# **Let's Get Out of the Box and Do Something Dramatic**

It is a fact that every traditional Christian religion is losing membership.  Even many Jewish congregations are feeling the trend.

And why is that?  In these modern times, members find objection to the many ways their religion imposes restrictions on their lives - don't be gay, don't marry a same sex mate, don't have an abortion, no dancing, . . .  Others find their church leaders turning against science, or frowning on those who have doubts.  And many find the hypocrisy of their church leaders unacceptable.  And of course there are those who simply have no use for religion - and prefer to spend Sunday morning sleeping or playing golf.

And if you doubt the trend - one night in January of this year, some 60 people braved temperatures in the 20S to hear David Silverman - the president of American Atheists - speak about atheism at the Abbot Library.  That size turnout speaks loudly for a town this size.

Except for the Sunday sleepers, most who have left their churches are still interested in pursuing their spiritual life, but have not found a home where they can do that.

Of course, we have that home - no imposing rules on one's life, no rejection of science (in fact, enthusiasm for it), acceptance of one's doubts and beliefs, and no hypo racy.  The only people for whom we have nothing to offer are those who reject all spiritual activities.

So why aren't people flocking to our doors?

A good part of the reason is that few know what we are about.  Further, we look just like a Christian church.  Outside, we have a steeple, inside we hold services the same time as the traditional congregations, we use the same terms - reverend, hymn, worship, etc. - as the churches they left.  We blend in with all the others. Of course it is not without reason - for our first 250 or so years we were a Christian congregation.  It is hard to shake off tradition and change an image.

But if we want to serve our community, that is exactly what we must do.  We must rebrand ourselves.

Let's start with our most obvious identity - our name - Unitarian Universalist Church of Marblehead.  Aside from the fact that it is a mouthful, the name is not merely misleading, it is a lie.  We are not Unitarian, we are not Universalists, and we are not a church.

Unitarians believe there is one god, while most Christians believe in the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.  Yet our congregation today is not based on a belief in any god.

Universalists believe that all persons are eligible for heaven, in opposition to the once popular Calvinism, which proclaimed that only a select few were born to be saved.  Yet our congregation is not based in a belief of heaven.

In the 60s, the Radio Corporation of America recognized that they no longer made radios, and furthermore having America in their name did not help sales in Europe.  It became RCA Corp.  Similarly, American Telephone and Telegraph Corp. changed its name to AT&T, Inc.  Recently the American Association for Retired Persons - in a bid to get members who had not yet retired - changed its name to AARP Inc.  in each case, the company retained a connection with the past, but got rid of the poison in its original name.

I suggest that we are better served calling ourselves UUs.  We can define UUism as something like:

UUs hold that the potential of all humans is to be both good and evil equally, advocating for a life-time of personal growth and cultivation, and hold reason, freedom, tolerance, and love as the primary spiritual virtues; we believe in love that includes all without exception, and believe that any religion, philosophy, ethic, or spiritual practice that leads into that love is worthy of learning from. We've unmoored these ideas from their Christian roots of Unitarianism and Universalism.

*Adapted from a Facebook post by David Miller.,interim minister at First Parish Church of Weston*

We call ourselves a church.  Yet a church is usually perceived as a Christian house of worship.  I note that only 482 of the 1,100 congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association of**Congregations** (emphasis added) has the word 'church' as part of its name.

We are not a church, we are a congregation.  The building is not a (Christian) church, but I must admit it is hard to find a better word.  Meeting House (or Meetinghouse) has a lot going for it, but it probably would not catch on today.

I believe Article I of the Bylaws should be replaced with:

ARTICLE I - NAME. The name of this congregation shall be the UU Congregation of Marblehead.

(Other changes are needed to replace ‘church’ with ‘congregation’ unless the word is referring to the building.)

Changing our name presents a great opportunity to tell our community what we are about.  Lots of publicity should accompany the change, explaining in a straight forward way that we are here to journey through life on a quest for knowledge together.  We can emphasize our programs of seminars, Meetinghouse Series talks, small groups, meditation, Over 60, yoga, and more.

We can introduce new programs especially for the new searchers, such as a doubter's group to explore atheism, and maybe an alternate service at a different time with a different style to attract those who avoid Christian-like services.

Wouldn't it be nice to be a congregation that is growing in this time of collapsing congregations?  To know that we have something to offer that no one else in town has.  To know that we are reaching out to needy people and inviting them to walk with us through the curiosities of life.

UUA President Peter Morales once told us that to not welcome persons into our congregation is the same as withholding food from the starving.

That is our challenge - to do all we can to provide spiritual food to those seeking it.

Hugh Stewart

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Suggested reading

A NEW NAME FOR UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM?

<http://www.tc.umn.edu/~parkx032/JP-UU.html>

Shall we keep "church" in our name?

<http://www.euuc.org/events/name_change.php>

THE NEXT ONE THOUSAND YEARS OF SPIRITUAL PROGRESS:

The Future of Unitarian Universalism

<http://www.tc.umn.edu/~parkx032/CY-UUfut.html>