

A message from mary
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Canadian Unitarian Council

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Can you say, "Unitarian"? I knew you could!

If you're within a couple of decades of my age, you'll probably remember Mister Rogers' Neighbourhood TV show where Fred Rogers used these phrases to teach important words!

This Sunday, at a forum on CUC at Capital Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Victoria, the discussion got around to ideas about how to let people know that we exist.

An (almost) new (I hope she'll join!) member had come with a friend and said, "You're a lamb in wolf's clothing. I never would have come to a 'church' but once I got here I liked the values, how everyone participates, how there's such diversity."

Another shared that they first came because they had enjoyed lunch-time conversations with a colleague, who one day said, "Why don't you go to the Unitarian church?" "I don't know. Do you?" "Yes," the person responded.

I pointed out that having a friend invite you is the most common way that we attract new members. In fact, the same is true of most religions.

I shared that because asking people what they do is such a common small-talk question I get to say the word "Unitarian" a lot. The wide variety of responses I get are interesting. More people than I would have expected know a little bit about us and have a generalized positive impression. Common responses include, "I was married by a Unitarian minister," or even, "Cool philosophy!" Of course this may reflect on the kinds of people I tend to meet!

It also helps to carry a wallet card with the seven principles so if the conversation doesn't resolve itself easily, you can encourage people to read the card and then find more information. On the ferry last night returning home, the cashier, after asking several questions concluded, "It sounds like a new age group." "Mmnnn. Not many Unitarians would agree with that," I responded, and handed her my business card and suggested, "If you're curious, read our principles and then check out the website. Sounds like you might be interested."

At Capital, while I encouraged the group to continue with the advertising efforts, displays, new member kits and their up-to-date website, I also challenged those present. "Find a way to insert the word 'Unitarian' into a conversation this coming week. It's not so hard," I said.

As examples, when I get a taxi to a Unitarian congregation, I first of all, say, "I'd like to go to the Unitarian Church of South Peel," (for instance). While so far, I still have to give the address and directions, it's at the very least good practice at saying this important word. When travelling, I say I'm going to a Unitarian church conference, not just I'm going to a conference. Many of you may know of the exercise of developing an elevator message, i.e. if someone in an elevator, asked what's a Unitarian, what would you say that could be complete before you got to the top floor? Same idea. Although I've had many "elevator conversations" albeit not in elevators.

In my case, my CUC Visa card has actually attracted attention a couple of times. In Fredericton, I purchased a book for the CUC library and found that the bookstore owner and his wife were new members! A t-shirt, bag or pen with "Unitarian" on it would work as well as a Visa card—possibly better! (check out www.cuc.ca/store if you want to buy a product that will help you let others learn this word.) And this is how the BC Ferries restaurant cashier noticed that I was a Unitarian.

If you're willing to conduct this simple experiment, please reply and let me know what happened when you said the word "Unitarian" (or the word "Universalist" or the phrase "Unitarian Universalist" of course!)

Take care of yourself and each other,
Mary

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