

WELCOMING THE STRANGER

Embracing a Congregational Culture of Welcome

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Welcoming as a Spiritual Practice

“This is not a matter of good manners. I am not talking about being polite. I am talking about true religious hospitality. I am talking about being truly, honestly, welcoming. I am talking about realizing that each visitor is a vulnerable human being who is reaching out. True hospitality is a spiritual practice. It comes from deep inside. Religious hospitality is more than being superficially friendly. Religious hospitality involves being open to the dreams and the pain of each visitor. Religious hospitality means offering the newcomer the real human connection he or she is seeking.

For you and me to ignore a visitor is the moral equivalent of not feeding the hungry and not housing the homeless. Every Sunday hundreds and thousands come to us seeking a spiritual home.....”

-Peter Morales from *Feed the Spiritually Hungry, House the Religiously Homeless*
Keynote, 2007 PCD Annual Conference

Why do people come to us?

Life Transition

Crisis

Religious Education for children

Social Isolation

Seeking like minded individuals

Missing a sense of the of spiritual

Other.....

Transformative Power of a UU Welcome

Welcoming as.....

A living example of the inherent worth and dignity of all

A step towards creating a world in which all are treated with justice, equality, and compassion

A concrete way to be the change we seek

What does a good welcoming program look like?

Consider....

- Someone outside to open door
- The Minister and/or Board Rep at entrance
- Designated RE Greeter to answer questions or give tours
- A Youth Greeter
- A designated Welcome Buddy in each RE class
- Greeters serving multiple weeks in a row
- Special colored cups for “friendly faces”, not for visitors
- Do not ask visitors to stand and introduce themselves in service
- Do not have sign in book but rather gather contact info

The Welcome

- The most important element is authenticity
- Start by centering yourself- take a deep breath
- Make eye contact
- Smile
- Say hello
- Introduce yourself
- Offer your hand and ask their name
- Bend down and meet the little ones
- Evaluate their reaction to the welcome.....

But then what.....

- Things to say or do:
 - I don't believe we have met, rather than are you new.....
 - I am so glad you found us
 - It is good to see you today
 - Tell them what you love about your congregation
 - Give them your elevator speech
 - Invite them to consider attending a visitor friendly event
 - Introduce them to someone else
 - Make them a name tag
 - Give them a visitor packet
 - Help them find a place to sit
 - Offer to give them a tour of the building
 - If they have children, offer to find someone from RE Program to talk to
 - Find them after service to check in
 - Ask them to complete a connection card after service (not before)
 - Thank them for coming
 - Tell them you hope to see them again
 - Tell them hello if you do see them again

Good Questions to Ask

- ▣ What brought you to service today?
- ▣ Have you been to a UU church before?
- ▣ Is this your first visit with us?
- ▣ How did you find us?
- ▣ Do you have any questions about the church?

One Example of a Visitor Process

- Welcome letter from the Minister
- Welcome phone call from a member
- Invited to attend First Steps Class (Monthly)
- Invited to Get Acquainted Gathering (2x Year)
- Invited to Pathways to Membership Class
- Invited to Face2Face Gatherings
- Receive a electronic visitor survey at 3 months
- Receive an anniversary phone call at 1 year

Name Tags



- 1st visit-sticker
name tag
- When they complete
Connection Card-
transitional name tag
- Members- hard plastic
name tag with year of
membership

Welcome Packets



Director of Congregational Life business card

Membership Brochure

UUA Elevator Speeches Brochure

UUA FAQ Brochure

Seven Principles Bookmark

Basic UU sermon

Copy of UU world

Parking information

Religious Education booklet (Children and Adults)

Small Group Ministry brochure

Social Justice brochure

Unity Circle brochure

Pass for free dinner at Wednesday night Programming

Connection Card

PLEASE PRINT LEGIBLY

Date _____

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City, state, zip _____

Home _____

Work _____

Cell #s _____

Email _____

Please check box if change in information

I would like a name tag

Children's names _____

1st time visitor visitor

pledging friend member

How did you learn about our church?

Help us connect...

- Small Group Ministry Hospitality Ministry
- Caring Ministry (*please circle choice*) need help give help
- Choir (*please circle choice*) children adults bell
- I would like to receive the weekly email.
- I would like to start receiving the weekly children's Religious Education email.
- Young Adult Group (ages 18-35)
- Becoming a member
- Other _____

Any Comments/Concerns?

_____ ***Please put completed card in the basket as you exit the Auditorium or turn in at Visitor's Table in Gathering Space.***

Thank You!

First Unitarian Church of Des Moines

Welcome during the service

Good morning and Welcome to the First Unitarian Church of Des Moines. My name is _____. I am a member of this church and serve _____. I welcome all of you to church this morning, whether this is your first time here or this is a familiar place for you.

I would like to take a moment and offer a special welcome to those who are visiting here today.

I would like to direct your attention to the Connections Cards found in the Order of Service (show sample card). We encourage all of our visitors to complete one, as well as our members and friends who have had a change of information or would like to be connected to one of our many programs

There is a time for Refreshments & Conversation immediately following the service in the Gathering Area between the Lobby and Channing Hall. You are invited to join us.

If you have questions, or would like more information about this Church, please stop by the welcome table located in the Lobby where someone will be available to help you and provide you information on the abundant opportunities to engage in this community.

I'm delighted you are here today and that we could be together.

Welcome Phone call

The goal of the visitor phone call is:

- To make guest feel attended to and welcome.
- To solicit information about the guest: how and why they found First Unitarian, how they feel about their visit, whether or not they might come back.
- To offer information to the guest: brief information regarding specific areas of interest, how they might pursue them, and responses to questions.
- To invite them back for specific events: events you might know of that are coming up soon and would be of interest to visitors in general or to them specifically based on something you have learned of them. Let them know about SGM: Small Group Ministry if they seem to have a serious interest.
- To record information received and given during the call, for use with future follow up.

Calls should be brief and conducted in the callers own style, without seeming to read a script. Proving an authentic experience is the most important thing you can do. Follow the guest lead as far as how long the call should last or how detailed the conversation should be. Be sure to leave your name and number in case they want to call you back. Take notes and record the information on this form immediately afterwards. Return to Lori the next time you are at church.

- 1.) Introduce yourself; ask them if you have called at a good time. If not, offer to try back at a time they suggest. Let them know you are calling from the First Unitarian Church to see if they enjoyed their visit, and wonder if they might share their impressions? It is also important to ask if they have any questions, or would like more information about our church.
- 2.) Information to solicit:
 - a.) How did they hear about us?
 - b.) Was this their first time to First Unitarian or a UU church?
 - c.) Are there any questions they have or any programs they would like to learn more about?
- 3.) Thank them for their time and invite them to return either to Sunday service or another program you know of that might interest them.

First Steps Class

Opening Words:

Read Global End and Church End Statements

Sharing Circle: What path (spiritual or otherwise) has brought you here?

How we work towards our ends:

Liberal Religious Experience:

- ▣ Soul Matters
- ▣ Religious Education: Children's classes

Creative Interchange and Community:

- ▣ Caring Communities
- ▣ Hospitality Ministry
- ▣ Face2Face meetings
- ▣ Silver and Gold Supers
- ▣ Wednesday Night Programming
- ▣ Musical Opportunities-
- ▣ Affinity groups
- ▣ Church Structure- Board

Social Justice:

- ▣ Intro to Social Justice Programs belong to/ support
- ▣ UUSC
- ▣ AMOS
- ▣ Second Basket Recipients
- ▣ IUUWAN
- ▣ Interfaith Alliance

How we connect with the larger UU Faith:

- ▣ Mid America Region
- ▣ UUA

How to learn more:

- ▣ Weekly E-mails
- ▣ Web-site
- ▣ Pathways Class Next one held....

3 month Visitor Survey

Opening Statement

1.) How did you hear about us?

Internet search, Friends/Family, Another UU congregation, Other:

2.) How many times have you visited?

Just once, Twice, Three times, Four or more times

3.) Are you still attending services/activities at church?

Yes

No If No, 1.) Are you willing to share why we are not a good fit for you?

2.) Is there something we could have done to make your experience more positive?

4.) Are you attending or planning to attend the First Steps or Pathways class?

Yes No

5.) Have you become involved in any church groups/ programs?

Yes If so, may we ask which ones? No

6.) Do you feel knowledgeable about the Religious Education programming available for children and adults?

Yes No

7.) Do your children feel welcome to participate in Religious Education?

Yes No (If no, can you tell us more?)

8.) How many people from church do you feel you have made a connection with?

0-3, 4-6, 7+

9.) What can we do to help you feel more connected?

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey. Your answers help make First Unitarian a stronger community for you! If you have any questions about opportunities at First Unitarian Church, or becoming a member, please contact xxx. Please feel free to leave any additional comments in the space below:

Friendly Faces

Coffee hour can be a make or break experience for your visitors...do you have individuals ready and able to truly invite them into community?

Face2Face Lunches

Quarterly lunches with an opportunity for Creative Interchange 20 minutes at a time.

Use the Resources Available to You!

- ❑ Unitarian Universalist Association of Membership Professionals (UUAMP) uuamp.org
- ❑ Sign up for the UUA Membership list serve
- ❑ Check out the Facebook Growth Lab
- ❑ Visit other churches, UU and **non-UU**, to see what they do well that your congregation can emulate.
- ❑ Contact other UU congregations. Staff member and lay leaders are often very willing to share ideas and resources.
- ❑ Utilize the Regional staff.
- ❑ **Consider on going consulting relationship with me ;-)**