



Metro New York District Consultation on Youth Ministry Summary Report

February 3, 2007

Community Church of New York, NY

Facilitators: Beth Dana and Rev. Phil Lund

The Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth District Information

Full name of district: Metro New York District

Date of district youth ministry gathering: February 3, 2007

Type of gathering: A stand-alone event (the day after a YAC meeting)

Length of gathering: 10 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Total number of participants: approx. 50

Number of youth participants: 20

Number of adult participants: 30

Does your district have a Youth-Adult Committee/Youth Steering Committee/the equivalent?

Yes

If yes, what is it called? Youth Adult Committee (YAC)

What positions/roles does it include?

Senior Chair, Junior Chair, 2 adult “co-chairs,” Energy Coordinator, Touch Group Coordinator, Social Action Coordinator, Con Person, Newbie Coordinator, Outreach, Chaplain Coordinator

YAC is not elected, but grows organically from the interest of youth who make the commitment.

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

Used to be. Now it’s a policy governance board – trustees represent the “whole”, not special interests.

Do youth serve on any other district committees? No

We have sought youth for Anti-Racism and Diversity Committee – no volunteers.

Does your district have a youth coordinator/minister? No

What other staff support, if any, exists for youth ministry in the district?

Youth ministry is in the responsibilities of the Program Consultant, who attends YAC meetings.

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?

Yes – lots. Most at least every other year.

The Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth State of Youth Ministry in the District Strengths and Growing Edges

Intergenerational Community

Strengths

- Youth appreciation! District does well!
- Youth independence
- Youth space is important for confidentiality, ownership
- Youth leadership throughout the congregation and district
- Good, democratic, empowering YAC is space for youth leadership
 - Run meetings, communities, corrections
 - Promotion of youth community
- Good youth/adult relations
- Good staff
- Good youth empowerment
- “Youth spots” – participation in churches
- Board governance – youth can attend
- Youth as RE teachers
- Youth groups
 - Churches recognize youth
 - Youth service at some churches
 - Youth involvement in services
 - Haunted House/Easter event participation
- Youth play music, talent recognition
- Social Action
- Aware, but not

Growing Edges

- Youth and adults need time to build meaningful relationships
- Youth not taken seriously, which means that adults often end up speaking up for youth in order for people to listen – need to be on equal footing
- Youth on boards and committees – youth need to be welcomed by the Board, not just advisors
 - Youth not seeing reason to go to committees
 - Tokenization of youth “reps” on boards/committees
 - No youth representation on district Board, need intentional spot
- Overbearing adults in junior high (COA and OWL are adult-led) sometimes make youth leave at 9th grade
- Be more aware
- Trust

- When youth groups meet at night or in different building they are separated from the congregation
 - Too much isolation, need visibility
 - Youth are not at church/congregation to set up tables, etc.
- Youth not always available/encouraged to attend services
- Youth used as source of labor
- Need to realize how much youth can teach adults/the larger community

Meeting the Spiritual Needs of Youth

Strengths

- Family/community camps
- Other youth
- Circle worship
- Youth involvement
- Music and movement in service
- Chalice lighting at youth group

Growing Edges

- Youth need opportunity to worship in a way that is meaningful to them
 - Sunday worship can feel like school: cold, isolated, anonymous
 - Opportunity to go
 - Closer spiritual relationship with adults, need to worship together
 - Variation in style
 - Youth share worship style and spiritual practice with adults
- UUs/youth are sometimes scared of spirituality and religion; react strongly when people talk about God
 - Some youth say retreats are not religion – UUism = cult, not religion
 - Many UU adults found UUism, weren't born in it – cradle UUs vs. converts - compromise
- Lack of focus on spirituality in youth group
 - Need to recognize that we are all (youth and adults) spiritual people
 - How to talk about UUism, “many beliefs, one faith” – need activity and instruction for youth groups
- Challenge of sustaining spirituality week after week vs. one weekend (small group vs. big group, new environment vs. “regular”)

Welcoming All Youth and Anti-Oppression Work

Strengths

- Live the mission of the church
- Many congregations *do* participate in AR/AO work
- Youth group, OWL, cons
- OWL check in

Growing Edges

- Passion for anti-oppression isn't filtered down to the congregational level

- Limitations of facilities for disabled individuals, should have a YAC accessibility group
- Congregations not invested in AO work: only selected individuals, not ongoing
 - Congregations THINK they're okay—more work can be done!
 - Identity—some people walking out, don't ID w/congregation
- Be accountable/in relation to marginalized groups
- Issues/challenges around identity caucusing
- Congregation needs to be vigilant
- Seek out ways to partner with other organizations
- Concept of colorblindness is challenging, because in practice it means ignoring differences and inequalities
- Discrepancy between adult community identities and youth community identities
- Adult community may not be as open/accepting
- “*Safe Space!*”
- Difficulty gauging who in congregations are actually doing AR/AO work outside specific communities/group
 - If youth don't know what's being done, not enough is being done
- Modeling is important (minister, lay leaders, etc.)
- Lack of diversity hinders AR/AO work
- Outreach
- Clique problem

Other Comments

- Comfortability
- Gender, race, sexuality
- Youth find statistic of UUism being predominantly white/hetero surprising
- Interaction is important
- Eyes open
- Open allies welcome
- Be accountable in relationships with marginalized groups
- Culture richer?
- Some congregations lack AR/AO – Why? Some areas predominately white
- Ideas:
 - Oral history project
 - Youth interviewing “older” members w/ more experience (civil right movement, etc.)
 - Do a service
 - Plan a service trip
 - Match up – bring in outside members of the congregation

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

Programming

Brainstorm – what is needed?

- Intergenerational
 - Small group ministry
 - Service projects
 - Music
 - Intentionally intergenerational local events
 - Life story sharing
- Spirituality and worship
 - More spiritual development
 - Bring spirituality back to cons
 - Youth services
 - Alternate services (worships)
- Curricula:
 - COA for senior high
 - More high school level Sunday school classes
 - Neighboring Faiths for senior high youth
- District Assembly – allow/invite youth to lead/participate in workshops
- Neighboring districts/congregations/youth groups collaborate
- Make calendar more youth-friendly
- Have more spirituality/leadership/ARAO working cons (include adults and youth)
- General Assembly
- Engage youth (outreach)
- Conversations, talking about youth ministry
- Ministers being proactive with youth ministry
- Opportunities to partner with social service groups
- Interfaith Day
- Standards and procedures with one individual with responsibility

Action Plans

Need/Change #1: More spirituality development

What will this change accomplish?

Enriching one's heart. Understanding identity. Articulating faith. UU values informing one's life.

Next Steps (Who):

1. Consolidating worship resources online. (Youth Office)
2. Spiritual Conference (not a training), including spiritual practice and ritual. (District)
3. Spiritual discussion facilitated by advisors between youth, ministers. (Congregation)

Need/Change #2: Opportunities to partner with social service groups

What will this change accomplish?

More community awareness. Provide focus, skill building, and character development.

Next Steps (Who):

1. Develop contact with UUSC. (Congregations, District)
2. See what congregations are doing/larger community. (Congregation, Youth)

Need/Change #3: Intentional intergenerational events

What will this change accomplish?

Create meaningful relationships between youth and adults.

Next Steps (Who):

1. Engaging youth for input. (Congregation)
2. Social activities for community building. (Congregation, Youth Group)



Training

Brainstorm – what is needed?

- Ministers:
 - Go to advisor training and spend time with youth
 - Go to youth chaplain training
- Advisors:
 - Go to chaplain and advanced advisor training
 - Check-up (updating training)
 - Mandatory evaluation for advisor hopefuls, and throughout their time as advisors
 - Advocate for more AR/AO training for advisors and members of congregations
 - Junior/senior advisor mentors
 - Youth Ministry Renaissance Module
 - More info on continental events
 - Need stable, consistent, trained advisors
 - Advisor support groups
- Working Cons
 - Components/workshops at cons based on Leadership Development Cons, Spirituality Development Cons, Anti-Racism/Anti-Oppression Trainings
 - Awareness trainings
 - Youth empowerment/youth group leadership training
 - Con trainings: for deans, for food coordination, for touch group leaders
 - Workshop slot (at cons?) to have local congregations discuss intergenerational work and youth empowerment
- Congregations
 - AR/AO training
 - Training on youth ministry
 - Youth bring back training info/ideas to their congregations
- Youth (General)
 - Articulating Your UU Faith
 - Youth telling advisors what they want, advisors asking youth what they want
 - Evaluating the age range
 - Self-empowerment
 - Guide youth in youth group ministry

Action Plans

Need/Change #1: Ministers go to advisor and chaplain training

What will this change accomplish?

A more intentional community. Better youth-minister relations. Better youth-congregational relations.

Next Steps (Who):

1. Minister to advisor training. (Ministers, Trainers)
2. Minister to chaplain training. (Ministers, Trainers)

3. Go to cons!!! (Ministers)

Need/Change #2: Advisors go to chaplain and advanced advisor training and have updates/evaluations.

What will this change accomplish?

A more trained/better prepared advisor group for cons.

Next Steps (Who):

1. Advisor hopefuls – to go advisor and chaplain training. (Adults, Advisors)
2. Advisors get updates/evaluations. (Advisors)
3. Advisors go to advanced advisor training. (Advisors)

Need/Change #3: Youth empowerment/youth group leadership training

What will this change accomplish?

More spiritual youth groups. Better leadership/foundation for youth group. Get youth more involved in congregation.

Next Steps (Who):

1. Regular Leadership Development and Spirituality Development Trainings. (Youth, Trainers)
2. Older youth and younger youth have discussion about leadership, form mentor relationships. (Youth)
3. More experienced members mentor newbies.
4. Mind the Age Gap

Need/Change #4: Dean, food, touch group leader training a.k.a. Con Training

What will this change accomplish?

Better facilitated cons. More time for and more intentional bonding. Con for con planners.

Next Steps (Who):

1. Set up day/night for youth groups with cons that year. (YAC)
2. Experienced con planners give tips on what made their con successful (voted by YAC). (Previous deans who were good, previous good food coordinators, etc.)
3. Go home, plan con. (Con congregations)

Resources

Brainstorm – what is needed?

Physical:

- Space – accessibility, size
- Money – fundraising/budget
- Time
- The church
- Technical – congregation and/or district blog
- Open source curriculum
- Worship Planning binder
- Youth curricula based on youth realities – covenant group curricula
- Strong website for each congregation

Human:

- Info – access to professional support and counseling
- Outside help
- The church
- Spiritual leadership
- District
- Mentors
- Liaisonships
- Legal
- Ministerial support
- Youth ministers
- Musical
- Medical
- Psychiatric
- Ministerial requirement of youth RE
- Teachers involved
- Youth-Adult Committee in each congregation/district – high visibility
- Board of Trustees
- Youth Ministry Associates at the UUA Youth Office

Abstract:

- Cohesiveness
- Accountability
- Expectations
- Respect for people's time – youth and advisors
- Flexible agenda

Programming:

- Spirituality Development Cons
- Social Action Coordinators
- Leadership Development Cons
- Adults from congregations at cons – workshop leaders
- DREs involved in youth group/con planning
- OWL workshops
- Cluster cons
- Music or art-based con

Action Plans

Need/Change #1: District Youth Minister

What will this change accomplish?

Coordinate district activities. Specialized pastoral care for youth.

Next Steps:

1. Build support among youth and congregations.
2. Approach District Board – funding.
3. Search Committee formation – youth.

Need/Change #2: Resource manual on what methods work/don't work

What will this change accomplish?

Help churches share successes and failures with each other.

Next Steps:

1. Organize a task force
2. Gathering information
3. Publishing manual

Need/Change #3: Covenant group curriculum/Neighboring Faiths curriculum for senior high

What will this change accomplish?

Create more purpose in youth group.



Infrastructure

Brainstorm – what is needed?

- Increase communication in the congregations, in youth groups
- Extend membership to youth
- A way for anyone to voice their opinion
- Youth-adult committees/forums/joint projects
- Advocate self-responsibility
- Youth involved in worship (congregational)
- District Youth Minister
- Youth Reps on the Board – Vote!!!
- ACTION!!!
- User friendly website for better communication
- Volunteers
- Congregational YAC
- Dedicated youth meeting/worship space
- Sports equipment
- Accessibility!!!
- Respecting privacy of youth meeting
- Youth inclusion in district and congregational governance with voting power
- New structure for YAC
- Newsletter contribution
- Clear lines for youth group space
- Visible youth – greeters at service, opening words

Action Plans

Need/Change #1: Extending membership and voting representation to youth (church, Board)

What will this change accomplish?

Voices of youth will be heard. Self-advocacy. Will keep youth and adults informed of each others' activities and needs in the community.

Next Steps (Who):

1. Figure out bylaws of individual churches (People who have discussed this bring it to their church board)
2. Make membership requirements a part of curriculum (Board, Advisors, DRE)
3. Creating youth reps from youth group to the Board, even to the UUA! (Youth Group, Board)

Need/Change #2: Increase communication between youth and adults in congregations

What will this change accomplish?

Empowerment. Understanding. Informed decision making. Appreciation. R-E-S-P-E-C-T!
Action. Initiative.

Next Steps (Who):

1. Column in newsletter on youth (Youth Group)
2. Forming Youth/Adult Committees (People in congregation who want to volunteer)
3. More frequent youth-led services, to update and enrich (Youth Group, Minister, Worship Committee)

Note: Worship committee etc. need to meet in the afternoon to be open to youth!

Need/Change #3: Visible and meaningful volunteer roles for youth

What will this change accomplish?

Forming of relationships between youth and the rest of the congregation. Respect for youth.
Increased community! Deeper connection to the community.

Next Steps:

1. Youth volunteer for services, opening words, coffee hour.
2. Youth and congregation invite each other to do things – conferences, worships, services.
3. Communication, advocacy, self-responsibility.

Who: Youth and adults who are already invested spread the word!! It's a two-way street!



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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- I really like this definition. It clearly articulates my view of the ideal youth ministry. I most like the emphasis on anti-racism and anti-oppression, and the part about relationship-centered ministry.
 - “Anti-“ is such a negative emphasis – why not “non-racist” and “unoppressive”? Further, I like that “spiritual and religious” is listed first.
 - “Racism” ALSO HAS A NEGATIVE emphasis. It is important that we recognize that we are working against racism and oppression rather than using “non-racist” which makes it seem as though racism does not exist.

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 Definitions:

- Youth empowerment should be giving the youth a say over what affects them and they should be seen as individuals who can make authoritative opinions and actions.
- Youth empowerment: the treatment of youth and adults as equals within a community who work together to enrich their own lives as well as doing important anti-oppression work. This goes back to the 7 principles. We believe in the inherent worth and dignity of all people. We believe in the right of individuals to have a vote in matters which concern them.
- Showing the youth are useful and talented by more youth volunteering. Youth appreciation.
- I don't think there currently is a youth-adult partnership. "Youth empowerment" today seems like youth-only decision making with adult supervision. Adults only step in to prevent disasters. I like the proposed definition.
- Youth empowerment is achieved by acceptance and awareness of what youth are capable of!
- Youth empowerment is a process, an evolution, a dialogue between youth and adults. It is a balance of shared privileges and shared responsibilities between youth and adults.
- Yes! I think it's a great statement. Maybe something about ministry or service of youth and adults, especially to each other. Calling each other to our "most robust expression of ourselves."
- Youth empowerment should help youth gain spirituality along with leadership skills. It should help youth find a voice in their communities.
- Youth empowerment should be a major part of UU youth communities throughout all districts. Advisors need to trust youth to act appropriately and govern themselves. Churches and congregational boards should not only acknowledge but embrace the youth in their congregations.
- Youth empowerment is all that is up and more because it is infinite and awesome.

- Youth empowerment is the involvement of youth and the level of respect and control and equal power as all others OR at least that's what I think.
- A practice based on mutual respect. "Respect is key."
- I like this definition a lot. I would also like to see an added emphasis on accountability on all sides to prevent entitlement and/or abandonment.
- Youth empowerment is youth feeling that they have a voice and a say in their communities. They feel able to talk to adults in their communities about themselves and their beliefs. They are able to take action and will be listened to and taken seriously.
- Having a voice that is listened to without bias by all.
- Youth empowerment means that youth should have the power to vote.
- Youth empowerment is possible when youth and adults can work together in a safe environment, with love and respect for each other, their congregation and the wider UUA.
- I like the working definition. More specifically – as an advisor, I want to make space for youth leadership in youth group.
- Youth empowerment would be when youth and adults can work together with respect for each other. Also the ability to speak out about matters that concern them and other things and take more action in their communities and congregations.
- One part of me says – yes!! This is what we should ram down the throats (with love) of our congregation. Another part of me says – no. Keep the youth in their place, which is probably the default position of many UUs.
- Under "achieved": Expression of themselves AND THEIR FAITH. Under "empowerment": Free and responsible is said too often to retain impact. How about "to develop free thought and being and to take responsibility for one's actions."
- Youth in charge. Youth having the opportunity to be in charge. Youth taking the initiative to seek opportunities to be in charge.
- I think this definition is great. It is full and complete. I like the specification that it involves mutual respect between "youth and youth," as well as "adults and adults."
- I think youth empowerment breaks down when youth get discouraged by adults' rejections of their ideas. I know I don't like to share if I know I'm going to be shot down.
- I would like that youth empowerment definition to be included in the report of this conversation...I like it.
- Perfect!
- Emphasis on mutual respect between youth and adults, recognition as colleagues. I don't see anything about accountability.

The Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth Evaluation Summary

22 evaluations were filled out and turned in.

Most Useful. Almost all participants said that small group discussions and talking about ideas with other people (especially youth) was the most useful part of the gathering. Participants also liked the needs and next steps section.

Least Useful. More than half of participants said “nothing” or “it was all great!” Others mentioned that they didn’t find the Power Point presentation helpful, or that parts of it were redundant. A couple participants said that certain sections of the gathering went on for too long. One participant remarked that this topic is so big and important that it needs more focused work.

Process. Almost all participants said that the process was great, awesome, wonderful, and even “divine!” Participants appreciated the facilitation and believe that the gathering was well-organized.

Two suggestions:

- print and hand out reflection questions for small groups
- add issues of accessibility to the anti-oppression section

Other comments:

“Prince is playing halftime at the Superbowl this Sunday!”

“Penguins are cool.”

“I feel inspired to speak up.”

“You will be seeing a lot of me!”



The Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth Process Schedule

Saturday, February 3, 2007; 10:00 a.m.-4:30 p.m.

10:00	Opening	Rachel Davis and Kasey Neiss (District Youth)
10:05	Facilitators' Welcome, Explain the Consultation	Beth
10:15	Where Do We Come From? Game and Song	Beth game, Phil song
10:30	Youth Ministry: A Common Understanding	Beth
	Explain background, participants read definition aloud, ask them to write feedback on blank newsprint posted on the wall throughout the day	
10:40	BREAK	
10:45	What Are We? – Presentation and Discussion	
	--Intergenerational Community	Phil
	--Meeting the Spiritual Needs of Youth	Phil
	--Welcoming All Youth and Anti-Oppression Work	Beth
	--Present each section, follow each section with small group discussion of strengths and growing edges	
	--Each group reports top ideas.	
11:50	Learning Across the Generations – activity in pairs	
	DIDN'T DO THIS BECAUSE DISCUSSION RAN OVER TIME	
12:30	LUNCH	
1:15	Prayer for Youth Consultation	Beth, Phil, Everyone
	Where Are We Going?	Beth and Phil
1:20	Explanation and group formation	
	--Break into four groups using animal sounds activity (horse, pig, sheep, chicken)	
1:30	Stations – to generate ideas (approx. 10 minutes per station)	
2:10	BREAK	
2:20	Small Groups – Digging Deeper	
	--Everyone go to the group they're interested in.	
	--Programming, Training, Resources, Infrastructure	
	--Process: 1) group, 2) prioritize, 3) expand and define, 4) next steps	
	--We started out timing each of these four stages of the process, but each group was doing it their own way and in their own time, so we decided to just give them an end-time and let them go at their own pace.	
3:35	Small Group Report Back – top three strategies/changes	
3:45	Wrapping Up and Follow Through Team	Genna Ayres (District Youth)
3:55	Youth Empowerment	Beth
	--Present definition; participants write their feedback on index cards.	
	--Four people share what they wrote.	
4:05	Closing Ritual – Everyone express an appreciation or meaning they are taking home	
4:20	Evaluations	