

# Ministry & Professional Leadership Staff Group Consultation on Youth Ministry

May 4, 2007; 1:30-3:30 p.m.

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**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—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.

Objectives:

- ⊕ 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.
- ⊕ To consider the question: What can MPL staff and the Association do to prepare ministers and professional leaders to contribute to the strength and vitality of youth ministry?

## Relevant Data from the Consultation Process

### Youth: Congregational Support (UU Youth Ministry Survey data)

Respondents generally experience supportive relationships with youth advisors, RE directors, ministers, and RE teachers – the adults they have the most interaction with. But there is a large gap between these leaders and Board members/other adults in the congregation.

- **80%** experience excellent/very good support from **YOUTH ADVISORS**
- **77%** experience excellent/very good support from the **RE DIRECTOR**
- **76%** experience excellent/very good support from the **MINISTER**
- **71%** experience excellent/very good support from **RE TEACHERS**
- **56%** experience excellent/very good support from **OTHER ADULTS**
- **50%** experience excellent/very good support from **BOARD MEMBERS**

### Youth Advisors: Congregational Support (Youth Advisor Survey data)

74% are **supervised** by a congregational staff person.

Youth advisors are more critical of congregational support than youth survey respondents were.

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

- DRE: 74%
- Other youth advisors: 72%
- RE teachers: 54%
- Minister: 53%
- Board members: 32%
- Other adults: 28%

#### Congregation's Support of Youth Advisor's Work (% Excellent/Very Good)

- DRE: 71%
- Other youth advisors: 70%
- Youth: 70%
- Minister: 54%
- RE teachers: 50%
- Other adults: 37%
- Board members: 36%

### Youth Spiritual Development (UU Youth Ministry Survey data)

Ministers and professional leaders have an important role in creating a spiritual home for youth and contributing to their spiritual development.

- **Congregation** is my spiritual home: 53% of respondents agree

- **Youth group** meets my spiritual needs: 53% agree
- **District** programs meet my spiritual needs: 70%
- **Continental** programs meet my spiritual needs: 63%

#### **Youth Involvement in the Ministry of the Congregation** (notes from Congregational Conversations on Youth Ministry and the LREDA Fall Conference)

- Ministerial **interaction** with youth **varies** widely
- **Ministerial support** is vital to youth ministry's success
- Youth need to have more of a role in **Sunday services** – visibility, leadership, creativity – “a real problem with separateness.” Youth as Worship Associates.
- Need more opportunities for youth to learn about **UU history, faith, and identity**. Develop ways to articulate what they DO believe.
- Youth involvement in **search committees** for ministers, DREs

#### **Staffing Youth Ministry** (notes from the LREDA Fall Conference and RE Credentialing Committee)

- Working with youth takes talented, trained, compensated adults – have relied primarily on **volunteers**, ignored **professional/paid model** (clear guidelines regarding responsibilities and fair compensation, different levels/types)
- **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, parish ministers, and youth advisors
- UUA should **collect data** from congregations about **number of youth** and whether they have a volunteer/paid **youth advisor** – will help UUA better serve youth and youth ministry professionals

#### **Staffing Youth Ministry** (Youth Advisor Survey data)

- **26%** of youth advisors are **paid**; of these, **56%** are paid for **less than 10 hours** per week
- **Paid** advisors are **less likely** to be **supervised** by a **professional staff person** than volunteer advisors.
  - Of those who are, **76%** are supervised by the **DRE**.
  - **Paid** advisors are **more likely** to be supervised by the **minister** than volunteer advisors.
- **Volunteer** advisors are **less likely** than paid advisors to have attended youth ministry **trainings** (with the exception of Basic Advisor Trainings).

#### **Education and Formation of Ministers and Professional Leaders** (notes from the MFC, RECC, and UUMA Executive Committee)

- Widely held assumptions can hold us back – requires **broad cultural change, time, collaboration** of many people and groups.
- **UU theological schools** – develop course **material**, do intentional **recruitment, validate** youth ministry
- **MFC** – youth ministry **essay** requirement, **reading** list content, **Regional Sub-Committees** ask youth ministry questions

- **RECC** – youth ministry **requirements, reading** list
- **UUMA – CENTER** program on youth ministry, share **success stories**, youth ministry **training** for ministers, encourage **transformational leadership, intergenerational** Sunday services, **ideas/tips** from the UUA

## Ideals

Beth D. shared a starting point for articulating the ideal. MPL staff offered additions, edits, and feedback.

### Ideal

- ⊕ Ministers and professional leaders are comfortable and knowledgeable doing ministry with youth. There are opportunities for education and continuing education pertaining to this important ministry.
- ⊕ Youth see ministers and professional leaders as sources of pastoral care and spiritual support.
- ⊕ Ministers and professional leaders contribute to the spiritual development of youth in their congregations.
- ⊕ The fellowshiping and credentialing processes for ministers and professional leaders include enough material and criteria to ensure that they can achieve the above ideals.

### Additions

- ⊕ Adequate pay for youth ministry professionals – a variety of salary recommendation categories.
- ⊕ Theological vision of the future undergirding youth ministry.
- ⊕ A clear understanding of empowerment and partnership.
- ⊕ Youth learn how to be leaders in their communities, how to serve the community.

## Brainstorm: Driving Forces

**Question to spark discussion:** What is happening currently in the MPL staff group and the Association that is moving us toward this ideal?

- ⊕ Consultation process is promoting conversation about and increasing the visibility of youth ministry
- ⊕ Getting rid of ministerial tracking
- ⊕ Theological education is being reshaped
- ⊕ Ministry With Youth Renaissance Module
- ⊕ Strong resources from outside UUism – e.g. Jeremiah Wright's youth program
- ⊕ Deep desire to minister to and with youth – young adult programs (bridging) have highlighted the need and desire
- ⊕ Coming of Age, Our Whole Lives, Bridging Ceremonies
- ⊕ Ongoing conversation about the relationship between Youth of Color and white youth, DRUUMM and White Allies

## Brainstorm: Restraining Forces

**Question to spark discussion:** What is holding us back from achieving this ideal? What are some of the challenges and growing edges?

- ⊕ Separation between Youth of Color and white youth
- ⊕ Inability of congregations to imagine the future – legacy, passing on, stewardship
- ⊕ Predominance of “come-inners” i.e. the idea that UUs “find themselves” in adulthood (an adult conversion process in which children don’t count) – the result is that we’re not growing children to be UUs
- ⊕ RE programs are not preparing children to be UU youth
- ⊕ Lack of parental commitment
- ⊕ Lack of pastoral care, attention to youth pain
- ⊕ Lack of compensation/guidelines for adults working with youth
- ⊕ Credentialing groups don’t have enough youth ministry experience to do assessment of youth ministry competency
- ⊕ Currently not a priority for leaders to have youth ministry experience/knowledge
- ⊕ Religious educator ambivalence about how/if they should deal with youth ministry – related to stature and compensation, depends on the culture of the congregation
- ⊕ Lack of continuing education on youth ministry – continuing ed is crucial because ministers and professional leaders need a context to learn and live ministry with youth (post-degree). Content should include how to relate to youth, how to deepen your ministry to include youth (not just as an add-on to an already full plate).
- ⊕ (Need more) sustainable and meaningful ministerial engagement with youth
- ⊕ Costs parents money to participate in youth programs in many congregations. Congregations don’t allocate (enough) funds to youth ministry.
- ⊕ Culture creation – is the minister there for the adults, the children, or both?

## Strategies and Opportunities

**Questions to spark discussion:**

1. What are some strategies and opportunities for overcoming some of these challenges?
2. What role can MPL play in supporting ministers and professional leaders to contribute to the health and vitality of youth ministry?
3. What role can the Association play in supporting ministers and professional leaders to contribute to the health and vitality of youth ministry?

**Consciousness Raising and Connections**

- ⊕ Recognition of what works in different size congregations
- ⊕ Distinguish youth ministry from children’s ministry (both within the lifespan)
- ⊕ Offer intergenerational connections between youth and adults who share interests (e.g. Sankofa Project)

**Youth Voice**

- ⊕ Youth position on the RECC and MFC
- ⊕ Youth input in ministerial search processes

**Education/Training for Religious Professionals**

- ⊕ Increase youth ministry training requirements for religious professionals

- ⊕ CENTER/UUMA Convo – offer a workshop track on youth ministry
- ⊕ Offer education (conference/gathering, CENTER, idea exchange among colleagues, online) – ease adult relationship with youth, build confidence working with youth

### **Ministerial Formation, Credentialing, Fellowshiping**

- ⊕ Changing MFC requirements would encourage theological schools to create material to meet those requirements
- ⊕ Preliminary fellowshiping process, renewal – youth ministry requirements and opportunities as part of development plan (after the degree)

### **UUA**

- ⊕ UUA Board require that all committee members have training on youth ministry (perhaps held at GA)
- ⊕ Develop an articulation of youth ministry that would be adopted and promoted by the UUA (should include competency and theology)
- ⊕ Change purposes and principles to reflect the value of children, youth, the future
- ⊕ Youth funds in the upcoming Capital Campaign
- ⊕ Compensation guidelines for youth ministry professionals – include in the 2008 survey, 2010 revision
- ⊕ Interim program – raise awareness and consciousness of youth ministry, assess the health, offer support in situations where implosion in the congregation was related in some way to youth ministry

### **Closing Thoughts**