

Starting Point

An Introduction to
the Unitarian Universalist Journey

Facilitator Guide



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I. What is Starting Point?

Starting Point is a unique newcomer program designed to:

- integrate your welcoming and small group ministries
- ensure higher participation in your small group program and other “small circle” ministries, thereby increasing newcomer retention
- provide newcomers with *an experience* of Unitarian Universalism not just information about it,
- bring new life to UU theology & history by framing it in terms of the “theology of healing disconnection”
- leave participants with easy-to-remember and easy-to-share understandings of UU theology and history
- give leaders a flexible structure so they can easily adapt the program to their unique membership ministries and church environments

Here’s what makes Starting Point unique:

A Pathway to Small Groups

Many “New to UU” classes focus on directing newcomers toward membership. Starting Point takes a different tack. Instead of orienting newcomers toward becoming a member, it guides them toward small group participation. This shift is about creating a “sticky church.” We know that newcomers who find a home in a small group stay involved with their congregation. They also become more deeply committed. So here at the start, newcomers are introduced to and experience the deep listening and sharing practices that occur in UU small groups. This strategy not only prepares newcomers for small groups, it also frames UUism as committing to a spiritual path not just “joining a group.”

Unitarian Universalism Presented as a Journey not a Set of Beliefs

The “UU path” is central to Starting Point. Inspired by the classic UU slogan, “deeds not creeds,” we present Unitarian Universalism as a particular way of journeying through the world rather than a set of beliefs to which one assents. Today, people are not so much looking for an organization to join as they are searching for companions to travel with. Their primary question is no longer “Do these people think and believe like I do?” but “Will this place provide me with tools and partners for my journey?”

This emphasis on journey shapes Starting Point’s content and structure. The first session focuses on newcomers’ *personal spiritual journeys* and how it led them to Unitarian Universalism. The second session turns to the *historical journey* of Unitarian Universalism and your congregation. From there, the third and fourth sessions move into the *shared journey* that church members travel together. We explain that this shared UU journey is made up of three fundamental and distinct UU spiritual practices:

- Listening to one’s deepest self,
- Opening to life’s gifts and
- Serving needs greater than our own.

The program ends by helping newcomers discern which of the many “journey groups” *in your congregation* will be their “next step.”

Moving Membership Down the Trail

Many UU congregations are rethinking the timing of membership. They are moving away from the idea that joining is the first step for newcomers. Instead, joining and membership is being repositioned as a later moment on one's journey when one publicly acknowledges their UU identity and makes a deeper commitment to one's faith community.

Starting Point supports this shift. Instead of seeing membership as the doorway and small groups as something you discover inside, small groups are framed as the way you discover and decide if UUism and this church is right for you. Or to put it another way, small groups are not the prize you get once you've "joined the club." Rather they are the means to discern if UUism and your particular UU congregation is truly your religious home.

This shift also changes the way people think about church. When small groups and ministry teams are presented as the starting point, church moves from being a place to which one belongs to a place where one discovers companions and tools for the journey.

Inviting Long-Timers to Begin Again

The focus on small group participation rather than membership has another benefit; it means Starting Point is not just for newcomers! It has a lot to offer long-time members as well. As our journeys take new or unexpected turns, we find ourselves looking for new kinds of companions. So if you're a long-timer but never participated in a small group, well then Starting Point is the perfect place for you. Likewise, maybe you're a long-timer looking to fall in love with your church and Unitarian Universalism all over again. Well then consider Starting Point your spiritual "re-starting point."

Experiential Learning

Starting Point is committed to providing newcomers with an *experience* of Unitarian Universalism not just information about it. For instance, instead of telling newcomers about our commitment to theological diversity, the curriculum engages them directly with the diversity of the participants in the room. This provides them with a real-life example of how Unitarian Universalism uses engagement with diversity as a doorway into spiritual experience. Another example of this experiential approach: the curriculum doesn't just *talk* about the practice of deep listening; it teaches newcomers that practice and has them use it throughout the entire class.

A Flexible Structure with Lots of Building Blocks

Every church environment is unique. Starting Point's design takes this into account. It gives leaders a flexible structure that can be easily adapted to any setting. The four sessions can be shortened, expanded or combined to fit whatever time period or session structure you like. Within each session, multiple activity options are given, providing leaders with the ability to pick the one that best fits their church style. We also provide optional resources and readings that can be used to deepen each of the lessons. And since much of the curriculum involves small group discussion, you can control the length of sessions by breaking the group into smaller groups to shorten the discussion time.

**The rest of the content has been removed
from this sample.**

Only session covers are included below.

**Full Facilitator Packet contains
over 60 pages of curriculum.**

**To purchase Starting Point,
Check out our website at**

<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/starting-point.html>

Session Plans



Session One

Your Journey:
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Session Two

The Unitarian Universalist Journey
and
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Session Three

Our Journey Together
The Three Paths of Unitarian Universalism

Session Four

Finding Your Journey Group



Appendices

OPEN FAITH

OPEN HEARTS

OPEN MINDS



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