

Religious Education Credentialing Committee Consultation on Youth Ministry

March 12, 2007; 3:30-5:00 p.m.

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Facilitator: Beth Dana

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 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.

Process Overview:

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:

- To engage stakeholders in visioning and goal setting for their ministry with youth. The input of stakeholders will help shape the outcomes and recommendations of the consultation.
- To consider the question: What can the RECC and the Association do to cultivate highly prepared and qualified religious educators, who will contribute to the strength and vitality of youth ministry?

What We Have Learned

How well supported do youth feel? Religious educators are big supporters of youth, 80% rating for youth advisors, much lower for “other adults.” (Youth Survey)

YRUU Leaders

- Anti Racism/Anti-Oppression.
- DREs have knowledge and partner with youth to plug into intergenerational work.
- Start young with anti-bias education for children.
- Bridging youth/young adult
- DREs have knowledge and skills to reach out to and support this age range
- Use resources offered by UUA

What Youth Advisors Are Saying (Youth Advisor Survey)

- 74% supervised by congregational staff person
- Of these, 76% supervised by DRE

Congregation’s Support of Respondent’s Work (% Excellent/Very Good)

Minister: 54%

DRE: 71%

RE teachers: 50%

Board members: 36%

Other youth advisors: 70%

Youth: 70%

Other adults: 37%

Congregation’s Support of Youth/Youth Ministry (% Excellent/Very Good)

Minister: 53%

DRE: 74%

RE teachers: 54%

Board members: 32%

Other youth advisors: 72%

Other adults: 28%

Discussion: Do youth advisors attend staff meetings? Do they isolate themselves?

What Religious Educators Are Saying (LREDA Fall Conference)

- Education, training, skill-building, professional support for adults working with youth; some adults lack knowledge to confidently work with youth.
- Communication and collaboration between religious educators and youth, religious educators and youth advisors, religious educators and parish members
- Fair compensation for youth ministry professionals

Discussion: How many people are involved in the Chrysalis Training Program? (Offers youth leadership, spirituality, chaplain, anti-racism trainings; youth advisor trainings in two levels; training recognition program for attendees/leaders includes OWL and Renaissance program as well.)

- Most districts hold at least one training per year.
- How many paid youth advisers? Don't have data.
- Youth are undercounted on congregational level; we count members and children registered in children's program.
- Lack of guidelines hampers congregations that want to fairly compensate youth advisors.
- Are there levels of youth professionals? Administration vs. education role.
- Designing a youth program around a youth group leads to disaster.
- Losing not only high school youth, but their parents. Often we lose parents once the child finishes high school.
- "Our youth don't feel failed, but we are failing them."
- If you are working with youth, you'd better be working with their parents on questions of how they deal with their youth.
- Some programs, but not enough content to engage our youth.
- We say we're empowering youth by letting them lead, but we don't teach them how to lead.
- At district level a lot of programs are counterproductive – what we should be doing is focusing on how to help congregations.
- Any church needs more than one youth program.
- Permission giving, laid back attractive but not sufficient.
- Those who demand more get driven out.

Vision

Highly qualified religious educators:

- have a deep understanding of the developmental needs of youth and how to nurture faith development.
- are knowledgeable about youth curricula and resources.
- have a working relationship with youth.
- determine programming in partnership with youth.
- know where and how to connect youth with the larger congregation.
- have the knowledge to be effective supervisors for youth advisors – connecting them with resources and support structures.
- understand that youth must be integrated into the mission of the congregation.
- identify and address the diversity of needs within the youth community.

- have the ability to oversee multiple programs
- effectively utilize rites of passage.
- have an awareness and analysis of anti-racism and anti-oppression.

Brainstorm: Driving Forces

- People working with youth are joining LREDA, networking, learning
- Churches are paying youth ministry coordinators, brings accountability, supports volunteers more effectively
- RECC requires that candidates have an understanding of faith development, systems/group process, youth faith development needs, basics of safe congregation and AR/AO/MC
- Open conversation going on right now because of congregational conversations and Consultation on Youth Ministry, doors opening for movement and change
- Ministry with Youth Renaissance Module and other trainings
- Safe Congregations policies – incorporate Coming of Age mentoring
- Growing structure and attention to Coming of Age programs
- Current RECC competencies – mentions young adults, but not youth
- Growth initiatives coming from every place! e.g. FACT Report
- Concern that we're not meeting needs of youth effectively
- Youth trips to New Orleans and Transylvania – enormous learning
- Looking at ways we do music in our congregations
- Greater focus on young adult programs leads to greater focus on youth programs
- Desire to have youth representation in governance/decision making
- Worship Associates including youth draws more youth to Sunday services
- Youth Caucus at GA – youth speaking publicly

Brainstorm: Restraining Forces

- Youth empowerment/district cons model – one size fits all, limits itself – need models for larger groups – haven't applied small group ministry model to youth
- DREs and other leaders protective of the “support group” model
- Haven't been doing “youth ministry,” we've been doing “youth groups”
- Part-time religious educators' responsibilities often don't extend to youth/teens
- Biased toward volunteer model – working with youth takes talented, trained, compensated adults – we've ignored professional/paid model
- Ignore developmental needs of junior high and high school youth – have been collapsed together
- Leadership development in junior high age range
- Leadership in youth programs shouldn't come from seniors because they're in life transition
- UUs give children a sense of entitlement that comes back to bite us when they're teens, value freedom over responsibility
- Need to articulate outcomes we want to see in youth, then design programs to create those outcomes

- Congregational culture of “we are an association of come-outers”, that becoming UU is an adult process
- Don’t invest enough resources in youth
- Lack of formation of youth ministers
- Fail to set expectation that families will participate
- Lack sufficient accountability structures – congregation to youth, youth to congregation, youth to youth

Strategies

- Add Skinner House book *When Youth Lead* to RECC reading list
- Clearly articulate that Chrysalis Training Program is appropriate for training youth professionals (but *not* a credentialing program)
- Ask that RE credentialing portfolios include working with youth
- Develop bibliography for youth work
- Encourage seminaries to develop courses in youth work

Other ideas alluded to earlier:

- UUA should collect data from congregations about number of youth and whether they have a youth advisor/paid youth professional.
- Clear guidelines regarding responsibilities and compensation for youth advisors/youth professionals. Perhaps including different levels/types of roles.

Closing – What Are We Taking Away From This Conversation?