

Communications Staff Group Consultation on Youth Ministry

March 26, 2007; 2-4 p.m.

Facilitator: Beth Dana

Participants included staff from Public Information, Publications, Periodicals (*UU World* and *InterConnections*), and Electronic Communication.

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.

Objective:

- ⊕ 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.
- ⊕ Learn what staff groups think their role and their constituents' role could be in youth ministry.

Ideals

Beth shared a starting point for articulating the ideal in each of the areas of Communications' work. Communications staff offered additions, edits, and feedback.

Overall:

- ⊕ Information and opportunities relevant to youth and adults working with youth reach them in a timely manner.
- ⊕ The UUA, congregational administrators, youth advisors, religious professionals, youth leaders, and parents work together to ensure effective communication of information and opportunities.
- ⊕ The UUA is able to offer models and support for effective communication within and between congregations and youth.

Communications staff note:

- We need to differentiate between interpersonal communication within congregations and the type of communication that the staff group is involved in.

Communications staff additions:

- There are standards and an awareness of how to communicate effectively.
- Resources developed by the UUA, Youth Office, and YRUU are in a language that is accessible and understandable to all – not just to “insiders.”

Publications:

- ⊕ There are diverse publications available (curricula, meditation manuals, etc.) that encourage youth faith development.
- ⊕ There are a variety of publications available for adults to prepare them and provide ideas for their ministry with youth.
- ⊕ UUA publications are designed to be accessible and engaging for youth.

Communications staff additions:

- There is a strong network of writers and resource people that the UUA can tap into for developing resources/publications on youth faith development.
- The Youth Office offers advice and suggestions to the Publications staff on what youth resources could be published.

Periodicals:

- ⊕ Youth find the *UU World* engaging and interesting. Material in the magazine speaks to the experiences and interests of youth.

- ⊕ *InterConnections* regularly includes content useful for congregational leaders and other adults working with youth, and is useful for congregations working to create a more intergenerational community.

Communications staff addition:

- Youth are able to communicate effectively to the larger UU community through UUA periodicals.

Bookstore:

- ⊕ The bookstore has a diverse selection of resources for youth and adults supporting youth faith development.
- ⊕ The UUA Youth Office and district staff know what is available in the bookstore and can recommend UUA bookstore resources to their constituents.
- ⊕ The UUA Youth Office and district staff assist the bookstore by letting them know the needs of constituents, and what resources are most important to stock.

Electronic Communication:

- ⊕ UUA web resources are engaging and useful to youth.
- ⊕ The UUA website is a dynamic and interactive resource for information and learning about youth ministry and the Association.
- ⊕ The UUA utilizes the power of online networking sites to connect with the UU youth community.
- ⊕ There are web forums for geographically isolated UU youth to be involved in a UU community.

Public Information:

- ⊕ The UUA has prepared “frequently asked questions” and is able to knowledgeably answer youth-specific questions.
- ⊕ The UUA has resources specifically for youth who have just found Unitarian Universalism.
- ⊕ Stories of youth activism are readily available to the larger UU community.
- ⊕ UUA tours are informative and interesting to youth. Youth come away from tours with a greater connection to Unitarian Universalism and to its history, including the important role that youth have played in our history.

Communications staff note:

- Regardless of age, people seem to ask the same questions and want the same clear answers. Youth don’t necessarily need to be served in a different way by the public information we have available.

Brainstorm: Strengths and Successes

- ⊕ The new UUA website is user-friendly, has a standard style, and has a well-designed visitor section. There is an opportunity for the Youth Office to be involved in articulating the web content on youth ministry.
- ⊕ The Youth Office staff have provided helpful ideas for acquisitions (publications). (Caveat: Pubs had to initiate the meeting.)
- ⊕ *uuworld.org* is accessible to youth and non-congregation-members

- ⊕ *UU World* uses myspace.com and Live Journal (online networks) to make content more accessible to Unitarian Universalists.
- ⊕ Erika provides informative and interactive tours of 25 Beacon for UU youth

Brainstorm: Challenges

- ⊕ Need larger and more inviting space to welcome visitors at the UUA
- ⊕ *Synapse* (YRUU magazine) – purpose and audience are vague
- ⊕ Lack of clarity around identity of Youth Office vs. YRUU, and what their relationship is to each other and the UUA
- ⊕ A “wall” between LFD/the Youth Office and Communications staff
- ⊕ Does there need to be a division of resources? Distinction between resources for youth and resources accessible to all.
- ⊕ We distinguish between resources for longtime UUs and resources for seekers – keeping the audiences separate. But many youth are seekers, even if they’re longtime UUs.
- ⊕ Youth Office/YRUU publications present a language barrier. They are full of acronyms and “insider” language, making them exclusive and inaccessible.
- ⊕ Need to better help people without youth or who don’t engage with youth to understand/appreciate youth.
- ⊕ Lack of clarity about who to go to for youth contacts, program/leader voices, proposal reviewers, youth organizations, etc.
- ⊕ Difficult to provide content for different audiences in publications – certain content engages some groups and turns others off.
- ⊕ Resistance from Youth Office/YRUU to having resources and writing by youth copy edited.
- ⊕ Youth are disconnected from resources they could/should be using to communicate with the UU community.
- ⊕ The temporariness of Youth Office staff positions contributes to a lack of connection to the larger UUA. Short-term don’t have enough knowledge of how to collaborate with Communications and how to utilize the communication channels available.
- ⊕ No easy channel to get the *UU World* to youth, because it’s currently a benefit of financially contributing to the Association (youth often don’t have this opportunity because they’re not allowed to be members of congregations).

Strategies and Opportunities

Communications Staff

- ⊕ *UU World* could solicit art, reflective writing, poetry from youth.
- ⊕ Communications staff (especially periodicals, publications) could do face-to-face outreach to YRUU leaders and to youth at GA.
- ⊕ Publications, Periodicals, and other offices of the UUA should recruit youth/young adult interns – a way for young people to learn about and become involved in the UUA.

Youth Office

- ⊕ Youth Office should distribute *Synapse* to UUA staff, or send an announcement out when it’s online.
- ⊕ Youth Office should let the rest of the UUA know when they have new staff, and describe what that new staff person is responsible for. New Youth Office staff should also have

thorough orientation to the UUA, the resources available and what other offices do so they can take advantage of what's available.

Communications Staff and Youth Office

- ⊕ Reassert that we're here for youth, congregations, UUs – we are interested in YOUR stories and feedback.
- ⊕ Youth Office could collaborate with Skinner House on resources for youth seekers.
- ⊕ Youth Office and Communications staff can: solicit stories/feedback from congregations, let them know that we're interested, solicit stories from youth
- ⊕ Youth Office can let Don Skinner know when there are new youth resources available, so he can advertise them in *InterConnections*.
- ⊕ Periodicals and media outreach staff would like to know what's happening in the youth world. Youth Office should provide leads/press releases ahead of time so that Communications can provide coverage.
- ⊕ Encourage congregations to buy *UU World* subscriptions for youth in their congregation.

Next Steps

- ⊕ Face-to-face meeting – Communications, LFD, Youth Office and CLF – addressing how we can collaborate to encourage youth communication to UU communities and integrate youth-related communication with other communication channels in the UUA.