

## **AR/AO/MC Staff, Consultants, and Trainers Consultation on Youth Ministry**

April 5, 2007; 1:30-3:30 p.m.

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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.

## Objectives:

- Bring together staff, consultants, and trainers who work with young people in the denomination doing AR/AO work.
- Bring all of those peoples' experiences, creativity, and insight into this ministry to the table to evaluate and figure out how to improve on our ministry with youth around issues of privilege, marginalization, entitlement, etc.
- Have a discussion about how the youth ministry of the Association, its congregations, and its many programs for youth can be infused with a consciousness of AR/AO/MC and attention to youth identity development.

## What We Have Learned

### What Youth Are Saying

(Sources: UU Youth Ministry Survey, YRUU Youth Council)

Statement: Anti-racism and anti-oppression work is important in my congregation.

- 72% agree
- Significantly less: transracially adopted, affiliated with DRUUMM and White Allies/ARE, biracial/multiracial, queer/questioning, transgender

Statement: I feel like my congregation is my spiritual home.

- 53% agree
- Significantly more: GLBQ
- Significantly less: Black/African descent, affiliated with DRUUMM and White Allies/ARE, transgender

Statement: My youth group meets my spiritual needs.

- 53% agree
- Significantly more: Black/African descent, biracial/multiracial, affiliated with DRUUMM
- Significantly less: transgender

Statement: I feel like I belong when I'm with other youth group participants.

- 77% agree
- Significantly less: transracially adopted, transgender

Issues named by YRUU:

- Start AR/AO education young
- AR/AO work should be intergenerational
- Need institutional support
- Want to create a radically inclusive YRUU community
- Need to have more intentional conversation around why we do this work at UUs
- Concerned about cultural misappropriation

### What Districts Are Saying

(Source: District Gatherings on Youth Ministry)

Almost all districts had discussions focused on AR/AO/MC, identity, and welcoming all youth.

Issues named:

- The need for congregation-wide AR/AO/MC awareness
- Colorblindness; latent/blatant racism in congregations
- Start AR/AO/MC education younger
- AR/AO/MC training needs to be more available
- Financial accessibility of events
- Need more mentoring
- Over-sexualization of some youth communities; lack of safety
- Comprehensive sexuality education is *important!* Everyone should take OWL.

### **What Religious Professionals Are Saying**

(Sources: LREDA Fall Conference, UUA Staff conversations)

- Youth get AR/AO training, and return to a congregation that has not done the work and is not prepared to support them and their identity work.
- Perception of youth empowerment: we don't yet have a handle on what we mean; confuse it with entitlement and/or abandonment. What does it mean for youth to be empowered? How does this play into identity development (can be both positive and negative)?

## **Ideal**

**To start...**

- Youth ministry is shaped by an anti-racism, anti-oppression, and multiculturalism lens.
- Youth ministry addresses the impact of privilege and marginalization on the identity development of youth.
- Congregations are engaged with anti-racism, anti-oppression, and multicultural work; they support and affirm youth involvement in this soul work.
- Groundwork, the Jubilee World Training Program, the JUUST Change Consultancy, and the AR/AO/MC Welcoming Congregations program are woven together into an intergenerational AR/AO/MC resource.

**Additions:**

- Shaped by “anti-racist multiculturalism and anti-oppression” (change of wording)
- Bridgers and young adults are included in intergenerational work in congregations
- The many programs/resources work together more, are in relationship
- Jubilee World Training Program, JUUST Change Consultancy, “Building the World We Dream About” should be intergenerational
- Criteria and process for becoming a trainer or consultant should be transparent and open to young people
- Resource support matches up with commitment expressed
- Accountability structures ensure resources are allocated equitably
- Recognition that anti-racism is only a part of anti-oppression
- Journey Toward Wholeness Transformation Committee should shape the work and hold us accountable

- Youth ministry dismantles racism and oppression in UU communities
- Youth ministry affirms youth in the fullness of their identities
- Youth ministry is valued as a ministry of the congregation for building community and leadership
- Anti-racist multiculturalism and anti-oppression are central to our ministry and programs.

## Driving Forces

**Question to spark discussion:** What is happening currently that is moving us toward a ministry with youth shaped by AR/AO/MC?

- Groundwork is trying and growing.
- This meeting (and these types of meetings) are moving us forward.
- Amazing adults working with youth. Interpersonal relationships.
- Programs and organizations: DRUUMM, DRUUMM YaYA, anti-racism programming at GA, identity caucusing, anti-racism programming at Youth Council, programming for multicultural families.
- Personal commitment of key people in Groundwork who have a vision. Their work goes above and beyond. The work of these people maintains a community for many others who would otherwise not have a place.
- Urgency of time – Bill Sinkford will only be the UUA President for a little while longer. We don't know whether this will be a priority of his successor.
- We are not dogmatic – we are dynamic and open.
- Intense pressure from society – we are seen as prophetic activists. Groundwork is receiving requests from many groups, including non-UU.
- Trying to do things in an AR/AO context (we have a ways to go)
- Youth and young adult leaders keep this on the agenda
- Gulf Coast dialogues – an opportunity for congregations to do social justice work, gain AR/AO analysis
- Districts taking this on, holding lots of trainings
- White people are working in their communities
- Young people are committed to making ARE intergenerational and inclusive
- Iraq War – veterans with disabilities will be parents of youth in congregations; new issues
- Existence of DRUUMM and ARE
- DRUUMM – relationship building, spiritual and pastoral work with young people, beginning to take root in congregations
- Groundwork – members taking the initiative to get mentors and support, finding anti-racist communities outside the UUA in which they can grow and develop

## Restraining Forces

**Question to spark discussion:** What is happening currently that is working against a ministry with youth shaped by AR/AO/MC?

- UU culture of individualism – need to distinguish between anti-racist/anti-oppressive PEOPLE and anti-racist/anti-oppressive COMMUNITIES – people too often say “that doesn’t concern my identity”
- Limited resources – money, people held accountable. Need leadership we can trust.
- Geographic distance makes it hard to do in-person work.
- Lack of strategy, and lack of willingness to sit down and strategize.
- We have an analysis, but we have a deficit of vision.
- People who are committed to AR/AO are not empowered to move their agenda forward. But those with power aren’t committed enough.
- White people don’t want to sacrifice privilege for the sake of justice and equity.
- White anti-racism work is often not done at all, or not done well. ARE is not accountable to People of Color, long-time activists, young activists, or people stuck in the middle. White people need to lay stuff out on the table – the current way of doing things is not about accountability and community.
- Need models for anti-racist leadership. People are often pushed out if they don’t fit in – viewed as “trouble-makers.”
- Lack of relationships between all the different groups, programs, consultancies, training collectives.
- Anti-racism groups in congregations don’t have young people in them – are separate from youth anti-racism work, with no expectations of working together.
- Level of responsiveness and connection from staff is low. Questions go un-answered. There is little capacity to support volunteers who want to help and who could help programs grow.
- Lack of/no theological grounding of youth ministry in the UU principles.
- No statement on how UU youth ministry meets the spiritual needs of youth.
- Communication gap between the UUA and congregations
- No conversation around what it means to be a community and what the role of individuals is in community.
- UUs are not sensitive to the emotional and spiritual suffering of People of Color – need more education and awareness-building
- Lack of sustainability of current AR/AO work
- Fear of success AND fear of failure
- Lack of content related to youth ministry and anti-racism/anti-oppression in ministerial training, support, requirements.
- UUA is not owning up to its analysis of racism/oppression, claiming it, and holding people accountable to it.
- AR/AO work is seen as a “choice” by some UUs; but for others it’s a matter of survival.
- This is a long haul. People want quick answers and solutions. Everyone needs to keep going.
- Ministers and DREs need to have AR/AO analysis to support youth.
- Not developing advanced leadership among People of Color in the UUA.
- There is a willingness to excuse or justify the departure of People of Color from UU communities, without letting them speak for themselves about why they left.
- No sense of history of justice work – gets lost. Justice work keeps getting restructured.

- Lack of consistency of resources (e.g. Journey Towards Wholeness Transformation Committee is less visible now than it once was).
- Lack of support for youth identity development and AR/AO work in congregations. Youth go to trainings and don't have the support they need afterwards. They often don't know how to bring their new awareness and skills home to continue the work.
- Lack of professionalism and sense of collective accountability within Groundwork. Mentors are missing.
- Youth leadership development (especially among white youth) is falling behind. There's a big gap between the younger young adults and those just getting into it.
- Lack of support from the UUA offices (Youth and Young Adult & Campus Ministry) – AR/AO/MC is not a focus of any one person or job position. Staff are pulled by too many priorities.
- Groundwork is volunteer-run, even though it's considered a "UUA program." Volunteers are under-appreciated, taken advantage of. Do this out of love.
- Not many AR/AO resources available for local congregations and youth groups.
- DRUUMM – still a lack of understanding about what DRUUMM can/cannot do with or without staff support.
- History – Selma, the walk-out – not used effectively.
- "The Work is Not the Workshop" – need to acknowledge work, like Education Reform & Multiculturalism, that *is* anti-racism work. We over-intellectualize and focus on workshops, thinking that's all we need to do.
- Need more connection to why we do this work as UUs.
- Privilege, entitlement, and white supremacy.
- UUA institutional structure is racist.

## Opportunities and Strategies

### Questions to spark discussion:

1. What impact can UUA staff, trainers, and consultants have on these restraining forces?
  2. How can we contribute to a youth ministry shaped by AR/AO/MC?
- Paid staff person at the UUA to support Groundwork
  - More young people involved in the UUA consultancy groups, change requirements for joining if necessary
  - Be more clear about what it means to be an educator vs. what it means to be an organizer or activist
  - Create institutional structures in which People of Color have a voice and are heard (they have been repeating things for years, and no one is listening)
  - Need institutional accountability to People of Color – supporting anti-racism work today is part of reparations
  - Better administration of communication to congregations about current AR/AO work
  - Use the UUMA effectively to gain the support of ministers – AR/AO IS a ministry. Pastoral work with People of Color IS a ministry.
  - Make sure that people with AR/AO experience are at the Summit on Youth Ministry – these people need to be organized into a collective

- Prioritize data presented to Summit participants to emphasize issues of oppression
- Make sure AR/AO/MC is central part of recommendations of the Summit on Youth Ministry
- Listen to the people with lived experiences – People of Color, youth, transracially adopted youth, transgender people
- Trainers/consultants can advocate for youth ministry and AR/AO work; can help transformation teams talk about youth and not just about younger children, have an intergenerational focus
- Prepare youth and adults to be a full members of communities throughout their lives
- Figure out how to support youth of color who do not have a community of color at home
- Improve training and credentialing of religious professionals around AR/AO work
- Create curricula around identity work for congregations
- Organize a meeting of all the consultant/trainer groups to meet face-to-face, build community, pool their resources, figure out what specific need each is meeting and get rid of duplication – recreate all these groups with an emphasis on collaboration between them
- Make sure we acknowledge and follow through on visions that have been generated in the past (e.g. Tampa, Portland, Long Range Planning Meeting, etc.)
- Make sure trainings are spiritually grounded
- Promote the new Beacon Press book by Beverly Daniel Tatum, bring in other data and ideas

## Closing Thoughts