



Clara Barton District  
Consultation on Youth Ministry  
Summary Report

January 6, 2007

First Unitarian Church of Worcester, MA  
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**The Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth  
District Information**

**Full name of district:** Clara Barton District

**Date of district youth ministry gathering:** January 6, 2007

**Type of gathering:** At a youth con

**Length of gathering:** 3½ hours

**Total number of participants:** 25

**Number of youth participants:** 9

**Number of adult participants:** 14

**Does your district have a Youth-Adult Committee/Youth Steering Committee/the equivalent?**  
Yes, a YAC

**Is there a youth on your district's Board of Trustees?** No

**Do youth serve on any other district committees?** No

**Does your district have a youth coordinator/minister?** No

**What other staff support, if any, exists for youth ministry in the district?**  
Program Consultant Deborah Levering

**Does your district regularly offer trainings (Leadership Development, Spirituality Development, Youth Advisor, Anti-Racism Analysis Development, Chaplain, Renaissance Modules)? If yes, which one(s)? How often?**

**Any other exciting aspects of programs of the district's youth ministry?**  
There is a junior youth day-long event that is well-loved by the district.

## **The Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth Identifying Needs and Changes**

### **Programming**

#### **What needs to change in this area for youth ministry to be the best that it can be?**

- YAC must focus on all youth needs not just “con youth” needs.
- Programming needs to appeal to and serve a greater percentage of youth.
- Intergenerational opportunities
  - Renaissance modules designed for youth and adults to participate together
  - Encourage youth participation in local worship services
  - Adult/youth con
- Advisors
  - “How to” notebooks for advisors
  - Adult to youth empowerment, support of the youth’s voice
- Conferences
  - Encourage attendance at Annual Middle School rally
  - Youth programming at district events (fall rally, annual meetings and GA)
  - Alternate one-night or one-day district conference offerings
- Religious education/curricula
  - Coming of Age, youth group, LIFT curriculum should be much more integrated with regular congregational life
  - More focus on UU identity in RE programming
- Take more action for charities instead of just talking about it
- Share ideas so every church doesn’t have to reinvent the wheel

#### **Need/Change #1: “How To” notebook for advisors (Idiot’s Guide to Being a Senior/Youth Advisor)**

What will this change accomplish?

Provides more resources for advisors. Invites people to become advisors. Promotes better relationships with youth.

Next Steps:

1. Have District RE Coordinator send out survey to find out what advisors think. Form a committee. (District RE Coordinator)
2. Group conference of advisors. (Advisors)
3. Put it all together and print. (District Office, RE Coordinator, committee)

#### **Need/Change #2: Take more action for charities instead of just talking about it**

What will this change accomplish?

Work with values of anti-racism and anti-oppression goals. Create awareness of social issues for youth and the community.

Next Steps:

Unsure how to proceed, but know it's possible.

### **Need/Change #3: More focus on UU identity in RE programming**

What will this change accomplish?

A greater feeling of self and belonging – both individual and in the congregational community. Better understanding and self purpose. Understanding that may prevent a decrease in the drop off age.

Next Steps:

1. Deb getting resources. (Deb Levering)
2. Conversation between RE coordinators and RE directors.
3. Directors along with district programs changing.

## **Training**

### **What needs to change in this area for youth ministry to be the best that it can be?**

- Elements of trainings
  - How to help youth integrate?
  - Ways to reinforce UU faith as a critical element to life
  - Facilitated by youth and adults, partner to lead and attend trainings
- Types of training
  - District supported individual congregational trainings on making a youth group work
  - Apprenticeship for church jobs
  - Online training
  - Locally-located youth advisor trainings
  - More specific trainings
  - Intergenerational communication trainings
- Follow up after trainings, trainees stay in touch
- More information sent out on trainings
- Trainings need to be affordable, cost for trainings and availability aren't in the range of possibility for youth sometimes
- Church members needs to appreciate the need for training ("I don't think that's important. We should spend that money on something else."). Attitude.

### **Need/Change #1: Accessibility**

What will this change accomplish?

Anti-oppressive – makes people's needs heard and addressed. Makes it more convenient for more people to come to trainings.

Next Steps:

1. Make sure information on trainings is readily available. (YAC)
2. Have scholarships and funding available on a congregational and district level. (Program Consultant and CBD Board)
3. Have training at a convenient place(s) for people to come from all over the district.

## **Need/Change #2: Different training models**

What will this change accomplish?

Reach more people (learning styles.)

Next Steps:

1. Have both youth and adult leaders.
2. Send out interest surveys. (Program Consultant, YAC)
3. Follow-ups to training. (Trainees)

## **Need/Change #3: Supportive attitudes from others**

What will this change accomplish?

Encourage people to attend. Encourage financially and emotionally.

Next Steps:

1. Speak to congregations about the importance of training. (Minister, Youth, YAC...)
2. Workshops at district events. (YAC, youth)

## **Resources**

### **What needs to change in this area for youth ministry to be the best that it can be?**

- More space for youth group rooms/meetings. Bulletin boards.
- Youth program needs visibility, visionary funding, and caring/committed adults
- Coordinated carpooling/transportation, a bus!
- People
  - Advisors for cons
  - DRE participation with youth
  - Greater volunteer commitment
  - Follow through on commitments
  - Professional music coordinator
- Communication
  - Released con dates with location
  - Updated websites
  - Make sure everyone gets current info in time to allow input
  - Mailings unreliable
  - Communication and planning for trainings, con dates, etc.
- Training
  - Chaplain trainings – youth chaplains trained to train other youth
  - Trainings for youth advisors on a regular basis
- Spirituality/Worship
  - Curriculum(s) that focus on spiritual practices
  - Traveling worship service presented to new churches by youth
- Seems to me People of Color get stifled as far as district level participation or good experiences. Since oppression often causes economic disadvantages, could cons cost less or some effort for helping with driving costs be made? (Not even just for People of Color maybe?)

### **Need/Change #1: Communications**

What will this change accomplish?

Increased, accurate, constant communication from district to local congregations.

Next Steps:

1. Develop a more updated website.
2. Maintain/update e-mail list.
3. Advance planning and timely release of information – by YAC and district.

### **Need/Change #2: Staff/DRE/volunteer/parent/legal guardian commitments**

What will this change accomplish?

All involved in youth ministry need to make a greater commitment.

Next Steps:

1. Follow through on commitments. (All Volunteers)
2. Need more volunteers
3. Parent/legal guardian support of programs

### **Need/Change #3: Need more money**

Next Steps:

1. Meeting Space
2. Transportation
3. Cost of involvement in activities

## **Infrastructure**

**What needs to change in this area for youth ministry to be the best that it can be?**

- Leadership
  - Youth on district committees
  - Encourage youth involvement in regular committee meetings
  - Youth on RE Boards
  - Youth on District Board
  - Youth on local congregational Boards
- Communication
  - More communication between all levels
  - More communication to deliver the “word” for youth – what’s going on
  - More advanced notice and timely communication about events
- Church’s continued building maintenance and safety

### **Need/Change #1: More opportunities for youth to be integrated into congregational and district leadership**

What will this change accomplish?

Youth will be more connected, supported, and empowered. Congregations and the district will benefit from youth perspective and involvement.

Next Steps:

A directive (from the district/UUA) to the importance of leadership opportunities for youth.

**Need/Change #2: More timely, efficient, and coordinated communication on all levels**

What will this change accomplish?

Greater participation. More common knowledge among all. Greater connection between congregations, district, and denomination.

Next Steps:

1. Better understanding of groups and organizations. (All)
2. Map out communication channels. (YAC and Program Consultant)

**Need/Change #3: Continuing and further attention to maintaining emotionally, physically, and spiritually safe environment for youth and adults.**

What will this change accomplish?

Appropriate and spiritually nurturing youth ministry. Greater participation.

Next Steps:

Design and implement a district-wide safety policy now!!! (YAC and Program Consultant)

## The Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth Youth Ministry

### Working Definition

Unitarian Universalist youth ministry is a collaboration between youth and adults to create authentic, anti-racist, anti-oppressive,\* multicultural, and intergenerational communities which empower and support:

- The spiritual and religious development of youth
- Mutual love, respect, and trust between and among youth and adults
- Relationship-based ministry and support among youth
- A youth-driven ministry of justice that calls all of us to live out our values in the world.

Like all ministry, ministry with youth is the responsibility of the whole congregation and the whole community.

“The great end in religious instruction...is not to make them see with our eyes, but to look inquiringly and steadily with their own.” – William Ellery Channing

\* Anti-racist and anti-oppressive communities are ones in which individuals actively work against individual and institutional racism and oppression while striving for safe, welcoming, and radically inclusive communities. The language of “anti-“ is used to emphasize the prevalence of oppression in the world. It is our calling as people of faith to actively dismantle oppression in Unitarian Universalist communities and the world at-large.

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### Participant Feedback:

- Many of the comments addressed the necessity of preparation for adulthood-
  - o We should be asking youth how/why church will be/ could be essential in their adult lives, not so much focusing on how to make youth groups more effective.
  - o Our definition does not speak to the larger vision of youth ministry; the goal should be to create strong UU adults who are grounded as UUs and have found their spiritual home as UUs.
- One person felt that since congregations are largely run and funded by adults, adults are responsible for making the effort to bring youth in.
- Youth ministry should encourage relationships and strong communities among youth.
- A good youth ministry program would include a balance of activity driven programming and discussion based opportunities.
- Youth ministry should include reaching out.
- One former LRY-er loved the definition, and “applauded the more forward collaboration and mutual respect. Perhaps now we can go forward without abandoning our youth again.”
- Youth ministry should reconcile fears between generations.
- The definition should include concrete statements about service and adult accountability.
- The definition should include something about youth developing a strong sense of self; that they should feel centered and valuable within themselves for anti-oppression work (and in general.)
- Youth ministry should be the growth of Unitarian Universalism in the world through the wisdom, enthusiasm, and energy involved in youth.

- One person stressed the prevalence of economic oppression, and one wrote: “Some adults involved with youth ministry do not empower youth and instead use their privilege to do what they feel is right without consultation with the youth.”

## **The Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth Youth Empowerment**

### **Working Definition**

A covenantal practice in which youth are recognized and affirmed as colleagues who are essential and vital to our faith community. A practice based on mutual respect and trust between youth and adults, youth and youth, as well as adults and adults. This practice encourages all to grow in a free and responsible way.

This is achieved by:

- A youth-adult partnership in all parts of decision making, including worship, resources and programming.
  - Talking directly, openly and honestly with love and respect in that relationship.
  - Mentoring relationships.
  - Youth coming together to strengthen confidence, build collective voice, and realize a more robust expression of themselves.
  - Recognizing youth ministry history as part of our collective history.
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Participant Feedback:

- More than one person said that the definition should include something about respecting life experiences and life situations, and a dedication to seeing multiple sides of an issue.
- Participants appreciated the emphasis on mutual respect and covenantal experiences. Covenanting seems to be a key part of this community.
- Multiple participants wrote that the definition should include something about intentional accountability on both sides of the youth/adult gap.
- The definition should address accountability in order to differentiate between empowerment and entitlement.
- Youth empowerment is not limited to the church; youth activism belongs in the public square as well.
- Enabling should be further defined as providing tools and resources, in addition to encouraging youth.
- One participant disliked the word “colleagues”: “I don’t really feel like colleagues is a good word. We’re just all human beings.”

NOTE: Many people, perhaps misunderstanding the activity (or perhaps looking for a way to vent emotions that had previously had no outlet), voiced general dissatisfactions with their youth ministry experiences instead of commenting on the definition. For example, “Adults don’t respect youth as individuals, they look down on us as children. Youth want to have a voice and an opinion,” and “Youth aren’t involved enough in their communities,” and “Adults distance themselves because they don’t have a connection.”

More than one adult expressed dissatisfaction with the late Coming of Age program. (9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade compared to 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade) Some adults felt that it feels like a boot kicking formerly RE aged youth out of the community. None of the youth present expressed this opinion.

## **The Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth Evaluation Summary**

18 evaluations were filled out and turned in.

### **Most Useful.**

- Almost all adults mentioned that the most useful part of the gathering was listening to youth, and more generally the conversations and exchange between youth and adults.
- Many participants found the data presentation useful.
- Participants also liked putting this knowledge into action by coming up with changes to make in the district.
- One person mentioned that it was useful to share what is going on in the district within a continental context/awareness.

### **Least Useful.**

- While some participants found the data presentation useful, others found it less useful and questioned its statistical significance.
- One person said they found the “needs and next steps” section least useful.
- A couple people mentioned that the time given to respond to the youth ministry definition was too limited.
- One person said that they were uncomfortable expressing what they felt because of who was in the room.
- Several people said that everything about the gathering was useful!

### **Process.**

- Almost all of the feedback about process and facilitation was positive.
- Participants appreciated the planning, facilitation, energy, information, and opportunities for input.
- The only comments expressing discontent were about the limited time for discussion and work at the end, and the layout of the space (chairs in rows).

**The Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth  
Process Schedule**

**Saturday, January 6, 2007; 1:00 – 4:30 p.m.**

1:00	<b>Opening</b>	Deborah
1:05	<b>Facilitators' Welcome</b> <b>Prayer for the Youth Consultation</b>	Rachel Both
1:15	<b>Participant Introductions</b>	Samaya
1:30	<b>Youth Ministry: A Common Understanding</b>	Rachel
1:40	<b>Youth Empowerment</b>	Samaya
1:50	<b>Energy Break</b>	Rachel
1:55	<b>Survey and Congregational Data: Presentation and Discussion</b> Samaya introduces, both share talking about slides	
2:05	<b>Discussion and Reflection Questions</b> Rachel introduces, Samaya concludes the activity	
2:50	<b>Break</b>	
3:05	<b>Explain Identifying Needs and Next Steps section</b>	Rachel
3:10	<b>Station Round Robin</b>	Samaya
3:30	<b>Taking It Deeper in Small Groups</b> Rachel introduces, Samaya wraps up	
4:10	<b>Wrap Up</b>	Rachel
4:15	<b>Evaluations</b>	Samaya
4:30	<b>Closing</b>	Samaya