

The Power of Invitation and Welcome

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UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST



A Word of Welcome

Thank you for selecting the packet of materials that celebrates our identity as the United Church of Christ. It is our hope that this packet will help equip you and your congregation as you seek to tell the story of our church.

Inviting others into the good news of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is one of the greatest gifts we can offer. While it is essential to base our invitation in faithfulness to Christ, it also is important to develop several skills so that we are effective in our invitation.

Our faith is not lived out in isolation from one another but, rather, our spiritual life is most authentically lived out when two or three are gathered together (and how much more wonderful if it is 20, 200 or 2000!). Therefore, the welcome you offer guests and newcomers to your congregation will have both a personal and corporate dimension. This tool kit can help you achieve a warm and engaging presence in both areas.

Consider the ideas presented here and adapt them to your particular situation. Share your successes and failures with us and with others in your conference. If we can be of help, let us know. It is through this dialogue that our whole church will learn from this effort so that we can be stronger in the future. Mostly, experience the joy of being a welcoming congregation. Appreciate the gifts that currently abound within your membership and keep your eyes and ears and hearts open for new persons — and their gifts — who come into your midst.

So, welcome to this adventure in faith. Be prayerful. Be positive. Join us in sharing the good news of Christ's Gospel as it is expressed in the United Church of Christ as, together, we witness the evidence that **God is still speaking,**

Ron Buford
Coordinator and Team Leader
The Stillspeaking Initiative

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Some Background

Poet Muriel Rukheyser reminds us that “the world is made of stories, not atoms.” There are exciting stories occurring within our church right now, and it is important that you embark upon this venture with songs in your heart and stories in your head. There are winds stirring in the United Church of Christ.

- The UCC’s Evangelism Ministry team reports that there are more than 100 gatherings of people who are worshipping regularly and exploring how to become congregations in the United Church of Christ. Praise God!
- Since June 2001, the readership of United Church News has grown from 55,000 to an estimated 315,000. Praise God!
- In the summer and fall of 2004, 144 members and leaders from 36 conferences gathered to learn about *God is still speaking*, a common strategy to proclaim who we are, invite people, welcome them and created a culture of belonging in the local church. By May 2005, more than 2,300 churches had joined the Stillspeaking movement.

What is one of your congregation’s success stories? What activities are you involved in that demonstrate how God is speaking in your community? How can you tell that story with enthusiasm to those who are unfamiliar with the United Church of Christ?

Quantifying the Challenge

We all have challenges in our midst. It is important that we look positively upon these challenges as opportunities for growth and development within and among our own ranks and within society-at-large.

Kirk Hadaway and Sheila Kelly in UCC Research Services helped us read between the lines. In 1999, while membership declined by 19,406 members (1.37%), and we lost 77 congregations (out of more than

6,000) — 41 of which withdrew from the UCC (6,387 members) — we also added 21 congregations. There were nine new church starts, six pre-existing congregations joined, and six former UCC churches were reinstated.

New church starts are especially encouraging since 39.5% of newer churches grew more than 10%. A look at membership growth within UCC congregations as a whole shows that while 15.9% are growing, 32% are declining and 52.1% show no change. Taken together, these figures show that the greatest opportunities for growth lie in starting new churches and energizing the majority of churches that show no change.

“Mainstream denominations are affected by the culture and demographics, but all the evidence suggests that they would be declining less if they put more emphasis on outreach and new church development,” say Hadaway and his colleague, David Roozen, in their book, *Rerouting the Protestant Mainstream*.

Many United Church of Christ members have not been comfortable with the term “evangelism” in recent years. Even in the 1990s, our anti-evangelism bias was so strong that a campaign emerged with buttons bearing the message, “Evangelism is not a dirty word.”

In the past, “[church] attendance was steered by heritage, habit, and social status,” says Peter Drucker, the noted business guru. According to Gallup polls in the 1950s, 49% of the U.S. population polled said they had attended a church or synagogue within the past seven days. However, large numbers of baby boomers on church rolls stopped going to church around college age — and failed to return later. Many who did return, especially after their children were born, discovered that in the 20 years since they had last been in church, not much had changed. Boomers became religious consumers, often opting out of church life altogether.

Failure of the Church to Adapt

As religious consumers, baby boomers make choices that include not going to church and getting religious meaning elsewhere.

“The fading of Christian or other religious tradition as a constraint and guide for choice means that individuals are increasingly on their own in developing what we call a lifestyle,” says Hadaway.

According to Hadaway and Roozen, “a sizable proportion of church members in mainstream denominations don’t care whether their churches grow or not ... they are uncomfortable with evangelism and they like their church the way it is.”

If the church, for example, were to see itself as being in the transportation business for Christ-driven spiritual journeys instead of converting people to participate in its 1950s model of “church,” imagine how different it might look. Think of the many people who desperately crave “transportation” for meaningful spiritual journeys. Many of our UCC congregations offer viable and exciting “transportation” that would appeal to people — if they knew about it. Do you want to offer it to them? Do you want that for yourselves?

If we are to be effective change agents, we must recognize and name this tendency to resist evangelism and expect it to continually re-emerge within us and in our community. Resistance will re-emerge for at least three very important reasons:

- Old habits die hard — especially when they have served us well in the past. We must honor their past usefulness, respectfully retire them and move on.
- Evangelism is invitation. Invitation can be scary because it makes us vulnerable to rejection. Most normal people avoid rejection at all costs. The best salespeople in the world go to selling seminars each year to remind them to do something we all avoid – invite people to buy or to participate. You will be tempted to keep avoiding it as well. It’s natural. Remember the words of the

apostle Paul: “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to everyone. God is faithful and will not let you be tested beyond your strength, but will with the temptation also provide the way out...” (I Corinthians 10:13).

- We have negative associations with overzealous and fanatical evangelists who lack respect for the deeply personal nature of each person’s unique spiritual journey. Let’s trust ourselves enough to know that, because of who we are, we will not make these mistakes. Let’s also recognize that the assumption that people already know who we are and have already been invited is a false assumption. You will prove this by inviting people who will tell you they never knew that a church like ours existed and that they wish someone had told them about it a long time ago.

As we prepare ourselves to be in touch with our own discomfort and the discomfort of other members in our community, let us be filled with compassion for ourselves and our community — ever moving forward. James 1:2-6 says it all:

“My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. Ask God in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind.”

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Successful Tendencies

Hadaway has analyzed the data and presents some surprising and hopeful correlates for church growth. Churches having one or more of the following qualities are more likely to grow:

- Liberal or progressive members
- Use of strings and woodwind instruments in worship
- Use of contemporary music
- Social justice work
- High proportion of new members
- Members who are excited about their church's future
- Congregation that is spiritually vital and alive
- Exciting worship services
- Lack of conflict

How many of these qualities does your congregation have? Remember that few congregations will exhibit all of these criteria, so it is appropriate to use this list as a motivating factor for your church, not as a list of unattainable goals. Celebrate your strengths while working to build up other aspects of your corporate life.

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Let's Build "Come to the Party" Churches

The theological foundation for the "come to the party" concept is found in the sacraments, in our Reformed tradition and in such scriptural passages as the parable of the lost coin, the lost sheep or the prodigal son, all found in Luke 15. Come to the party!

Chapter 2

The Prodigal Son

A Modern Retelling

A mother had two sons. Both sons were handsome, well educated and confident. The mother and her two sons ran a highly successful vineyard in a pleasant, pastoral setting. They lived in a wonderful community, had many friends and all of the modern conveniences.

Both sons were computer literate, enterprising and hard working. Things were going well until the younger brother started becoming more and more distant. He kept up with all of his duties, but somehow his heart just wasn't in it anymore.

The younger brother summoned up the courage to approach his mother about his unhappiness. He asked her for his portion of the family inheritance so he could try his wings and explore the world on his own.

After much thought, and with a heavy heart, the mother gave in, not wanting to hold the son back from discovering his pathway in life. The financial arrangements would be difficult and complicated. It would take some of the family's working capital, but with additional effort, she thought that she and the elder son could probably make it work.

The dreaded day of her son's departure finally came. To the last day, she and the elder son tried to gently persuade the younger son to stay. They could not.

The mother stood and watched as the younger son drove off in his luxury convertible. The younger son took the winding road, down a hill that led through

the fertile valley where their vineyard was located. The mother stood there until she could no longer see his car.

Each day at break times, the mother could be observed looking out the huge window in her office. The window faced the long open road on which her son departed and on which she hoped he would return.

Years passed. Not only did the younger son not return, but eventually, they stopped hearing from him altogether. Though she and the elder brother sometimes feared that the younger brother might be dead, the mother continued to watch for him.

One summer day around dusk, the time of day when everything seems to stand out more clearly against the dark and intensely blue sky, the mother saw a car coming from off in the distance. It was noticeable because it was blowing clouds of smoke. To her disbelief, the car pulled up to the front of the house. A thin, shabbily dressed and sickly looking man emerged from the exhaust. The mother realized at once that this was her younger son and, running toward him, she shouted, "My child!" She grabbed and held him close. She laughed and cried with joy.

It was her son. He was home. They sat down to a meal and he told his story. He told her how he'd lost everything, that his health was failing, and that he had no other place to go. He apologized for leaving and for losing everything, but most of all, for being such a huge disappointment. He asked his mother to forgive him and begged for any job he could have — no matter how small.

Hearing his story, the mother said,

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“Enough of this talk for now. Let’s get some food in you, and get you back on your feet. There’ll be plenty of time to discuss how you get your life back. For now, the only thing that’s important is that you’re alive and that you’ve come home.”

After dinner, the younger son went to his old room and was surprised to find everything there just as he had left it. Meanwhile, his mother was working her Palm Pilot to call doctors, a barber, a clothier and others to help her son right away. She also called a group of his old friends and invited them to a dinner to be held the following Friday night. Within 48 hours, she had managed to pull together the biggest party anyone in the area had seen in years.

She suddenly realized that she had not called the eldest son — who was traveling on business — to tell him of his brother’s return. She dialed his cell phone and told him the good news. There was silence on the other end. For a moment she thought the line had gone dead. “Are you there?” she asked.

“Yes. I guess I was just a little distracted.”

She continued, “Make sure you’re back by 6:00 p.m. on Friday night to celebrate your brother’s return.”

That Friday, the house was extravagantly decorated and filled with guests. But the elder brother was not there. Just as the mother began to get anxious, she saw him drive up. She ran to meet him. As he got out of the car, she put her arms around him. She could see that he was upset.

“What’s wrong, honey?”

He paused and said, “What’s wrong? I’ll tell you what’s wrong. While your ‘baby’ was out wasting his inheritance, I’ve spent all this time trying to earn back what he has cost us. Now he shows up and you expect me to act as if nothing ever happened? After all the work I’ve done, you’re throwing *him* a party!”

Her eyes filled with tears as she listened.

She thought about both her boys. She remembered them playing together, working together on homework and even fighting as boys often do. She remembered them carrying their dad’s casket and comforting her as they all said their last goodbyes to a good man they all loved.

With the sounds of laughter and music around them, she placed her arm in her son’s arm as she’d done so many times. Clearing her eyes and holding her head high, she looked at her son and said, “Your brother, whom we feared to be dead, has come home — alive. The one we thought was lost has been found.”

Letting go of his arm, but clearly expecting him to follow, she turned toward the house filled with music and laughter. Moving toward the house and gesturing to him all the while, she said, “Come to the party!”

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The Sacraments

The sacraments are more than mere rituals. In baptism — whether by sprinkling or immersion — we affirm that, by faith, we belong to God as sons and daughters, and to each other as sisters and brothers. We are connected to one another and to the worldwide community of faith. This community promises to love, support and care for the baptized. We vow not to take back that promise, because God does not take it back, no matter where the faith journey leads.

In the sacrament of communion, we come to Christ's table, where we reaffirm our baptism. Breaking bread and pouring the cup reminds us of Christ's sacrifice and the discipleship to which we are called. Just as grains of wheat are gathered to make one loaf and many grapes are gathered to make one cup, so, too, the many people of God are made one in the body of Christ, the church. This "welcome table" says, in effect, "No matter who, no matter what, no matter where you find yourself on life's journey, you belong to this community. Come to the party!"

Our Reformed Tradition

The Heidelberg Catechism, published in 1563, is a central creed in the Reformed tradition and familiar to many of our congregations of German heritage. John Calvin inspired the core concepts in this document. The opening words ask us to consider the question, "What is our only comfort in life and in death?" The answer remains the same for us now as it was then: "I belong — body and soul, in life and in death — to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him."

You might read or sing the hymn, "I Was There to Hear Your Borning Cry" (#351 in *The New Century Hymnal*), as testimony to the sense of belonging that you feel to Christ and the church:

*I was there to hear your borning cry,
I'll be there when you are old
I rejoiced the day you were baptized
to see your life unfold
I was there when you were but a child,
with a faith to suit you well;
I'll be there in case you wander off
and find where demons dwell.*

*When you found the wonder of the Word,
I was there to cheer you on;
You were raised to praise the living God,
to whom you now belong.
Should you find someone to share your time
and you join your hearts as one,
I'll be there to make your verses rhyme
from dusk til rising sun.*

*In the middle ages of your life,
not too old, no longer young,
I'll be there to guide you through the night,
complete what I've begun.
When the evening gently closes in
and you shut your weary eyes,
I'll be there as I have always been
with just one more surprise.*

*I was there to hear your borning cry,
I'll be there when you are old
I rejoiced the day you were baptized
to see your life unfold.*

John Ylvisaker, 1985. Tune: "Borning Cry," 9.7.9.6D.

It is in this spirit that we are glad that you and your church have decided to be a "come to the party" community. This is a holy and sacred action. It also is your celebration and mine. We *all* belong. Welcome to the party!

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A Tactical Plan for “Come to the Party” Churches

Selecting Your Team

The first and perhaps most critical step in this process is to establish a high-energy team that will initiate, implement and tweak the strategy as needed until it works.

Be sure to include team members who represent different parts of your congregation’s life. It will be important for your whole church to feel included in this process. If you have any marketing, public relations or advertising professionals in your congregation, make certain that you recruit them. Don’t forget to make this fun! Your team members should be able to:

- Work together
- Think of “out of the box” ways to invite and welcome
- Embrace those aspects of your church’s culture that make it unique and valuable to your community
- Connect all promotional and hospitality items with a similar look, feel and philosophy
- Establish themselves as a clearly identifiable presence of the welcoming Christ

Give your team an interesting name. One church calls its welcoming team the “Good News Team.” What would be a catchy phrase that would appeal to “seekers” in your setting?

P-s-s-s-t: a word of caution...

Let’s be honest. All human groups have different factions within them — including congregations. Failure to recognize and work with this principle will doom your plan to failure. Your welcoming team will need to “sell change” to everyone in the congregation. Leave no faction behind without doing everything humanly possible to bring them along. Carefully select representatives of your team — even those from difficult factions. Make certain that you go out of your way to include them; there is a good chance that some of them may already feel excluded. You may discover that this is the first and most important invitation — the invitation within. Although this is not always possible, it may begin a process of healing relationships that have been wounded for years.

Keep It Fun

Regular meetings are essential, but meeting-oriented groups lose creativity quickly. Covenant to meet for not more than one hour. Keep the brainstorming brisk and fun. End your meetings with assigned tasks and plans. Remember, meetings can be “fun” without being “funny.” A team holding quickly paced meetings that accomplish interesting outcomes generates fun — automatically. Don’t forget to use prayer as an essential part of your meeting agenda.

Perhaps because the stakes are so high, religious people are often very serious. This needn’t (and shouldn’t) be the case! One of God’s greatest gifts is the gift of joy. Life is meaningless without laughter. As theologian Frederick Buechner reminds us, “The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (*Wishful Thinking*, p. 95). Rejoice and be glad as you welcome people into God’s love.

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Critical Tasks

- Build fun into the process.
- Clearly define and state, “the business your church is in” in 20 words or less.
- Think strategically about becoming a welcoming presence in your community.
- Plan specific tactics to implement your vision.
- Set reasonable and measurable goals relative to a workable time frame.
- Determine the best time and method to sell the plan to the congregation.
- Track progress and flexibly adjust goals when appropriate.
- Visualize both the positive and negative impact of success.
- Prepare for success.
- Establish new rituals that celebrate milestones of accomplishment.
- Mark progress.
- Honor the team’s work and thank

team members.

- Strengthen team members and other church members when the going gets tough.
- Give God the glory.

A Word about Strategic Thinking

Think of a strategy as a plan for a trip. Forget everything you’ve done before.

Answer these questions:

- What business are we in?
- Where do we want to go?
- What do we want to take along? In other words, what do we love and value most about our congregation’s ministry? What do we do best? Are we thinking big enough? Are we willing to sacrifice to have the kind of bold vision our church deserves?
- How soon can we get there? How will we know when we are there? What measurable criteria will help us mark our progress?
- What if we need to change our plans along the way? What process have we built in to enable us to be flexible?
- What are the tools from this tool kit that will work best for us? How will we customize them for our use?

Remember the old spiritual that says, “Everybody talkin’ ’bout heaven ain’t goin’ there”? The same is true for strategies. They are worthless without concrete tactics to turn measurable goals into the reality of measurable outcomes.

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Making Your Entire Church a Welcoming Community

It won't happen. There's a Buddhist saying, "All unhappiness comes from unreasonable expectations." People come to church in varying moods and with varying abilities. Here's what you can do: You can create a welcoming team that "works" the fellowship hall and other greeting areas, ensures that visitors are welcomed and invited back, and introduces guests to members. "A little leaven, leavens the whole loaf." Over time, others will catch on. In the meantime, the intentional, fun, energetic and creative group can change the welcoming climate in your congregation — overnight.

A Sample Answer to the "What Business Are We In?" Question

"To be a visible witness and an active presence of God's radical and all-inclusive welcome." (15 words)

A Sample Strategic Goal

By faith, we trust in God's promises and believe that if we are a visible witness and an active presence of God's radical and all-inclusive welcome, God will increase the active membership of our congregation by 25% with people under the age of 40 over the next five years.

Strategic Outreach Tactics

First, ask yourselves, "Is there a population within a 10- to 20-mile radius that is under the age of 40?" Locate them using demographic tools like Percept www.percept1.com/pacific/start.asp, which the UCC's Evangelism Ministry team recommends, or those at <http://ext.nazarene.org/m3/scr/ucc.exe> or reports from the UCC Research Office at 866-822-8224 x2149.

Next, have team members identify and speak with two or three people from your target population. Tell them you are working on a research project for your church and that you want to know the answers to a few questions. Secure their permission to take notes. Ask such questions as:

- Do you think of yourself as being on a spiritual journey?
- How is this important to you?
- How could you best be supported in that journey?
- Do you think churches are places where people can get this sort of support? Why or why not?

Report your results back to your team. Develop specific outreach programs based upon your findings. Promote these programs by sending brochures, postcards and press releases about the events. Advertise in local newspapers and on radio. Encourage the congregation to invite younger people they know to attend worship.

Time these events in ways that build momentum, creating a "buzz" about your church in your community. Assess the response and impact. Refine the approach based upon the outcome and the feedback. Restart the process.

*Follow-up
is critical*

Calling All Seekers: stillspeaking.com

To aid you in your outreach and evangelism, a special website has been set up: stillspeaking.com. The site, especially geared for young and young-at-heart seekers, includes faith stories, UCC history, sermon samples and much more. The site serves as a wonderfun introduction to who we are and what we believe. It also links to the UCC website, www.ucc.org. As you invite in members of your community, make sure to tell them to visit www.stillspeaking.com.

Worship

*It is
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invite
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experience*

Making people feel welcome at worship requires special skills. Many people who have no history with the church or who have been away from the church for a long time will have a natural reluctance to enter a sanctuary for worship. Many, too, have been hurt or humiliated by the church in the past. These wounds can be very deep. Yet worship is central to a congregation's life and so it is essential to invite people into the worship experience. Remember to offer a truly welcoming presence without "pouncing" on your unsuspecting guest.

Develop a careful tactical plan for this important invitational effort. For example, ask a person or group of gracious people (your welcoming team?) with unobtrusive but winning personalities to be responsible for passing out nametags. Encourage members to wear a certain color nametag (e.g., white) while guests receive a different color (e.g., pale blue). The team seeks out blue nametags and offers a gentle welcome and warm hospitality, provides information about the church, and makes sure no blue nametags are standing around alone. Introduce blue nametags to one another and to white nametags, offer tours of the church, express a genuine interest in **listening** to guests, and ask the guests, if they are comfortable doing so, to sign a guest book, providing their addresses.

Follow-up is then critical. Send a handwritten note or card to visitors, and if possible, refer to information learned during conversations before or after worship. Reach out to all newcomers (and old timers you haven't seen in awhile) without regard to race, gender, physical ability, sexual orientation or apparent class.

Know what to do when a visitor says, "How can I get involved in this church?" For example, it is important that your church offers people an opportunity to join *frequently*, even every Sunday. To those unfamiliar with it, the church can seem like a difficult place to join. You may want to look at language

like "receiving" new members. Do such phrases send the message that people can only join when *we're* ready? Many of our churches ascribe to the (once valid) assumption that most members are born into our congregations through generations of continuing membership. By not printing in the bulletin each week the "who, what, where, when, why and how" of becoming a member, congregations may seem off-putting, even while trying to be friendly.

The story of the apostle Philip and the eunuch is an appropriate marketing model. In marketing terms, it is important to "close the deal" when the interest is expressed. Invite your team to read the story of Philip and the eunuch and discuss its relevance (Acts 8:26-40). In this story, the question the eunuch asks — "How can I understand unless someone guides me?" — is the central question before us.

Offer a non-threatening gathering time for people interested in participating in your congregation. It is not necessary to wait until there are enough people to make a large group. When there is interest, seize upon it right away. Even if you have only one interested person, if she or he is open to the idea, have a couple of current members meet with the person, including someone from the professional ministry staff. Keep the conversation non-judgmental and non-threatening. Focus on relationships, rather than programs.

Keep in mind the phrase
"TYAD WYAD YAG WYAG"

If You Always Do
What You Always Did,
You Always Get
What You Always Got

A Checklist of Important Dos and Don'ts

- Do watch your language. In your team's visioning process, avoid language that makes "the old" seem bad.
- Don't leave people out who are likely to be the most resistant. Rather, find ways to include someone who can represent alternative views without scuttling the process.
- Do avoid tension. Keep it friendly. While there will be disagreements along the way, constant tension creates an unhealthy congregational environment.
- Don't make immediate and radical shifts that alienate long-time members. Congregations need to blend the new into the old in ways that allow everyone to feel a part of the process — even in the midst of change.
- Do deepen your connections with the denomination. Show congregants and visitors the "big view" of the work of the UCC and the ways they fit into it — financially and structurally.
- Don't be surprised if your church does not feel quite as cozy after it grows.
- Do anticipate some failure. Take the setbacks in stride and restart the process. You can also anticipate some negative impact from success.
- Don't be deceived about the costs of change — emotionally and financially.
- Do ask yourselves if you are sure you are you ready for new leaders with new ideas. Try to ascertain if the current power centers in the congregation are truly willing to step aside to, and share power with, newcomers.
- Don't fail to make a long-term (five-year) plan, and don't be afraid to stay with it. That said, make it a living plan that your team revisits at least quarterly and modifies as needed.
- Do get a broad-based buy-in before you begin implementing your plan and spending your church's resources. Remember, relationships will grow your church.
- Don't forget to reduce terms and practices that are widely unfamiliar to non-church goers. For example, what do "Responsive Reading," "Doxology" and "the Lord's Prayer" mean to the non-church-goers? If terms are important to retain in your church bulletin, add a word of explanation.
- Do invest in good and innovative music.
- Do develop centers of excellence and work from your strengths.
- Do design an engaging and compelling brochure that tells your congregation's story. Invest in sharp writing and interesting graphics. Seek professional help in designing this important piece.
- Do recognize that the first impact of your work will be to energize existing members. Create a sense of expectation among them.
- Do establish opportunities for members to have non-threatening "excuses" to invite friends and family to church. Studies show that the number one reason people come to church is because someone invites them to attend.
- Don't be afraid to provide every visitor with a no-pressure invitation to join your church. If you fail to do this, your growth is walking out the door. Studies show that the number one reason people join a church is because someone invites them to join.
- Don't be afraid to take in new members as often as you have them; don't make them wait. The ritual of joining a church is important because, each time, it allows current members to reconnect with their spiritual journeys. It also provides a visible sign on an ongoing basis that growth is happening. Momentum comes as more people join and there is diversity among those joining.
- Don't fail to acknowledge that many people are afraid to invite others to

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church or to join a church. We all fear rejection. There is an important selling maxim: "Salespeople live in a world of failure." In this way, selling is very much like the realm of God, where primary focus is on the one who comes home — not the ones we've lost. However, people can become active in the life of the church *without* joining. Ironically, in many of our growing congregations, participation is the goal, not increased membership. Most people who participate will eventually join when the moment is right.

- Do acknowledge the great mystery that if you build a process of invitation, the "right people" will come. The "right people" are those who do feel called to join your congregation. By embracing the rainbow of God's creation, your congregation will be enriched.
- Do seek the presence of God to fill you with more grace than you ever thought possible.

Reach Out

Give your members non-threatening opportunities to invite people to church:

- Hold "What if Everybody Came?" Sundays
- Hold "Invite a Friend" Sundays
- Invite special speakers with a big draw
- Encourage families to bring their family reunions to church
- Sponsor (alone or with other like-minded groups) non-church events
- Hold art openings or concerts celebrating the creative spirit in each of us
- Become a "safe place" where the community deals with difficult issues
- Start a speaker series
- Organize a day care center
- Do *everything you can* to break the "empty church" syndrome

Reach In

- Nurture a caring and loving church; it is the best witness
- Watch the "party mix" — too many gray hairs can be scary
- Don't forget about the children; places without children seem strange
- Don't just count heads — note who is absent; we like knowing we're missed
- Nurture spirituality in small groups

Quantify Your Goals and Measure Your Progress

Stay with a strategy long enough to see your "faith become visible" (see Hebrews 11:13). But also, don't be afraid to abandon a tested strategy that is truly failing. Share your successes and failures with others. If you are not failing at some things, you are not stretching yourselves enough.

Connect with the Ad Campaign

In everything you do, connect with God is still speaking, identity images and slogans. For example, many churches begin worship with the welcome statement, "Good morning to XYZ United Church of Christ. No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you're welcome here."

This is important. People who come as a result of seeing the commercial will need reassurance that they are in the right place. Some pastors have included these words in the invitation to the table.

God is still speaking, images, symbols and posters should be everywhere. Don't worry about overdoing it; it is more likely that you will under-do it. It takes a lot to get people's attention.

The Tools

A description of the tool kit is last because, in some ways, it is the least important thing. These tools will not grow your church. Your relationships with each other and your community will grow your church.

In a recent sermon, author and religion professor Marcus Borg said, “I believe it is exegetically correct to replace the word ‘commandment’ with the word ‘relationship’ in the following passage: This is the greatest and first *relationship*, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and all your soul, and with all your mind. And the second great *relationship* is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Borg went on to say that we can keep the commandments and still be “jerks,” but we cannot have a relationship with the Divine One without being transformed. Once we establish right relationships with God, with each other, and with the communities that surround us, then the tools in this packet will be helpful.

It is useless to invite people into a church where there is no welcome or hospitality. Prayer has been called the hospitality of the soul entertaining the most high. Similarly, a vibrant presence of invitation and welcome is the hospitality of the *soul of the congregation* entertaining the returning sons and daughters of the most high. We are all God’s sons and daughters.

Public Relations Strategies

Both internal and external public relations are important to growing your church. Internal public relations strategies help churches keep members and friends informed. External strategies keep significant events, news and feature stories in the forefront of your community.

Internal Public Relations

- Newsletters give members and friends the heads-up on schedules, events, news and other activities at your church.
- Pastoral letters, committee reports and a church’s annual report also are opportunities to keep members and friends “in the know” and feeling upbeat about the life of the church.
- Integrate God is still speaking, themes into the liturgy, in banners, stoles, robes and rituals.

Additional resources and information will be forthcoming. We will alert you to new material as it becomes available.

External Public Relations

News is free advertising. Get into the news every chance you can:

- Create a “niche market” and “work it” via regular contact with the reporters who cover the beat.
- Send press releases — event, news and feature story releases.
- Follow up all press releases with phone calls to the media outlets to where you’ve sent press releases.

Make certain that your release contains news. A common error concerning press releases and getting the word out is that we forget that the people receiving our releases do not love our issues as much as we do. It is our job to interest them. It is not their fault that they are not interested.

In the appendix of this packet are three press release examples that you can use as models to get out a quick release. They include:

- Basic event release
- News release
- Feature story release

Here are a few steps to aid you in the public relations process:

- Build an accurate media list, and cross-reference it by media type and news covered.
- Establish one contact to speak to the media. (Multiple persons will create confusion and dilute your message.)
- When you receive a call from a reporter, have someone other than the pastor find out what the issue is about before the pastor has to respond. This will give the pastor time to prepare a response.
- Plan early. Send releases to magazines at least two months in advance of publication dates.
- Know the who, what, when, where why and how of the release. Make certain that this information is in the first paragraph or two.
- Target your release to the people interested in or specializing in those areas.

- Get to know the key media players, their likes and interests in your town.
- Follow up every release with a phone call and be prepared to do a 10-second pitch that states why **the reporter** would want to be there. What’s in it for the reporter? Is it a real scoop? How can you make it sizzle for the reporter?
- Be prepared to re-fax the information when you make your follow-up phone call.
- When reporters show up to cover an event, thank them for coming. They just might seek you out the next time they want to feature a church in a story.

*Get
into the
news
every
chance
you can*

How To

This is where the rubber hits the road — this section tells you how to use the tools in your kit. We will take you step-by-step through the process of getting your commercials aired on local TV, how to go about getting a billboard placed, how to get customized posters and postcards, and how to order additional mugs, T-shirts and decals for fundraising campaigns. It's easy! And we've done most of the work for you.

Customizing the TV Commercial

The form you need to customize the commercial is included in the Forms section of the CD. Within a week of your form arriving in Cleveland, we will contact you with the next available production date. It would be safe to plan for the video team in the UCC's national office to need up to four weeks to make your customization. We do all customization work on one day each month. The national office is not staffed to provide more than basic customization services unless there is a compelling reason to do so.

You will receive a broadcast quality, customized version of the commercial selection(s) you have chosen, along with the information the station requires. You also will receive a VHS copy of this tape. You should review this VHS copy and check for accuracy. The broadcast-quality beta copy is the ONLY tape that is suitable for airing on cable.

Placing Your Commercials on Cable Television

First and most important, in the words of a host of angelic voices in scripture, DO NOT BE AFRAID! Studies have shown that the most prohibitive reason for mainline religious bodies not to be on the airwaves is because people are afraid to approach the media with requests. Don't worry about not sounding like an expert. Remember that you will be looking to buy time. This is

important. Do not go in expecting something for free. However, do not be surprised that if you go in looking to buy air time, you come out with a sweet deal!

- Find a cable company. You will find cable TV company listings in the Yellow Pages of your local phonebook under the heading, "Cable Television."
- Ask for the local advertising/sales department.
- Tell the advertising representative that you have a finished 30-second spot that you would like to place. Confirm tape format requirements and get an idea of the placement costs. (Your ad rep will work with you in determining the number of placements you can get for the amount of money you have to spend.) You may find that these rates are surprisingly reasonable, especially if you let the cable company determine when the ads will run.

Note: Not all cable stations offer local placements. Research this first, before ordering a broadcast tape from the UCC national offices. Also, be advised that networks are possible broadcast outlets for your stories as well, but network ad rates are usually much higher than cable rates. Basically, however, the same process for placement applies.

Placing Your Commercials on Local Radio

- Find a local radio station that appeals to the demographics you are trying to attract in your welcoming campaign. You will find local radio stations listed in the Yellow Pages under the heading "Radio Stations & Broadcast Companies."
- Ask for the advertising/sales department.
- Tell the advertising representative that you have a 60-second spot that you would like to place. Confirm the format requirements (many stations will accept

your ad via CD or even over the Internet).

- Ask about minimum order requirements and request a rate card.
- Choose one of the spots on the CD. Use the sample text on the CD to add your locally produced, customized tag line to the spot. (The Identity Kit—Graphics Toolkit v.3 and later carries radio commercials, including a way to e-mail the spot to your local radio station.)

Your Graphics Toolkit

*Show
your
colors!*

The Identity Kit—Graphics Toolkit is a CD containing a catalog of customizable items that you can use to make posters, door hangers, brochures, billboards, transit shelter signs, postcards, banners, newspaper ads, press releases and Yellow Pages ads. Details as to how to get each item printed and, in some cases — billboards, transit shelter signs, etc. — how to get them placed, are included below. Order the kit from United Church of Christ Resources by calling toll-free 800-537-3394. Ask for item PICIG.

Posters

We have provided campaign poster images. Typical poster sizes are 17" x 22" and 24" x 36"). There is a place for you to customize your posters by adding your church name, address, phone number and website address. Once you have chosen a poster and gathered together the customization information, save it to a CD and take the CD to Kinko's or other local full-service print shop. Tell them which file you want printed and how many you need. You can also order generic posters (which would have to be customized by hand) from United Church of Christ Resources by calling toll-free 800-537-3394. Ask for item PICGP.

Brochures and Postcards

A generic brochure template is included. This particular template is a framework upon which you can hang information that is pertinent to your particular church.

When you are happy with the text you've written, print it out or save the copy to a CD and take it to your local full-service print shop. You can order small quantities of generic postcards from UCC Resources by calling toll-free 1-800-537-3394. Ask for item # PIC38.

Door Hangers

The door hanger artwork carries the "God is still speaking," theme. Door hangers are ideal for youth group or inter-generational projects. Why not put them on the doors of all the houses in your neighborhood?

The people who are your target market may not live in your immediate neighborhood, but don't let that discourage you. People are willing to drive long distances to get to a church where innovative things are happening. Programs like Percept (see Chapter 3) can help you identify the demographics of any neighborhood. For information about Percept, visit www.percept1.com/pacific/start.asp.

There are many door hanger printers on the Internet. For quantities of 10,000, the price is about 10 cents each. Another option is to order generic door hangers (you would have to hand write your information on each hanger) from UCC Resources by calling toll-free 800-537-3394. Ask for item # PIC36.

Billboards

- Find a local outdoor advertising company. You will find outdoor advertising companies listed in the yellow pages under the heading,

All Stillspeaking identity items are available through UCC Resources toll-free at 800-537-3394 and online at [The Stillspeaking Store on stillspeaking.com](http://TheStillspeakingStore.com).

The Power of Invitation and Welcome

“Advertising—Outdoor Signs.”

- Ask for advertising/sales.
- Tell the rep that you have files on CD for most standard sign sizes. All that is needed is to replace “Your Church Here” with the name and address of your church.
- Ask about location and date availability and rates. Work with your ad rep in determining the best placement and number of ads.

Transit Shelter Signs

- Find a local outdoor advertising company. You will find outdoor advertising companies listed in the yellow pages under the heading, “Advertising—Outdoor Signs.”
- Ask for advertising/sales.
- Get the dimensions, and use the artwork on the CD to create the correct size.
- Ask about location and date availability and rates. Work with your ad rep in determining the best placement and number of ads.

Note: Many cities do not allow religious-oriented advertising in city-owned transit shelters because of the “separation of church and state” issue.

Banners

- Find a local outdoor advertising company. You will find outdoor advertising companies listed in the yellow pages under the heading, “Advertising—Outdoor Signs.”
- Ask for advertising/sales.
- Tell the rep that you have files on CD for one standard sign size.
- Ask about size, quantity and price. Work with your rep in determining the best number of banners for your needs.

Newspaper Ads

There are two sets of templates on the CD for two-color versions of the ads. Templates for posters and ads on the CD can be resized to fit the needs of most publications. (Toolkit v.3 and later contains an ad suitable for small-scale production.)

Note: Not all newspapers will allow you to choose the second color for a two-color ad. Sometimes it’s better to use a striking black and white ad than to use a color ad that is not exactly right.

How to Place a Newspaper Ad

- Call the advertising department of your local newspaper (display, not classifieds).
- Tell the rep that you have an ad you would like to place.
- Ask the rep for a rate card.
- Ask the rep for the preferred graphics file format and resolution.
- Save the ad you want to use on a CD-ROM and take it to the typesetter at the paper (or e-mail the file directly). Tell him or her which ad you are using. The typesetter will resize the ad to match the paper’s column width.
- Give the typesetter the appropriate information (church name, telephone number, address, etc.) needed to customize your ad. He or she will set the type for you and provide a proof for your approval.

Yellow Pages Ads

Yellow Pages usage is as strong as ever: over 50% of the population use the Yellow Pages at least once a week. For SBC advertising, see www.sbcyellowpages.com or call: Midwest 800-647-9000, East 800-479-2977, Southwest 800-479-2977, West 800 248-2800, or SBC Smartpages.com 877-547-6278.

*Signs,
signs,
signs!*

United Church of Christ

Where to Go for What *God is still speaking*, Items

T-shirts, (\$16) caps, golf shirts (\$32), sweatshirts, (\$29.00) and cotton long-sleeve shirts in red or black,(\$37.00), mugs (\$6), comma stickers, bumper stickers (\$1.00)... and more.

United Church of Christ Resources 800-537-3394

When you wear Nike, Levi, or Wrangler, you advertise their companies. Why not wear something that let's people know about the United Church of Christ? The better known the name of the United Church of Christ becomes, the more effective all of our ministries will be — ministries for service, for advocacy, or that invite people to find a spiritual home. Show your colors!

T-shirts (Customized with name of church on back of the tees)

Erin Smith smithe@ucc.org

Screen set up fee \$25. You must order at least 25 T-shirts to place a custom order. Customized on back only – 2 lines maximum.

Non-Customized Banners (Heavy Duty, 10 mil with grommets, 6' rope leads and wind slits, \$90.00)(18 mil \$120.00)

United Church of Christ Resources 800-537-3394

They scream, "this is the place"!

Customized Banners (Contact Pam or Meghan for pricing)

Pan DeMarce pjdemarce@bluesheetmarketing.com Meghan Peterson mepeterson@ccbussinesolutions.com Carlson Craft 800-545-6620 ext. 3110

Allows you to put your church name on it

Lawn Signs (packages of 6 \$80.00, includes 30" step stakes)

United Church of Christ Resources 800-537-3394

A great way to reinforce the *God is still speaking*, message; also great for communities that do not allow big signs.

Posters (each poster is 17" x 21" rolled in a durable storage tube — 5 per tube, \$35)

United Church of Christ Resources 800-537-3394

Posters for five headlines: "Our faith is over 2000 years old, our thinking is not;" "If you think getting up on Sunday Morning is Hard...;" "We don't sing come Some of ye faithful;" "If Jesus embraced lepers...;" and "Never place a period..." Subsequent headline sets TBD.

Identity Kit—Graphics Tools Kit (\$50) — graphics with Ron in the box and the commercials

United Church of Christ Resources 800-537-3394

Get the graphics you need to make your own stuff.

Stewardship DVD

United Church of Christ Resources 800-537-3394

God is still speaking, and Stewardship team up for an exciting new DVD product that includes Inspiring Generosity.

Pew Pads with tracking questions (50 sheets per pad, 20 pads per pack, \$24.95)

United Church of Christ Resources 800-537-3394

OK. So you had more people. Do you know why? Info will help you target your tactics.

Hymns and liturgy

www.stillspeaking.com

Reinforce the *God is still speaking*, message in worship with hymns written by UCC members who have been inspired by the campaign.

Web, bulletin, and newsletter resources

www.stillspeaking.com

It's "cut and paste" time. You have permission to use anything on Stillspeaking.com. So... run with scissors!

Bulletin Covers and folders

United Church of Christ Resources 800-537-3394

Have an event coming up?

Liturgical Stoles

In Stitches — Brenda Grauer 440-543-7128

Eva's Temptations — Eva Baseley 301-271-3327

Hand-crafted *God is still speaking*, liturgical stoles

Sample Event Press Release

United Church of Christ
Barb Powell, press contact
(216) 736-2217
powellb@ucc.org

On the Web: <http://www.ucc.org>

For immediate release

Nov. 2, 1998

Conference on children filled with hope, humor and hands-on workshops

CLEVELAND — Who and what are shaping our children’s lives and our future? Are these questions being addressed in our churches, in our schools, in our homes and in our communities?

The United Church Board for Homeland Ministries and UCC-related Eden Theological Seminary in Webster Groves, MO, are sponsoring “Children, Church and Community V,” Nov. 12-14 at Eden.

This year’s theme invites participants to “Pray! Act! Play! The Village Celebrates!” and is open to all adults who care about children, not just Christian educators.

“Children are valued members of the faith community,” says Patricia J. Goldberg, the Homeland Board’s minister for education in the family. “Because of that, adults are called by God to be in ministry to and with them. It is our hope that the conference will help equip, empower and enable pastors, educators, parents, advocates and other caring adults to strengthen the ministry of children.”

The three-day seminar includes worship services, musical presentations, bookstores and display areas, and workshops including:

“Nurturing the Religious Imagination of Children” — Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso, of Congregation Beth-El Zedek, Indianapolis, author of children’s books.

“Nurturing Faith through Experiential Learning” and “The Faces of Jesus” — Jerome Berryman, author and director of Center for the Theology of Childhood, Houston.

“Children and Grief” — The Rev. Pam Lucas, pastor, Bridgewater Congregational UCC, Bridgewater, VT.

“Open Arms, Open Community: Hospitality in a Multicultural and Multiracial World” — The Rev. Wallace Ryan Kuroiwa, executive director, UCC Office for Church in Society, Cleveland.

“Paint Me a Faith: Children, Art and Faith” — Sidney D. Fowler, editor, Curriculum Resources, United Church Board for Homeland Ministries, Cleveland.

To set up an interview or for further information on the conference, please contact Barb Powell at the UCC’s Office of Communication in Cleveland, (216) 736-2217.

The United Church of Christ, with national offices in Cleveland, has 1.4 million members and more than 6,000 congregations in the United States and Puerto Rico. It was formed by the 1957 union of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church. Its United Church Board for Homeland Ministries organizes ministries in evangelism, church development, Christian education, publication, theological training, social justice and health.

Sample News Release

United Church of Christ
William C. Winslow, press contact
(212) 870-2137
winsloww@ucc.org

On the Web: <http://www.ucc.org>

For immediate release

March 3, 1999

Church groups support FCC on EEO rewrite

NEW YORK CITY — led by the Office of Communications, Inc., United Church of Christ, a coalition of religious and civil rights organizations today (March 3) filed comments in support of the Federal Communications Commission's proposal to overhaul its equal employment opportunity rules.

Specifically, the groups filed comments applauding FCC efforts requiring broadcasters and cable operators to establish employment policies to ensure EEO for women and people of color at all levels of employment. The FCC also wants an in-house and ongoing monitoring program to assure compliance and the application of EEO standards to all job vacancies.

The proposed rule making also has the support of former FCC general counsel Henry Geller, who calls EEO "an integral facet of the broadcaster's obligation to operate in the public interest."

Although there have been EEO rules on the books since 1971, women and people of color have had a difficult time breaking into mid-level policy-making posts, according to the Rev. Everett C. Parker, director emeritus of the UCC Office of Communication. The new rules are essential "if we are to ensure that the broadcasting and cable industries go forward vigorously with the hiring and upgrading of women and minorities," he says, so that "we never again tread the path of racial and gender intolerance."

In 1967, Parker successfully petitioned the FCC to institute the first set of EEO regulations for broadcasters. These rules had never been challenged until a three-judge panel of the D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals recently held that comparing a station's employees with the total workforce in its community of license was tied to quotas, and was therefore unconstitutional.

While there has been some progress in opening the doors to minorities in the past 25 years, their total employment has increased by less than eight percent. "It is a waste of valuable resources," Parker claims, while noting that stations with a diverse workforce generally have a stronger bottom line.

The new guidelines do not require employers to compare their workforce with the general workforce in their community. But, in its comments the religious coalition says the rules put broadcasters on record that discrimination in the workplace will not be tolerated and that those who violate them "should be subject to license revocation."

The coalition does not challenge an FCC recommendation that religious broadcasters may establish religious belief or affiliation as a job qualification but it does oppose EEO exemptions for stations with 10 or fewer employees.

Those joining in the comments, beside the UCC Office of Communication, Inc., are the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A., Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), United Methodist Church, American Baptist Churches, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church and Black Citizens for a Fair Media.

Sample Feature Story Press Release

United Church of Christ
William C. Winslow, press contact
(212) 870-2137
winsloww@ucc.org

On the Web: <http://www.ucc.org>

For immediate release

August 19, 1998

Mickey's ears ringing with church youth group video message

NEW YORK CITY — Mickey Mouse and his boss probably won't like the message, but they'll love the medium in which it was delivered.

A videotape sent to Disney chairman Michael Eisner features a group of United Church of Christ teenagers crooning the lyrics to "Dear Mr. Eisner," a song by the Rev. Brian Sirchio, a UCC minister and professional songwriter from Madison, WI. The refrain won't be music to the ears of the Walt Disney Company's chairman:

"If Disney won't pay a real living wage
You won't get a dollar of mine
I won't go to your movies, your theme parks or stores
I'll tell folks that Mickey Mouse rips off the poor."

The teens are protesting what they claim are sweatshop conditions in apparel factories in Haiti that make clothing for Disney. "As young adults, we appreciate everything Disney has done for our generation," they say in a letter of petition accompanying the video, but then go on to denounce what they say is Disney's use of starvation wage labor in developing countries.

The taped message grew out of a recent Great Lakes Regional Youth Event at Beloit (WI) College sponsored by the United Church of Christ's Board for Homeland Ministries. Sirchio, who writes songs on social issues, performed "Dear Mr. Eisner" during the event.

The song, which Sirchio wrote after one of several trips to Haiti, compares the Disney chairman's hourly wage to how much the workers in Haiti make per hour. Captivated by the song's content and sound, the youth wanted to learn the lyrics and sign it themselves. They did — in front of a video camera belonging to someone at the event. That videotaped recording is what Eisner was sent, along with a petition calling for such reforms as global standards to outlaw starvation wage labor and free unannounced access to factories in conjunction with other human rights groups.

"It was a real '70s type of moment for those of us old enough to remember being teens in those years," confesses the Rev. Jeffrey Dick, minister of South Haven (MI) Congregational UCC and one of the youth event's adult advisors. "For the young people, it was a spiritual moment of putting their faith on the line for others.

The United Church of Christ has 1.4 million members and some 6,000 local congregations in the United States and Puerto Rico. It was formed by the 1957 union of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Church.

Hospitality Basics

Most people make up their minds whether they will return to a church within the first four to eight minutes of their initial visit... long before the pastor enters the pulpit! How would you want to be treated as a guest at church? What are some of the barriers congregations have that keep newcomers from feeling welcome? (courtesy of Wisconsin Conference, wcucc.org)

Ahead of time:

- Recruit and train warm, friendly, knowledgeable volunteers
- Develop a welcome packet (pastor letter, note from follow-up team, brochure, newsletter, catchy item, tickets to upcoming event, all in a plastic zip bag)
- Announce and use pew pads that everyone signs
- Encourage the congregation in generous hospitality (leave close-in parking spaces and back pews for latecomers, wear nametags)
- Note worship time on answering machine, outdoor signage, yellow pages listing and website
- Post clear signage for parking, entry, restrooms, childcare, etc.

Before worship:

- Colored nametags to identify guests
- Welcomers are in place and ready to go
- Watch actively for visitors
- Consider having welcomers in the parking lot or outside the front door
- No church business while on duty; make eye contact & smile; bend down to talk with children
- “Hi, I’m _____. I don’t believe we’ve met yet.” (*not* “Are you new?”)
- Know the basics (nursery, restrooms, coat rack, building layout, communion practice)
- Nametags for everyone

During worship:

- Let latecomers slip in without calling a lot of attention to themselves
- Distribute a visitor-friendly bulletin that lays out all the responses and songs that regulars just know

After worship:

- Welcomers invite but do not force guests to come to coffee hour
- Welcomers may introduce guests to the pastor or other church members

Follow-up Plan:

- Lay team visits guests within 36 hours of worship (some churches are “mugging” guests with GISS mug & candy on a short visit)
- Pastor mails a letter on Monday or Tuesday
- Bonus points: call guests on Saturday to invite them back

Feedback Forms:

- Keep track of guests who come in response to The Stillspeaking initiative
- Share stories with Stillspeaking staff via stillspeaking@ucc.org
- Focus on the compliments and work on the criticisms

Appendix

The best way to increase the number of guests who visit your church is to increase the number of members who invite someone they know to come to worship!

Hospitality Basics

Role Plays for Hospitality Practice:

Beginner: It's fifteen minutes before Sunday worship begins, and you are handing out bulletins at the door of the sanctuary. You meet a family you don't know, a mother and father with two children, aged 10 and 13. They tell you that they have just moved to town and are looking for a United Church of Christ congregation. They need your help to get their children to the right place and to get themselves settled before the service begins. They also tell you that they'd like to know more about the activities that are available in your congregation, because they would like to join right away.

Intermediate: You are the greeter on duty at the door to the sanctuary, handing out bulletins on December 18. Yesterday there was record snowfall, and the streets aren't really clear yet. The choir has already started to process down the aisle when a somewhat frazzled looking woman hurries into the narthex with her two children, aged 12 and 14. You've seen her in town, but you don't know her. She wants to know, "Is this the church I saw on TV?" She tells you that she was raised as a Roman Catholic, but left the church after her divorce. The children work hard to look cosmically bored. During your conversation, the service has begun, the announcements and welcome are over, and the minister has started the prayer of invocation. You help her to find the right place for her children, and to find her place in the sanctuary.

Advanced: It is Christmas Eve, and you are handing out bulletins and candles for the 11:00 pm service. The sanctuary is packed, and the ushers are setting up extra chairs. Lots of folks have come back to town for Christmas, and it's really nice to catch up with people you haven't seen in a while. At 10:59 pm, you are approached by an older woman who is by herself. She appears very serious, and asks you in a voice so low that you can hardly hear, if your church really doesn't turn anyone away, like Jesus, which is what your commercial says. She wonders if people in your congregation will want her there.

Additional Resources:

Evangelism page of the UCC website: www.ucc.org/evangelism

Stillspeaking web page: www.stillspeaking.com

Evangelism Toolkit: an annotated bibliography of resources from seven denominations, available at www.ucc.org/evangelism/eword.htm

The Inviting Church: A Study of New Member Assimilation, by Roy Oswald and Speed Leas, The Alban Institute, www.alban.org

Making Your Church More Inviting, by Roy Oswald, The Alban Institute, www.alban.org

Welcome! Tools and Techniques for New Member Ministry, by Andrew D. Weeks, The Alban Institute, www.alban.org

Can Our Church Live? Redeveloping Congregations in Decline, by Alice Mann, The Alban Institute, www.alban.org

Various resources at www.congregationalresources.org, The Alban Institute

Various resources at www.macucc.org, Massachusetts Conference UCC

The First 30 Seconds: A Guide to Hospitality for Greeters and Ushers, by S. Joan Hershey, New Life Ministries Service Center, Fort Wayne, IN, 800-774-3360, www.newlifeministries-nlm.org

How to Share Your Faith without Losing Your Friends, by Harold Percy, www.churchtoolbox.org

Preparing Lay Callers for Visitor Follow-up, ELCA, 800-328-4648.

Develop the Welcoming Habit, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), 888-346-2631

A Hospitality Checklist with Suggestions for Enhancing Welcome, www.elca.org/evangelism/assessments/hospitality.html.

Hospitality Basics

Trade “secret visitors” with another church to learn about yours. Even great churches might not have every single element in place every single Sunday. This isn’t heaven! Don’t be discouraged by the length of the checklist or any gaps in your secret visitor’s experience. Use the list and the feedback to improve continuously and provide feedback to leaders of your church. Secret visitors: Be honest. Be fair. Feedback is a gift.

Guest’s Checklist for Hospitality (courtesy of Massachusetts Conference UCC, macucc.org)

- 1) How did I find out about the church?
- 2) If I phoned, was the answering machine or receptionist friendly and clear?
- 3) How did I get to the church?
- 4) If I didn’t know the area, could I find the church via road signs? Suggestions?
- 5) Were there signs outside the church to tell me where to park and enter?
- 6) Were there adequate parking spaces? Handicapped spaces?
- 7) Was I greeted in the parking lot by anyone?
- 8) Is the building exterior attractive and well maintained?
- 9) Was I greeted inside by stationary greeters or roving welcomers who accompanied me?
- 10) What were my first impressions upon entering (lighting, smell of coffee, friendliness, background music, conversations vs. silence, etc.)?
- 11) Did someone help me with a nametag, hang my coat, show me the childcare rooms and restrooms?
- 12) Were there sufficient interior signs so I could find my way around?
- 13) Were the rooms clean and well maintained?
- 14) Were there trained classroom leaders?
- 15) Were there secure procedures to ensure the safety of children?
- 16) Was I given a brochure explaining those procedures?
- 17) Did someone usher me to a seat or did I find my own way? Was I comfortable there? Why?
- 18) Could I follow the worship bulletin or were there responses/hymns/practices that made no sense to me?
- 19) Was “insider” language used during the service that I didn’t understand?
- 20) Was the preaching helpful or not? Why?
- 21) Was the pace of worship helpful or not? Why?
- 22) Were modern technologies utilized in worship?
- 23) How was I greeted after worship?
- 24) Did anyone speak to me if I waited in line to shake the pastor’s hand?
- 25) Was I invited and escorted to coffee/fellowship time?
- 26) Did I leave with any helpful information/material?
- 27) How would I rate my overall experience (1 to 10)?
- 28) What other helpful comments could I share?