

UU CONVERSATIONS GUIDE FOR FACILITATORS

The goal of UU Conversations is to provide an opportunity following the worship service for visitors to TVUUC to attend a brief, informal question/answer session to learn more about our denomination and our congregation. If no one decides to attend a given session, this is OK. Most important is that we provide the opportunity. Each facilitator of UU Conversations will approach the task differently. However, this document is intended to foster some “best practices” for facilitators.

1. **In advance:** If you have a conflict and can not make your session, send an email to the UU Conversation Team (Including the Administrative Assistant) seeking to trade dates. Ideally this will be completed a week (or more) before the service so that the Order of Service can be correct. Team members receive a reminder email the week of their assignment through the church calendar software.
2. **Arrive Early:** Get to church well before the 11:15am service (10am summer service) to communicate with the Board Member on Duty to confirm that you are the facilitator. This is especially important if the Order of Service is not correct due to last minute substitution, as you will be introduced near the beginning of the service. Supplies for UU Conversations are in a plastic box in the “e. e. cummings” room. Put the “Welcome to UU Conversations” sign with your name as facilitator on the door, and even a second sign in the window before the service begins.
3. **Be Prompt:** Get into the “e. e. cummings” room ASAP after the service to greet visitors and assure them there will be a session. Invite any visitors to go to the Fellowship Hall to get coffee if they wish and indicate a firm start time for the session.
4. **Introductions:** Introduce yourself and ask folks to fill out a name-tag if they do not already have one, and then introduce themselves.
5. **Thanks:** Express thanks the attendees for their interest in coming to church and for taking time to attend UU Conversations. Note: people have made a big step just by attending the session and it is important to affirm their search for a church that matches their needs.
6. **About the Session:** Depending upon how many people are in attendance, note that the session usually takes about 20-30 minutes. If they have children, offer the opportunity to use the activity box to draw, etc. Mention that UU Conversations provides an opportunity to address any questions that they may have about Unitarian Universalism and TVUUC. Present yourself as a sort of “reference librarian” and if there is a question you don’t have the answer to, you can find someone who does. Note: strive be as much a listener as a presenter.
7. **Ice-Breaker Question:** You could start with a question such as:
 - How did you hear about TVUUC?
 - What brought you here?
 - Is this your first time visiting us?
 - Have you ever attended a UU church before?
 - Did you go to church as a child?

In posing a question, you should always answer the question first.

8. **Information:** Provide a brief overview of Unitarian Universalism and the history of TVUUC. Note: Some facilitators prefer to let visitors ask questions from the outset, and you cover the highlights in your answers. In some cases, people will have done a fair amount of research about our faith tradition, or even come from a UU background, but are seeking to learn more about TVUUC. There are a number of brochures in the UU Conversations box that you can pass out, including the *What Do UUs Believe wallet card*, the *We Are Unitarian Universalists* red brochure, etc. Note that copies of the *UU World* in the box are available for them to take as well.

9. **What to Cover:**

- Our UU Principles and Purposes
- The concept that we are a church community based on covenants rather than creeds.
- Provide a simple definition of Unitarian Universalism: (a) Unitarianism – God is one (not three in one) with Jesus as a great teacher/prophet, and (b) Universalism – God is Love... all are saved. A loving God would never create Hell in the afterlife.
- Talk about how diverse theologically our congregation is, with Humanists, Theists, Christians, Buddhists, Pagan, Atheists, etc. Note: that we have a tradition of free inquiry.
- Talk about the history of social action with our church, noting that we welcome all races, sexual orientations, and gender identities. Note: 1960s with civil rights in Knoxville, 1980s with the sanctuary movement, 1990s with Spectrum Café, etc.
- The Minister Chris Buice and the Minister for Pastoral Care Jenny Arthur and how to contact them (typically by calling church at 523-4176) if they wish to.
- Tell them about the Director of Lifespan Religious Education. If they have a child they wish to enroll, collect contact information for the Director of Lifespan Religious Education.
- Mention our sister congregations in Oak Ridge (ORUUC), Farragut (WSUUC) and Maryville (FUUF).

10. **UUA.org:** the official web site for the Unitarian Universalist Association includes a “Beliefs and Principles” section with a number of useful sections, including UU history. Facilitators of UU Conversations should be able to provide a primer on UU History and principles. In addition, the Wikipedia web site also has a useful summary of our principles and history:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unitarian_Universalism

11. **Making Connections:** Emphasize that we are an active church with numerous activities and opportunities to participate, and that the weekly electronic newsletter will have a listing of things they may be interested in attending. Note that the church web site (www.tvuuc.org) has a calendar with a full listing of events. In addition to Sunday Worship, examples include weekly forums, the Personal Beliefs and Commitments sessions each Sunday morning, Wednesday Potlucks and Fellowship Meals, Gentle Yoga, All-Church Retreats each Fall, Women’s Table, the auction each December, etc. You can also talk about the many opportunities for social action, including tutoring at Lonsdale Elementary, helping with FISH,

supporting Volunteer Ministries of helping with the Family Promise initiative. There are also numerous opportunities to help at church, including the welcome table, being an usher, making coffee, working in the community garden, etc. Stress that all forms service and participation are welcome.

12. **Membership:** If someone has come to church several times, feels in line with our principles and church community, and asks about membership, you should share their contact information with the Membership Services Coordinator. Prospective members are asked to attend 2 of 3 membership classes offered quarterly. The first class always includes a meal and all classes include childcare. Sometimes they can talk to Minister instead of attending one of the classes. New members are welcomed into the congregation at a new member ceremony on a Sunday. It is worth noting that the church does not have a fixed financial expectation of membership, but encourages members to fulfill fair share guidelines based on income to help fund the church. Also stress the importance of new members in bringing new perspectives to our church community.
13. **Spiritual Care:** Sometimes you may have a visitor who has pastoral care needs. In such cases, connect the person with a member of the Spiritual Care Team.
14. **Ending the Session:** Ask the visitor if they would like to complete a gray card to receive more information. You can also invite them to contact the church office (523-4176) if they need additional information. Thank them again and invite them back.
15. **Before You leave:** If you have their address from a gray card, write a short note to each attendee thanking them for attending the session. These may be left with any gray information cards on the desk of the church receptionist. Check to make sure the UU Conversations box is well stocked with: pens, name tags, gray cards, brochures, note cards and envelopes, information on the RE Program.

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