

Common Ground III: *Can we just change the world already?*

Sponsors: YRUU Steering Committee

Primary Aid: Jennifer Dunmore, Megan Dowdell, Tim Fitzgerald

Purposes:

- Extend and strengthen the Unitarian Universalist institution of YRUU through visioning and long term planning.
- Gather the ideas, visions and support of congregational youth who are not formally associated with YRUU.
- Explore what it means to be accountable to all Unitarian youth and learn how to accommodate their diverse needs.
- Foster and develop strong connections with the Board of Trustees and other adults.

History/Cover Letter:

In 1981, after the collapse of Liberal Religious Youth, the organization of Unitarian Universalist youth in Canada and the United States, young people needed a total revisioning of youth programming and the way their organization worked. Such a large scale revisioning came in the form of Common Ground I, an event that brought together all the visionaries and young people with great ideas in the UUA and CUC. These youth and adult allies envisioned what a new and improved organization might look like within the larger adult structure. A year later many youth with planning and implementation ideas came together to figure out how to implement the ideas of young UUs. During that two year process, Young Religious Unitarian Universalists was formed.

At the time of the Common Grounds, youth and adults came together and charted a structure, a purpose, bylaws and procedures and core programming components for YRUU. For over twenty years, these documents have remained virtually unchanged and there has been little opportunity for a large revisioning of YRUU by the youth who are invested in it. There have been several attempts at reexamining our organization, but very few of the ideas generated have been implemented to date. Efforts like the 15 year review, the youth advisor Task Force, the Long Range Planning meeting, have tried to gather together the important players of YRUU and youth programs to look at the way we work, but each time the ball has been dropped and YRUU has continued unchanged. Although we need to value the work done and use the ideas generated from these meetings, a bigger scale revisioning is needed for our organization and revisions the very soul and spirit of YRUU.

We feel that this revisioning is Common Ground III, to be held in 2006. There are many reasons why it would be appropriate and strategic to hold CGIII as soon as possible and the following are just a few of them. YRUU needs new visions and goals, after 20 years of existence, staff positions have been cut and structures changed to compensate, anti-racism and anti-oppression is shifting the direction YRUU is taking, many youth have so little connection to UUism and YRUU, the leadership has become less accountable to its constituents, the recent UUA/CUC split and growing concerns about the rift between YRUU and adults.

Our goal for CGIII is to bring together many different youth and adults who have diverse views on YRUU and youth programming. We need to reach out beyond the leadership bodies, beyond youth who attend continental events, beyond the advisors who attend every conference. For YRUU to really look at itself critically, we need to gather together representatives of all the aspects of YRUU, including UU youth who are not even involved on a local level in a youth group.

Common Ground III must incorporate the views of the youth who are always present and the youth who are seldom heard, especially those who are part of marginalized groups in our faith such as people of colour and members of the GLBT community. Only when we bring together all these groups and hear the voices of all the youth and adults involved with youth programs can we truly obtain the buy-in and support of all the members of YRUU. If the revisioning of Common Ground III is successful, YRUU will become a more inclusive and effective organization that can serve the needs of diverse groups of youth.

Ideas for the formation of the Common Ground III Planning Group have been bounced around, but there is still a need to reevaluate who will be on this group and how they will be selected. It has been decided that the co-conveners of the Planning Group will be a youth elected at Youth Council and Bill Sinkford. Hopefully Bill and the youth selected will show in the planning process what it means for youth and adults to have a productive and accountable youth-adult relationship.

It is extremely important for the entire planning group and process that youth and adults on the Planning Group work in accountable relationships that demonstrate youth empowerment. In a meeting with the YRUU Steering Committee, Bill Sinkford, Megan Dowdell, and Paul Richter a possible structure was brainstormed for the CGIII Planning Group. On this group there are the co-conveners, a Steering Committee or Youth Council representative, a DRE, a Common Ground 1 or 2 staff member or participant, a congregational youth not involved in the structure of YRUU on a district or continental level, a youth on Board of Trustees, an adult on Board of Trustees, a member of the Youth Office Staff, a member of the UUA Staff, and a DRUUMM YaYA representative.

There are concerns with the adult-youth ratio on this possible structure, and with the institutional power on the Planning Group. Steering Committee will brainstorm other possible ideas for the formation of the Planning Group and get them to the Board ASAP.

Keep in mind that Common Ground III is not definitely going to happen, and that Youth Council must come to consensus on the resolution before any more steps can be taken. We welcome any feedback the Board has on this proposal, and the Steering Committee will consider the recommendations made. In accordance with YRUU's system of Youth Empowerment, this proposal has been drafted by youth, and all changes will be made by youth with input and feedback from adult allies. We look forward to working with the Board on this project, and hope that Common Ground III will renew the YRUU and UUA commitment to accountable, empowering youth-adult partnerships. Thank you for your support. If you would like to reach any Steering Committee member, our contact information is at www.uua.org/yruu/governance and can also be obtained from the Youth Office.

Sincerely,

The YRUU Steering Committee

Specific Problem being addressed:

YRUU has not had a serious large revisioning session in a long, long time. Figuring out what it means to be a sponsored organization of the UUA, to be accountable to all UU youth and to exist as a unique cross-border organization with a relationship with the UUA and the CUC. We would also like to clarify the role of UU youth in the UUA and the denomination as a larger body.

Short term goal: To hold Common Ground III

1. Find site in the St. Louis, MO area
 - a. The reasoning behind the initial choice of this site is that General Assembly 2006 is in that area and June of 2006 would be an ideal time for CGIII. St. Louis is also a central location to accommodate youth from many geographical areas.
2. Find out how much money is available from outside the YRUU budget
3. Explore the ways in which as many people as possible can attend the meeting
4. Chose a date and finalize length of the meeting. Date recommendation is after General Assembly in June/July 2006.
5. Put together a planning committee and eventually pick a group of staff for CGIII.
 - a. Use outside facilitation for large group meetings. Conferees will be empowered to create the agendas and visions for this conference.
 - b. The Planning Committee will work with YRUU Steering Committee to find an appropriate way to pick staff.
6. Figure out a way to make the meeting more accountable to people who can't come. Discuss how to get the ideas and energy of YRUUers and UU youth that won't be able to attend the meeting.
7. Compile the results of the Common Ground III Survey, which has been distributed by the Youth Office.

Evaluation: The meeting shall be evaluated by the participants. From the group of participants, a group will be created to compile the evaluations and then send them to the youth office to be put in the upcoming years youth council pre-packet. Although recommendations of the Long Range Planning Meeting were not implemented, the structure of having a continuing task force to monitor the implementation and accountability of YRUU to the recommendations may be an appropriate process for implementing CGIII.

Local and District people: We are choosing not to differentiate between "local/district people" and "continental people" because we feel that that distinction breaks down the YRUU community and furthers the current culture of an exclusive leadership body. However it is important that at the Common Ground III meeting there are youth participants with a wide variety of experiences in YRUU and UUA youth programming, involved in all levels of programming and involvement.

Long term goal: To revision all of YRUU

1. Through the conference we hope to hear the visions and opinions of youth and advisors from all levels of YRUU and all geographic areas. We also need to make sure the voices of marginalized groups, such as BGLT youth and people of colour are heard and that their ideas are incorporated into the revisioning of YRUU.
2. To reexamine and change for the better the face of YRUU. The changes adopted will likely affect the structure, staff, programming, bylaws and priorities of Unitarian Universalist youth and may drastically alter the path that YRUU is currently taking.

Resources: Money from YFUUD and a general FUUD grant could likely be obtained through the application process. We recognize that all UUA budgets are tight this year and will be for the years to come but we have also noticed the huge cuts to the Youth Office that have taken their toll on YRUU programming. It is unlikely that the Youth Office will be able to contribute any significant funds for Common Ground III.

As the leadership and CGIII Planning Committees study the history of Common Grounds in the youth movement and learn about best practices for CGIII, we will use such written resources as the SCOYP report, fifteen year review, the Youth Advisor Task Force report, Wayne Arnason's book on LRY, and the history of YRUU and Anti-racism in the UUA. We will also be in close contact with Common Ground I and II participants, staff and planning committees as well as interviewing people who were youth or advisors around the time of the formation of YRUU. The information that these people share with the planning committee will help us set up the logistics and meeting procedures of Common Ground III.

How will this further the principles and vision of YRUU? By envisioning where YRUU will go in the future and making new goals for the organization I think that this conference will help YRUU grow stronger, create a blueprint for future leadership, help to create stronger institutional ties with the UUA and CUC, and generally help make YRUU more meaningful for those involved in it.

How will this further the greater denomination and the world? As of 2001, the president of the UUA is the former president of Liberal Religious Youth, the predecessor to YRUU. This is true of many of the UUA's leaders, so by creating a better YRUU, we are working to create a better future for the UUA and CUC. As well, a new and improved YRUU is likely to inspire more dedication to anti-oppression and anti-racism work, which will hopefully make Unitarian Universalism a truly welcoming place and a leader for the world in these aspects of social justice.

Organizations that will be involved: Many YRUUers are already connected and deeply involved in many organizations outside of the UUA, which has created a more inclusive, connected and knowledgeable YRUU body. In general, there will be a strong push to make sure that organizations within the UUA and CUC are involved in the revisioning process and support the outcomes of the conference. UUA affiliated groups that we will likely be involved with include Lifespan Faith Development, Liberal Religious Educators and Directors Assn., Identity-Based Ministries, Diverse Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries and the Young Adult and Campus Ministry Office. Great support for Common Ground III has already been shown by the UUA president, Bill Sinkford.

Fiscal Impact: At present, little financial analysis of this gathering has been done but some numbers have been explored for the CGIII planning committee. The cost of CGIII has been estimated at tens of thousands of dollars, including the planning, staff support and the actual event.

Consensus: Not Reached; Referred to Committee

Reasons for stand asides:

- we didn't address all of the concerns listed.
- Can't support CG3 without addressing all of the concerns.
- Still confused as to why we even need a CG3, we already had LRP.
- Feel very strongly to pass CG3 but that seems to block consensus, and this resolution wouldn't have been brought up if everyone in UU youth ministries was being served.
- During this process people have not listened, not represented constituencies, have gone off topic and been led off topic.
- This CG3 can happen whether we buy into it or not, feel lonely here about that.
- Mental capacity is not allowing to pay attention long enough to understand what is being said.
- Need self-care and can't pass this without going through all the concerns.
- We can't possibly solve this without sending it to committee.
- Can't agree with resolution as it stands.

Irresolvable concerns:

- Feel that we would have better accountability for our constituents under the precedent set by LRP; since we don't have resolution in front of us there's lots of information missing.
- Really disheartened by the fact that Bill came out here to build a relationship and made it clear that this wouldn't necessarily pass but that YC must come to consensus on this resolution before any more steps can be taken; see too much conflict.
- Seems like a problem of youth empowerment vs. youth entitlement.

Clarification: Lyn said the Board can do this without youth buy-in, but won't necessarily do that.

Suggestion: YRUU evaluates its decision process. Thank you so much for staying at the table, it means so much, this says volumes.

Suggestion: assume good intentions on both sides of Board and YRUU.

Question: if this doesn't pass, will Board look into any of the concerns listed here if they choose to evaluate youth ministry anyway?

Answer: The entire Board will get Lyn's notes, which have times on them. Board will probably refer this to the Board Working Group.

Concern: If we don't pass this the Board still could.

Concerns: Hidden agenda from the Steering Committee through the entire process and that broke down the community. Feelings of being betrayed by people who were controlling the process. It is disruptive to the consensus process for this breakdown to exist. If people are so outside of their needs from self care that they are falling asleep during the process they are not representing their constituencies and are hurting the consensus process.

Sending the Resolution to Committee:

Proposal: old Steering Committee would get the names and information from people who are interested specifically from Adults, youth at large, People of Color Caucus, Youth Council Representatives, New Steering Committee, and Old Steering Committee