

Congregational Services Consultation on Youth Ministry

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Welcome and Introductions

Overview of the Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth

Desired Outcomes:

- More than just a one-size-fits-all youth ministry—a youth ministry that is robust, flexible, and diverse
- Denominational youth work that focuses on serving local congregations
- Mutually respectful and empowering relationships between youth and adults
- Anti-racism and anti-oppression work infused within every part of youth ministry, with a recognition that there is not one "right" way of doing the work—providing a forum for youth identity development and institutional change
- A youth ministry that meets the spiritual needs of youth and increases the spiritual depth of our congregations
- Effective communication within, between, and among all areas of the Association.

The Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth is a two-year process of gathering input from Unitarian Universalist youth ministry stakeholders. It will culminate in a Summit on Youth Ministry in July 2007, which will recommend changes to the way we do youth ministry throughout the Association.

Leading up to the Summit, we will gather input from:

YOUTH – In January and February 2006, 1400 youth ages 12-20 completed a survey about their experiences with UU youth ministry.

CONGREGATIONS – From April through September 2006, over 75 congregations held congregational conversations on youth ministry.

DISTRICTS – Every UUA district will hold a district gathering on youth ministry during the 2006-2007 church year. These will focus on how the Association and its districts can better serve youth at the local and district levels.

STAKEHOLDERS – Dozens of youth ministry stakeholder groups will also have conversations about youth ministry and contribute their input to the process. UUA staff are one of these crucial stakeholder groups.

Objectives for conversations with UUA staff groups:

- Engage UUA staff groups in visioning and goal-setting for the delivery and support of youth ministry. The input of UUA staff will help shape the outcomes and recommendations of the consultation.
- Share with staff groups what the consultation process entails, how it impacts their constituents, and how their constituents have been involved so far.
- Many of the constituencies of the staff groups are also stakeholders in the consultation process, so we want to learn what the staff groups think their role and their constituents' role could be in youth ministry.

Survey and Congregational Conversation Results

→ Priorities and Growth

In a survey of 1,399 Unitarian Universalist youth:

“Youth programs are a priority in my congregation.”

58% agree

Congregations and Stakeholder Groups

- Placing a **priority** on youth ministry, including adequate **staffing** and **funding** is **crucial to its success**.
- “Religion simply occupies a largely losing structural position when it comes to most adolescents’ obligations, schedules, routines, and habits.” (*Soul Searching* – Smith and Denton)
- The challenge of ministry with **families** to make church, religious education, and youth ministry **a priority in their busy lives**.

What attracts and keeps youth and families?

→ Retention and Growth

UU Youth Survey

- Reasons for disengaging from youth programs and RE:
 - Too busy (50%)
 - Didn’t like other youth (25%)
 - Started attending worship services instead (24%)

National Survey of Youth and Religion

- Reasons “nonreligious” teens raised in religions became “nonreligious”: Intellectual skepticism; Don’t know; Lack of interest; Just stopped attending services; Life disruptions and troubles; Dislikes religion; Lacked parental support; Vague or no reason
- Some factors: Parent religiosity; Parental marital status; Relationship with parents; Close friends; Organized activities

What can congregations do to engage these youth?

→ Congregational Fundraising

Congregations

- Lots of talk about budget and financial support for youth ministry
- Decided to fundraise or allocate more money toward youth ministry (over 40%)
- Involve youth in developing and managing their own budget

Religious Educators (at the LREDA Fall Conference)

- Priority/hope: adequate funding and fair compensation for youth ministry professionals (youth advisors, youth coordinators, youth ministers)

How can congregations fundraise to meet their youth ministry visions and needs?

→ Youth Ministry in Large Congregations

Youth Ministry Conversations in Large Congregations

- 10 participated
- Lots of youth who want to participate
- A variety of options for youth (40% have Youth-Adult Committees)
- Some have paid staff for youth (50% of those reporting); others decided to hire paid staff for youth as a result of their congregational conversation

Religious Educators (LREDA)

- Question whether our current district structure serves large congregations, or whether it's geared toward small and mid-size

→ Ethics and Safety for Youth in Congregations

Congregations should be **safe place to...**

“Question”	“Explore”	“Grow”
“Be challenged”	“Try new things”	“Lead and follow”
“Speak your mind”	“Be social”	“Explore diversity”

(quotes from congregational conversations)

Congregations and Stakeholders

- Have not discussed safety and ethics very much
- Have stressed the importance of training for adults working with youth
- Have stressed the importance of ministerial support for youth – for spiritual development and pastoral care

→ Youth and Congregational Justice Making

Survey

- Social justice activities are #1 way respondents are involved in congregational life (34%)
- “Anti-racism and anti-oppression work are important in my congregation” (72%)
- “My youth group gives me opportunities to address significant social issues such as racism and oppression” (71%)

Congregations

- Youth justice work fosters leadership skills and strengthens youth ministry
- Need for youth social justice work to go “beyond self affirmation/ understanding to action”

Religious Educators (LREDA)

- Justice work connects youth and adults, youth interest with church need

- Youth get AR/AO training, and return to a congregation that has not done the work and is not prepared to support them

→ Welcoming All Youth in our Congregations

Do youth feel at home in our congregations?

Survey

- Overall, almost 90% of respondents feel welcome and respected
- “The congregation is my spiritual home” (53%)
- Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning respondents are very active and hold leadership positions; but some of these respondents feel more group/peer pressure than their heterosexual peers
- Transgender/genderqueer respondents rate youth group experiences consistently and significantly lower than males/females
- Transracially adopted youth rated youth group experiences consistently and significantly lower than others – belonging, group pressure, opportunities to do justice work

What do congregations and religious educators want for youth?

Congregations

- “Inclusive=Empowerment”
- Want their youth programs to be welcoming/inclusive; want larger congregation to be welcoming/inclusive to youth

Religious Educators (LREDA) discussed

- Diversity among youth advisors
- Normality in diversity
- Tokenism
- Listening/caring for one another
- OWL
- Building ally systems

→ Ministry With Youth Bridging into Young Adulthood

Bridger = 18-20 years old

Survey

- 4% (56) of survey respondents were bridgers
- Less likely to have joined a congregation; more likely than 12-17 year olds to no longer consider themselves a member
- Bridgers are more critical than other age groups about perceived support from congregational adults
- Involved in congregational social justice work, teaching RE

Congregations

- Small number mentioned that young adults/bridgers are under-served by their congregation
- Suggest involving youth in developing young adult programs

Vision/Ideal

Marketing and Growth

- Youth see themselves in the Unitarian Universalist Association's marketing campaigns. These campaigns engage youth, reflect youth interests, and draw families into our congregations.
- We grow our community by providing diverse and robust ministry and programs for youth that help them to deepen their faith and their commitment to this community.

Additions/changes:

- All Unitarian Universalist youth stay UU, and bring friends!
- Our youth find their proper place in the world (even if that's in another religion!).
- There is a place for each unique youth.
- Unitarian Universalist youth ministry is a point of attraction in congregations.

Congregational Stewardship and Fundraising

- Congregations support youth ministry financially and otherwise.
- Youth play a role in the stewardship of their community, and are supported in recognizing the gifts that they can contribute.
- Congregational fundraising consultants are prepared to help congregations see youth as an asset in congregational stewardship, and can work with youth and congregations to help them meet their goals.

Large Congregations

- Large congregations are centers of innovation around youth ministry, sharing these innovations with the larger movement.
- Large congregations have full-time paid staff to support a vibrant youth ministry.
- Youth are fully integrated into all aspects of the congregation – in youth programming and in other aspects of congregational life.

Additions/changes:

- When sharing innovations, large congregations are sensitive to the capacities and limitations of others (often smaller congregations with fewer resources).

Safety and Ethics

- Youth in our congregations are safe in body, mind, and spirit.
- Adults working with youth maintain appropriate boundaries and work with youth to create safe and empowering communities.
- Ministers have the support and knowledge necessary to minister with youth in crisis.
- Congregations have explicit policies about safety and ethics, with pieces particular to youth.

Additions/changes:

- Youth develop ethics about how they are in the world – accountability, learning to challenge *and* be responsible. Expectations of what is given and returned.
- Safe congregations policies are well-communicated to the congregation, so that everyone is clear about expectations.

- Rather than policies, there are covenants of spiritual relationship.
- Our Whole Lives is used as a resource to teach youth what is appropriate (for them and for adults).

Justice Making

- Youth actively engage in justice making within their congregation, and see justice as a central part of their faith and spiritual practice.
- A youth-driven ministry of justice that calls all of us to live out our values in the world.
- JUUST Change Consultants support congregations in building a vision of intergenerational justice and anti-oppression work.

Additions/changes:

- Rather than being youth-driven, justice work should be a partnership and collaboration – something that all generations do together.
- Youth learn how to bring their knowledge of anti-racism/anti-oppression into the world with diplomacy.

Young Adult and Campus Ministry

- There is a strong bridge from youth ministry to young adult ministry at all levels of the Association. Youth feel welcome in the young adult community they enter into.
- There is Unitarian Universalist campus ministry at all colleges and universities. These campus ministries partner with and are supported by neighboring congregations.
- The ministry of congregations supports people of *all* ages.

Additions/changes:

- We need a wider bridge.
- Needs to be an “entry ramp” for those young adults who left as youth, but decide to come back.

Brainstorm: Driving Forces

What is happening currently – in your staff group and in the larger UU world – to move us toward this ideal?

Large Congregations/ Growth and Marketing

- Engaging with congregations on increasing youth involvement in all aspects as a prelude to young adult involvement
- Representing “family groups” in marketing graphics
- Paying attention to communities where marketing is happening
- Large congregations work on staffing ratios/proportionality
- Marketing shows and quotes youth – hope for more feedback from youth (media/messages)
- Younger ministers, leaders, families promote growth
- Large congregations are encouraged to consider staffing and getting right people (lay leaders) to the table

Congregational Stewardship and Fundraising

- Consultants talk about how much support RE is getting

- Encourage people to think about RE/youth space in capital campaigns
- Some fundraising (for global ministries) activities

Safety and Ethics/Justice Making

- Concern for safety of children and youth drives concern over safety and ethics
- Maintaining safety about substance abuse issues (recent letter in congregational mailing)
- Culture shifting to greater openness about talking about inappropriate adult behaviors
- Youth and young adult Groundwork training program for AR/AO/MC work
- More interest in policies and covenants by and with youth
- Jubilee visioning work has occurred in some congregations but need more support of social justice agenda
- Some mentoring is occurring
- Allies for Racial Equity

Young Adult and Campus Ministry

- Engaging with congregations on increasing youth involvement in all aspects as a prelude to young adult involvement
- C*UUYAN trying hard to be welcoming place for all
- Number of campus ministries steadily increasing; % not related to a nearby congregation is decreasing
- Lots of resources for congregational leaders and bridging youth

General

- Significant cultural changes in all areas (possibly synergy) toward ideal state
- Youth and young adults are on the agenda of Congregational Services
- Youth Office and Office of Young Adult & Campus Ministry are collaborating
- DRUUMM Youth and Young Adult Caucus is a place for leadership development for Youth of Color

Brainstorm: Restraining Forces

What is happening currently – in your staff group and in the larger UU world – that is holding you back from achieving this ideal? What are some of the challenges?

Think about and mark which forces we can have an impact on, and which are beyond our control (a way of prioritizing and focusing).

Code:

- A force that can be impacted with a thoughtful strategy
- A force that is beyond our control
- Compartmentalization
- Community ministries are missed opportunities because they are marginalized. Ministers of Color often go into community ministry because they can't get parish work.
- Enormous disagreements re: safety and ethics in our congregations and among UU leadership. No consensus re: alcohol consumption, R-rated movies, sexuality, etc.

- Other priorities supersede a youth agenda – lack of commitment (we let that happen).
- Generation gap – our UU culture holds us back.
- Age-appropriate understanding is limited for fundraising and stewardship issues (we don't understand our youth).
- Not enough incentive to do the work. Marginalized youth. Who are we there to serve? Demographics, age-more power etc. to adults.
- Dominant white culture – Family systems model is inadequate for inclusions of youth and People of Color.
- Too few of these conversations at the congregational level. A disconnect between national agenda and local/congregational level.
- We don't understand our youth. Education issue. We need to educate adults about what youth at different ages are able to do. This issue is overarching all.
- Energy goes into maintaining existing norms. Demographics of UUism (gatekeepers) mean that cultural change is extremely challenging.
- Perception of youth empowerment: we don't yet have a handle on what we mean; confuse it with entitlement.
- Reluctance to engage in real mentoring, vs. “cheerleading” or placating.
- Unevenness of soliciting feedback from youth.
- Lack of genuine relationships; “mutual stigmas” perpetuated, although tokenization is also problematic.
- Lack of anti-oppression awareness, or the use of an AO analysis is when it might not further the relationship. You cannot apply the same analysis of racism to ageism.
- Our culture of scarcity.
 - “Nordstrom” vision for worship vs. “Wal-Mart” vision for children/youth
 - Scarcity culture affects compensation for youth professionals
- Our ideology of “anti-proselytizing” which extends to our own youth.
 - The continental clique (rarefied air)
 - Lack of sensitivity to people who don't fit societal norms – they are looking for a community to support them “through the awkward stage”
 - Church as a sanctuary, which mitigates against providing a place for “others” (i.e. children, youth, young adults, etc.)

To be continued...

Congregational Services will meet again in January to strategize around the restraining forces they have identified.

Something to consider in closing:

Congregational Services works with a lot of consultants, who interact with congregations and help them achieve their vision.

- ❖ How can we equip these consultants so that their work is truly multigenerational and inclusive?
- ❖ What can Congregational Services do and what support could they use from the Youth Office and others?