

Preparation for Session G35 – Our Ministry in the Church Community

"In talking about ministry today, one never just means the professional clergy, but the mission and program of the church—its ministry. Ministry is certainly the most important aspect of any church. Yet ministry as we know it is changing dramatically and will need to continue to change if we are to move with strength into the future. How that ministry is changing was described best to me as 'giving the ministry away'... Giving the ministry away begins with an attitude toward church life that sees in everything we do the potential for ministry... every task done, every group that meets, every committee that organizes, understands itself as a part of a ministry... Ministry is the heart and soul of [the] church for everyone."
- Barbara Wells, quoted in Salted With Fire: UU Strategies for Sharing Faith and Growing Congregations, edited by Scott W. Alexander.

In the last session, we shared our personal reasons for being in the church community, emphasizing benefits we receive as individuals. In this session, we'll think about how we might give back to the church. Many define "ministry" as work done in support of the church community. This is a chance to think about your lay ministry—how your unique talents and energies can strengthen our religious community.

1. List the volunteer jobs—big or small—that you've done for the church in the past year or so. Which were the most satisfying to you personally? Which were the least satisfying? Why? If you have not been able to participate as a volunteer yet, have you discovered any programs that might interest you in the future?
2. Think about the following quote from "Belonging: The Meaning of Membership," a report of the UUA's Commission on Appraisal (www.uua.org/coa). Do you agree or disagree with it? Why? "Real community can only be built through hard and unglamorous work. Like any effective relationship, it requires commitment. Often these days we hear people say they are seeking a 'spiritual community' but want nothing to do with 'organized religion.' By the former they seem to mean a place that will meet their religious needs; the latter they seem to associate with a place that will make demands upon them to support the institution's needs. The reality is that you cannot have one without the other, and part of the church's job is to lead people to the discovery of the spiritual truth that it is only by giving that we receive, giving not only our money but ourselves. In other words, only by making a commitment to a community can we hope to build a community. And this commitment consists not of lofty idealisms but of practical realities."
3. Can you think of any ways our church's spirit of community and our commitment to each other could be strengthened?