



Unitarian Universalist Youth Ministry Survey Summary Report

A Report from the
Unitarian Universalist Association
Task Force on Ministry To and With Youth

June 2006

The Basics

Survey designed and analyzed by Market Voice Consulting

Number of surveys analyzed: 1,399

Average age of respondents: 15.2 years old

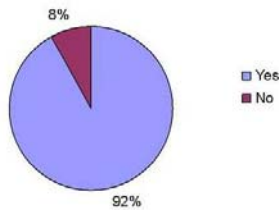
A SNAPSHOT OF YOUTH MINISTRY INVOLVEMENT

Respondents who participate in local **religious education and/or worship** **87%**
 Respondents who said their congregation has a **youth group** **92%**
 Respondents who are or have been **leaders in their youth group** **28%**

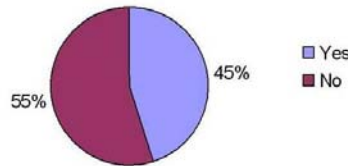
Respondents who are involved in **district/regional youth programs** **45%**
 Of those involved at the district/regional level, **28% are or have been in leadership positions.**

Respondents who are involved in **continental youth programs** **9%**
 Of those involved at the continental level, **23% are or have been in leadership positions.**

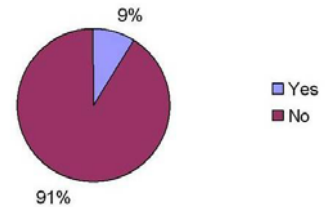
Congregational Youth Group



District/Regional Programs



Continental Programs



YOUTH MINISTRY SURVEY FINDINGS – FIVE KEY AREAS

Creating a Spiritual Home

The vast majority of youth report that, on all levels of youth ministry (local, district/regional, and continental), they feel welcome and respected. Most respondents also believe that youth ministry programs provide them with opportunities to learn new things, to get involved in their communities, and to develop leadership skills.

Despite the generally positive experiences, one area is lacking – spiritual development.

- ❖ Only 53% of respondents consider their congregation their spiritual home.
- ❖ Similarly, 53% of respondents say that their youth group meets their spiritual needs.
- ❖ Of respondents who are active at the district/regional level, 70% say that district/regional youth ministry meets their spiritual needs.
- ❖ At the continental level, proportionately more respondents (63%) say that it meets their spiritual needs.

Spiritual Beliefs and Congregational Influence

"I have no solid beliefs; I just believe that there is something greater than us humans out there. My congregation has shown me many beliefs, and given me ideas and started to lead me down the right path. The only reason I do not have a more concrete belief is that I have not fully figured out what I think." – Junior High Youth

"My personal congregation was very influential growing up. However, the past two years rendered the youth program hostile and ineffectual...The local church I attended supports in no way YRUU or any other UU youth programming and has become detrimental to many youths' attitudes toward youth programming as well as their spiritual and emotional growth..." – Senior High Youth

"I feel spiritually akin to all that lives, and find growth through many different vessels and spaces. The UU community has created a strong and safe community space for me to explore my own spirituality. The local YRUU program was extremely important to my spiritual development, as was the continental YRUU community." – Older Youth

"I consider myself a non-denominational Christian. I have felt that the adults in my congregation for the most part do not focus on or discuss spirituality in any relation to Christianity. I found my beliefs by my own search." – Older Youth

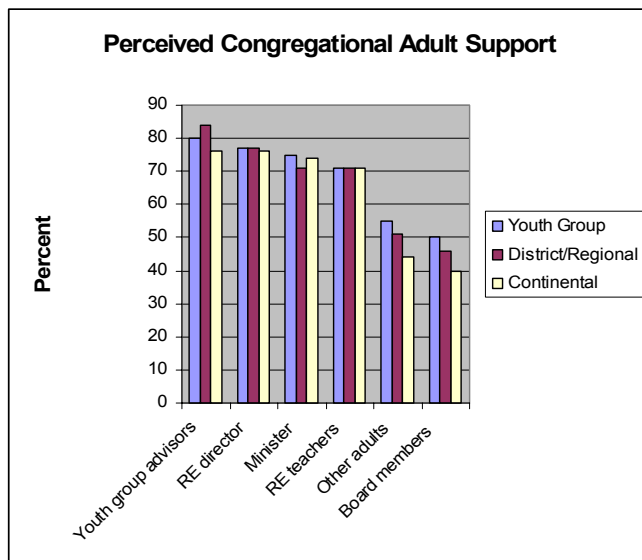
Question for reflection and dialogue:
 How can our ministry with youth help them to determine their spiritual needs, articulate their faith, and feel spiritually fulfilled?

Intergenerational Community and Youth-Adult Relations

Youth group advisors, religious education directors, ministers, and religious education teachers are rated highest on their support of youth ministry. However, only about half of respondents believe that other adults or their congregation's board members support youth ministry.

The lack of local adult support felt by respondents involved in local, district/regional and continental youth programs suggests that this involvement may cause youth to feel alienated from adults in their congregation.

- ❖ Respondents who participate in religious education programs feel more congregation-wide support than respondents who participate in youth group.
- ❖ Respondents involved at the district/regional and continental levels are 5-14% more likely to say that some adults in the congregation don't value their feelings and opinions.



Question for reflection and dialogue:

What aspects of youth groups, district/regional and continental youth programs are causing youth to feel alienated or isolated from adults in their congregation?

Priorities and Involvement

Involvement Beyond the Congregation

- ❖ Respondents involved with their congregation's youth programs are the most likely of all youth to participate at the district/regional level. Likewise, respondents who are local leaders are also more likely to participate at the district/regional and continental levels.
- ❖ District/regional youth program participants are more likely to be involved at the continental level.

Communication

About district/regional opportunities: The five communication channels used most frequently now are the same ones respondents say are most effective for finding out about district/regional activities – youth group advisor (if a local youth group exists), friends, email announcements, district/regional mailings, and the religious education director.

About continental opportunities: E-mail is the primary information source about continental youth programs, and is the channel that respondents prefer. Respondents would like to see more use of e-mail announcements and the YRUU website.

Disengaged Youth

Some youth choose to stop attending youth group or religious education, even if it's available in their congregation. Of these respondents:

- ❖ 50% got too busy to attend.
- ❖ 25% stopped attending because they didn't like the other youth in the program.
- ❖ 24% started attending worship services instead.

These results suggest that youth group/religious education did not meet the needs or engage the interest of these youth, and therefore they did not make it a priority in their lives.

Question for reflection and dialogue:

What motivates youth to become and remain actively involved in different types of youth ministry?

Junior High Youth

The average age of survey respondents was fairly low in the 12-20 range – 15.2 years old. Junior high youth (ages 12-14) made up about 37% of survey respondents. On the local level, junior high youth are much less involved in congregational activities than high school or older youth. The most common activities are: social action (28% of respondents) and leading or helping with worship services (26% of respondents).

Should junior high youth programming be separate from high school youth programming?		
According to:	Yes, separate district/regional	Yes, separate continental
Junior High	35%	36%
High School	61%	68%
Older	65%	43%

Access to Information, Resources, and Opportunities

- ❖ While most respondents (90%) high school age or older receive information about district, regional and continental opportunities, junior high youth are 11% less likely to receive this information.
- ❖ Junior high respondents depend more on locally-distributed information than older respondents to find out about opportunities.
- ❖ Junior high youth are less likely to be aware of and to use YRUU/UUA resources.

Question for reflection and dialogue:
How can we ensure that there are relevant opportunities and resources for junior high youth, and that this information reaches them, enabling them to be actively involved both within their congregation and in the larger UU community?

Welcoming All Youth

The response to the survey suggests that youth program participants are predominantly white, and the majority identify as girls or women. Girls/women are more likely to hold leadership positions. How does this affect whether our youth programs are welcoming to youth of diverse identities and backgrounds?

- ❖ **GLBTQQ Youth:** Respondents who reported their sexual orientation as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning are relatively more active in

youth groups and more likely to hold leadership positions. They also have higher levels of involvement throughout.

- ❖ **Youth of Color:** Respondents of color are most likely to participate at the continental level.
- ❖ **Transracially adopted youth:** Adopted youth who are of a different race than their adoptive parents made up 63% of all adopted respondents. They rated the youth group experience lower than other respondents – indicating less of a feeling of belonging, more of a sense of pressure to conform to beliefs and attitudes, and fewer opportunities to address social issues such as racism and oppression.

Question for reflection and dialogue:
How can congregations support the healthy racial identity development of youth?

Conclusions

Based on an analysis of the youth ministry survey results, the following changes are needed to create a stronger and more vibrant youth ministry in our Association.

- ❖ Better meet youth's spiritual development needs.
- ❖ Provide more opportunities for all youth to develop and practice leadership skills.
- ❖ Provide a variety of programming designed to meet the different interests and needs of junior high, senior high, and post high youth.
- ❖ Integrate youth programs more fully with other congregational activities, so that youth do not feel isolated or alienated.
- ❖ Do more to help youth explore how to deal successfully with life situations.
- ❖ Develop better locally-based resources and support for youth's spiritual, racial, and social identity development.

Youth ministry should be especially strong at the congregational level in order to provide youth with a spiritual home. Opportunities for youth to connect with youth in other congregations are an important aspect of youth ministry, but should not *replace* local connections.

Developing a successful and sustainable youth ministry is about commitment and involvement by adults as well as by youth.