

## **All Souls Aspires Project 1: Enhancing Hospitality at All Souls**

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This is our church's plan for enhancing the Sunday hospitality and welcoming processes at All Souls. It is consistent with the Board's policy articulated in response to the All Souls Aspires Strategic Plan that was endorsed by the Congregation in December 2009. The Plan describes a staff-coordinated, large-volunteer-team hospitality program, addressing (1) the full experience of a newcomer to All Souls, from the first time he or she walks in the door through his or her initial education and invitation to membership and (2) the experience of friends and members of All Souls attending church on Sunday and throughout the week. The Plan includes our current lay-led initiatives as well as new initiatives.

While our current hospitality program has expanded over the years due to a variety of diligent individual and group efforts of All Souls members, both the Congregation in the All Souls Aspires development work and a number of current hospitality volunteers strongly support strategic improvements. The objectives of this plan are to build upon our existing welcoming and hospitality process at All Souls in a way that:

- enhances the hospitality capacity of All Souls members so that a deepened sense of welcoming is present in all All Souls activities on Sunday and throughout the week
- encourages a greater percentage of our visitors to join the church
- results in a more diverse congregation
- creates an intangible but very real feeling that All Souls is a place of refuge— a home that is warm, friendly, spiritually alive, intergenerational, and open to all

This plan was developed based on information and ideas from:

- meetings of leadership volunteers currently involved in Sunday hospitality
- a large number of individual conversations with these same leaders and others within the church
- Board policy directives (page 9)
- best practices from Jefferson Unitarian Church, Golden, CO, well-known for their excellence in this area and former church of our UUA President Peter Morales

### **Responsible Staff:**

- Minister in charge of Community Life and other staff
- A group of key lay Welcomers

## SUNDAY MORNING WELCOMING

### Welcoming Team

The Welcoming Team will be a team of volunteers, coordinated by staff, who all are committed to helping this Plan succeed. The staff will recruit the volunteers, either directly or working with a small lay team, intentionally seeking people of diverse ethnicities, ages, physical abilities, and sexual orientations to serve as Welcomers. The team will encompass:

- Welcomers who usher at worship services
- Welcomers to assist people inside the Sanctuary
- Welcomers in vestibule before and after each worship service who are not ushering
- Welcomers outside on the sidewalk (weather permitting) before the worship services
- Welcomers at Fellowship Hour Welcome Table
- Free-range Welcomers at Fellowship Hour
- Kids' Corner Welcomer at Fellowship Hour (see below)
- Potentially Welcomers for other assignments as Plan implementation progresses; we will encourage the addition of volunteers from identity/interest groups who perform a welcoming function for their groups

### Creating a Unified Team

We will foster a sense of team identity and mission in three ways:

- **The Huddle:** ten minutes before each service, all Welcomers on duty will gather with a Sunday Team leader or staff member to remind one another of the spiritual importance of their work, of their responsibility in representing All Souls, and practical information about church activities that day. The Huddle for the 11:15 service will include the Fellowship Hour Welcomers.
- **The Stole:** all Welcomers will wear a distinctively colored stole (to be coordinated with the robe color of worship Associates) or some equally visible sign (TBD) so as to be highly recognizable. If they wish, they can also wear the "Welcome" buttons currently worn by some.
- **The Welcome Training:** all current Welcomers will participate in a three-hour training within the first year of this plan rollout. Subsequent Welcomers will participate as soon as is practicable. The training will be offered monthly for the first year and quarterly thereafter and will be open to everyone in the congregation. It will include three essential elements:
  1. Intro to hospitality: religious premise of welcoming, practical advice, and role-play exercises in talking to visitors and All Souls members; introducing newcomers into existing group conversations; connecting newcomers with All Souls' social and outreach groups; remembering and using people's names; how to be enthusiastic but not overbearing
  2. Listening skills training: pastoral skills to help people feel heard and known
  3. Diversity skills training: skills for actively welcoming people from ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds different from one's own; sensitivity to the particular experiences of minority groups

Those who complete the Welcome Training may attach ribbons to their badges (the same color as the Welcome scarves), indicating that they are friendly people whom newcomers can safely approach for conversation and questions at Fellowship Hour.

### **The Job of the Welcoming Team**

The essential “job” of the Welcomers on duty in connection with worship services and Fellowship Hour is four-fold:

- Deliberately seek out newcomers, say hello, and seek to engage them in warm, friendly conversation in which the visitor does most of the talking and the Welcomer, in a pastoral role, does most of the listening.
- Essentially do the same thing with newer members or friends who are trying to expand and deepen their relationships within All Souls
- Gather Visitor Cards and jot down on the card any additional info learned
- Provide brochures and information about All Souls upon request and answer questions. Ushers will distribute orders of service and refer people to other Welcomers who are not ushering as necessary.

### **Sunday worship services**

#### Welcome Usher in Sanctuary

Before the Service starts, one Welcomer will be moving through the Sanctuary to assist people with disabilities and otherwise encourage making space for later arrivals.

#### Pulpit Welcome

We will write a new script for the pulpit welcome, including a warmer greeting, information on how to find the Welcomers, invitation to Fellowship Hour (especially for visitors and families), and a description of All Souls as a community for all. Members will be encouraged to wear their name badges at Fellowship Hour. The Order of Service will include this same information each week.

#### Offering

Visitors will be invited to let the offering plate pass – they are our guests and do not need to contribute today. This practice will be announced from the pulpit. (According to Jefferson Unitarian Church’s experience, this will help people feel like valued guests and will have no impact on what they actually give.) Welcomers will convey a sense of friendliness and appreciation as they pass the plate.

#### Pew Greeting

We will experiment with the idea of a pew greeting during the service in which, either after the Opening Words or after the Postlude, the congregation is asked to introduce themselves to their neighbors and invite them downstairs for Fellowship Hour. We may try this every Sunday or periodically, as in Intergenerational Services only.

### Welcoming Emphasis in Worship Service

Once per month for one year, and at least quarterly thereafter, the topic of the spiritual significance of welcoming will be part of the worship service (Opening Words, new member ceremony, or sermon). See 24/7 Congregation-wide Welcoming.

### Order of Service

The Order of Service cover will include a welcoming message to newcomers, inviting them to Fellowship Hour and letting them know whom to talk to and where to go for information and connection.

### Migration to Fellowship Hour from Second Service

Worshippers will be asked to inquire if anyone near them would like help getting to the Fellowship Hour. Welcomers in the vestibule after the service ends will direct people to the staircase leading to Reidy Friendship Hall. Signage will provide directional assistance also.

### Vestibule

- Welcomers in Vestibule Once Service Begins: Usher leaders will insure that the vestibule is adequately staffed by Welcomers during the Service both for security and ushering for late comers and to serve worshippers with small children who stay in the vestibule.
- Vestibule Welcome Rack: A Welcomer will stand near the Welcome Rack to talk with people and collect visitor cards. The same set of materials will be available here and at the Welcome Table in Reidy Friendship Hall.
- Vestibule and Sanctuary Public Address System: All Welcomers working in the vestibule/Sanctuary area will learn how to adjust the volume in the vestibule and how to explain the use of headset phones to Worshippers who request them. These headset phones will be periodically checked to insure that they are working.

### **Fellowship Hour**

#### Entry to Reidy Friendship Hall

Several Welcomers will stand at the entry point to greet entrants and try to identify newcomers who may need introductions to appropriate people with whom they can talk.

### **Water Fountains**

We will install one or two water fountains in the building, one downstairs at the Reidy Hall level and possibly one upstairs at the ground level. In keeping with our commitment to environmental stewardship, these will be drinking fountains with city water, not water coolers with water shipped in from elsewhere.

### Welcome Table

The Welcome Table will be staffed by Welcomers who will be available to answer questions about All Souls, make introductions, and to provide a variety of literature and brochures of interest to both Newcomers and All Souls people. The current large, vibrant “Welcome” sign will continue to be stationed near the Welcome Table.

### All Souls Newcomer Material

The messages in All Souls Newcomer materials will be coordinated so that there are consistent messages and tone in Welcome Table materials, materials sent to Newcomers, information on the church website, information given at Newcomer workshops, and in other Newcomer communications.

### “Meet New People” Corner

On an experimental basis, a “Meet New People” Corner (name TBD) may be established with signage, both to cater to people who don’t want to be introduced around and to signify that Fellowship Hour is becoming more intentionally hospitable to people who feel uncomfortable walking into a large room of people who they do not know.

### Coffee Table

Each of the groups that staff the coffee table on a rotating basis will be encouraged to participate in the Welcome Training. The issue of providing food will be evaluated from a church-provided-cost versus volunteer-provided perspective as well as from the perspectives of nutrition and environmental sustainability. We will consider serving beverages and/or food in multiples sites throughout the room in order to spread the crowd more evenly.

### Ministers’ and Trustees’ Visibility

At least one minister and several Board trustees will be present and actively engaging newcomers, members and friends at each Fellowship Hour. The Board trustees may wear stoles or special identifiers so that people know who they are. We will also strive to have a minister, Board member, or Worship Associate present to welcome assembled groups at major social and outreach events.

### Kids’ Corner at Fellowship Hour

To encourage families with children to participate in Fellowship Hour, we will create a Kids’ Corner in Reidy Friendship Hall. There will be a table, toys, books, and sustainably-grown, healthy food for sale (feedback we’ve received suggests that children can’t wait until 1 or 2 pm to eat lunch). The Kids’

Corner will be created and coordinated in collaboration with the Director of Religious Education and staffed by a Welcomer.

### Interest/Identity Based Welcoming Groups

The Fellowship Hour Welcomers on duty will coordinate with these groups for the purpose of introducing interested people to them. Each of these groups will be encouraged to participate in the Welcome Training.

### Name Badges

Eventually, new “Welcome” name badges will replace the current ones. They will not display the year of membership, which suggests to some a seniority system. Everyone will be encouraged, both during the worship service Announcements and upon entry to Reidy Friendship Hall, to wear their badges during Fellowship Hour and eventually at all church activities throughout the week. It will be requested that all Interest/Identity Group Welcome Team members on duty also have some indication as to their group affiliation in order to facilitate introductions to them.

## **24/7 CONGREGATION-WIDE WELCOMING AND HOSPITALITY**

### **Full-spectrum Welcoming**

We will all work to spread the message that welcoming is a ministry in which everyone in the congregation should be engaged at all times, not just on Sundays and regardless of whether one is an official volunteer Welcomer. Sunday announcements will highlight the upcoming Welcoming Training, in which everyone is encouraged to participate. The eventual goal is for at least half of the members and friends attending a Fellowship Hour to wear the ribbon on their name badge indicating their intention to be proactively welcoming to all.

### **Welcome Greeting and Introductions**

Most All Souls activities and events whether social, educational or church business, will start with a ritual welcoming statement to encourage a welcoming environment during that activity or event. Where practical, everyone would be asked to briefly introduce themselves, with Newcomers being asked to identify themselves as such so that they could receive hospitality from All Souls people similar to the Sunday morning experience.

### **Signage and Visuals**

- We will create improved signage directing people to Fellowship Hour and Restrooms as well as a prominent Welcoming message outside the church building.
- Current photos, prints, and paintings throughout the building will be consolidated and large new photos of current church life and events will be placed conspicuously throughout the church. These photos will be changed every year or so.

- Member profiles with portrait photos will be posted in Reidy Friendship Hall and possibly elsewhere in the building.
- The bulletin board in Reidy Hall will be used more intentionally, possibly for new member profiles, community announcements, recent sermons, calendars, and other materials of interest to the community.

### **Fellowship Dinners**

We will start a monthly dinner series, either free-standing or connected to Lifelines (as Lifelines was initially configured). People register in advance and pay for the meal, so it is not a great expense to the church. As with the old Lifelines dinners, there will be a facilitator at each table. Newcomers are deliberately welcomed and engaged.

### **Revamped Church Website**

The church website revamp will pay particular attention to how Welcoming can be strongly supported.

### **All Volunteer Appreciation**

Special emphasis will be placed on appreciating our volunteers, ranging from volunteers (not just Welcomers) being encouraged to regularly thank each other for their service as well as more formal periodic public recognition and recognition from the ministers.

## **NEXT STEPS FOR NEWCOMERS**

### **Follow-up with Visitors**

Visitors who fill out Visitor Cards will receive a packet in the mail within one week of their first visit:

- letter from the Senior Minister
- note from a volunteer or staff to establish a personal connection and invite them to next Newcomer Workshops (see below)
- free coupon to a Fellowship Dinner
- copy of the most recent Bulletin
- pamphlets about Unitarian Universalism and All Souls
- info about RE program if they have children

Additionally, visitors will receive a phone call from a volunteer member within two weeks. The call should have a pastoral tone asking about their experience, letting them know they are welcome at all church events, not just Sunday worship, and suggesting events that might be of special interest. We will attempt to contact local visitors who do not return a second time, or who come a few times and then drift away, to do an “exit interview” and find out why All Souls was not a fit for them.

### **Newcomer Workshops**

The current Welcome to All Souls Workshop will be split into two monthly workshops. Each will emphasize opportunities for discussion amongst the participants and a light lunch will be served.

- Welcome to Unitarian Universalism – discusses Unitarian Universalism in general, theology, congregational polity, etc. (for those new to UU churches)
- Welcome to All Souls – the video that is currently shown will be eliminated or replaced with a revised, shorter video to allow more opportunity for newcomers, volunteers, and staff to interact (for those who have already been a member of a UU church and/or have taken the Welcome to Unitarian Universalism course).

## **GOING FORWARD**

There will be a continual hospitality improvement process drawing upon learnings from the “huddles,” regular meetings with volunteers, UU churches with exemplary hospitality processes, and new church hospitality literature. The staff will continue to explore resources of the UUA and Metro NY district.

### **Hospitality Council**

A Hospitality Council will be established, comprised of everyone involved in welcoming efforts including ushers, greeters, Reidy Friendship Hall Welcomers, people involved in Welcome Workshops and follow-up with visitors, staff and the key lay Welcomers, as well as all members who have completed the Welcoming & Hospitality training. The Hospitality Council will meet periodically, both as a social celebration of our work together and as an opportunity to reflect on the progress of the Hospitality Plan. The group will discuss what’s working and what’s not working, and coordinate improvements.

## LEARNING AND SUCCESS MEASURES

- Compare annual differences in congregational survey about hospitality on Sunday and in church events throughout the week
- Number of name tags containing hospitality ribbons
- Demographic survey of our Welcomers now and June 2011
- Welcomer volunteer satisfaction questionnaire
- 3 “secret shoppers” now and June 2011 (at least one of them, a person of color)
- Interviews with 3 new members now and June 2011 (again, at least one person of color)
- Qualitative follow-up with each person who submits a newcomer card but chooses not to continue with an All Souls relationship
- Compare visitor cards to new member ratios for church year 2009-2010 and then 2010-2011

## THE BROADER CONTEXT

The issue of improving hospitality at Unitarian Universalist churches has become a high priority issue for our movement. Currently, the UUA is recommending to all UU congregations a significant enhancement of hospitality. The UUA’s new President, Peter Morales, spearheaded a number of hospitality initiatives at his former church, Jefferson Unitarian Church, with great success. Speaking about the newcomer side of hospitality, a recent article in the UU World summarized his views:

Morales believes that growth is best accomplished at the congregational level, through simple acts of hospitality. His church has grown from 400 to 770 members in the past decade. “A lot of it is becoming aware of the visitor, paying attention to who they are and what their needs are,” he said... “What we need as a movement is something that goes far beyond normal management changes, programmatic tweaks, and a shifting of resources. The change we need is much deeper and is a cultural-level change.”

Of course, as Galen said in a recent letter to the Congregation, All Souls should pursue welcoming for its own sake even though membership growth may be one result of that. “Nothing in the [Aspires] plan states that growth in numbers is our objective; but if we achieve our other goals, it will be a consequence. If we welcome more people, and of diverse backgrounds, and we better articulate our faith and strengthen our community, then All Souls will be stronger and more vital... The future, religiously speaking, belongs to large congregations with the resources to achieve excellence and to small congregations where everyone feels like family. Truth be told, the future really belongs to large congregations with the vision and commitment to create a small-church feeling of community. This is where we want to go.”

## RELEVANT ASPSIRE PLAN PROVISIONS

**Initiative:** Strengthening Our Community: We will build deeper relationships among newcomers, members and friends, of all ages, through programs that encompass all phases of congregational life from a visitor’s first experience through eventual leadership roles.

- **Goal #1:** We will enhance the Sunday morning welcoming process to make it warmer, more intentional, coordinated and responsive to the diverse needs that worship participants bring.

**Initiative:** Deepening Our Capacity for Diversity: We will intentionally welcome people of diverse racial, ethnic and demographic backgrounds, sharing common spiritual ideals and celebrating our differences.

- **Goal #2:** We will cultivate an intentionally welcoming congregation. Church leadership, staff and members will encourage each other to welcome everyone who comes to All Souls.
- **Goal #4:** We will encourage new members of diverse backgrounds to remain in our midst. Our church will become richer and more vibrant as we strengthen community and celebrate diversity.

**BOARD POLICY DIRECTIVE TO STAFF TO CREATE “ENHANCING SUNDAY HOSPITALITY PROJECT” PLAN THAT REFLECTS:**

- A staff-coordinated, unified, diverse and well-trained volunteer team of Welcomers for the Sunday worship services and Fellowship Hour (previously called Coffee Hour)
- More focus during worship services on welcoming and hospitality
- Improved welcoming processes during Fellowship Hour
- Visible hospitality roles for the Ministers and Trustees at Fellowship Hour
- Welcoming, engaging and explanatory signage and visuals throughout relevant church areas and similar improved welcoming material on the church’s website
- Implementation as soon as practicable