

Acknowledgments

Digital innovation requires a team effort. It takes many creative minds, passionate souls, and risk takers. Heretics often contribute the secret sauce.

And so it's true with the result of my work, REACH: A UU Digital Ministry Program." It was made possible by a 2010 grant from the Unitarian Universalism Funding Program.

It also takes tremendous love from dear ones who support the effort. I couldn't have done this work without Heather Crombie, my partner for nearly 25 years and legal spouse for two. She gives me space and unending love to pursue my passions – which can be intense. I strive to do the same for her.

Together we have more than 30 years of working online, and our digital lives brought us closer together offline. We know how important and natural it is for digital activities to enrich in-the-flesh relationships. All of the products and services we've worked on have been based on this experience.

More than 50 clergy, lay leaders, congregation members, local staff employees, seminarians, UU musicians, UUA staff, colleagues in the digital world, and friends played key roles in this work.

I visited 10 congregations in person and three seminaries. Numerous phone and Skype calls helped me understand the needs and thoughts of ministers I couldn't meet in person.

I wouldn't have completed the work without the encouragement of Rev. Dr. Linda Olson Peebles of the [UU Church of Arlington, VA, or UUCAVA](#), my home church. She encouraged me to file for a grant extension when it became clear professional and family obligations were demanding most of my attention.

Rev. Meg Riley, of The Church of the Larger Fellowship, and Rev. Nate Walker of the UU in Philadelphia, gave of themselves freely and at critical times for me despite their time constraints. Rev. Naomi King in Florida was also generous with her time and her expertise in Twitter, to name just one of several platforms she has mastered for ministry. Meg, Nate, and Naomi motivated me to continue despite times when life presented challenges.

I've also benefited greatly from their ministries. And what I especially appreciate is that they understand and are growing in their comfort with a practice I believe is emerging - one that has far more value than negative consequences. It is: UUs will choose their ministers through digital means regardless of geography. They'll have more than one, and one or more of the ministers may not be local to the individual.

Meg, Nate, and Naomi already know this. The three ministers are respectful of the boundaries necessary to ensure the ministries of local colleagues are not impeded by their digital work. All agree that a fundamental part of digital ministry is to drive participants offline into their local UU congregations.

The following ministers were patient with me, a far flung stranger, who phoned them out of the blue or showed up for in-person Sunday visits: Revs. Christine Robinson of Albuquerque, NM; Galen Guengerich in New York; Brian Kiely of the Edmonton, Alberta UU, who is the president of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists; and John T. Crestwell in Annapolis, MD. Thanks also to Rev. Susan Ritchie in Dublin, Ohio, who invited me to be on a panel at the 2010 General Assembly and who later talked to me about the teaching she does online for the Starr King Seminary in Berkeley, CA.

Rev. Mary McKinnon Ganz, formerly of UUCAVA, and now serving the congregation in Brewster, MA, believed in the possibilities of digital ministry early on. Rev. Maj-Britt Johnson in North Carolina also believed in the work and supported my bid for grant funding.

A number of UUs leapt into online church-based ministry before me. Rev. Robinson, was one of the first among UU clergy. Several more UUA staff members at the national and district levels were working to leverage the Internet at various stages of its development.

I'm grateful to Joyce Dowling, a long-time Internet consultant to UU district work, for recommending that I join a variety of listserves, blogs, and UU Facebook groups. Peter Bowden, founder of UU Planet and UU social media consultant was a linchpin, connecting me to Naomi, and many Boston-area UUs who had already tried a variety of network solutions previously. Tim Atkins, a volunteer, at the UU Congregation of Atlanta, of has also inspired me through his digital ministry and participation in online UU social media groups.

I follow a number of UU bloggers who are noted at www.thenewuu.com, my blog. I also benefit from many wonderful thinkers who participate in these Facebook groups: [UU Social Media Lab](#); [UU Growth Lab](#); [Unitarian Universalists Exploring Congregations & Beyond](#); and [Leaders of Large Congregations](#).

In the 11th inning of completing this grant work, I chatted with Rev. Peter Newport of the UU in Lancaster, PA, about the launch of his Drupal-based church website. His experience supports aspects of the larger strategy for our faith online that is discussed in the UU Digital Ministry strategy section of the work.

A controversial area in social media ministry is the digital rights of associated with multimedia and intellectual property (IP). I consulted with IP attorneys, composers, and musicians. UU composer Nick Page, recommended a few other sources, such as his publisher the Hal Leonard Corp. Bea Ann Phillips, the director of the children's choir at the UU of Arlington, shared insights. I also considered UUA policies on the matter.

In July 2012, the UU Musicians Network was to meet for its annual gathering and discuss this issue. Meanwhile, I also considered my experience in digital rights management from many years leading

entertainment-related services at AOL, Time Warner, Discovery Channel, Disney, and TV Guide Online.

In addition to church visits and phone calls, I read a number of books and articles on various interfaith theological concepts. They helped me think about digital ministry in relation to them. They are listed in a bibliography.

The impetus for this grant work came from the success my church has had with [its online presence](#). If you count the loyal nonmember visitors to our site, our church is 37 times the size of its 1,000 regular members and friends. If you count, the 37,000 unique visitors who repeatedly visited the site in its first two years, you could argue that UUCAVA is the largest ministry in the faith.

However, if you build it, there's no guarantee they'll come or come back to the site!

You need compelling content and teamwork to attract and retain online viewers. UUCAVA is blessed to have talented professional photographers and videographers in its pews. The work of Todd Parola and Barbara Johnson, in particular, makes a huge difference. Plenty of volunteers whip out their pocket cameras and take pics and videos too!

UCAVA member Jill Herndon spearheaded aspects of the six-month training program I created to help everyone in the congregation get to know and use our site. Some 65 members contributed their time in beta testing the site for three weeks in the summer of 2009. Their insights still ring true in the context of this grant work.

Many of UUCAVA's members regularly write blogs and update their status lines with daily gratitude as devotional practices. Our ministers, Rev. Dr. Linda Olson Peebles, Rev. Carlton Elliott Smith, and Rev. Michael McGee (retired in June 2012) integrate social media into their preaching and their ministries. Our RE teachers use parts of the site to share best practices. One member even taught a course online through it.

And of course there's our staff, without whom we wouldn't be able to do much online. I'm grateful to Mary Ann Bolton and Sarah Masters for the commitment they put into our digital ministry. Bill Peters, our longtime church administrator who retired this year, took a chance on me, a brand new UU with no religious background or training. I waltzed into his office in January 2009, presented a few ideas. Without hesitation, he said let's do it! He was spontaneous and supportive, two qualities that often don't go together. I miss him.

Diane Ullius, a UUCAVA lay leader, shared her professional gifts and copy-edited portions of the program's written documentation. I appreciate the support of Cynthia Adcock, also a UUCAVA member.

The way UUCAVA practices digital ministry is not right for everyone. It's been a great laboratory in which to experiment. There are valuable lessons to learn from it, regardless of how your congregation chooses to develop its online presence. Lessons from the experiments of other churches, mosques and temples also shaped the REACH program for digital ministry.

I am so grateful for the privilege of doing this work and for the friendships I've made because of it. I hope to make many more through a community that might arise around it.

All of the work is housed at www.thenewuu.com in a section called "REACH."

June Herold, July 2012
Falls Church, VA