

## **Small Town U.U. Ministry Syllabus**

### **Instructor**

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(No calls before 8:00 am or after 9:00 pm, Alaska Time, please. Alaska Time is one hour before West Coast time, four hours earlier than East Coast.)

The instructor is a 1994 Starr King School graduate and ordained Unitarian Universalist minister, who served seven years as Organizing Minister of Seward Unitarian Universalists, in Seward, Alaska, population 2,600.

### **Description**

This course is designed for ministers/interns contemplating service in a small town Unitarian Universalist church, ministers currently struggling to apply mid-size and large church models of ministry in a small town U.U. church, and interested ministerial students who have taken at least one practical ministry course. It will focus on the unique dynamics of small-town ministry as a liberal minister. It will also address aspects of ministry common to small churches (100 or fewer congregants.)

### **Objectives**

Students will assess their own suitability for small town ministry and gain insight into which regions they could successfully serve. Students will address the challenges of social action in conservative circles and apply research, experience, and brainstorming to tackle a variety of theoretical or real problems. They will complete the course with a collection of practical ideas, an extensive resource list, and inspiration for this particular form of cross-cultural ministry.

### **Course Outline**

- ❖ The difference that regional location makes - will you fit in?
  - Geography, history, laws, accents
  - Demographics
    - Population, education, income, races, languages
- ❖ Your Town - get to know it
  - History, cultures, values
  - How do people earn a living there? Why do they move there? Why do they leave?
  - Current events and who's who
  - Educational institutions
  - Recreational and social opportunities

- Are there seasonal population fluctuations? Is there seasonal employment/unemployment?
- ❖ Your U.U. church
  - New or old congregation?
  - Ministerial history – get the details and the truth
  - Do they have a building, or not?
  - History of the church/fellowship
  - Who does what in your congregation?
    - Gatekeepers and stewards
  - Social Action program and history
- ❖ Ministry in the small church
  - Minister/teacher/secretary/administrator/sexton/gardener...
    - Setting limits and delegating
  - Partnering with your congregation
    - Lay leaders
    - Leadership development
- ❖ Worship and community in the small church
  - The joy of intimacy
  - The strength of community
  - Unwritten codes of conduct
  - Tailor-made sermons
  - Music
  - Celebrations and ceremonies
    - Traditions
- ❖ Ministry to children, youth, and young adults
  - Love and safety
  - Small-number children’s RE programs
  - Youth groups
    - Our Whole Lives* Sexuality Education Programs
    - Mentoring
    - Suicide prevention with bisexual, gay, lesbian and transgender youths
  - Young adults
    - Where are they?
  - Campus ministry in college towns
- ❖ Pastoral care and counseling
  - A full range of need
  - Gossip or caring?
- ❖ Welcoming diversity
  - Recognizing small-town racism and cultural prejudice
    - Inter-racial couples and children
    - Journey Toward Wholeness
  - Bisexual, gay, lesbian and transgender community
    - Creating/maintaining a safe place for those ‘in the closet’
    - Welcoming Congregation* program
  - Speakers of English as a second language
  - Accessibility issues

- ❖ Social action in conservative circles
  - Discerning the *status quo* in your town
  - Local anti-oppression work
  - Economic justice for all
  - Global opportunities
- ❖ Creative fund raising
  - Within the congregation
  - In your town
  - Beyond the borders
- ❖ Small-town ecumenical and interfaith work
  - When the local Ministerial Association doesn't want you
  - Finding common ground
  - Public prayers and blessing
- ❖ Self-care
  - Recognizing stress
    - Getting help
    - Confidentiality in a small town
  - Maintaining collegial ties
  - UU ministers' meetings, GA, etc.
- ❖ The minister's social life
  - Public department
  - When all the religious liberals in town are members of your church
- ❖ Other topics as requested by students

### Required Texts

- ***Dynamics of Small Town Ministry***, by Lawrence W. Farris; Alban Institute, 2000, –and–
- ***The Indispensable Guide for Smaller Churches***, by David R. Ray; Pilgrim Press, 2003.  
Both of these books are available from Amazon.com, and probably many other places as well. (I like to support local, independent bookstores whenever possible.)
- ***Big Ideas for Small Congregations***, by Jane Dwinell and Ellen Germann-Melosh; Spirit of Life Publishing, 2007.  
Available directly from the authors. Download a printable order form at <http://www.spiritoflifepublishing.com/books.html> .

### Assignments

Students will do research on a region, state, town, and U.U. church of their choice. Subsequent work will be done with these particulars in mind. Students may choose another region/state/town/church at any time so long as they are willing to do the background research again. Results may be conveyed in outline or note form so long as they are clear.

Readings will be assigned from the required texts as applicable. Other research may be required. Each week's material will require a brief written reply:

research results, additional ideas, new resources, group brainstorming effort, liturgical sample, or thoughtful response to the reading. I will share with class members any results that might be useful or thought-provoking for others. Class members will have opportunity to communicate with each other.

The Final Paper will include an overview of your chosen location. It will look at the strengths of the congregation and include a realistic plan to enhance what they are doing well. It will consider potential or actual challenges within the church and community, especially in the area of social justice and anti-oppression, and possible strategies or solutions. You will assess your own strengths and limitations in relation to living and serving in a small town, and create a plan for self-care.

### Supplementary Reading and Resources

*Students will be required to do research in a number of areas, mostly online. The following resources may be useful; they are not required. Students are encouraged to assemble a personal collection of the materials they find most relevant.*

- 1) ***The Advocacy Manual for Sexuality Education, Health and Justice: Resources for Communities of Faith***, by Sarah Gibb, UUA, 1999.
- 2) **Anti-racism and anti-oppression programs and services**, UUA Congregational Services. [www.uua.org/programs/justice/antiracism](http://www.uua.org/programs/justice/antiracism)
- 3) ***Called to Serve: Creating and Nurturing the Effective Volunteer Board***, by Max DePree; Eerdmans, 2001.
- 4) **Church on Loan Program**, Church of the Larger Fellowship, UUA. Provides services to small congregations. [www.uua.org/clf/church-on-loan.html](http://www.uua.org/clf/church-on-loan.html)
- 5) ***For Praying Out Loud: Interfaith Prayers for Public Occasions***, by L. Annie Foerster; Skinner House Books, 2003.
- 6) ***Growing a Beloved Community: Twelve Hallmarks of a Healthy Congregation***, by the Rev. Tom Owen-Towle; Skinner House Books, 2004.
- 7) **"Kentucky Law: Sexual Orientation, HIV Status, and Transsexuality,"** by Jeff Jones; 2003; 9 pages. <http://web.qx.net/jeff/gayky/laws.htm>
- 8) **"Low-Budget Strategies for Small Town Survival,"** by Dr. Al Myles; Mississippi State University Extension Service, 2005; 2 pages. <http://msucares.com/pubs/misc/m1432.pdf>
- 9) ***New Campus Organizer's Handbook***, Unitarian Universalist Campus Ministry; UUA, 2005. [www.uua.org/ya-cm/resources](http://www.uua.org/ya-cm/resources)
- 10) ***No Little Places: The Untapped Potential of the Small-Town Church***, Ron Klassen, John Koessler, Warren W. Wiersbe; Baker Pub Group, 1996.
- 11) **"Only a Few Children,"** by Dan Harper; UUA, 2003; 2 pages. [www.uua.org/ga/ga03/2059.html](http://www.uua.org/ga/ga03/2059.html)
- 12) ***The Prophetic Imperative: Social Gospel in Theory and Practice***, by Richard S. Gilbert; Skinner House, 2000.
- 13) **"Responsible Staffing: Helping You Create Safe Congregations for Children, Youth, and Vulnerable Adults,"** UUA; 2 pages. [www.uua.org/programs/ministry/responsiblestaffing.html](http://www.uua.org/programs/ministry/responsiblestaffing.html)

- 14) ***The Safe Congregation Handbook: Nurturing Healthy Boundaries in Our Faith Communities***, edited by Patricia Hoertdoerfer and Fredric Muir; UUA, 2005.
- 15) **Small Talk**, monthly newsletter for UU congregations under 150 members, by the Rev. Jane Dwinell and Ellen Germann-Melosh.  
[www.spiritoflifepublishing.com/newsletters.html](http://www.spiritoflifepublishing.com/newsletters.html)
- 16) ***Social Justice Empowerment Program Handbook***, UUA.  
[www.uua.org/programs/justice/ep/hbk.html](http://www.uua.org/programs/justice/ep/hbk.html)
- 17) **"Top Ten Tips for Young Adult Ministry,"** Office of Young Adult and Campus Ministry; UUA, 2002; 3 pages.
- 18) **UUA Interconnections**, newsletter for congregational leaders; UUA.  
[www.uua.org/interconnections](http://www.uua.org/interconnections)
- 19) ***The Welcoming Congregation Handbook: Resources for Affirming Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian and/or Transgender People***, UUA Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Concerns; UUA, 1999.
- 20) **"A Welcoming Religious Education Library,"** UUA Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Concerns; UUA, 2002.  
<http://www.uua.org/obgltc/resource/wrebiba.html>
- 21) ***When the Drama Club Is Not Enough: Lessons from the Safe Schools Program for Gay and Lesbian Students***, by Jeff Perrotti and Kim Westheimer; Beacon Press, 2001.
- 22) ***Where 20 or 30 Are Gathered: Leading Worship in the Small Church***, by Peter Bush and Christine O'Reilly; Alban Institute, 2003.