

# GROWTH AND VISIBILITY

MU NOW SUPPLEMENT NOVEMBER 2013

## GROWING CONGREGATIONS



What can we do as congregations to attract newcomers ?

It's a question I'm sure we've asked ourselves many times . Between us we will have tried many different approaches, some undoubtedly more successful than others.

This *MU Now Supplement* contains some straightforward suggestions about this collated by your representatives on the MUA Executive Committee. These ideas may help.

They have all been tried and have worked to a greater or lesser extent in congregations across the MUA region. You may already have tried some of them, and you may possibly regard others as impractical from your point of view.

Nevertheless, if only one of them strikes a chord with you and your congregation and can be used in an effective way, then this exercise of sharing *Growth and Visibility* suggestions will have been worth while.

Please let me know if you find any of these ideas helpful. Please also send us any other ideas that you believe are effective in this respect, so that we can also publicise these for others to use.

Sharing our expertise in these matters can only be helpful.

I hope that you will find this of some help, and look forward to hearing from you.

Ash James President MUA

### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *Celebrating our good fortune in our Unitarian faith; sharing that good fortune with others. 'Giving Unitarianism away'*
- *A church with no community is at best a Museum ?*
- *Be lively in your faith*  
*From MUA members*

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# Great Minds



# All Unitarians!



[www.unitarian.org.uk](http://www.unitarian.org.uk)  
many beliefs, one faith

[I'M VERY AWARE  
THERE ARE LOTS  
OF OTHER PEOPLE  
WHO ARE JUST  
BRIGHT AND  
WORKING JUST AS  
HARD, WITH JUST  
THE SAME  
DEDICATION TO  
MAKE THE WORLD  
A GOOD PLACE.  
TIM BERNERS-LEE](#)



Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the world-wide web.....and a Unitarian.

## ESTABLISHING THE BASICS

1.Begin by establishing the reasons why you wish to grow. Understanding this, together with energy and enthusiasm will be vital. From this initial intention growth strategies will arise, have meaning, and stand a better chance of success.

2.Start from where you are and utilise what has actually 'worked' so far. So start small with realistic objectives.

3.Accept that growth will require change, and an influx (hopefully) of others with ideas and passion. Be prepared to give to those new influences a chance to think differently, to try new ways of doing things

4.Use reason to good effect; target precisely, those groups in your community whom you think are most likely to become new Unitarians, and those groups you can best serve.

Are there liberal thinking groups who may be interested in the spiritual aspect of life, but haven't successfully found a home for such activity? For example these could be from the local U3A and social justice groups (charities, Round Table, campaigning rights groups, family support groups). Are there locally needy groups, whom you could support, for example those who are lonely , or young

family groupings such as Mothers and Toddlers ?

5.Can you afford professional spiritual leadership? If yes, are there also outreach leaders linked of course to your Target Groups that you could appoint to assist? If no, can you 'borrow' that expertise (or at least gain advice), or are there funding sources that can be explored to secure such support?

6.Do you talk to people about Unitarianism? Do you invite friends and family to a social event or service? Have you worked out as a church what it is you will actually say to people about Unitarianism, and what your church will actually offer? Are you sure of that key message you wish to impart to attract newcomers? Word of mouth and personal contact are so important.

7.Encourage all *Rites Of Passage*. They are a vital service to the community, and an important source of new attendees.

8. Be determined that your worship offering is of the highest quality. If you rely upon visiting leaders, brief them well upon what you expect, provide them with a clear framework. Never have to *apologise* for a service.

Your music offerings and readers should be effective and hopefully uplifting. Services can be joyous as

well as serious. Will therefore the diet that you currently offer actually *keep* newcomers? Try asking a *trusted other* from outside your congregation to visit and to tell you 'as it is'.

9.Keep in mind that *liberal* expression is now broadly available to people in a way unimaginable even 50 years ago. Many may not feel that they require a liberal church, even for the purposes of liberal spiritual expression. This may be a difficult thing for us to accept.

So we need to be attractive, useful and inspirational enough to effectively embrace with such people. They need to find and want what we have, and we need to cater for this challenge. Celebrate our past, yes, but focus intently upon the offers of a Unitarian future.



'Senior' Baked Birthday Cake

Young Unitarians at Great Hucklow

## SOME PRACTICAL STEPS

\* Make your building as attractive and welcoming as you can, both outside and in. To many potential newcomers, a church building can remain an austere and foreboding place to visit. Making it comfortable, warm, clean and light may help retain a visitor.

\*Ensure that the *social areas* are welcoming. Decent seating, flooring, crockery, notice boards and quality coffee, tea and cake are always appreciated. Anything that is *derelict* in the eye of the newcomer, will most likely convey the wrong message.

Again, ask a *critical friend* with a modern eye for these things, to advise, or use the lessons of successful and attractive spiritual environments elsewhere, Unitarian or other.

\*Utilise *special services* and events as to attract newcomers; eg, Carol Service, Harvest Festival, Easter, Festival of Peace, Celebration of Local Community with services of thanksgiving for Local Charities, Emergency Services, Care Staff, and so on. They are a source of newcomers, are newsworthy, and importantly of support to those in our community.

\* Use Heritage Weekends (or any weekend) as an opportunity; many of our buildings are fascinating in their own right and attractive to visitors. This

can be a chance to engage about Unitarianism. It can also enable us to make use of our particular local histories, and thereby reinforce the positive and radically liberalizing force for good in which all can share.

\*Undertake *outreach* activities; e.g. do a service in a local residential home, become a School Governor, or get involved in local charities and social justice groups. Word of mouth and personal contact are powerful drivers.

\* Hold events that will engage with the local community. For example, an Easter Egg Hunt if you have grounds, live music event, debating event on issues of significance, celebratory lecture, organ recital (if you have one!), Puppet Show, Local Drama Group, Film Night, Councillor/MP 'meets the public' night, Fun Day with Bouncy Castle and Car Wash, a *Chat Café* (with free offers, e.g. coffee), Walking Groups etc. These all provide opportunities to participate positively with those we serve. And yes, we should continue to offer our Fayres and perhaps try a weekly stall, front of house? \*Those other events just listed could be considered as 'other than Sunday' sessions; creative activities that potentially already have a liberal spiritual dimension. Through and from these it may be possible to develop *Friday Church* (or any day of the week), with social activities plus the offering of

a short (e.g. 30 minutes) spiritual gathering to those in attendance who wish it. This can be led by the Minister (if you have one) or a suitable Lay Leader-or perhaps you could 'borrow' a local Minister/Lay Leader to start these activities? Consider therefore offering days other than a Sunday, for spiritual support in a non-traditional way, to cater for those who have no interest in attending a formal church activity but who nevertheless have spiritual needs. Providing an early evening (or evening session) may also encourage attendees disinclined towards Sundays. Evesham (*Friday Light*), and Kidderminster (*New Meeting Nights*) find this helpful. Kingswood use *Lunchtime Services* to good effect.

New kinds of gatherings can be perhaps therefore be imagined and constructively arranged.

\*Use 'Meet Up' to advertise your event locally. Google 'Meetup' or go to [www.meetup.com](http://www.meetup.com)

\* And nothing of course beats a very *warm and sincere greeting* on the door, a welcome to the building and its community, and the subsequent sense to a newcomer of a joyful and caring community that practices what it preaches.

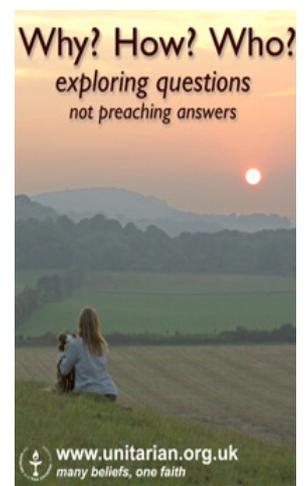
**Anything remotely approaching the following will destroy all your hard work;**



And a faith worth growing !

THERE IS NOT A HUMAN LIFE SO POOR AND SMALL AS NOT TO HOLD MANY A DIVINE POSSIBILITY

JAMES MARTINEAU



[www.unitarian.org.uk](http://www.unitarian.org.uk)  
many beliefs, one faith

## SOME PRACTICAL STEPS

Comments such as..... Avoid *bureaucracy* that prevents new ideas . For example, unwieldy committee structure dominated by one age group, or unwilling to *let go* and risk newcomers trying out new ideas.

“we’ve always done it this way”

“sorry we’re so few” (a brilliant and forward thinking few, so be positive !)

“we believe anything here”

“ah, somebody young”

“we’re a church for intellectuals”

“so, you work then ?”

“like churches everywhere we’re declining”

“the internet ?”

Or an over-tight control of finances, unwilling to risk a well-worked out *best shot* at growth. Surely a church with substantial assets and no community is at best a museum?

## How to get further help.

- Attend MUA Training. The ‘*Gathering For Growth*’ on September 21st at Kingswood was very successful, and is reported upon in the Winter Issue No 40 of the *MU Now* magazine. A Spring Training Day on *Using Social Media* is to be held at New Meeting Birmingham-look out for dates.
- Use the growth ideas found on the MUA web site and the GA web site. The latter can be found at [www.unitarian.org.uk](http://www.unitarian.org.uk) in the training, support and resources section.
- Use the growth ideas on the GA’s team *2020 Congregational Development* site found at [www.2020unitarian.org/](http://www.2020unitarian.org/)
- Network, share the best ideas, send these to the MUA for publication, ask the MUA for help with templates, draft leaflets, web sites. Invite growth specialists to your church. With optimism and ‘*liveliness in our faith*’ we can grow our congregations.

## MEDIA

\*Try hard to get the *media* message right. None of the following will necessarily cause people to find us, but as part of the complete offering an effective public face is absolutely essential. So ideally:

- Get someone with the requisite skills to become your *press contact*, and to feed regular interesting stories and updates.
- Create a professional and modern website, linked to other social media such as  *Blogger, Facebook and Twitter* . Keep these sites up to date. Have contact details on

them.

•Ensure *professional quality literature* is available about your building, background, but more importantly what you *stand for*. Have up to date contact persons on this .

• Make your building *visible*. Buy quality A-Frames, Notice Boards, Banners with logos and the like, and why not have an appropriate *welcomer* on the street outside when events are on, armed with leaflets?

•And of course, experiment with adverts on your social media and in the press.

### OTHER MUA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS.

Mr Sandy Ellis, Evesham (Treasurer)

Rev Jeffrey Bowes, Coventry

Mr David Heppingstall, Banbury.

Mrs Jill Hudson, Birmingham

Mr Ian Kirby, Kidderminster

Ms Angela Maher, Birmingham

Mr David Mearman, Stourbridge

Mrs Pam Rose, Black Country Group

Ms Diane Rutter, Birmingham.

Mr Malcom Sadler, Warwick.

Mrs Bronwen Taylor, Shrewsbury

Mrs Alison Thursfield, Cotswold Group and member GA Exec



## MIDLAND UNITARIAN ASSOCIATION

Birmingham New Meeting Church  
31 Ryland Street, Five Ways,  
Birmingham B16 8BL

**President: Ash James**

Tel:01384 374007

[ashashjames@gmail.com](mailto:ashashjames@gmail.com)

**Vice-President: Jane Couper**

Tel:01386 839458

[jane couper@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:jane couper@hotmail.co.uk)

**District Minister and Secretary:**

**Rev Sue Woolley**, 5 Martins Rd,

Piddington, Northampton, NN7 2DN

Tel:01604 870746

[sue.woolley@virgin.net](mailto:sue.woolley@virgin.net)

### The objective of the Midland Unitarian Association is

*‘the promotion of religion in connection with the freedom which rejects subscription to any articles of theological belief’.*

In support of this the MUA presents leadership, ministerial support, and financial assistance to congregations, other denominational institutions and local social and religious causes. It also encourages and fosters closer liaison between member congregations via newsletters and MUA -wide events and training.

WE’RE ON THE WEB

[www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk](http://www.midland-unitarian-association.org.uk)