



# UUA Pastoral Care to and with Youth

## December 2016 Webinar Notes

Welcome. This is the fourth webinar in the Youth Ministry Training Series: Pastoral Care to and With Youth, Thank you so much for taking part. Now, don't worry about furiously taking notes, the recording, slides and notes will be available for you afterwards.

### Presenters:

Jennica Davis-Hockett, Leadership Development Associate, UUA's Youth and YA Ministries Office: Run programs like Summer Seminary, Luminary Leaders and Youth Caucus @GA and do curriculum development like Bringing the Web to Life.

Nancy Combs-Morgan, Faith Development Program Manager, MidAmerica Region of the UUA

Kim Sweeney is our technical support tonight.

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### Chalice Lighting

A Prayer, by Frederick Gillis

From many places and conditions of the spirit we come seeking a center for our lives, a sense of wholeness.

From dry places where the words and knowledge seem broken, into brittle fragments that do not cohere –

From overfilled places where information abounds,

But there is no real understanding –

From hard places where feelings are dulled,

And lonely, hollow places where meanings seem empty.

In this caring and supportive community,

Filled with the spirit that flows in and among us and throughout the world...

Enable us to find that power that already lies within us –

Power for love, for creativity, for hope.

Open our eyes to the possibilities of love and sustenance

That already surround and uphold us...

May our hearts be open to compassion,

(and) Our minds open to wisdom.

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### Introduce Yourself

You've heard a little about who we are and now we'd love to know more about you. We have so many people tonight from all over, I'd love for you to write in the chat box where you're calling in from, your role and how many people you're watching with.

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### Vision

Let us share a vision of UU youth ministry to help create spirit filled communities of care, covenant, consent, and creativity



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Unitarian Universalist youth and adult leaders care deeply for one another, and place a great importance on the deep connections made in our congregations and at regional and national gatherings.

Throughout the Unitarian Universalist Association of congregations, there is intentionality to ensure that all youth and adults have safe and inclusive experiences.

To be inclusive, we must share a goal of creating *communities of care*, which are mindful of pastoral care.

Pastoral care begins with an openness of heart; a faith that calls each of us to care for all beings, and a willingness to be attuned to one's self and others.

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### Defining Pastoral Care

The core task of all pastoral care is enabling spiritual healing and growth. Do you have to be a minister to provide pastoral care? Do you have to be suffering greatly to receive pastoral care? No. Pastoral care is sort of like making music. Yes there are skilled professionals and there is definitely a realm of complexity that should be left to them. But everyone can be healed by listening to or making music.

Like music, pastoral care can be an instrument of healing and growth, by helping to develop what is most difficult to achieve – depth in relationships. When we care deeply for each other in spiritual community we begin to build community sustaining relationships. Is that not a truly a radical act in an age of distraction, individualism and isolation?

At the core of true, compassionate, pastoral care is a kind of listening... (a) relational attentiveness\*\* Pastoral care requires of us a willingness to truly hear/see one another. Have you ever heard that quote by Norwegian poet Arne Garborg “To love a person is to learn the song that is in their heart and to sing it to them when they have forgotten.”?

Being pastoral means responding with sensitive awareness, and as faith based people we are called to sensitively respond\*\* To be pastoral does not mean to have answers, simply to have awareness. To be aware, to witness disorientation, isolation, broken heartedness, as well as joy, celebration and transition is a great gift.

Pastoral care is to be “with” another *in* relationship – sharing both beauty and tragedy, joy and sorrow, hope and despair.\*\* Pastoral care is the spiritual practice of engaging fully in the depth and breadth of human experience as it is, not as we hope it would be.



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It (contains) celebrating and comforting, laughing and crying together. But most often it is simply waiting and listening.\*\* Pastoral care is often an art of relaxing your grip on outcome and releasing control.

Because we are continually striving to be radically inclusive multicultural and anti-racist communities and welcoming communities for our LGBTQ+ siblings, our pastoral care must reflect that. Our congregations are the most likely places we can care for the spiritual lives of our young people, inclusive of all their identities.

This Trump presidency has already reminded us that LGBT, queer and questioning youth and young adults can face homophobia and transphobia because of their gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation. Our pastoral care must affirm sexuality as a healthy part of human development, support a critical perspective on media images of sexuality, gender roles, and body image and encourage young people to develop a healthy self-image.

Youth and young adults of color can face racism and exoticism because of their race or ethnicity. Our pastoral care must support youth and young adults of color by acknowledging the pain caused by interpersonal and institutional racism, providing tools to explore racial and ethnic identity, encouraging community building with other youth and young adults of color, seeking role models for youth and young adults of color who need them and respecting the importance of every person's racial and ethnic heritage.

Our pastoral care needs to also tend to the spiritual needs of youth and young adults who benefit from systems of oppression, helping them to recognize their privilege, process their emotions, and know that the beloved community embraces them.

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## Elements of Providing Pastoral Care

1)Empathy: the ability to actually feel what others feel. Through mirror neurons, we are biologically predisposed to be empathetic creatures. Think of me biting into a big juicy lemon. What happens in your mouth as you think of me eating a lemon? That is empathy.

2)Clarification: to be truly empathetic, we must ask clarifying questions to ensure we're clear on what another is feeling, not what we think they're feeling. Clarification also helps the other tune into themselves.

3)Silence: In our daily experience we're often comfortable with noise, which can be a tool for distraction. When we take the distraction away and revel in silence, even if it's uncomfortable, surprising truths may be revealed.

Slide – Grey



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## Elements of Providing Pastoral Care, cont.

4) Confrontation: Sometimes pastoral care takes the form of shining a light on what we'd rather not see. Naming the things we may be afraid to name because it might incite conflict can actually begin a healing process.

5) Support/Comfort: Notice that the quote "god never gives you anything you can't handle" does not include the phrase "by yourself." Sometimes we each need buttressing or buoying.

6) Guidance/Sustenance\*: While pastoral care is not about fixing or solving, it can be about providing perspective when one cannot see the forest for the trees.

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## Introducing idea of Communities Care/Radical Hospitality

Weekly in our congregations the echoing themes of welcome and warm hospitality are lifted up, so that all feel truly welcomed.

As Unitarian Universalists we seek to create environments and experiences where those who are treated unfairly in any other context can feel welcomed without fear.

For all youth and adults to feel truly welcomed, we must insure that all our rituals and practices are welcoming, inclusive, and mindful of personal boundaries.

Being conscious of neuro-diversity, physical ability, gender expression and cultural differences. And actively seeking input and evolving based on feedback from people of all ages who experience oppression or are distressed.

Slide – YA reception

Platinum Rule: being inclusive in the ways people WANT to be included and mindful of personal boundaries.

Culture of consent

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## Starting with Covenant

The foundation of communities of care is covenant. \*It's important to build and maintain a thoughtful covenant. Creating, continually lifting up and repairing your covenant is the way we practice an ethic of caring for one another in community. The covenant should include a review of confidentiality including what information should stay confidential, what will need to be shared with the DRE or minister and how to share what you learn from other people's stories. Hopefully, your covenant will include wisdom of how we can care for ourselves and others.

Often times we use covenants as a list of do's and don'ts or behavior guidelines. Adolescents are developmentally tuned to thriving within concrete boundaries so rules are good, but covenants are not about rules. \*Covenants that feel as if they are about rules or rule breaking, do not embody the covenantal purpose.



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Using the metaphor of the road as our spiritual journey together: youth do need traffic lights/rules to keep them safe, but this is also a great time developmentally to help them practice their agency to enter into agreements willingly about looking beyond oneself towards the health of the community as a whole. Covenants are like the trees lining the road. They shape our path and point towards the horizon. Covenants are living agreements of how we care for one another, which puts the greater good of the community as the primary purpose.

In the new Bringing the Web to Life curriculum by the office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries, there is an hour long session on creating covenant together. This workshop can be done with a small group, or with some modifications that I could show you, with a group of 100 plus youth and adults. Basically participants form small groups and discuss their answer to one of a series of questions, and from this the collective covenant is built. The questions move the covenant away from a list of rules towards aspirations for how we want to care for each other.

Now, given the maturity level of the group, adult input may be needed to help youth get to the heart of these questions. For example, on "how do we make amends?" youth may need some prompting to think beyond "we'll take it on a case by case basis." For some groups who are familiar and well versed in the particular cultural elements that usually make it onto a covenant like "take space/make space", staying aspirational works well. For youth who are new to UU youth culture, or for youth who like to push those grey areas of boundaries, it would be worth going back through the statements they write and actually coming up with the concrete behaviors that reflect the aspirational statements.

We call our covenants living documents, but sometimes they get a little dusty if there is no one actually assigned to call us back to it frequently\* Consider creating a youth group lay pastoral "share the care" team that could be the covenant minders, bringing up intermittently, asking "How are we doing on our covenant?"

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### Rituals and Traditions for Youth Groups

\* Practice generous hospitality. When youth are visiting for the first, second, or third time make sure that one or two youth leaders are ready to be "youth group greeters." They hopefully will model the group learning their name and express hope to see them again. \*

Maintain or institute the practice of introductions which *invite* youth and adults to share their preferred personal pronouns;

\* Introduce "Community Attention" as a process of being a community of care. The youth advisors, with the lay pastoral care team, could introduce and attend to the community attention envelope/box/folder. This is a powerful method of taking



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the pulse beat of the group, and allows voices who would not share otherwise to name something which is laying joyously or heavily upon their hearts.

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### Rituals and Traditions beyond Youth Groups

Rituals and traditions can reach beyond youth group as well.

Our congregations/communities are some of the few places left in our culture where mutually respectful and beneficial multigenerational relationships can thrive. Even though youth and young adults may not be official members of the congregation, pastoral care teams should consider them as part of their ministry to the church. There are many reasons youth or young adults may not be members including inability to contribute financially or not knowing where they'll be in a year or two. These things should not be a barrier to belonging to a caring community.

Think about the last time youth and adults in your congregation interacted with one another. My guess is that most of you thought of a time when the youth were 'on stage,' performing a task like clean up, or asking for money for a fundraiser. This is not uncommon. But, multigenerational relationships are not built when we perform for each other or through financial transactions. Relationships are built when we care for one another. There are plenty ways to create non-transactional, lower-risk relationships between generations that respect the developmental stage of youth:

If the pastoral care team is to think of youth as part of their ministry, they could gather photos of the youth (with their parents' and their consent) and comment cards written by the youth with statements about something big happening in their life currently (perhaps a big test, a new job or a breakup). Spend 10 minutes in a pastoral care meeting praying for or meditating on the youth in the photos, praying for them in their time of success or trial.

Early and late adolescence is a time of a lot of stress with pressure to succeed and many transitions. Send care packages to youth and young adults during finals, in their first year of college or a new job to let them know even if they're not able to attend on Sundays, that you still care about them.

Change the narrative for bridging youth from one of "good luck, it was great to have you" to one that honors the continued, if new, relationship youth will have with their congregation after they bridge out of youth group. Ask congregants to write notes of encouragement to give as a gift to bridging youth.

Since youth and young adults are more likely to be without a car, include them in the ride-offering network just as you would elders who are unable to drive. You'll



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have to have a conversation with your leadership team about how offering rides to minors fits with your safe congregation policies.

Young people can also offer care. They can participate in pastoral care networks in meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways by signing birthday or condolence cards that the pastoral care team sends to members which helps them gain perspective that adolescence is not the only time in life we face transitions.

Young people can offer their services for members who are moving or otherwise need help around the home (while being mindful of your safe congregations policies). Cooking meals or go grocery shopping for congregants who are sick or otherwise unable to cook or shop for themselves. As UUs we sometimes focus our attention on the needs of people beyond our community, forgetting that within our own walls some of us are in need of extra care.

Interviewing elders, so they can share their life stories. There is a great [Congregational History Project \(PDF\)](#) that I can put in the resource list I'll send out after the webinar that you can use for this.

Multigenerational pastoral care takes considerable relationship building: lay leaders will need to get to know the youth that are now part of their ministry. It would also take some tweaking to the system so that the ministry is more inclusive. For example, if a youth wants to serve on the care team but the team meets at noon on Tuesdays and only coordinates via email, that may be too many barriers for a youth to overcome.

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## Practical Skill Building

\*Early in the year, find out which youth are particularly interested in expanding their pastoral care skills. Send youth and adults to a regional/district Youth Chaplaincy Training, who will then come back and share their lay pastoral care skills.

\*Throughout the year those designated folks can keep a pastoral care awareness for the youth group; who understand they are working in a team approach with the youth advisors and DRE.

\*Have a youth group session on the importance of maintaining healthy self-awareness and boundaries. Share the example of asking "consent" around hugging.

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## Practical Skill Building

Youth can learn, practice and teach active listening skills in Session 5 of the Bringing the Web to Life Curriculum. Understanding and using nonverbal communication - silence, body language, eyes, facial expressions, space, vocal



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volume and tone to show compassion and understanding come naturally to some, but not all folks. Teaching and practicing active listening skills can be especially helpful for youth with autism or Asperger's and for neurotypical youth who care about their peers who are neurologically different from them.

That Active listening session teaches skills like Paraphrasing, synthesizing and asking probing questions to help youth practice the clarification and confrontation elements of pastoral care. Youth often tell me what a relief it is to learn that pastoral care is not about fixing or solving another's problems, but about being present with them.

As you as an adult practice active listening, you will also need to be mindful of the things you hear that you will want to share with the rest of your leadership team.

The truth is, youth may encounter difficult or crisis situations with their friends or peers whether or not they are ready to handle it. Youth need developmentally appropriate crisis management skills. Sometimes 'just listening' is not the appropriate response, sometimes 'just listening' may be too hard to do. Talk with youth and help them know who to go to when a peer tells them they are being harmed or harming themselves. Help them understand the difference between keeping confidentiality and keeping a toxic secret.

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### Attending to Warning Signs

When we create safe space, we don't know what will be invoked. And youth, just like people of all ages, deal with grief, loss, stress, transition, addiction and loneliness.

Using a team approach, be sure to talk with other advisors/DRE/minister when youth demonstrate these signs:

\*Dramatic change in emotional state

\*Begin to give away possessions

\*Intentionally connect with other youth who have a pattern of significant behavioral health issues, particularly suicidal ideation

\*Indicate high levels of stress

\*Signs of physically withdrawing, or clothing to intentionally cover up



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“Plan tight and lead loose” Create a plan to prepare for when things go deeper than you’d anticipated. You don’t have to force depth, but don’t get caught unprepared

\*Never hesitate to "check in" with youth, if your gut instinct says that something is amiss, follow that instinct, but first talk it over with other adults

\*Do not take responsibility for other people's problems; remember that a caring response is not one where you are taking responsibility for other people's problems

\*Stick with the here and now, you are not there to delve deeply into the past, but to be aware if a professional response is indicated;

\*Deal with feelings first -- sometimes in a helpful mode the inclination is to solve problems, but you are there to listen and to help them evaluate their options and steps going forward

While youth advisors may be the first responders to youth in crisis having a direct relationship with the minister and other adults plays a vital role in keeping teens and young adults in our churches safe and cared for.

YM Teams should make explicit what are the boundaries and limitations of advisor/youth pastoral conversations (based on the job description of the advisor and their skill level)

How does the advisor and DRE create regularity around checking in about the pastoral needs of the group?

How does the YM team involve family support for pastoral needs, knowing that sometimes the issue is family relationships?

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Questions?

I’m sure this has brought up a lot for you, we’d love to answer any questions this has raised. Just type them in the chat box and Kim will share them with us.

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Discussion/Reflection Questions

In the spectrum of neuro-diversity, there is a wide range of reactions to what for some may be a fun and engaging practice.

Some practices from our rich YRUU history in Unitarian Universalism, and especially fellowship activities which evolved from “Deep Fun,” (the text which for years has been the source of many youth activities practices), such as phuufing



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and wink, have been experienced by some youth as profoundly anxiety producing..)

“How does your youth group keep the lens of neuro-diversity focused in your welcoming games and activities?”

“Does your youth advising team share the practice of meeting with your DRE/Minister to talk through any pastoral care concerns?”

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## Next Steps

This may all be quite overwhelming, but you don't have to change everything overnight. I would urge you to pick one thing that spoke to you in this webinar, or one thing from this list that you can experiment with and make it your own.

Think about just one one-hour session, perhaps from this list, that you can commit to facilitating in the new year to strengthen your community of care.

## Resources

This is by no means a compressive list and in fact we'll send you a PDF with more resources in the next few days.

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## Closing Reading

By Darcy Roake [uua.org/worship](http://uua.org/worship)

There is too much hardship in this world to not find joy,  
every day

There is too much injustice in this world to not right the balance,  
every day

There is too much pain in this world to not heal,  
every day

Each of us ministers to a weary world.

Let us go forth now and do that which calls us to make this world  
more loving, more compassionate and more filled with the grace of divine  
presence,  
every day