

***Adapting Small Group Ministry for Children:  
An Implementation Plan with Sample Sessions***

**by Gail Forsyth-Vail**

**Gail Forsyth-Vail**, the adult programs director in the Ministries and Faith Development staff group of the Unitarian Universalist Association, previously served as the director of religious education for North Parish of North Andover (Massachusetts), where she led the initiative described in this publication. A credentialed religious educator, master level, Gail is the 2007 recipient of the Angus H. MacLean Award for Excellence in Religious Education.

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## Overview

**Section 1, Planning, Implementation, and Outcomes** describes the process by which North Parish moved to a new RE model, the challenges and opportunities the small group ministry model provided, and the new model's beneficial outcomes.

**Section 2, Sample Sessions** offers Part I, an orientation session for leaders, and Part II, eight sample RE session plans drawn from Tapestry of Faith RE programs and resources provided by the UUA. You can use the framework of the sample RE sessions to create additional small group ministry sessions for children. While many RE curricula can be adapted to this model, you will find Tapestry of Faith programs uniquely suited to such adaptation.

**Section 3, Resources** provides correspondence and reports that were created in the process of implementing the small group ministry model at North Parish. These can be used as a starting point for communications in your congregation.

## Section 1, Planning, Implementation, and Outcomes

In 2001, the North Parish of North Andover, Massachusetts, took a new direction in religious education (RE) programming. The Religious Education Committee decided to depart from the "Sunday School" model, wherein children meet by age group each week with a volunteer teacher and follow a lesson plan, typically including a story, discussion, and a craft or activity that supports the story. Although it had served the parish well, this traditional model no longer met the congregation's needs. In its place, the committee chose to offer a Sunday morning worship and small group ministry to nurture the faith development of children and the adults who worked with them. The parish used the new model of religious education for seven years, making changes to accommodate the congregation's move to two services, a building expansion project, and other institutional challenges and transitions.

North Parish originally published this resource in response to queries from Unitarian Universalist ministers, religious educators, and RE Committee members. The two original volumes, published in 2003 and 2006, have been combined and adapted here. The original sample session plans have been revised to use material from the Unitarian Universalist Association's [Tapestry of Faith](#) programs and resources.

### ***Planning: A New Model for Children's Faith Development Programming***

In the winter of 2000-01, the North Parish Religious Education Committee was experiencing a challenge familiar to many Unitarian Universalist RE committees and religious educators: Teacher recruitment for the spring session was not going well. North Parish was then a congregation of 325 members with about 180 active children and youth, and programming for four-year-olds through high school. The lives of adults in the congregation were so busy that few were willing to make a volunteer commitment longer than eight weeks. The Safe Congregation policy required two adults present at all times with groups of children or youth. As a result, the RE program required a total of 111 volunteers each year to staff all of its programs adequately.

After a particularly frustrating week of recruitment phone calls, RE Committee members met to talk over the problem. Common threads emerged in congregants' reluctance to teach RE:

- Some did not want to miss the worship service; they felt disconnected from the community while teaching.
- Some had children who were occasional or reluctant attendees, so did not want to commit to teaching; this was particularly true for parents of older children and junior youth.
- Some felt they knew too little about teaching and/or about Unitarian Universalism to be a "teacher."
- Some lacked the time to commit to lesson planning and preparation.

The committee also considered major changes that had happened in the local community and in the congregation over time that made it hard to staff the RE program. Steady growth in RE enrollment over a 20-year period had created space problems and changed the quality of interaction between teachers and children/junior youth. Many teaching partners did not know each other prior to working together. Many teachers had work commitments outside of home and were struggling to find enough time for family. Others did not feel qualified to teach some of the stories and issues raised in the curricula. Some felt unable to cope with behavioral challenges or different learning styles present in a group of children. Preparation for teaching had become a burden for many, and teaching a duty approached with reluctance rather than an opportunity to share time with children.

Volunteer teachers brought to their work varying degrees of skill in working with children. Those who had both skill and temperament for working with children were true treasures and their classes were engaging places where children grew in faith, commitment, and Unitarian Universalist identity. However, among those teachers who were less secure about their ability to work with children, it was common practice to read to the children from the curriculum book, with children either passively listening or fidgeting. Even leading a discussion or an art project, many volunteer teachers felt bound by the questions and instructions in the curriculum, no matter how much encouragement they had received to adapt to the needs of the class. Somehow, teachers had received the message that the

important part of religious education classes was the content, rather than the interactions. The program had become focused on making sure that certain material was “covered” (i.e., presented) rather than on helping children and junior youth to develop a healthy spiritual life and a strong sense of community.

The RE Committee longed for an approach that would not only serve the children and youth well, but would also serve their parents, who were often new to Unitarian Universalism and seeking to understand our faith. The committee had also become disenchanted with the “social action Sunday” approach to justice and service projects, noting that when one tries to organize a hundred children to create baskets for a homeless shelter, crowd control becomes the priority, and the participants’ experience comes second. The committee wanted an approach that would give children the opportunity to understand the “why” of the project and to have the processing and reflection time which leads to spiritual growth. Further, the committee was disenchanted with children’s worship experiences. A weekly 15-minute children’s chapel (once a month in the sanctuary with the adults), was too brief to allow children to participate regularly in some of the rituals of Unitarian Universalism—candles of joy and sorrow, hymn singing, meditative music, and prayer.

### **Considering a New Possibility: Small Group Ministry**

While the RE Committee struggled with the limits and frustrations of the RE program model, the Committee on Ministry was studying the “small group ministry” model for adults, and looking to bring it to the North Parish. They read books on small groups as a key to growth, including *Nine Keys to Effective Small Group Leadership: How Lay Leaders Can Establish Dynamic and Healthy Cells, Classes, or Teams* by Carl George and Warren Bird (Mansfield, PA: Kingdom Publishing, 1997). They engaged a team from the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Augusta, Maine to explain their small group ministry program. Rev. Lee Bluemel, the parish minister, recommended books to the director of religious education (DRE) and began slipping pertinent material into the RE Chair’s mail slot. At the same time, the DRE read *Essex Conversations* and was struck by the ideas in Dan Harper’s piece “Learning Types and their Needs,” which talked about the different faith development between newer Unitarian Universalists and deeper or long-time Unitarian Universalists of all ages, and by Jen Harrison’s “Youth Groups as a Model for

Transformative Ministry.” In March, in her monthly report to the RE Committee, the DRE asked the committee to articulate the goals of the Religious Education program before designing a model to fit the goals. (See Section 3, Document I).

### **Identifying Program Goals**

After reflection, the RE Committee decided their primary goal for the children/youth was to facilitate connections within groups and with the faith community. Then, the DRE proposed that the RE Committee consider moving to a new model of religious education, one that supports and encourages connections. The committee looked for a model that would:

- Place the emphasis on relationships, rather than on “teaching.”
- Allow for significant time as a worshipping community so that children, youth, and adults could experience sacred space and time together on a regular basis.
- Place the content in the hands of the DRE, who would prepare worship.
- Simplify the amount of material presented to children, using carefully chosen wisdom stories, some of which would be repeated year after year.
- Allow for meaningful social action projects, with ample time to reflect on the experiences, rather than just doing a service activity without reflection.
- Eliminate most teacher preparation time for adult leaders, to make leading a RE group a joyful, rather than stressful, experience.
- Blur rigid age and grade grouping to allow for new combinations of children.
- Allow for a more efficient use of very tight space.

The RE Committee decided to try a worship-and-small-group approach to the religious education program at the North Parish (see Section 3, Document II).

### **Educating the Congregation and Seeking Support**

With some concern about the congregational response, the RE Committee faced the task of explaining the new model for Sunday morning RE to the congregation. The plan had the wholehearted support of the parish minister, as well as the enthusiastic support of a number of long-time religious education volunteers. Knowing that the plan offered a wonderful opportunity to educate the parish about its children’s programming, the RE



Committee drafted a letter to the entire congregation (Section 3, Document III). They also knew there were likely to be questions about the new model, some philosophical and some logistical, and that committee members had to be prepared with answers.

The DRE had a crucial role in preparing the RE Committee to educate the congregation.

The committee became a visioning group, and the DRE, as professional staff person, helped them identify ways to bring their vision to life, by:

- Reflecting back to the committee its own vision about the program through memos, letters, and conversation, putting into theological and philosophical language the ideas and insights which had emerged in committee conversation.
- Reassuring the committee that it was possible for the proposed new model to work at North Parish, given the space configuration and limitations and the numbers of children participating in the program. Before moving forward with the vision, the committee made a preliminary nuts-and-bolts plan, showing how the logistics for the new model would work.
- Providing a blueprint to help committee members understand how all the parts of the program fit together and see the model laid out in clear form and uncomplicated language. This step gave the committee the confidence to answer questions and concerns that arose from members of the congregation (see Section 3, Document IV).

### ***Implementation: First Year Challenges***

Once the RE Committee developed comfort with the philosophical basis for moving to a worship-and-small-group-ministry model and the basic logistics, some practical questions needed to be considered:

- What kind of RE committee structure would be required to support such a program?
- How would the children's and junior youth groups be formed? Who would make the decisions?
- How would the space be used for children's/junior youth worship?

- What kind of support was needed from the music director and the Music Committee for an expanded young people's worship service?
- Who would decide the topics?
- Would the congregation completely abandon the curriculum books they had spent money to purchase?
- What kind of orientation was needed for the volunteers who would implement the program, some long-time RE teachers and some who had never before volunteered to teach RE?
- How would the suggested reflection questions/activities be distributed to the leaders?

### **Religious Education Committee Structure**

The Religious Education Committee chose to restructure itself to better support a small group ministry program. One person became the liaison to the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten groups, which were going to follow a more traditional program. Three other committee members became liaisons to the three different age groups, each responsible for supporting adult volunteers and making sure that any questions, comments, or concerns were communicated back to the RE Committee and to the DRE.

### **Small Group Formation**

Small groups were chosen to reflect the greatest possible diversity. Considerations included:

- Gender balance
- Mixing children from the older, younger, and middle ranges of each age group
- Mixing more active children with quieter ones
- Mixing children who like to express themselves with words and those who prefer visual arts or musical expression
- Separating a few combinations of children who had had trouble working well together.

In the end, there were three groups of first and second graders with about ten children in each (with the expectation of six to eight children typically attending); three groups of third, fourth, and fifth graders with about 16 to 18 children in each (with the expectation of 10 to 14 typically attending); and two groups of sixth, seventh, and eighth graders with about 20 junior youth in each (with the expectation of 12 to 15 typically attending).

Ideally, a small group has ten people in it, including the facilitators. Because there was not adequate meeting space to accommodate any more groups, the older children's and junior youth groups were larger than is ideal. Group lists were given to adult group leaders about a week before the program started. Although there were some minor moving around between groups and new additions as families joined the congregation, the groups remained remarkably close to the plan proposed by the DRE with input from the RE Committee.

### **Children's Worship**

Worship would now be the entry point into the small group discussions, so decisions about worship content had to be made with care. There were a number of practical considerations. The plan called for moving to a half-hour worship format, one that would include music as well as story. Because the practice at North Parish was to have the children join the adult service one Sunday a month for a portion of the service, often at special days on the liturgical calendar, it was important to figure out how that would fit with the worship-plus-small-group-ministry model. The RE Committee and the DRE made a joint decision that the worship content and the small group ministry plans would be the responsibility of the DRE and would be centered around a wisdom story or a ritual each week.

Music was to be an important part of the service, so the music director agreed to help by finding youth who would play a prelude and/or could accompany hymns on the piano. A good quality second-hand piano was donated for the parish hall, where children's worship was to be held. The RE Committee asked members of the congregation to consider purchasing hymnbooks for use in the young people's service and received donations to purchase more than 50.

The minister and the DRE decided that, in general, the intergenerational part of worship services in the sanctuary would be a half hour in length, so that children/ junior youth could

then go to their small groups and work with reflection questions/activities based on the service. This model addresses both the shorter attention span of young people and the need for some congregants to have a quieter time in Sunday morning worship. A one-page calendar showing expected themes for each month of the year was distributed to all parents.

### **Wisdom Stories**

As the RE Committee and the DRE began to work with the program, it became clear that the new format did not allow for as much “content” in the Sunday morning program as there had been in the past. The worship central story had to be well chosen and able to hold the attention of a wide age range of children and junior youth. Because the first year of the new format was the “world religions” year of a three-year rotating curriculum cycle, the DRE opted to use wisdom stories from Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Pagan traditions. The plan was not to teach “about” those religions, but rather to use the wisdom found in stories as an entry point for children and junior youth to reflect on their own spiritual journeys. The RE Committee also discussed the value of repeated stories, ones told year after year at the same time in the liturgical calendar (e.g. the Nativity story for Christmas, the Mustard Seed story for All Souls, and the Exodus story for Passover), agreeing that those stories are ones which can be mined for new meaning each year.

The RE Committee agreed that the worship leader should be prepared to tell a story rather than read it, or, at the very least, to read from written text or notes rather than from a picture book. While a story read from a book, particularly a children’s picture book, risks making adults and youth passive spectators to a children’s worship experience, a “told” story invites them to participate in a multigenerational experience.

### **Group Leader Orientation**

With logistical decisions made, the RE Committee and the DRE talked about how to orient the group leaders. The DRE designed a Power Point presentation explaining the new RE model and the role of the small group leaders. This presentation served as the first part of the teacher orientation. It set the tone and gave the volunteer group leaders a framework for asking questions about the program. The orientation was also intended to reassure the group leaders that all would be well—that the proposed program was not only doable, but would demand less preparation time of them. The new program simply asked that the

leaders be fully engaged with the children/junior youth during the group meetings. At the orientation, the DRE proposed sending the Sunday worship plans and suggested reflection questions to group leaders by email (or U.S. mail) on Wednesday or Thursday of each week. Initially concerned about not having curriculum books in hand, the group leaders soon adapted to receiving plans each week.

### ***Outcomes: First Year and Beyond***

The RE Committee and the DRE were ready to begin with the new model of religious education in September of 2001. The year began with a group leader orientation to introduce the new model (see Section 2, Part I, Leader Orientation). The orientation went well, and people seemed genuinely excited about the coming session.

Two days later, terrorists attacked the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and the North Parish immediately became a place for people to come for spiritual support. The worship-and-small-group model gave the North Parish RE program the flexibility to respond to the needs of the children and the parish. The DRE was able to create a timely, age-appropriate service for the children and junior youth and prepare guidance for the adult leaders. Visitors and newcomers seeking a spiritual community at a time of national crisis were invited to join their children for worship for the first half hour; new or visiting parents gained a sense of Unitarian Universalist theology and religious practice, while their presence at worship offered new children reassurance and a start at becoming comfortable as part of the congregation.

### **Small Group Ministry and Youth Programming**

As the year proceeded, the congregation discovered ways to use the small group ministry model in their Coming of Age and Bridging programs. The Coming of Age group, rather than having individual meetings with the minister, met with her in a small group to answer the questions: "What are my gifts? What gives me hope for the future? What brings me joy?" A rich time of discussion and spiritual growth resulted, which was reflected in the faith statements subsequently written by members of the group. Bridgers met in a small group to talk about the gifts they had been given by the North Parish and the gifts they had to offer the world. Their thoughts became part of a word collage that was offered to the congregation as part of the Bridging ceremony.

## **First Year Evaluation**

At the end of the first year, North Parish evaluated the new model by asking children, youth, parents, and group leaders to reflect on the program. Group leaders facilitated discussion with the children about what they most remembered about the year and what they liked and disliked. RE Committee members phoned all the group leaders and talked with them about the program. The Committee shared anecdotes they heard from children, heard from parents, and observed.

What the children remembered most of all were the stories they had heard. Different children remembered different stories, perhaps the ones that spoke most deeply to them. The RE Committee heard that the first and second graders need to have lots of things to do while the group is talking. Third, fourth, and fifth graders wanted to spend more time in their small groups role playing, and acting out the stories. Everyone liked having a service project each month. The sixth, seventh, and eighth graders had mixed feelings about the new model: Some really liked it, while others wished for a longer discussion time for just middle-schoolers, thinking that they were too sophisticated to attend worship with younger children or that the worship was “boring.”

Parents commented that they liked being able to attend worship with their children before separating, the adults going to the sanctuary and the children to small group. Some liked the consistent schedule. Some liked the fact that their children got to know a new set of children because of the mixed age groupings. Some parents said they still had a hard time getting their child to come to church (although attendance was up somewhat over the year before). Some parents of middle schoolers expressed concern that there was not as much “content” as there had been in previous years.

In their one-on-one conversations with group leaders, RE Committee members learned about some wonderful moments the leaders had experienced during the year, and some concerns. A leader of a grade three, four, and five group told how the story “Amaterasu’s Light” triggered a discussion about anger. She had been somewhat concerned when the conversation did not move in the direction suggested by the reflection questions, but she had decided to go with it. The result had been a great opportunity for pre-adolescents to talk with each other about how to handle being angry with their parents. “Amaterasu’s Light” had also sparked a wonderful conversation in a sixth, seventh, and eighth grade

group about all the different ways one can handle anger; the DRE had stopped by just in time to hear the group leader say, “OK, we have the revenge model and we have the door slamming model. What other ways can you deal with anger?” All Souls Sunday had brought forth an outpouring of stories from children about pets, aunts, parents, and siblings who had died, and a discussion about how death touches us all. The story of the Green Man in the spring had led the first and second graders into a discussion of camping, hiking, and just being alone in nature—all while painting the Green Man’s face on paper plates. Two changes emerged from the evaluation process. First, the leader orientation was revamped in order to teach adults how to “go with it” when a discussion took an unexpected turn. Leaders needed explicit permission to leave the written plans aside and explore the reactions of the children in their group to a given worship service and story. Second, it was agreed to involve the middle school youth as worship leaders on a regular basis, so they would find it easier to be present with the younger ones in worship.

### **Ongoing Evaluation and Learning**

The RE Committee and DRE continued to evaluate and tweak the model for several years to support the goal of increasing connections between children and youth; between children, youth, and adults who led them; and between children and youth and the congregation as a whole. Here is some of what they learned and improved:

- They learned a great deal about effective communication among the various stakeholders. The RE Committee and DRE learned to communicate well with parents and families, children, youth, group leaders, professional staff, and the congregation at large.
- They tried a number of different forms of leader orientation and development, continually making improvements.
- They learned that group leaders need significant written background information on each session, and that parents want some of the same, but shorter!
- They learned that keeping children up-to-date on congregational social justice projects helps connect the faith community. For example, thank you notes from children to volunteers who are doing work children cannot yet do really make a difference to those volunteers.

- They discovered it was effective to have children and junior youth work in small groups to prepare their contributions to intergenerational worship.
- They learned the value of taking digital photos of children and youth early in a year, so the photos could be printed and used at various times during the year.
- They learned to listen well to parents and volunteers and be strategic in implementing ideas for improvement.

The Religious Education Committee showed extraordinary leadership. The committee set aside an hour of its monthly meeting to talk about a “big picture” topic; evolution/creation, violence and children, and meditation for children were some of the many themes. From these rich conversations emerged many ideas which made their way into the DRE’s worship and small group ministry plans for the children and junior youth.

## ***Conclusions***

The original motivation for changing religious education programming was to create a more effective, viable RE model for the North Parish congregation. Over time, the RE Committee, parents, and professional staff realized the adapted small group ministry model also served to deepen children’s spirituality, enhance their sense of connection to each other and the congregation, and offer them ways to become agents of change in making the world a better place.

The successful experience of using a small group ministry model led the RE Committee and professional staff to conclude:

- The primary focus of the volunteer teacher/group leader should be on the children/youth in the group and not on the content.
- Children/youth develop spirituality in the context of a particular faith tradition by examining their own lives and experiences in the light of the wisdom from the tradition. It is in examining and exploring their own experience as it intersects with wisdom from our Unitarian Universalist Principles, Sources, and tradition that children/youth develop a Unitarian Universalist identity and spiritual practice.
- Many volunteers are relatively new to Unitarian Universalism and can therefore have a difficult time presenting wisdom stories or other content from a Unitarian Universalist perspective. Having worship for children led by a religious



professional or a person with a clear and deep understanding of Unitarian Universalist identity and their own theology allows for presentation of content in a way that supports a fuller engagement by both children/junior youth and the volunteers who lead their groups.

- Children's/junior youth small groups are the best place to "locate" social justice and service projects to ensure that the participants experience both action and reflection.
- The children's/junior youth program should engage with the priorities and projects of the congregation and should enable a response to events in the world, the wider community, and the faith community.

## Section 2, Sample Sessions

### *Part I, Leader Orientation*

#### **TIME**

2 hours

#### **MATERIALS**

- Newsprint, markers, and tape
- Chalice, candle, and lighter, or LED/battery-operated candle
- *Singing the Living Tradition*, the Unitarian Universalist Association hymnbook
- Story, "[The Power of the Question](#)," from *Telling Our Tales: Stories and Storytelling for All Ages* by Jeannette Ross

#### **PREPARATION**

- Invite members of the Religious Education or Lifespan Faith Development Committee to facilitate group conversations during the workshop. (Ideally, you'll have three people to help with this.)
- Write these scenarios on newsprint, and set aside:
  - Nobody says anything.
  - One child reveals that they worry about their parents when the parents must fly to other cities on business trips.
  - One child is really taken with the idea of demons, and proceeds to draw a TV cartoon demon and tell you in great detail the plot of the show.
  - A child tells of their fear of bullies on the school bus.
  - A child tells you they fear getting sick.
  - A child tells you there is nothing at all that they fear or worry about.
  - One child in your group had a pet die the day before and can't think of anything else right now.

- Two children are very excited about attending a friend's birthday party that afternoon.

## **SESSION PLAN**

### **Opening Words and Chalice Lighting** 3 minutes

Have participants join in Reading 466 from *Singing the Living Tradition* as you light the chalice.

### **Introductions** 10 minutes

Invite participants to share their names and tell which age group they will lead.

### **Guided Meditation** 10 minutes

Lead the meditation, using these or similar words:

*I invite you to get comfortable and to close your eyes. Think back to when you were a child, and try to remember a positive moment you had in your faith home, or in school. Where were you? Were you inside or outside? Who was there? Was there a teacher? Other students? Or, were you alone? What did you taste, smell, or hear? What did you feel? Did you feel safe? Did you feel accepted? Did you feel connected to something or someone? What were you thinking? Consider what it is that makes the moment so special that you can still remember it years later. When you are ready, open your eyes.*

### **Small Group Sharing** 10 minutes

Invite participants to form groups of three and share their memories with each other.

Remind them to pay attention to the time so all have a chance to speak and to listen. Each person should take no more than three minutes to discuss their memory.

### **Large Group Sharing** 15 minutes

Ask:

*What from your memorable experience would you like to see happen for your own child, if you have children? For the children and youth of our congregation?*

Invite participants to comment as they are moved to speak. Take note of themes that emerge or phrases that recur, so you will be able to mention a few when you sum up this conversation.

### **Summary Remarks** 5 minutes

Say, in these words or your own:

*The most profound moments in religious education have little to do with learning "material" in a curriculum. The most profound moments are the moments of spiritual growth. They have everything to do with [our sense of wonder, our sense of sacred community, small epiphanies, etc.—the themes that emerged in large group discussion].*

*In our RE program, your role as leader is to encourage the special moments by providing space for them to happen. I want to demonstrate how such a session might work.*

### **Story: "The Power of the Question" by Jeannette Ross, from *Telling Our Tales*** 10 minutes

Tell participants you are going to read them a story about a young boy who learns to master his demons and put them to work for him. Read the story aloud to the group.

### **Reflection Question and Possible Responses** 30 minutes

Invite participants to imagine they are meeting with a small group of children following a worship service that offered the story they just heard. Model how you might approach the conversation with children, in these words or your own:

*Sometimes the things you fear or worry about are called your demons. In the story, the boy is able to put his demons to work for him when he can name them and question them. I invite you to use to use watercolors, pen and ink, or markers to draw a demon that represents what you most fear or worry about.*

Ask participants to imagine they allow children time to complete their drawings and then invite the children to share them, either with the whole group or in pairs or threes.

Post the list you wrote on newsprint, and tell participants that these are some ways the children might respond to this hypothetical session. Invite participants to form small groups (those working with children in grades 1 and 2, those working with children in grades 3, 4, and 5, and those working with middle-schoolers) and consider the scenarios listed on the newsprint. Ask:

- Which scenarios seem most likely with the age group you are leading?

- How might you respond?

Introduce the RE Committee members who will facilitate the small group discussions.

**Large Group Sharing** 15 minutes

Invite each group to report on the issues raised in their discussion and how they might respond to the most likely scenarios. After each small group reports, invite others to offer suggestions.

**Review Policies and Procedures** 10 minutes

Briefly review the policies and procedures relevant to teaching RE, such as safe congregations, Internet use, photo permission, field trips, and session content approval.

**Closing** 2 minutes

Read aloud Reading 649 from *Singing the Living Tradition*, and extinguish the chalice.

## Section 2, Sample Sessions

### ***Part II, Sample Session Plans Adapted from Tapestry of Faith Curricula and Resources***

The times provided here add up to an hour—30 minutes in whole group worship and 30 minutes in small groups. However, in real life, sometimes the adult worship goes overtime and the children will be in their small groups for unexpected additional time. Sometimes activities or conversations take more or less time than estimated. Leaders should be encouraged to let a good conversation or activity continue, rather than cut it off to "get to" everything.

You can use the framework of these RE sessions to create additional small group ministry sessions for children. While many RE curricula can be adapted to this model, you will find [Tapestry of Faith](#) programs uniquely suited to such adaptation.

## **SAMPLE SESSION 1, COVENANT**

**Suggested Time of Year:** September

### **ORDER OF WORSHIP**

#### **Prelude/Gathering Music**

Have a youth musician play a piece or the whole group sing a song, such as Hymn 389 or Hymn 188 from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

#### **Chalice Lighting**

Choose familiar chalice lighting words that children have committed to memory, or use this one from James Vila Blake:

*Love is the spirit of this church,  
and service its law.*

*This is our great covenant:*

*To dwell together in peace,*

*To seek the truth in love,*

*And to help one another.*

#### **Story**

Read "[Noah and the Rainbow Covenant](#)" from the Tapestry of Faith curriculum Love Connects Us.

#### **Candles of Joy and Sorrow**

#### **Prayer**

Offer a brief pastoral prayer, which may reference the story and/or the joys and sorrows shared during the candles.

#### **Music**

Play a recording of "The Storm Is Passing Over," composed by Charles Tindley (this piece is widely available in choral recordings).

#### **Benediction**

End the session with a benediction or closing words familiar to the congregation.

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 1 AND 2**

### **Opening and Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Play the [Web Name Game](#) from the Tapestry of Faith curriculum Moral Tales.

### **Reflection** 15 minutes

Create a [Group Behavior Covenant](#), using the instructions in Moral Tales.

Invite children to retell the story of Noah and the Rainbow Covenant. Ask:

- What is the *covenant* in this story?
- What does a rainbow mean today?
- (If your congregation displays a rainbow flag) Why does our congregation display a rainbow flag?
- What promises is a congregation making when it displays this flag?

Decorate the group covenant with rainbows, using stickers or markers.

### **Carrying Our Faith into the World** 5 minutes

Talk with children about what promises families make to each other. Ask children to talk with their families about making a covenant together.

### **Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask children what they appreciated about the morning. Ask them about their hopes for the year, and write down what they say.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 3, 4, AND 5**

### **Opening and Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Invite the children to introduce themselves, using the directions from [Love Connects Us](#).

### **Reflection/Carrying Our Faith into the World** 20 minutes

Follow the directions for creating a [Group Covenant](#) from Love Connects Us.

Follow the directions for playing the [Human Knots Game](#) from Love Connects Us.



**Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask the children what they appreciated about the morning. Ask them about their hopes for the year, and write down what they say.

Relight and then extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

**PLAN FOR GRADES 6, 7, AND 8**

**Opening Check-In** 3 minutes

Light the chalice. Invite the youth to introduce themselves, using the directions from the Tapestry of Faith curriculum [Love Connects Us](#).

**Reflection** 10 minutes

Follow the directions for creating a [Group Covenant](#) from Love Connects Us.

**Carrying Our Faith into the World** 15 minutes

Follow the directions for a [Congregation Tour](#) from Love Connects Us.

Ask the youth to consider how the signs and symbols they discover point to the covenants the congregation is honoring.

**Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 2 minutes

Ask the youth what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

## **SAMPLE SESSION 2, FEAR AND COURAGE**

**Suggested Time of Year:** October

This service is led by the older children (grades 6-8), who should spend two or three weeks preparing before leading it.

### **ORDER OF WORSHIP**

#### **Prelude/Gathering Music**

Have a youth musician play a piece or have the whole group sing a song, such as Hymn 389 or Hymn 188 from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

#### **Chalice Lighting**

Choose familiar chalice lighting words that children have likely committed to memory, such as Reading 452, Reading 455, or Reading 473 from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

#### **Reflection**

The youth leaders each name something that used to make them afraid and no longer does.

#### **Story**

Tell the story "[The Lion on the Path](#)," incorporating the suggestions for [active participation](#) from the Tapestry of Faith curriculum Moral Tales.

#### **Candles of Joy and Sorrow**

#### **Prayer**

The youth leaders teach a prayer that was first offered by Julian of Norwich, who lived in England 600 years ago. Tell the children this is a good prayer to say to yourself when you are afraid. Say the first line of the prayer and invite the children to repeat it. Do this for each line, and then lead the children to say the whole prayer a few times:

*All will be well*

*and all will be well*

*and all manner of things will be well.*

#### **Music**

Play a recording of "I Whistle a Happy Tune" by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II from *The King and I*.

## **Benediction**

End the session with a benediction or closing words familiar to the congregation.

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 1 AND 2**

### **Opening and Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Ask each child to share something about their Halloween plans.

### **Reflection** 15 minutes

Play [Courage Tag](#), following the directions in Moral Tales.

Invite children to reflect on the story, using the [questions](#) in Moral Tales.

### **Carrying Our Faith into the World** 5 minutes

Distribute heart-shaped Courage Stickers, as suggested in Moral Tales, and invite the children to give the stickers to people in their family, friends at school, and others they know who have done an act of courage.

### **Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask children what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 3, 4, AND 5**

### **Opening and Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Ask each child to share something about their Halloween plans.

### **Reflection/Carrying Our Faith into the World** 20 minutes

Do [The Courage Workout](#) and then [The Bully in the Path—Assertiveness Skills Practice](#), following the directions in Moral Tales.

### **Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask children what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 6, 7, AND 8**

### **Opening Check-In/Reflection** 10 minutes

Light the chalice. Share tea and cocoa. Celebrate the good job they did leading children's worship! Ask:

- What was your favorite part of the worship service?
- What surprised you?
- What might you do differently another time?

### **Carrying Our Faith into the World** 15 minutes

Engage the youth in the activity [Dealing with Fear](#) from the Tapestry of Faith curriculum Heeding the Call, adapting the language as needed. Invite the youth to write about fears they have about standing up for others or helping others. Ask:

- How can your Unitarian Universalist *faith* be helpful when you are afraid?
- How can your UU *community* be helpful when you are afraid?

Have the youth share their responses, if they are willing to.

After the youth have spoken, the adult group leaders should share some of their own experiences of fear and courage.

### **Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Thank each youth individually for their part in the service, naming something you appreciated about each contribution. Invite the youth to offer further appreciations.

Extinguish the chalice and say, "Go in peace."

## **SAMPLE SESSION 3, DEATH**

**Suggested Time of Year:** All Souls Sunday (first Sunday in November)

### **Preparation**

- Prepare the worship or centering table using silk or real colored leaves, chrysanthemums, an orange tablecloth, a bowl of candles, a chalice, and a bowl of mustard seed.
- Send or e-mail a note to parents inviting them to talk with their children about people and pets they would like to remember at this service. Encourage them to bring pictures to place on the worship or centering table.
- You may wish to have a microphone to make sure each person who says the name of a loved one can be heard.

Note: The worship story and the small group activities that follow are drawn from [\*Stories in Faith: Exploring our Unitarian Universalist Principles and Sources Through Wisdom Tales\*](#) by Gail Forsyth-Vail (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 2007).

## **ORDER OF WORSHIP**

### **Prelude/Gathering Music**

Have the children's handbell choir or a child instrumentalist perform "We Are Dancing the Year's Circle" to the tune of "We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder," Hymn 211 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

### **Chalice Lighting**

Choose familiar chalice lighting words that children have committed to memory, such as Reading 452, Reading 455, or Reading 473 from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

### **Conversation and Story**

Introduce the story, using these or similar words:

*This time of year, when the days grow darker and colder, is a time when we are all very aware of death. The leaves have died and fallen; we wear Halloween costumes of ghosts and other spirits; we hang skeletons on our doors. These things are part of Halloween, to be sure, but they are also part of a much older and very important*

*holiday. Although it has other names, the Universalists called it All Souls Day. It is a day when we remember those whom we love who have died. Why do we take the time to remember? And why do we do it here in our congregation, gathered in our worship service? I'd like to answer that by telling a story from the Buddhist tradition.*

Tell the story "[The Mustard-Seed Medicine](#)."

Conclude with these or similar words:

*This is why we come together to mark All Souls Day. We remember that each of us has times of sadness, and each of us has times when we grieve the death of someone close to us. It is in coming together, in sharing our sadness, in knowing that others understand our feelings and miss their loved ones too, that we are comforted.*

### **Candles of Remembrance**

Say, in these words or your own:

*Today we name the people and pets we would like to remember. I invite you to come forward to light a candle of remembrance.*

*If you choose, you may say the name of your loved one into the microphone.*

*If you brought a picture, you may place it on the altar when you come forward.*

### **Prayer**

Offer a brief pastoral prayer that acknowledges the sadness of loss and the happiness of remembering the love of those remembered in the ritual.

### **Hymn**

Invite the group to sing "We Are Dancing the Year's Circle" (lyrics by Gail Forsyth-Vail) to the tune of "We Are Climbing Jacob's Ladder:"

*We are dancing the year's circle (3 times)*

*Sisters, brothers all.*

*Spring to summer, fall to winter (3 times)*

*Brothers, sisters all.*

*Dark to light and light to darkness (3 times)*

*Sisters, brothers all.*

*Birth to death and death to birth (3 times)*

*Brothers, sisters all.*

## **Benediction**

End the session with a benediction or closing words familiar to the congregation.

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 1 AND 2**

### **Opening and Check-In** 10 minutes

Light the chalice. Invite each child to tell about a person or pet they love who has died.

### **Reflection** 5 minutes

Ask, "What do you do when someone you know has had a death in the family?" (Answers may include sending cards, offering words of comfort, bringing food, going to a funeral or memorial service, or being especially kind.)

If theological questions are voiced (e.g., "Is there a heaven?"), you can state what you believe, yet also tell the children that other people have different beliefs. Ask them what they think. If they do not ask theological questions, stick with a discussion of responses to loss and grief.

### **Carrying Our Faith into the World** 10 minutes

Make sympathy cards for people who have suffered a recent death of a loved one. Each child may choose a different recipient for their card.

### **Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask children what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 3, 4, AND 5**

### **Opening and Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Invite each child to tell about a person or pet they love who has died.

### **Reflection/Carrying Our Faith into the World** 20 minutes

Ask, "What do you do when someone you know has had a death in the family?" (Answers may include sending cards, offering words of comfort, bringing food, going to a funeral or memorial service, and being especially kind.)

Tell children generally what happens at a memorial service or funeral in your congregation and at calling hours at a funeral home. Invite children to share any experiences they have had with funerals, memorial services, or wakes.

Use role play to practice with children words they might say to a friend whose grandparent has died or whose pet has died.

**Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask children what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

**PLAN FOR GRADES 6, 7, AND 8**

**Opening and Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Invite each youth to tell about a person or pet they love who has died.

**Reflection/Carrying Our Faith into the World** 20 minutes

The youth will likely have both practical and theological questions about death. Do not hide your own theological beliefs, yet be sure to let the youth share other points of view, including their own and the views of their parents and other family members. Invite the youth to talk about what to say and do when someone has had a death in the family (for example, say, "I'm sorry," send a card, go to the service, bring food to the family). Help them understand that responding to the loss, rather than ignoring it, is the compassionate thing to do.

Bring a selection of sympathy cards, and have the youth look them over and read them. Some of the cards may express theologies that the youth might find problematic, which could lead to a provocative discussion.

Invite the youth to be alert for times when they can respond with compassion to someone else's grief.

**Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask the youth what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."



## **SAMPLE SESSION 4, THE STILL SMALL VOICE**

### **ORDER OF WORSHIP**

#### **Prelude/Gathering Music**

Have a youth musician play a piece, or have the whole group sing a song, such as Hymn 389 or Hymn 188 from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

#### **Chalice Lighting**

Choose familiar chalice lighting words that children have committed to memory, such as Reading 452, Reading 455, or Reading 473 from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

#### **Story**

Tell the story "[Elijah and the Still, Small Voice](#)" from the Tapestry of Faith program Toolbox of Faith.

#### **Candles of Joy and Sorrow**

#### **Prayer**

Offer a brief pastoral prayer, which may reference the story and/or the joys and sorrows shared.

#### **Hymn**

Sing "Voice Still and Small," Hymn 391 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

#### **Benediction**

End the session with a benediction or closing words familiar to the congregation.

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 1 AND 2**

#### **Opening and Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Invite the children to name times when or places where they are quiet. Ask, "How does it feel to be quiet during that time or in that space?"

#### **Reflection/Carrying Our Faith into the World** 20 minutes

Say, in these words or your own:

*Today we will talk about being quiet and paying attention to the thoughts and feelings inside our heads and hearts. We'll use mirrors to remind ourselves to pay attention to what is inside.*

Invite children to decorate mirrors as described in [Reflection and Expression](#) in Toolbox of Faith. Simplify the directions by saying:

*We're going to be quiet and let you listen for the still, small voice inside. What are you thinking about? What are you feeling? I invite you to stay silent while you decorate your mirror. Maybe this mirror can remind you to take some time to be quiet and to pay attention to what you think and feel.*

### **Closing** 5 minutes

Ask children what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 3, 4, AND 5**

### **Opening and Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Invite the children to name times when or places where they are quiet.

Ask, "How does it feel to be quiet during that time or in that space?" Say that today we will talk about being quiet and paying attention to the thoughts and feelings inside our heads and hearts.

### **Reflection/Carrying Our Faith into the World** 20 minutes

Play [Mirror Games](#) as described in Toolbox of Faith.

Discuss the activity, using these questions from Toolbox of Faith:

- How does reflection help you see your internal self?
- How is it similar to the way a mirror helps you see your external self?
- When are you most reflective or most able to be reflective? Around a campfire? On a mountain top? At night?
- What kinds of things do you think about?
- What does your still, small voice say to you?
- Has this kind of reflection ever given you a fresh idea? Calmed you down? Helped you solve a problem?

- What other experiences have you had with reflection, or listening to your own still, small voice?

**Closing** 5 minutes

Ask the children what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

**PLAN FOR GRADES 6, 7, AND 8**

**Opening Check-In** 10 minutes

Light the chalice. Play [Mirror Games](#), as described in Toolbox of Faith.

**Reflection/Carrying Our Faith into the World** 15 minutes

Offer a [reading](#) from a contemporary essay by Rabbi Michael Comins. You may wish to tell the group that Rabbi Comins has traveled to the site where Elijah is said to have had the experience of hearing the "still, small voice."

Invite each youth to tell a story about a time when they heard a still, small voice inside that helped them discover something about who they are.

Ask:

*How will you make time for the kind of silence that allows you to be present to the still, small voice inside?*

**Closing** 5 minutes

Ask the youth what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

## **SAMPLE SESSION 5, LOVE MAKES A FAMILY**

For this session, children worship with the entire congregation for the first half hour, then meet in their small groups as usual for the second half hour. During the story portion of the worship service, offer the prose poem *What Family Means to Me* (see **Preparation**) and reflections prepared by three families (see **Preparation**).

**Suggested Time of Year:** A Sunday near Valentine's Day

### **Preparation**

*About two weeks before the service:*

- Invite three families to participate in this service by briefly sharing something about their family and what *family* means to them. Choose non-traditional families. Include children's or youth's voices in the mix. Consider inviting at least one family (either a single parent or a couple) who does not have children living in the home. Ask each family to prepare a three- to five-minute reflection.
- Ask the adult leaders of the children's small groups to collect children's thoughts about *What Family Means to Me*. Have a volunteer or staff person (adult) create a prose poem that uses the children's thoughts.
- Check with the congregation's minister or caring team to generate a list of people who cannot easily make it to the congregation for worship (such as sick people, elders who are homebound, and members away at college or in the military).

*A week before the service:*

- Recruit several children to read the prose poem in sections.
- Arrange a rehearsal, so that families can practice telling their stories and the children can practice reading the prose poem.
- Obtain doilies, heart-shaped cutouts, stickers, glue, glitter, construction paper, scissors, markers, and other supplies for valentine making.

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 1 AND 2**

### **Opening and Reflection** 10 minutes)

Light the chalice. Celebrate the children's participation in the worship service, as readers, writers, or storytellers!

### **Carrying Our Faith into the World** 15 minutes

Adapt the directions from [Faith in Action Outreach](#) in the Tapestry of Faith program Moral Tales. Invite the children to make valentines for the members and friends of the congregation who cannot get to the congregation for worship, or who could use an extra bit of love. Ask the children to sign their valentines, indicating their name, age, and/or grade, but not to address them to particular individuals. Tell them that you will address and mail them after they are finished.

### **Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask children what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 3, 4, AND 5**

### **Opening and Check-In** 10 minutes

Light the chalice. Celebrate children's participation in the worship service, as readers, writers, or storytellers!

### **Reflection/Carrying Our Faith into the World** 15 minutes

Adapt the directions from [Faith in Action Outreach](#) in Moral Tales. Invite children to make valentines for the members and friends of the congregation who cannot get to the congregation for worship, or who could use an extra bit of love. If the children resist this activity because they think that making valentines is an activity for little kids, engage them in conversation about why it is important for those who are ill, homebound, or away from home to receive a message of love from their congregation. Recognize and pay special attention to those children whose loved ones are among those in need of valentines. Invite children to make valentines and sign them, indicating their name, age, and/or grade, but not to address them. Tell them that you will address and mail them after they are finished.

**Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask children what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

**PLAN FOR GRADES 6, 7, AND 8**

**Opening Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Celebrate the youth's participation in the worship service, as readers, writers, or storytellers!

**Reflection/Carrying Our Faith into the World** 20 minutes

Share the story "[Valentines for the Governor](#)" from the Tapestry of Faith program Faithful Journeys. Follow the directions for [Valentines for Marriage Equality](#) from Faithful Journeys, adapting the language and discussion topics as needed for your group.

**Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask the youth what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

## **SAMPLE SESSION 6, WHO IS MY NEIGHBOR?**

**Suggested Time of Year:** Spring

The Good Samaritan is a well-loved and familiar parable of Jesus. It offers a great opportunity for high school youth to lead worship, perhaps by telling the story in skit form. If these youth will lead the service, have them create their own worship plan or alter the standard one themselves.

### **Preparation**

- Ask those involved in social justice projects in your community to take photos of people helping others (stocking food pantry shelves, building a house for Habitat for Humanity, etc.). Focus on those doing the helping, rather than those who are the recipients of such help. Gather additional photos of members of your congregation engaged in these projects. Make copies of the photographs for collage-making (grades 1 and 2). Set some aside to show the children in grades 3, 4 and 5.
- Identify a space in your congregation for the collage that participants will create, and secure permission to hang it there.
- Arrange objects on the worship or centering table that will help with telling the story of the Good Samaritan, such as a cloth bag or backpack, a first aid kit, a bag of coins, a cloth, a shawl or blanket, and/or some bread.

## **ORDER OF WORSHIP**

### **Gathering Music or Opening Reading**

Have a youth musician play, or have the whole group sing the following lyric arrangement from the Song of Solomon 2:11, 12:

*For lo the winter is past  
The rain is over and gone  
The flowers appear on the earth  
The time of the singing of birds is come,  
The time of the singing is come.*

Note: There is a beautiful musical arrangement of this in the 1955 orange children's and youth hymnbook, *We Sing of Life*. Your congregation or district library may have a copy.

### **Chalice Lighting**

Choose familiar chalice lighting words that children have committed to memory, such as Reading 452, Reading 455, or Reading 473 from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

### **Conversation and Story**

Tell or act out the story of "[The Good Samaritan](#)" from the Tapestry of Faith program Moral Tales, Session 8.

### **Candles of Joy and Sorrow**

#### **Prayer**

Offer a prayer that responds to events in the congregation's social justice ministry, as well as the joys and concerns that arose during the candles.

#### **Hymn**

Sing "Gaudeamus Hodie," Hymn 390 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

#### **Benediction**

End the session with a benediction or closing words familiar to the congregation.

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 1 AND 2**

### **Opening and Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Invite the children to tell about something they have done to help someone else.

### **Reflection/Carrying Our Faith into the World** 20 minutes

Invite children to think about the idea that when Jesus said "Love your neighbor," he meant *every other person in the world*, especially those who need help of some kind. Follow the directions for the [Who Is My Neighbor? Collage](#) from Moral Tales. Add the photos from congregational service and social justice projects. Share with the children any updates or information on the congregational service or social justice projects in the photos.

When the collage is complete, hang it where it will be seen by the entire congregation.

If there is time, play and process [Frozen Tag](#), following the directions in Moral Tales.



### **Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask children what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 3, 4, AND 5**

### **Opening and Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Invite the children to tell about something they have done to help someone else.

### **Reflection** 15 minutes

Guide a conversation on the Good Samaritan and helping one's neighbor, using these questions to prompt discussion:

- What message was Jesus teaching when he told this story?
- Who is your neighbor?
- How do you decide if someone needs help?
- What might stop you from helping that person?

Point out to children that notifying an adult about a situation *is* helping. There are times when children should not try to do something by themselves.

Have children act out the story of the Good Samaritan, using the props from the worship or centering table.

Ask, "Are there ways that this story can still be told today?" (For example, the children might suggest a scenario where someone is being bullied and other children, for various reasons, ignore the issue until one finally steps in to help.) If the group comes up with an idea for retelling the story, suggest that they end the session by acting it out for a wider group or another small group.

### **Carrying Our Faith into the World** 5 minutes

Share the photos you have, and give the children updates or information on the congregational service or social justice projects pictured. Invite the group to decide which project they would like to know more about, and help them compose a note requesting that

a person involved in the project visit your group and suggest ways in which children can help.

**Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask children what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

**PLAN FOR GRADES 6, 7, AND 8**

**Opening Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Invite the youth to share one exciting or challenging thing that happened to them over the course of the past week.

**Reflection** 10 minutes

Follow the directions for [Ethic of Reciprocity](#) from the Tapestry of Faith program A Chorus of Faiths.

**Carrying Our Faith into the World** 10 minutes

Invite youth to consider some of the following situations and decide if and how they might be a Good Samaritan:

- You encounter a small child stuck on a wall, afraid to jump off.
- You see someone who has fallen off their skateboard and skinned a knee. The person is someone you don't like very much.
- You see someone who has fallen off their skateboard and skinned a knee, but helping them will make you late for school.
- You see someone who has fallen off a bike and appears to be badly hurt (they seem to be unable to get up, or are bleeding profusely).
- You witness a car accident.
- You encounter some older kids pushing around a young child who is crying and struggling to get away. You notice one of the bullies is an older sibling of the young child.

- You encounter some older kids teasing a young child. The older kids are bullies who have given you a hard time in the past.

Invite the group to act out one or two of the above scenarios, or create their own to act out.

**Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask the youth what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Ask the youth what they liked about the session, and what they wish had been different.

Extinguish the chalice. Close with a benediction, or simply say, "Go in peace, and to bring peace."

## **SAMPLE SESSION 7, WATER**

**Suggested Time of Year:** Late spring

### **Preparation**

- This service is led by the older children (grades 6–8), who should spend two or three weeks preparing it. The opening reading, the worship story, and the small group activities that follow are drawn from "Families: Weave a Tapestry of Faith" (the Family pages) in the Summer 2010 issue of *UU World*. The Family pages are the four-page, color insert published in the center of each issue of *UU World* and posted [on the UUA website in pdf format](#).
- Decorate the worship or centering table with a variety of containers of water and items representing water and rain, such as a water bottle, sea glass, a sand pail, an umbrella, a rain hat or rain boots.

## **ORDER OF WORSHIP**

### **Gathering Music**

Have a youth musician play a piece or have the whole group sing a song, such as Hymn 389 or Hymn 188 from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

### **Chalice Lighting**

Choose familiar chalice lighting words that children have committed to memory, such as Reading 452, Reading 455, or Reading 473 from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

### **Conversation and Reading**

The youth leaders invite the children to look at the objects on the worship or centering table and guess what the topic is today.

Ask:

- When does rain make us happy?
- When does it make us sad?

Explain that the children will hear the thoughts of two children who think about water very differently. Have two youth present [the reading](#) "Water Justice Meditation for Two Voices," on page 3 of the Family pages insert.

## **Story**

Read the story "[The Clearwater](#)."

## **Candles of Joy and Sorrow**

### **Prayer/Meditation**

Offer a brief prayer that names some of the wonders of the spring to come and expresses gratitude.

### **Hymn**

Sing "I've Got Peace Like a River," Hymn 100 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

### **Benediction**

End the session with a benediction or closing words familiar to the congregation.

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 1 AND 2**

### **Opening and Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Invite the children to share one thing they really like about water or about rain.

### **Reflection** 10 minutes

Read "[Water Fun—Is It Fair?](#)" from the *UU World Family* pages, and engage the children in a conversation about it. Emphasize that children can express their gratitude for being able to play in water by using it wisely and helping to conserve.

### **Carrying Our Faith into the World** 10 minutes

Go to a sink and try the [water conservation experiment](#) from the *UU World Family Pages*. Engage the children in naming other ways they can conserve water.

### **Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask children what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 3, 4, AND 5**

### **Opening and Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Invite the children to share one thing they really like about water or about rain.

**Reflection** 10 minutes

Read "[Water Fun—Is It Fair?](#)" from the *UU World* Family pages, and engage the children in a conversation about it. Emphasize the unequal access that people around the world have to clean water. Ask:

- How can we express our gratitude for having clean water?
- How can we conserve water resources?

**Carrying Our Faith into the World** 10 minutes

Share the information about [bottled water](#) from *UU World* Family pages. Invite the children to decide what they will do to make the situation better. If they need prompting, you might suggest:

- Use refillable water bottles.
- Educate others about the problem with single-use plastic water bottles.
- Start a campaign to end the use of single-use bottles in the congregation.

**Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask children what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

**PLAN FOR GRADES 6, 7, AND 8**

**Opening Check-In** 10 minutes

Light the chalice. Share tea and cocoa. Celebrate the good job they did leading the children's worship!

**Reflection/Carrying Our Faith into the World** 20 minutes

Share the story of [water justice in Guayaquil](#), Ecuador, from *UU World* Family pages. Share further information about the [Mi Cometa Movement](#) and show the [UUSC video](#) about water in Guayaquil. Explore the [suggested actions](#) regarding water justice on the UUSC website, and begin a conversation about what your group might do to carry our faith into the world. Begin plans for a water justice project, possibly a long-term one.

**Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask the youth what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

## **SAMPLE SESSION 8, MEMBERSHIP**

**Suggested Time of Year:** Membership Sunday

### **Preparation**

- Obtain a list of those who will be recognized as new members on Membership Sunday. Determine any connections with the children, including family relationships, friendships, experience working together on a project or event, and so on.
- Find out the date your congregation was gathered.
- Arrange for the older students (grades 6–8) to help prepare a celebratory refreshment table in honor of the new members and to help at social time following the service.

## **ORDER OF WORSHIP**

### **Gathering Music**

Sing "Gathered Here," Hymn 389 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

### **Chalice Lighting**

Choose familiar chalice lighting words that children have committed to memory, such as Reading 452, Reading 455, or Reading 473 from *Singing the Living Tradition*.

### **Conversation and Story**

Introduce the story by asking:

- What does it mean to join the congregation?
- Why do people become members of this congregation?"

Explain that being a member means belonging to something bigger than yourself. In this case, it means joining a faith community that has gathered for a certain number of years (or, since a particular date). Name and celebrate all the new members, with special mention of new members who are siblings, parents, or grandparents of those at the children's worship.

Tell the story "[The Difference Between Heaven and Hell](#)," a Japanese and Chinese folktale from the Tapestry of Faith program Toolbox of Faith. Tape spoons to rulers as suggested in the story instructions, and invite volunteers to help dramatize the story.



## **Candles of Joy and Sorrow**

### **Prayer**

Offer a brief pastoral prayer, which may reference the story and/or the joys and sorrows shared during candles.

### **Hymn**

Sing "Circle Round for Freedom," Hymn 155 in *Singing the Living Tradition*.

### **Benediction**

End the session with a benediction or closing words familiar to the congregation.

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 1 AND 2**

### **Opening and Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Invite the children to brainstorm a list of groups or organizations where children are members. If they need examples, suggest Scout troops, sports teams, theater groups, and musical groups. Point out that they are also members of a family as well as members of this congregational community.

### **Reflection** 15 minutes

Invite the children to talk about what it means to be a member of something. Play a cooperative game in which each person is a member of a group, such as [Frogs and Lily Pads](#) from the Tapestry of Faith program Moral Tales. Your group may also choose to invent its own cooperative game. If weather permits, play outside!

At the end of the game, invite the children to reflect on what it was like to be part of a group doing something together.

### **Carrying Our Faith into the World** 5 minutes

Highlight a partnership or membership that is important to your congregation. If your congregation has formed a partnership through the [Partner Church Council](#) or is part of a local interfaith partnership, invite the children to consider how to celebrate that partnership. Suggest that an exchange of artwork is one way to honor the partnership, and invite them to brainstorm what kind of art project would best represent them to a partner congregation. Engage children to help consider issues such as mailing or transportation as they consider their project. Invite them to help you make a list of needed supplies for the chosen project.

### **Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask children what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 3, 4, AND 5**

### **Opening and Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Invite the children to brainstorm a list of groups or organizations where children are members. If they need examples, suggest Scout troops, sports teams, theater groups, and musical groups. Point out that they are also members of a family as well as members of this congregational community.

### **Reflection** 15 minutes

Invite children to play the game [Eating in Heaven and Hell](#) from Toolbox of Faith.

At the end of the game, invite the children to reflect on the experience. Ask, "How is being a member of a congregation like eating in Heaven?"

### **Carrying Our Faith into the World** 5 minutes

Highlight a partnership or membership that is important to your congregation. If your congregation has formed a partnership through the [Partner Church Council](#) or is part of a local interfaith partnership, invite the children to consider how to celebrate the partnership. Suggest that an exchange of artwork and letters is one way to honor the partnership, and invite them to brainstorm what kind of art project would best represent them to a partner congregation. Raise issues such as mailing or transportation as the children consider their project. Invite them to help you make a list of needed supplies for the chosen project.

### **Appreciation/Wishes/Closing** 5 minutes

Ask children what they appreciated about the morning and what they wish had happened differently.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

## **PLAN FOR GRADES 6, 7, AND 8**

### **Opening Check-In** 5 minutes

Light the chalice. Make sure everyone in the group knows everyone else's name.

**Reflection** 10 minutes

Guide a conversation on the topic of membership, using these or similar words:

*Consider what it means to be a member of something. Is being a member different from just going to something? Why are we members of teams, but we go to school? What is the difference?*

If people in your group know some of the youth or adults who decided to become members of the congregation today, acknowledge these connections.

Show your group some membership materials. Ask:

- What is the difference between being members of the *congregational community*—which you all are—and being members of the *congregation*?
- What are some responsibilities and privileges of membership?

**Carrying Our Faith into the World/Closing** 15 minutes

Create greeting cards or notes to congratulate the new members of the congregation.

Extinguish the chalice, and say, "Go in peace."

Help prepare the celebratory refreshment table in honor of the new members.

## Section 3, Resources

### **DOCUMENT I. NORTH PARISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION DIRECTOR'S MONTHLY REPORT TO THE RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COMMITTEE, APRIL 3, 2001**

Each spring, the Religious Education Committee turns its attention to the following year. As we contemplate the issues once again, I am aware that the committee found it difficult this year to do those things necessary to maintain the current program. We have added more classes, more teachers, more spaces, but still . . . Teacher recruitment feels like "begging," curriculum preparation can be overwhelming, and figuring out where to put all of our classes??!!

I am hoping you will consider taking another look at the model you are using for religious education. Is the graded classes format the best way to educate religiously? In order to answer that question, we need to figure out what we mean by religious education, what is most important that we pass along to our children and youth, and what systems must be in place in order for us to accomplish that which is most important. These are big issues, and each member of this committee will have different ways of looking at them. In this report, I offer you my understandings—my philosophy of religious education. I will also pose some questions for you to contemplate as we consider together how best to "take responsibility for the spiritual growth of ourselves and our children" (from the North Parish mission statement).

#### **What is the purpose of religious education?**

To engage in religious education is to invite people into a covenanting community that seeks to realize (make real) the presence of Creative Love. Religious education encourages people to seek truth, allowing them to choose actions that help build a world where harmony, justice, and loving community prevail over injustice, hatred, and fragmentation. Through education we invite children and adults to bring their separate gifts, stories, ideas, and questions to the whole, experiencing the power of love that transforms a group of like-minded seekers into a community, and helps us to connect, not only with one

another, but with all of humanity. We are inviting people not just to individually seek truth, justice, and harmony; we are inviting people to seek those things in a community that understands and tries to act in accordance with the immanent presence of Creative Love.

### **What truths will we share as we educate religiously?**

As a Unitarian Universalist, I believe that revelation is continuous and can be found in many sources. Through solitary reflection and through communal worship and discussion, people form meaning from their own experiences and from the shared oral, artistic, and written wisdom of those who have gone before and of those with whom we share the journey. The UU covenant (our even Principles) calls us to honor the journey and to expect that life's great questions will never have definitive answers. Through religious education, we reflect upon our experiences in the presence of others, challenging one another to reach new meaning, and honoring each person's insights and understanding. We are informed in our search for truth and meaning by wisdom from the six Sources of our living tradition:

- Direct experience of transcending mystery and wonder
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men
- Wisdom from the world's religions
- Jewish and Christian teachings
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason
- Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions

### **How will we educate religiously?**

*The method is the message.—Angus MacLean*

#### *Community*

If the goal of religious education is to guide people as they grow in understanding of their role in our covenantal community, then we must educate in community. The challenge for congregations is to structure events and gatherings within the congregation that allow people to experience formation of and living with covenants. We must ask of our children, youth, and adults a commitment to walk together and to be together in a way that allows for individual and group reflection. (It would be good to begin a dialogue with the Small Group Ministry Task Force to see how this model might work with children and/or youth.)

### *Action/Reflection Model*

In educating religiously, we hold two ideas in tension:

- We believe in the worth and dignity of each person and in the individual search for meaning (the first, third, fourth, and fifth of the seven UU Principles).
- We also believe in our responsibility to be and act as a community, holding up a vision of a world wherein peace, justice, equity, and compassion are available to all (the second, fifth, sixth, and seventh of the seven UU Principles.)

The ideal teaching model to encompass this tension between individual and community is an action/reflection (praxis) model. What this means in terms of religious education is that each "action" (e.g., collecting food for the People's Pantry) must be both preceded and followed by reflection. Each "reflection" (e.g., discussion about how to handle anger) must be both preceded and followed by action. It is the reflection part that makes our actions *religious* actions, rather than simply good works. It is the action part that makes our reflection more than an intellectual exercise. Advocacy, service, and compassion for others take on a religious dimension when we do such work reflectively, fully aware that we are serving as hands and voices inspired by Creative Love and by hope for a future in which love, peace, and justice reign on earth.

### *Symbols and Rituals*

Perhaps because of the emphasis on the freedom of the individual and on the individual search for meaning, Unitarian Universalists are ambivalent about the use of symbol and ritual. Both symbol and ritual are embedded with shared meaning; they affirm the communal experience rather than the individual. When we create ritual and embed it with meaning, as a congregation or as a small covenanting group, we must take care to assure that each new person who becomes part of the group or the congregation hears from others the stories of the ritual's meaning and significance. In this way, they may fully participate and be transformed by the ritual experience.

### **Who is the teacher? Who is the learner?**

All of the content of Unitarian Universalist religious education—experiences with nature; participation in service projects; social justice work; participation in ritual; sharing of stories from the six Sources; discussions of sexuality, birth, and death; and individual search for

the nature of the Divine—is part of each person's religious education from preschool through adulthood. Learners revisit each of these areas again and again, in age-appropriate ways and in many contexts. One of the ways in which an adult learner revisits these areas is through facilitating a group of children or youth who are also learners. Adults who work with children or youth are themselves seekers, willing not only to guide and facilitate the learning of a group, but also to be themselves changed by the encounter.

### **Questions for the Religious Education Committee**

- What is the purpose of religious education for children and youth at the North Parish?
- What outcomes do we hope for and expect as a result of the RE program at North Parish?
- What should be the "content" of the program?
- What methods should we use to educate religiously?

I look forward to the discussion!

## **DOCUMENT II. LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TO THE NORTH PARISH RELIGIOUS EDUCATION COMMITTEE, MAY 2, 2001**

Dear Members of the RE Committee:

The discussion we had at last night's meeting was wonderful! It was good to think together about what is most important for the children of the North Parish. It was exciting to think about how we might re-make Sunday mornings for children and youth in a way that nurtures a variety of connections:

- Connections between adults and children
- Connections between one child or youth and another
- Connections between our kids and the natural world
- Connections between our kids' lives and Unitarian Universalist teachings
- Connections between our kids' values and ways in which they can live out those values
- Connections to the still, small voice of wisdom inside each child

Our covenant together is not just about connecting. There is another, equally important, part of educating religiously: We must help children to understand that each of us is called to serve. Each one of us has our own unique talents and interests, so the ways in which we serve are as many as there are individuals in the community. Our job with children and youth is to nurture the process by which they not only come to understand the call to service, but also learn to discern the ways in which they individually can best serve. I believe that the Sunday morning model we talked about at our meeting will nurture the call to service if we are intentional about both connection and service.

When I arrived at church this morning, I found the UU Family Network Clearing House packet in my mailbox. When I opened it, I discovered [a piece written by Rev. Lynn Ungar](#) for *The Journal of Liberal Religion* that addresses some of the very same questions that the RE Committee has been discussing. I've enclosed a copy for you (with notes in the margins and underlining some parts in case you don't have time to read it all). I hope you will find it as inspiring as I did.



I have also enclosed for you a preliminary plan for next year, with logistical suggestions. I thought that such an outline would allow us to affirm that this model is indeed do-able, and allow the RE Committee to focus on the philosophy behind the change rather than on particular logistics.

The third item I have enclosed is a draft of a letter to the congregation. I'd appreciate your feedback on that within a week. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Gail Forsyth-Vail, Director of Religious Education

## **DOCUMENT III. LETTER ANNOUNCING THE NEW MODEL TO THE NORTH PARISH CONGREGATION, MAY 2001**

Dear Members and Friends of the North Parish:

This spring, the Children's/Youth Religious Education Committee has been considering ways to offer a Sunday morning program that better serves our children and junior youth. As a result of continuing growth in the church and a congregational move toward mission-based programming, the committee considered some basic philosophical questions:

- What is the purpose of religious education for children and youth at the North Parish?
- What outcomes do we hope for and expect as a result of the RE program at the North Parish?
- What should be the "content" of the program?
- What methods should we use to educate religiously?

What emerged from the discussion was that "connections" should be a primary emphasis of Children's/Youth RE programming—building relationships between children, relationships between children and adults, connections between the adult worship of the church and children's worship, and connections between Unitarian Universalist values and the everyday lives of our young people.

Rev. Angus MacLean, a well-known Universalist religious educator, often reminded religious educators, "The method is the message!" The RE Committee has chosen to adopt for next year a model of religious education that reflects the message that a sense of connection and belonging should be a primary outcome of an excellent program. The Committee has chosen to adapt the "Small Group Ministry" model for use with children in grades 1–8. In the fall, each registered child in those grades will become part of a group of children (mixed ages, within a narrow age span) who will meet together each Sunday morning following a half-hour worship in the parish hall. Volunteer adults will lead discussions and activities that will enable children to get to know one another better and also to "process" the story or message from the worship service. Adults will no longer be teachers, instructing children with curriculum books, but rather group leaders, exploring

with children how to be connected within the faith community of the North Parish. Here are some examples of what might occur:

- A worship service on a particular theme, with a story from one of the Sources of our tradition.
- Small group gatherings that include a check-in or a getting-to-know-you game; some discussion of the story, using prepared, age-appropriate questions; and then an art activity, a service project, or a game that looks at the idea of change in our lives.

I am pleased to be part of what will be a bold new venture for the children, youth, and families of North Parish! We hope that many of you will be intrigued and excited as well. Those who wish to share this ministry with our children may sign up for next year (as leaders, not teachers) by calling me at the church during the week or by visiting the RE Committee table in the parish hall on Sunday mornings. Next year's leaders will have the unique chance to help shape the new model along the way!

Please be sure to contact me or any member of the RE Committee with questions or comments.

Sincerely,

Gail Forsyth-Vail, Director of Religious Education

**DOCUMENT IV. MEMO TO THE RE COMMITTEE AND BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
FROM THE DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: A BLUEPRINT FOR  
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION, JULY 6, 2001**

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH AT  
THE NORTH PARISH OF NORTH ANDOVER, UNITARIAN  
UNIVERSALIST**

*Goal:* Development of a sustaining faith, a total response to life, composed of both spirituality and religious identity as a Unitarian Universalist. Unitarian Universalist faith is spirituality, a depth of personal religious feeling and active commitment, shaped by the heritage of wisdom preserved in our Unitarian Universalist community and heritage and conveyed by elders and spiritual mentors.

There are four "tasks" for learners on this path to faith.

**First Task: Learn How Unitarian Universalists "Do" Religion**

*Who?*

Children ages 4–8, families, and children new to Unitarian Universalism

*Faith Stage*

Faith by imitation

*Content*

Introduction to Unitarian Universalism and its practices (name, chalice symbol, caring community, worship practices, hymnal, covenant)

*How?*

- Four- to six-year-olds, in two separate groups, learn about Unitarian Universalism and the chalice. They experience caring community and begin to learn some worship practices.
- Six- to eight-year-olds learn about worship practices and the hymnal through attendance at children's worship. They experience caring community and our covenant through small group sessions following worship.

### *Milestones and Rituals*

At the end of the kindergarten year, there is a ceremony to give a chalice to each family, noting that religious education is primarily the responsibility of the family, supported by the community.

At the end of second grade, there is a ceremony to give each child their own hymnbook. This puts some of the wisdom and spiritual practice of Unitarian Universalism into the hands of each child and family.

### **Second Task: Learn the Stories, Practices, and Lore of the Faith Community**

#### *Who?*

Children ages 8–12, and families new to Unitarian Universalism

#### *Faith Stage*

Joining

#### *Content*

Unitarian Universalist heritage, and wisdom from UU Sources:

- From Universalism: God is Love, everyone is included, build the Kingdom of God on earth
- From Unitarianism: Freedom of belief, use of reason, tolerance of difference
- We are carriers of the heretic's flame
- God (the Divine/Mystery) is too big for any one metaphor
- Direct experience of mystery and of gratitude
- Wisdom from the world's religions
- Wisdom from the Jewish and Christian struggle to understand God
- Our Unitarian Universalist covenant
- Living individually and collectively as part of a covenanting community
- Responsibilities to others and to the earth
- Responsibility to act on our principles and to give back

### *How?*

Children ages 8–11 participate in children's worship and in small-group sessions. Small groups engage in social action, reflecting on service in the light of UU faith. Small groups act as covenanting communities. Children's worship stories draw from UU heritage and from wisdom of other religions. Direct experience of mystery and wonder is a goal of both worship and small groups.

Older children ages 11–13 assist in leading as well as attending children's worship. They also take field trips to visit other faith communities, and they engage in social action projects.

### *Milestones and Rituals*

At the end of grade 5 (or its equivalent, for home-schoolers), there is a ceremony to give each child a copy of the UUA Principles and Sources and to mark their entry into the Junior Youth Group.

## **Third Task: Thinking About Oneself and One's Faith**

### *Who?*

Youth ages 12–15, who have been part of the faith community for some time

Note: People may continue with this task for many years, into and through adulthood!

### *Faith Stage*

Discernment:

- Who one is as a religious individual
- Who one is as part of a faith community
- Who one is as a religious person in the wider world

### *Content*

Youth continue learning the stories and wisdom of the faith tradition. They also participate in a comprehensive, UU values-based, sexuality education program. In every aspect of the program, the process of *discernment* takes priority.

### *How?*

Eighth graders (or the equivalent, for home-schoolers) continue with the Sunday morning program, assist with Sunday worship, and participate in small group activities and field

trips. In the spring, eighth graders participate in Our Whole Lives, the UU comprehensive sexuality education program.

Ninth graders (or the equivalent, for home-schoolers) participate in a mentored Coming of Age program, wherein they explicitly engage in a discernment process about their own faith and collect a spiritual tool kit to help them with Task Four. Ninth graders become members of the Senior Youth Group.

#### *Milestones and Rituals*

There is a ceremony and party at the end of OWL.

There is a ceremony marking the transition from the Junior to the Senior Youth Group.

There is a Coming of Age ceremony at the completion of the program, during which the youth declare their willingness to take responsibility for their own spiritual well-being. A meditation manual or other suitable book is given as a gift from the parish.

### **Fourth Task: Deeper Reflection, Testing of Faith Through Life's Challenges**

#### *Who?*

Youth age 15 or older, through adulthood

#### *Faith Stage*

Personally chosen faith

#### *Content*

Theological reflection: The youth think about living religiously and acting on religious beliefs and feelings. There is a need to find words (metaphors) to talk about faith.

#### *How?*

Through the Senior Youth Group, Sunday worship, and personal spiritual practice, and involvement with the wider congregation (through the Youth-Adult Committee and other committees and groups), the wider Unitarian Universalist Association (through district and national activities), and the wider world (through social justice projects).

#### *Milestones and Rituals*

At the end of high school or upon reaching age 18, there is a Bridging from Youth to Young Adulthood ceremony.