

Youth Ministry Working Group Fall Meeting Friday October 3 - Sunday October 5

The Youth Ministry Working Group convened for its third meeting in Waltham, MA. While the group had met twice during the late winter and spring of 2008, this was the Group's first meeting with the additional youth and youth advisor positions, which were filled in August 2008.

Friday, October 3, 2008

Prior to the official start of the meeting, youth members of the Working Group gathered on Friday morning to welcome the six youth newcomers, as well as get to know one another better. In addition to icebreaker activities, they also participated in a discussion around identity and privilege facilitated by Nancy DiGiovanni and Laura Spencer.

Later that afternoon, the two new adult members of the Working Group joined the new youth for an orientation to the Working Group facilitated by Terasa Cooley. Several returning members were also in attendance in order to provide additional insights and background. This orientation addressed the history of the Working Group as well as the core values that came out of the April 2008 Meeting and their importance.

The remainder of the Working Group gathered for initial introductions in the late afternoon, followed by dinner. The rest of the evening included a worship, a more extensive round of introductions, and a logistical conversation about food, rooming, guidelines such as remaining onsite and agreeing on a "lights out" time, and the weekend's agenda.

Friday evening's program concluded with a brief reflection and closing song. Subsequently, the youth members of the Working Group reconvened and spent time caucusing with one another.

Saturday, October 4, 2008

Present Participants: Nick Allen; Robin Barraza; Charlie Burke; Helia Daigaeu; Nancy DiGiovanni; Mara Dowdall; Caitlin DuBois; Judith Frediani; Morgan Ivens; Michael Kusz; Andrea Lerner; India McKnight; Alison Miller; Victoria Mitchell; Katie Parker; Bill Sinkford; Laura Spencer; Judy Tomlinson; Archene Turner; Jackie Whitworth

Terasa Cooley (facilitator); Jeremie Giacoia (staff support); Sarah Prager (meeting recorder).

Morning

The day began with an opening reading and a round of brief introductions. Additionally, there was a "report-back" from youth caucusing regarding the previous night's logistics conversation and lack of youth input. No action was requested.

A timeline for the year was presented by staff. The goal expressed was to have recommendations for youth ministry by the April 2009 Board of Trustees meeting so that the recommendations can contribute to the 2009-2010 budget process as well as be discussed at General Assembly 2009. Staff emphasized that the recommendations, while crucial, may not all be instantly effected since many of them will require a significant culture shift within our UU movement.

At the same time, it was also noted that the staff and Administration have already begun to move forward on some of the findings of the Consultation process. For example, one of the clear recommendations from the Summit, which was reinforced at the February 2008 Working Group meeting, was that a new

UUA staff position for ministry to youth and young adults of color should be created. Staff reported that this position was created and filled just a few days before the Working Group meeting.

Questions about the Working Group's communication to the larger UU world were raised. One member noted that if districts and congregations knew the direction in which the Working Group was headed, they might start working toward related goals. The question of communication was deferred for later discussion.

Another member named the importance of the Working Group's recommendations for young adults who have just "bridged out" of the high school age range. It was indicated that the needs of this age group should be also be discussed during the meeting.

The Working Group then moved into a covenanting process. The covenanting process built on the covenant the Working Group had created for its April meeting last year and the covenant the youth had made as part of their identity and privilege work on Friday morning. The latter document had also been discussed at the New Member Orientation on Friday afternoon.

Looking over these two covenants, group members shared what different parts of the covenant meant from their perspective.

The covenants included:

- **Respect**
- **Step-Up, Step-Back**, meaning to be aware of the privilege you have when you speak and how much you are speaking. Also included in this phrase is that one shouldn't feel pressured to speak; while there should be room for voices that haven't been heard as often, no one should feel forced to speak. The Working Group also included "assuming good intent" and "checking defensiveness" under this point.
- **Make history accessible**
- **Share knowledge with love**, meaning to be aware of members' different levels of knowledge based on things like whether one is a returning or new member of group and the nature of one's relationship to and involvement in the UUA. It was also noted that acronyms should be fully explained.
- **Literacy moment**, meaning that people can ask for clarification during the meeting.
- **Call out with love and mindfulness**, meaning that critiques or praise should be constructive and made in a way that reflects our relationships with one another.
- **Grow**
- **Conflict is our friend**, meaning that the group should not shy away from conflict.
- **Fill in the Blanks for People**, meaning that members should try to avoid the need for literacy moments before they happen by explaining as much as possible when they are sharing ideas or thoughts with the group.
- **Be open to new ideas**
- **Organic Process**, meaning acknowledging how you interact with others; the difference between feeling and knowing was also discussed under this point.
- **Process Observations**, meaning that there should be an accountability check for the whole group, made by all members of the group, and brought up in the course of the meeting instead of at the end. It was clarified that personal issues with individuals should be handled privately between meeting sessions.
- **Responsibility of Behavior**
- **Revisit Covenant**

- **Use ‘I’ Statements**, meaning to speak from one’s own experiences, rather than making generalized statements about groups. It was acknowledged that members of the group were selected partially for the constituencies they serve and have different accountabilities to keep in mind. Clarifying identities and being conscious when speaking was added to this point.

The Working Group then moved to a discussion of “Youth Empowerment and Voice,” which was a key core value of youth ministry identified at previous Working Group meeting. During Friday’s orientation, the newcomers and present returning members had reflected on the meaning and implications of this value for youth ministry.

These reflections, which were shared with the whole group on Saturday morning, included: spread empowerment widely; needing to get buy-in/stake-giving; the difference between empowerment and entitlement; the difference between having a voice and being tokenized; authenticity; honoring the spirit of but not replicating exactly the YRUU Steering Committee; needing to embody and create the value; safety/boundaries; the difference between youth “voice” and youth voices; revolution of relationship; everybody in the movement transformed; empowerment on the continental level being accountable to districts and congregations.

Prior to the weekend, Working Group members had received a summary document to serve as a starting point for the meeting. The document, which was prepared by Youth Ministry Office staff, synthesized the recommendations and values of the Consultation on Ministry to and With Youth, the Summit on Youth Ministry, the Roundtable on Theological Education, and the priorities established at previous Working Group meetings.

During the next portion of the meeting, group members engaged with this document, which:

- (1) named the core values to guide the creation of our new youth ministry;
- (2) identified desired outcomes for youth; and
- (3) named six possible strategies for building the youth ministry we imagine.

The “core values” were:

- Youth Empowerment and Voice
- Anti-racism, Anti-oppression and Multiculturalism
- Congregationally-based
- Spirit-centered/Faith-centered
- Building Community

The “desired outcomes for youth” were:

- A strong and healthy sense of self
- A sense of belonging in our UU faith community
- A sense of responsibility to our larger world

The six “possible strategies” for achieving this ministry were:

- Shift the “Center of Gravity” of youth ministry from the continental level to congregations.
- Include youth in existing leadership and program structures at all levels of the Association.
- Maintain accountability to all stakeholders.
- Promote multigenerational collaboration and community at all levels of the Association.
- Utilize a multicultural, anti-oppressive and anti-racist lens in re-envisioning and creating new youth ministries.
- Prioritize faith development for youth at all levels of the Association.

In order to begin engaging with the ideas in the synthesis document, the Working Group took part in a role-playing exercise. The facilitator split the group into youth (20 and under) and adults (21+). Each individual was to read over the document, trying to put themselves in the shoes of the opposite age group (i.e., youth were to evaluate the proposal as if they were adults and vice versa). From the perspective of their adopted age/life stage, the groups were to discuss the potentialities and obstacles of the proposed outcomes and strategies through the youth empowerment value lens. Groups met for around 40 minutes and then came back together for report-back and discussion.

The youth group reported back first, explaining that their process was to identify particular adult stakeholders and view the proposal from those perspectives. The group noted that it was important to remember they had never been adults.

A summary of their report, by stakeholder group, follows.

- **Parents:** want to share faith community with children; want children to get something out of Religious Education; may have concerns about church activities taking away from other priorities (schoolwork, etc); the group also acknowledged that youth involvement is often at the convenience of parents' schedules.
- **Ministers:** want youth to be a part of the church; want multigenerational communities; want happy congregations; want youth to remain UUs; want adults to be happy (acknowledging the power dynamic that adults are the ones who contribute money to the congregation).
- **Advisors:** want to help youth but also want boundaries; want to connect with and affirm youth; want to contribute to the growth of youth and respect youth empowerment; needed balance between giving them resources and stepping back and letting them make mistakes and criticizing them; are accountable to parents and other stakeholders, too.
- **Church Staff:** want rules to be followed and desire a minimum of needing to deal with insurance companies, parents, etc; want to remain employed; depending on congregation structure, aren't necessarily accountable to youth.
- **Congregation goes skeptical of youth program:** may feel threatened by multigenerational worship; may see UU youth as "mini" UU adults.

The youth group then reported on the three desired outcomes:

- **Healthy Sense of Self:** may mean safe, responsible, and UU like adults are; adults may be uncomfortable with "the ability to name and claim identities" included in that section as parents may worry that life will be harder for their children when they claim certain identities.
- **Sense of belonging:** sometimes an awkwardness between youth group and church and Religious Education; questions raised about where bridgers fit in as well as the difference between a future UU and a current UU.
- **Sense of Responsibility to the larger world:** youth and adults often have differing opinions on what this means and how to approach it; adults may see something as radical that youth don't; adults might see youth social justice involvement as either not enough (apathetic or one-issue) or as too much (activist culture); stereotype of youth as lazy and uncaring about the larger world.

The adult group then reported back. They identified their process as actual role-playing; they tried to interact and speak as if they were youth. They noted a difficulty in trying to think and feel like youth. They first reported back on desired outcomes.

- **Healthy Sense of Self:** it is more than a capacity for self-determination and empowerment; it is about not just who I am right now, but who I will be, so there is a need for support for ‘who I am and who I may be.’
- **Sense of belonging:** the need to gather with peers as well as in multi-generational community is important; desire for healthy relationships with adults; youth are not only nourished in community but they nourish; leaving one’s home congregation often means that congregations don’t know what to do with youth; it may be hard to connect to a new community – like one at college.
- **Sense of Responsibility to the larger world:** need for recognition of living out values and identities

They then moved on to discussing obstacles and potentialities in the first few strategies.

- **Shift the ‘Center of Gravity’:** need for multiple pathways; raises questions of the role of technology in creating virtual communities for those who may not have community on the congregational level; questions raised as to how familial relationships are nourished, how relationships with other adults are nourished and how safe environments are created; obstacles include difficulty in finding good and committed youth advisors, what to do when there are few youth, limitations in only having Sunday services, and finances; the concern was also raised that if competent leadership is made synonymous with professional leadership, it could exclude youth leadership – so clarity is needed.
- **Inclusion of Youth:** making connections outside the congregation; opportunity to learn more about other religions; opportunities for service projects and trainings that address white privilege are desired; ask what structural changes are needed in congregations to effect these changes and how finances are allocated for them; further questions include how to handle youth membership in congregations and voting as leadership and participation in decision making; ministers who don’t care about youth ministry and consider it the DRE’s responsibility were named as an obstacle; concern about tokenization of youth.

Following the reporting, the group discussed how to proceed with the document and small group work. Individuals expressed a desire to not do further role-playing, citing both discomfort with the tendency to rely on stereotypes of groups and the sense that the best work is done from our own experiences. It was decided that two smaller groups, balanced with regard to a variety of identities and positions/roles would focus on the potentialities and obstacles of each of the six proposed strategies, rather than process by which the entire document would be evaluated through the lens of the five core values. The Working Group then separated for age-based caucusing, followed by lunch.

Afternoon

Following lunch, some further clarification of the Working Group’s role and timeline was requested. The function of the group was described as taking the vision crafted at the Summit and making concrete recommendations that will bring the ideals of the Summit to a working level. It was explained that it takes about two years to plan for new UUA staff positions due to the budget process, and it was noted that some findings have already been implemented, while others will come to the UUA Administration and the Board of Trustees in the form of the Working Group’s recommendations.

It was also noted that the Working Group was to address some of the youth-ministry-related questions that remained unanswered after the Summit. These unanswered questions were the age range for youth ministry, the relationship to Canada, and the nature of a possible Youth Advisory Committee recommended in the summary document. The position for ministry to youth and young adults of color was named as one of the recommendations already being implemented, as well as UU University being multigenerational and including youth.

The remainder of the afternoon was spent examining the six strategies and their related tactics in small groups. The groups identified the potentials and obstacles within each possible strategy for achieving the Summit's vision of youth ministry.

Evening

Following dinner, the group did a small-group ministry style round of sharing, then engaged in identity caucusing around racial identity and age.

Sunday, October 5, 2008

Present Participants: Nick Allen; Charlie Burke; Helia Daigaeu; Nancy DiGiovanni; Mara Dowdall; Caitlin DuBois; Judith Frediani; Morgan Ivens; Michael Kusz; Andrea Lerner; India McKnight; Victoria Mitchell; Katie Parker; Laura Spencer; Judy Tomlinson; Archene Turner; Jackie Whitworth

Terasa Cooley (facilitator); Jeremie Giacoia (staff support); Sarah Prager (meeting recorder).

The Working Group began the morning with a brief worship, then took up constructing a timeline of the youth ministry process, including the history of how it came about. The purpose of this activity was to make sure all members were on the same page regarding what had already occurred and what still needed to be accomplished in the coming months. Some members of the group pointed out that there are multiple perspectives on the history of the youth ministry process and that any timeline cannot represent the full range of experiences.

The Working Group was then asked what additional items needed to be added to the timeline, both in terms of accomplishments and steps to take in the future. Added to the timeline were both upcoming youth-related events and "to-do" items for the Working Group. They included the need to make decisions regarding GA; that staff structure recommendations would need to be made in time for next year's budget; the need to discuss the age-range; having another draft of the summary document/draft proposal for the next meeting; the need to include DRUUMM YaYA in the conversation; the upcoming Summit on Excellence in Ministry (there are two youth attending from the PNWD, in which the event is being held); the upcoming Mosaic Project recommendations; the Program Associate for Ministry to Youth and Young Adults of Color starting part-time in October and full-time in February; and the desire to have a discussion with the UUA presidential candidates

The Working Group then returned to Saturday's afternoon discussions about the draft document. The group broke into pairs and shared with a member from the other group what their group had talked about, then came back together to name one or two things that were really exciting from the conversations with the whole group. These included the possibility of having a more exciting and interactive web presence; the creation of resources for youth ministry and the availability of those resources online; the professionalism of youth ministry staff; AR/AO/MC trainings in congregations; the creation of communities of different kinds and sizes; the idea of regions and clusters; mentorship and how it can impact people; feedback loops and how to adapt as we go; opportunities for faith development; interactivity; DVDs; and creating multigenerational networks for AR development.

At the suggestion of the facilitator, the group was invited into a discussion of how it could choose a name or descriptive phrase to identify this new youth ministry. As a way of entering into this conversation, the facilitator proposed an activity where group members would share "powerful words" related to youth ministry. There was a mixed response to this activity – in part, because it touched on replacing "YRUU," which has come to describe many layers of youth programming, with another word or description. For some members of the group, the "naming" brainstorming activity touched on residual grief and frustration

about the ending of the continental YRUU structure and uncertainty about what is to come next. After significant conversation, it was decided that the group would revisit this issue at a later time.

The Working Group then turned to a discussion of the age range. Group members each shared what they thought the ideal “youth” age range would be. After a round of sharing, there seemed to be a consensus among the group for an upper age limit of 18, though whether this would mean “to 18” versus “through 18” was not fleshed out. There was also strong support for looking particularly at the bridging age (roughly 18-20) and thinking about how best to serve that population. The ages identified as ideal for the younger end of the spectrum were varied, with some suggesting that the Junior High age range and its programming be considered a separate entity from high-school-age youth. A formal age range was not defined, and it was decided this question would be taken up again at the next Working Group meeting.

Afternoon

After lunch, the Working Group addressed remaining loose ends from the meeting. Members discussed how the content of the meeting would be communicated to the larger UU world, tasking the Youth Ministry Office with compiling a public meeting report for feedback from the entire group.

The possibility of creating and maintaining an e-mail address at which to receive feedback was raised and will be pursued by the Youth Ministry Office.

It was also determined that a youth and a non-staff adult would approach the Presidential Candidates about engaging with the work of the group. It was also noted that several Working Group members would be at the LREDA Fall Conference and that youth-ministry questions could be asked during a planned presidential candidates’ forum.

The planned celebration of YRUU at GA was also brought up, but it was determined that the Working Group would not have a role in that planning, though would like to remain informed about it.

It was determined that the connection between the Youth and Young Adult Empowerment Resolution and the Working Group Recommendations would need to wait for a later meeting when more concrete recommendations had taken shape. The Working Group was informed that the Administration was in the process of determining the best way to gather the data requested by the resolution.

It was decided that the important conversation about accountability to constituencies would be taken up at the next Working Group meeting (now scheduled for January 9-10, 2009 in Boston, MA). The agenda committee for the next meeting was selected and the group closed the meeting with a brief reflection.