

An Invitation to Growth:  
Building Our Churches Through  
Reaching Out



# Context and Theology

- *It is the understanding of this presentation that Unitarian Universalism is a saving faith. Based on my own experience and the experience of people I have met, our church can bring hope, community, meaning and joy into people's lives.*
- *It is the understanding of this presentation that the values of Unitarian Universalism are important and relevant, and that the more Unitarian Universalists we have in the world, the better off the world will be as a whole.*
- *It is the understanding of this presentation that growth is a goal of our church, theologically and morally, and that our churches that are constantly growing come from a strong place of health and faith.*
- *Unitarian Universalism is my strength, my faith, and that which grounds me in all that I do. I believe that we need to share what we have.*



The Recent Story of  
The First Parish Church in Taunton

*From March 2012-March 2017*

March, 2012:

Average Sunday attendance: Between 5 and 15

Total membership: 18

Total yearly income: Approximately \$6,300

Ministries beyond Sunday morning: None

March, 2017:

Average Sunday attendance: Between 55-65

Total membership: 102

Total yearly income: Approximately \$115,000

Ministries beyond Sunday morning: Matthew Mission: Warming Center and case management; collaborative youth group; Book Group; TED Talks; Forest of Light; Auction; one-off activities like Providence Gay Men's Chorus Concert and the Homeless, Opiate and Mental Health Symposium.

The church, originally founded in 1637, was financially sustained by the endowment, which was rapidly depleting. They were at a crossroads in March of 2012, and made the internal decision to do something different. They hired Rev. Christana Wille McKnight, and intentionally moved from an attraction model to an invitational model.

Some of the first changes that we made were to make the building more intentionally welcoming, find ways to incorporate kids into everything that we did, and dream big for the future.

This video was made in 2013, and highlighted some of our initial changes and developments.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxO0uZjGbHw>

# Attractional VS Invitational

## ◆ Attractional Model

“We sit and wait for them to find us and join what we already have. We will make ourselves attractive to people who might be coming by. They will become part of us.”



◆ Invitational Model:

“We will go out to the people and invite them to come to church. We will intentionally raise our voices as a part of this community. When new people come, we will be changed by their visions.”



# A Brief Word About Change.....

- ◆ Naturally, when speaking of how the church is changed by people's visions, I am not speaking of changing the mission and vision of your congregation. That is the basis on which we gather, and is the most important part of religious life.
- ◆ What I am speaking about is how to live out that vision; perhaps there is less interest today in a Men's Breakfast and more in an Opiate Task Force. Perhaps there is less interest in your community in the Garden Club and more interest in working intentionally with the LGBTQ community. We must be open to who we have been, and also who we are becoming.

**A Common Reaction When  
We Start Talking about the  
Invitational Culture:**

*“What do you mean, start inviting people to church? I don’t want to become one of those creepy church people! How is that even possible?! Do you want me to be a Jehovah’s Witness and go door to door? That sounds terrible!”*

# Invitation is not about cold calling. It is about NETWORKING

- ◆ All of us talk to people in all parts of our lives. We talk about our families, our careers, our politics and our values. Why would we not talk about our faith?
- ◆ And if we value our faith and find it to be worthy in our lives, why would we not share it?



So where do I go to have these conversations? Who do I talk with to network about church?

*Anywhere that you are. You can go to places intentionally, or you can talk to the people already in your existing networks.*

*Here are some places I and our members have gone, and where some of our new members have come from.....*

The logo features a light blue silhouette of the state of Massachusetts in the background. Overlaid on this is a white, torn-edge rectangular banner. The text 'Massachusetts' is written in a large, blue, serif font at the top of the banner. Below it, 'Chamber of Commerce' is written in a smaller, red, serif font. At the bottom right of the banner, the word 'Directory' is written in a red, cursive script font.

# Massachusetts Chamber of Commerce Directory

## Chamber of Commerce After Hours

*It's appetizers, it's close to your church, and it's under \$10. What's not to love?*



## Your local Farmers Market

*Two of our members were invited by one of our members who purchases meat from their farm. They got into a conversation about the values of environmental stewardship and there you are.*



Your child or grandchild's sporting event

*You're trapped on the sidelines for however long the practice or game is.*

*Why not take advantage of it?*

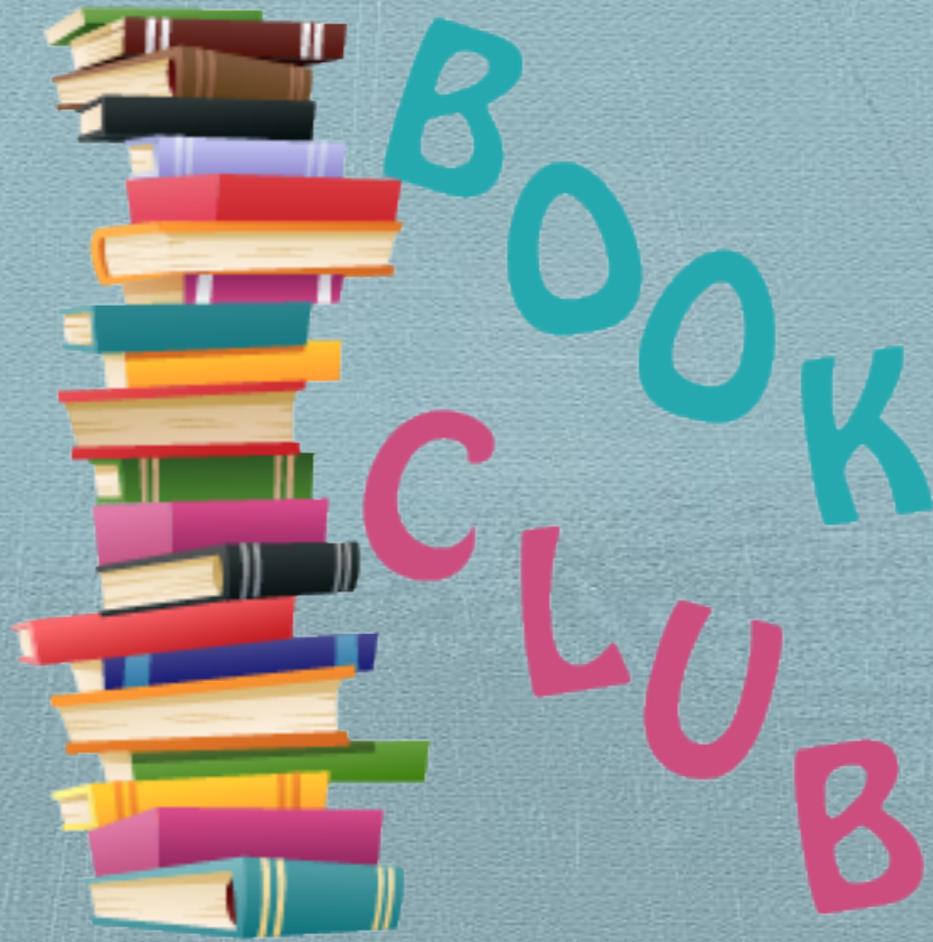


# WOMEN'S MARCH

— ON WASHINGTON —

## Political events and / or causes

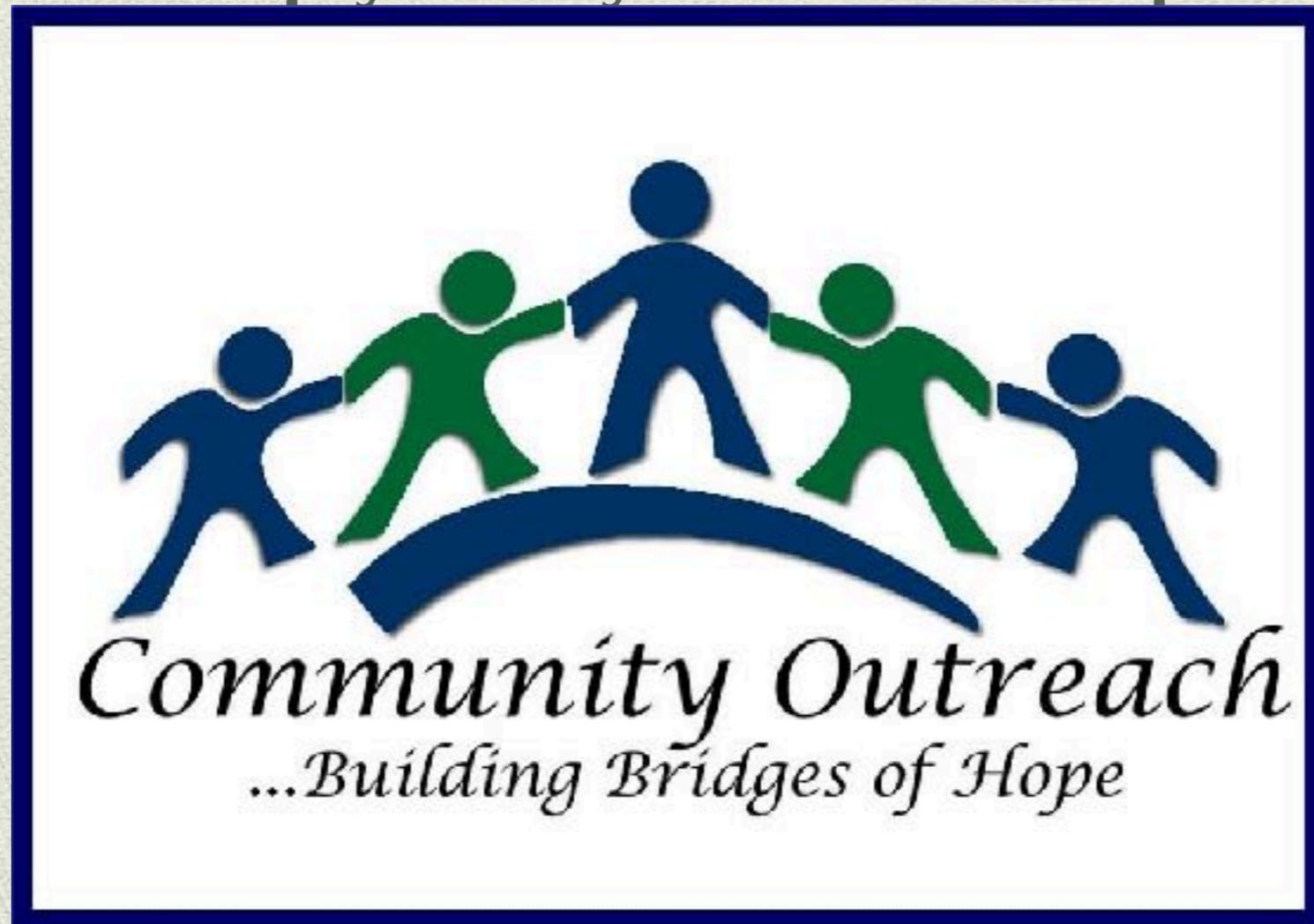
*One of our newer members organized a bus to Washington D.C. with me and some of our community, and connected with us through the Women's March SE MA Chapter. She has now joined the church, is doing a project with her students on the history of First Parish, and her children (ages 3 and 6) sing in the chorus.*



Any group or hobby you enjoy;  
anything that is part of your life!

How else do you invite besides direct networking?

Keep your eyes and ears open



How the Matthew Mission came to be

# Use All Available Resources

- ◆ Facebook
- ◆ The local paper
- ◆ Community calendars
- ◆ Clergy Networks
- ◆ Local library
- ◆ Community Bulletin Boards



*Back to theology:*

*We network and focus on growth  
because we believe in the saving  
faith of Unitarian Universalism,  
and that the world needs us now  
more than ever.*

Break

So once you get them in the  
door.....

*Then what?*

# Welcome, Welcome, Welcome

- ◆ Intentional welcome has been very important for our growth. According to our aggregate statistics over the past three years, we have an average retention rate of first-time visitors of approximately 45%.
- ◆ I am told that the average retention rate for our congregations is between 5% and 10%.

Part of how we have achieved this rate is through a warm welcome and inclusiveness

- ◆ Have a greeter at the door, warmly welcoming and handing out bulletins (if you use them).
- ◆ Never use insider language in any part of the service without clear explanations.
- ◆ Have people warmly greet others during Hands of Fellowship (if you have it) and delegate people to speak to new folks no matter what.
- ◆ Always have someone “lifeboat” a first-time guest to coffee hour.

# After the service.....

- ◆ Follow up any contact card with adding them to the Weekly Update email list.
- ◆ Send out a handwritten card to their home, thanking them for joining us and inviting them back.
- ◆ Encourage anyone who spoke with them during their visit (or the person who brought them) to follow up 1-2 weeks later either in person or virtually.

# Becoming a Member

- ◆ Make the barriers to membership low. We offer a “First Steps” Class where people can sign the book at least once every six weeks, and where they learn about what it means to be a part of our community.
- ◆ Make the connection high. We offer a six-week “Roots” class that all people are invited to take part in after joining that talks about what it means to be UU.
- ◆ Meet with all new members at least once in a 1:1 to find out their gifts, interests and talents.

# Engaging new members: Structure and Process

# How to engage new members: Croquet vs. Basketball

- ◆ Know that ministry is more important than structure.
- ◆ Give them a voice.
- ◆ Invite them to follow their passions.



## Croquet:

*Slow moving, clearly defined structure, every person has their own ball, you must get through each hoop to get to the end. There is, by in large, one right way to go.*



## Basketball:

*Fast-paced, one shared object that gets passed from person to person. Ball must remain in constant motion for the game to be played. Lots of surprises, and every person has a role.*

# Process is rooted in Mission

- ◆ At First Parish Church in Taunton, our mission is to inspire spiritual growth, connect with one another and serve the wider community with love. Inspire, Connect, Serve. Everything that we do must come under one or more of these missions. People use their gifts to these ends, but begin with their own passions.

# Ministry in Action: The Halloween Party

- ◆ One of our members, Lindi, loves Halloween. She asked if she could do a Haunted House for the church. She got the materials donated through Wal-Mart and she and her friends decorated the church. Several people came through, but not as many as hoped.
- ◆ It was a lot of work, and the next year, she wanted to make it simpler, so she adapted it to be a Halloween Party. Now we have a movie showing, we make a Facebook event, invite the church and share it over our networks. It has brought us in several new families in the past year, and the kids look forward to it every year.





The question we try to work is not “How can you help us?”

*But rather, “How can we help you follow your interests, love and passions in the world that will help all of us and Unitarian Universalism?”*

# Some F.A.Q.'s about how this model has impacted how church work is done.

- ◆ We have three standing committees; Membership, Finance and the Board of Trustees. Membership and Finance meet quarterly, Board of Trustees meets monthly.
- ◆ All other ministry groups are run by either the staff or by task forces that meet for a period of time until their task is completed and then disband. The groups largely communicate on Slack or via email, and with the occasional meeting after church.

- ◆ We are staffed at what appears to be average for a 100 member church; minister is full time, administrator is 18 hours / week, sexton, DRE and Music Director are all 10 hours / week.
- ◆ I generally work 40 hours / week, and am away from my house 1-2 evenings per month for work-related meetings. If I am running a Roots class, I am away from the house for six weeks of the evening classes. We have a lot of activities on Sundays, and the building is generally empty by about 1 pm (worship starts at 10 am).
- ◆ The average age of the congregation, roughly calculated by our membership team, is 41 years old. 80% have joined the church in the last four years, and of our 10 highest pledgers, 3 of them have been in the church longer than 5 years. The average pledge of the church is \$1,283 currently.
- ◆ R.E. attendance varies a lot depending on what is going on, but we generally have between 10-15 kids under the age of 12. Kids older than 12 generally stay in the service and often participate in worship. There is an intentional area for kids in every room of the church.