

Twitter: It's about meeting strangers who share interests

REACH: A UU Digital Ministry focuses on creating an online church environment for a congregation's practice of Digital Ministry. A congregation is a collection of people who come together in community to live parts of their lives together. Members of congregations are bound by covenant. They are not strangers to each other, as they are on Twitter. For this reason, Twitter is not covered extensively in the REACH program. [YouTube has many good tutorial videos for beginning Twitter users.](#)

Twitter is different than Facebook. Twitter enables users to connect with strangers, to reach them where they are and in real time. Whether connections on Twitter are the basis for lasting friendships, is secondary to its purpose.

To be sure, relationships do occur on Twitter. Many businesses would say Twitter is essential for customer service and also for promotions. They can broadcast discounts and freebies in real time.

Activists depend on Twitter to aggregate like-minds and prompt them to offline action, where subsequent relationships form. We know the stories about how the Arab Spring exploded out of Twitter. At this writing, the Muslim Brotherhood and the U.S. Government are following each other on Twitter and tweeting back and forth, with millions of "followers" watching.

Facebook, however, is where people who know each other meet online. You may see activity on Facebook of people you don't know, but they are friends of people you consider to be in your circle of friends and family. So, they've been "vetted," if you will.

The Twitter word "followers" illustrates a key difference between Facebook and Twitter. Facebook "friends" are more than contacts. A Facebook network of friends can see what is going on in the lives of their friends and family in a far more robust way than they can on

Twitter. And that's because content that is published by you to Facebook, has a longer, usable shelf life for relationship building.

When you are a Twitter follower, you take in tidbits of wisdom and information from others. You yourself disperse bits of information as well.

What is unique to Twitter is the use of hash tags. They enable subject-specific conversations between strangers across the Twitter universe of more than 500 million users. Anyone, regardless of whether the participants have "followed" each other, can join in.

A hash tag is the number sign, #, used as a prefix to a key word such as "#unitarianuniversalist."

When you follow someone on Twitter, you subscribe to his or her tweets, which are limited to 140 characters or less. It's difficult for most new Twitter users to understand how to say something in so few characters. It takes a while to learn Twitter's ins and outs.

For these reasons, individuals 60 and older are not attracted to it. UU congregations that use Twitter do so to broadcast news, calendar events, and inspirational, short sayings.

Twitter is great for interacting with people age 35 and under. Rev. Naomi King has several ministries on Twitter. Her 2,900 followers love her blessings, prayers, meditations, and responses to her followers. She holds them up, frequently, by re-tweeting (sharing) what her followers are saying.

It's easy to set up an account on Twitter. And, if you are using a website platform that has social media tools in it, you probably can publish content to it and to Twitter simultaneously. Ning, Drupal, Wordpress, and other platforms all make it easy to do so.

In sum, if your congregation is relatively new to digital ministry, use Twitter for the following:

- Post announcements about church life, brief reflections, news about UUism in general, and share links to web content that is germane to conversations occurring in your congregation.
- If your congregation's activities will be beneficial to other churches, to broader conversations in the UU world, then Tweet your announcements, using hash tags. Your information will be automatically broadcast out to followers of the hash tags who are actively participating in ongoing conversations about specific topics.

Here is a list of hash tags created by Joyce Dowling, Peter Bowden and Rev. Naomi King for the UU Social Media Lab group on Facebook:

Hash tags are how we create multiple-person conversations, themes, memes, and, if we're big enough, trending topics. Example: #chaliceLight = chalice lightings

What are some key hash tags for Unitarian Universalists to know?

Of Unitarian, Universalist, or Unitarian Universalist interest
#uu = In English, this is usually Unitarian Universalist content, unless we have a Discworld conversation going on.

#unitarian

#universalist

#uu2020 = conversation specifically Unitarian Universalist related to the Faith2020 conversation for Christian faith formation

#uubiz = UU business, as in traveling on UUA, district and/or related Unitarian Universalist congregational business

#uugov = Unitarian Universalism governance conversation

#uugrowth = conversation about growing Unitarian Universalism

#uugrowthlab = items related to our growth lab and connected labs

#uugrowthtools = tools and resources related to growing Unitarian Universalism

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#uuga = Unitarian Universalist General Assembly (GA) generally;
specific GA dates are followed with the year, e.g. #uuga2011

#sideoflove = Standing On the Side of Love Campaign

#icuu = International Council Unitarians and Universalists

#uua = Unitarian Universalist Association

#uusc = Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

#freechurch = Free Church tradition of which we are part

#ya = young adult programs, caucus, or content

#youth = youth programs, caucus, or content

#DRUUM = Diverse & Revolutionary Unitarian Universalist

Multicultural Ministries

#ARE = Allies for Racial Equity

#EqUUal = EqUUal Access

#chaliceLight = chalice lighting

#chaliceout = chalice extinguishing

#wisdomtalewednesday = we share wisdom tales

Principles are referred to like this: #1stP #2ndP #3rdP etc.

Sources are referred to like this: #1stS #2ndS #3rdS etc.

James Luther Adams' 5 Smooth Stones of Liberal Religion: #1Stone

#2Stone #3Stone etc.

#LREDA = Liberal Religious Educators Association

#UUMN = Unitarian Universalist Musicians Network

#AUUA = Unitarian Universalist Association of Administrators

#UUMA = Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association

Not only UU, but drawing a number of U, U, and UU folk:

#sermoninseconds

#spirit

#justice

#immigration

#peace
#multifaith
#interfaith
#atheist
#pagan
#humanism
#giving
#stewardship
#green

Multifaith Hash tags (details only if not self-explanatory) - any holiday can be and is hash tagged for conversations

#Bahai but not Bah'ai because the ' mark cuts off the hash tag
#Buddhism
#Christian is also tagged #xtian
#Druid
#Ethical = Ethical Culture
#Hindu
#Islam - to refer to religion, #Islamism refers to nationalist movements
#Jain
#Jewish
#Muslim
#SGI = Soka Gakkai International, a form of Nichiren Buddhism
#Shinto
#Sikh
#Taoism
#Wicca
#Zen
#Zoro = Zoroastrian, the dude w/ the sword is #Zorro

A tip: If your message plus your hash tag & your Twitter handle makes it too long for someone else to retweet, you are cutting yourself out of the conversation, since handles and hash tags are the first things retweeters will cut. Keep your messages under 100 characters & your message plus hash tags under 120 for maximum conversation and connection, as well as for putting out news or events.

Tip 2: If you're tweeting about your congregation, especially an upcoming event, use a local geographic hash tag and maybe your state, too.