

## Minister's Primer Part Three:

I. What is Unique About Your Voice Online?

II. Shaping Stories vs. Telling Stories

III. What makes content compelling and how do you plan for it?

### I. What is Unique About Your Voice Online?

Your online voice is about what makes you unique: your interests; activities; and activism, for example. Share them and pick a few to be running themes.

A key formula for success in digital ministry, however, is authenticity. You get that by learning how to translate your voice and viewpoint into social media using a variety of tools. Remember, digital ministry is a conversation; it's social. It's important that you are consistent and that you acknowledge comments and feedback left by your followers. Otherwise, they might think you are only interested in talking at them and not with them.

There are several categories of "voice" emerging in digital ministry:

#### 1. Social Justice

**Activism:** The digital minister posts updates on social justice issues; shares his or her own actions; and asks people to take action. UU Rev. Nate Walker, for example, created videos and podcasts about his effort to get

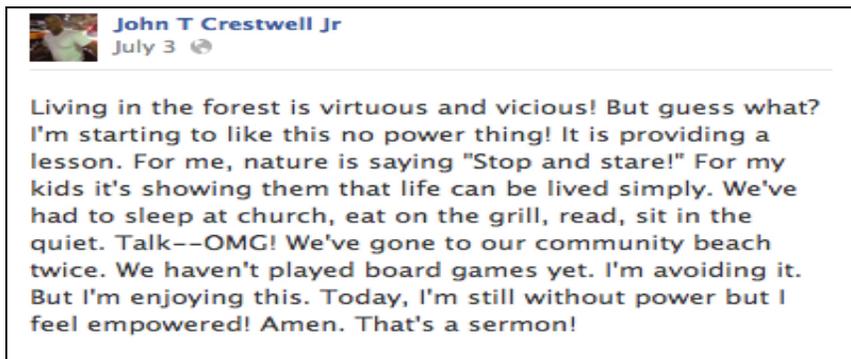


Monsanto to agree to a 21<sup>st</sup> century Hippocratic-like oath for the field of biotechnology. In Facebook postings, UU Revs. John T. Crestwell and Rob Hardies called Baltimore and Washington DC area UUs to an impromptu interfaith demonstration in reaction to the Feb. 2012 murder of Travon in Sanford, Florida.

2. **Affirmation/Witnessing:** Many ministers, such as Rev. Carlton Elliott Smith, hold up or comment on the activities of church members.



3. **Relational:** Some ministers connect social media users to one another and share personal content that deepens connections with their congregation and followers. Revs. Meg Riley, Victoria Weinstein and John T. Crestwell are masters at this.



- Pastoral Care:** Ministers post prayers, meditations, and blessings. Rev. Naomi Klein's presence is consistent and soothing for many of her 2,900 Twitter followers and nearly 1,000 Facebook friends.



- Spiritual:** Lay leaders and clergy alike share spiritual quotes, gratitudes, inspirational images, and music. Rev. Heather Christensen recently offered this:



6. **Educate and Inform:** Rev. Galen Guengerich, post news stories, information, and RE related items.



Your ministry may fall into several of the categories but if you're just starting out with digital ministry focus on one category and then branch out. Use [Worksheet #1: How Are You Currently Practicing Digital Ministry](#) to think about your "voice" and whether your practice is authentic.

## II. Shaping Stories vs. Telling Stories

Story telling and sharing is a key ingredient in building relationships. Offline, stories told in conversation, books, videos, song lyrics, and art are typically understood in a short period of time. Story telling online is different. It is done through snippets of daily life that you post. It unfolds over time and in the presence of others. Like the narratives of religious texts, the stories of digital ministry are the result of more than one person's journey. Multiple paths emerge as followers and friends enter the stories to shape them and share again.

An out of all the stories and conversations, digital ministry manifests an overarching narrative about the higher good at work. It makes it easier to witness as it's happening.

To be sure, everyone who experiences your content will digest it differently. You cannot control what the stories mean to them, but you can

shape the narrative. By being consistent in your approach and by posting a few times a week, an important leitmotif will emerge: your church; your ministries; and you care and are committed to co-creating beloved community.

Meanwhile, your stories lend credibility to areas of your ministry that are separate from congregation-related work. For example, Rev. Nate Walker's digital ministry told an online story that helped executives at Monsanto to agree to meet with him. Rev. Walker sought to draw the company into a dialog about biotechnology ethics with the goal of getting the company to take a Hippocratic-like oath. Executives watched his YouTube videos and read his posts. They learned he was not a crackpot, as they might have stereotypically assumed. The upshot: Rev. Walker spent the better part of a day start a conversation at the company's headquarters.

### **III. What is content and how can you plan for it?**

The content you post in digital ministry is the content of your character or of your congregation's character. It is your virtue. It mirrors the church back to itself and shows your church in action to prospective newcomers.

The social media content you use in digital ministry is exceedingly important for "nones." They are the individuals raised without religion who only have popular culture's notion of it as a point of reference. It takes New UUs a few years to learn by living the language and rhythms of a congregation, let alone the religion.

New UUs don't necessarily understand, for example, what the phrase "the offices of love" mean. Many new UUs may be puzzled by much of what they experience at first. Consistent digital ministry on a church's website and social media locations will help make up for large gaps in Adult Religious Education programs. Digital ministry will make it easier for them to ask questions and learn from others. Existing members will learn along with them.

Small to mid size congregations that may not have enough volunteers to create content can still practice digital ministry. YouTube, for example, contains thousands of videos from other UU congregations and other

religions. Larger UU congregations like the UU of Arlington, VA, publish a lot of videos. They make the videos available to others through the platforms they use. YouTube, for example, offers “embed code” on many of its videos. The code can easily be inserted into websites, blog posts, Facebook comments and status updates. You’ll find the embed code and a url for a video by clicking the “Share” button that sites below most YouTube videos. The below image shows what you see after you click “Share.” The embed code is highlighted in gray. You copy past that into a Facebook status line, for example, to post to your Facebook Timeline.



## Basic Content For Digital Ministry:

At a minimum create a Welcome video and post it to your church's website. The Unitarian Universalist Church of Berkeley's [greeting is a great example](#).

Everything that occurs in a congregation is social content because it all stimulates conversation, caring and action! Sermons, performances demonstrations, quilts made by covenant groups, blessings, prayers, meditations, the notes from board meetings, religious education, weddings, memorial services and the list goes on.

It's content even if it cannot be shared publically. For example, a live-streamed video of a memorial service may not be appropriate, but a blog post about the deceased's life and photos from it will matter to the congregation. The comments left by readers will make the blog more compelling.

You may not be able to visit with a member who is extremely ill and under the care of family in a different city. But you and a few members can shoot and post a video of you all singing a hymn or a Christmas carol. The UU of Arlington, VA sang for a long-time member. She was too infirm to talk by phone but she could watch the video on the Internet, and it meant a lot to her and her family.

Planning content for digital ministry is relatively easy. For congregations, their ecclesiastical calendars are a good starting point. Sermons and worship services are planned according to it. Find videos of poems, readings and music on YouTube that match the themes in the calendars and post them a week before the service. You can post them into a Facebook comment, or into a blog you write to introduce the sermon subject. Enlist lay leaders, for example, in worship committees, choirs, green action councils, and dance groups to blog about what they are doing and what it means to them.

Post YouTube videos of hymns you intend to sing. Chances are there are several versions sung by UU choirs or other groups that are available on YouTube. These videos will be appreciated by interested parties who

intend to attend services. It's easy to feel like an outsider when you aren't familiar with the church's music.

Post videos of sermons. They are more compelling than podcasts and audio recordings. If the texts of sermons are posted, link the names of poems, artists, and other references to sites online that enable a deeper exploration. Take photos of the service and post them to the same page as the sermon. Here's an example of how to [deepen a sermon experience and continue the conversation after it's delivered](#).

Using, pocket-sized digital cameras, volunteers can make very good short videos that teach your congregation how to use the various platforms for digital ministry. Screencast making tools such as [Screenr](#) make it easy to create how-to tutorials. They record your cursor and voice explaining what's happening on a screen. Here are examples of [screencast tutorials made to teach a UU congregation](#) how to use its site.

There are many ways to invite all ages of your church into creating compelling content for digital ministry. People love to share digital photos taken of holiday events, performances, and service projects. Families like to post photos of college graduates who were raised in the church.

Create polls and surveys to see what members and followers feel about issues important to the church. Free tools such as [Poll Daddy](#) and [Survey Monkey](#) make it easy to do so.

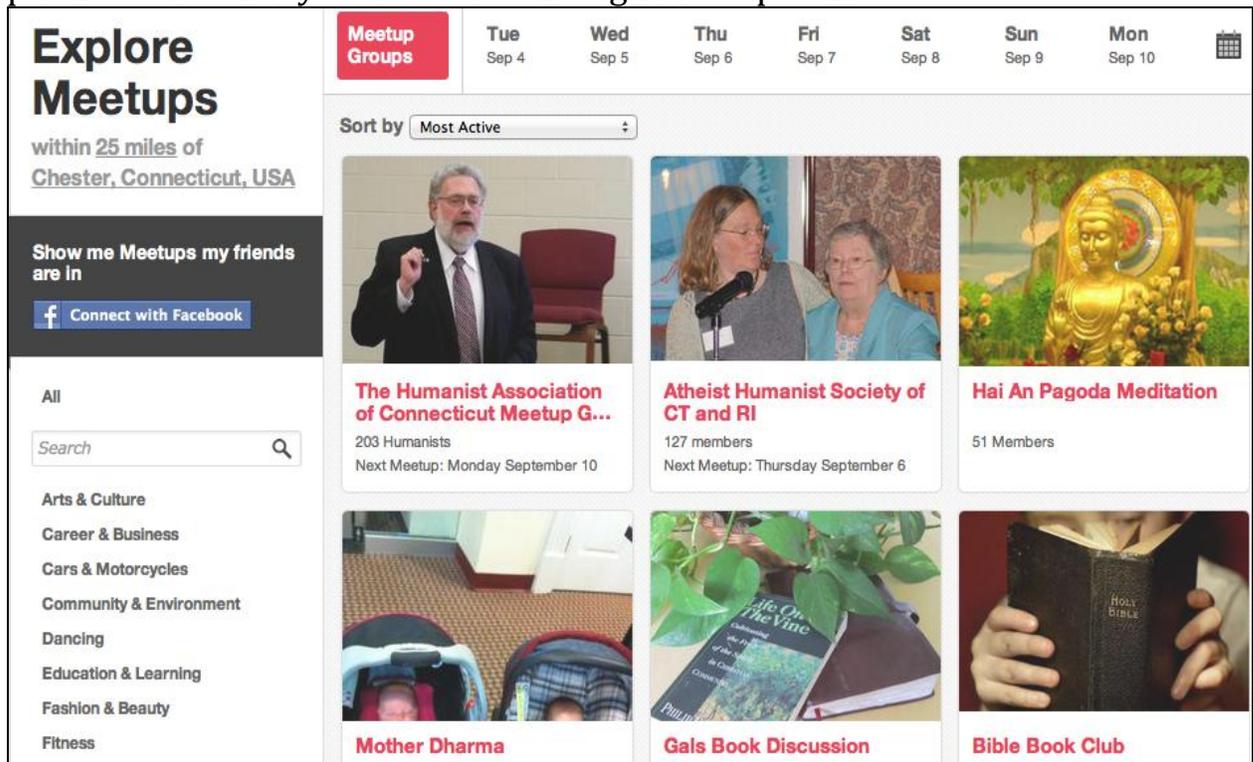


Behavior online is also content that is compelling. You can share your activism and can “check-in” regularly to relay your spiritual journey from specific locations. “Check-Ins” use geo-location technology that shows where you are when you post something. Just log into Facebook or its

mobile phone application and then post a photo or a comment. Some might liken social media check-ins to pilgrimages or to the Christian Gospels which highlight Jesus “check-ins” from Nazareth to Jerusalem.

Invitations to offline events are also content. You can have a far greater influence on starting conversations with larger communities beyond your church through digital ministry. Aspects of Community Ministry are logistically easier to do. Services such as Groupon.com and Meetup.com effortlessly gather strangers - lapsed UUs for example - with similar interests to dine together at restaurants. And with Groupon deal, the meal would cost less because the prices are discounted.

You can also engage communities outside of your church by creating public events that you advertise through Meetup.com.



The best times of the day to publish content on any platform are as follows. Post your most important content at these times or post reminder status updates at these times to drive traffic to it.

- Best Time to Post Content: 4 p.m. EST on Wednesdays. Publish content then to reach people during the highest peak usage time of the week

- 2nd Best Time to Post: 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. and at 8 p.m. EST
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Best Time: Sundays from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. EST
- Why these times? Whether you post on Twitter, Facebook, or YouTube, these are the times when most people are on these networks in the United States. You have a better chance of people looking at your posts because these times are when they are scanning their accounts for activity in their social network.