

# **Ministerial Fellowship Committee 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 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 MFC and the Association do to prepare ministers to contribute to the strength and vitality of youth ministry?

## **What We Have Learned**

### What Youth Are Saying (UU Youth Ministry Survey)

- 76% say they feel excellent/very good support from their minister
- This varies slightly by age: Junior High (79%), High School (74%), Post-High (73%)
- 53% say their congregation is their spiritual home
- 53% of respondents involved in youth groups say it meets their spiritual needs
- 70% of respondents involved in district youth programs say it meets their spiritual needs
- 63% of respondents involved in continental youth programs say it meets their spiritual needs

### What Youth Advisors Are Saying (Youth Advisor Survey)

- 74% are supervised by a congregational staff person; of these, 23% are supervised by the minister
- Rating Congregation's Support of Youth/Youth Ministry – 53% say minister provides excellent/very good support
- Rating Congregation's Support of the Youth Advisor's Work – 54% say minister provides excellent/very good support

### What Congregations Are Saying (Congregational Conversations)

- Ministerial support is vital to youth ministry's success (some congregations decided to hire a youth minister or youth ministry coordinator)
- Ministerial interaction with youth varies widely
- Youth need to have more of a role in Sunday services – visibility, leadership, creativity
- Youth involvement in ministerial search process

### 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, collaboration, and supportive relationships between religious educators and parish ministers, youth advisors and parish ministers
- Congregational commitment to staffing youth programs with paid youth ministers
- Youth involvement in worship planning, “a real problem with separateness”
- Opportunities for youth to learn about UU history, faith, and identity. Develop ways to articulate what they DO believe.

## Brainstorm: Vision

### Questions to spark discussion:

1. What are the qualities of a minister who is engaged with youth ministry?
  2. What skills, experience, and competencies would the ideal minister possess in order to effectively and confidently minister with youth?
- Has done work on understanding their own ageism
  - If youth ministry isn't someone's strong suit, they need to work with people who understand youth and can help them.
  - Recognizes that they are a minister to a whole congregation and that spirituality is like sexuality (a life-long process) – this is a paradigm shift.
  - Need to be able to talk about sexuality in a spiritual way with youth. The fact that a minister is willing to talk about sexuality is very helpful for youth.
  - Connects with youth outside of Sunday services; youth are often invisible in congregations.
  - Ministers have kind of excused youth from worshiping on Sundays. There is not an expectation that youth will worship with the rest of the church. Other religions don't often have this problem. Worship should be designed to be more inclusive.
  - Should be able to offer quality worship – quality worship appeals to all ages.
  - Being a parent or having a sense of humor helps when working with youth.
  - We should not assume that youth are not church members until they are older. Ministers should not patronize youth.
  - Have deep respect for youth
  - Must like youth, but not all ministers are comfortable with youth
  - Can mobilize people based on their skills
  - Understands the developmental needs of youth
  - Listens to youth
  - Is willing to change self and the culture of the church – more creativity in ministry, explore different liturgy options (youth are not looking to be lectured to).
  - Committed to empowerment and stepping back when needed to allow space for youth to claim their power; can also model this for other adults.
  - Committed and willing to push for youth ministry
  - Committed and willing to recruit great adults for youth ministry the way you recruit adults for the church board
  - Asks youth to be involved in non-youth parts of the congregation
  - Theological schools should do intentional recruitment of students interested in youth ministry; validate youth ministry as an important ministry

## Discussion: Current State of Ministerial Preparation and Competency

### Questions to spark discussion:

1. What were your hopes in including youth ministry materials and reading in the ministerial fellowship process?
  2. How effective do you think this has been?
  3. What are the current strengths and growing edges of ministerial competency around youth ministry?
- The MFC is cognizant that the number of people who come before them who want to work with youth is very small.
  - Why was youth ministry included in the materials? “Youth” wasn’t mentioned before.
  - In what ways is it now included?
    - Statement of Competency submitted by candidates (about coursework, life experience, additional reading done on ministry with youth/young adults)
    - Questions during interviews
  - Has not been hugely effective. It needs support from seminaries, and the MFC needs to better “enforce” the requirement. Could improve the reading list.
  - Youth ministry doesn’t often come up in congregational search packets.
  - Will take time for this to change and become more effective. Incremental. Consciousness-raising. Requires broad cultural change, which will take time and many people will need to play a role.
  - Need to look at what other denominations are doing
  - Have given 2s and 3s to candidates who flubbed the youth ministry questions; have required that they attend a Youth Leadership Development Conference or other experiential training with youth.

## Discussion: Opportunities and Strategies

### Questions to spark discussion:

1. What opportunities does the MFC have to increase ministers' preparedness for ministry with youth?
2. How can the work the Association does make it such that ministerial candidates the MFC reviews are more prepared for youth ministry?

### MFC:

- People don't take youth ministry seriously enough, but the MFC could play a role in changing this.
- MFC could add an essay requirement – ask candidates to reflect on a hands-on experience of working with youth.
- Work with Regional Sub Committees – ask youth ministry questions, expect direct interaction with youth

### Theological Schools:

- Ministry to youth is a ministry of its own but there doesn't seem to be much recruitment at our theological schools for youth ministry. Theological schools should develop curriculum regarding this. Both Presidents of the UU theological schools will be at the Summit on Youth Ministry.

### Congregations:

- Congregations need to make youth ministry experience more necessary when in search for a new minister.
- Get youth in leadership positions (e.g. Board of Trustees)

### UUA:

- The UUA seems to have abandoned curriculum for high school age youth. We seem to forget that they still need a disciplined approach to spirituality. The Association needs to create curriculum after Coming of Age. Youth need to be able to articulate what they do believe in. This may improve with the recent hiring of a Youth Resources Director at the UUA.
- Get youth in leadership positions (e.g. Board of Trustees)
- All UUA programs and consultancies should address youth issues, have an all-ages lens

### Everyone:

- Look at what we reject and what we affirm
- Understand the developmental needs of youth so we can affirm and meet them where they're at
- Ministers have a role in ministry with youth – pastoral, conflict, God