



Leadership and Ministry Development Resources

Welcoming System Guide

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Please note that all Internet links were current as of January 2015.

Unity Worldwide Ministries Leadership and Ministry Development Resources

Welcoming System Guide

Spiritual Gifts Discovery Guide

Sacred Service Ministry Guide

Emotional and Spiritual Maturity Development Guide

Leadership Development Guide

Future Planning 1 Guide

Future Planning 2 Guide

All resources available in 2015 as downloads at
www.UnityWorldwideMinistries.org/Guides.

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Introduction and Intention

You are embarking on a journey that will allow your ministry to grow and become more conscious in its welcoming process. The importance of an effective welcoming system and culture cannot be overstated. Research indicates that every year, hundreds of thousands of people attend a spiritual community for the first time. The number one reason given for why they did not return is “poor hospitality.”

When people visit our ministries, they are assessing much more than the lesson and the music. They are getting a feel for the ministry and their level of comfort within the spiritual community. They are looking to see if they can form relationships, be spiritually fed, and make a difference.

This *Welcoming System Guide* serves to support you in incorporating the best standards of practice for a welcoming system. The intention of this guide is to provide an integrative, inclusive and conscious process that generates a sense of deep connection for the first-time guest and a sense that they will be supported on their spiritual journey and given opportunities to grow, to contribute and to serve in a meaningful way. Expect this guide to both validate what you are already doing and to shake up your thinking with new research and practices. As times and people evolve, new approaches may be required.

Your welcoming system is more than a program, it is also a consciousness held within the spiritual community as they greet and receive people into the ministry. It is the entry point into an integral, whole systems plan of development that consciously and systematically unfolds spiritual and emotional maturity within the seeker and leads them into service and membership.

Those researching religious and spiritual trends in today’s U.S. culture indicate that the primary group of guests in our spiritual communities will be those who identify themselves as spiritual but not religious and those who are religious but not currently attending a church. Hospitality or “welcoming” is cited as the easiest way to attract the spiritual but not religious and the religious but unchurched. The primary purpose of welcoming, however, is not to get people to come back (if it is, they will sense this), but rather to love them and to serve them which can result in continued attendance.

Another key group of first-time guests is the 18- to 35-year-old group, commonly referred to as the Millennial Generation. Some of the Millennials’ positive qualities include being confident, self-expressive, liberal, upbeat and receptive to new ideas and ways of living. Millennials grew up with many opportunities to be involved in teams and leadership. The Barna Group states: “The first factor that will engage Millennials in a ministry is as simple as it is integral: relationships.” Specifically, this group prefers intentional relationships such as a buddy or mentoring system. Your welcoming system will assist in demonstrating your openness to the desires and interests of this significant population group.

An intentional welcoming system creates effective pathways for a wide range of people to grow into relationship with your spiritual community rather than leaving it up to chance. It involves intentionally finding ways for any guest to feel welcome and want to return again and again.

So, **welcome** to the journey!



Getting the Most Out of the Welcoming System Guide

The Welcoming System is an aggregate of best practices designed to grow and deepen the welcoming culture within the ministry. Much effort has been put forth in researching the essential elements underlying a comprehensive and effective welcoming system. This guide breaks down the entirety of the program into three phases or implementation components:

- Phase One
- Phase Two
- Phase Three

It is likely that your ministry already has some or even many of the elements of the Welcoming System. This implementation guide will assist you in aligning your current system with “best practices” and in developing a system that serves your community in increasingly supportive ways.

The complexity of your Welcoming System will ultimately depend upon many factors, including the size of your ministry. Each phase in this guide represents a benchmark of excellence in system development, moving from simple (Phase One) to deeper (Phase Three).

If you are a family- or a small pastoral-sized community, it is best to begin with Phase One elements and gradually work toward implementing Phase Two practices. Larger ministries will likely begin at Phase Two or Three and work toward enacting best practices as outlined in this implementation guide.

Definition of Assimilation:

to include or bring into the whole or to make one

Tips from the Field-Test Ministries:

Take each phase separately.

Take your time to integrate any steps.

*It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the myriad of ideas.
Assess where you are, identify the potential next steps,
and decide when and how you will move forward.*

Using the Welcoming System Questionnaire

The aim of the Welcoming System Questionnaire is to help ministry leaders review their ministry's current welcoming system in order to determine with which phase to start.

- Begin with the *Questionnaire–Phase One*. Consider each question and then ask yourselves how your welcoming system measures up. A simple yes or no answer will suffice.
 - Questions answered **yes** will help identify the complexity of your ministry's current program.
 - Questions answered **no** will reveal areas needing development within the framework of your Phase One welcoming program.
- Review items answered **yes** and compare your current practice with the Action Steps of Phase One to ensure they are aligned with best practices.
- Review items answered **no** and follow the Action Steps pertaining to each of these elements.
- Make sure that each Action Step of Phase One is working well **before** proceeding to subsequent phases.
- Proceed with *Questionnaire–Phase Two* in a manner similar to Phase One.
- Proceed with *Questionnaire–Phase Three* in a manner similar to Phase Two.

Important Reminder: Each phase is foundational to its successor. For greatest success, **do not** attempt to “pick and choose” elements to incorporate without first fulfilling the preceding foundational phase.



Welcoming System Questionnaire—Phase One

1	Are there reserved parking spots for guests?	Yes	No
2	Is there signage that clearly identifies the location of restrooms, youth ministry, bookstore, fellowship hall, offices, etc.?	Yes	No
3	Does the guest receive a welcome packet?	Yes	No
4	Does the welcome packet contain information about Unity?	Yes	No
5	Does the welcome packet contain a Guest Information Card?	Yes	No
6	Does the Guest Information Card request name, address, email and phone number?	Yes	No
7	Does the Guest Information Card request permission to place the guest on the ministry's email list?	Yes	No
8	Does the Guest Information Card request the names and ages of any children?	Yes	No
9	Does the Guest Information Card allow the guest to make a special request (prayer support, contact from minister, service opportunities, spiritual counseling, etc.)?	Yes	No
10	Does the welcome packet contain a coupon or gift certificate valid for a discount or free gift?	Yes	No
11	Is the guest greeted immediately upon entering the facility?	Yes	No
12	Are nametags used as clear identifiers for key leaders in the ministry?	Yes	No
13	Do you refer to and treat first time people as "guests" (versus visitors)?	Yes	No
14	Are guests acknowledged in the Sunday worship service?	Yes	No
15	Does acknowledgement happen toward the end of the service?	Yes	No
16	Does the minister, at the time of the guest acknowledgment during the Sunday service, do a mini "What is Unity" talk?	Yes	No
17	Are guests asked to fill out a Guest Information Card and place it in the offering (or other depository)?	Yes	No
18	Are guests told that they are not expected to participate in the offertory?	Yes	No
19	Are guests invited to fellowship?	Yes	No
20	Does the minister go to fellowship and intentionally connect with the guest?	Yes	No
21	Does the guest receive a written welcome letter from the minister by the following Thursday?	Yes	No
22	Does a member of the welcome team or minister contact the guest by phone?	Yes	No
23	If the guest is willing, does the minister make a brief 10-minute get-acquainted visit within two weeks?	Yes	No
24	Is a second letter sent one month later to invite the guest to a service or Unity Basics class?	Yes	No

Implementation Overview: Phase One

When guests visit your ministry, they are assessing more than just the lesson and the music. They are getting a feel for the ministry and the type of spiritual community it is and wondering if they can fit in. Making space for guests is not just about adding new people to the congregation; it is about providing an experience that makes them feel welcomed and inspires them to return.

Your welcoming system can become a ministry unto itself. It provides first-time guests with an authentic experience of caring and fellowship and the beginnings of a transformed life. It's all about giving guests the feeling of being connected—connected to the Divine within themselves and connected to fellow travelers on the spiritual path. Connections create relationships, and people in relationships tend to stay in the places where they feel connected. Your welcoming program is an integral part of creating a thriving ministry. A welcoming culture is the foundation of community building and the evidence of walking your talk.

Welcoming new people into your ministry is a multi-faceted process.

- Complete the *Questionnaire–Phase One* with key leaders and the Welcome Team. Note your current strengths and areas for improvement.
- Start by exploring and embracing the spiritual aspects of hospitality.
- Focus on creating and then deepening your welcoming culture.
- Make welcoming practices visible to guests as they arrive, before they have to “figure things out.” Try to remove any foreseeable awkward moments.
- Engage first-time guests and introduce them to smiling faces and caring hearts.
- Assist guests in finding a small group in order to quickly make friends and learn about all that the ministry offers.

It may take some time to establish these practices if you don't already have them. If do you have a solid welcoming system in place, use Phase One field-tested best practices elements to make enhancements.

Before proceeding, go to www.unityworldwideministries.org/thriving-unity and click on *Thriving in Unity 1.0* and scroll down to Benchmark 3 where you will find the following support materials:

- Facility Assessment
- Guest Information Card (ready-to-print templates)
- Welcome Brochure

These important resources will streamline your efforts to create or enhance your welcoming system.



Action Steps

Creating a welcoming environment encompasses many aspects of ministry. Phase One practices will focus on a set of simple steps as a starting point. Completing all of these steps will enable your ministry to successfully establish the foundation for the Phase Two level of development.

Phase One Action Steps:

- Complete the *Questionnaire–Phase One*
- Conduct a Facility Assessment
- Create a Welcoming Packet
- Strengthening Usher and Greeter Teams
- Moving to a Language of Guests (versus Visitors)
- Acknowledging Guests
- Conducting Guest Follow-Up



Complete Welcoming System Questionnaire–Phase One

Complete the *Questionnaire–Phase One* assessment to determine where and how to strengthen your welcoming program. Include key leadership and Welcome Team members.



Conduct a Facility Assessment

Start by assessing your facility from a guest's perspective:

- From the website: www.unityworldwideministries.org/thriving-unity, click on the *Thriving in Unity 1.0* link and scroll down to Benchmark 3.
- Walk through your facility from the parking lot to the sanctuary, classrooms, youth education, etc. looking with the eyes of someone new to your ministry. If you plan to attract families with children, pay special attention to your nursery and youth classrooms. Your job is to assess the “welcome vibration” demonstrated by your facility.
- Evaluate what could be better (such as signage, reserved parking for guests, etc.) Can people, new to the facility, easily find what they are looking for?
- Based on your observations, present your findings and suggestions for improvement to your church leadership.
- While touring your facility, determine the best placement for greeters.

Once you’ve completed the above preparatory steps, continue setting up the following components:



Create a Welcoming Packet

Create an informative and supportive Welcoming Packet containing:

- Information about your ministry
- Information about the Unity movement (Pamphlet: [*Unity: A Path for Spiritual Living*](#) available from Unity Worldwide Ministries.)
- A Guest Information Card (GIC):
 - For first-timers to fill out (Download editable welcoming materials from www.unityworldwideministries.org/thriving-unity, *Thriving in Unity 1.0*, Benchmark 3.)
 - Make sure the GIC requests permission to place the guest on the church's email list. (See template from website above.)
- Prayer request card
- Letter of greeting
- Daily Word™



Strengthening the Usher and Greeter Teams

- Set up teams of ushers and greeters (if you don't already have them).
- Position ushers and greeters throughout the facility for worship services. Consider the parking lot, entry doors, classrooms and sanctuary.
- Gather the teams before the service to pray together, envision perfect hospitality and hold all in prayer who enter that day.
- Help guests find a place to sit. Some may be concerned that they are taking a regular attendee's place. It's even better is to introduce them to someone to sit with.
- Assign the hospitality team to actively look for guests to greet after the service.



Moving to a Language of "Guests" (versus Visitors)

How have you been thinking of and referring to someone who comes to your spiritual community for the first time? Whether you think of them as a "visitor" or a "guest" makes a difference.

Think for a moment about someone ringing the doorbell of your home. If they are a stranger, you might think, "Who is this person and what do they want?" You might experience their arrival as an inconvenience or even an intrusion.

Now imagine that you have invited someone to your home. You have prepared for them and are eagerly awaiting their arrival. When they arrive, you are excited, happy to see them, eager to talk with them and share their company. Take a moment and feel the difference between the two experiences. The other person, of course, feels the difference too.

Rev Jim Ozier, Director of New Church Development and Congregational Transformation of the United Methodist Church, characterizes the difference: “A visitor might well enjoy her or his visit, but a guest will *connect* with the experience. A guest will experience more than just good feelings; the events will somehow connect on a personal level. And that connection is what increases the likelihood of that person returning for a second time.” A guest experiences a culture of hospitality that is “intentional, robust, and heartfelt.” When the culture is deeply welcoming, they feel that they were “highly anticipated, eagerly awaited and exceedingly loved.” (*Clip In: Risking Hospitality in Your Church*)

Research shows that those who come to a spiritual community for the first time are often within thirty days of a life-changing event. They may feel weighed down by burdens, decisions that must be made, challenging relationships, blows to their self-confidence or financial situation. They are seeking support. Your spiritual community, through its welcoming culture and message, can be a bridge for them to connect with others and to receive that support. A goal of hospitality is to be the welcoming, inclusive, loving presence of the Divine. As Rev Jim Ozier states, “In so doing we help reduce or relieve the anxieties that another person may be feeling. Whatever we can do to make life (or the guest’s experience at our spiritual community) easier can become a blessing! How we smile at the person we don’t know, make eye contact, go out of our way to introduce ourselves and then to connect that person with other people—how we live out and create a culture of hospitality can make all the difference in the world to a hurting person.” (*Clip In: Risking Hospitality in Your Church*)

Research also indicates that most people with a human need will give six weeks to seeking support from others. They may come to your spiritual community six times or try different churches. If they haven’t formed a connection within the six weeks, they are likely to remain unchurched for the rest of their lives.

Imagine how a culture and way of being that supports people to feel highly anticipated, eagerly awaited, exceedingly loved, and also takes steps to connect them with others, will impact those coming to your community with life challenges.





Acknowledging Guests

Research into welcoming best practices reveals that *the best time to acknowledge the first-timer is just prior to the collection of the love offering*. Delaying the acknowledgment until the guest has had the opportunity to experience the bulk of the Sunday service enables the guest to feel more comfortable than if they are acknowledged before the Sunday lesson. (Your “welcome & greet” time in your service can be near the beginning of the program.)

Here are some guidelines for guest acknowledgment:

- Consider **not** using identifiers that make guests stand out such as ribbons or nametags. Also avoid asking them to stand or speak as most people are highly embarrassed by this. A warm, friendly and low-key welcome is cited by research as a key to having a guest return. (Gary McIntosh, *Beyond the First Visit*, p. 110.) At the same time, **having members wear a name tag is very helpful to a guest**.
- At the time of acknowledgment, the minister (or platform assistant) gives a one-minute, “What is Unity?” talk or some other testimonial regarding the value of the spiritual community.
- The minister (or platform assistant) invites first-time guests to raise their hand so the community can welcome them and ushers can give them a Welcome Packet.
- Congregation applauds.
 - Minister invites guests:
 - To fellowship after the service.
 - To redeem coupon for a free gift and/or or copy of today’s service.
 - To complete the Guest Information Card and place it in the offertory as you do not expect a first-time guest to share a love offering.
- Just prior to the offertory blessing and collection, the minister (or platform assistant) announces:

*It is now time in our service for the giving and receiving of tithes and love offerings; this commitment in giving is a part of our community’s spiritual practice. If today is your first visit, we would like to honor and acknowledge that you are a blessing to us and that your presence here today is your gift to this ministry. You are **not** expected to participate in the offering. We do ask that you place the Guest Information Card in the offertory basket (bag, plate, etc.).*

- Prior to the conclusion of the worship service, guests can be invited to connect with a chaplain for confidential prayer support.
- Minister should connect with guests following the service.



Conducting Guest Follow-Up

- Add the guest information to your mailing list.
- Call guest to thank them for attending services within 48 hours. Ideally, the minister makes this phone contact in Program-size churches or smaller.
- If the guest is agreeable, the minister can set an appointment to “make a brief visit.” Keep visit to 10 minutes or less. Answer questions; let the guest know about something in her area of interest. Invite them back.
- Mail a thank-you or welcome letter to each guest.
- Mail a second letter one month later to invite the guest to an upcoming service or a Unity Basics class or a small group lunch with the minister.



Welcoming System Questionnaire—Phase Two

Welcoming Culture

1	Is there an intentional process of creating a welcoming culture within the ministry?	Yes	No
2	Is the congregation, at large, encouraged to be a welcoming community?	Yes	No
3	Does the congregation know and understand what their role is in supporting a welcoming culture?	Yes	No
4	Do you have an intention of nine (9) contacts with guests (pre-service, during and after service, and over the coming week)?	Yes	No

Linking Mission/Vision/Core Values

5	Are the ministry's mission, vision and core values statements included during guest acknowledgement, in the welcome packet and in the bulletin?	Yes	No
6	Are the ministry's mission, vision and core values statements included in the Welcome Team training guide, in the descriptions of Welcome Team roles and accountabilities, and in every aspect of the Welcome Team support?	Yes	No

Welcome Team

7	Is there a written purpose statement or mission for the Welcome Team?	Yes	No
8	Are the roles and accountabilities clearly defined for each Welcome Team member?	Yes	No
9	Does the Welcome Team represent a good cross section of the congregation (age, ethnicity, gender, etc.)?	Yes	No
10	Is there a structured training program for ushers, greeters, hosts, etc.?	Yes	No

On Sundays

11	Does someone other than the greeter/usher make contact with the guest when they first arrive?	Yes	No
12	Are key leaders and board members intentionally making contact with guests?	Yes	No
13	Does the congregation routinely wear nametags?	Yes	No
14	Is the guest introduced to other guests?	Yes	No
15	Is someone assigned to count guests?	Yes	No
16	Are second- and third-timers acknowledged during the Sunday service?	Yes	No

17	Are key leaders, board members and congregants assigned and trained to make contact with guests after the service?	Yes	No
18	Is the guest introduced to others in the congregation?	Yes	No
19	Do you share inspirational Sunday lessons at least twice a year that invites the entire community to demonstrate a welcoming consciousness?	Yes	No
20	Is the 5-10-Link Rule used to embody welcoming? (see p. 24)	Yes	No

Integrating Welcoming

21	Is the welcoming process applied to other events (mid-week services, classes, workshops), not just worship services?	Yes	No
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Creating an Intentional Follow-Up System: Data Tracking

22	Is someone responsible for entering guest information into a data base?	Yes	No
23	Is there a way to track and follow up on the guest's feedback regarding their Sunday service experience?	Yes	No
24	Is there a data tracking system in place?	Yes	No
25	Does the tracking system show the follow up actions such as letter, calls, and visits?	Yes	No
26	Is the Welcome Team and Board reviewing the tracking results?	Yes	No

Moving Newcomers into Greater Involvement

27	Does the Welcoming System have the aim of moving guests into a deeper relationship with the community via Spiritual Gifts Discovery, Sacred Service, and Spiritual Development? (Available from Unity Worldwide Ministries—see page 3.)	Yes	No
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Implementation Overview: Phase Two

The Welcoming System for Phase Two is much more intentional and integrates the community's mission, vision and core values (M/V/CV) into the welcoming process and culture. The *consciousness* of welcoming is developed and supported by every individual member of the community. This serves to provide an atmosphere conducive to ongoing spiritual development and sacred service in the ministry and it also invites everyone within the ministry to live from its core values.

Phase Two has the following aims:

- Creating an intentional welcoming practice
- Connecting each piece of the welcoming system to the ministry's M/V/CV
- Understanding welcoming as a system within the greater context of the ministry evolving a consciousness of welcoming
- Creating a follow-up system that supports people in getting connected
- Moving people toward greater involvement and deepening relationship

Think of your welcoming system as a ministry within your ministry that supports individuals on their spiritual path and guides them to opportunities to deepen that walk. It is an avenue for people to connect to the spiritual support they are seeking and contribute to a bigger vision. It is also an integral part of creating a thriving ministry.

Deepening the Welcoming Culture

It is often said that *“people don't just want a friendly church; they are looking for a church where they can make friends.”* The most effective welcoming process involves a deep culture of welcoming that does not rely solely on a Welcome Team. It is a culture shared by all. Church members understand the importance of their role in connecting with guests. Ministries in other denominations that are creating a welcoming culture have the goal of “every member every Sunday.” This involves a consciousness and practice of welcoming as a responsibility of everyone in the spiritual community with the intention of making connections with guests.

Deep welcoming is intentional, relational, interactive, engaging and connecting. Deep welcoming consciousness and practices become the DNA of the entire congregation. As a result, guests experience that you are not only glad that they are present, but also that you care about who they are, what their story is, and that you want to be part of it. (*Clip In: Risking Hospitality in Your Church*) Without this deep welcoming culture, you may be doing some good welcoming practices, but not yet creating the experience for your guests of being loved and cared about.

To create and sustain such a culture, the ministers and lay leaders commit to regularly teaching welcoming consciousness and practices to the entire congregation in Sunday service settings, modeling welcoming, and reinforcing it whenever appropriate. They also “make it the spirit of the Sunday service. What creates culture in any organization is where

there is consistency of messaging throughout the organization.” (Clip In: *Risking Hospitality in Your Church*)

A key aspect of moving into a welcoming culture is to ensure balancing the support of existing members (so that they feel loved and honored) while creating the momentum of reaching and welcoming new people.



Action Steps

In Phase Two you will explore and implement each aspect of the welcoming system and are invited to add your ministry’s mission, vision and core values to the process. Completing all of these steps will enable your ministry to successfully establish the foundation for the Phase Three level of development.

The welcoming system is not just about a team assigned to greeting on Sunday morning, it is a *whole community process* that soaks into and permeates the fabric of the consciousness of *all* persons within the ministry. Perhaps one of the most of important elements of Phase Two is the training and reinforcement of the role of the spiritual community.

Phase Two Action Steps:

- Completing the *Questionnaire–Phase Two* with key leaders and the Welcome Team
- Linking your mission, vision and values to the basic welcoming process
- Defining roles and implementing explicit accountabilities
- Training the people involved in the welcoming process
- Creating a Sunday service that supports all aspects of welcoming
- Integrating welcoming into all aspects of ministry
- Creating an intentional follow-up system
- Moving newcomers into greater involvement in the community



Complete the Welcoming System Questionnaire–Phase Two

- Complete the *Questionnaire–Phase Two* assessment to determine where and how to strengthen your welcoming program.
- Invite key leaders to participate in the Questionnaire. This will prepare them to be more conscious of the process and where they can make a contribution.



Linking Mission/Vision/Core Values to Basic Welcoming Process

This step requires you to personalize your welcoming material. It is important that the purpose of welcoming be linked to your ministry's mission, vision and core values. Make sure to include this information:

- During guest acknowledgement
Example: *"We are a welcoming community whose mission is to As such we want to acknowledge all our first-time guests and let you know you are welcome here."*
- In the welcome packet
- In the bulletin
- In the Welcome Team training guide
- In the descriptions of Welcome Team roles and accountabilities
- In every aspect of the Welcome Team support process



Defining and Implementing Welcome Team's Roles and Accountabilities

Welcome Team members are an integral component of sustaining a welcoming culture in the spiritual community. They are counted on to bring a high level of presence and caring to first-timers. To achieve this, it is necessary that team member roles and their corresponding accountabilities be linked to the aim of creating a dynamic welcoming system. The ministry counts on each team member to fulfill his or her purpose within the welcoming system structure.

The following roles comprise the Welcome Team:

- Welcome Team Leader
- Host/Buddy
- Greeter
- Usher
- Support Staff

Depending upon the size of your ministry, it may be necessary for individuals to serve in multiple roles. For instance, in small churches one individual may serve as a host/buddy, greeter and usher.

The role definitions and accountabilities listed in the Appendix: Phase Two are examples. You will need to modify and expand upon them in order to make them specific to your ministry's welcoming system. In addition to identifying explicit accountabilities, create a list of skills needed for each role and to whom the role reports (see examples in the *Appendix: Phase Two*). Include any qualifications associated with a particular role. This will aid in the recruitment process. It is

equally important that you add the procedural elements that are specific to your community and to the individual roles.

Creating Explicit Accountabilities

- **Role Accountabilities:** Think about accountabilities with respect to a welcome team member's role, i.e. what you count on this person (role) for. Then ask, "What does someone say yes to when they agree to serve?"
- **Role Actions List:** Once you identify what you count on each role to accomplish and what purpose needs to be fulfilled by the role, make a list of the things the person(s) in this role will do. Consider the tasks and procedures that comprise your welcoming process that they will follow. Focus on what they **do** to fulfill a particular expectation, purpose, objective, need, etc.
- **Accountability Statements:** After creating the Role Actions list; write an accountability statement for each responsibility (what you count on someone for). **Use a brief phrase beginning with an "ing" verb**, making sure to **describe what they do** (must be measurable).

See *Appendix: Phase Two* for examples for each team role.



Training People Involved in the Welcoming Process

It is equally important that each member of the Welcome Team receive training to support them in demonstrating the best practices within the welcoming system and to remember that this is all about being in sacred service to those people who are new and may feel uncomfortable or be unfamiliar with the workings of the ministry.

It is just as important that team members feel comfortable within their role. Intentional training allows them to fully understand the process of welcoming and the part they play with it. In *Appendix: Phase Two* you will find a format for training that will provide individuals with the tools they need to become effective members of the Welcome Team.

(See *Welcome Team Training Guide* in *Appendix: Phase Two*.)



Creating a Sunday Service that Supports All Aspects of Welcoming

There are a number of elements that support the community in creating a welcoming consciousness. The Sunday service is the primary opportunity to make people aware of what being a welcoming community means and how each individual within the ministry plays a part in that process. It is also the first introduction to the community for most new people. It is thus vital that the worship service be an intentional place of creating a welcoming culture.

This begins with:

- Acknowledging guests during the worship service
- Appreciating second- and third-time guests
- Connecting key leaders with guests
- Sharing an inspirational Sunday lesson that invites the entire community to demonstrate a welcoming consciousness

Guest Acknowledgment During the Sunday Service

After first-time guests have been acknowledged and have received their Welcome Packet, ask that returning guests (second- and third-timers) raise their hands. Appreciate their presence and invite them to fellowship. The Host should be on the lookout for these individuals and make sure they are introduced to a key leader or other welcome team member.

Connecting Guests to Key Leaders

Whenever possible, guests should be introduced to key leaders who are trained to go beyond “small talk” to deepen the guest’s experience of the spiritual community. The Welcome Team should identify the various opportunities to connect, such as:

- Prior to the beginning of the service (by the Host or Greeter)
- During the meet-and-greet time in the service
- During fellowship

The key leaders serving in this element of the welcoming system should have a pre-determined list of topics for conversation, such as:

- How did you come to find out about the ministry?
- Are you familiar with Unity?
- Would you like a tour of the facility?
- What brought you here today?

Any guest’s special need learned in the conversation is passed along to the Welcome Team leader.

Inspirational Sunday Lesson on Demonstrating a Welcoming Consciousness

It is important to regularly emphasize the importance of the community embodying a welcoming consciousness. Along with the other items mentioned, a Sunday message can help bring home the experience of welcoming and remind everyone how it is an important part of living the shared values of the community.

(See *Appendix: Phase Two* for a sample Sunday lesson and other resources.)

Methodist ministries coached by Rev Jim Ozier have adopted the **5-10-Link Rule**. At the end of the Sunday talk on welcoming, this rule is taught and practiced during the service at least two times a year.

- **5 refers to time.** Fellowship and visiting with friends is important in a spiritual community. Five minutes before the service starts, and five minutes after it ends, meet someone you don't know.
- **10 refers to space.** Even if you are with a group of friends, when someone you don't know comes within ten feet of you, reach out to them and invite them into your group.
- **Link refers to connecting.** When you meet someone new, quickly link them to someone else based on some common affinity such as occupation, interests, etc.

A key aspect of making these connections is providing a simple way to get beyond the concern most of us have about not remembering names. When you include sample ways to handle introductions and connections after the Sunday talk, you help members to feel more comfortable and confident about connecting and linking.

For a simple way to teach and practice the **5-10-Link Rule** during the Sunday service and with the Welcome Team, see *Appendix: Phase Two* in the Welcome Team Training, *Welcoming Practice: 5-10-Link*, p. 57.

Don't worry that a welcoming-related talk and practice exercises will "get old" if repeated twice a year. Churches who follow this practice have said that the opposite is true. Members appreciate the reminder. Guests report that they appreciate the interest of this spiritual community in true welcoming.

A few other practices for connecting are in the *Appendix: Phase Two* in the Welcome Team Training.



Integrating Welcoming into All Aspects of Ministry

Though the worship service is a vital point of contact for many new people, the Welcoming System must permeate all aspects of the ministry. The intention is to connect new people to your classes, activities and events, so they may begin to become integrated into the community.

The aim is to create a welcoming culture that can be seen and felt throughout the ministry. In order to do that, it is important that *every* member of the community understands their role in the welcoming process, even if they are not on the team. Guests often wait to be invited to participate. After all, they are in a place where they feel like the outsider. This can be done in a number of ways, which all involve the key concept of *inviting often*.

New Member Classes and Their Role in Welcoming

It is important to support new members in understanding their role in welcoming. Once someone enters the membership track, they are making a commitment to play a bigger role within the community and in demonstrating a welcoming presence. Members are unofficial ambassadors within the community and each one has an opportunity to demonstrate a welcoming presence and to create an opening for greater connection. Teaching this in every new member class is vital.

You may consider inviting them to remember what it felt like to be new and how they were welcomed. How do they wish someone would have greeted them, interacted with them or made them feel welcome? What would have made them feel comfortable? Have them write these items down and then commit to demonstrating those behaviors each week.

Board, Staff and Leadership Trainings

Each of the key leaders in a spiritual community is responsible for creating a welcoming culture and demonstrating the behaviors and attitudes that will allow newcomers to feel welcome and begin to connect with, and integrate into, the community. Each leader should be familiar with the members of the Welcome Team so they can connect new people to the process, as well as understand that they are an unofficial member of the team as well.

Invite key leaders to participate in the facility assessment and in completing the *Welcoming System Questionnaire*. This will prepare them to be more conscious of the process and be better able to contribute.

Small Group Ministry

Getting involved in Small Group Ministry is one way for a newcomer to become quickly integrated into the community. It may also be a person's first experience of the community, if they were invited to be a part of it. Be sure to include a process for connecting and acknowledging people who may be new to the community in your training of group facilitators.

For guidance in implementing Small Group Ministry, see UWM's [Small Group Ministry Guide](#).

Classes and Events

Often new people come to a class or event they've seen advertised and aren't even aware of the Sunday services that are available. It is important to make every contact point of the ministry an opportunity to receive new people. Likewise, those who do attend on Sundays are seeking other ways to connect with your ministry.



Creating an Intentional Follow-Up System

A newcomer returns to the community when they feel connected to it, when they see an opportunity to form relationships, to be supported on their spiritual path and to make a difference. There needs to be a number of 'touch points' along the way, a **minimum of nine** according to research, in order for a first time guest to feel that connection and return to a community.

Having an intentional follow-up system is a way to provide increasing levels of excellence in your services through the capturing of pertinent data that allows for the conscious integration of new guests into the spiritual community from the first visit (and beyond).

Important elements of the follow-up system:

- Guest Information Card (See *Appendix: Phase One*)
- A database to track guests and returnees

Data Tracking

Data tracking is integral to thriving ministry. The advent of web-based technologies and database software specifically designed for church organizations provides a time-saving and efficient tool to manage the myriad details of ministry operations.

Most church data tracking systems will not only completely organize all of your church information, but will help you improve visitor follow-up, become proactive with member and leader development, analyze all of your small group details, simplify contribution reporting, and even streamline your child check-in process.

In addition to these common features, you can:

- Generate attendance reports
- Track volunteer hours
- Conduct mass emailing to promote special events
- Stay on top of trends within the ministry
- Retain more visitors
- Geographically view and manage your small group ministry
- Track contributions and pledges
- Eliminate paperwork
- Establish web-based forums to support small groups, community outreach and special projects
- Track spiritual gifts and callings of individual members

A simple Google search of “church data tracking systems” will result in dozens of vendors representing a diverse array of programs. Here are three possibilities to explore:

- www.excellerate.com This is a software-based data tracking platform that is scalable to your size of ministry. Software costs depend on the size of your ministry.
- www.churchmetrics.com This is a web-based platform and **free**. The features are not as complex as Excellerate, but worth exploring. If you can count it, you can track it.
- www.churchdb.org Another **free** web-based platform with great versatility designed for larger ministries requiring a part-time tech person.

- www.MinistryTracker.com This system has a monthly subscription rate starting at \$25 for their simplest web-based system and a 7-day free trial.

The advantage of a web-based platform is that data can be tracked from any Internet connection. The primary disadvantage is that your data is in virtual storage. Software-based systems keep your data on your desktop PC or Mac. The disadvantage is that only the computer with the installed software can access the system.

Note from one of the field-test ministries:

They were able to renegotiate their mortgage favorably partly due to tracking their numbers (increase in attendance, classes, students, teams, team members, events, community outreach, etc.)



Moving Newcomers into Greater Involvement in the Community

The aim of the welcoming system as a whole, is to integrate newcomers into the community so they can be supported in their spiritual growth, form relationships and discover the joy of being in sacred service. So this can happen, it is important to connect people to the ministry's activities, classes and groups. This can be done in a number of ways.

- Adding information on upcoming events, classes and groups to the Welcome Packet
- Utilizing bulletin inserts
- Sharing testimonials from the platform about upcoming classes or ongoing groups
- Inviting personal friends and neighbors
- Offering the Emotional and Spiritual Development Process *
- Providing the Spiritual Gifts Discovery Process *
- Implementing the Sacred Service Ministry Program *

* These are additional downloadable UWM Guides (part of the Leadership and Ministry Development resources, see p 3).

Welcoming System Questionnaire—Phase Three

Greeting and Welcoming Enhancements

1	Are guests greeted in the parking lot?	Yes	No
2	Is there an attended information table?	Yes	No
3	Are guests with children greeted by Youth & Family volunteers/staff and invited to tour youth classrooms?	Yes	No
4	Is someone assigned to intentionally interact with guests?	Yes	No
5	Are guests invited to go on a guided tour of the facility?	Yes	No
6	If there is a special event or program happening that week, is someone assigned to share information with the guest?	Yes	No
7	Is there a host/mentor/buddy system to connect with the guest?	Yes	No

Including Millennials

8	Are the perspectives of the Millennial generation and unchurched considered in the Sunday service, welcome materials and other communications?	Yes	No
9	Is sacred service (that has a broad and intergenerational appeal) a regular part of your programming?	Yes	No

Tracking, Review and Evaluation

10	Is there a quarterly review of the welcoming language in the Sunday service, welcome materials and other communications?	Yes	No
11	Is there a system in place to track attendance at services, classes, special programs, volunteer hours, or participation in projects/ministry teams/outreach, spiritual gifts, areas of expertise, etc. of guests and congregants?	Yes	No
12	Is there a system or process in place to review data that is tracked?	Yes	No
13	Is someone assigned to track, analyze, and distribute data that is tracked?	Yes	No
14	Is there a system to track follow-up letters, notes, postcards, phone calls, etc., for first-time guests?	Yes	No
15	Is there a system in place for team leaders to review and evaluate the welcoming system?	Yes	No
16	Is there a system in place to review the effectiveness and capability of individual Welcome Team members with respect to their roles and accountabilities?	Yes	No
17	Is there a regular debriefing or review process in place for Welcome Team members to discuss program effectiveness and make recommendations for improvements?	Yes	No

Pathway to Membership

18	Does the welcoming system have the aim of moving the guest to the first level of integration/membership in the ministry?	Yes	No
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Culture of Recommending

19	Does the welcoming system include developing a culture of recommendation?	Yes	No
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Implementation Overview: Phase Three

Phase Three elements deepen the complexity of your welcoming system/team and introduce the explicit aim of inviting the guest into the first level of membership in the spiritual community. It also introduces an evaluative component where both the “system” and the “team” are reviewed at regular intervals.

Phase Three has the following elements:

- Guests greeted in the parking lot
- An “attended” information table
- Guests with children greeted by Youth & Family staff & volunteers
- Intentional pairing of guest with Buddy/church leader
- Additional opportunities to enhance connection
- Tracking of attendance (services, classes, events, etc.), volunteer hours, participation in projects, outreach activities, spiritual gifts and areas of expertise
- Review and evaluation systems
 - Data tracking and reporting
 - Welcoming system effectiveness
 - Team effectiveness (peer review)
 - Tracking follow-up (letters, notes, postcards, phone calls, visitation)
- Guided facility tours and guest orientation
- Events promotion and invitation by member

Phase Three implementation relies heavily upon established Phase Two structures and the competence and capabilities of trained team members to ensure successful fulfillment of this aim. It is best suited for Program-, Corporate- and Mega-sized churches. Some elements may be manageable for Pastoral-sized churches.

The seeds for many Phase Three elements have been planted in Phase Two. The action steps for Phase Three will build upon or expand established structures, systems and aims. They may require more resources (volunteers and/or funding) considering the complexity of a fully functional welcoming ministry. The Welcome Team Leader (WTL) role may need to become a full-time staff position as the accountabilities for this role evolve.

It is recommended that the WTL facilitate a small group of team members to study the Phase Three elements and develop an implementation plan for bringing them online. The elements may be prioritized in the context of your current system, keeping in mind that all are necessary. Whenever new structures are put in place or established structures enhanced, guidelines, procedures, systems and role definitions/accountabilities must be created, updated, or otherwise documented. Remember that it takes time and follow-through to increase the complexity of the welcoming process. A clear, step-by-step action plan will aid in the implementation of Phase Three elements.



Action Steps

Phase Three Action Steps:

- Complete the *Questionnaire–Phase Three*
- Greeting and Welcoming Enhancements
- Other Ways to Enhance Connection
- Opening the Sunday Service to Include the Millennial Generation
- Strengthening Communications
 - Expanding Sacred Service as a Practice for Assimilation
- Tracking, Review and Evaluation
- Pathway to First-level Membership
- Creating a Culture of Recommending
- Be the Welcome You Want to See in the World



Complete the Questionnaire–Phase Three

- Complete the *Questionnaire—Phase Three* assessment to determine where and how to strengthen your welcoming program.
- Invite key leaders to participate in the Questionnaire. This will prepare them to be more conscious of the process and where they can make a contribution.



Greeting and Welcoming Enhancements

In Phase Three, the greeting of guests is expanded to include: the greeting of guests as they arrive in the parking lot, a team of Youth & Family volunteers and/or staff to greet guests with children, guided tours of the facility, promotion of events, an “attended” information table and the intentional pairing of the guest with a Buddy or other designated team member.

- It is important to have convenient, **“designated” guest or visitor parking**. This makes it easier to identify first-timers. The **“parking lot greeting team”** can use wireless devices to communicate to other team members serving indoors to be on the alert for a guest and any special needs they may have. For instance, if the guest has children, Youth & Family staff can be alerted. If a guest needs assistance, indoor staff can be alerted. If a guest arrives late, indoor staff can be alerted to ease the guest’s transition to the worship service. If it is raining, the parking lot team can offer an umbrella.
- Youth & Family volunteers and/or staff should **greet guests with children**. A young person (YOUer, Uniteen, or other peer) could be a part of the team. The Youth & Family team should create procedures for welcoming young guests so they can easily acclimate to the experience of meeting new friends.
- A great way to enhance a first-time guest's experience is to **offer a tour** of your facilities. It provides an opportunity to showcase the ministry’s history, mission, programs and special events. The guided tour is not only a good way of connecting with the guest; it enables the Host, Greeter, or Buddy to get to know the guest more personally. End the guided tour with a visit to the bookstore or information table.
- Your **Information Table** needs to be staffed by trained volunteers skillful in greeting guests as well as knowledgeable of ministry’s programs and services. Remember, an aim of your welcoming process is to optimize the guest’s experience as well as to link them to the people and services that will increase the likelihood of their return. Their “information table” experience can be that connecting link.
- Be sure to have a **clean, welcoming hospitality area** that offers light food, pastries and beverages. If people have something to eat, they won’t be as anxious to leave and will have reason to linger longer and get to know others.
- Consider creating a 2-6 minute **video** about your center and community. In the video, welcome a viewer at your front door, give them a tour of major areas, show a small sample of a Sunday, and add one or two events (especially if one is sacred service). This can go on your website and in your welcome packet. It allows people to check you out or remember their experience with you.

There are many examples of videos; here are three:

- Howard Caesar, Unity of Houston, Texas, <http://unityhouston.org/>
 - Kevin Ross, Unity of Sacramento, Calif., <http://www.unityofsacramento.com/>
 - Michael Beckwith, Agape International Spiritual Center, Culver City, Calif., www.agapelive.com
- Be intentional about pairing a **Buddy** with the guest. It's the Buddy's job to support the guest in finding their way to an authentic connection to the community and beyond. The Buddy's role expands to include:
 - Gathering information on the guest's interests and needs and connecting them with someone who might be willing to meet them at a class, support group or volunteer team meeting and introduce them to the group.
 - Adding pertinent information to the data tracking system so the guest can be informed of any upcoming activities or events that suit their interest.
 - Assuring the minister makes personal contact with the guest.



Other Ways to Enhance Connection

Introduction to the Minister and Leadership

The more a community grows, the more leadership is required to step back from direct pastoral care-type support of the congregation and step into a more expansive role that holds the bigger vision of the community. It is important, however, for congregants to still feel like they have access to the minister and the leadership in some way. This is a great way for new people to get to know the leadership and begin to move toward greater involvement. The added benefit is that often the more accessible the leadership seems to be, the less overall problems occur. Below are some options to consider.

- **Open Office Hours:** The minister can reserve one afternoon/evening a week for open office hours in which people can drop in for prayer, to express concerns or just connect. A sign-up sheet marked with half hour increments marked can be placed on the door one week in advance to avoid conflicts.
- **Personal Time with the Minister(s):** Once a month, or once a quarter, depending on the size of the community, the minister(s) can create a space for a smaller group meeting. This could look like coffee, breakfast,

pizza with the preacher or whatever format works for the minister's schedule. Advanced sign-ups would be required and spots would be limited to 10-20 people and reserved first for those who have not attended before. This would be an open time to ask questions about the community, Unity beliefs or discuss current events and how Unity theology addresses those situations.

- **Hospitality:** It is important to have your leadership available in the hospitality area so they can support guests in meeting others and connecting to the community's events.
- **Social Events:** Themed banquets, potlucks before special classes or services, holiday parties etc. are all good ways for the leadership to visit and connect with large numbers of people at once.

Guest Orientation

Newer members of the community can be invited to a monthly guest orientation. This can occur immediately after the service and might include a brief explanation of Unity's guiding principles, as well as an overview of the ministry's mission and vision, what services it offers and its compassionate social action projects. This may be led by a board member or other leader in the community and should be no more than 20-30 minutes with time at the end for questions.

Friendship Sunday

You can bring new visitors and help connect them to your church with a Friendship Sunday event. A well-planned event can serve as a pathway to greater involvement and eventual membership. Some ideas to consider are:

- **Build a base of prayer.**
 - Have your chaplains and leadership hold the consciousness of welcome and openness for several weeks in advance of the event.
 - You may choose to bless the sanctuary before the service, as well as the new people they "see" sitting in the chairs.
- **Build momentum and share tools to support the process.**
 - Make an announcement each week.
 - Cast a vision for hospitality and welcome and invite everyone to participate.
 - Prepare marketing materials or invitations members can give away.
 - Distribute flyers.

- Invite people to share information with their networks like Facebook.
- Review and update your webpage to make sure all information is relevant.
- **Update/review your hospitality systems.**
 - Give your building/meeting space a fresh review for cleanliness and presentation.
 - Have your hospitality team prepare additional food and create a welcoming atmosphere in the area.
- **Launch a Sunday series that day.**
 - Launch a 4-7 week sermon series that will draw people in and make them want to return.
 - Choose topics that are relevant to current life situations.
 - Foreshadow the next installment to increase the possibility of a return visit.
 - Teach a class that starts the following week and supports the Sunday series.
- **Additional opportunities**
 - Prepare a social event within a few weeks of the Friendship Sunday.
 - Inform guests of additional connection opportunities (see above) and invite them to participate.
 - Invite people to serve in the community or get involved in compassionate social action projects your community offers.
 - Send them a hand written note of welcome and invitation to future participation.



Opening the Sunday Service to Include the Millennial Generation

An essential for Millennial guests (ages 18-35), the "spiritual but not religious" and the "religious but unchurched" is that the Sunday service is engaging and that they feel connected.

- **Announcements** are important yet frustrating to many.
 - Try using brief **video clips** by the person in charge of each announcement (for easy facial recognition for later questions). This keeps things moving and can be done with a smart phone camera.

- If you are using a PowerPoint slide, add a **photo of the person** with whom a guest can follow up. Guests do not know members and can be at a loss as how to explore an offering any further.
- Briefly **explain "insider" words**. “The canoe trip with the HAWKS team is for single parents.” Guests typically do not ask and will miss an opportunity especially designed to engage them.
- Place announcements towards the **end of the service**. Let a guest sense if the lesson and music resonate with them; then they will want to know how they can connect more deeply.
- Be sure that the **words** you used from the platform, on PowerPoint and bulletins are carefully thought out with the intention of **connecting**.
 - Avoid words or phrases like “Join us for ____.” Instead, **focus on the benefits** available to anyone who participates in the event.
 - “Join us” can create suspicion in the minds of some first-time guests. Is the spiritual community there to connect with and support them, engage them, and provide opportunities to serve or is the community focused on trying to get them to “join and be part of ‘us’ ”?
 - Use helpful language such as "invite" and invite them to something specific.
 - Help first-time guests see immediate ways to connect with a cause or purpose by saying: "If you are a first-time guest, you are probably here not just to hear what we have to say but also to find a place and way to make a difference. I invite you to check out how you can do something really helpful ..."
 - at the Habitat House we are working on.
 - in collecting food for the hungry.
 - making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for Wayside Shelter immediately after our service today.
- Consider ways you can deliver lessons to which a first-time guest can relate to and engage in. Surveys conducted reveal that most **Millennials say they are not interested in coming to church to hear someone talk. They would prefer to have opportunities to share their questions and dialogue with others about spiritual matters**. This engagement may be a special feature of the service; the ongoing use of Twitter, texting, or a style of communication.
 - Provide opportunities for people to talk with each other, do something personally meaningful, build a sense of community

- Provide specifics of how people can put into practice what you are talking about
- Share real stories about how people are actually using what the talk is about. Better yet, share short videos or invite people to come up and share their stories.
 - Solicit stories via email, text, Facebook.
 - Let people know that their stories may help shape someone else's story.
- Rethink how to increase discussion.
 - Some, like Unity minister Rev Denise Yeargin, Unity of Music City, Nashville, Tenn., (www.unityofmusiccity.com), have removed some pews and added some tables for a more relaxed feeling in the meeting hall.
 - Consider a question-and-answer period during the service.
 - Some have discussion questions available to stimulate conversations after the service.
- Ensure that all parts of the service match your welcoming culture.
 - Model a spirit of camaraderie, teamwork and fun on the platform.
 - Guests feel connected when they experience a sense of fun and community.
 - Before the offering, say “Those of you here for the first, second, third time (fill in what works for you) are our guests, and we want you simply to receive the blessings of this service and spiritual community. We're glad you are here.”
(from *Clip In: Risking Hospitality in Your Church*)



Strengthening Communications

For most Millennials, their cell phone and social media are their connection to the world. They are used to connecting through texts and social media and seeing videos via their phone. Some possible practices:

- Stop for a moment in the service and ask all who have cell phones to take them out, scroll through their contacts, stop and pray for names on the screen, then send them a text, “I’m at Unity of _____ holding you in prayer.”
- If you use PowerPoint, try having the final slide at the conclusion of the service read: “If you have questions about anything you heard or experienced today, text #_____ and one of our staff/leaders will

get back to you within two hours (or a workable timeframe for your ministry).”

- If you don't use PowerPoint, print the message in your bulletin. Be sure to have a dedicated cell phone that can be rotated among staff or lay leaders to field any inquiries, and be diligent to provide immediate response.
- Even if you never get a texted question, you are communicating your desire to connect and engage and that you “speak their language.”
- When someone does text, your response may open the door for greater connection or even a personal friendship.
- Bonus: You have a cell phone number. Keep a database of all cell numbers and send out “blast texts” for hands-on service opportunities (from *Clip In: Risking Hospitality in Your Church*)



Expanding Sacred Service as a Practice for Assimilation

Millennial guests want to make a difference in the world. Barna and Pew research shows that spiritual communities who emphasize service that supports others in the outer community are attracting those in this age group and growing. And it attracts the other age groups as well.

Service Opportunities

A key factor in attracting and retaining Millennials is moving them into engagement and service as quickly as possible. Feeling that they belong to a community and that they are engaged in it and in service is essential.

- Consider the possibility of having a Sacred Service Outreach Team that sets up simple service opportunities that all interested spiritual community members and families can do immediately after the Sunday service. This could be making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and putting them into brown bags, along with an apple, for the Outreach Team to take to a shelter that afternoon. Or putting items like soap, shampoo, toothpaste, toothbrush, washcloth, deodorant into bags as personal hygiene kits that the Outreach Team has arranged to share. Or packing food backpacks for school children to eat over the weekends when they may not have enough food otherwise. There are so many possibilities.

If your spiritual community steps into such simple service opportunities right after Sunday service, those connecting with guests can invite them to

join in that service activity. A first-time guest, especially a Millennial, will likely stop and help, if invited.

If the guest does participate, they can be naturally connecting with the others around them as they work together. If every member has taken on the responsibility of connecting with guests, this can quickly build a sense of connection, belonging and community along with service that can bring anyone—especially a Millennial—back for more. They will likely tell their friends and share on social media what they did and where they did it, which can attract others to your spiritual community.

- If you are sending a welcome letter to first-time guests, consider sending a **text** to a Millennial guest instead. Include in the message, “We were so happy to have you with us last Sunday for our Sunday service and community outreach project. This outreach project made a difference for (put in number and specifics) people. Let me share some ways you can make a difference in the coming months: (list dates and types of after Sunday service activities.)”



Tracking, Review and Evaluation

In Phase Two, data tracking was introduced to more efficiently manage guest information, follow-up and attendance trends. Phase Three recommends taking full advantage of data tracking technology in order to bring a high level of functionality to your welcoming system as well as other information management tasks of the ministry. As the ministry grows in numbers and complexity, data tracking, analysis and reporting will aid in evaluating the effectiveness of programs, services and outreach.

- As a general rule of thumb, **track everything**. If you can count it, you can track it. While the welcoming system itself is dependent upon good follow-up, your tracking system will enable you to generate reports and data useful in evaluating its effectiveness. Expand the scope of your data tracking to include:
 - First- and second-timer’s attendance of services
 - Classes, events, etc.
 - Sacred service teams and hours
 - People’s participation in projects and outreach activities
 - Spiritual gifts and areas of expertise, etc.

- Establish a role and the accountabilities for data tracking and the generation of reports useful in evaluating the effectiveness of programs and services.
- Routinely evaluate the effectiveness of the welcoming system by having regular debriefing sessions among Welcome Team members and the ministry’s leadership. The Welcome Team leaders should also establish a peer review process for optimizing the effectiveness of the Welcome Team and the individuals that comprise it.



Pathway to First-level Membership

As mentioned in the implementation overview, an aim of the welcoming system is to transition the guest from first-time guest to community member (the first level of community membership). Ideally, your ministry has an enhanced membership system (community member/governing member) that differentiates entry-level belonging from being spiritually developed and qualified as a governing member.

Integral to this objective is a structured program of spiritual development and sacred service. For guidance in implementing these programs, see UWM’s *Emotional and Spiritual Maturity Development Guide* and *Sacred Service Ministry Guide*. (Available mid-2015.)

Saying yes to becoming a “community member” ostensibly means making a commitment to growing one’s own emotional and spiritual maturity; taking on some form of sacred service aligned with the individual’s identified spiritual gifts, and agreeing to fulfill a minimum member contribution with their time, talents and treasure.

Think of the “pathway” as a series of stepping-stones that begins with the guest’s first visit to the ministry.



During their first visit they experience a warm and friendly welcome and meet people of like mind and heart. They enjoy fellowship and learning about the ministry’s many interesting programs, activities and services. Later in the week they receive a letter, phone call or handwritten note thanking them for their visit and encouraging them to come again.

Within 3 to 6 weeks of their first visit to the ministry they choose to say yes to joining the community. They are formally welcomed into the community and begin the path to a greater expression of who and what they have come here to be. The member then chooses if they will complete the second part of the membership pathway where they intentionally take on the qualifications to participate as a governing member.



Creating a Culture of Recommending

While inviting people to your spiritual community for a Friendship Sunday may work well for you, many people in your spiritual community may not be comfortable inviting people. They may feel awkward in inviting someone, may feel that perhaps they will need to take their friend out for lunch afterwards or coordinate their schedules so that they arrive at the same time. **Those working with creating a welcoming culture are finding success in creating a culture of recommendation.**

Think for a moment, why do you go to a restaurant that you haven't been to before? Often, someone you know has recommended it to you. This same experience can work well for your spiritual community.

Ways to create a culture of recommendation:

- **Smart Phone Videos**
 - Ask Welcome Team members or other interested lay leaders to serve by taking videos with their smart phones and train them to do the following:
 - In the five minutes before church and ten minutes after church, ask a member and even a relatively new person a question such as:
 - ◆ “What brought you here the first time?”
 - ◆ “What would you recommend about this church?”
 - Listen for good stories. When you hear a good one, simply ask the person to say it again on a cell phone video. You can give them a starting prompt, if needed:
 - ◆ I first came here because ...
 - ◆ This is what I would recommend about this spiritual community ...
 - If you overhear hallway conversations or learn about a good story, go to that person and ask him or her to tell that story again while you record it on your cell phone to inspire others in the Sunday service.

- Email the video to the ministry’s tech person (staff or volunteer), so it can be quickly shown during the service.
- At every Sunday service, show one of these videos. If possible, show a video created just before the service or one created the previous week. Keep them current.
- After showing the video, the minister then says to all, “Friends, when you talk about our spiritual community with your friends, you can change someone’s life.” (*Clip In: Risking Hospitality in Your Church*)
- Make the videos available on your website or Facebook page for others to like and share with people they know.

When the videos are shown on the screen during each Sunday service and available for sharing, it creates a culture where people see the value of recommending the spiritual community to others and have comfortable ways to do so.

- **Survey**

- Email and have on your website a quick survey.
 - We are interested in finding out what people in our spiritual community really connect with. If you have time, please reply to the following quick question: _____.
 - What ministries, programs, groups, or events would you recommend to a new neighbor, family member, friend or co-worker?
- Include some of the stories from the survey in Sunday talks and on the website.

- Include **recommendation stories** and instructions on recommending in the Sunday talk.

- Acknowledge that although many find it awkward to invite, it is easy to recommend.
- Speak to **phases of recommendation** and offer easy ways to recommend
 - **Acknowledging**
 - ♦ Check in on Facebook before/after the Sunday service, or Like or post on the spiritual community’s Facebook page.
 - ♦ Mention the spiritual community’s name in conversation to others.
 - ♦ Specifically reference an attribute of the community at work or on social media. “Unity of South Lake is collecting canned goods for the hungry this Thanksgiving. If you’d like to help, let me know and I’ll pick them up.”

- **Affirming**
 - ♦ Check in on Facebook with a comment, “Enjoying great music at Unity of South Lakes this morning!”
 - ♦ Be specific in a Twitter feed. “Loved going to Unity of South Lake today. Connected with people and deep questions.”
 - ♦ Allow a fifteen-second video of your personal story of the spiritual community’s impact in your life to be shared in the Sunday service.
- **Advocating**
 - ♦ Forward to people on your contact list a creative, compelling electronic flyer (sent by the spiritual community) promoting a service opportunity or exciting event or talk series along with a personal comment.
 - ♦ Be intentionally self-revealing in talking with another person who may be going through a tough challenge, “The Parents of Teens support group really helped me when we were going through tough times with Sarah; I think it would help you too.”
 - ♦ Share with others how the spiritual community has personally impacted you.
- **Asking (inviting)**
 - ♦ Post on your Facebook page a picture of the spiritual community with information on some special event, “I’ll be going to the Posipalooza concert at Unity of South Lakes this Saturday night. Want to join me?”
 - ♦ “I know you are the kind of guy who loves to build things. We could sure use your help on our Habitat House. Will you go with me this Saturday morning?”
- **Reinforce** recommendation frequently.
 - Publicly thank people whose names come up in a recommendation story.
 - Send people in recommendation stories and videos a personal, handwritten thank-you note (or text a Millennial a sincere thank-you).

(Clip In: Risking Hospitality in Your Church)

Research shows that when someone says even one thing positive about something, they begin to form brand loyalty, so the more people share their stories and make recommendations, the more they step into loyalty and ownership in your spiritual community.



Be the Welcome You Want to See in the World!

Each step of the welcoming process provides greater opportunity for new people to feel welcomed and begin to integrate in the community. As you move through the phases, it is important to come back to the questionnaire, get input from your team members and periodically review your process. The point of enhancing your system is not to lose the basic focus and support you had in Phase One. It is equally important to come back to the reasons you had this intention in the first place.

Community growth is not about numbers; it's about people.

Know that your intention supports the mission of your ministry and leads to changed lives and ultimately to a world transformed through the growing movement of shared spiritual awakening.

You are helping to create a consciousness within your community that will spread out into the lives of your members. You are a blessing to this world and we celebrate your ongoing success!



Appendix: Phase One

Guest Information Card 46

Possible Gifts for Guests 47



Sample Guest Information Card

< Logo >

Guest Information Card

Welcome to [Insert Church Name]

In order for us to continue supporting those seeking a spiritual community, we ask you to please take a moment and fill in this card.

We appreciate your input!

Name _____

Address _____

City/St/Zip _____

Phone _____ Cell _____

Email _____

Please add my name to your mailing list.

How were you greeted when you arrived and what was your first impression of our spiritual community when you entered the building?

Besides the ushers and greeters, how would you describe the friendliness of our congregation?

- Not enough—didn't seem friendly
- Just right—people were friendly
- Too much—it was overwhelming
- Other (fill in below)

What describes your most overall recent spiritual background?

- Metaphysical/New Thought
- Traditional/Mainline Christianity
- Evangelical/Fundamental
- None
- Other (fill in below)

(Please see other side)

I attended –

- time of 1st service time of 2nd service
- Wed. Night service Musical Event
- Workshop/Class

How did you learn about <insert ministry name>?

What did you like most about our community and service?

What suggestions do you have for improvement?

I would like:

- More information about church activities and events
- To be added to the mailing list
- More information about Unity and its teachings
- Prayer support at this time
- More information about Youth and Family Ministry
- To speak to a minister
- To receive Chaplain Wellness Calls
- To establish connections in our community

I am – New to Area; New to Unity

How would you characterize the atmosphere of our community?

Cold & Unfriendly *Okay* *Warm & Friendly*

1.....2.....3.....4.....5

Thank you for your help.

We invite you to join us again as you are guided.

<Insert Ministry Name, Address, Telephone & email>

Possible Gift Ideas for Guests

Keep in mind that your ministry may choose several: one for the first-time guest, another for the second-time guest, and one if you offer a minister's visit.

If you are a part of the Unity Identity Program (branding), there are many options (with *your logo*) available at the online store.

1. Discount coupon from your bookstore for selected items such as books and magazines.
2. Refrigerator magnet perhaps with an inspirational picture or saying (and if your logo fits this is even better).
3. Bookmark with an image or saying plus your ministry's information.
4. Coffee or tea mug/travel tumbler that can be used repeatedly. Add an inspirational saying on one side and your ministry's information on the other side.
5. Journal book with pen for classes or notes on Sunday lessons. Add a label with your ministry's information.
6. Classic Unity books such as *The Universe Is Calling* (Eric Butterworth) or *The Handbook of Positive Prayer* (Hypatia Hasbrouk).
7. Mouse pads with your community's image/information.
8. A coupon for a local pizzeria (good reward for third-time guest) with a thank you note.

If you offer a Friendship Sunday, consider collecting the Guest Information Cards and having a drawing for a gift basket. (All first-time guests still receive their gift; this is a "bonus" since they attended on Friendship Sunday.)

The options are limitless!

Appendix: Phase Two

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Welcome Team Training Overview

Training Intention

To create an atmosphere of welcoming that permeates every aspect of the ministry.
To give members of the team an opportunity to connect and support one another.

Objectives

Participants will be able to:

- Describe what it means to be a welcoming community
- Relate to welcoming as a ministry
- Explain specific roles and accountabilities on the welcome team
- Demonstrate application of the welcoming process in specific scenarios

List of Materials and Preparation

Paper, pens, flip chart paper, a gathering song, CD player, iPod or computer and speakers. Copies for each person of: the ministry's mission/vision/values, Unity's 5 Basic Principles, team job descriptions, directions for 5-10-Link, p. 56, and WEAVE, p. 58. Training intention and objectives written on a flip chart. Cards or papers with possible scenarios for practice role plays, p. 60, written on them.

Time

There are several options for the Welcome Team training. It can be done as one complete training over the course of several evenings, or as an initial training with the practice pieces used as part of your follow-up team meetings.

The informational portion of the training will take approximately 4 hours. Allow additional time if you are including the *Putting It into Practice* portion of the training. Be sure to include time for appropriate breaks and discussions.

In addition to a training session, consider taking your Welcome Team somewhere in your community where they can have the experience of great hospitality and debrief that experience together.

Welcome Team Training Session

Gathering

Welcome

- Model the best practices for welcoming as you greet these “newcomers” to the training.
- Greet participants with eye contact and a friendly word at the door and invite them to make a nametag.
- Take a moment to introduce yourself and what your role will be.

Song or Reading

Open with a song or reading that creates an atmosphere of welcoming.

Centering Prayer

Lead the following heart-centered prayer or share one of your own.

I invite you to settle into your seat, close your eyes if that is comfortable for you, and begin focusing on your breathing as we join together in prayer. Take a few slow, deep breaths to relax and to release any tension you may be feeling. As you continue to focus on your breathing, move your attention to your heart and imagine breathing right into your heart space. Activate a feeling of appreciation by bringing someone or something into your mind’s eye that you are grateful for. Let that feeling grow and expand until it fills your body and radiates out. Blessed Spirit, we give thanks for this time of sharing and exploration as we discover and express our inner gifts to bless our world. For the opportunity to serve the Divine, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

Overview of Welcome Team Training

Share the intentions of the training and the information that follows.

Explanation of Welcome Team Intentions

- **To create an atmosphere of welcoming that permeates every aspect of the spiritual community**

Imagine how those coming to our community would be impacted by a culture that eagerly anticipates their arrival, provides unconditional love, and connects them with others.

- **To give members of the team an opportunity to connect and support one another**

We will connect to our own experience of being new to this spiritual community and look at what gifts and abilities we have to contribute to creating an atmosphere of welcoming.

Explanation of Welcome Team Objectives

Review the objectives of the training and share the information that follows.

- **To assess and explore what it means to be a welcoming community**

We will objectively assess our spiritual community from the point of welcoming, looking at common assumptions people make and things to avoid. We will also explore statistics regarding first time guests and what makes the difference between a person who never returns and one who becomes integrated into the community.

- **To relate to welcoming as a spiritual community**

We will affirm our mission, vision and core values in relation to our welcoming process and look at how this is an opportunity to put our principles into action.

- **To explain specific roles and accountabilities of the Welcome Team**

We will look at the distinct roles within the team and understand what each team member is accountable for in the welcoming process.

- **To demonstrate how to apply the welcoming process in specific scenarios**

We will be role-playing and exploring some real life scenarios and how they can be handled.

Connecting to Our Purpose

Introductions

Who am I and what gifts do I bring to this community/team?

Have each person share their name and one unique spiritual gift they have and can contribute to the team. You might provide some examples, such as the gifts of kindness, non-judgment, compassion, hospitality, etc.

Exploration

Invite Welcome Team members to take a few deep breaths, get comfortable and close their eyes if they desire. Then guide them through a remembering of their own experience of being a newcomer somewhere.

- Remember an experience of being new somewhere, a first-timer at a meeting, event or community in which you felt very uncomfortable or unwelcome.
- What happened that created that feeling? What did they do to make you feel unwelcome?
- What could they have done better? What would have made a difference?
- Now remember another time in which you felt completely welcomed into a group and ended up returning or getting involved in that group.
- What did they do to make you feel welcome? What made you feel connected and want to return?

Discussion

Take some time to discuss what came up and write down some of the common themes and points on the flip chart.

Becoming a Welcoming Community

Our welcoming system is more than a program, **it is a consciousness** that is held within the spiritual community as we greet and receive people into the ministry. It is the entry point into an integral whole systems plan of learning. It consciously and systematically unfolds spiritual and emotional maturity within the seeker, and leads them into membership.

When guests visit our ministry, they are assessing more than just the lesson and the music. They are getting a feel for the ministry and the type of spiritual community it is and wondering if they can fit in. Making space for guests is not just about adding new people to the congregation; it is about providing an experience that makes them feel welcomed and inspires them to return.

Our welcoming system provides first-timers with an authentic ongoing experience of caring, fellowship and the beginnings of a transformed life. It's all about giving guests the feeling of being connected—connected to the Divine within themselves and connected to fellow travelers on the spiritual path. Our welcoming system is an integral part of creating a thriving ministry. A welcoming culture is the foundation of community building and the evidence of walking our talk.

Recent Research and Facts

- People assume that because the people within a group are friendly to one another, that someone coming from outside would perceive them the same way.
- Research done by Unity Worldwide Ministries shows that, on average, in Unity and New Thought churches, less than 10% of those who visit stay and assimilate into the spiritual community.
- New guests who enter a community **need a minimum of nine (9) connections** or touches, starting from the first moment of the greeting experience coming in the door, through the follow-up process of the letter sent by the minister.
- Visitors determine the friendliness of a community and **decide if they will return within the first eight (8) to ten (10) minutes after the end of the worship service.**¹
- The **second most important time is the first ten (10) minutes of the guest's arrival from the parking lot and into the building.**

*Five Things a Guest Looks for in a Spiritual Community*²

1. Friendliness and warmth of a community
2. The character of the worship service. Is there an experience of God's Presence?
3. A place for their children.
4. An adult program that fits their needs.
5. The facilities. This doesn't cause a community to grow, but it can hinder it.

¹John P. Chandler, *Effective Guest Follow-Up*, Courageous Churches Group, 2005.

²Bob Bast, *Attracting New Members*, Church Growth Inc., California, 2005.

Things to Do

There are several things that we, as Welcome Team members, can do to support guests having a welcoming experience.

- **5-10-Link:** In the **five minutes** before and after Sunday service, focus on meeting someone you don't know, greeting anyone who comes within **ten feet** of you and immediately linking them to someone else based on some common affinity.
- **WEAVE:**
 - Welcome guests on a personal level,
 - Empathize by truly listening to them,
 - Acknowledge the needs and interests of those you meet,
 - Verify that their needs have been met, and
 - Exit on a personal level.

We will have an opportunity in this training to learn and practice these.

Things to Avoid

- Getting caught up in lengthy conversations with people.
- Interrogating newcomers or keeping them too long at the doors, especially if your conversation keeps others outside.
- Leaving people hanging while waiting for an answer or assistance with a problem.
- Kissing and hugging; some people (regulars and newcomers alike) feel awkward about being touched in such a personal way by an acquaintance.
- Leaving your assignment unattended, especially close to the start of worship when newcomers are likely to arrive.

"... for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.... Lord,... when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?... Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

—Matthew 25:35-40

Welcoming as a Ministry

This section will need to be developed and personalized for your own situation.

- Review the ministry's mission/vision/core values
- Explore how each of these relates to the welcoming process
- Review Unity's 5 Basic Principles
- Explore how the 5 Basic Principles relate to the welcoming process
- Explore how welcoming is a sacred service practice

The Welcome Team, like all the teams that are in this ministry, is a Sacred Service Ministry Team. Sacred service ministry is more than just volunteering or performing needed tasks in the church out of a sense of duty. It is a philosophy of service based upon knowing that each of us brings gifts and life experience into our spiritual communities along with an inner desire to experience meaning and purpose in our lives. We desire to know that we are making a difference in the lives of others. Through sacred service we assist each other as spiritual community members in finding and creating fulfilling ministry as part of our own spiritual journey.

Roles and Accountabilities

Welcome Team members are an integral component of sustaining a welcoming culture in the spiritual community. They are counted on to bring a high level of presence and caring to first-timers. To achieve this, it is necessary that team member roles and their corresponding accountabilities be linked to the aim of creating a dynamic welcoming system. The ministry counts on each team member to fulfill his or her purpose within the welcoming system structure. *(Provide copies of roles to Welcome Team at this point—pgs. 62-67.)*

The following roles comprise the Welcome Team:

- Welcome Team Leader
- Host/Buddy
- Greeter
- Usher
- Support Staff

Review each of the roles and corresponding accountabilities and invite discussion.

Depending upon the size of your ministry, it may be necessary that individuals serve in multiple roles. For instance, in small churches, one individual may serve as a host, greeter, buddy and usher. Insert the roles and accountabilities specific to your ministry.

Putting It into Practice

Welcoming Conversations

A newcomer's experience can be similar to going to someone else's family reunion. Everybody knows each other, has histories and experiences in common, but we're left standing on the edge—unless someone approaches us to hear our stories and include us in the family.

To help someone new feel comfortable is to serve them. How you do this is not as important as why, but the following are suggested techniques. You supply the "why," and be assured that it will be evident in the warmth of your smile and your tone.

Through an authentic welcome, you can create a safe space for visitors, guests and newcomers. Be attuned to "story-listening" rather than rushing into "story-telling." There can be plenty of time to promote the church later if, first of all, the visitor feels valued and respected for who they are and where they are.

Sample Welcoming Conversation: 5-10-Link

Ideally everyone in the spiritual community is familiar with and practices the 5-10-Link. This will be taught and practiced at least two times a year in a Sunday service. It is certainly important for each Welcome Team member to use the 5-10-Link each Sunday and at any event.

- **5 refers to time.** Fellowship and visiting with friends is important in spiritual community. 5 minutes before the service starts, and 5 minutes after it ends, meet someone you don't know.
- **10 refers to space.** Even if you are with a group of friends, when someone you don't know comes within 10 feet of you, reach out to them and invite them into your group.
- **Link refers to connecting.** When you meet someone new, quickly link them to someone else based on some common affinity such as occupation, interests, etc.

A key aspect of making these connections is providing a simple way to get beyond the concern most of us have about not remembering names. When you include sample ways to handle introductions and connections after the Sunday talk, you help members to feel more comfortable and confident about connecting and linking.

Welcoming Practice: 5-10-Link

- Give handout *5-10-Link*.
- Ask for volunteers.
- Coach the volunteers in using the 5-10-Link through the following examples.
- **Practice Example #1** with three volunteers:
 - Two of the three volunteers are members talking to each other.
 - The third serves as a guest who walks near the two talking.
 - One of the two talking goes over to the guest and introduces herself, “Hi, I’m Amy.”
 - If they just say, “Hi,” they are saying they are not ready for more, so simply state “I’m glad to see you this morning” and move away.
 - If they give their name in return, they are open to a connection.
 - When the guest is open, ask, “Have you met my friend, Stacy?” There is no need to repeat their name if you have forgotten it. They will respond with their name and you have the opportunity to hear it again.
- **Practice example #2** with two volunteers:
 - Person One sees someone that they know has been there before and who is standing alone, but forgets their name.
 - Person One goes over to the other and says, “Hi, I’m Amy. Help me with your name.”
 - Everyone understands because we all share the challenge of remembering names.
 - People love to help and are grateful for the connection.
 - Person One then introduces the person to others she has been talking with.
- Remind team members that these connections don’t stop at Sunday service but are important at every encounter with guests even when they see them at the supermarket.

Sample Welcoming Conversation: WEAVE

This is an intentional conversation starter that can be powerful.

Give handout WEAVE.

- **W**elcome on a personal (but not intrusive) level.
 - Greet: *Hello, I'm _____ and you are ...?*
 - Assure: *I'm so glad to meet you.*
Note how this adds more than a simple "Good morning."
 - Show interest: *Do you live close by? What attracted you to this community? What brings you here today?*
 - Work to find a balance between being personal and being respectful of personal space, between being friendly and being intrusive.
- **E**mpathize.
 - Truly listen
- **A**cknowledge the needs and interests of those you meet.
 - Serve:
Is there any way I can help you? Have you found the hospitality area and the information table? Did you receive a guest packet? Is there something specific you are interested in?
 - Connect:
 - Personally, with something the guest has said.
 - ◆ Commonality: *It's really brave of you to attend a new place. It can be a bit unnerving. I know I felt that way when I came for the first time.*
 - ◆ *When I first came to this community, I found that I liked the ____ (class, group, program, service activity). What interests you?*

Offer to get information for them or introduce them to someone who is currently attending that activity or invite them to something you are going to and offer to meet them.
 - With someone else as part of 5-10-Link or with someone who can support their identified needs or interests
 - ◆ *I'd like you to meet someone.*

Hello, (name), this is (guest's name). (Share one thing you learned about the new person.)

- ♦ *Let me introduce you to someone who can be of help to you. (for identified need/request)*
Hello, (name), this is (guest's name). (Share request or way the person you are introducing the guest to can serve them.)
- ♦ *I'd like you to meet someone who also (identified interest).*
Hello, (name), this is (guest's name). (Share an interest the two have in common.)
- **V**erify that all needs have been met.
- **E**xit on a personal level.
 - *Thank you for being here. I'm really glad I met you.*
 - *I'll look for you next week, if you like, so you'll have someone you know to sit beside.*

The point of a Welcome Team and WEAVE is to turn interactions into significant connections and engagement.

Welcoming Practice: Role Plays Using WEAVE

With partners, one or two people role-play the guest(s) and another person role-plays the Welcome Team member. Adapt the characters for your situation. Practice as many of the role-plays as time allows—and until the member feels comfortable being welcoming. These scenarios can take place before, during or after the church service. Set it up with your partner.

Member Role: Refer to the *Sample Welcoming Conversation: WEAVE*. Help your guests feel comfortable, respected and valued for who they are and where they are in life.

Guest(s) Role: Each person chooses a slip of paper/card of one of the possible scenarios. (*Prepare slips/cards in advance.*) Before the role-play begins, don't tell the partner playing the member anything about you other than gender and approximate age. It is up to the member to help you feel welcome and comfortable. Share information with the member as you would feel necessary. Really play the part! Give feedback to the member after the conversation. Did you begin to feel welcomed, valued and respected?

Possible Scenarios

Single male, age 25. Loves computers. Used to attend a church with his parents but quit when he was in high school. He's looking for something different because he's feeling depressed, like something is missing in his life.

Frantic mother, age 30. Has three children under the age of 6. She's brought them into hospitality and they're trying to eat all the cookies on the plates. Mother has come to the community because she's near her wit's end. Her husband wants a divorce and she's doing the best she can to manage.

Homeless man, indeterminate age. Has been on the street for several days without a bath or clean clothes. Came to the community looking for hope.

Newly-married couple, early 20s. They just moved to town. They're looking for a community that has something for young people and is not so dogmatic.

Two women, early 40s. They're going to be in town temporarily, for an extended period. They're musicians and often have gigs on the weekends, either in or out of town. They're looking for a place where they can enrich their spiritual journeys.

College student, age 18. Is in an alcohol recovery program and looking for an alternative to typical college life of partying.

Retired military male, age 60. Used to attend church but quit 15 years ago over a dispute with the pastor. Now that his wife has died and his kids have moved away, he's searching for meaning.

Same-sex couple, mid-fifties. They each have a career, no kids. This is the first time they've come here. They're shopping for the community that will meet their needs and is accepting of their lifestyle. They've tried out several churches already.

Woman, age 70s. Very well-dressed, doesn't seem friendly. She is looking for a community that has integrity, high standards and a clear mission.

Male, age 20s. Young parent with a small baby. He doesn't want to take the baby to the nursery but the infant is clearly agitated and is liable to disrupt the service.

Other. What other situations have you witnessed? Make up your own scenario and present it.

Discussion

- What came up for you?
- What did you notice?
- What resources do you have to fall back on when you experience an unfamiliar situation?

Closing

Reflection Time and Wrap-Up

You've done some really great work today. You each have an intention to be a welcoming presence in our community and to create a welcoming consciousness in all aspects of our ministry. Let's touch on a few things before we close.

- We will be meeting again (share date, time and regular meeting info) so we can check in and address things that come up.
- Let's review what we have learned today. (Revisit objectives.)
- Pair Share: With your role-play partner, share a new insight or skill you have learned today that you will use as a Welcome Team member.
- Any final questions or concerns?

Closing Prayer

Lead the following heart-centered prayer or share one of your own.

At this time we simply breathe and step into the energy of gratitude for all that we have discovered about ourselves and all the tools we now have so we can be in service to our community. We know that we will continue to learn and grow in this process and support one another as we move forward. We look forward to the continued blessing of sacred service and affirm that the living Spirit of God moves through us, expressing a welcoming consciousness in all that we are, all that we speak, and all that we do in service to this community. And so it is. Amen.

Welcome Team Role Descriptions, Skills and Accountabilities

Welcome Team Leader Role

Reports to: Executive Director and/or Minister as assigned.

The Welcome Team Leader (WTL) is primarily responsible for the overall effectiveness of the welcoming system and process. In addition, the WTL guides, inspires, trains and equips Welcome Team members in their respective roles. The WTL is also charged with maintaining program excellence and coordinating all aspects of the welcoming system including evaluation of system and team members, team recruitment and support.

Skills needed:

- Enjoys conversations—one-on-one or in groups
- Is a good listener and knows when not to speak
- Has knowledge of the ministry and its various programs and services
- Is able to share their spiritual story, succinctly and with grace
- Is comfortable in spiritual conversation and with sharing prayer
- Knows Unity principles and is able to speak to basic principles and ideas
- Models good leadership skills (directing, coaching, supporting, acknowledging)
- Able to supervise and train volunteers
- Has effective organizational skills

Qualifications:

- Is a governing (voting) member of the spiritual community
- Has completed your spiritual community's leadership qualifications
- Has previous sacred service experience

Accountabilities:

We count on our Welcome Team Leader to:

- Oversee the welcoming program
- Identify team members for specific roles and tasks
- Train and recruit team members
- Schedule team members' service schedule
- Train alternate or associate team leaders
- Arrive 45 minutes prior to worship service
- Pray with team members prior to worship service

- Conduct weekly team debriefing sessions following worship service
- Attend any leadership team meeting or meeting with staff, as necessary
- Conduct quarterly welcoming system evaluation
- Report to leadership/minister on a regular basis
- Serve as a greeter, as necessary
- Serve as a host, as necessary

Identify other accountabilities as well as procedural elements that are relevant to your welcoming system.

Host/Buddy Role

Reports to: Welcome Team Leader

The Host and Buddy roles are similar insofar as each is counted on to provide first-time guests with multiple connections to others, as well as ensuring that each guest has the opportunity to discover the array of programs and services happening within the spiritual community. They take conversations a bit deeper than just saying “hello” and welcoming first-time guests. They both greet and connect guests with others in the ministry trained to ensure that the guest has a positive experience.

Additionally, the Buddy role serves to deepen the guest’s connection to the community by partnering with the guest—answering questions, providing a tour of the facility, after-service escort to the fellowship area, offering to pray with them, and making arrangements to connect with the guest the following Sunday. When the guest joins a small group or class the “buddy” service is complete.

Skills needed:

- Enjoys conversations one-on-one or in groups
- Is a good listener and knows when not to speak
- Has knowledge of the ministry and its various programs and services
- Is able to share their spiritual story, succinctly and with grace
- Is comfortable in spiritual conversation and with sharing prayer
- Knows Unity principles and is able to speak to basic principles and ideas

Qualifications:

- Is a governing (voting) member of the ministry
- Has previous sacred service experience
- Chaplain training is a plus

Accountabilities: *Host*

We count on our Welcome Team Host(s) to:

- Arrive 45 minutes prior to worship service
- Pray with team members prior to worship service
- Participate in weekly team debriefing sessions following worship service
- Assist guests in becoming acquainted with the ministry and its services
- Introduce guests to key community members
- Provide guided tours to share the beauty of the ministry's history, building and grounds
- Serve as a Buddy, as necessary
- Assist staff in stocking hospitality supplies, welcome packets, and information table
- Invite first-timers to fill out and submit their Guest Information Card
- Attend training sessions as needed
- Serve as a greeter, as necessary
- Serve as an usher, as necessary

Identify other accountabilities as well as procedural elements that are relevant to your welcoming system.

Accountabilities: *Buddy*

We count on our Welcome Team Buddy(s) to:

- Arrive 45 minutes prior to worship service
- Pray with team members prior to worship service
- Participate in weekly team debriefing sessions following worship service
- Assist guests in becoming acquainted with the ministry and its services
- Introduce guests to key community members
- Provide guided tours to share the beauty of the ministry's history, building and grounds
- Write a hand-written note or postcard thanking the guest for their visit and inviting them back
- Make a casual but committed agreement to meet the guest the following Sunday for coffee/tea after service in Fellowship
- Offer to pray with the guest or offer to find a chaplain for prayer support
- Note any special need and passing it along to the minister or Welcome Team Leader

- Assist staff in stocking hospitality supplies, welcome packets and the information table
- Invite first-time guests to fill out and submit their Guest Information Cards
- Attend training sessions, as needed
- Serve as a greeter, as necessary
- Serve as an usher, as necessary

Identify other accountabilities as well as procedural elements that are relevant to your welcoming program.

Greeter Role

Reports to: Welcome Team Leader

Skills needed:

- Enjoys conversations one-on-one or in groups
- Is friendly and loves to smile
- Has knowledge of the ministry and its various programs and services

Qualifications:

- Is a member of the ministry

Accountabilities:

We count on our Welcome Team Greeter(s) to:

- Arrive 30 minutes prior to worship service
- Pray with team members prior to worship service
- Participate in weekly team debriefing sessions following worship service
- Greet guests upon arrival
- Assist guests in becoming acquainted with the ministry and its services
- Answer questions relating to the guests' needs
- Introduce guests to the Host, as necessary
- Attend training sessions, as needed
- Introduce guests with children to Youth Ministry staff

Identify other accountabilities as well as procedural elements that are relevant to your welcoming program.

Usher Role

Reports to: Welcome Team Leader

Skills needed:

- Enjoys conversations one-on-one or in groups
- Is friendly and loves to smile
- Has knowledge of the ministry and its various programs and services

Qualifications:

- Is a member of the ministry

Accountabilities:

We count on our Welcome Team Usher(s) to:

- Arrive 30 minutes prior to worship service
- Pray with team members prior to worship service
- Participate in weekly team debriefing sessions following worship service
- Greet guests upon entering the sanctuary
- Aid guests in finding a seat
- Pass out Welcome Packet during guest acknowledgment
- Collect the love offering
- Assist in the counting of the love offering as requested
- Answer questions relating to the guests' needs
- Introduce guests to the Host, as necessary
- Attend training sessions, as needed
- Count first-time, second-time and third-time guests
- Count Sunday worship attendance and reporting all metrics to staff
- Monitor the comfort level of sanctuary and reporting issues to appropriate staff
- Support the minister in calmly following established emergency procedures

Identify other accountabilities as well as procedural elements that are relevant to your welcoming program.

Welcome Team Support Role

Reports to: Executive Director/Minister

Skills needed:

- Familiar with or willing to learn ministry data tracking program
- Has knowledge of the ministry and its various programs and services

Accountabilities:

We count on our Welcome Team Support Person to:

- Ensure welcome packets are in good stock and ready for ushers prior to Sunday worship service
- Stock information table with current flyers and brochures
- Input Guest Information into data tracking program
- Report feedback from Guest Information Cards to ministers/executive director

Identify other accountabilities as well as procedural elements that are relevant to your welcoming program.



Sunday Lesson

A Welcoming Community—Sunday Talk

William Butler Yeats once said, “There are no strangers here; only friends you haven’t met yet.”

So if that is true, how do strangers become friends? And how do we make sure that happens here, in our community?

- Do you know visitors determine the friendliness of a church, and decide if they will return, within the first 8-10 minutes of arriving?

Would you say we are a friendly, welcoming community? I bet most of you would say, “Of course, we’re a Unity church! Aren’t we known for being loving, accepting people?” This is true. However, Rick Warren in his book, *A Purpose Driven Church*, points out that just because a church is loving, doesn’t mean it is welcoming. If all that love is focused inward, to the people that are already there, the ministry becomes a closed circle that newcomers are unable to break into.

- Unity Worldwide Ministries has done research that shows less than 10% of those who visit a Unity church stay and become a part of the spiritual community.

Not because these communities are not friendly—they just might not be intentional about being welcoming.

- **Story—*Walking Your Talk*** (see story at the end of this talk)

It’s human nature to want to stay comfortable. Stay where it feels good, surround ourselves with people who think like us, dress like us, agree with us—people who are familiar and who like us. So to allow someone new into our lives, we have to get uncomfortable. They are different, unknown and unpredictable.

- The Doors said it best, “People are strange when you’re a stranger.”

So to make someone new feel welcome, to invite them in and make them a part of our lives, a part of our community, we may have to get uncomfortable. We may have to give up our favorite seat, learn to talk to strangers, give up the closest parking spot, or (“Gasp”) let someone else get to the coffee and donuts first. (Big Smile)

So you may be saying, “There are plenty of social, extroverted people in this community, I’ll let them do that. That’s just not me.”

But don’t we have a shared purpose here? Isn’t it the reason we are here, to know God in deeper ways in our lives? To connect with the One Power and the One Presence that is the basis for our Unity teachings and principles.

We can’t know God more if we are closed to new experiences, closed to the unknown, closed to greater possibility, closed to the expansiveness that is the very nature of God. And that expansiveness includes all people, connects all people ... unites all people. We are on this planet to be in relationship with one another. To find and create those connecting points where we can meet and truly see each other.

So what’s more important? Staying comfortable? Or experiencing the expansive, loving, uniting Presence of God? I’ll assume since you’re here, it’s the latter.

- When we become isolated, when we close off, we disconnect from our purpose. Being a welcoming community means living our purpose in bigger ways. It means remembering who we are and what we are here to do.

So I invite you to close your eyes for a moment and imagine

- Remember a time you were new to a group, or a church or a function—a time you didn’t feel welcome. Connect with the distress you felt as you tried to understand what was going on, where you were supposed to go, what people were talking about. Feel the discomfort of that experience. Take a moment and imagine what others could have done that would have made you feel more welcome, more comfortable?
- Now remember a time you were new to a group, a church or a function and you did feel welcome. Connect with the excitement and the interest you felt as you became familiar with this new place. Remember how you wanted to become involved, how you wanted to learn and experience more of what they had to offer. What was it people did or said that made it easy for you to relax and open up to this new experience? Now open your eyes.

Which experience do you want the new people who come to visit our community to have?

I think we can agree on the answer. However, wishing does not make it so. It is the intention of each one of us that will make it happen. It is up to each of us to create and recreate the consciousness of welcoming here in our ministry. It is the commitment to be that same energy of welcoming we experienced when we were new somewhere and people made us feel at home.

This community has a core value of (*insert one that applies*). To live that as a community we are each called to demonstrate it as individuals. It is an invitation to be present to the person in front of you, the person beside you...the person behind you. What could you do right now, to make them feel more comfortable, more welcome, more at home here? You know because we all share the common experience of having been new somewhere at some point in time.

Mother Theresa, at the pinnacle of service, said the following-

I never look at the masses as my responsibility; I look at the individual. I can only love one person at a time—just one, one, one. You get closer to Christ by becoming closer to one another. Jesus said, “Whatever you do to the least of my bretheren, you do to me.” So you begin. I began—I picked up one person. Maybe if I didn't pick up that one person, I wouldn't have picked up forty-two thousand.... The same thing goes for you, the same thing in your family, the same thing in your church, your community. Just begin—one, one, one.

One person at a time we know God. One person at a time we grow and are grown. Consider this your invitation, to walk our talk, to know God in deeper ways, to reach out with compassion and kindness. That’s what we’re all about—in our parking lot, in our hallways, in our classrooms and in our services. And it will take all of us to make it happen. If you don’t, then what happens to that person in front of you who may be here for the first time? Or the person right beside you who might be having a tough week? Or the person behind you who might not have been brave enough to do hospitality on his own?

You are the one we’re waiting for. Join us in creating an atmosphere that is so welcoming, so kind, and so considerate, that every new person who walks in that door feels welcome from the moment they arrive. Together, let us demonstrate what Unity is all about.

A Story—Walking Your Talk

(Adapted from a personal story shared at www.lightworkers.com.)

His name is Bill. He has wild hair, wears a T-shirt with holes in it, jeans and no shoes. This was literally his wardrobe for his entire four years of college. He is brilliant. Kind of profound and very, very bright.

Across the street from the campus is a well-dressed, very conservative church. They want to develop a ministry to the students but are not sure how to go about it. One day Bill decides to go there. He walks in with no shoes, jeans, his T-shirt and wild hair. The service has already started and so Bill starts down the aisle looking for a seat.

The church is completely packed and he can't find a seat. By now, people are really looking a bit uncomfortable, but no one says anything. Bill gets closer and closer and closer to the platform, and when he realizes there are no seats, he just squats down right on the carpet in front of the minister.

By now the people are really uptight, and the tension in the air is thick. About this time, the minister realizes that from way at the back of the church, one of the ushers is slowly making his way toward Bill. Now this man is in his eighties, has silver-gray hair, and a three-piece suit. He is a long-time member and well-respected in the community—a godly man, very elegant, very dignified, very courtly. He walks with a cane and, as he starts walking toward this boy, everyone is relieved that he is going to address the situation. No one could blame him for what he was about to do. How can you expect a man of his age and of his background to understand some college kid on the floor?

It takes a long time for the man to reach the boy. The church is utterly silent except for the clicking of the man's cane. All eyes are focused on him.

You can't even hear anyone breathing. The minister can't even preach the sermon until the old man does what he has to do.

He reaches the front of the church and shocking everyone, this elderly man drops his cane on the floor, and with great difficulty, he lowers himself and sits down next to Bill and worships with him so he won't be alone. Everyone chokes up with emotion.

When the minister gains control, he says, “What I'm about to preach, you will never remember. What you have just seen, you will never forget.”

Friendship Sunday Lesson

A Friendship Sunday Talk: Growing Holy Relationships

This is Friendship Month Talk 1—“Growing Holy Relationships, Part 1 of 2”

From Michele Whittington's www.NewThoughtSeedThoughts.com

A variety of packages with lessons and marketing materials are available.

Comments in (*Italics* and Parentheses) are her personal examples and you may want to tailor with your own.

Introduction

In his heartfelt comments following the shootings at a Safeway in Tucson, Arizona, President Obama said: **“In the fleeting time we have on this earth, what matters is not wealth or status or power or fame, but rather how well we have loved.”** We come together every Sunday this month to learn to love more deeply and to celebrate the power of friendship and connection while exploring the spiritual Truths found in all relationships. Bring your friends, and you and they will be eligible for wonderful prizes each week. Or make a new friend by connecting with someone you don't already know here at our center. Whatever you do, it's all about the Divine Connection between us all and the Love of God we are meant to share with one another.

We come together every Sunday this month to have a powerful, tangible experience of what really matters—love—Love of the Divine—love of God—love of Source—love of the Infinite *and*, at the same time, love on this earthly plane expressed from one being to another as we celebrate friendship, connection and unity.

Activity

So I want you to turn to someone right now—whether you brought them or not, heck, whether you know them or not and say, “I'm glad we're here together.” “This is going to be fun!” “Thank you for being here today!” And if you don't know them, then introduce yourself. Quickly!

For those of you who are new to us today—We are a **New Thought denomination** founded in the mid-1800s by **Charles and Myrtle Fillmore** based on the teachings and the wisdom of the ages. In a nutshell, it is a blending of Eastern and Western spiritual philosophies that helps us to create a personal, intimate relationship with God, to take full and complete responsibility for our lives, and to learn to live a life of balance, harmony, joy and love, and to be a beneficial presence on this earth.

The philosophy of New Thought is nothing new to the world. It is rather a synthesis of the greatest concepts that have ever come to the mind of humankind. The laws of Moses, the love of Christ, the ethics of the Buddha, the morals of Confucius and the deep spiritual realization of the Hindus—all find an exalted place in the philosophy of Unity.

Charles Fillmore wrote these beautiful words, which will serve as our cornerstone for today and next week:

It is the law of Spirit that we must be that which we would draw to us. If we would draw to us love, we must be love, be loving and kind.

Ernest Holmes wrote:

The one who has learned to love all people, no matter who they may be, will find plenty of people who will return that love. This is not mere sentiment, and it is more than a spiritual attitude of mind. It is a deep, scientific fact.... It is not until we send out love vibrations that we can receive love in return.

Talk Title

Today and next week we are going to explore **six ways to send out a love vibration** based on some scientific research done several years ago, research done to identify the most effective behaviors to foster good relationships—relationships this morning I am calling *holy relationships*, relationships that are deep, connected, meaningful—those of a romantic nature and those with friends, family members, etc. These behaviors apply across the board. I believe one builds on top of the other. So, today we will look at the first three ways and then next week, the second three, so be sure to be with us next week to get the full scoop!

We are going to explore each of these concepts from two perspectives. We will first look how each is expressed at the level of the Divine, God, and then we will look at how to bring it into our world of tangible experience.

Body

1. Make and Keep Clear Agreements. (Integrity)

What does Making and Keeping Clear Agreements mean as it relates to our spiritual life, as it relates to the relationship with the Divine?

Well, I'm wondering. Have any of you ever felt that God let you down? When a tragedy struck or when prayer didn't seem to be answered or you thought you did everything right, but the outcome was not what you wanted—or in whatever circumstance, we felt like God let us down; God didn't keep His/Her/Its end of the bargain? I bet every one of us has felt that at one time or another.

But I want to tell you, my friends, that the agreement that God made with us when we came into this earthly experience has always been, is now and always will be fully engaged. And that agreement is to breathe us, is to live us, is to be our source and support.

The sacred scripture we call the Holy Bible is filled with assurances of this agreement. Here are just a few:

Job 33:4 (Handout)

The Spirit of God has made me and the breath of the Almighty has given me life.

Psalms 91

The Lord . . . shall cover you with His feathers, And under His wings you shall take refuge; His truth shall be your shield.

Philippians 4:19

And my God will supply every need of yours

God's power, support, strength, courage, love, etc. are always 100% present even when they feel like they aren't. I love the analogy made by **Hindu leader**

Ramakrishna who said,

You don't see the stars in the daytime, but that doesn't mean the stars don't exist.

So I promise you, my friends, the Infinite Source of Life itself does keep His/Her/Its agreement with us. We just might not have been able to see it and usually that is because we have gotten in the way when our own fear, pain, doubt and struggle.

Example

Here's an example of how struggle got in the way of a Divine connection: On a recent trip to Mexico with a woman with a difficult personality, as I focused on what I thought was wrong (based on my judgments), I felt angst and discomfort. Working on this talk reminded me to look for the good and be open to the wisdom and support of Spirit. Once I let go of negative thoughts and let God guide me—she changed and was easier to be with!

You can relax into God, my friends, you absolutely can!

But what does that concept mean for us here—in our one-on-one relationships? What does it mean for us to make and keep clear agreements?

Well, it comes down for me to a word that is really important—**integrity**. Are we in integrity in our relationships?

1. *Do we do what we say we are going to do?* That's a base level, a bottom line that must be present for a relationship to go anywhere. So yes, you do what you say you are going to do or you renegotiate the agreement. That's what builds trust and trust builds a relationship. I have to know I can trust you—you have to know you can trust me—or we really can't have much of a relationship.
2. But being in integrity in our relationships is much deeper than that. *More deeply, it means does our outside match our inside?*

To be in a meaningful—truly a holy relationship, I have to be who I am no matter who is home, *and* I have to know that you are being who you are.

(Believe me, I know this one from real life experience. I spent many, many years of my life not being who I really was because I was afraid if I said my likes and dislikes, my wants and needs, I might not be liked. And I did that with friends and boyfriends. So I was never truly in integrity with myself. I often felt a victim of my relationships—not because of what they did, but because of who I was (or, more accurately, who I wasn't) in them! And I've been in relationships where the person became different with other people—so who were they really???)

The deepest and holiest thing you can do in a relationship is bring the real you to it! To be as **authentic and real** as you possibly can be. And here's a fact of life, my friends, [**Breathe!**] not everyone is going to resonate with us. Not everyone is going to like us. We are not going to be a match with everyone—OMG! Can we stand it? Yes, we can. More than that, when we bring the real us to relationships, the ones that click, that connect, are so sweet and profound.

3. And **your job is to accept** the real and authentic in your friends and loved ones. How many times have we seen this scene in a movie—and in the movie of our lives? Someone is upset about something. We say, "Tell me what's wrong. It's okay, you can tell me."

So they do and then we blow up at them about it. We throw something in their face that they have done we don't like. Then you can then hear the relationship toilet flush and watch the relationship begin to go down the drain!

Making and keeping clear agreements by being authentic and real and giving your friends space for that as well is essential for love to be present, for love to grow, for us to create holy relationships.

2. Honor Our Differences.

It is a gross understatement to say that God honors our differences. God doesn't honor our differences, God takes absolute delight and pleasure in them—so much so that **nothing made is exactly the same.**

That was done intentionally, my friends! **We see God's love for diversity everywhere** we look. No tree is the same; no flower the same, no snowflake the same, no sunset the same, no grain of sand the same **and** not a one of us is the same.

Said another way—each one of us is a unique, individualized expression of the Divine. What does unique mean—one of a kind! You are one of a kind. Made that way on purpose! Look around the room. We are all special and unique. It is important to us that our uniqueness is honored—it really is.

Example

At a Washington DC Prayer Breakfast, U.S. Congressman **Samuel Tribble** from Georgia told a story about teaching his daughter that she was her own person—that who she was, is important. Wherever she went, the little girl was constantly associated with her father. "Oh, you must be Congressman Tribble's daughter," well-intentioned adults would coo.

She explained to her parents that she wanted to be herself, not simply known as Congressman Tribble's little girl. Her father told her not to worry about it. Her mother, who perhaps understood the problem better, suggested, "The next time that happens, just stand right up and say, 'No, I am **Constance Tribble!**' "

The opportunity arose just a few days later. A group of people met her and when they heard her name, they said, "*Why, Congressman Tribble must be your father!*" Constance looked right back at them and said, "*Oh, no! That's not what my mother says!*"

We can be assured that Congressman Tribble was her father, but that fact was only a part of who Constance Tribble is. She rightly believed herself to be unique, and she wanted to be known as her own person.

You can choose not to be in a relationship. If you **do** choose to be in relationship, accept who they are. You may need to set healthy boundaries yet avoid trying to change them.

So honor what is unique in you **and** honor what is unique in your friends.

Do we have any fans of the television show *Frazier* here this morning? In the third episode of the show, Niles meets Daphne for the first time. As she shakes his hand in greeting, she has an intuitive hit and tells him something about himself.

He looks very puzzled at Frazier who says:

She's psychic. We've decided to find it charming.

Example

We desire to be in relationships and then as soon as we are, we start to pick them apart because our friend isn't exactly like we are! Look for the good. Find the differences charming!

Spiritually, what does it mean to communicate well? Spirit is always communicating with us. The question really is are we dialed in to the correct channel to hear it? One way you can do that is with what you tell yourself. Is there a constant flood of negative chatter in your mind about yourself, others, the world?

If so, you're not tuned to God's channel. Because God's channel is one of beauty and love, passion and compassion, kindness and joy.

1. Create an open space for communication with God through prayer, through meditation, through thoughts that are on God's channel.
2. Create an open space for clear communication with others as well. Yes, it takes paying attention and not going on automatic pilot, but when our communication is complete we experience oneness. We enter into communion.

(Share the communication mix up with Revs Michelle and Sandy while we were in LA at the minister's convo at Agape. Rev Michelle said while driving to Agape for the evening service: "Don't let me forget to take in my iPad." Gary thought she meant, "... into the meeting room tomorrow to take notes," because that statement reminded me that Gary wanted to pull my notepad (yes, paper notepad!) out of my suitcase to do the same thing. Rev Sandy thought she meant to take it into that evening service. However, Rev Michelle meant she wanted our help in remembering to take it out of the glove box of the car and into the hotel room when we returned for the night.)

No wonder humanity can't get along with each other if there's that much confusion over one little innocuous statement!

Virginia Satir

I know that you believe you understand what you think I said, but I'm not sure you realize that what you heard is not what I meant.

So if you are the one communicating, be as clear as you can. If you are the one receiving, check your assumptions! Use feedback to ensure understanding. If there is a challenge or an issue that comes up, go back to No. 1, be authentic and real. Say what you need to say in the most kind, honoring and loving way you possibly can.

A mentor of mine once gave me a powerful, powerful spiritual phrase for having healthy relationships. Are you ready for it? You might want to write it down:
"Shovel while the pile is small."

Conclusion

We are meant to be in relationships—with God and other people. It is through our relationships that we can grow and deepen our emotional and spiritual maturity.

Today we have looked at three ways in which we can consciously emit the Love vibration, that high energy of Love, remembering that God is the very vibration of Love itself and thus our very nature is also the vibration of Love itself and in so doing we attract Love into our lives in return.

That is simply the way it works. That is the way the Universe works. It matches **your** vibrational level. **Love begets love.**

So, my friends remember that God has always kept Its agreement to have your back (so to speak) and you uplevel your love vibration when you Make and Keep Clear Agreements—live in integrity.

Remember that God so loves differences that **nothing** is exactly like something else and we too can honor, love and find charming that which is unique about others, just as we would want them to do for us. And finally, open, direct, and regular communication with the Divine is our lifeline and so is it the lifeblood of a holy relationship.

Be sure to be with us next week as we will look at the other three Divine Activities for sending out the love vibration and then we will pull them all together in an exciting and empowering way.

However, for now let us pray together [about needing each other. (*End the prayer with a statement we all say together.*)

Monthly Affirmation (from *Creative Mind and Success*, p. 22, Ernest Holmes)

The God in me is unified with the God in all. This One is now drawing into my life love and fellowship. I am now surrounded by all love, all friendship, all companionship, all health, all happiness and all success. I am one with all Life. For this, I celebrate and rejoice!

Our Gratitude

www.NewThoughtSeedThoughts.com has numerous resources. We are grateful that Rev Dr Michele Whittington was willing to share this lesson at no charge to benefit the New Thought movement.

Additional Sunday Lesson Resources

www.NewThoughtSeedThoughts.com

602.906.4080

New Thought Seed Thoughts
Friendship Month Lesson Series with
supportive materials and coaching
from Rev Dr Michele Whittington

www.uua.org/worship

Unitarian Universalist Association
Sermons: Radical Hospitality
- Marilyn Sewell
- Dr William O. Reeves

[*Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations*](#)

by Robert Schnase
One practice is Radical Hospitality.

Appendix: Phase Three

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Why Do Millennials Stay in Church?

Based on research by the Barna Group

18- to 35-year-olds are a complex generation called the Millennial generation. Many desire to stay active in a spiritual community. There are compelling reasons why they choose to stay or leave.

Relational Outcomes

- 59% of those who stay had at least one close adult friend in the spiritual community
- 28% of those who stay had an adult mentor/buddy other than church staff

Discernment Outcomes

- 46% of those who stay learned how they can positively contribute to society
- 45% of those who stay feel they better understood their purpose in life

Vocational Outcomes

- 45% of those who stay came to view their gifts as part of their spiritual calling
- 29% of those who stay discovered how the Bible relates to their daily life and work

Youth and Family Ministry Welcoming Assessment

Welcoming is one part of a larger set of benchmarks of excellence for an entire Youth and Family Ministry (YFM) program available at www.unityworldwideministries.org/youth-and-family-ministry-assessment. This same assessment is included in *Thriving in Unity 2.0* under Benchmark 6.

The above questionnaire is printed below:

Item	Yes	No	Required Action
Is the YFM information easy to find on the church's website?			
Are there easy-to-read signs clearly marking the church entrance and children's ministry areas?			
Is the YFM ministry area easy to find in the church?			
Are greeters informed and helpful in directing families to the YFM area?			
Are printed materials containing information about YFM ministry easily accessible?			
Are the classrooms labeled?			
Are classrooms in reasonably close proximity to each other?			
Are classrooms in reasonably close proximity to the sanctuary?			
Are visitors able to identify the YFM ministry director, youth minister, or other designated staff members?			
Are visiting children welcomed and identified as visitors in each classroom?			
Is the sign-in area prepared (materials available for each event)?			
Is parent contact information on file?			
Is snack information clearly posted?			