

## What is Digital Ministry?

- **Definition:** It is a set of collaborative (social) practices that administer pastoral care, radical hospitality, witnessing, worship, and community. It manifests Unitarian Universalist beliefs and values wherever people gather digitally. It is inherently a blended experience of online and offline cultures, which intentionally influence each other. It uses tools and services that collectively are known either as social media or social networking. Digital ministry is not a top-down, one-way communication like traditional broadcast media is.
- **Mission:** The ministry works to reveal and promote the existence of a higher good where life occurs online.
- **Two-Pronged Goal:** To draw people into our physical churches and local activities and to solidify an easily recognizable and understandable identity for Unitarian Universalism.

## What is REACH?

REACH stands for core principles of digital ministry. They are:

1. **R**adical Hospitality
2. **A**ccompaniment
3. **E**ngagement
4. **C**onnection and collaboration
5. **H**old and be Held

REACH serves two purposes: First, it offers a basic path for congregations of any size to get started with digital ministry. Second, it offers a strategic vision for UUism that shows how it can create a blended online/offline experience that inherently will coalesce an easily understandable UU identity.

The program is specifically for congregations. It assumes that churches are institutions that outlive current members and clergy. This means

REACH: A UU Digital Ministry Program

that a digital church extension requires the same kind of deliberation and recognition that our physical churches do. For example, we don't take fundamental changes to our physical structures or our ministers lightly. Changes to social-based church websites cannot be based on whims.

Changes to a website, Twitter feeds or Facebook accounts happen instantaneously by comparison to physical buildings. But changes to how ministry is conducted through them needs conversations first. We'll discuss how to uphold covenants and maintain an experience that's in right relationship to our principles.

### **Facebook's Importance**

Considerable attention is given to Facebook in this program because many UU congregations have official church pages on it. Also, many of our fellow UUs are still not on Facebook or are light users. Some of the material here might help them learn to use it. For those who are advanced, the Facebook section questions whether the social media pioneer is an environment that supports right relationships.

Meanwhile, huge numbers of UUs, liberal religious people, and ministers are on the social network too. Facebook is a fact of life for UUism. It is discussed throughout REACH because:

- It drives the standards for nearly all social media and networking. Just as Twitter drives the standards for what is known as micro-blogging. Church members may assume that any other social network platform you use will behave like Facebook. Teens will for sure. Ning, for example, has a few fundamental differences. And if your parishioners don't understand the differences, you could be in for a few awkward learning moments.
- Facebook offers great benefits to digital ministry but we need to be aware of its fundamental characteristics that run counter to some UU values.

## Program Materials

- **Explanatory Text** to provide context, examples, policy considerations, and recommendations
- **Questionnaires** to help determine strategy and planning
- **Step-by-step How-To Worksheets** for getting started and maintaining digital ministry for
  - Ministers
  - Staff
  - Lay leaders and members
- **Videos**
- **Summary Tables** that are cheat sheets for how-tos

## Topics Covered

- **Strategy and Planning**
- **Safe Online Church Practices**
  - Privacy and Permissions
  - Covenant
- **Friending**
- **Content:** What is it and how much? Where do I store it?
- **Intellectual Property/Copyrights**
- **Platforms:** What's the right one to use?
- **Launching** an online church
- **Budgeting** for digital ministry
- **Stewardship/Governance:** Leverage digital ministry for it.
- **Religious Education**
- **Social Justice:** Spreading and funding the change we want
- **Handling Bad Behavior**
- **Inspirations & Resources:** Lists of online digital ministry related groups, and blogs. In addition, a bibliography of books and articles
- **REACH UUs** – a strategy for UUism in general

### **How To Use This Program**

The program can be used by lay leaders, church staff, and ministers to integrate digital ministry into church life. You can go through it sequentially, or parts of it can stand-alone. Beginners and advanced practitioners will hopefully benefit alike.

The program is a version 1.0. It needs your participation to improve and learn from others to develop best practices.

I've created a preliminary home for REACH at my blog, [TheNewUU.com](http://TheNewUU.com). If warranted I'll move it to a social-network based platform. As of this writing, it's more important for me to get the work out than to build a robust community right away.