



Southwest Unitarian Universalist Conference
Consultation on Youth Ministry
Summary Report

February 3, 2007

Dallas, TX

Facilitators: Jodi Slezak and Jesse Jaeger

The Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth District Information

Full name of district: Southwest Unitarian Universalist Conference

Date of district youth ministry gathering: February 3, 2007

Type of gathering: A stand-alone event

Length of gathering: 6 hours

Total number of participants: 60

Number of youth participants: 19

Number of adult participants: 41

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

Yes

If yes, what is it called? SWUUC YAC

What positions/roles does it include?

Youth Council Rep, Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, 2 adults at-large, Program Consultant, SWUUC Board Rep, RE Committee Rep, Calendar Rally Approval Person (CRAP)

Is there a youth on your district's Board of Trustees? Yes

Do youth serve on any other district committees? Yes

RE Committee, Committee on Youth Advisors

Does your district have a youth coordinator/minister? No

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

Program Consultant Jennifer Nichols-Payne

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. LDC, SDC, Youth Advisor Training, Renaissance modules – every year. Chaplain and Anti-Racism every few years.

Facilitators' Report Summary

The District Gathering for the Southwest District was largely very successful. As the facilitator of the gathering Jodi and Jesse conducted interviews with key leaders, looked at congregational conversation data and youth survey data to prepare. From this research and from observing the outcomes of the district gathering itself we have a few recommendations for the district. These should be considered starting points for the district youth programs:

- **Safety and Appropriate Boundaries:** We would encourage the Southwest District to do some examining of their safety and ethics policies and programming. There seems to be a lot of energy in the district about boundary and safety issues, coming especially from young women. There are youth that would come to district events but do not because of either actual or perceived boundary or safety issues. We recommend that the district bring a diverse group of youth and adults together to address these issues in the district. This group should include YRUU Leaders, Youth who have been alienated from programming, parents, ministers, youth advisors and religious educators. We would recommend that any process to look at these issues focus not just on rules and policy but also on educational opportunities for both youth and adults on how to set appropriate boundaries. With the energy that their seems to be in this district from both youth and adults around this issue some really productive work could get done that could be come a model across the Association.
- **Youth Voice in a Policy Governance Model:** There seems to be a lot of concern that youth voices have been sidelined with the district taking on a Carver governance model. Policy Governance can really help district clarify how to make their decision making process clearer. However, youth can easily get lost in this governance model. We would encourage the district leadership to do some thinking about how you might be included in the new model of governance. We believe that this is important because our youth learn their leadership skill by being in leadership relationships with adults. The Carver model, if implemented in a pure form, could easily but up barriers between youth and adult leaders. We believe it would be good for the district to think creatively about how youth can be included into the decision making process.
- **Youth Involvement in the District Leadership School:** We think that the proposal below about including youth and youth ministry content in the Leadership School is a really good idea. It has the benefit of building on existing structures, it will build intergenerational community and it seems to have the potential to reach a wide and diverse group of congregational leaders. It looks like a project that might not take that much effort but could have a wide impact.

When we first talked with leaders in the district about this process we recommended that you form a Taskforce on Youth Ministry to study the outcomes of this district gather and the outcomes of the overall Consultation on Youth Ministry with the goal of making the changes that make sense for the Southwest District. We still recommend a Taskforce be formed and that these three ideas that we highlighted from the district gathering would be a good starting point.

Below is a detailed report from the district gathering.

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

What do the survey and congregational input imply about the current state of Unitarian Universalist youth ministry in the district?

<u>Strengths</u>	<u>Challenges/Growing Edges</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Increase financial resources in the District• Solid, core group• Amount of community youth have developed• Better job serving youth than adults• District – positive spirituality for youth• New literary magazine• Rallies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Youth voice seems less important in decision making processes• Understand what democracy means in our faith• What is appropriate use of youth empowerment• Issues around governance



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

Programming

Programming Need/Change #1: Programming (Training and Resources) that focus on UU identity and history.

What will this change accomplish?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn how to share you and your church’s beliefs/values. • Understanding that we are a “living tradition” by understanding philosophical history. • How to adapt the seven principles into/as your beliefs and values. • How to search inside UUism 	
NEXT STEPS	WHO
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Printed discussion starters with recommended reading 2. In depth understanding and adapting the seven principles into a framework to develop your own living tradition (beliefs) 3. District and Local Advisor trainings so that advisors are prepared and having training on building community in order to have deeper sharing whenever we are together as a community. 4. Have resources to learn philosophical history that has been part of our faith. (i.e. Enlightenment, humanism, transcendentalism) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advisors • Youth • UUA • Continental YRUU • Ministers • Any church official

Programming Need/Change #2: Better boundaries and safety for people of all ages and genders.

What will this change accomplish?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New people, visitors and youth who are not into over sexualized behavior will feel more welcome. • More constructive projects, activities could be accomplished (redirect energies) • Contribute to less risk and liability. Easier to uphold Big 4. • Promote greater inclusiveness. 	
NEXT STEPS	WHO
1. Enforce rules and clear boundaries.	Youth and Adults
2. Empowerment guide to teach how to set their own boundaries	
3. Youth supporting youth: holding youth leaders to a higher standard.	Youth

4. Empowering youth, through coaching and guidance, to be more effective leaders and enforcers.	Adults and Community
5. Stronger adult supervision	Adults

Programming Need/Change #3: Intergenerational Chalice / Covenant Groups

What will this change accomplish?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generational vertical integration. • Life-long friendships • Mentoring 	
NEXT STEPS	WHO
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Form groups based on shared interest 2. Focus certain chalice circles / covenant groups on intergenerational programs (not necessarily family based) Possible themes: gaming, cooking, drama 3. Special training: youth step up, adults step down 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • YAC • YRUU • Programming • RE Community



Training

Training Need/Change #1: More youth content and more youth (1/3) at Leadership School.

What will this change accomplish? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building relationships and trust between adult and youth leaders in SWUUC and its congregations • Raise awareness and significance of youth ministry issues in SWUUC and congregations. • Promote multi-directional intergenerational learning 	
NEXT STEPS	WHO
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage Leadership School Board and Committee 2. Assess safety issues (alcohol/smoking), Big 4 3. Restructure curriculum 4. Recruit faculty with Youth Ministry experience 5. Counsel Congregations on Appropriate Recruiting 6. Write Grant to UU Funding Panel 7. Familiarize youth with the nature of leadership school and expectations 8. Research for other groups doing similar tasks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth • Leadership School Board • Interns at UUA Youth Office • UUA Trainers • Congregational leaders • SWUUC Staff and Leadership • Grant Writer

Training Need/Change #2: More frequent chaplain trainings

What will this change accomplish? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having a chaplain at every youth event • Safety / preventative work • List of youth and adults in congregations who are trained 	
NEXT STEPS	WHO
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If possible utilize our own trainers 2. Present issue to YAC 3. Present issue to district RE Committee and Committee on Youth Advisors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jennifer Nichols Payne • District RE Committee • Committee on Youth Advisors • District YAC

Training Need/Change #3: Training (and Programming) on Social Justice and Mission Trips (international, local and national)

What will this change accomplish? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help others • Broaden youth and adults' outlook on the world • Get the UU name out to the greater society
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- Intergenerational bonding
- Set example for young children and those new to UUism that this is what we do

NEXT STEPS	WHO
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Money 2. Get “buy-in” from church, district leadership and youth and adults 3. Network with other districts who are doing this work to help train 4. Find need and set plan 5. Speaking to small children about mission, get them involved in helping and keeping photo journals of the trip 6. Annual or biannual trips 7. Working through other organizations 8. Set up scholarship and fundraising events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Church and district leaders • Youth and adults • Eligible sponsors • UUSC • Other districts or churches • The communities we go to



Resources

Resource Need/Change #1: A year-round UU retreat center in SWUUC for youth groups and other UU groups.

What will this change accomplish?	
A place to go with your own church's youth group to bond and have fun and do cool stuff like rafting, water sports, ropes course, paintball. A place to go to plan youth services. A place to call our own. A place for traditions.	
NEXT STEPS	WHO
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Find a place near a lake or river 2. Find people who you can hire to provide programs you want 3. Find a place that has cabins 4. Find a place that has staff like medical personnel, maintenance... 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth Groups • Church Groups

Resource Need/Change #2: More funding for paid professional staffing for more in-depth trainings with a mutual understanding of and ability to integrate needs of adolescents.

What will this change accomplish?	
Higher quality programming, professional help, training on adolescent development, increased number of trainings and subjects with help to defray costs. (more scholarships)	
NEXT STEPS	WHO
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Multi level funds – denomination and districts' churches as well 2. Develop a widely-available grant/scholarship program for use in training on adolescents 3. Review and adjust curricula (available to all churches each year) 4. Could take program to other districts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers • Volunteers • Youth advisors • DRE • Training of Trainers

Resource Need/Change #3: Resources for youth programming curriculum produced at the higher level to help people at local levels.

What will this change accomplish?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information • Compile best practices • More effective RE AND Youth Ministry 	
NEXT STEPS	WHO
Is this on the Tapestry of Faith Horizon?	

Infrastructure

Infrastructure Need/Change #1: Create a process that utilizes both consensus and democratic processes to allow for better decision making.

What will this change accomplish? Everyone gets a voice.	
NEXT STEPS	WHO
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Be clear about meaning of consensus and democratic process and which decisions. 2. Be clear about who's involved, in which decision, and at all levels. 3. Devise processes for accountability of leaders. 	SWUUC board creates a trial definition and surveys congregations about its acceptability. YRUU is considered a congregation.

Infrastructure Need/Change #2: Having and respecting youth as part of the process for programs and change.

What will this change accomplish?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better communication • More involvement • Increase intergenerational trust • Effective and efficient decision making • More youth created programs that will satisfy, rather than pacify the youth. 	
NEXT STEPS	WHO
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Youth Board positions at local churches 2. Informing youth and creating transparent process while decisions are being made 3. Allowing youth to be part of the process when possible 4. Providing leadership opportunities for youth in UU programming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Church Boards • Youth in step with current administration in the district and UUA • Youth position with RE Council, Program Council, YACs, etc.

Infrastructure Need/Change #3: A process to identify and foster dynamic youth and adult leaders to lead a strong youth group.

What will this change accomplish? Bring out strong leaders, which leads to strong youth groups, and in turn, stronger congregations.	
NEXT STEPS	WHO
1. Mentoring	Current leaders

2. Identify leadership characteristics	Mindful youth and adults
3. Identify willingness and desire to lead	Mindful youth and adults
4. Create awareness of the need	Youth and adult leaders
5. Provide leadership and growth opportunities	Congregation, district, cluster, etc.



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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- Where are families and family systems in this conversation?
 - Family ministry emphasis supported from the top down.
 - More punctuation in the first sentence. It is a bit of a run on sentence.

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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What did participants like?

- "...between youth/youth, youth/adults; adults/adults"
- "To grow in a free and responsible way."
- What I like about the definition is that it includes respect for the adults --- mutuality is often overlooked when "youth empowerment" is abused.
- I really like how that final definition worked out. It seemed to respect adults, but it gives the youth a voice, which is one of the primary reasons I came today.
- A covenantal practice in which youth are recognized and affirmed as colleagues.
- Mutual respect and trust between youth and adults, youth and youth
- Very good definition – it hits all the high points but where are you going?

What did participants not like?

- "Empower" is too vague and/or incomplete
- The given definition sounded fine from a process standpoint. Not sure that I heard clear articulation of outcomes we hope to see from healthy, vital youth empowerment.
- Youth are not "colleagues." No mention of developmental appropriateness. Adults create a safe container for youth empowerment to occur.

What did participants say is missing?

- "Respect, trust, and SUPPORT between..."
- Giving a chance for youth to not only initiate change, but follow through with support whether it is for community, church, personal, or faith.
- Youth empowerment is shared ministry of youth and adults, with adults providing guidance. It's a chance requiring some grace on both sides.

- Youth empowerment is allowing you to voice their opinion on issues that affect them.
- I think there needs to be more emphasis on how youth are empowered. It should include some type of statement to the effect that youth are empowered through guidance, training and supervision by adult advisors and other adult members of the congregation. I feel that many youth and youth advisors understand youth empowerment as simply letting youth do whatever they want. Youth advisors need to be leaders, teachers and supervisors.
- Responsibility and accountability are part of empowerment
- I'm not comfortable with the generality. Maybe a covenant required in addition. Maybe different covenants at different levels of organization – continental, district, congregation.
- Incorporate decision making and authority
- Part of youth empowerment is not just helping them express and manage their own power, but also recognizing – or at least accepting – that adults have much to teach and offer, there seems to be a fantasy, expressed today, that we can leave youth in charge of their own religious education.
- The given definition sounded fine from a process standpoint. Not sure that I heard clear articulation of outcomes we hope to see from healthy, vital youth empowerment. How about: 1) Active, responsible citizens of the world, 2) Self-differentiated
- I like the definition but it leaves out the role and relationship with younger members within the church. It covered youth-youth, youth-adult, adult to adult ...but what about modeling and mentoring for children in the community?

Other comments:

- I think it's important for youth to have opportunities to grow and lead and contribute. I disagree with some UU adults who think freedom from constraints, parameters or realities is "empowerment." Ultimately, the adults are responsible.
- Youth empowerment is a fiction perpetuated by adults to youth for the purpose of developing youth and building a responsible transition to adult empowerment
 - This implied covenant between adults and youth expects youth to be responsible with the power they are given. Youth also have an expectation that they will be treated like adults when coordinating the level of power and its dispensation.
 - When adults forget this second part of the covenant. They breed distrust and betrayal feeling that take much effort to repair.
 - Both youth and adults have a responsibility for the creation of this fiction so that it can be used for its stated purpose and not as a tool to create disillusion and despair.
- Youth rock
- Democracy (more common for adults) consensus (more common for youth) communication
- What is most important about youth empowerment is for it to be carried out in real-life decision making in the Southwest District and the UUA. No plan for youth empowerment can be useful if decision-makers feel they can ignore it.
- Youth given tools to learn leadership skills, opportunities to exercise those skills
- Youth opinions matter
- Youth considered and consulted in decision making and are part of decision if appropriate
- I think that youth empowerment is giving us freedom but not too much where things start getting out of order at the same time listen to what we have to say.

- The most important part of youth empowerment is preparation. By giving the youth more voice in what happens to them, they're being prepared to take leadership positions in the church, and in the adult life in general. Boom, ya know?
- Youth working with adults making decisions to change their lives
- Giving the youth a chance to do the things they want. Giving them a voice.
- With guidance and training the youth will be able to facilitate and participate in a healthy and worthwhile organization
- Youth empowerment is important as a place for youth to grow, but it is also essential to draw the line between empowerment and self-governance. We, the youth, are very young and often fail to see and understand the larger picture. Adults must continue to make or guide us in making large decisions that will span years longer than our short time in YRUU. Youth must be empowered in order to grow, but also they must understand and accept that they do not get to make all decisions that affect them.
- Trust is key in youth empowerment. Much more emphasis should be placed upon it.
- Youth empowerment has been said to be an excuse for adult abandonment. We need not to be guilty of this which means investing funds, time and other resources into the development of youth programs and support for those programs. We keep wanting to turn the clock back on YRUU to "start all over again." But there's no need for that. Let's build on our successes. There are plenty of them. I fear this "consultation" began with a fight between Youth Council and the UUA.
- Guidance without patronizations. Helping youth to understand the wider world.
- This covenantal sharing of power and leadership among youth and adults is one way that our UU community can work on our ageism as an anti-oppression issue. AO work like this is essential for building authentic communities.
- The Coming of Age program meets these issues by pairing youth with mentors. The presentation of individual credos is an introduction of the youth to the congregation and a welcoming to the youth from the congregation.
- Giving youth the opportunity and voice in the community at many levels.
- Youth empowerment should be a product of – not a goal of our efforts. Our goal should be developing the spiritual lives of youth. As that happens youth will be naturally empowered.
- Allowing youth to manage their own fate without the disruptive and undo influence of over-zealous bureaucrats.
- Means youth are encouraged to go to their limits or people guiding youth to be themselves.

The Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth Evaluation Summary

37 evaluations were filled out and turned in.

Most Useful.

- Small group discussions.
- Sharing of energy and ideas.
- Problem-solving.
- Learning that we still have a problem with racism.
- The facilitators.
- All of it.
- Good youth, minister, religious educator interaction.

Least Useful.

- Large group discussion.
- Would have liked more youth participation – should have scheduled during YRUU rally.
- Would have liked more handouts with facts.
- Data/slide show (one person said it looks like conclusions are being drawn with little or no statistical support).
- Individuals venting and going on tangents.
- Too long, time spent sitting.
- Covenant/rules.
- Last couple hours – voting on changes.
- Explanation of why the UUA is engaging in this process.

Process.

- Generally, participants felt heard and were pleased with the facilitation.
- Punctual/on time.
- Could have been more focused.
- Some said the flow was good, and others felt it could have been improved. Slow at some points.
- Helped some participants understand more of what they can do to help.
- Would have liked a microphone, but that could have impacted the spontaneity.
- Should be less talk and more activities.

The Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth Process Schedule

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

10:00	Opening	Jodi
10:10	Facilitators' Welcome	Jodi
10:20	Participant Introductions	Jodi
	Name and congregation	
	Youth-Adult Pairs share about learning across the generations and introduce partner to the group	
10:40	Covenant	Jodi
10:50	Youth Ministry: A Common Understanding	Jesse
11:00	Data Presentation and Small Group Discussion	Jodi and Jesse
12:00	Process Check	Jodi
12:15	LUNCH	
1:00	Youth Ministry Definition (read out comments)	Jesse
1:15	Introduce Next Steps	Jodi
1:30	Stations – Brainstorming Needs/Changes	Jodi and Jesse
1:50	Prioritize	Jesse
2:00	Break (facilitators group similar items)	
2:15	Expand and Define	Jodi
2:30	Next Steps	
2:45	Report Back	Jesse
3:15	Youth Empowerment and Youth Ministry	Jodi
3:20	Evaluation	Jesse
3:45	Closing	Participants

