

# **General Assembly Planning Committee and Youth Caucus Staff Consultation on Youth Ministry**

April 13, 2007; 2 hours

**Participants:** GA Planning Committee, GA Youth Caucus Staff

**Facilitators:** Beth Dana and Jesse Jaeger

## **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 – youth interests/needs are diverse
- Effectively serve youth in local congregations
- Mutually respectful and empowering relationships between youth and adults
- Anti-racist and anti-oppressive multiculturalism is a central part of the way we do youth ministry
- Youth ministry focuses on the spiritual development of youth
- 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**

Engage you in a discussion that:

- Evaluates the changes made to Youth Caucus since 2003.
- Imagines the role and purpose of General Assembly and Youth caucus in youth ministry at-large.

- Serves as input for the Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth.

## Ideal

### To start...

- A vehicle by which youth have an individual and a collective voice in the decision-making of the Association.
- A national connection point for UU youth.
- A place where youth can gain skills, exchange ideas, and learn models to bring back to their congregations and youth groups.
- A place for youth to be exposed to AR/AO work – broadening their understanding and ability to contribute to UUism’s journey to becoming an anti-racist and anti-oppressive multicultural institution.
- A place where youth and adults connect throughout – modeling intergenerational community for congregations and districts.
- A space for youth to learn more about themselves and their faith.

### Additions:

- Spiritual development and worship at GA
- Networking and meeting people
- Youth are an integral part of GA – everything is intergenerational, especially AR/AO work
- Show our commitment to youth and AR/AO by following through on and continuing discussions
- Address ableism, heterosexism, other oppressions in the GA setting
- YRUU youth connect with non-YRUU youth
- Business = fun!!
- There is respect between adults and youth. Youth are taken seriously.
- The youth community is more con-like and close-knit.
- Youth and adults listen and learn from one another. Listening and learning go in both directions.
- Adults don’t generalize about the behavior of youth.
- GA is more economically accessible to youth.
- GA strengthens the UU identity of youth attendees.

## History of Youth at General Assembly

Participants talked in small groups about historical points/events/happenings related to youth at General Assembly. They then added them to a timeline, with one newsprint sheet for each decade. Pairs then presented the events of each decade to the larger group.

### 1960s

- Unitarian and Universalist youth become joined organization (Liberal Religious Youth) before the UUA was created.
- 1961 – First GA
- 1968 – LRY walks out of GA with the Black Caucus. Funds were pulled from both groups.

- The song “We Would Be One” comes out of the youth movement.
- Late 60s – Youth at GA spearheaded resolutions that were both approved – legalization of marijuana and civil rights for homosexual people (the first public statement from the UUA on gay rights)

### 1970s

- LRY died.
- Youth Caucus on the rise. Formal ongoing model for Youth Caucus was created in 1975 – intended to be a rallying point for all UU youth attending GA.
- Some LRYs became steadfastly local – didn’t like what was going on at district/national/continental level.
- Youth housing provided at universities

### 1980s

- YRUU is born out of two Common Ground assemblies. Rev. Wayne Arnason was director of the Youth Office.
- Youth Office took over organization and staffing of Youth Caucus when created in 1983
- Mid-1980s – volunteer youth position of business manager created, Youth Office organized/supervised youth housing
- 1984 GA at OSU Columbus; 1986 GA at University of Rochester; 1989 GA at Yale
- Cons
- Small (40-60) but powerful Youth Caucus with very tight community.
- 1983 – First youth elected to Nominating Committee
- 1984 – First youth appointed to GA Planning Committee

### 1990s

- 1994 – Youth Caucus led energy breaks during plenary
- Denny Davidoff (moderator) supportive of youth
- 1996 – youth focus at Indianapolis GA (348 youth)
- Young Fun starts
- ID groups start
- YRUU commits to AR/AO work at GA
- JPD homeless fundraiser – youth mobilized GA attendees to raise money for homeless shelters in the area
- Charlotte GA – Jefferson Ball – brought up history of racism, offended many people
- Calgary GA – major resolution about anti-racism and anti-oppression
- 1997 – YRUU passes resolution committing to AR/AO work

### 2000s

- 2002 – delegates voted to change bylaws to allow voting youth trustee on the UUA Board
- June 2003 – GA Boston the largest gathering of UU youth ever (750 youth registered, more attending)
- November 2003 – GA revisioning task force convened after GA Boston, where there were some problems (e.g. “the Sheraton letter”)
- End of serving alcohol at GA-sponsored events

- GA Fort Worth – “the incident,” racism became a more visible issue especially as it’s experienced by UU Youth of Color
- 2005 – Youth get delegates to vote for Moral Values statement
- 2006 – Statement by youth at plenary leads to a resolution calling on congregations to do AR/AO work

#### **Changes made since the 2003 meeting:**

- No more 24 hour youth space, closing time depends on the site
- Youth space moved to a central location in the convention center
- GA Planning Committee greatly increased funding for Youth Caucus
- No official youth housing
- HUUPER attends fall GA Planning Committee meeting; HUUPER and Youth Office staff participate in grid schedule meetings
- All-GA youth worship in a more prominent space (plenary hall)
- Re-emphasis on sponsors being responsible for youth at GA
- Revision of youth registration form
- Youth Caucus programming in every slot, all listed in the Program Guide
- Two Community Specialists (combined working groups manager and special events coordinator); Workshop Coordinator position is new
- More staff positions becoming co- positions
- Youth Caucus staff and Planning Committee meet at same time and place for presite
- Greater connection between GA and Youth Caucus chaplains, share space
- Anti-racism training track

### **Driving Forces**

**Questions to spark discussion:** What aspects of the reforms made since 2003 are driving forces moving us toward our ideal? What other driving forces are there?

- No youth housing
- Youth space is more central and visible
- Adults go to Youth Caucus programming
- Increased funding for Youth Caucus
- Youth Caucus and Planning Committee interaction and communication
- Emphasis on sponsor role and improved trust
- Youth Office and GA Office partnership
- Youth Chaplain Training Program
- Youth worship is visible and intergenerational, has dedicated time in the schedule
- Increased AR/AO work

### **Restraining Forces**

**Questions to spark discussion:** What aspects of the reforms made since 2003 are restraining forces holding us back from achieving our ideal? What other restraining forces are there?

- Fear and mistrust between youth and adults – difficult to find a balance
- Generalizations and stereotypes of youth
- Turnover in leadership leads to lack of continuity
- Lack of congregational commitment to having youth as delegates
- Congregations haven't caught up to youth ministry that happens at GA
- Lack of money, especially for AR/AO programming
- Safety issues, liability (requires us to slow down to deal with issues)
- End of youth housing has made GA less affordable for youth
- Schedule conflicts, choices
- Cost of GA limits who can attend, limits diversity
- Rule infractions confirm stereotypes of youth and suck energy out of staff/volunteers

## Opportunities and Strategies

### Questions to spark discussion:

1. What are some additional strategies or reforms that could be made to address these restraining forces?
2. What can the GA Youth Caucus Staff and Planning Committee do to make GA Youth Caucus the best it can be?

We should celebrate our current successes!

### Participation and Accessibility

- More money for scholarships. Restructure the way scholarships are given – needs to be up front, rather than just reimbursing expenses.
- Planning Committee and Youth Caucus staff can encourage congregations to send more youth.
- Encourage youth who aren't active in congregations to go to GA.
- Hold GA every other year at more affordable sites

### Taking it Home

- Encourage participants to bring intergenerational model of GA home to their congregations.
- Support local congregations – orient GA programming toward ideas for congregations.
- Take the energy of GA and bring it back to districts.

### Youth in Leadership

- Have youth and young adults on the GA Planning Committee. Maintain a permanent liaison from the Planning Committee to Youth Caucus.

### Intergenerational Community

- Emphasis on relationship-building
- Find vehicles by which GA becomes more and more intergenerational, through GA Planning Committee sponsored events
- Young Adult Caucus should be more visible and strong
- Stronger programming for bridgers (junior high and young adults)

- More youth and adult partnership on projects at GA – e.g. “greening” GA

## **Closing Thoughts**