing to remember as the new congregation starts weekly worship services and religious education is that quality in everything is very important.

The Unitarian Universalist Association's Church of the Larger Fellowship has worship services and materials for delivery at new churches. Also, inviting visiting Unitarian Universalist ministers and seminary students to lead services will help people learn how much a minister will bring to the congregation. Funds should be designated to pay as many guest ministers as possible.

Charter Sunday

Typically, several months after the first public Sunday program, the congregation will decide upon its name and draft and adopt the mission and covenant. The name and covenant are then put into a charter, which may be in a specially designed book for individuals who wish to become charter members by signing their names. On Charter Sunday, when the charter is first opened for signatures, a ritual of signing should be incorporated into the program. To be as inclusive as possible, the charter membership book should be open to additions until the time of applying for affiliation.

Some new congregations have combined their first public Sunday program with Charter Sunday and had the charter available. However, in most cases, Charter Sunday should be delayed until after the first public Sunday program, when more people will be attending.

Charter Sunday is another celebratory event in the life of the new church. Invite your district executive, district extension or growth committee members, and district board members to attend. Celebrate your success; you've achieved one important milestone.

First Annual Meeting

Several important one-time-only events occur at the first annual meeting. The congregation adopts its bylaws, which become the foundation for its democratic governance. This meeting is also the point at which the Steering Committee is formally replaced by a board of trustees elected by the members of the new congregation. The annual meeting preparations need to start at least four months in advance and should include plans for the coming year, such as the selection of a new Nominating Committee.

Planning Phase
 Gathering Phase
Ministering Phase
 9. Hold the First Public Sunday Program
 10. Build the Foundations
**11. Become a Member Congregation of the
 Unitarian Universalist Association**

11. Become a Member Congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Association

The sequence of events relating to institutionalizing the new congregation and becoming a member congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Association will vary with each new congregation. During this time, the new congregation should be establishing a public relations program, leadership training, and a financial base, as well as securing appropriate physical space. Once the new congregation has matured and developed bylaws, it should seek to be a member congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Association. The following documents are needed to accomplish the affiliation:

- Application from the congregation.
- The congregation's bylaws.
- Check to the Unitarian Universalist Association for the Annual Program Fund.
- Recommendation from a nearby minister.
- Recommendation from the district trustee.
- List of charter members.
- Articles of incorporation.
- Recommendation from the district executive.
- Recommendation from the district president.

See the document "Congregational Membership in the Unitarian Universalist Association," by the Congregational Services staff group, for the necessary forms, sample bylaws, and other materials, at www.uua.org/cde/education/affiliatingyourcong.pdf.

In Summary: Pervasive Qualities of a Healthy, Growing New Congregation

- **Vibrant.** They are excited about living a religious life.
- **Entrepreneurial.** They reach beyond their comfort zone.
- **Unafraid** of being vulnerable, of making mistakes.
- **Unique communities.** They have a unique culture to offer to others.
- **Clear in their vision** that they want to be a powerful new Unitarian Universalist community.
- **Partners** with other churches, interest groups, and government.
- **Enthusiastic leaders.** Lay leaders are committed people with the goal of having a strong new congregation.
- **Big-picture thinkers.** People seem able to move beyond their self needs and put priority on the needs of the new community.
- **Dividing** to grow. Small groups begin to emerge to meet different needs. The congregation divides into special groups and programs.
- **Visible.** The new congregation is involved in community projects and publicizes its existence continually.
- **Focused.** Initial energies are focused in a few areas:
 - Quality worship.
 - Religious education for children and adults.
 - A smooth, effective organizational structure that encourages follow-up, evaluation, and teamwork.
 - Stewardship for openly raising the issue of needing money.
 - Support and encouragement for volunteers.
 - Positive attitude toward having a minister and other paid staff.

Exercise: Defining Your Personal Ministry

Each one of us possesses unique gifts and interests. Individuals and congregations blossom as more people are empowered to discover and share their gifts and to live out their callings in the world.

1. Think of ten talents and gifts you possess that are the essence of who you are. Write them below (*for example, leadership abilities, sense of humor, abundant energy*).

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2. *Out of this list, select the two items of which you are most proud. Circle these two items above.*

3. Think of the ten things you do best, and write your verbs below (*for example, support others, motivate, build, encourage, lead*).

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

4. *Out of this list, select two that represent what you do best of all. Circle these two items above.*

5. At the top of the next column, write your vision of the perfect world in a sentence (*for example, A place where people respect one another and bring out the best in one another*).

My idea of a perfect world is a place where . . .

6. Combine all your responses so far to write your personal ministry statement. Combine the two talents or gifts you are most proud of [nouns] with
? two things you do best [verbs] and
? your vision of the perfect world.

Example: My personal ministry is to use my leadership abilities and my sense of humor to support and motivate people to respect one another and bring out the best in one another.

Share your personal ministries with one another.

Questions for Reflection

1. What surprised me about this exercise was . . .
2. Currently, how am I living my personal ministry in my congregation and in my life?
3. What actions and/or changes might be required to bring my personal ministry more to life?
4. In reading and hearing the ministry statements of others, I was . . .
5. How does my congregation invite, equip, or support people to discover and share their personal ministry?
6. What actions might be required to help people bring their personal ministries more to life?
7. Among the actions and/or changes that might be required to bring my personal ministry or the personal ministries of others in the congregation more to life, I will circle the three things above that I am most committed to doing in the next year.

How to Use This Tool

This tool is great for use at retreats, board meetings, New UU classes, congregational workshops, and so forth. You may choose to invite participants to write their final statement on a card and display the cards on a poster for all to read, include some of the statements in your congregational newsletter, or read them aloud in a Sunday service. Experiment! This tool ideally leads to a deeper conversation about how one's personal ministry statement is or is not congruent with one's life and to helping one another discover ways to live out our ministry more fully in our lives (at home, church, work, and everywhere).

Responsive Program Planning

Adapted from Gustave Rath et al., Marketing for Congregations.

To further a sense of outward orientation in a Unitarian Universalist congregation, we need to begin to reorient our programs to meet the needs of both the current gathered congregation and specific groups that have the potential to be a ministry focus group for our congregation.

Important Steps to Responsive Programming

1. Determine the ministry focus group to be served.
2. Improve services and ministries to this group.
3. Intentionally reach out to members of this ministry focus group in the wider community.

A Congregational Process for Responsive Programming

On the next page is a more detailed, five-step process designed for use by a planning group or council within the congregation. This group might include members from the board, adult religious education, children's religious education, the Membership Committee, the Growth Team, and the church council.

Whom you invite should be determined, in part, by who has an understanding of the ministry focus group. It should not be limited to these people, though, because you wish to have this ministry owned by the congregation. For example, if your ministry focus group is parents of youth aged twelve to fifteen, you may want to include some parents from this group, the religious education director, some parents who have gone through this phase, social workers, and potential leaders.

Exercise: 5 Steps to Responsive Program Planning

Adapted from Gustave Rath et al., Marketing for Congregations.

Step 1: Identify the Ministry Focus Group				
Step 2: Identify the Needs of People in the Ministry Focus Group What needs (for example, spiritual, personal, and social) do you aim to have your ministries/programs satisfy? If the planning group members are not themselves members of the ministry focus group, invite people to put themselves in the shoes of someone in the ministry focus group.		Step 3: Identify the Ultimate Aim What is the ultimate aim of your ministry to this ministry focus group? Why, as a Unitarian Universalist congregation, do you feel led in ministry to this group? Link to our mission, vision, principles, and theology.		
Step 4: Develop Your Program-as-Outreach Plan				
PROGRAM: Define the program or ministry that your church will offer this group.	PRICE: Determine the costs (in time, commitment, and finances) to those <i>offering</i> and those <i>using</i> this ministry.	PERSONNEL: Who will lead the program? How will they be chosen, trained, and supported?	PLACE: Where will you offer this ministry? How does the space need to be set up?	PROMOTION: How will you make the ministry focus group aware of this program?
Step 5: Implement and Evaluate Your Plan				
Go to it! Tweak and revise your plan as required. Identify goals to measure success.				
Goal 1	Goal 2	Goal 3	Goal 4	Goal 5

Questions for Defining Your Congregation's Ministry Area

1. Are there any culturally distinct groups within your ministry area? If so, who are they, and what are some of their distinct characteristics?
2. Have there been changes in the social, economic, or racial/ethnic makeup in the past five years? Describe these changes. How has this change affected your community?
3. What are the needs of people in your community?
4. Based on what you have discovered about your community, what opportunities exist or will develop in the next five years?
5. What possible threats to your church's ministry may develop in the next five years?

Outline for Writing a New Congregation Proposal

The following is an outline for a written proposal for your new congregation. Think through each section. Create a written description for each item, and compile your answers in the following order.

1. Why start a new church?
 - a. State your calling.
 - b. State your vision (briefly).
 - c. State the reasons for church planting.
 - d. Demonstrate the need for new churches.
2. Where do you want to start this new congregation?
 - a. Describe the community in its physical terms.
 - b. Describe access to the community and, specifically, where you might hold weekly worship.
3. Who is your ministry focus group?
 - a. Describe your ministry focus group.
 - b. Describe the community needs.
 - c. Include appropriate demographics.
 - d. Describe the proposed location.
4. What kind of church are you trying to plant?
 - a. State your core values.
 - b. State and expand your mission statement.
 - c. Describe your church's ministry style.
 - d. Define your ministry model.
 - e. Draw your ministry flow chart.
5. With whom will you plant this church?
 - a. Describe your ideal launch team.
 - b. Include a profile of any confirmed ministry partners.
 - c. Define the specific roles you expect to fill.
 - d. List the team members you will need.
6. How and when will you plant this church?
 - a. Include a detailed strategic plan.
 - b. Include a detailed time line for the first eighteen to thirty-six months.
 - c. Include a detailed explanation of how you will gather your core group.
7. How much will it cost?
 - a. Include a start-up budget.
 - b. Include a cash flow analysis.
 - c. Define your funding strategy.
8. How can one be involved?
 - a. Volunteer needs.
 - b. Potential contacts.
 - c. Equipment needs.
 - d. Financial needs.