

Voices of UCC Guidebook

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Voices of UUCC Blog: Purposes & Focus

A blog is a website that updated regularly with posts that typically look like short magazine articles. Posts can also consist of a variety of photos with some explanatory text. While blog posts may vary significantly, and may be submitted by different writers, they are united by a common topic or principle, the focus of the blog.

Primary purpose: to show the public who we are.

Voices should illustrate what we (the UUCC community) value and care passionately about; and how we act to make the world better. It should illustrate the ways that UUCC is a warmly welcoming, diverse, fun, caring, engaged, thoughtful, characteristically UU, and generally awesome religious community. **Voices** blog posts can also illustrate Unitarian Universalism more generally, rather than UUCC specifically.

Primary Audience: the public

Specifically, persons whose values, beliefs and passions might resonate with UUCC. *All blog posts should be written with the public in mind.*

A big bonus is that the UUCC community can learn more about itself.

Another purpose: conversation.

Readers can react to a blog post and discuss it using “commenting.” A goal is for **Voices** to promote interaction, using commenting on blog posts.

UU congregations traditionally set aside time called “talkback,” to discuss issues raised in worship. Nowadays, talkback often happens in coffee hour.

Voices, through blog posts and commenting, can offer another place for discussion.

We also hope members of the public, through engaging with **Voices**, will come to see themselves as congregants, or at least interested friends, even if they live far away or can't come to Sunday worship.

Audience & Purpose Comparisons

| | <u>Voices of UUCC</u> | <u>The Link Newsletter</u> | <u>UUCC Calendar Event Listings</u> |
|------------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Primary audience | The public | The congregation | Audience depends on the type of event: |
| Secondary audience | The congregation | The public | Internal events: the congregation Events open to the public: the public |
| Primary Purpose | Convey a sense of UUCC's identity (in a positive light) to the public. | Reminders & announcements to the congregation | Information about UUCC events. Conveys who, what, when, where, how, & some why info so readers can decide whether to attend. |
| Secondary Purposes | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion forum • Pique interest in UUCC events & initiatives. • Keep folks who connected to UUCC, even if they can't come to OBIC. | Members of the public can read the <u>Link</u> & learn more about what UUCC is like. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marketing & outreach. Non-UUCC persons can browse to learn more about UUCC. • "Landing page" – page with detail information that can be linked from Facebook, Twitter, other social media, & other pages within the UUCC website. • Congregants may also read the Calendar event listings to keep track of what's going on at UUCC, even if they don't plan to attend. |
| Non-UUCC readers expect ... | ... content geared to the public (<i>avoid content that only UUCC readers can understand</i>). | ... some insider references in a church newsletter. | ... some insider information on a church calendar. But listings of open-to-the-public events should avoid references that only UUCC readers can understand. |

Content Guidelines

Here are some content guidelines for **Voices of UCC** blog posts. If you're uncertain about a particular blog post's suitability, [please email the blog team](#).

- **Posts that appear in Voices must promote the blog's purposes and objectives** (see page 2).
- Posts must be written to be **understandable and welcoming to its primary audience, the public**.
- **Posts should draw readers in** (not all readers, and not all posts – we expect a diverse audience). Ideally, a reader of one post will be enticed to keep on browsing the blog.
- **Posts on controversial topics are fine, but unless it's patently obvious, the post should explicitly relate the post content to the Seven Principles.** Also bear in mind that it's not legal for UCC to take explicitly political stands for or against political candidates.
- **Purely personal narratives** (what I did on my vacation, my recent trip to the hospital, my work in a charitable organization, etc.) are fine, if the post talks about the significance for you as a UU or UCC member.
- **Posts don't have to be serious essays.** We're a fun and funny bunch, and **Voices** should illustrate our diversity. Just make sure the post is written for public consumption and that the relationship to UCC or UU-ism is clear.
- **Similarly, posts don't have to be written by writer-types, or even by grownups.** Even if all you have is an idea, email the blog team at blogteam@uucolumbia.net – we'll help you transform your idea into a suitable post. And people love reading brief posts by youth, and even younger.

What Not to Do On the Blog ... and how, mostly, you can fix it!

- **Use Voices to announce news or events.** We have the Link and calendar events listings for that. But you can take a “deep dive” on something that gets announced in these other places. It’s a matter of degree: a post that’s mainly news or an announcement goes in the Link, and one that’s mostly an event announcement goes in the calendar. But a post mainly about the significance or the implications of some piece of news or event is suitable for Voices. If your post serves multiple purposes, consider dividing it up. We’ll help you post the parts to the right places.
- **Blog about personal information.** But if you connect your narrative to UUCC or UU-ism, it’s OK.

Two questions you have to answer “yes” to: (1) Have you related the contents to UUCC or UU-ism? (2) Would the contents be understandable and interesting to readers who know nothing about you, your family, your friends, UUCC, or Unitarian Universalism?

- **Include references that only insiders would understand.** Examples:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Wrong: During worship, Paige said ... | Better: During worship, our minister, the Rev. Paige Getty, said ... |
| Wrong: I spend a lot of time at OBIC. | Better: I spend a lot of time at the Owen Brown Interfaith Center, UUCC’s religious home. |

- **Violate the law.** One important element to bear in mind is UUCC’s tax status, which can be destroyed if UUCC is seen to favor certain political candidates. You can take positions on issues, so long as you articulate the connection to your UU principles and values.
- **Violate the Seven Principles in Your Post.** Or otherwise conduct yourself in a manner inimical to UUCC’s principles, values, Ends, or to Unitarian Universalism generally.
- **Undermine UUCC or register complaints.** The place to go is the Board, the Executive Team (Paige and Maureen), or another staff person or UUCC leader. We take your concerns seriously, but Voices isn’t the place to communicate them.
- **Use the blog for commercial purposes.** Don’t use the blog to market your services or wares. On the other hand, you can refer to your work life in the blog. Example, “My career as a public health professional showed me that racism is a public health crisis.”
- **Copy your own blog posts.** Posts must be original content. Don’t reblog one of your previous posts that have been published on a public website.
- **Copy or reblog somebody else’s post.** Don’t do it!! When quoting, use appropriate citation/attribution (ask us if you need help with citation), and get permission to use significant parts of somebody else’s content (footnote in your post that you have their permission). See “Legal(ish) Stuff” (page 9).

Ten Ideas for Blog Posts

-- By *Chris Gallant*

Chris is a UUCC choir member, co-chair of the Communication Council, and creator of the blog [Catapulting into Classical](#), which has been featured on the [WordPress Discover page](#).

Blogging has come to UUCC! Here are some ideas for you to take the next steps to becoming a blog author.

If you've never written a blog post, never fear! You don't have to write something long (try for 300-500 words – we'll give you some markers below as a guide.)

Voices of UUCC blog posts can be positive, serious, thought-provoking, funny, entertaining, informative, and/or uplifting. They should in some substantive way connect with UUCC, UUism, or UU principles.

We want people to keep coming back, keep reading. Blog posts, as the public face of UUCC, should reflect our best qualities.

[We just hit 100 words on this page, not including the title or author info.]

Delight your readers and/or make them think. It is ok for a blog post to be serious—we deal with many serious issues at UUCC, and our blog should reflect that. If a non-member reads a post and thinks, “Yes, these are folks I'd like to sit down and talk with,” that's a good post. But we are also a light-hearted bunch, and, wouldn't it be nice if a reader from the general public thought, “That looks like fun, I want to join in too!” That too is a good post.

Try to create a title that intrigues people to read more. Blog posts typically use relatively short sentences and common words. However, more serious topics can include more complex structure and vocabulary. Keep your paragraphs short.

Here are some formats you may want to consider in creating your blog post.

1. **As seen on the web.** Found something great on the web that relates to the UU experience that you want to share with the UUCC community and the public at large? Turn it into a blog post. Tell the reader why it's great and be sure to link back to the original article. Do not quote the entire article. If you can put together a few such links on a particular topic, even better!

[This is already over 300 words. See how fast they add up?]

Which brings me to ...

2. **Lists!** People love lists. Top 5, Top 10, The Best. What are the best things about a particular topic? I could have called this “Top 10 Formats for a Great Blog Post.” Examples: “5 Things You Might Not Know About Unitarian Universalism,” “Top 10 Reasons to Come to UUCC,” “10 Famous UUs.”

3. **Recent activities.** If your group had a fun time at a recent activity, tell the readers about it! Include pictures if you can (but make sure you get the permission

of the people in the photos first). Tell the reader why this activity was important to you: was it a social action activity? a team building experience? Did it just make you feel warm and fuzzy because you were surrounded by great UCC folks? Let the reader know why they should come to the next event (*and in doing so, point them to the calendar entry, which is where all the time and place details should go*).

This naturally leads to

4. **Upcoming events.** Tell the reader why you're looking forward to an upcoming event that your group is sponsoring. Why should they come and get involved? What makes it fun or significant, or both? Include a link to the calendar item for the event. *A blog post talks about the significance of the event; the calendar lets folks know the details about it; a [Link](#) article tells people to save the date, or reminds people that it's coming soon.*

[You're up over 500 words.]

5. **Historical tie-in.** UU history is filled with a lot of interesting figures and events, and is well-suited to a blog post. If possible, give your article some little-known historical details. Who was president when UCC was founded? How much did gasoline cost? Who was friends with Joseph Priestley?

6. **Interviews.** If you know someone who can provide expert information on a topic (and we have lots of experts at UCC), why not interview them? Make sure you show them the finished blog post and get their permission before posting it. The expert will be flattered, and your reader will appreciate the input of an expert. Be sure to tie the subject matter back to UUism and its principles or activity at UCC.

7. **Personal stories.** Examples: "What UCC (or UUism) means to me," "How I found out about UUism," "How I found UCC." Talk about something that happened at UCC that enriched your life. One caveat: this will be seen by the public, so refrain from including *overly* personal information. It can make some readers uncomfortable. Would you let your neighbor read it? Your boss? Your grandma?

[This is over 700 words. Most posts are no longer than this, though they can be a little longer]

8. **The seven principles.** If you can tie a story into one of the Seven Principles, that's wonderful!

9. **Work in progress.** Is your group working on a long-term project? Give the reader a progress report. Include pictures if possible.

10. **Reflections.** If you heard something or saw something or found out about something that really made you think, that reaffirmed your values, or challenged them, tell the reader about that journey. Did UCC help you on that journey? How? What did you conclude from your exploration, or is it an ongoing process?

These are ten possible areas for a blog post, but there are so many more. If you have any questions, don't hesitate to ask the blog team, they're always available to help. Good luck!

How to Submit a Blog Post

Here are guidelines for submitting your post. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Regina Verow (regkp@verizon.net), Laurie Coltri (lscoltri@verizon.net) or Chris Gallant (gallantmdnj@gmail.com).

If you're on Regina Verow's schedule of bloggers, she appreciates **post submission** no later than the week before the due date. This lead time allows the editorial staff time to copy edit (if necessary) and get your blog formatted and up on the website on time. Submissions can be sent to **Regina Verow** at regkp@verizon.net.

Blog post length: roughly 200-600 words. Much longer posts can sometimes be divided into chapters and published in separate posts.

Bio (*first-time authors only*): Please submit a brief bio (100 words or less) to be published with your post. Examples of content: ways you're active at UCC; relevant interests, hobbies or passions; theological/religious beliefs (eg agnostic, Buddhist); job/career/profession; children; pets; state or nation of origin; recency of becoming a UU (eg "lifetime Unitarian Universalist"); etc. These are just suggestions.

Photos (*first-time authors only*): Please submit a portrait-style photo of yourself. We want people to be able to put faces to words and bios.

Additional photos are welcomed. Visual "eye candy" really helps to sell a blog post and to keep readers interested.

Ownership and permission: images MUST be in the public domain or belong to you. Otherwise, you need written permission from the owner of the image to use it for the blog. (See *FINDING IMAGES*, below.)

Editorial decisions: Post submissions are subject to editing for grammar/syntax/spelling. And they may be edited for content. If a substantial change is made to your post, you will be informed. See Content Guidelines.

Finding Images – Five Easy Ways

Here are five ways to find images suitable (and **legal!**) for your blogpost:

1. Use your own images, or those of a personal acquaintance who gives you permission to use the image in your blogpost. In the age of smartphones and tablets, supplying your own high-resolution images has gotten really easy!
2. Buy a package of images that explicitly say they are royalty-free. See, eg, <http://www.hongkiat.com/blog/more-free-stock-photos-royalty-images/>
3. Use Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page
4. Use Google Image search. After typing in your keywords and obtaining a page of images, click "Tools" above the pictures, and under "Usage rights" click "Labeled for reuse with modification."
5. Use the image resources here: <http://www.uua.org/communications/art> (some images require permissions, so be careful). See, especially, <https://www.flickr.com/groups/uustockphoto>.

Legal(ish) Stuff

Quotations, Attributions, and Consent

Brief quotes are acceptable, provided that you properly attribute them to their author(s). For longer quotes, or if your quote is a large proportion of the work from which you're quoting, you must have written permission for their use from the owner of the content. See <https://www.nolo.com/legal-encyclopedia/fair-use-rule-copyright-material-30100.html>

Privacy

Blogposts are read by the public. So ...

- Make sure that **all adults mentioned by name, appearing in photos, or identifiable from context give their consent.**
- **Written permission is required to show, or write about in an identifiable way, minors under the age of 18.** Children currently enrolled in UCC's Religious Education program have such consents on file. DO NOT show photos of other minors unless you have written consent in hand.