

UUA District Staff Stakeholder Conversation November 29, 2006

Facilitators: Jesse Jaeger, Tera Little, Megan Dowdell

→ **Share feedback** from Thomas Jefferson, Mountain Desert, and Ballou Channing district gatherings in November.

→ **Question: How can youth ministry serve the spiritual needs of youth?**

Group #1

- Ministers who are interested and engaged
- Youth age is all about relationship – critical mass is important
- Not just one way to get youth together
- Help youth advisors see youth ministry as more than movie nights
- Acknowledge and understand that ministry to youth is ministry of the congregation
- Faith formation and UU identity time separate from youth group
- District focus on growing vibrant local YRUU, not district level youth groups (i.e. district YACs)
- Camps can be positive training ground
- Paid, trained youth advisors

Group #2

- Chicken and egg – adults don't do it so how/why should congregations do it with youth?
- Needs to be family-based
- Need to educate families to do [i.e. serve spiritual needs] at home in early years
- Adults and young adults who were raised UU need something different than come-inners
- All or so much – depends and hinges on advisors who are not well-supported or trained
- Needs are diverse, offer different mediums
- Religious educators need more training and support to know how to do this
- Need more “umph,” people in congregation to get involved
- Ministers need to show up more, especially in local
- Need more than whatever YRUU offers in a given district, more than con culture
- No youth abandonment
- There's no formal youth ministry training for ministers – desperate need.
- There's no mystery to spiritual needs of youth or adults, we just need to pay more attention to this

→ Needs, Changes and Next Steps

RESOURCES group

Brainstorm:

- Paid staffing for youth in each district and congregation
- Develop online “how-to” manuals for youth trips
- Manual for cluster youth groups
- Clearinghouse with online resources
- Create resources on identifying and recruiting youth leaders
- Youth-specific worship resources
- Review and update spirituality conference, leadership conference, etc on 3-4 cycle
- Deepen youth ministry in theological formation/seminary

Priorities and Resources:

1. Paid staffing for youth ministry in each district and congregation
 - a. Congregation – identify and create job descriptions for part-time positions (Youth Office)
 - i. Funding – compensation consultants and district advocacy
 - ii. Priority by congregation
 - b. District – ¼ time to build capacity in congregation
 - i. Create job description and hire
 - ii. Find money for district budget
2. On-line resources (Task Force or authors)
 - a. Clearinghouse of online resources
 - b. How-to manuals for youth trips
 - c. Manuals for cluster youth group and activities
 - d. Youth-specific worship resources
3. Create a tool to help districts and congregations identify and recruit appropriate youth leaders [advisors?]
 - a. Include an effective job description (Youth Office) with clarity about accountability, training, support and supervision

INFRASTRUCTURE group

Brainstorm:

- Youth Council reps elected by congregational YRUUs or youth within districts
- DYSC reps also elected through congregations
- Problems: elections of district youth advisors for YAC, “we”/”they” cultures (balance safe space and creating culture of entitlement)
- Incorporate youth not in congregational mainstream
- Ministry to youth not ministry to youth organizations
- District YRUU defines “YRUU” as people who attend programs

- Focus on congregations not district level youth group
- Supported by responsive, responsible, not anxious adults, NOT reactionary or inflammatory feeding adults
- Big question: why continental youth council? Youth's role in the Association?

Priorities and Resources:

1. Incorporate youth into congregational mainstream
 - a. Authentic integration of youth. Train congregations (non-nominal, non-special interest) (Jesse Jaeger)
 - b. Seminaries offer hands-on how-to engage with youth and UUMA (MFC, UUMA)
 - c. Drive Time essays on youth empowerment (Don Skinner with help from healthy identified people)
 - d. Select, train and develop responsive responsible non-anxious adults for leaders/youth advisors at congregational/district/continental levels
 - i. Creation of maturity as part of training
 - ii. Create standards for responsible staffing (national level)
2. Elect youth reps through local congregations for district and continental positions
 - a. Do it. (Policy Governance districts – staff; Non-policy governance districts – district boards, Harlan)

COMMUNICATION group

Brainstorm:

- Stop just selling programs
- Confidentiality does not equal communication (culture of safe space needs to change)
- Subscribe people to e-lists, manage electronic
- Engage ministers (with religious educators, advisors, youth)
- Continue to talk about appropriate leaders (continental and district, local)
- Build relationships
- Keep parents involved
- Use existing communications lines (UUMA, LREDA)
- Pay attention to adults in communication with youth-safeguards
- Identify goals and communicate with parents
- Elections not getting best youth in leadership

Priorities and Resources:

1. Build relationships (e.g. engage ministers, religious educators, youth advisors)
 - a. Religious educators and ministers need to minister to youth rather than stick them in a program
 - b. Some culture may need to change to facilitate building relationships (e.g. culture around confidentiality hinders communication)
 - c. Between district and continental levels (esp. re: leaders)
2. Who needs to know? At what level, determine this and make sure they know some suggestions:

- a. Use existing communication lines (UUMA, LREDA, district, YAC, youth announce, etc)
 - b. Subscribe leaders to e-lists, manage electronic communication well and wisely
3. Keep parents in loop (e.g. identify goals and communicate them with parents), orient parents (they have to for every other activity their kids are a part of)

SYSTEM group

- Identify issues within UUA systems that identifies youth as the problem or patient (District staff and others)
- District staff to engage in a serious conversation about where health is/isn't and how to help congregations and association to integrate youth into a relationship allowing them voice within their appropriate roles
- Teach boundaries, real empowerment, developmental appropriateness, responsibility to/accountability to adults working with youth (resources for congregations)
- Goal of training healthy UUs and being healthy UUs → helping the movement come of age * * *

PROGRAMMING group

Brainstorm:

- Mission building – create mission statements (congregations)
- Cluster experiences for youth groups (6-8th graders and senior high) – ministers and RE
- DYGGT: District Youth Groups Gathering Together – congregational based programs in cluster gatherings – recognize bigger picture
- Interfaith “youth for change” programming (social justice)
- Bahai youth group program (Coming of Age Program at district level)
 - Look to other faith groups and youth programming
- Youth Build Your Own Theology curriculum, senior high RE class
- Youth worship with congregation – small group ministry for youth, spiritual practices with youth

Priorities:

1. Explore gathering congregational youth groups in smaller clusters
2. Social justice and faith in action project across ages
3. Attend to youth faith and spiritual development (practice, worship, small group ministry, youth group retreats)

Next Steps:

1. Update curricula (On the Path, LIFT, Building Your Own Theology series, Coming of Age at district level, include training)
2. Explore models for cluster development and professional buy-in
3. Explore justice needs in own community and consider community asset mapping

4. Varieties of worship models to engage all
5. Youth pick topic (cult, for example, and have minister preach on topic and involve youth in service)

TRAINING group

Brainstorm:

- Next step trainings for youth (spiritual leadership)
- Leadership – Pacific Northwest model
- New models (series of weekend retreats), differing lengths
- Trainings for congregational lay leaders, parents, ministers, and RE professionals re: their roles in youth ministry
- Uniform anti-racism/anti-oppression/multiculturalism training
- Choice of trainers (like OWL and Renaissance Modules)
- Cost accessible
- Something like “On the Path” (including spiritual development)
- Everyone learn that youth work is part of their spiritual development

Priorities and Resources

1. Everyone needs to learn how youth work is part of their spiritual development
2. Expand training for a wider range of people – ministers, parents, religious professionals and lay leaders
3. Develop new models of training so more people can engage with involvement in youth ministry
 - a. CENTER program (for religious professionals)
 - b. Small group ministry that is multi-age