

Membership

From Visitor to Member

THE CHALLENGE Collectively we see more visitors per year than we have members in our congregations. People clearly are interested in what we have to offer. Our challenge is not marketing, but welcoming visitors into our lives.

PRE-QUALIFIED Before visiting many people will have talked to friends, explored your website and researched Unitarian Universalism. In a sense they are pre-qualified for membership.

SHORTER TIMELINE Coming pre-qualified means the membership process is much faster today than in years past.

KNOW THE STEPS To welcome people successfully into our congregations, we need to understand their needs as they move from visitors to members. We can focus on four distinct steps – first visit, second visit, becoming a regular and ultimately, a member.

Best Practices

First Visit Follow-Up

RETIRE YOUR GUEST BOOK In order to follow-up after a first visit you need names and email addresses. Guest books are not designed to capture this information well. Place a friendly human being with cards and clipboards between the front door and the pews. These can be taken and completed leisurely during the worship service.



MONDAY EMAIL A great default follow up strategy is a Monday afternoon email. Make sure this includes a personal message – no form letters. Follow with suggestions, still personal in tone, for opportunities to start connecting with the community.

DESIGN EXPERIENCES We know the next step after a first visit is connecting with others. Design and schedule connecting experiences with newcomers in mind.

Look at the calendar. What events are both newcomer friendly and have opportunities for conversation?



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"People aren't looking for a friendly church, they're looking for friends!"

FIRST VISIT Visitors want to get to their seat without difficulty. Strive to eliminate the awkward moments. Classic points of difficulty include parking, entering the proper door, finding the restrooms, and dropping off children. An anxiety free pre-service experience (and worship service that meets expectations) leads to a second visit.

SECOND VISIT The next visit is different and more difficult. When visitors return they are ready to start connecting. Most need assistance finding opportunities that will lead to new friendships. Established members often don't realize how challenging this is. You have a limited amount of time to help newcomers form relationships and build the sense of belonging that lead to becoming a regular attender.

REGULARS As people become regulars, help them find meaningful opportunities to contribute to the work and ministry of the congregation. Participation cultivates

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- Ministers
- Membership Leaders
- Administrative Staff

a sense of ownership and responsibility for the congregation and leads to an interest in membership.

There is no set timeline for developing this sense of ownership, though without some assistance it is possible it won't happen. People can linger on the periphery of your congregation for years waiting for help taking the next step.

MEMBERSHIP PROCESS For visitors to become members, not only must they come back a second time, connect with others and participate in congregational life in meaningful ways, you have to tell them how to join. Seriously...

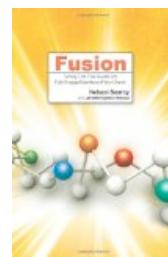
STATING THE OBVIOUS It might seem obvious, but many congregations fail to make the process for becoming a member visible. Instead, they highlight it periodically when there is a sense there are potential members on the scene. Periodic promotion of membership builds a culture where membership doesn't matter.

CLARITY IS KEY Whatever process you have, be it signing a book or completing a form, required classes or participating in membership oriented worship service, make sure these are communicated at all times. From the first visit the membership process should be clear. A clearly articulated and promoted membership process will allow people to prepare for it, ask questions, and place associated events in their calendar.

Membership Resources

Visit the "Membership Resources" page on uugrowth.com for a frequently updated compilation of membership resources. Includes top membership resources from the Unitarian Universalist Association, the UU Member Professionals Resource List, electronic copy of this resource and more.

<http://www.uugrowth.com/membership>



Fusion: Turning First-Time Guests into Fully-Engaged Members of Your Church by Nelson Searcy

<http://tinyurl.com/newcomerfusion>

"One of my favorite books on church membership, Fusion brings much needed clarity to the newcomer experience & membership journey."

– Peter Bowden



Peter Bowden is an organizational development consultant and Unitarian Universalist change agent working with congregations across the United States. Read his blog and connect via social media at his website <http://www.uugrowth.com>.