

# **Ministry With Youth Renaissance Module**

## **Reader Packet**

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# **Reader 3-1: Youth Empowerment: Unitarian Universalist Guiding Principles**

## **ATTRIBUTION**

From the Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth Summary Report (UUA, 2007).

## **TEXT**

Youth empowerment is both a goal and a practice that has intrinsic merit for each of us in our ethical and spiritual lives. The practice of fostering youth empowerment varies by context. In congregations, youth empowerment practice depends on the geography, culture, history, and structure of the congregation. Youth empowerment and youth leadership development reinforce one another – calling for our personal and community commitment to right relationship between youth and adults. Across diverse contexts, the principles of youth empowerment remain the same, but the details of its practice must address the particular needs of each community.

The task of youth empowerment is not to make our congregations safe for youth or to determine authority within Unitarian Universalist institutions. These are the responsibility of our shared faith community. If covenant is the backbone of our faith, youth empowerment is one vertebra among many. In order for individuals, groups, and communities to determine the structural barriers to youth empowerment and enact the practices in which youth empowerment might be fully realized, we must first define a philosophy of youth empowerment grounded in our Unitarian Universalist principles.

Youth empowerment is a covenantal practice in which youth are safe, recognized, and affirmed as full and vital participants in the life of our shared Unitarian Universalist faith community. This covenantal practice is based on the following set of guiding principles:

- Love and trust between youth and adults, between youth and youth, and between adults and adults,
- Mentoring relationships among children, youth, and adults, which draw from direct experience and wisdom,

- The development of youth confidence and self-identity through building community, learning to use their voices effectively, and realizing a more robust expression of themselves,
- Encouragement for all to grow together in accountability,
- Youth defining their issues and participating in the decisions that affect their lives and impact their communities,
- Youth and adults having access to information through direct and honest communication expressed with grace, humility, and respect,
- Trust in the competence of youth skills and insights,
- Appreciation of the prophetic wisdom and energy of youth to be agents of social change, justice, and service,
- The recognition that youth ministry is an integral Unitarian Universalist ministry and part of our collective past, present, and future.

# **Reader 3-2: Looking to Our Past to Find Our Future: Foundations of Unitarian Universalist Youth Ministry**

## **ATTRIBUTION**

By Tera Little (2005); used with permission.

## **TEXT**

“Youth empowerment is ... about building the courage to announce to the world what is right and what is wrong.” Anonymous youth (UUA Youth Office, 2001)

“Youth empowerment is ... providing youth a chance to participate in the discussions that impact their own experiences.” Anonymous youth (UUA Youth Office, 2001)

Our Unitarian Universalist youth group meeting rooms are filled with it. So are district and continental youth conferences, events and meetings. Youth Empowerment is the foundational philosophy of our youth ministries for ages 14-20. But if you ask ten or twenty or one hundred people the definition of youth empowerment, you are just as likely to receive that many differing answers. Considering the theological diversity in our congregations, that may not be surprising, but it is necessary for our adult and youth leaders to have a similar grounding in the foundation of the reason we do youth ministry the way we do it if they are to effectively minister to and with one another and pass along the torch of our faith. There are three essential elements within youth empowerment: freedom with responsibility, leadership development, and the free and responsible search for truth and meaning. This is not to say that other fundamentals are not existent in our youth ministry programs, things like deepening spirituality and caring for one another, and obviously those are crucial within any ministry; however, they exist in ministries that do not also claim youth empowerment as a building block. This paper will trace some of the theological beliefs from early Unitarians in order to see the solid ground on which our theology of youth empowerment stands so that we might better look ahead to our future.

Since its birth in 1982 with Common Ground, a continental-wide two-year process that examined the then-current structure of Unitarian Universalist youth ministry, Liberal Religious Youth, Young Religious Unitarian Universalists (YRUU) have heralded youth empowerment as fundamental to youth ministry and that belief is at the core of continental and district trainings in leadership, spirituality, and social action. It is important to note that youth empowerment does not equal adult abandonment or adult disempowerment. As its simplest, youth empowerment means youth and adults working together in partnership, within established boundaries, to accomplish mutually agreed upon goals. As of this date, there is no published definition within our movement about what youth empowerment means to us or how to effectively live it out within our churches; hence, the confusion that often abounds when it comes to doing youth work. However, a goal of the Consultation on Ministry to and with Youth, a major initiative of President Bill Sinkford and the UUA Board of Trustees, is to come away with a definition as part of the two-year process of re-examining and re-visioning youth ministry services to our congregations.

So, how did we get to youth empowerment? One can look to William Ellery Channing and find direct links to our current belief system. When he publicly gave his sermon “Self-Culture” in 1838 as part of the Franklin Lectures in Boston, Channing used this as an opportunity to speak directly to trades people, regular folk who might not otherwise be in a place to hear his ideas (Channing, 1838). Even this simple act of preparing words meant for manual laborers is relevant in the exploration of youth ministry; never will you hear of someone stating that our youth ministry programs are too complex or intellectual for some youth to attend. The goal is a creation of a youth program that garners the maximum participation of every person, regardless of intellectual or economic background.

In “Self-Culture,” Channing is arguing that people do have the power to shape themselves, and a belief in God demands that each person takes the time for self-betterment. This was among the more radical ideas of his time and was in direct opposition to the Calvinistic view of pre-determination. It required personal responsibility (the freedom with responsibility in youth empowerment) and assumed that each person has the right to a free and responsible search for truth and meaning (again, a tenant of youth empowerment). Channing states, “One of the chief arts of self-culture is to unite the childlike teachableness, which gratefully welcomes light from every human being who can give it...” (Channing, 1838). In our youth ministry programs, each young

person is seen as having wisdom and truth, and with youth empowerment each person's voice is drawn into the collective in order to achieve a greater understanding of the topic at hand, whether it is local politics, world religions, human sexuality, spirituality, or the myriad of topics in between. There can be no greater learning at times than the simple truths spoken by our young people. When they are in a safe space, in which they know their opinions and viewpoints are honored and celebrated, they are able to reach great depths on complex topics and their lights shine on each other.

The use of the democratic process also figured heavily into the realization of Channing's self-culture. He notes that self-culture is found "in our free government, in our political relations and duties ... they do much to awaken and keep in action a nation's mind, ... (and) a republic is a powerful means of educating the multitude (Channing, 1838). Freedom with responsibility and leadership development in youth ministry programs connect here with his thought. While there are parameters set by adult advisors, youth are given the amazing challenge of making decisions and creating programming for each other. In order to accomplish this they must learn appropriate skills such as meeting facilitation, decision-making processes, avenues toward building community, and use of rituals. In 1997, a young man from our youth group who was 16 years old, traveled east to Washington D.C. to participate in a national Social Justice Youth Conference. The whole congregation was excited about his participation, and they had given money and encouragement for his trip. Upon his return, the young man, Gavin, exclaimed, "I feel like I can move mountains now!" (Gavin Smith, personal communication, March 1997). He had experienced the power of being part of the political process, of having his voice heard, of understanding how our governmental structures function and the ways in which citizens can voice their opinion and organize for social change. In our churches, our youth are given a microcosm of that experience when they are encouraged to become members of the congregation, hold a seat on the Board or religious education or some other committee, when they actively engage in church meetings, and when they are given control of their own monetary budgets. The words of Channing ring out clearly from the pages of our hymnal, "The great end of religious education ... is not to make them see with our eyes, but to look inquiringly and steadily with their own" (Unitarian Universalist Association, 1993). Our philosophy of youth empowerment demands that youth do just that, and the job of the adult advisors is to give them the tools and support necessary to do that, while maintaining the appropriate boundaries and giving redirection as needed.

There has been commentary in recent years that congregations “ghettoize” their youth groups when the youth do not participate in adult worship services. There is great value in the entire church community - children, youth, young adults, families, singles, and elders - worshipping and touching the divine together. It is also important to worship together within peer groups, which helps give shape to what Channing called “free spiritual powers” of human beings, that ability to nurture and bring forth the sacred from within to touch the holy (Channing, 1838). Each age group is at a different stage along the path in faith development, and as such worship experiences will hold a different meaning and vitality depending upon the age group and worship style. An area that needs to be strengthened in many youth groups is the worship element, and more time and training needs to be given to this because it is through worship that some of the most powerful searches for truth and meaning can take place. Through the quiet of meditation, or through joyful expressions of dance in youth worship, young people can connect with the divine and with each other in ways that bring out the power from within and create personal transformation. Without giving form and substance to the spiritual self then a full realization of one’s self culture cannot take place.

The inner light continued to shine brightly when Emerson wrote these words in his famous essay, *Self Reliance*: “Nothing is sacred except the integrity of your own mind” (Emerson, 1841). Again, here we see the early identification of our building blocks of freedom with responsibility and our search for truth and meaning. If the most sacred is the integrity of individual minds, then it stands to reason we would put much effort and importance in developing the minds of our young people and entrusting in them decisions crucial to their programs, in accordance to where the young people are developmentally. With a younger youth group, more direction is needed on the part of the adult advisors, and as the youth group grows older and has more experience in leading programs, the advisors can step back into more supportive roles. Learning leadership skills and practicing them on a weekly basis is great exercise for the mind, and the leadership skills learned in our youth groups have a lifelong impact. Marissa Gutierrez, a former Pacific Southwest District youth leader and current employee of the Unitarian Universalist Association, shared that she took the skills she learned in youth group into a volunteer coordinator position at the University of Southern California. While there, she worked with an adult advisor who exemplified, in her eyes, an adult modeling youth empowerment. On one of their projects together, he would affirm what she was doing right, and gently redirect her in areas that needed more attention. Afterwards,

Marissa realized she was able to head up a complicated project and carry it out to the end, and if she could do it there she could do it anywhere, throughout her life (Marissa Gutierrez, personal communication, December 2005). Those are the sacred skills that get continual playback in one's lifetime. In Gavin's words, it is the realization that mountains can be moved (Smith, 1997).

Clearly, our current model of youth ministry is built on a firm theological foundation, a gift from Channing and Emerson that lives on. What, if anything, does this say about our future? Does it mean our youth ministry is static or unchanging? It means that with our solid ground, we are free to explore deeper meanings and iterations of youth empowerment. We must be diligent and ensure our youth ministry programs are places where dialogue and learning take place, they cannot only be a comfortable room in which to hang out during the church service. It means that to realize the self culture and self reliance encouraged by Channing and Emerson, respectively, the adults and youth leaders take on roles of pushing the comfort areas of the youth enabling them to grow and expand. Jesse Jaeger, UUA Youth Programs Director, tells of two young women in leadership positions, both of whom did not come into the position with strong facilitation skills. By the end of their first year, through direction and experience, these two came to be the co-facilitators for one of the most complicated national youth discussions in recent years, whether or not to instigate a Common Ground III. These young women, in the midst of a passionate, potentially explosive, conversation among forty-plus youth leaders, as Jesse put it "centered the volcano of emotion." (Jesse Jaeger, personal communication, December 2005). They moved a mountain, not just for them, but for a whole continent of Unitarian Universalist youth.

The future of our youth movement demands a cadre of well-trained, committed youth advisors who can do more than just open the door for youth on Sunday mornings, but who can be the stable partners in this ministry, who can help them reach Channing's goals of self-culture and Emerson's hope of self reliance by honoring each voice in the group, encouraging the free and responsible search for truth and meaning, giving freedom with responsibility, and teaching leadership skills and then stepping back and letting the youth use them. The future of this movement also depends upon religious professionals who can understand the unique characteristics of a vibrant youth ministry and who can

nurture the process rather than stand in its way. It is necessary if we are to completely honor the foundations of our youth ministry.

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# Reader 4-1: Supporting Adolescent Development

## ATTRIBUTION

By Tracey Hurd, published in *Nurturing Children and Youth: A Developmental Guidebook* (Boston, MA: UUA, 2005).

## TEXT

### The Young Adolescent *Ages Twelve through Fifteen*

“When I found out that my parents were getting a divorce, I picked up the phone and called my three best friends. I had to let them know; they are the ones who are really important.”

#### **Physical Development**

Early adolescence is a peak time of growth and physical development. Marked by the onset of puberty, the adolescent’s body changes dramatically. Hormonal changes usher in physical, sexual, and psychological growth. This period is characterized by an increased need for food and sleep. The early-rising child now sleeps late. By age fourteen many girls have reached full physical maturity, while most boys are still growing rapidly. Caring for an evolving body and body image are critical tasks of early adolescence. Self-conscious, the early adolescent routinely compares herself to others. She is sensitive to media images of strength and beauty and can be at risk for eating disorders. While bulimia (binging and purging) and anorexia (severe appetite loss) are most often diagnosed in female youth, their prevalence in males is increasing.

Sometimes moody, the adolescent negotiates dramatic changes in his physical appearance, strength, coordination, and athletic abilities. At times it can be difficult to determine if adolescent moodiness is typical or indicative of any developing mental illness. Dramatic, sustained depression can indeed be cause for concern. If a youth withdraws from family and friends, he may benefit from intervention to bolster and support his developing sense of self. Early adolescence can also be a time when youth are exposed to drugs and alcohol. Honest conversation and guidance about addictive substances support youth in current and future decision making. Research demonstrates that youth want to talk with their caregivers about these issues.

Young adolescents engaged in extracurricular activities are less likely to engage in early risk behaviors. All adolescents have the capacity to meet challenges and passionately engage in a multifaceted life; providing opportunities to do so is the task of supporting adults.

The early adolescent also needs support for his physical development and provisions for his developing body. He needs privacy and sustained, enduring love,

despite any difficult or oppositional behavior. Food, regular exercise, involvement in various activities, and social belonging bolster his self-esteem. Like everyone, he needs respect and care.

### **Cognitive Development**

The early adolescent's thinking is no longer tied only to the concrete world; she is beginning to engage in abstract and hypothetical thinking. Developmental psychologist Jean Piaget calls this the start of formal operations, marked by an ability to think about thinking. With logical reasoning skills in place, the young adolescent can now ponder cause and effect. She enjoys mental problems that involve balancing more than one idea. With mental operations ready to help her classify, store, and remember information, the early adolescent is a facile learner who can both take in and make her own sense of large amounts of information. Practicing thinking skills, she engages in argument, even sarcasm, based on deductive reasoning.

New intellectual acuity combines with preoccupation with the self, resulting in increased adolescent concern about what others might be thinking about him. According to psychologist David Elkind, the adolescent lives as if he has an imaginary audience. He is highly conscious of himself and feels like no one could ever quite understand him. He uses his intellectual skills to challenge assumptions he notices in the adult world; he can be brazen in these challenges.

During these years particular intellectual strengths, or intelligences, may become evident. Psychologist Howard Gardner argues that there are nine intelligences: linguistic (word-smart), logical-mathematical (number-smart), spatial (design-smart), bodily kinesthetic (body/movement-smart), musical (music-smart), interpersonal (people-smart), intrapersonal (self-smart), naturalist (nature-smart), and existential ("big questions"-smart). Adolescents are ready to understand their own and others' intellectual strengths, and multiple intelligence theory often affirms what they already know. "That girl is a biology whiz, but she totally blew that oral report because she's so bad at talking about it," comments an adolescent.

### **Social and Affective Development**

During early adolescence, social relationships with peers are of great importance. The adolescent spends increased time with her friends and begins to build her identity through what she shares with them. Interested in sports or music or skateboarding, the young adolescent actively engages with others; this becomes a currency of friendship. Mutual self-disclosure, reflecting, and sharing thoughts creates new intimacy for friends. In his psychological research, Henry Stack Sullivan found that the close same-sex "chumships" of early adolescence provide foundational skills for later intimate friendships. During early adolescence, girls' social networks of friendship usually increase in size, while boys' networks decrease.

According to psychologist Willard Hartup, the amount of time spent with friends is greatest during middle childhood and early adolescence. He estimates that teens spend almost a third of their time with friends. Friendships and peers provide both support and stress for the young adolescent. Able to observe and critically evaluate, he constantly

compares himself with others. While he has a much deeper capacity for compassion than he did when he was younger, he also has the capacity to use social information for both inclusion and exclusion. Peer pressures emerge. In the pursuit of acceptance, the early adolescent may change his appearance or engage in new behaviors. He may work hard to reconcile his inner self with his outer, social self. He needs role models to nurture his ethic of care, for himself and for others. He needs to learn how to engage in responsible social decision making.

The young adolescent is continually exploring his identities. Gender identity and the beginnings of sexual attractions are central, as are racial and ethnic identities. Youth learn to express emotions in ways congruent with their identities, sometimes resulting in differences between what they feel and what they express. Psychologist Stephanie Shields notes that by adolescence, boys and girls know there are expectations for them to show and hide anger, respectively. Expressing emotions is part of expressing identity.

Scripts for socially correct emotional expression are also embedded in race and ethnicity. This can be a particularly sensitive time for transracially adopted, multiracial, or multiethnic adolescents. Navigating multiple identities, they may feel the need to choose with whom they will identify. They are often called on to be much more intentional than monoracial or monoethnic peers, for whom the choice of role models seems preset.

Youth learn social scripts—embedded in contexts of race, ethnicity, and class—about what it means to be a sexual person. Two youth of the same ethnicity may be socialized with very different cultural messages about maleness, femaleness, and sexuality, based on where they are raised (urban, suburban, or rural environments), their caregivers' backgrounds, their economic context, and other variables. The young adolescent negotiates messages about how to express sexuality from family, peers, culture, and the community.

Sexuality is linked with power in much of the media that surrounds American youth. Sexuality researcher Deborah Tolman asserts that girls often get the mixed message that it is powerful to be a sexual object but unacceptable to have their own sexual desires. Such messages don't serve any gender well. Additionally, most dominant sexual scripts assume heterosexuality. Youth may feel pressured to claim heterosexuality before they have sexual stirrings or in opposition to their bodily impulses. Alternative social messages from family and church communities can affirm broader, more accepting perspectives on sexuality. Parental support, communication, and monitoring are consistently correlated with reduced at-risk sexual behavior in youth. As adolescents search for their identities, family members remain primary influences.

Racial and ethnic identity development are similarly influenced by the many contexts in which youth move and function. Psychologist Beverly Daniel Tatum explains that youth of color think about themselves in terms of race because that is how the rest of the world thinks of them. They may even enact racial stereotypes in the process of coming to racial identity. All youth absorb racist messages. Although such messages do not support healthy identity development, they may influence behaviors. Early adolescence is the time when youth seek to be with others who seem like themselves, a challenge for youth who are under-represented in many Unitarian Universalist

congregations. Identifying with others is critical, and the process may seem frenetic in youth. This is part of the path to later, more individuated identity.

Researcher Donna Jackson Nakazawa finds that in the process of identifying who they are, multiethnic and multiracial adolescents are likely to reject all that they are not. Multiracial youth often report feeling that they must choose one racial identity in order to fit in somewhere. Sometimes this puts adolescents at odds with their siblings or families. When multiracial and multiethnic youth actively discuss racial and ethnic identities with their families, they are better equipped to negotiate these complexities with peers. They develop descriptive language that can counteract the limited labeling that dominates discussions of race and ethnicity. In addition, multiracial and multiethnic youth benefit deeply from communities rich in a diversity of races and ethnicities.

White adolescents who have not lived with racial diversity may enter adolescence without even considering their racial identity or white privilege. They may need to learn that “seeing color” is a step toward claiming their racial identity and becoming antiracist. Youth need to have white privilege named and explored. Reflecting with white adolescents about what their racial identity means (for example, “When I go to the mall, I am not followed by clerks or security guards, though my peers of color are”) is an essential task. They need to encounter their whiteness as new. By exploring ethnic backgrounds, white youth learn more deeply about individual differences that are not always apparent.

All adolescents are best supported in their racial identity development by knowing diverse people in multiple contexts and engaging in sustained friendships and alliances across races and ethnicities, in addition to having strong role models to whom they can relate. Youth construct their identities based on their experiences. Although racial and ethnic identity may be a central organizing force in defining who the adolescent is at the moment, adolescence is a time of increasing complexity. Meaningful engagement with others nurtures appreciation of our inherent human diversity.

Engaging in multiple activities (sports teams, clubs, church activities, etc.) with different groups of peers serves as a buffer to stress associated with the adolescent’s emerging identity. Having several realms in which he can achieve broadens the adolescent’s self-critical lens. With increased cognitive capabilities, he develops an evaluative eye as well as a sense of humor and sarcasm. He finds his parents embarrassing and goofy as he imagines outsiders’ perspectives. Recent research has shown that adolescents still wish for parental attention and appreciation; they need to feel valued and taken seriously. Their emotions are fluid; they first say, “I can’t stand my family,” and then ask their families for advice or reassurance. The older adolescent works at reconciling conflicting feelings and identities.

### **Moral Development**

The adolescent’s ability to take the perspective of others deeply influences her moral and ethical perspectives. She is able to consider multiple perspectives on a situation, and she makes decisions accordingly. She navigates what she thinks based partly on her perception of what she imagines others will think. Her personal concern about social approval provides a basis for respecting social order. The early adolescent can often

have a law-and-order perspective that lends itself to the development of great respect for systems and agreements between people. In her personal realm, she may challenge authority, particularly her parents'. Yet when thinking through moral issues, the early adolescent can be enormously generous.

Through experiences of mutuality and increased connection to others, the early adolescent develops a large capacity for care and altruism. The adolescent is able to put his thinking about fairness into action. Encouraging (and even mandating) his community participation will help him create and hold the identity of a moral thinker and doer. He develops a sense of purpose to further his sense of being a part of community. This paves the way for commitment to moral and ethical ideals in later adolescence and complements his emerging interest in issues of justice in the wider world.

### **Faith Development**

Valuing connection to others and understanding multiple perspectives, the young adolescent may find new meaning in religious and faith communities. A sense of belonging is critical to the adolescent, and she now has the cognitive abilities to understand the moral underpinnings of a faith community. She may be drawn to the authority of a religion, particularly if it embodies her values. The creed, or lack of creed, of a religion may comfort or challenge the early adolescent who enjoys the neatness of moral order.

Faith researcher James Fowler believes the adolescent is ready to accept conventional notions of faith. The young adolescent wants to synthesize his values and faith can provide a framework for doing so. According to Fowler, adolescents yearn for coherence amid the complexity of their lives. Faith can offer a philosophical organizing rubric. In the Fowler's synthetic-conventional stage of faith development, the adolescent's spiritual growth may be nurtured by sustained involvement in a faith community that allows him to wrestle with religious questions and ideas. Working within a faith community deepens his spirituality and helps him find a larger narrative for his life. If the community allows for questioning, the adolescent will have the opportunity to move toward his own reasoning about faith and spirituality. Seeking love, understanding, loyalty, and support, the developing adolescent can both serve and be served by a faith community.

### **Characteristics of This Age**

- Transitions to an adult body
- Eats and sleeps more
- May demonstrate behaviors indicating risk of eating disorders or depression
- Seeks support for self-esteem and body image
- Engages in formal operational thinking, including abstract and hypothetical thinking
- Concentrates on the self and other's perceptions of the self
- Engages an imaginary audience, a mental representation of others watching
- Develops domain-specific intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily kinesthetic, musical, intrapersonal, interpersonal, naturalist, and existential
- Engages actively with peers and social relationships

- Participates in same-sex friendships, which are a foundation for later intimate relationships
- Takes on others' perspectives and understands that sharing perspectives doesn't necessarily mean agreement
- Demonstrates altruism and compassion
- Tries to reconcile the inner self with the outer self
- Explores gender, racial, and ethnic identities through affiliations
- Negotiates messages about sexuality from peers, communities, and family
- Achieves in several realms as a way to buffer stress
- Expresses criticism of self and others
- Shows concern with social approval
- Respects social order but sometimes challenges it as well
- Demonstrates interest in ethics of care and justice
- Seeks belonging and membership
- Expresses interest in religion that embodies values
- Enjoys presence or absence of religious creed
- Wants to develop a personal, although perhaps temporary, credo
- Sustains faith development by engaging with a community that allows questioning
- Enters Fowler's synthetic-conventional stage of faith development
- Seeks love, understanding, loyalty, and support

### **Ways to Offer Support**

- Provide for physical needs, including nutrition, body-care products, privacy, and affection.
- Support a critical perspective on media images of beauty and adulthood.
- Carefully monitor signs of depression or eating disorders.
- Promote healthy body image and self-esteem.
- Affirm and support the adolescent's many physical, emotional, and cognitive changes.
- Be flexible and responsive.
- Model respect.
- Provide opportunities for complex thinking and the pondering of big questions.
- Respect and take seriously the adolescent's self-consciousness.
- Recognize that challenging authority provides an outlet for new cognitive skills for the adolescent.
- Respect the adolescent's interest in peers.
- Maintain clear expectations so adolescents can make independent decisions.
- Afford autonomy within limits of safety.
- Be a sounding board for youth's exploration of ideas.
- Keep some routines or rituals that provide continuity from childhood to adulthood.
- Encourage involvement in multiple settings.
- Actively support the adolescent's exploration of racial and ethnic identity.
- Provide repeated, sustained opportunities for engagement with ethnically and racially diverse peers.
- Engage in honest, supportive talk about sexuality.

- Provide information and resources about healthy sexuality that affirm a range of sexualities and gender identities.
- Encourage participation in a faith or religious community.
- Provide outlets for questioning faith, religion, and creed.
- Facilitate youth's work in community.
- Celebrate the adolescent's change and continuity.
- Understand that vulnerabilities may be displayed in multiple ways, including anger and resistance.
- Have a sense of humor.
- Welcome each adolescent.

## The Middle Adolescent

### *Ages Fifteen through Eighteen*

“I was thinking about what Omari might be thinking about what Mary thinks about what Nina did, and I'm not sure what to think.”

#### **Physical Development**

Middle adolescence can be a time of continuing dramatic physical growth, particularly for males, for whom this can be a peak developmental period. Female adolescents usually complete physical growth within two years of reaching menarche, often between the ages of eleven and fifteen. All middle adolescents, however, grapple with the newness of their developing bodies and fully developing sexuality.

Learning about sexuality is a critical part of adolescence; feelings of gendered attraction and sexual orientation are often central to the adolescent. Conforming to societal ideals can be a pressure for youth, and those whose sexual orientation is conflicted or who are gay are at increased risk for psychological distress. All adolescents benefit from environments that accept sexuality as a healthy part of life and from adults who can offer guidance about safe, caring, and moral sexual behavior for youth.

Middle adolescence is also a time of increased exposure to alcohol and other drugs. Research has found correlations between early alcohol use and later alcoholism and between alcohol use and early sexual intercourse. Youth need honest conversation and clear guidelines about drug and alcohol use that emphasize health and personal responsibility.

Adolescence is a time of increased risk taking in all realms. This is an outgrowth of increased autonomy and the cognitive ability to reason and to consider possibilities. Often youth create what psychologist David Elkind describes as a “personal fable”: They see the possible risks associated with various behaviors and decide that because they are aware of those risks, they are immune to them. In this personal fable, the adolescent is the star who knows that “it will never happen to me.” Continued dialogue with and support from trusted adults can attenuate the personal fable. The responsible adult understands that risk taking can be part of adolescent behavior and accepts the challenge of providing guidance and limits to assure physical, social, and emotional health and safety.

## **Cognitive Development**

The middle adolescent has the ability to think deductively, inductively, conceptually, and hypothetically. According to developmental psychologist Jean Piaget, the adolescent has the capacity for formal operations—the ability to think through possibilities, to construct contrary-to-fact ideas, and to play with concepts and reasoning skills; she can now think about thinking. Psychologist and researcher David Elkind notes that the advent of formal operations can result in overthinking. Combining disparate facts to paint a picture, an adolescent argues, “Well the chance of being injured while driving a car is way higher than the chance of being hurt while skiing, and that’s much higher than the chance of being hurt skateboarding, so it’s actually safer for me to skateboard—even without a helmet—than to drive myself to school or go skiing with the family. It’s the safest thing I could do this weekend.”

During this period some middle adolescents engage in practices like keeping a diary or rereading emails that celebrate their new mindfulness about self. The middle adolescent also brings an analytical lens to his studies. He is able to consider possibilities and weigh information. His learning extends beyond knowing to reasoning. He can uncover themes and identify underlying principles. He becomes more interested in the broader world, often including politics and systems. Some middle adolescents become goal-directed and concerned about planning the future. Others become critical of aspects of the world around them, including their families. These are initiatives borne out of cognitive competence.

## **Social and Affective Development**

In middle adolescence the youth embarks on the task of claiming and defining identity. According to psychologist Erik Erikson, she tries to consolidate her identity before entering into the intimate relationships of early adulthood. Identity forms through relationships and through individual growth. In contrast, psychiatrist Jean Baker Miller asserts that the identity of being-in-relationship can be as important as individual identity; she contests Erikson’s notion that identity must be completely formed before intimacy can develop. The process of coming to identity is inherently social, and it is usually not resolved until early adulthood. During this time, youth are often highly engaged with peers and more distant from their caregivers. Friendships are of primary importance as youth try to form close, durable relationships outside the home. Psychologist Willard Hartup notes that in middle adolescence, girls’ social networks often become larger and boys’ become smaller. For all youth, there is a psychological tension between wanting to be independent and wanting to belong. For some girls, the intensity of best friendships that were rewarding in earlier adolescence may come to feel too confining. Shifting friendships are often part of middle adolescence.

In an important report, the Carnegie Council of Adolescent Development identifies several key tasks of middle adolescence, including finding a valued place in a constructive group (like a sports team or peer group); cultivating problem-solving skills; acquiring support systems and knowing how to use them; learning conflict resolution skills; finding ways to be useful to others; and feeling a sense of basic self-worth. These

tasks are fulfilled when youth are engaged in activities and structures that support their development and augment their natural peer groupings. Belonging and contributing are powerful experiences for youth; the adolescent has the opportunity to see herself through multiple positive lenses by virtue of her involvements.

Middle adolescents wrestle with their gender, racial, and ethnic identities. Psychologist Beverly Daniels Tatum explains that the parts of our identity that capture our attention are those that other people notice and reflect back to us. Racial identity is key to youth of color, since their race is salient to others. During middle adolescence, youth of color often find strength in affiliation with other youth of color. Sitting at the same table in the cafeteria and creating a culture together can help youth of color claim racial identity in the face of marginalization. When confronted with limited role models, youth of color often rely on media images to shape how they go about adopting a racial identity. This can result in behaviors or attitudes that feel oppositional. The behavior emerges as part of a developmental trajectory; oppositional behavior is more likely to be motivated by wanting to belong to a group than wanting to be outside of other groups. Some youth of color assimilate into majority culture, subsuming their racial identity and emphasizing other identities (derived from academics, sports, or other talents). Racial identity development is a lifelong process during which an individual may try many ways of realizing herself.

For white youth, middle adolescence can also be a time of beginning to claim a racial identity; often, however, it is not. Living in a society of white privilege affords many white youth the option of not thinking about race. They are far less likely than their peers of color to be perceived by others according to race. Racial identity researcher Janet Helms proposes a model of white racial identity development in which the first two stages are contact and disintegration. When white youth start to have meaningful contact with people of color, they can start to see the implications of race. Noticing that she is followed around in a drugstore when shopping with a Latino friend but not when she is shopping with a white friend, the adolescent cannot remain color-blind. These experiences push youth toward starting to think about race and racism; previous beliefs that race does not matter disintegrate and they are ready for new understandings.

White youth who have sustained multicultural involvements are more likely to progress in their own racial-identity development. If not, they may not even confront their race or ethnicity as they shape their beginning adult identity. Psychologist Peony Fhagen-Smith finds that youth of mixed racial and ethnic ancestry need meaningful opportunities to explore the facets of their racial or ethnic identities. Youth of all colors are supported in their racial-identity development by exposure to and personal experience with a diversity of people. All youth need to see a range of models of how people can enact racial identities. This is critical in an age of racial stereotypes in the media; youth need support in their quest for models of how to enact racial identity and resist negative images.

During middle adolescence, youth also struggle with gender and sexual identities. As youth claim these powerful identities, they may experiment with different appearances that signal their developing sexuality. In a culture of highly charged heterosexual images, youth feel pressure to conform to those images. Gay, lesbian,

bisexual, and questioning youth often struggle silently with their sexuality. Adolescents therefore need direct, honest information and conversation about sexuality.

Youth benefit from knowing that sexuality is a normal, healthy part of individual development and that it is frequently expressed within relationships. Dominant cultural scripts often present sexuality as either nonrelational or dysfunctionally relational, emphasizing power over others. Adults can foster youth's positive development by affirming sexuality as part of life and defining it as a continuum of behavior—not just intercourse. This can help youth recognize that there are many ways to explore and express sexuality.

Middle adolescence is often a time of sexual activity. While statistics vary, most studies have found that approximately 50 percent of middle-adolescent youth engage in sexual intercourse. They therefore need guidance about healthy sexuality and contraception. They also need and want to know what their parents' values are about sexual intimacy and relationships. Unitarian Universalists can offer youth principles to support sexual behavior that is respectful of themselves and others.

Aware of their own feelings and those of others, youth may be much more vulnerable than they appear. Research demonstrates that youth want to have adults to talk with as they struggle to claim their identities. The middle adolescent's advanced cognitive skills enable her to understand adult perspectives and appreciate the motivations of love and care that guide adult support.

### **Moral Development**

Although he concentrates deeply on himself, the youth of this age holds a broad interest in the world around him. Less egocentric than when he was younger, he has an increased interest and investment in abstract values and moral principles. His ability to think conceptually readies him to engage intellectually in moral reasoning. The ability to truly understand multiple perspectives can lead to moral relativism. The middle adolescent is much more likely to place his moral decisions in context. His increasingly empathic perspective often leads to greater interest in moral dilemmas.

During middle adolescence, the youth may begin to have "principled morality," in which she regards the moral principles that guide laws as more important than the laws themselves. In family life, the middle adolescent sometimes claims a moral perspective that accords primacy to the rationale of rules and limits as a way of countering them. For example, a youth may argue that since her parents' rationale for a curfew is to ensure her safety, then the curfew should be different based on the different potential risks or dangers of the evening. This demonstrates the middle adolescent's ability to think beyond what is presented, to examine conceptual and moral underpinnings.

This can be a time of increased social awareness and activism. Charged with his understanding of a larger societal vision, the middle-adolescent youth can be energized to engage in projects that serve his local and wider community. He is drawn to engaging in work that supports justice and is motivated by the ethic of care. The middle adolescent's moral vision is not limited to what is sanctioned as correct; he often seeks his own truths. His moral development is enhanced by adult support and guidance for

his moral impulse. Encouragement to care, work against injustice, and contribute more broadly to society empowers the adolescent to seize an identity with moral agency.

### **Faith Development**

In middle adolescence youth may become more involved with or less interested in faith and religion. The cognitive capacity for abstract and conceptual thinking can both support and attenuate youth's interest in the spiritual. Faith researcher James Fowler asserts that most adolescents are in the synthetic-conventional stage of faith development; they are searching for faith that offers coherence. They need conventions that delineate paths for structuring their lives. Even if such paths are not right for them, the model of faith as a life-organizing tool can be useful.

Faith is most meaningful at this stage when it offers youth a base from which to synthesize values and balance complexities. Adolescents can draw deeply on faith in their process of identity development. Although able to think critically about religion, the middle adolescent still perceives religion as an outside authority. During these years, as he confronts broader conceptual issues, the adolescent may scrutinize the authority of religion. As he wrestles with tensions between what is relative and what is absolute, faith can offer guidance. Fowler claims that the middle adolescent's questioning of faith and religion can lead him to a greater commitment and ownership of his faith; it can also lead to abandonment. Leaving home—often the final transition of middle adolescence—can mark the end of this stage of faith.

The Unitarian Universalist faith tradition capitalizes on youth interest in and commitment to broader moral and social ideals. Opportunities to engage in social action can funnel youth's energy toward faith. By engaging in faith communities, youth are led toward deeper spiritual development. Any disconnect between youth's interest in questioning and moral searching and the tenets or activities of their faith communities makes them less likely to move toward the next stages of faith development.

Adults can support the faith development of middle adolescents by acting out and acting on faith in families and communities. Youth need to see that doing right is an integral part of having faith. Adults can support youth participation in meaningful faith-based activities and ensure that youth are truly welcomed in their religious communities. Through the process of becoming involved in a faith community, the adolescent's sense of spiritual agency grows. She becomes able to see how she contributes to and creates her faith with others. This helps grow her soul and deepen her sense of spiritual or religious identity. In addition, she may learn how faith can be a sustaining force during times of sadness or fear, as large as world conflict or as personal as the breakup of a friendship.

### **Characteristics of This Age**

- Grows based on an individual trajectory (boys often grow rapidly at this age while girls are more likely to stop growing)
- Develops sexuality more fully
- Navigates greater risks relating to alcohol, drug use, and unsafe sexual activity
- Sustains the personal fable that "it couldn't happen to me!"

- Practices increased cognitive skills such as deductive and inductive reasoning and conceptual and hypothetical thinking
- Engages in over-thinking
- Becomes less egocentric and more interested in the larger society
- Tries to claim an identity
- Considers friendship and peers important, with some shifting of alliances
- Needs to belong and have a sense of self-worth
- Continues to develop a racial or ethnic identity
- Participates in social groupings as a way to navigate race and racism (youth of color often claim alliance by race and/or oppositional behavior or do not claim racial identity as important)
- Recognizes privilege as white youth and challenges the colorblind perspective or does not consider racism and racial identity important
- Struggles with gender and sexual identities (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth often experiences increased stress)
- Explores sexuality
- Expresses growing interest in abstract values and moral principles
- Thinks conceptually and enjoys moral reasoning
- Engages in moral relativism
- Demonstrates increased empathy
- Favors principles over laws
- Enters Fowler's synthetic-conventional stage of faith development
- Conceptualizes religion as an outside authority that can be questioned
- Questions faith, sometimes leading to deeper ownership of personal faith or disillusionment
- Develops a sense of spiritual agency through faith-based contributions
- Deepens or attenuates religious or spiritual identity

### **Ways to Offer Support**

- Provide for physical needs, including nutrition, body-care products, privacy, affection, and love.
- Affirm sexuality as a healthy part of human development.
- Remain open to talking about sex and sexuality.
- Support a critical perspective on media images of sexuality, gender roles, and body image.
- Provide information about safe sex and contraception.
- Offer values for discerning sexual behavior that is respectful and affirming of self and others.
- Monitor signs of eating disorders or depression.
- Promote a healthy self-image.
- Be present, flexible, and responsive.
- Model respect.
- Be available for conversation, be a sounding board.
- Offer fair and grounded support around risk taking; provide limits for safety.

- Enjoy the adolescent's new ability to think critically, hypothetically, and conceptually.
- Ask large questions that fully engage new thinking skills.
- Encourage practices that celebrate new adolescent mindfulness (such as journaling or writing editorial letters).
- Understand that new thinking skills may result in new criticisms
- Respect the intensity of interest in peers.
- Understand that some adolescents need psychological distance from caregivers as they create their own identities.
- Encourage involvement in multiple realms of activity or achievement (like sports, music, faith, or community groups).
- Support exploration of racial and ethnic identity.
- Talk about racism, learn and support youth's realities, and share struggles.
- Strongly encourage sustained engagement with ethnically and racially diverse peers and seek role models for youth of color who lack them.
- Recognize that adolescent vulnerability can be expressed as withdrawal, anger, or sadness and offer support.
- Encourage growing interest in the broader world.
- Welcome the adolescent's skill at thinking about principles underlying rules and laws.
- Engage openly in conversations about moral reasoning.
- Encourage participation in a faith or religious community.
- Provide outlets for questioning and talking about faith.
- Encourage faith-based work and experiences that deepen spirituality.
- Provide opportunities for leadership within and beyond the faith community.
- Welcome each adolescent.
- Have a sense of humor.
- Provide unconditional love.

## The Older Adolescent and Young Adult

*Ages Eighteen through Twenty-Two*

"It was Communion Sunday, and as I went up there, all of a sudden, I heard the words anew, and I was like, 'I can't do this, I don't believe this.' And I sat back down."

### **Physical Development**

Most women have completed their physical growth by age seventeen, but many men are still developing muscle, bone mass, and strength. During late adolescence, physical growth slows. Caring for the new adult body through good nutrition, exercise, and healthy sexuality is a key task of the newly independent late adolescent. Late adolescents and young adults are very interested in sexuality and are likely to engage in partnered sexual activity, so they need information about protection against sexually transmitted diseases and birth control.

Late adolescence can bring new stresses. Managing stress through exercise, social support, and individual practices (such as meditation, psychological support, or

spiritual practices) is essential. For many, late adolescence and young adulthood mark a transition period during which the care and keeping of one's own body becomes her independent, singular responsibility.

### **Cognitive Development**

Late adolescence/young adulthood is a time of cognitive competence. Formal operations—the ability to think abstractly and hypothetically—are no longer new. Thinking skills developed in adolescence are honed, including memory retrieval, abstract thinking, and complex problem-solving skills. The late adolescent can be passionate about knowing; this is a time ripe for formal and informal education that builds on the adolescent's excellent memory skills and development. According to scientists Raymond Cattell and John Horn, an individual has two kinds of intelligence: fluid intelligence, which refers to functional intelligence and thinking skills, and crystallized intelligence, which refers to learned content. The late adolescent's fluid intelligence is sharp from schooling and practice. He is ready to learn and retain information.

Open to learning, the late adolescent may be relativistic in her thinking. She sees many points of view and may claim multiple realities as the truth. William Perry, a developmental psychologist, proposes that ways of knowing become relativist as the adolescent/ young adult comes to understand competing perspectives. This doesn't mean that she lacks an intellectual or moral compass; it is simply a reflection of her increased cognitive competence. Over time relativism diminishes, but the skills gained through practicing it remain. Her knowing is both objective and subjective; the late adolescent/young adult becomes more aware of her role as a producer of knowledge.

The late adolescent/young adult's thinking skills are augmented by his increased skills of expression. Translating thought into words, he deepens his understanding of phenomena while engaging others. His improved language skills both reflect and support increased cognitive functioning. Unlike in earlier periods, the late adolescent/young adult is better able to reason and come to his own decisions. While he continues to learn through engagement with others, he has become more self-reliant in his thinking.

### **Social and Affective Development**

Socially, late adolescence/young adulthood is a time of intimacy and identity development. Psychologist Erik Erikson asserts that the late adolescent first develops identity and then establishes intimacy. Others, including psychiatrist Jean Baker Miller, believe the reverse, that identity develops through the process of intimacy and relationship. The spiral of intimacy involves being in relationship with others and also developing a self that remains apart from relationship. Newly independent and often separated from the family who nurtured her, the late adolescent/young adult wonders, "Who am I?" and "Who should I become?" She explores intimacy and learns about mutuality, love, and isolation.

Sexuality is central to her identity, and claiming a sexual orientation is an important part of late adolescence. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and transsexual youth are more at risk during this period as they navigate sexuality in a predominantly

heterosexual culture. Everyone learns the dominant social scripts about sexuality, and homosexual youth may hold learned aversions to homosexuality. This puts them at odds with themselves and places them at greater risk emotionally. It is critical for young adults to have peer, family, and community contexts in which a diversity of sexual identities are affirmed. Unitarian Universalism offers principles that affirm and promote respect for all persons.

Peers and friendships remain important in this stage of life, but their primary purpose shifts from defining to supporting the individual. He cares deeply about the company he keeps but makes his own decisions. Intimate relationships with one partner may become central and can affect the individual's relationship with larger peer groups. These social balances are part of claiming a central identity.

Vocational and personal life choices become new identity issues at this time. Freud says that there are two tasks for the healthy adult: to work and to love. Finding the path to the life vocations of love and work is important to youth approaching full adulthood. For some, this is a period of new work habits and an increased drive to achieve. Making school and work choices, the individual seeks possibilities for her future. The expectations of her family and community shape her identity development. Recent research shows that high expectations, caring relationships, and opportunities to contribute meaningfully to a group or society are the three factors that facilitate resiliency. Developing resilient patterns of successfully coping with the pressures and promise of entering adulthood positively shapes the late adolescent's identity development. It gives her self-confidence as she transitions from a focus on external authority to claiming her own authority and perspectives. Psychologist Robert Kegan calls this the shift to self-authorship.

Racial and ethnic identity development continues to be an integral part of peoples' lives in late adolescence and young adulthood. All adolescents are either tacitly or overtly encouraged to make claims about their ethnic and racial affiliation. Studies of multiracial youth reveal how monocultural racial and ethnic affiliations are widely assumed. Psychologists Karen Suyemoto and Juanita Dimas find that multiracial and multiethnic youth feel constant pressure to claim or refute racial and ethnic identities. They must answer the question, "What are you?" repeatedly. And they must reconcile their answers with their understandings of social expectations. When youth identify differently from their families, they may feel conflicted or uneasily independent. Sometimes multiracial or multiethnic youth conform to monocultural expectations and claim single identities. Youth may make context-specific decisions, such as claiming one identity in one setting and another in a different setting, as they explore the meaning and consequences of different approaches for their self-concept and social relationships.

Psychologist Jean Phinney suggests that racial and ethnic identity development for adolescents of color goes through three stages: unexamined racial or ethnic identity, active identity search, and achieved ethnic identity. For ethnic minority adolescents with monoracial or monoethnic backgrounds, the search for identity includes dealing with negative ethnic stereotypes, resisting those stereotypes, and coming to their own identity. Biracial adolescents often go through this trajectory for both ethnic groups with which they identify. This can result in claiming one racial or ethnic identity over the other.

As they mature, late adolescents and young adults often claim their own unique ethnic identity. Social environments that welcome textured racial and ethnic identities can provide critical support in this period. Racially or ethnically stratified contexts may be differently useful to the late adolescent. For some, according to psychologist Beverly Daniels Tatum, new maturity makes them reject alliances based solely on race. For others, same-race peer groups perform an essential grounding function in a society replete with racism.

Embedded in multiple social contexts, late adolescents and young adults may be likely to notice discrimination and privilege based on race and ethnicity. Peggy McIntosh, a psychologist studying racism, says that many white adolescents know about racism as a system of disadvantage based on skin color but often do not know about racism as a system of white privilege. It is only through direct consideration of the issues of white privilege that youth move toward greater awareness of the structural aspects of racism. Understanding white privilege provides an explanation for the persistence of racism. Youth who are knowledgeable about social structures larger than their own experiences are better equipped to engage sensitively with others on these issues. As white youth develop a fuller understanding of the nature and meaning of race and ethnicity, they realize that there is diversity within race. Learning about his own ethnic background leads the white youth toward healthy racial identity development.

Understanding their own and others' racial and ethnic identities as embedded in cultural expectations may shift behaviors at this age. Increased exposure to and interaction with a diversity of people enriches the experiential knowledge base of the late adolescent. Learning about the uniqueness of each person counteracts stereotypical thinking and systemic oppression. This is an essential step for all youth in becoming actively antiracist. As the late adolescent/young adult searches for identity, he couples his personal experiences of race and ethnicity with his emerging understandings of institutions and society.

### **Moral Development**

This can be a time of passionate moral idealism and philosophical thinking. Strong cognitive skills, increased awareness of the wider world, and the beginnings of personal authority prepare the late adolescent for moral decision making. He is able to comprehend multiple perspectives and is conscious of social order. This can be a period of social activism, when the late adolescent recognizes structural social problems and works to change them. Newly apparent tensions between individual rights and societal needs force him to negotiate the ethics of care and justice.

Life trajectory choices are imbued with the late adolescent's personal morality. She faces her own moral questions: "What defines achievement for me?" "Whom should I keep company with?" "How can I live a life according to my moral and spiritual values and still support myself economically?" Like the younger adolescent, the late adolescent/young adult's impulse toward care is supported through engagement in community work and giving. Her identity as a person of faith is nurtured through meaningful engagement with people of diverse backgrounds and ethnicities.

## **Faith Development**

The late adolescent/young adult, supported by strong cognitive skills, is drawn to existential thinking. He is sorting out his thoughts about his own morality and may draw on religion or spirituality for guidance. He feels able to come to his own convictions about religion and faith. He is claiming his own authority. Some late adolescents may abandon faith or religion, which can be an act of authority. Others explore their faith more deeply.

According to faith researcher James Fowler, late adolescence/ young adulthood is often the beginning of the individuative-reflective stage of faith development. No longer trying on other people's ideas about faith and religion, the individual consciously constructs her own. She looks critically at her previous commitments to religion. She considers the meaning of religious rituals and symbols and tries to figure out their meaning for her. As she rejects some aspects of her faith and religion and accepts others, she ushers in spiritual maturity, a process that happens both alone and with others.

Participation in a faith community can offer youth approaching adulthood a way to work in service of their moral ideals. Social activism within liberal faith communities highlights aspects of faith and religion that are realized through activity. Although able to think abstractly, the youth benefits from knowing that faith and spirituality are more than psychological constructs. The process of doing faith, beyond traditional religion, helps lay down the spiritual life path toward full adulthood.

## **Characteristics of This Age**

- Achieves full physical development
- Becomes more self-assured about body image
- Engages in sexual activity and more likely to be partnered
- Learns to manage stress and maintain health
- Is able to think abstractly and hypothetically, using complex problem-solving skills and existential thinking
- Engages in relativistic thinking
- Expresses ideas with linguistic skill
- Becomes more self-reliant
- Develops identity
- Forms intimate attachments
- Continues to develop sexual identity and reconciles that with broader cultural contexts
- Expresses interest in vocational and personal life choices
- Often develops identities as a friend, partner, and member of a racial or ethnic group
- Expresses interest in moral and philosophical thinking in terms of both the self and the wider world
- Wrestles with personal morality and life choices
- Claims personal authority around issues of faith

## **Ways to Offer Support**

- Provide support for self-care, including stress management.

- Provide information about birth control and safe sex.
- Respect the privacy of the late adolescent.
- Respect the intellect of the late adolescent.
- Provide complex problems and thick questions to ponder.
- Allow the late adolescent's questions to guide activities.
- Offer opportunities for complex learning.
- Tie activities to broader philosophical and social concepts or issues.
- Welcome the late adolescent/young adult as a person with their own ideas.
- Understand that intimacy and identity development are linked and respect the late adolescent's attention to this aspect of life.
- Provide contexts that affirm all sexual and gender identities.
- Celebrate the late-adolescent process of searching for a path toward adulthood.
- Provide models and conversations about vocational and life choices.
- Respect the importance of racial and ethnic heritage in late-adolescent lives.
- Facilitate sustained engagement with diverse peers to further individual and collective identity development.
- Become an antiracist ally and discuss privilege and oppression.
- Celebrate and channel the later adolescent's moral idealism into action.
- Encourage engagement with difficult moral issues.
- Encourage, love, and affirm.
- Accept the spiritual journey, including questioning of religion.
- Encourage the construction of individual religious and spiritual commitments.
- Encourage participation in faith communities.
- Provide opportunities for leadership development and leadership roles.
- Learn from youth.

# Reader 4-2: Nurturing Youth of Color

## ATTRIBUTION

By Rev. Dr. Monica Cummings; used with permission.

## TEXT

### Culture and Identity Formation

Every human person in certain respects:

Like All Others

Like Some Others

Like No Other<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

The culture of a country has a significant role in the identity formation of persons and communities. There has been significant research and documentation on identity formation in the United States of America (U.S.). However, most of the work done has used a Western/European cultural model as the normative experience of identity formation in the U.S. Such a model ignores or only gives minimal attention to people who identify as being persons of color or members of an ethnic minority group. Consequently, many members of the dominant culture who look to scholarly works or other literature to learn about the relationship between culture and identity formation never gain more than a superficial knowledge about people whose identities are tied to or rooted in soil other than that of the Western world.

This chapter will explore the importance of ministers and religious educators having awareness of the influence that the dominant culture in the U.S. has on the identity formation of people who identify as persons of color or members of an ethnic minority group. I will explore and define the terms culture, race, ethnicity, and minority. In addition, I will address the impact that U.S. culture has on the ability of ministers and religious educators to provide culturally sensitive pastoral care to people whose identity formation has been negatively impacted by the dominant culture in the U.S.

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<sup>1</sup> Clyde Kluckhohn and Henry Murray, *Personality in Nature, Society and Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 1948), quoted in Emmanuel Y. Lartey, *In Living Color: An Intercultural Approach to Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2003), 34.

## Culture

What is culture? Culture includes the language, history, beliefs and behavior of a group. Culture "...denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which [people] communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life."<sup>2</sup> Such systems can be defined with a range of other terms, such as mass or popular culture, dominant and subcultures. Lee Butler Jr., indicates that "Mass culture and popular culture are synonymous with what society commonly identifies as dominant culture and subculture, respectively."<sup>3</sup> The term dominant culture can be defined as one that is able to impose on subordinate cultures values and ways of behaving, perceiving, communicating and beliefs through legal or political domination. These include, for example, classism, the Puritan work ethic, ownership, the sense of superiority, and distrust of people who look and behave differently.

When the term subculture is used it sometimes refers to expressions of resistance by people who feel excluded, oppressed or misunderstood by the dominant culture. Subcultures focus attention on certain religious expressions, youth activities, immigrant communities, persons with disabilities, sexual orientation and ethnicity. Every person in the U.S. is influenced in some way by dominant and subcultures. Religious traditions express and reflect aspects of both cultures.

Unitarians, Universalists<sup>4</sup> and the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations have a long history of working for social justice in this country. Unitarians and Universalists also have a history of silence in support of the *status quo*. During the enslavement of Africans in this country there were UU ministers who advocated for the freedom of the enslaved, and there were UU ministers who for various reasons refrained from the debate. During the civil war there were UU ministers in the North who were loyal to the Union, while some UU ministers in the South supported those who seceded from the Union. During subsequent socially and politically related ills in this country (such as the women's suffrage and civil rights movements) many UU ministers and religious educators responded by framing the discussion in terms of social justice. With this frame, UUs were called to the streets to protest in the name of social justice.

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<sup>2</sup> Geertz, 89.

<sup>3</sup> Butler, 16-17.

<sup>4</sup> Unitarian and Universalists merged in May 1961 to form the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.

However, the efforts towards “social” justice did not offer a holistic paradigm. Instead, a paradigm was established in which the demand for social and political change was the primary focus at the expense of recognizing the personal trauma experienced by persons who were being oppressed, leaving many of them spiritually, emotionally and psychologically wounded, without community or ministerial support to help in their healing.

Since Unitarian Universalists and other religious liberals are influenced by the dominant culture in the U.S., behavior change that will honor “the inherent worth and dignity of every person”<sup>5</sup> will need to be intentional, focused and reflected upon. For example: intentionality in not participating in oppressive aspects of the dominant culture; focused learning about the minority cultures of congregants and children in religious education programs; and reflection upon one’s actions based on self-education about the cultures of congregants. In other words, the goals and trends of the dominant culture in the U.S. need to be challenged and UUs cannot passively accept or unquestioningly participate in the activities or agenda that the dominant culture sanctions.

### **Race**

The category of race was an intentionally constructed concept by European scientists to classify people. According to Lee H. Butler Jr., It was not until 1570 that race developed as a concept. Francois Bernier first employed the category of “race,” primarily denoting skin color, in 1684 for the purpose of classifying human bodies. The first authoritative racial division of humanity is found in the works of naturalist Carolus Linnaeus in 1735. Hence, it is not until the eighteenth century that political, linguistic, and geographical distinctions became “race” issues.<sup>6</sup>

Out of this intentionally constructed system of classifying human beings, a vertical hierarchy of importance and closeness to God was established. People of European ancestry were placed at the top of the hierarchy, and people of African ancestry were placed at the bottom.<sup>7</sup> In North America, this system of classification provided justification for the inhumane treatment of the sons and daughters of Asia, Africa and the indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. People of Chinese descent were treated inhumanely even as they helped to build the U.S. railroad system. People

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<sup>5</sup> Principles and Purposes of the UUA, see Appendix C.

<sup>6</sup> Butler, 37.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid 42.

of Japanese descent were divested of their property and liberty and placed in internment camps in California and other areas on the West Coast. Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas were first enslaved, then systematically divested of their land, religion and many aspects of their culture.

The concept of race continues to be used to justify the inhumane treatment of those who have been classified as being inferior to people of European descent. Discrimination is woven into the fabric of the dominant culture in the U.S. Consequently race continues to determine the quality and quantity of opportunities available to people who have been adversely and negatively classified according to the color of their skin or the place of their birth.

### **Ethnicity**

In the dominant culture in the U.S., the terms race and ethnicity are often used interchangeably. However, there are substantial differences between the two. The concept of race was created to validate the supposed superiority of Europeans and inferiority of all other peoples. Additionally, the concept of race is primarily based on skin color and other physical characteristics of a person. Ethnicity encompasses a great deal more about a person than just the color of their skin, the texture of their hair or the shape of their eyes. According to the *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, "Ethnicity may be viewed as a primary bonding, an identification and context of belonging, shared by groups with common language, behaviors, histories, lifestyles, values, and norms."<sup>8</sup> However, just as the concept of race has been used to deny the uniqueness of human beings, the concept of ethnicity has also been a simplistic means to ignore the complexities of human identity. For example, Chinese, Korean and Pilipino peoples have different languages, histories, and norms and yet are generally categorized as Asian. Similarly, in North America, Spanish speaking people from Central or South America and the Caribbean are labeled Latino/Latina/Hispanic regardless of their respective countries of origin. Therefore, ethnicity is a complicated and complex concept to comprehend. On one hand it is helpful in acknowledging similarity amongst groups, while on the other hand it ignores the differences amongst group members, differences that are very important to individual identity formation.

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<sup>8</sup> Way, 253-54.

## **Minority**

“The term *minority* has traditionally been used in reference to groups whose access to power is limited by the dominant culture.”<sup>9</sup> In the U.S. the term minority may refer to the following: gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, national origin, and cultural heritage. In the U.S. people identified as ‘minority’ are very diverse in language, national origin, and ethnicity and many have experienced oppression in various forms. For example, most women of all ethnicities, ages, sexual orientation, physical ability or disability, rich, poor, U.S. born or foreign born have had their access to power limited by the dominant culture because of their gender. As a result, middle class white women mobilized and started the feminist movement, a movement that was the primary source of support and means for survival for many women. During the civil rights movement in the U.S., African Americans organized publicly to demand equal rights. During the mid-1980’s gay and lesbian organizations joined forces to demand that health-care professionals and politicians put more money, time and energy into treating a new illness (AIDS) that was killing gay men. Minority group status in the U.S. today continues to limit many persons’ ability to fully engage life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness as promised in the U.S Constitution.

## **Identity Formation**

By the time I was school age, I understood many things about my life. As a female I was restricted from doing certain activities that my brothers were allowed to engage in. When I questioned why, I was told that those activities were not lady-like. I was called nigger most times when I left my neighborhood. I experienced shame when my mother used food stamps to buy groceries or when I told people that I lived in public housing. Without knowing it, my identity formation was being influenced at the very deepest levels of my being.

Identity is a consistent sense of self discerned through relationships, whereby the character traits contained within every individual are expressed with consistency. An identity is only discernable through relationships, with the first and most fundamental series of relationship being the family. A person begins to experience himself or herself through the nurture received at home. Seeking to discern the answer to the question

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<sup>9</sup> Hays, *Addressing Cultural Complexities*, 13.

'Who am I?' is shaped within the context of a family that simultaneously states, 'This is who we are, and this is who you are to us.'<sup>10</sup>

A person's most influential relationship in identity formation is the family and the values, beliefs and behaviors passed down from generation to generation within one's family. The search for who I am is facilitated in the context of realizing who we are. When the first Europeans landed on the shores of North America, they were greeted by people who had lived on the land for thousands of years, a people who had well-established ways of behaving, perceiving, communicating and believing. In other words, the people who occupied this land when Columbus allegedly discovered it had rich and diverse cultures.

Within a few short years after contact with European settlers, sovereign Indian nations and their cultures came under attack. Their land was stolen and they were forced to live on uninhabitable land. Their families were separated when children were forced to attend missionary schools. They were threatened with violence or jail for practicing their religion or speaking their native languages. In other words, every aspect of their culture and way of life was systematically attacked and destroyed. What impact on identity formation would that have on a person? Mary Crow Dog explains:

The whites destroyed the tiyospaye,<sup>11</sup> not accidentally, but as a matter of policy. The close-knit clan, set in its old ways, was a stumbling block in the path of the missionary and government agent, its traditions and customs a barrier to what the white man called "progress" and "civilization." And so the government tore the tiyospaye apart and forced the Sioux into the kind of relationship now called the "nuclear family"—forced upon each couple their individually owned allotment of land, trying to teach them "the benefits of wholesome selfishness without which higher civilization is impossible."<sup>12</sup>

In the context of systematic destruction of a people's culture, a family answering the question "This is who we are and this is who you are to us" can be a complicated ordeal. After centuries of oppression, families and consequently persons within the family, internalize who their society tells them they are as a people and as an individual. The internalization of what a society tells a person about who he or she is often is stronger than who the family says they are. Therefore healthy identity formation for

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<sup>10</sup> Butler, 3.

<sup>11</sup> At the center of the old Sioux society was the tiyospaye, the extended family group, the basic hunting band, which included grandparents, uncles, aunts, in-laws, and cousins.

<sup>12</sup> Mary Crow Dog and Richard Erdoes, *Lakota Woman* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1991), 13.

people marginalized by the dominant culture has to be an intentional act of self-care and survival.

Erik Erikson is well known for his identification of the eight life-cycle stages of development. "Each successive stage and crisis has a special relation to one of the basic elements of society, and this for the simple reason that the human life cycle and man's institutions have evolved together."<sup>13</sup> His contention was that human beings go through certain developmental stages at certain ages and that social organizations have significant influence on whether or not individuals experience positive or negative support for development. The eight life-cycle stages are:

1. Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust (infancy 0-1). In this stage the infant learns trust through consistency and continuity of its care-providers.

2. Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (early childhood 1-2). This stage is marked by the child learning to hold on and to let go. The child's care-providers must balance age appropriate boundaries (so the child does not injure himself/herself) with freedom for the child to experience its surroundings. Harsh words or actions toward the child in this stage can cause the child to feel shame or doubt.

3. Initiative vs. Guilt (play age 2-4). In this stage, initiative aids the child's autonomy by helping him or her learn about regulation of wants (care-provider's attention) and responsibility (picking up toys or helping with younger children).

4. Industry vs. Inferiority (school age 5-12). This stage is where the child learns to work with and alongside of others. It is also the stage at which a child sees himself or herself most clearly through the eyes and actions of others. If acceptance is withheld because of perceived physical or mental differences, thoughts and feelings of inferiority can develop.

5. Identity vs. Role Confusion (adolescence 13-18). This stage holds the tensions between values and behaviors learned in childhood and those expected to be developed in adulthood. The struggle with identity at this stage is heavily influenced by family and peer groups. Role confusion involves doubts about self in relation to socially constructed roles, especially those related to gender and sexual orientation.

6. Intimacy vs. Isolation (young adulthood 18-35). This stage marks the readiness of the individual to commit to relationships, partnerships and group affiliations with the willingness to be selfless and to compromise for the common good.

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<sup>13</sup> Erikson, 250.

7. Generativity vs. Stagnation (adulthood 36-60). The primary focus of this stage is for persons to take responsibility for guiding the next generation through their offspring, mentoring, coaching or teaching. Persons who decline to participate in this stage are in danger of stagnation in growth and limited intimacy with others.

8. Ego Integrity vs. Despair (mature adulthood 60 plus). This final stage encompasses the previous seven stages. Ego integrity involves emotional integration and wisdom acquired from lived experience. If the person has engaged and navigated through the previous seven stages, he or she will not have feelings of despair related to the life they have lived.

Stages four and five of Erikson's life cycle are especially important in understanding the identity formation process for individuals who are marginalized by the dominant culture. Erikson wrote,

We have pointed out ... the danger threatening individual and society where the schoolchild begins to feel that the color of his skin, the background of his parents, or the fashion of his clothes rather than his wish and will to learn will decide his worth...and thus his sense of identity.<sup>14</sup>

For persons who are labeled as members of a subculture and are therefore marginalized by the dominant culture, developing a healthy sense of self and positive identity involves a process of intentionality in uncovering and understanding the messages of inferiority imbedded in and transmitted by the dominant culture. In recent years the importance of understanding this process has generated various ethnic/racial identity development theories and models. One such resource that is well known, but will not be used in this project, is *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*, edited by Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell and Pat Griffin.<sup>15</sup> William E. Cross pioneered the Nigrescence (to become Black) Theory to define Black Identity Development in 1991. Cross' Nigrescence Theory consists of the Pre-Encounter, Immersion-Emersion and Internalization stages. The Pre-Encounter stage is characterized by three elements, assimilation (internalizing a 'pro-White' identity), Black self-hatred or anti-Blackness (a Black person's hatred of the self because of race), and miseducation (internalization of negative stereotypes about Blacks). The Immersion-

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<sup>14</sup> Erikson, 260.

<sup>15</sup> Rita Hardiman and Bailey W. Jackson "Conceptual Foundations for Social Justice Courses" in *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, ed. Maurianne Adams et al. (New York: Routledge, 1997), 23-29.

Emersion stage consists of the individual withdrawing from the dominant culture and becoming immersed in Black culture. Emersion involves dealing with the guilt, and anger/rage toward the dominant culture while developing a sense of self-pride. The Internalization stage is characterized by the individual's self-healing and being comfortable with being Black.<sup>16</sup> W.S. Carlos Poston noted that Cross' model has "inherent limitations when applied to biracial persons."<sup>17</sup> Sue and Sue remarked that Cross' model pertained specifically to the Black experience.

The following framework may be helpful to ministers and religious educators in understanding the stages of identity development for transracially adopted, biracial and persons of color or members of ethnic minority groups who have been miseducated about their inherent worth and dignity by the dominant culture. I chose to compile the following models to provide a more comprehensive user-friendly model for use by non-clinicians. This framework is my compilation of William E. Cross' Nigrescence Model, Derald Wing Sue and David Sue's five-stage Racial/Cultural Identity Development Model<sup>18</sup> and W.S. Carlos Poston's work on the five stages of Biracial Identity Development.<sup>19</sup>

#### **Four Stages of Identity Formation Model**

The following stages are meant to be guidelines; they are not stagnant, but fluid. A person can remain at one stage or move between stages during a lifetime. The value of having the following model as a guideline is that it provides valuable information for people who identify as persons of color or a member of an ethnic minority, and those working with them, to better understand identity formation. The limitation of such a model and guideline is that human beings are different, constantly evolving and changing; the model could be used to label or stereotype the populations who are the focus of the model.

1. Assimilation Stage. This stage is characterized in terms of a person being educated or indoctrinated to believe that the standard of excellence and all that is good is synonymous with the dominant culture. Indoctrination of this message from an early age becomes internalized for many persons who learn to think that the dominant culture is better than their own ethnic/racial culture. Consequently, many may prefer teachers, doctors, lawyers, schools, etc. from the dominant culture, while denying the value of

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<sup>16</sup> Vandiver, et al., 174-200.

<sup>17</sup> Poston, 152-54.

<sup>18</sup> Sue and Sue, *Counseling the Culturally Diverse*, 215-33.

<sup>19</sup> Poston, 153-54.

professionals of their own cultural group. Self-hatred is possible during this stage, as is lack of awareness or an integrated approach to assessing the merit or value of the dominant culture.

At this stage biracial/transracially adopted children are just becoming aware of their particular racial or ethnic identity. Children who are raised in homogenous environments and assume they are part of the dominant culture may experience this stage differently than other people of color and ethnic minorities, because “they just assumed they were like everyone else. Until they experienced some form of racial prejudice or discrimination from schoolmate, strangers, or even relatives of their adopted family.”<sup>20</sup>

2. Questioning or Awareness Stage. This stage is usually initiated by a crisis (personal, political or social) or comment that causes the person to question their beliefs about self, by comparing what they have been taught with what they actually experience. Through questioning, awareness begins to take root and the person notices comments, behaviors and even facial expressions directed toward him or her that are offensive or hurtful. For example, recently at my church, I was engaged in conversation with two males, one of European descent and one Latino. A third male of European descent walked up and asked the Latino to help him move a heavy piece of furniture. A person in the questioning and awareness stage would ask why the male of European descent was not asked to help move the furniture. A person going through this stage begins to reflect on their life experiences and usually grows angry with self and society for a lifetime of indoctrination and unequal treatment.

For biracial and transracially adopted persons, this stage may be experienced slightly differently. At this stage a biracial person may question/become aware that society and possibly family members are forcing them to choose one ethnic/racial group identity. For persons who are transracially adopted by people of European descent, there maybe awareness that although their adoptive parents may want to live in a colorblind world, the people they interact with on a daily basis do not live in such a world. Experiences of racism in their communities, schools, churches and sometimes their adoptive families can trigger feelings of isolation and dejection.

3. Rejection-Disengagement Stage. This stage is characterized by withdrawal from the dominant culture and immersion in one’s own culture. For Hispanics, it may

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<sup>20</sup> C.N. Le, “Adopted Asian Americans” *Asian-Nation: Asian American History, Demographics, and Issues*, 2001-2007; accessed 8 July 2007; available from <http://www.asian-nation.org/adopted.shtml>.

mean taking pride in speaking Spanish and not wanting to speak English. For Asians, it may manifest as wanting to learn more about the culture and history of their country of origin. Persons in this stage develop and project a strong connection with their own cultural/ethnic identity. This stage is also marked by anger/rage as the person begins to address a lifetime of shame and guilt projected onto them by the dominant culture.

For many biracial persons, this stage helps to explain the feelings of guilt over the possibility of having to reject one parent's culture and ethnicity. Biracial persons may experience self-hatred because of having to reject a part of one's self. Transracially adopted persons may experience this stage in two ways. They may disengage from their ethnicity of birth and only identify with their adoptive parent's identity. Or they may disengage from their adoptive parent's identity and take pride in their ethnicity of birth. For both biracial and transracially adopted persons this stage is difficult because it usually involves having to reject either a part of self or a part of their family.

4. Integration-Reengagement. Persons in this stage, having learned from and moved back and forth through the previous stages, have gone through tremendous personal growth. Their sense of self is more positive and their connection/attachment to the world is more secure. They have discovered that being human is flexible and fluid and they have learned to embrace the many paradoxes of everyday living. They are able to accept the healthy and reject the harmful elements of the dominant culture. They are also willing to be critical of their own culture. In other words, they have integrated the cultures that impact their daily lives, and their outlook and attitude toward life is holistic and hopeful

# **Reader 5-1: Tapping the Potential – Discovering Congregations’ Role in Building Assets in Youth**

## **ATTRIBUTION**

By Glenn A. Seefelt and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain (1998; electronic version, 2005); used with permission from The Search Institute, [www.search-institute.org](http://www.search-institute.org).

## **TEXT**

### **FORWARD**

A new voice is being heard in conversations and debates about America’s youth and their future. In the not-too-distant past, mention of congregations or religion as a resource for youth development would have been rare in public discussions. Today, that’s beginning to change.

More and more people are affirming that congregations have tremendous potential for helping young people grow up healthy, principled, and caring. The challenge for congregations is to discover new ways to realize this potential.

With major support from the DeWitt Wallace-Reader’s Digest Fund, Search Institute launched the Uniting Congregations for Youth Development pilot initiative to equip congregations of all faiths to build “developmental assets” for and with youth—to provide young people with the foundation they need to be successful in life. We had no idea how far-reaching the impact would be. Today, congregations in seven pilot communities, several other communities, and numerous national religious systems and denominations have committed to making asset building the foundation for their youth agendas. We also know that countless individual churches, synagogues, and other congregations across the country have also embraced this approach to youth development.

I believe the excitement and energy around asset building reflect congregation’s discovering or reclaiming their tremendous, undertapped potential for helping young people grow up healthy, principled, and caring. This booklet presents a vision for youth

work in congregations that we hope captures your imagination, gives you ideas, and motivates you to take positive steps on behalf of youth.

Peter L. Benson, Ph.D.  
President  
Search Institute

**What is your  
community  
doing to  
support and  
care for  
children and  
families?**

### **A CONTEMPORARY PARABLE**

Ben and Gloria have decided to move. As they search for a new home, they look for a community committed to caring for children and families . . . a community that works hard to be a community . . . a community with strong congregations and strong schools.

As they identify some possible places, they ask local educators, business leaders, clergy, youth workers, parents, and others one

question: “What is your community doing to support and care for children and families?” In most communities, they hear of a smattering of programs that are available. . . if you look hard enough.

Ben and Gloria’s search brings them to St. Anthony Village, Minnesota. Here, they learn about a community that has been working toward a vision for healthier youth. Unlike communities that seem consumed with worries about youth, they see a community that is enthusiastic about young people. They hear how the community has held “Villagefest” celebrations to focus attention on positive ways the community supports young people. They hear how the schools and neighborhoods are talking about what

they can do. They hear how community leaders have been gathering to create a plan for “asset building.” On further investigation, they discover that a congregation was the initial catalyst behind the vision and effort. The congregation—whose slogan is “Healthy Families for the Future”—had adopted a strategy of nurturing developmental assets as a focus for its mission with youth and families, based on Search Institute research. It had gathered a community-wide steering committee and helped to shape a community vision.

As part of the focus, the congregation sponsored a series of “Thank-You Sundays” to honor different groups who contribute to community health, including teachers, firefighters, and police officers. The congregation also wanted to sponsor an after-school program requiring a gymnasium. The search for a gymnasium space provided an ice-breaking conversation with the director of community services, which in turn led to a cooperative effort between the congregation and community services called “Teen Time,” an after-school program for 7th, 8th, and 9th graders. Community services provides the space, and the congregation provides the staff and volunteers.

## CONGREGATIONS' ASSET-BUILDING POTENTIAL

It may be a different way of thinking to suggest that the faith community can play a lead role in building assets for youth. Yet more and more congregations are discovering that it is imperative to address all aspects of young people's lives. Consider some of the asset-building strengths congregations already offer youth:

- **SUPPORT**—Most congregations can provide a caring community in which young people are surrounded by networks of support.
- **PARENT SUPPORT**—Because families are often involved together in congregations, the faith community has a unique opportunity to influence, support, and equip parents in their central role of nurturing assets.
- **INTERGENERATIONAL AND PEER RELATIONSHIPS**—Congregations have a unique potential to be intergenerational

communities in which youth connect with caring adults of all ages, build healthy relationships with peers, and develop attachments to younger children.

- **SERVICE**—All major faith traditions include an emphasis on service as an expression of faith. Personal involvement in service—at many times during childhood and adolescence—is a key strategy for nurturing assets.
- **VALUES**—Shaping values is at the core of the congregation's mission. By naming and nurturing positive values, congregations help to shape the life choices of the young people they touch.
- **COMMUNITY ADVOCACY**—The faith community can provide pivotal leadership, making congregations key partners in community-wide asset-building efforts.

Guiding and inspiring all these efforts is a community-wide vision:

In May 2007, the valedictorian of St. Anthony High School's graduating class (those children who entered kindergarten in the fall of 1994) will say: "This graduating class has reached a goal: Seventy-five percent of us have [almost all of the] assets. . . . I want to say thanks to my parents for their love and support, and also to my classmates, teachers, and other adults in this community, because it took the whole village to raise us."

### **THE POWER OF ASSET BUILDING**

What does that congregation and community mean by "asset building"? And what is it about this strategy that has energized and united this congregation and community, as well as many others across the country? The concept of developmental assets grows out of research conducted by Search Institute on youth across the United States. Instead of focusing on problems (such as violence or drug use), the research focuses on 40 developmental assets—positive things young people need to grow up healthy, principled, and caring (see box on page 6). These assets are divided into two broad categories:

• **External assets**—Twenty assets come primarily from outside of young people— from families, other people, and institutions—and surround them with the support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, and constructive use of time they need to thrive. These external assets are like the nest in which young birds are carefully nourished, nurtured, and protected as they mature and become independent.

• **Internal assets**—The other 20 assets are commitments, attitudes, values, and skills that support our youth from within. To continue our analogy, they are the wings that provide strength and skills to enable growing birds to thrive and fly. Most people agree that these assets make intuitive sense. When they first hear about the concept of assets, they often say: “This helps me put together a lot of what I’ve been thinking and feeling. It makes so much sense!” In addition, people from many faith traditions see asset building as compatible with their theology and mission. But are the assets really important? Do they really make a difference? Research suggests that they are and do—and that’s why so many people and organizations are joining the asset-building movement.

**SEARCH INSTITUTE'S 40 DEVELOPMENTAL ASSETS (page 6 box)**

**EXTERNAL ASSETS**

<p align="center"><b>SUPPORT</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Family Support</li> <li>2. Positive family communication</li> <li>3. Other adult relationships</li> <li>4. Caring neighborhood</li> <li>5. Caring school climate</li> <li>6. Parent involvement in schooling</li> </ol>	<p align="center"><b>EMPOWERMENT</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Community values youth</li> <li>8. Youth as resources</li> <li>9. Services to others</li> <li>10. Safety</li> </ol>	<p align="center"><b>BOUNDARIES AND EXPECTATIONS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. Family boundaries</li> <li>12. School boundaries</li> <li>13. Neighborhood boundaries</li> <li>14. Adult role models</li> <li>15. Positive peer influence</li> <li>16. High expectations</li> </ol>	<p align="center"><b>CONSTRUCTIVE USE OF TIME</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17. Creative activities</li> <li>18. Youth programs</li> <li>19. Religious community</li> <li>20. Time at home</li> </ol>
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**INTERNAL ASSETS**

<p align="center"><b>COMMITMENT TO LEARNING</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21. Achievement motivation</li> <li>22. School engagement</li> <li>23. Homework</li> <li>24. Bonding to school</li> <li>25. Reading for pleasure</li> </ol>	<p align="center"><b>POSITIVE VALUES</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26. Caring</li> <li>27. Equality and social justice</li> <li>28. Integrity</li> <li>29. Honesty</li> <li>30. Responsibility</li> <li>31. Restraint</li> </ol>	<p align="center"><b>SOCIAL COMPETENCIES</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>32. Planning and decision making</li> <li>33. Interpersonal competence</li> <li>34. Cultural competence</li> <li>35. Resistance skills</li> <li>36. Peaceful conflict resolution</li> </ol>	<p align="center"><b>POSITIVE IDENTITY</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>37. Personal power</li> <li>38. Self-esteem</li> <li>39. Sense of purpose</li> <li>40. Positive view of personal future</li> </ol>
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For more information on building each asset, see Peter L. Benson, Judy Galbraith, and Pamela Espeland, *What Kids Need to Succeed* (Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit, 1998).

Search Institute's research has found that these 40 assets powerfully protect young people from a wide range of risky behaviors, including premature sexual activity, antisocial behavior and violence, alcohol and other drug use,

and more. The more of these assets our youth have, the less likely they are to get involved in each of these problems. Furthermore, youth with these assets are more likely to make positive choices and commitments (see charts, page 8).

Yet as important as these assets are, far too few youth in America have enough of them in their lives. Indeed, the average young person we surveyed has only about 18 of the 40 assets. No wonder so many people are worried about youth: young people don't have many of the building blocks that guide them to make healthy, positive choices. The power of the research often motivates people to focus on asset building. In addition, assets also attract people's energy and commitment because:

- **They give a framework**—Most congregations build assets, even though they may never think of what they do in those terms. The asset-building concept provides a framework for understanding the connections between many different emphases and efforts. It gives a focus to your congregation's mission for youth, reducing a sense of fragmentation by helping you put the pieces together.
- **They are shared**—People with many different perspectives find that they can unite behind the assets. They form a common ground on which diverse communities can start working together toward shared values and commitments.
- **They are hopeful**—Most efforts on behalf of youth have focused on problem solving. And while there certainly is a need to solve problems,

the emphasis on problems tends to drain energy. It doesn't take long before people burn out or become frustrated. In addition, the problem-centered approach is rarely effective in promoting long-term, positive change. Because asset building focuses on young people's strengths, sees youth as resources, and focuses on the positive possibilities, this approach can give energy and a vision that will sustain efforts. Furthermore, this hopeful perspective is consistent with the theology of most faith traditions.

- **They are effective**—People want to do things that they believe will make a difference. They want a return on their investment of time and energy. With asset building, people easily see how they can make a positive difference, creating healthier families and healthier communities.
- **They are manageable**—Asset building isn't dependent on cumbersome bureaucratic processes. One person or one group can begin immediately. Building the 40 assets can be seen as 40 goals or priorities. Each one makes a difference, and each one builds on the other, creating more strength as the number of assets increases.
- **They empower**—Everyone can build assets, so every congregation member has a role to play. In this way, positive

youth development becomes the responsibility of all members. People take creative action and make changes on their own, based on their own concerns and interests. When you begin understanding the asset building idea, it can refocus energy and give a new perspective for youth work (see box, page 7). In the process, it can challenge congregations to reenergize their youth programs and develop innovative strategies to build strengths for youth in the congregation and community.

## WHAT'S DIFFERENT ABOUT ASSET BUILDING? (page 7 box)

When congregations adopt an asset-building perspective, it can change many things about the way they work with youth and families. Here are some ways it may be different:

<b>COMMON APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS YOUTH WORK</b>	<b>AN ASSET-BUILDING APPROACH TO YOUTH WORK</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program is made up of many seemingly unrelated activities without a clear mission or purpose.</li> <li>• It's often unclear what the congregation needs to do that will make a difference in youth's lives.</li> <li>• The focus is primarily on youth-to-youth relationships.</li> <li>• Children and youth in the congregation are the responsibility of the youth leader, volunteers, and parents.</li> <li>• Parents are only superficially involved in the youth program (providing refreshments or being informed).</li> <li>• Energy is consumed by reacting to problems after they occur.</li> <li>• The focus is almost exclusively on running the congregation's own youth program.</li> <li>• The youth worker is primarily a program leader, planner, and mentor for youth in the congregation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The framework helps to integrate diverse activities into a larger framework of positive outcomes.</li> <li>• The framework gives concrete things the congregation can do to make a lasting difference for youth.</li> <li>• The focus broadens to building intergenerational community.</li> <li>• Everyone in the congregation recognizes her or his responsibility for children and youth—and her or his power to build assets.</li> <li>• Parents are active partners in the youth program, through family activities and parent education.</li> <li>• Energy is put into nurturing skills and values that help to avoid problems before they start.</li> <li>• Congregations become committed to cooperating with others in the community.</li> <li>• The youth worker also serves as a networker and voice for youth in the community.</li> </ul>

# The Importance of Increasing Assets

Nurturing assets has tremendous potential for reducing many of the problems that we worry about among youth. Based on a Search Institute study of nearly 100,000 6th- to 12th-grade youth, the following charts show that youth with more assets in their lives are much less likely to be involved in a range of at-risk behaviors, and more likely to be involved in positive, prosocial behaviors. Percentages indicate youth who reported involvement in each area.

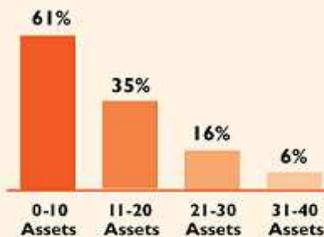
## SEXUAL ACTIVITY

Average: 18%



## VIOLENCE

Average: 33%



## PROBLEM ALCOHOL USE

Average: 27%



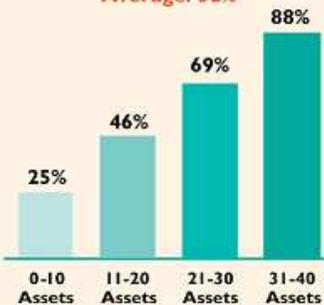
## SUCCESS IN SCHOOL

Average: 23%



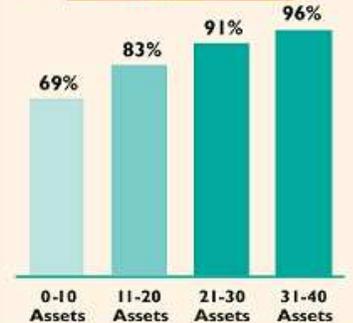
## MAINTAINS GOOD HEALTH

Average: 52%



## HELPS OTHERS

Average: 83%



For definitions of each behavior, see Peter Benson, *All Kids Are Our Kids* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

## **ASSET BUILDING AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT**

While people from many faith traditions have affirmed the compatibility of asset building with their theology, some have questioned its relationship to congregations' historical focus on spiritual development and socialization into a specific faith tradition. They worry that asset building could deflect energy from a primary focus on nurturing young people's religious identity. Some may have a tendency to say, "Our role is to focus on the religious aspects of development and leave the rest to families and others."

These perspectives raise important questions that are worthy of reflection and discussion among leaders, parents, and youth. Several points help clarify the issues:

- Most theological traditions affirm that religious youth work involves addressing young people's spiritual needs in the context of their whole lives, which includes the developmental issues identified in the assets.
- Many asset-building themes are rooted in a basic philosophy of religious youth work, including the importance of relationships, caring community, intergenerational relationships, and more.

- Many asset-building strategies are also important strategies for nurturing faith. These include involvement in service, creating a warm and caring climate for youth, supporting families, developing thinking skills, developing friendship-making skills, and others.\* Thus asset building can actually enhance faith development efforts.

- Many faith communities already have a tradition of being at the forefront of efforts to address the well-being of young people. Asset building is a natural expression of those commitments.

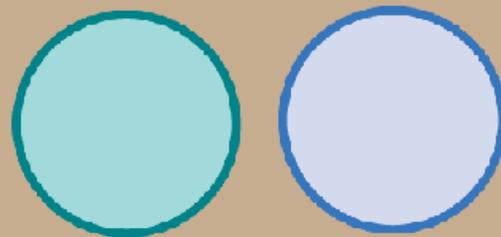
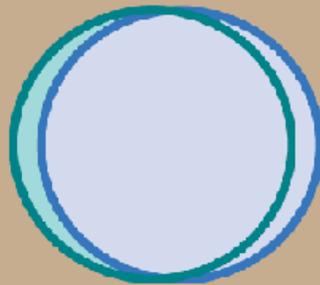
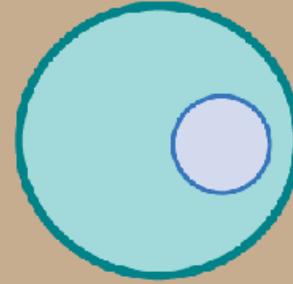
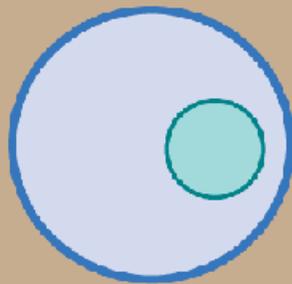
- All major faith traditions seek to guide young people away from various problem behaviors, such as alcohol or other drug use, premature sexual activity, and violence. Asset building can be seen as an effective strategy to employ in addressing these issues with youth. Of course, not all congregations have a clear commitment to developing strategies that address all aspects of young people's development. Thus, for some, asset building can be seen as a call to reclaim or reaffirm their tradition in nurturing the development of the whole child. For others, it may be a challenge to consider an intentional focus on youth development and asset building in their programming.



## MIXING ASSET BUILDING WITH FAITH DEVELOPMENT\*



A useful discussion for congregations is to talk about your goals for youth work using the circles below. Is faith development a subset of a commitment to youth development (#1)? Is asset building (youth development) a subset of a focus on faith development (#2)? Are the two essentially the same goal (#3)? Or are they totally distinct and unconnected goals (#4)? Your answers to these questions can help to shape the place of asset building in your congregation.



FAITH DEVELOPMENT



YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

\* The term "faith development" is used generically to refer to religious formation and/or spiritual development within all religious traditions.

Too often, youth don't experience the community of care that congregations could offer.

## 10 ASSET-BUILDING STRATEGIES FOR CONGREGATIONS

Once you begin to see the possibilities of this new perspective for youth work, specific strategies emerge that build the assets, thus enhancing young people's lives and futures. While each congregation is unique, here are ten strategies to begin the process.

**1. Assess current needs and programs**—As you begin thinking about how asset building might fit into your congregation, assess young people's needs and how they are being addressed through your congregation. Use the framework to evaluate existing programs—religious education, parent support, youth group, outreach, worship experiences, and other opportunities—and to begin identifying possibilities for innovative strategies. Also celebrate and strengthen congregational efforts that already nurture assets. Use the checklist on page 11 as a tool in your assessment.

**2. Build a shared vision**—Asset building can be particularly powerful in helping to shape a vision that gives focus and direction to youth work. When youth, parents, volunteers, congregational leaders (including clergy

and the congregation's governing body), and other members all have a role in shaping your vision, it can unite and energize the whole congregation. Then, with vision in place, you can develop the concrete strategies that will move the congregation closer to that vision.

**3. Create awareness and commitment**—All members in a congregation may not lead the youth group or go on retreats, but they do influence young people's asset base. As adults accept responsibility for asset building, the congregation can truly become a place where young people are nurtured by the entire community of faith. Get out the message that everyone is an asset builder, and encourage members to make personal commitments to some kind of asset building. Do this by:

- Placing articles and announcements in newsletters, worship bulletins, bulletin boards, and special mailings.
- Talking about the ideas with the congregation's governing body and the planning group for youth activities.
- Sharing the ideas in adult and youth education classes and groups.
- Having a special event or retreat to create a shared vision for asset building.

**By articulating and nurturing positive values, congregations help provide a foundation for many of the life choices young people will make.**

In addition to building a general commitment to asset building, identify or form a group that will take the lead in assuring that your asset-building strategies move forward. Though an existing committee may be able to serve in this role, it may be more effective to form a special asset-building team of people who are eager to move the vision forward. Include leaders, parents, youth, older members, and representatives of other subgroups in the congregation.

#### **4. Nurture the support**

**assets**—Congregations have great potential for building the support assets by nurturing positive relationships in families, with peers, with younger children, and with adults of all ages. Indeed, most faith traditions see creating a caring, affirming place for young people as central to their mission. However, too often the focus in youth work has been on developing relationships within a youth group and only with those few adults who commit themselves to working with youth. Others in the congregation may rarely see—much less talk with—young people. Too often, youth don't experience the community of care that congregations could offer.

Thus, it is vital to break down the barriers that tend to isolate youth. To do this will require promoting a youth-friendly environment in which adults know the names of youth, talk and listen to youth, and engage in activities with youth.

A goal might be for every child and adolescent in the congregation to have a sustained relationship with at least two non-parent adults in the congregation from age 5 to age 18. These relationships might be fostered by providing opportunities for adults

#### **USING THE CHECKLIST**

The worksheet on page 11 can be used for personal reflection or with youth and adults to develop a shared vision for asset building.

1. Identify how important you think each strategy ought to be for your congregation's work with youth (1 = not important; 5 = top priority).
2. Evaluate how well your congregation nurtures each element of an asset-building characteristic or strategy (1 = not well at all; 5 = very well).
3. Think about ways you can focus more energy on the strategies that are most important to you, yet are not effectively addressed (i.e., the ones with the largest difference between the two columns).

# Identifying Asset-Building Priorities

ASSET-BUILDING STRATEGIES	HOW IMPORTANT DO YOU THINK THIS OUGHT TO BE? (1=NOT IMPORTANT; 5=TOP PRIORITY)	HOW WELL DO WE DO NOW? (1=NOT WELL AT ALL; 5=VERY WELL)
<b>1. ASSESS CURRENT NEEDS AND PROGRAMS</b> Knowing and celebrating what is currently being done to build assets. Having a clear sense of the needs of youth in the congregation and community.	_____ _____	_____ _____
<b>2. BUILD A SHARED VISION</b> Developing a clear vision for children and youth programs that blends promoting assets with spiritual development. Involving many people in shaping the congregation's asset-building vision.	_____ _____	_____ _____
<b>3. CREATE AWARENESS AND COMMITMENT</b> Communicating the vision for asset building to all members. Having many members who intentionally seek to build assets among youth. Involving youth in identifying priorities and developing action plans for asset building.	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
<b>4. NURTURE SUPPORT ASSETS</b> Building sustained relationships between adults and youth. Nurturing caring relationships among youth. Building sustained relationships between teenagers and children. Nurturing a youth-friendly environment throughout the congregation.	_____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____
<b>5. EMPOWER YOUTH THROUGH SERVICE AND LEADERSHIP</b> Engaging every young person, ages 5 to 18, in at least one service activity per year. Integrating youth as leaders throughout the congregation. Helping everyone in the congregation see youth as positive resources.	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
<b>6. INVOLVE YOUTH IN CONSTRUCTIVE ACTIVITIES</b> Connecting all 6th- to 12th-grade youth to a weekly program. Providing social opportunities for youth and their friends. Providing a safe place where youth can gather after school.	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
<b>7. ARTICULATE AND NURTURE POSITIVE VALUES</b> As a congregation, articulating core values to pass on to the younger generations. Educating the congregation and community regarding these commonly held values.	_____ _____	_____ _____
<b>8. DEVELOP SOCIAL COMPETENCIES AND POSITIVE IDENTITY</b> Provide opportunities for youth to lead and make decisions within the congregation. Intentionally building life skills through education programs.	_____ _____	_____ _____
<b>9. EDUCATE AND SUPPORT PARENTS</b> Nurturing parents' skills in areas of asset building and spiritual development. Providing opportunities for families to serve others together. Supporting parents by building relationships among families and across generations.	_____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____
<b>10. REACH OUT TO THE COMMUNITY</b> Developing strategies for reaching out to unconnected youth. Working with other clergy and youth workers to promote positive opportunities for youth. Supporting community efforts to nurture healthy youth through strong schools, strong parks and recreation programs, enforcement of alcohol laws, and so on. Serving as a partner in or a catalyst for a community-wide asset-building initiative.	_____ _____ _____ _____	_____ _____ _____ _____

Copyright © 1998 by Search Institute, 800-888-7828 Permission to photocopy this worksheet granted for individual and educational use only. From Tapping the Potential, by Glenn A. Seefeldt and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain. (page 11 checklist)

and youth to share meals, do service projects side by side, participate in sports and music together, worship together, and share congregational leadership.

In addition to fostering positive relationships in general, congregations can introduce programs that are specifically designed to nurture intergenerational relationships. These might include:

- Regular intergenerational programs (educational events, choir, plays, etc.).
- Intergenerational social activities and festivals (softball games, picnics, etc.).
- Intentional efforts to engage all ages in worship experiences.
- Formal mentoring programs that match youth with adults for long-term, intentional relationship building.
- Peer-helping programs in which youth learn skills to provide care and support to each other.
- Opportunities for youth to relate to children in leadership and caring roles.

**5. Empower youth through service and leadership**—Because of their commitment to service to others, most congregations already involve young people in service projects. In addition to the benefit to people being served, these opportunities can be instrumental in the healthy development of youth, particularly in nurturing in young people caring values, commitments, and skills.

Because service involvement can be a powerful asset-building strategy, a goal for congregations might be to engage every young person—ages 5 to 18—in at least one service project each year. At the same time, these efforts should involve opportunities for youth to interact with caring adults as they work side by side. In addition, a shift to an asset-building approach includes integrating young people into the leadership of the congregation. Involving youth as leaders builds important skills and competencies in young people, gives them a sense of real ownership of their programs and the congregation, and provides the congregation with new energy, ideas, and enthusiasm.

**6. Involve youth in high-quality, constructive activities**—In 1992, the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development drew national attention to the fact that about 40 percent of young adolescents' waking hours are discretionary. In too many cases, the free time provides opportunities for experimenting with and developing negative behaviors—particularly when young people live in places that are unsafe or have few constructive opportunities.

Congregations have great potential for meeting young people's need for constructive activities. Efforts should be

made to connect all 6th- to 12th-grade youth with a weekly program, paying particular attention to maintaining involvement through high school.

Congregations can provide:

- Safe, positive places to spend time after school or in the evenings, particularly if the congregation is in a unsafe neighborhood.
- Opportunities for recreation, athletics, or socializing with friends (both those within the congregation as well as others they might invite to participate).
- Opportunities for youth to build skills (for example, through computer training), enhance their education (through tutoring), and nourish their creativity (through music, theater, or other arts).

**7. Articulate and nurture positive values**—While schools and other non-sectarian youth organizations often shy away from discussions of values, shaping values is at the core of the congregation’s mission. By articulating and nurturing positive values (such as compassion, honesty, equality, respect, and responsibility), congregations help provide a foundation for many of the life choices young people will make. Though articulating values may be an obvious task for congregations, it can also be a difficult one. Many congregations may assume shared

values among youth and adults, only to discover divisiveness when those values are clearly articulated. However, the process of gaining clarity will have important benefits to young people, parents, and other adults.

**8. Develop social competencies and positive identity**—Young people need a set of social competencies or life skills to thrive. These include being able to make good decisions, being comfortable with people who are different, knowing how to make friends, having a sense of hope and purpose. Congregations have opportunities to build these competencies, particularly if intentional efforts are made. Some approaches that can make a difference include:

- Involving youth in challenging leadership positions in the youth program and congregation where they practice decision-making and assertiveness skills.
- Providing a caring, supportive, and affirming climate that nurtures a positive self-image.
- Building friendship-making skills (and other competencies) into religious education classes, youth group meetings, retreats, and other youth programs.
- Emphasizing the hopeful dimensions in the congregation’s faith tradition.

Building social competencies and a sense of identity may be particularly important in communities where young people have fewer opportunities to develop these skills—and where some skills may be particularly critical. For example, Cass Community Church in Detroit developed a series of four retreats to help youth discover alternatives to violence. By participating in the program, young people examined their own attitudes toward violence, looked at the role of violence in the world, studied nonviolence, and developed their own strategies for addressing violence in their schools and community.

**9. Educate and support parents—**

While it is true that everyone in a community has responsibility for raising young people, the family is the primary shaping influence. Congregations have unique access to families, since they maintain ongoing contact with many parents who often look to the faith community for education, guidance, and support.

## WHY JOIN WITH OTHERS IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

Linking with other sectors in the community and with community-wide initiatives takes time and effort, and congregational leaders already have plenty of other things to do. Why add something else? Here are some benefits such an approach brings both to the congregation and the community.

### WHAT CONGREGATIONS CAN GAIN FROM COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

**COMMITMENT TO SERVICE**—All major faith traditions include a commitment to serve others. Reaching out to build assets for the community's youth (particularly those most vulnerable) can be a significant and lasting outreach.

**CONNECTION**—Connecting with teachers, youth workers, city leaders, social service agencies, and other residents can help you identify resources for the young people and families in your congregation, while also providing opportunities for personal support and professional growth.

**COORDINATION**—A common complaint is that different sectors in a community don't know what others are doing, so conflicts in schedules and priorities inevitably emerge. Partnerships can ease some of these problems.

**COMMUNITY CLIMATE**—As more and more sectors in a community adopt the asset-building vision, the whole community is strengthened, creating a better place for all youth and families, including those in your congregation.

**CLOUT**—Joining with people in other sectors can heighten your congregation's visibility and influence in the community.

### WHAT THE COMMUNITY CAN GAIN FROM CONGREGATIONS' INVOLVEMENT

**COMPASSION**—Congregations are filled with many willing and motivated hearts and hands that want to make a difference—and that can be mobilized effectively.

**COMMUNITY**—Congregations model intergenerational community in action.

Congregations can provide settings where children and youth can learn from an older generation's wisdom and values.

**CONTACT**—More parents and other adults are involved in congregations than in any other institution in a community.

Congregations can access these adults to bring them onto the asset-building team.

**CLARITY**—The congregation appropriately provides an ongoing safe place for people to test, reflect on, and articulate their values.

**CATALYST**—As congregational energy and excitement build around asset building, the energy becomes contagious to others in the community.

**CREDIBILITY**—In many communities, congregations maintain an important leadership role. Their support of an asset-building vision can be important in gaining support for the efforts.

From Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, *Youth Ministry in City Churches* (Loveland, CO: Group Books, 1987), pp 201-202.

**An asset-building vision invites and challenges congregations to reach into the community to create a healthier place for all youth.**

Unfortunately, too few congregations do an effective job of involving, equipping, and empowering parents. A study of mainline Protestant congregations by Search Institute found that only 10 percent of those congregations offer regular parent education. However, some congregations—like Beth El Synagogue in Minneapolis—have made family support a focal point for youth programming. The congregation regularly offers

workshops and study sessions for parents. It also sponsors mini-retreats for families. As a result, parents are highly motivated and supportive of the overall youth program.

By strengthening parents' abilities to build assets in their families, congregations can have a tremendous and lasting impact on young people.

Several strategies may be appropriate:

- Providing educational and support groups for parents in which they examine their own parenting, explore developmental issues, and support each other in their parenting roles.
- Emphasizing family involvement (youth and adults together) in service projects in the community.

- Offering opportunities for youth and parents to talk together within the context of the congregation (in classes, retreats, or other settings).
- Distributing videos, audiotapes, and printed resources parents can use at home.
- Building support networks that include people from multiple generations for parents to depend on, particularly in times of crisis or stress.

**10. Reach out to the community**—In addition to reshaping the congregation's work with youth, an asset-building vision challenges your congregation to reach into your community to create a healthier place for all youth. Building bridges can happen on many levels.

You can . . .

- Advocate with and on behalf of youth when public issues that affect their lives need to be addressed. This might include support for education, employment opportunities, health services, recreation and arts activities, and other positive opportunities.
- Connect with congregations of many faith traditions to nurture a shared commitment to asset building. Building relationships can open doors for joint training, support, programming, and advocacy.
- Network with secular youth workers and educators to develop mutual

respect and a shared understanding of asset building and to pool resources.

- Develop strategies for reaching youth who are not connected to congregations or other positive socializing systems in the community. These young people are often the most vulnerable youth in communities, yet they are often the youth for whom the least is available.
- Join existing community-wide efforts by sitting on task forces or vision teams. Work together to identify priorities and establish strategies for many sectors in the city or town.
- Initiate community-wide efforts if your community isn't already involved in asset building. This role might begin with convening community influencers and other residents to learn about asset building and explore possibilities. Then the congregation might provide ongoing coordination to see the vision begin to turn into concrete action.

### **RENEWED COMMITMENT**

As American society has become more pluralistic, the influence of the religious sector has diminished in many communities throughout the nation. Too often, congregations are reluctant to work with other sectors for fear of compromising their priorities or values. Too often, congregations are not seen as resources for youth in their communities. Too often, the religious

community is ignored in discussions of youth issues. And too often, congregations don't make it a priority to work with others in the community.

These realities represent real challenges. But as congregations and other institutions in communities discover a new, positive vision for asset building, communities have the opportunity to commit to working through differences toward a shared vision for young people. When that begins to occur, the faith community will rediscover and begin to tap its tremendous potential for leading communities toward a hopeful future for youth in the congregation, the community, and the nation.

## ASSET-BUILDING RESOURCES FROM SEARCH INSTITUTE

### **Building Assets in Congregations**

*A Practical Guide for Helping Youth Grow Up Healthy*

This in-depth practical guide offers a discussion of developmental assets, an easy planning guide for creating an asset-building congregation, and worksheets, strategies, and ideas for infusing assets into youth programs, work with families, congregation-wide activities, and work in the broader community.

### **A Foundation for Success Video and Leader's Guide**

This motivational and educational video offers ideas and examples from all faith traditions on how asset building can be integrated into the activities and life of a congregation.

### **Building Assets Together**

*135 Group Activities for Helping Youth Succeed*

This book gives creative, easy-to-use activities to introduce developmental assets to youth. It includes 94 interactive group activities for 6th-to-12th-graders, and 41 attractive, reproducible worksheets that help youth understand their own assets.

### **What Kids Need to Succeed**

*Proven, Practical Ways to Raise Good Kids*

*What Kids Need to Succeed* introduces the 40 assets and shows practical and specific ways everyone can build each

of the assets. It includes more than 900 commonsense ideas for building assets at home, in the congregation, at school, and in the community, and offers checklists to help parents and others identify the assets of their own young people.

### **All Kids Are Our Kids**

*What Communities Must Do to Raise Caring and Responsible Children and Adolescents*

In his book, Peter L. Benson presents a comprehensive vision of what children and adolescents need to grow up healthy and what everyone in a community must do to build this foundation for healthy development. Included is a complete description of 40 developmental assets and practical steps for creating an asset-building community.

### **Ideas for Parents**

#### **Newsletter Master Set**

This set of 50 newsletter masters is designed for schools, community groups, or other organizations to copy and distribute to parents. It focuses practical tips on how parents can help their children grow into responsible, successful adults. Master set includes a users guide with an overview of each newsletter and helpful suggestions for customizing, promoting, and distributing the series.

Note: This product is not intended for individual sale.

# Reader 8-1: Role of the Religious Educator in Youth Ministry

## ATTRIBUTION

From the RE Road Map (2006) by Cindy Leitner, used with permission.

## TEXT

*With respect to youth advisors*

- Work directly with Board, RE Committee, Youth Group, and minister to develop criteria, qualifications, and job description for Youth Advisor
- Provide Youth Advisor(s) with training opportunities and all the support material from the UUA Office of Youth & Young Adult Ministries and your district
- Provide advisors with best curricula and encourage working with youth to set yearly programming
- Check in with advisors regularly
- Ensure that supply needs are adequately covered by the budget and advocate for better budget as necessary
- Provide a “dedicated” youth meeting space (that they can call their own)
- Acknowledge advisors and make them and youth visible in the congregation

*With respect to youth program*

- Talk about including all the components of the web of youth ministry in your youth ministry
- Provide church calendar to group and advisors so that date conflicts for social events can be avoided
- Advocate for the value of youth programs in the congregation and with the Board

- Support the presence of youth as members, on committees, and on the Board

*With respect to district youth programs*

- Know the structural organization of your district
- Invite a district Youth Adult Committee (YAC) member to visit the congregation
- Make sure that a DRE from your cluster is represented or will act as liaison to the YAC
- Make sure youth advisors understand the need to connect beyond the church with youth cluster groups, YAC, etc.
- Support the presence of youth on district committees and district Board

*With respect to parents*

- Hold a parent meeting early in the year to go over the program plans, complete permission slips, and address parental concerns
- Use the fishbowl technique as a way to get adults and youth listening to one another
- Provide support materials to parents
- Suggest/facilitate a support group for parents of teens in your congregation

# Reader 8-2: Role of the Parish Minister in Youth Ministry

## ATTRIBUTION

From the Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth Summary Report (UUA, 2007).

## INSTRUCTIONS

Parish ministers have an important role in ministry with youth. This resource provides some food for thought about how ministers can build relationships with youth in their congregation.

## TEXT

**In the Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth, many stakeholders including the UU Ministers' Association discussed their vision of the ideal minister.**

### **The ideal minister:**

- Recognizes that spiritual growth is a lifelong process and commits to ministry with people of all ages
- Connects with youth outside of Sunday services
- Offers worship opportunities that inspire people of all ages and is open to exploring a variety of liturgy options
- Has a sense of humor
- Deeply respects youth
- Is able to gain or earn youth's trust
- Listens to youth
- Understands the developmental needs of youth, especially when it comes to racial/sexual/gender identity development
- Has a strong understanding of racism and oppression and how they operate in our Association and the larger world
- Understands their power in the congregation and is able to step back when necessary in order to allow space for youth to claim their power (and models this process of stepping back for other adults)

- Values their relationships with youth
- Is creative in their ministry
- Is present with youth and is a source of pastoral support
- Is skilled in conflict management (and does not resort to conflict avoidance)

**How do ministers engage with youth in Unitarian Universalist congregations?**

- Participate in recruiting and hiring youth advisors
- Meet with youth advisors periodically
- Let youth know that they are available for pastoral and spiritual support
- Meet with the youth group periodically
- Plan worship with youth
- Help with Coming of Age
- Lead workshops for senior youth who are bridging
- Lead or help with the senior high youth's bridging ceremony
- Lead multigenerational worship services
- Encourage youth to attend worship and create worship that is multigenerational, youth-inclusive, and which youth have a role in planning
- Holding up the importance of youth when engaging with the leadership of the congregation
- Serve as chaplain at youth conferences, camps, and events

## Reader 8-3: Basic Approaches to Chaplaincy

### ATTRIBUTION

From the Unitarian Universalist Association Youth Chaplain Manual (2006).

### TEXT

There are several key aspects to remember when approaching any chaplaining situation. These recommendations help guide the general framework of the relationship between chaplain and chaplainee.

#### *Respect as a Fundamental Value:*

In his book, *The Skilled Helper*, Gerard Egan states that respect should be the fundamental value of any counseling relationship. Respect must not be merely felt by the chaplain, it must also be communicated to the chaplainee (Egan 46). Egan demonstrates some of the ways in which this respect can be shown.

Communicate to the chaplainee that you are “for” them: Focus on the chaplainee, give them your undivided attention. Find whatever ways seem natural to you to communicate to them that, at that moment, they are the single most important person in the world for you to be with.

Keep the needs of the chaplainee central: Egan emphasizes focusing at all times on why the person has come to talk to you, what they want to communicate, and how you can assist them with this. Do not unnecessarily bring issues from your personal life into the relationship and do not delve into people’s lives and emotions simply to satisfy your interest or curiosity (Egan 46).

#### *Be Nonjudgmental:*

Another important way of communicating respect is to avoid being judgmental of them, their situations, or their actions. Every person has different values and makes different decisions based upon those values. Rather than trying to encourage someone to conform to what you believe is best, the chaplain is instead there to “help them identify, explore, and review and challenge the consequences of the values they have adopted”

(Egan 46). The chaplain's job is to provide emotional and spiritual support, not to serve as an authority for moral guidance.

*It's All About the Feelings!*

More than anything, chaplaining is about feelings. In our society, it's often difficult to find safe places to express deep feelings. So much of chaplaining is simply seeking to provide a space where people can share and explore their feelings. Simply being able to express one's feelings generally does people a tremendous amount of good. Having someone who cares about and listens to those feelings helps even more so. Freudian psychotherapists might try to deal with subconscious desires, Zen masters might try to help a person find peace with the universe. When chaplaining though, the primary "realm" that you will be in is that of the chaplainee's feelings.

*Other Suggestions:*

In his book, *Peer Counseling*, Vincent D'Andrea gives a number of other suggestions to guide counseling relationships such as chaplaining:

- **Don't Take Responsibility for the Other Person's Problem:** It is not the chaplain's job to solve the problems people bring to them. When you start feeling frustrated or inadequate as a chaplain because resolution does not come quickly or easily to the chaplainee, it becomes very easy to fall into the trap of overstepping your boundaries and to start directing the other person's life in order to fulfill your own desires to feel effective (D'Andrea 8).
- **Stick With the Here and Now:** The reasons for this are largely practical. Delving deeply into peoples' pasts generally requires a much more long-term and professional helping relationship. Furthermore, it is difficult to resolve complex issues involving people who are not present (D'Andrea 1910). The chaplain's job is primarily to assist people in dealing with and making sense of the feelings they are experiencing right now. This can be a time to be more directive in the conversation than you might otherwise be. For example, a person is distressed because they are failing a class in school and they start talking at length about their fears that now they won't be able to go to college and then they won't be able to get a job, and then they will have a miserable life, etc., etc. It may be good to steer the conversation back towards the immediate situation of the class the person is failing, how they're feeling about it, what's causing the situation, and what they can do about it. Likewise, if

someone is fighting with their mother, dwelling on fights the person had with her several years ago is not likely to be as effective as looking into what can be done in the immediate future to improve the relationship.

- **Deal With Feelings First:** As has already been mentioned (and will be mentioned many times again, due to its great importance), feelings are amongst the most crucial things that chaplains deal with. Although chaplains may also assist people in problem solving, evaluating their options and decisions and other such factors, it is almost always best to first address what the person is feeling. Once a person has been able to vent and perhaps clarify their feelings, it is then possible to move into other areas such as problem solving (D'Andrea 10).

#### *Works Cited*

D'Andrea, Vincent, and Peter Salovey. *Peer Counseling*. Palo Alto: Science and Behavior Books, Inc., 1983.

Egan, Gerard. *The Skilled Helper*. Pacific Grove: Wadsworth Group, 2002.

## Reader 8-4: Understanding Human Needs

### ATTRIBUTION

From the Unitarian Universalist Association Youth Chaplain Manual (2006).

### TEXT

Every person has some basic needs that must be met in order for them to live a happy and healthy life. There are a number of basic needs that are universal. Often, when these needs are not met, they cause serious emotional difficulties for people and can often result in the kinds of situations that will bring people under your chaplaining care. Some essential human needs include:

- **Safety and Security:** “Human beings need to feel safe and secure, and to live in a non- threatening environment” (Doyle 18).
- **Stability and Order:** While everyone has some degree of personal lifestyle preferences, a life with absolutely no predictability or dependability, a life where there is no knowing what will happen from moment to moment is apt to be exceptionally stressful (Doyle 18).
- **Structure:** Once again, each person has some variation in preference, but having some regular structures such as school, jobs, relationships, etc. in which to invest time and energy is a basic human need (Doyle 18). Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week with absolutely nothing to do, no time commitments or requirements is not a healthy living situation.
- **Need for Attention and Human Contact:** Humans are innately social creatures. We need contact (physical and emotional) with other people and we need to have our presence recognized. “Those of us who do not have these needs satisfied in a positive manner by receiving smiles, hugs, or words of approval will seek to have them satisfied in negative ways by seeking frowns, slaps, or words of admonition” (Doyle 18).
- **Need for Affection and Love:** Likewise, we also need affirming relationships in our lives that value our self-worth and goodness as individuals. “When this need is not met, it is one of the more prominent causes of behavioral problems among individuals” (Doyle 18).

- **Need for Uniqueness and Worth:** “Each one of us needs to feel unique and worthwhile and to have a positive feeling of self-worth” (Doyle 18).
- **Need for Personal Time/Space:** Each person also needs, to one degree or another, personal and private space to be alone and reflect (Doyle 18).
- **Need for Control Over Environment:** A person living in an environment over which they have no control and living a life in which they have (or feel they have) no influence over what happens to them is a person with great needs being unmet (Doyle 18).

It can be very beneficial to keep these needs in the back of one’s mind while chaplaining. Not only can they be harmful when not met, people can also be driven to seek unmet needs in harmful, destructive, or inappropriate ways (such as tolerating abusive relationships to satisfy the need for attention). As chaplains, we can be of tremendous help to people if we can help them better understand their own needs: what they are currently doing and what they can do in the future to meet them.

*Works Cited*

Doyle, Robert E. *Essential Skills and Strategies in the Helping Process*. Pacific Grove: Wadsworth Group, 1992.

## Reader 9-1: Boundaries and Confidentiality

### ATTRIBUTION

By Rebecca Edmiston-Lange, in *The Safe Congregation Handbook*,  
<http://www.uua.org/leaders/safecongregations/handbook/leadership/165736.shtml>Enter

### TEXT

Is everything a congregant tells a minister confidential? Is everything a congregant tells another congregant “in confidence” confidential? When is it okay to break a promise to “keep a secret”? When does confidentiality become secrecy and an abuse of power? Are all secrets bad? What is the difference between privacy and secrecy? What is the difference between anonymity and confidentiality? Is any gossip “good” gossip?

How members and staff of a congregation answer these questions has a great impact on whether or not a congregation can be deemed “safe.” Unfortunately there are no easy answers because there is an unavoidable tension in the appropriate handling of sensitive information. Our congregations should be places where individual privacy is respected, where individuals feel they can risk being vulnerable and can rely upon clergy and other congregants to treat personal communications with trust and discretion. On the other hand, especially in an association governed by congregational polity and an emphasis on democratic practices, our congregations should be places where leadership, both clergy and lay, is committed to a certain level of transparency in its operations, to truth telling, and to the sharing of information vital to the well-being of all.

Nowhere is this tension more apparent than in clergy sexual misconduct and child abuse cases. Too often in such cases we have seen how a destructive cloak of secrecy can be confused with legitimate claims to privacy, how claims of confidentiality can be abused to shield injurious behavior, and how desires to avoid “unpleasantness” have led to silence, which compounds the betrayal and

cripples a church's effectiveness as a spiritual institution. As a consequence, we have recognized the need to "break the silence" about such matters, to cultivate openness in dealing with such violations of the public trust. But sometimes such an emphasis has led to further confusion. Any claim to confidentiality can be viewed as suspect and secret has almost become a dirty word.

Now more than ever, we need shared clarity about definitions and insight into how ethical distinctions should be made concerning these issues, not just for clergy-congregant relationships but also for members of our congregations involved in shared ministries or leadership positions. While there are no hard and fast rules and no substitutes for personal judgment and moral discernment, there are some problem-solving techniques that can help guide our way. Perhaps the first step is to acknowledge that not all secrets are bad. Some secrets can be delightful and strengthen relationships. But how do we tell the difference? As Evan Imber-Black writes in her book, *The Secret Life of Families*, "Enforced silence, selective telling, covert talking, and whispered confidences all can be used to plan a surprise party or to shield a pedophile." Imber-Black distinguishes four kinds of secrets. Sweet secrets are of short duration and kept for the purpose of fun and surprise, such as those involved in planning surprise gifts or parties. Essential secrets involve those areas of privacy that are central to a person's or community's identity and well-being. They help to promote necessary boundaries, define relationships, and preserve dignity. For example, details of one's personal history or the intimate secrets that committed couples share are essential secrets. Essential secrets can also provide necessary protection, as in keeping secret the location of a battered women's shelter.

Sweet and essential secrets are positive and beneficial. Toxic and dangerous secrets, on the other hand, are destructive and threatening to emotional and possibly physical safety. Toxic secrets, while not posing any immediate physical danger, poison relationships with others, disorient identity, and promote anxiety. Maintaining a toxic secret has a chronic negative effect on emotional well-being

and energy, both for the person carrying the secret and for others in relation with that person. Toxic secrets create barriers between those who know and those who don't. Living inside such a secret makes us question our perceptions and second guess others' responses to us and cuts us off from vital resources. We wonder what others would think of us if they knew. Living outside a toxic secret creates confusion and disequilibrium and inhibits growth. We know something is amiss, but not knowing what it is, we begin to doubt our reality. A philandering spouse is an example of a toxic secret in a family system. Knowledge of clergy sexual misconduct is an example of a toxic secret in a congregational system.

Carrying a toxic secret feels like living inside a pressure cooker. The pressure to reveal the secret can build until the secret erupts in damaging ways, or it can leak out in subtle clues that force someone else to uncover it. Toxic secrets most often need to be revealed both for the health of the person carrying the secret and for the health of the relationship system, but because a toxic secret does not involve immediate physical danger, its revelation can be planned carefully. Revealing toxic secrets is always painful and upsetting, sometimes shattering. Healing and the reshaping of relationships takes a long time and much therapeutic work. But such healing may take even longer if the toxic secret is revealed in a reckless or explosive fashion.

Dangerous secrets are those that put people in immediate physical jeopardy or debilitating emotional turmoil. In contrast to toxic secrets, which allow time to carefully consider the impact of revelation, dangerous secrets require immediate action to safeguard persons. Examples of such dangerous secrets are physical or sexual abuse of children, plans to commit suicide or homicide, or incapacitating substance abuse. In many jurisdictions, there is a "duty to warn" if one discovers such a secret; the need to protect outweighs any claims to confidentiality or promise not to tell.

Dangerous secrets often involve power dynamics, intimidation, and fear. The powerless person in a dangerous secret is often threatened physically or emotionally and led to believe that revealing the secret will result in even greater harm to themselves or someone they care about. The powerful person in a dangerous secret often invokes a false notion of privacy, saying, “This is no one else’s business but ours.” By their very nature, dangerous secrets must be disclosed.

Understanding the different kinds of secrets helps to distinguish between truly private matters and unhealthy secrecy. The same information, depending upon the context, may be either. For example, not telling my neighbors about my positive HIV status might be maintaining an appropriate level of privacy. Not telling my fiancé the same information is keeping a dangerous secret.

The distinctions among different kinds of secrets are also helpful in defining the limits of confidentiality and a “promise not to tell” within a congregation, both for professional ministers and lay leaders. Most people assume that whatever they tell their minister in private is confidential—and in the majority of cases that is a safe assumption. We expect ministers to respect individual privacy and autonomy and, indeed, they are bound by professional ethics to do so. Without the expectation of confidentiality, those who need pastoral help or spiritual counsel might never seek it. But clergy are not only responsible to individual congregants. They are also stewards of the overall spiritual and moral well-being of the congregation as a whole. In addition, clergy feel, and may be mandated by law to consider, an obligation to the good of society. At times these other considerations may outweigh an individual congregant’s expectation of confidentiality.

Generally speaking, in both law and ethics, confidentiality is considered only a prima facie duty, meaning that it can be overridden by other more compelling duties in certain circumstances—to protect someone from harm to self or to

protect an innocent third party, for example. Here we are dealing in the realm of dangerous secrets, and decisions regarding whether or not to divulge information may seem rather straightforward. If a congregant confesses to a minister that he abused a child in the church's Sunday school, the minister cannot keep that information secret. If an otherwise healthy adult reveals to a minister a plan to commit suicide, most ministers would not hesitate to break confidence in order to avert the suicide, whether or not they are legally obligated to do so. (Many jurisdictions do have laws imposing a "duty to warn" or a "duty to divulge" when clergy possess knowledge of child or elder abuse, potential homicides or suicides, or participation in criminal activity.)

But not all cases where a clergy person may feel the need to break confidentiality are that clear cut. Toxic secrets, because of the lack of immediate physical danger, may present more complex choices about how, what, and to whom to divulge them. A teenager confesses she is pregnant and intends to seek an abortion and wants to keep this secret from her parents. In many cases the minister will most likely try to assuage her fears regarding her parents' response and urge her to talk to them directly, even offering to accompany her. But if the teenager refuses, is the minister obligated to tell the parents, to whom the minister also has an inherent, obligatory relationship of trust? A variety of factors might enter into the decision—the age and maturity of the girl, what the minister knows about the health of the family system, the stage of the pregnancy, and so forth.

It is important to note that the issue of clergy confidentiality is further complicated by the laws regarding whether or not clergy-congregant communications are deemed inadmissible as legal testimony. Further, states often have laws specifying who can waive confidentiality, the congregant or the clergy person or both. Such laws may vary from state to state or even from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. (Note: Generally speaking, courts consider four factors in deciding what is confidential—whether the information was disclosed in a setting where it

might be overheard; whether the information conveyed implies harm to the discloser or to another person; whether the disclosure was made in the sacramental context of confession of sins; and whether the person receiving the disclosure is ordained professional clergy. (Read “Confidentiality in the Church: What the Pastor Knows and Tells” by D. Elizabeth Audette and Confidentiality and Clergy: Churches, Ethics and the Law by William W. Rankin for fuller discussion of these matters.) It behooves clergy to acquaint themselves with the relevant state and municipal laws, particularly those regarding the situations in which one has a “duty to warn” or “duty to divulge.”

However situations can arise in which one’s ethical judgment appears to be at odds with the law. One might, because of a higher duty to protect, feel the need to divulge confidential communications regarding a potential suicide even when there is no legal obligation to do. Alternately, one might consider a form of civil disobedience under certain circumstances in order to meet the demands of conscience and choose not to report, for example, a planned suicide by a mentally competent and terminally ill person. Under such circumstances, legal counsel should be sought so that the decision is not made without full understanding of the legal consequences. It should not be the policy of a congregation to condone disobedience of existing laws.

Nevertheless, as Sissela Bok stresses, any decision to override confidentiality requires a rigorously derived justification. William Rankin, arguing from Bok, offers four guidelines to aid in the decision:

- Is the request for secrecy a fair request? In other words, could you reasonably make the same request of another if your roles were reversed?
- Is what is being asked of you in consonance with your deepest values?
- Is what is being requested of you something that you would regard as undesirable if anyone else did it?
- Does the request allow you to respond in ways compatible with your religious tradition?

Both Rankin and Bok caution that confidentiality issues in churches can become clouded by a tendency to treat some ethical problems as purely pastoral problems rather than as wrongs for which redress is needed. While this tendency may be motivated by a laudable compassion, it may just as likely be motivated by an overestimation of one's ability to change another's behavior. Honest reflection on Rankin's four questions mitigates these tendencies since they acknowledge both obligation to one's self as a promise-keeper and obligation to justice in community. Given that compelling reasons to break confidentiality can exist, perhaps it is always more honest to state one's intent as "I will try my best to keep confidential what you are about to disclose but if you reveal something illegal or that puts yourself or another person in danger, I may feel obligated to break your confidence to protect you or another person."

When confused about which course to follow, clergy should not hesitate to seek counsel from other colleagues or district executives. In many cases it is possible to talk about a situation without divulging identifying information.

Much of the discussion on clergy confidentiality is applicable to lay people in positions of leadership. While lay people do not possess any legal privilege concerning confidentiality, they are often privy to sensitive information and are bound by their covenantal relationship with the church to take issues of confidentiality seriously. Lay leaders must also distinguish different kinds of secrets and may, at times, feel compelled to consider higher ethical considerations, such whether to warn or to protect, when confronted with toxic or dangerous secrets. Lay leaders, like clergy, bear responsibility for the welfare of the church as a whole and will, at times, need to balance individual requests for secrecy with the community's need to know. Like clergy, lay leaders should feel predisposed to honor confidences, but if a rigorous moral justification to override a confidence exists, they should not feel they have betrayed another by divulging the information. Even when a "promise not to tell" has been exacted, confidence can and should be breached if secrecy would allow violence to be done to innocent persons or involve complicity in a crime. As Sissela Bok puts it in her

book *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*, “We can properly promise only what is ours to give or what is right for us to do,” that having “made a promise” does not justify participation in wrong doing. Again, there is no substitute for personal discernment. There will be times when the right course involves potential conflict and pain. Such is the burden of leadership. But the guidelines offered for clergy can be helpful to lay people also. Like clergy, lay people should not hesitate to ask for advice, either from their minister or the district executive.

The positions of lay pastoral ministers and covenant group leaders warrant further discussion. Trainings for such lay pastoral ministries as the Befrienders Program or Stephen’s Ministry explicitly address confidentiality issues, recognizing that congregants in those roles will need ongoing supervision to strengthen their ministry. When discussing a case, these programs suggest omitting names or disguising identifying characteristics to preserve the person’s anonymity and the confidential nature of the information. Such an approach can be helpful in other situations as well; for example, when seeking advice from another (one’s minister, a colleague, or district executive) about whether or not to break a confidence. Furthermore, there will be times in congregational life, as in clergy misconduct cases or child abuse cases, when it is necessary to disclose facts and, at the same time, protect the vulnerable by preserving the anonymity of the victim.

Most covenant groups within our churches do not have an expectation of complete confidentiality. It is expected that members of covenant groups will have conversations among themselves outside the group meetings. It is also expected that members of a covenant group will want to share their experiences with non-members. Rev. Robert Hill recommends a “covenant of discretion and respect for privacy interests of members.” Some groups have rules that members sharing particularly private information within the group should identify it as such or that one must ask permission to share another’s identifying story. Discussion

of confidentiality and privacy issues should be part of the covenant building process for such groups.

There should be ongoing conversations in our congregations about confidentiality and privacy issues. All members of the church need to understand the limits of confidentiality and recognize that blanket assurances of confidentiality, even from clergy, are neither possible nor wise. Furthermore, our congregations are covenantal communities of people responsible to and for each other. An appropriate sharing of information is necessary if we are to minister to one another through the trials and sorrows of life and if we all are to grow spiritually. By joining a covenantal community one has made a choice to be in relationship, to have others involved in our lives.

Certainly none of us wants to encourage malicious, intrusive, or even trivializing gossip, but a certain level of is probably inevitable and maybe even desirable in congregations. Writers like Sissela Bok have pointed out the many supportive uses of gossip: It allows us to learn life-lessons by observing others; it conveys information vital to a group's functioning; it spreads the word about who is sick or in need of help; and, it teaches through example how others navigate the trials of life with grace. Phyllis Rose argues in *Parallel Lives, Five Victorian Marriages* that gossip is the beginning of moral inquiry, the low end of the ladder that leads to self understanding. In *Dakota*, Kathleen Norris coins the phrase "holy gossip" to describe gossip that strengthens communal bonds. She points out that gossip is derived from the words for God and sibling and thus means those who are spiritually related.

Whether or not we want to reclaim a positive definition of gossip, we need to share information about one another if we are to truly minister to one another. If we err too far in the direction of an unqualified right to privacy, our communal life will be stifled. On the other hand, we need to be respectful of personal autonomy. Whenever we talk about someone who isn't present we need to ask ourselves if we are talking out of genuine concern for the other person or whether we are

talking out of a need to feed our own ego—to feel superior, to seem important or “in the know.” In this, as in so much, there is need for discernment and judgment.

And that is why we need to talk about how we talk. For it is through congregational conversation, which honors our commitments to one another, that we will best find the ways to live creatively with the tension between openness and privacy, truth telling and confidence keeping.

## Reader 9-2: Creating Policies with Youth Groups

### ATTRIBUTION

By Sarah Gibb Millspaugh, in *The Safe Congregation Handbook*;

<http://www.uua.org/leaders/safecongregations/handbook/reand/165938.shtml>

### TEXT

When congregations have healthy, viable, active programs for youth (ages fourteen to twenty), both the young people and the congregations receive incredible benefits. Some of these youth, now young adults, have written about their experiences. Elizabeth Martin of the Fourth Universalist Society in New York City writes,

In Young Religious Unitarian Universalists (YRUU), I learned to get along with others. Youth and adults, together. We worshipped, played games, cooked, ate, talked, and sang. I discovered myself... I have built friendships I hope to keep for years to come. Most importantly, my memories of YRUU continue to make me feel loved and safe. During the moments when I was in YRUU, I was safe.

And in a Washington Post article from a few years ago, Ashley Wilson of Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church in Bethesda, Maryland, speaks of her experience:

One thing I appreciate is that my church believes in full education so individuals can make their own educated and informed decisions...I love my church because it is so supportive of youth...this religion has given me a better way to live my life, exposed me to many wonderful people, educated and supported me.

With youth ministry, as with any type of ministry a congregation might undertake, there are risks involved. Some of these risks, like the risk of abuse, are risks in all of a congregation's programs. Others, like the risk of underage drinking, are more particular to this age group. Some universal risks need to be emphasized

more with youth than with adults. Anyone in a church can break furniture, but youth are more likely than adults to think of using a couch as a trampoline.

Unitarian Universalist (UU) youth are at a crucial phase in their religious and social development; they are simultaneously empowered and vulnerable. They've been raised to think for themselves and by their capacities for independence of thought and action are increasing; yet they are vulnerable due to cultural sexualization and a lack of legal power. Youth in Unitarian Universalist congregations need a safe environment in which they can share themselves in a genuine way and develop as leaders.

Unfortunately well-intentioned adult leaders can actually diminish youth safety by creating and enforcing rules in a disempowering way. Our religious movement has too many examples of youth programs being damaged or dismantled because adults in leadership positions forget that youth can be their allies in creating safety. Some examples include church boards barring all youth from district conferences because one youth was found smoking marijuana or religious education committees disallowing youth group overnights because someone broke a classroom window.

But our movement also has many positive examples of youth and adults working together to create safety. When a pair of youth playing tag at one youth conference, youth and adult leaders convened to determine who should fix the window and helped identify constructive ways for the hyper youth to channel their energy.

Youth sometimes rebel against rules and structures imposed from the outside. It can be alienating for a youth group to be told, "This is how things are going to be." On the other hand, a lack of rules and structure can be equally alienating for youth, resulting in chaos and compromising their safety.

There must be a balance. Youth, like adults, have a strong interest in safety in youth groups and at youth events. They can work as allies rather than adversaries. In "The Sunday-School: Discourse Pronounced before the Sunday-

School Society,” William Ellery Channing writes that the goal in religious education with young people is “not to impose religion upon them in the form of arbitrary rules, which rest on no foundation but our own word and will, but to awaken the conscience, the moral discernment, so that they may discern and approve for themselves what is everlastingly right and good.” Discussions about youth group safety are an ideal place to awaken the consciences and moral decision-making skills of youth. This is a chance to see UU values and Principles in action.

Our congregations often take great care to offer well-balanced religious education curricula for children from preschool to eighth grade. We teach children that ours is a religion of diversity, respect, and acceptance. We teach children to honor and uphold the “inherent worth and dignity of every person,” and “justice, equity, and compassion in human relations.” Although many of our congregations do not use formal curricula with high-school aged youth, noted religious educator Maria Harris, author of *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church*, reminds us that these youth are absorbing a curriculum nonetheless. The circumstances of the life of the church form what she calls an “implicit curriculum.” This implicit curriculum is conveyed to youth in the way the church and its representatives relate to them. Though the explicit curriculum of a church school may be to uphold the seven Principles, an implicit curriculum of conflict and interpersonal power struggle could undermine what the church is attempting to teach. For youth, the implicit messages communicated in the creation of guidelines and policies can have just as a profound effect upon their faith development as the explicit messages about honoring our UU Principles. When the implicit curriculum is in line with the explicit curriculum, a congregation is more likely to foster youth commitment to Unitarian Universalism.

Creating policy well is an essential aspect of doing our job as congregations. Therefore as congregations set out to discuss, develop, or revise safety policies that concern youth programs, including youth in the process is very important. Maybe a group of adults would arrive at the same policy that a group of youth

and adults would, but creating different policies, or different rules, is not even half of the point of youth inclusion. Primarily, as Angus MacLean taught, “the method is the message.” Inclusion of youth communicates that their congregation honors them and respects their experiences and ideas. Further, when youth have a role in creating policy, they are more likely to feel responsible to and abide by it. On both practical and philosophical levels, youth safety is enhanced when policy is created in a context of youth empowerment in our congregations and conferences. Congregations should consider the following elements as youth and adults assemble to create policies together.

### **Youth Group Staff**

Who are the adults who advise the youth group? Are they volunteer members of the congregation? Are they paid advisors? Are they on the staff of the church? The answers to these questions can help to determine the accountability of adults who work with youth in your congregation.

Questions surrounding accountability include: Who selects advisors? If there is trouble who can fire an advisor? Who supervises adult advisors, and how? Who reviews their performance on a regular basis and offers feedback?

When establishing a structure of accountability for adults who work with youth, it’s advisable to include youth input in the hiring and selection processes as well as feedback and performance review. Anonymous feedback can also bring up issues that youth are afraid to talk about in person. The Youth Office publishes a helpful guide for this process, “Seven Steps to Hiring a Youth Advisor,” available at [www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/leaderslibrary/45566.shtml](http://www.uua.org/leaders/leaderslibrary/leaderslibrary/45566.shtml).

Adults working with the youth group must sign a code of ethics under “Resources” on the above. It is also recommended that youth advisors consent to a criminal background check or at least a sex offender background check. Church Mutual, an insurance carrier used by many congregations, offers background screening for employees and volunteers (see [www.churchmutual.com](http://www.churchmutual.com)).

In staffing a youth group, many congregations often find themselves without many willing adults to choose from. Therefore if an adult with little or no background in youth work wants to be an advisor, advisor training can be very valuable. The Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries provides a series of trainings for youth advisors through the Chrysalis Training Program Training covers such issues as ethical behavior and safety as well as more basic items like how to lead youth group activities.

Congregations can also set policies concerning the ratio of youth to adults in the youth program. Typical ratios are ten youth to one adult and seven youth to one adult. At Con Con, an annual continental YRUU conference, a ratio of ten youth to one adult is in place. Such ratios are established not because adults need to supervise youth or run all their activities but because youth community is enriched by the positive participation of adults. The Search Institute's research, published in "Forty Developmental Assets," indicates that support from "three or more nonparent adults" is one of the building blocks that enable youth to develop in healthy, caring, and responsible ways.

In order to staff youth groups responsibly, adults working with youth must acknowledge that they are different from youth and behave accordingly. Adults help youth the most not by acting like youth but by acting like adults and setting a good example. They must also acknowledge that certain boundaries between youth and adults are necessary to create and uphold a healthy youth group.

Just like in the church school, it is advisable to have more than one adult with youth at all times. This helps to protect youth from abusive or manipulative situations as two adults can "check" each others' behavior. The presence of more than one youth can serve the same purpose. In some cases, youth may want to meet privately with an advisor for a variety of reasons. In such situations, it's advisable to meet in a public place, such as a mall or a coffee shop, or at the church with others nearby.

For many Unitarian Universalist youth, the opportunity to give and receive hugs and affection at youth group is vital. Touch is so sexualized in other contexts that it can be a real joy to have friends in YRUU whom they can caress and snuggle with without it being “a sexual thing.” Adults who work with youth may crave this kind of casual affection too. However the power differential between youth and adults makes it impossible for adults to participate in hugs or backrub circles as “just one of the gang.” Even well intentioned adults can get themselves in trouble in this area because youth can feel violated by an adult’s hug even though they might feel comfortable with similar hugs from other youth.

“Jack,” an advisor who saw himself as loving and kind would walk up to female youth in coffee hour, put his arm around their waists, and stroke their hair as he chatted with them and their friends. The girls probably wouldn’t have minded the same behavior by another youth. But the girls in this youth group felt, understandably, extremely uncomfortable with the advisor’s behavior. He was twenty years older than they were. “It just felt icky,” one of the girls said. That “icky” gut feeling indicated that something was wrong. It was inappropriate for the advisor to initiate this kind of physical contact with the young women in his group.

Adults working with youth are responsible for maintaining boundaries. It’s important, therefore, that they understand that physical affection is not theirs to initiate. Adults also have the responsibility to resist certain kinds of physical affection initiated by young people. While youth should understand appropriate boundaries of youth-adult touch, adults are ultimately responsible for enforcing these limits.

What kind of physical affection is appropriate then? Here is a checklist of guidelines that can help any adult working with youth:

- The touch is initiated by the youth.
- The touch is clearly not intended as a sexual advance.
- The adult does not experience the touch as a sexual advance.
- The touch is taking place in an open setting with other people around.

- The touch is clearly socially acceptable within the terms of the adult's advisory relationship to the particular youth, i.e., a handshake, a pat on the back, a moderate hug.
- The touch is something both the youth and adult can stop easily if it becomes uncomfortable.

Finally, the receiver of the touch determines whether a touch is appropriate, inappropriate, or confusing. For this reason, no matter what the advisor's intentions, it is best to err on the side of too little touch than too much.

Advisors are sometimes invited to participate in youth group activities that involve touch, such as back rubs or games like "Ha," "Wink," and "Honey, if you love me." Such touch-oriented games are risky for advisors to participate in because they could involve youth group members sitting on the advisor's lap and vice versa ("Honey if you love me"), the advisor holding the ankles of youth and kissing them on the cheek ("Wink"), or the advisor's head resting on a youth's belly and a youth's head resting on the advisor's belly ("Ha"). Advisors are strongly discouraged from getting involved in such group games and activities.

"Check-in," a popular element of youth group meetings, involves sharing things that are going on in the lives of youth in the group. Adult advisors also participate in check-in. Two safety issues arise from this situation; one involves the advisor's level of sharing and the other involves the limits of confidentiality.

As with touch, advisors are reminded not to use the youth group to meet their own needs. An advisor using check-in as a place to unload emotional baggage on the youth group is inappropriate. It changes the dynamic of a youth group so that youth find themselves caring for the advisor rather than the other way around. Sharing details of your love life, tales of last night's drinking escapade, or sexual fantasies is totally inappropriate. Beyond clearly inappropriate topics, however, there is a gray zone. Advisors are well-advised to think in advance about bringing up personal topics close to their hearts that would dominate the youth group's attention and care-taking—topics such as a break-up or pending

divorce, a friend's illness, or a family member's death. Advisors can address these issues during check-in in appropriate ways that let the group know what's going on. For example, saying, "Please keep me in your thoughts and prayers as I head down to Florida for the funeral" lets the youth group know that you are sad and that you're dealing with the death of a loved one. The advisor must not lean on the youth group too heavily for emotional support. Advisors are well-advised to have adult friends whom they can lean on and sources of emotional support beyond the youth group.

Confidentiality is a principle that is basic to most congregations' youth groups. It is understood that sensitive personal information stays in the room. There are, however, limits to the confidentiality a youth group can and should offer. First, state law may designate youth advisors as mandated reporters of abuse. Certainly religious education directors are mandated to report abuse. Adults working with youth should make it clear at the outset that there are cases in which information shared in the group, or privately, must be shared with others. Advisors ought to be able to discuss confidential youth issues with their supervisors on the congregation's staff. Regular supervisory meetings between advisors and ministerial staff allow advisors to openly process their experiences and keep the ministerial staff informed of youth program activities. It is important that advisors have the freedom to be totally candid about their youth program experiences in these supervisory meetings. Therefore when discussing confidentiality, advisors can clarify that they reserve the right to discuss what comes up in youth group with their supervisors, who are also sworn to confidentiality.

The Unitarian Universalist Association's (UUA) Youth Advisors Handbook sums it up nicely:

It may sometimes be difficult to stay in your "adult" role as advisor. The youth in your group are looking for a friend and advisor, but they want you to be an adult one. If you think becoming an advisor is a chance to relive your youth, think

again. This doesn't mean that you can't play games or participate with your group. It does mean that you should keep a certain distance or boundary between you and the youth. They will not be comfortable with you at the same level of intimacy that they share with each other.

## **Creating Rules Together**

Aside from rules and policies set by committees charged to do so, youth groups traditionally play a role in setting up their own ground rules, or covenants. Some typical rules for youth group activities include:

- Personal information is confidential.
- Everyone has the right not to share personal information.
- Listen when others are speaking.
- Don't interrupt.
- Respect people's differences.
- Use "I" statements when talking about opinions.
- Speak for yourself.
- Alcohol and drugs are prohibited.
- Sex and "hooking up" are prohibited within the youth group.
- Weapons are forbidden.
- Turn off cell phones.

Youth groups often develop lists of rules by brainstorming and then coming to consensus on the rules they will abide by. This gives the members of the group the opportunity to own the rules—to feel that they can both abide by and help enforce them. Adults working with the youth group are expected to abide by the same rules at youth group events.

An adult's primary role in a youth group is that of advisor, not supervisor. Youth and adults work together to ensure the safety of the group. This partnership must be clearly communicated because both youth and adults can assume that the adults are the only ones in charge. A revolutionary aspect of YRUU is that rule

infractions are dealt with by the whole group, not just adults. For example, if a young man is found to be drinking alcohol at a conference, the Spirit Committee—a group of youth and adult leaders—will convene to deal with the problem. However, in cases of imminent bodily danger, such as fire or oncoming traffic, a collaborative approach is not necessary. Youth or adults are encouraged in such cases to do whatever it takes to get people out of harm's way. Advisors are strongly encouraged to become familiar with their congregation's safety policies and reporting procedures.

At overnights and conferences, it is not the adult's job to patrol from room to room and sleeping bag to sleeping bag to make sure that no rules are broken. At most conferences and overnights, at least one adult is awake and available at all times that youth are awake. This adult can even go from room to room, checking in on people. But the goal is to relate to youth. If adults (or youth) see rule infractions it is their responsibility to handle these concerns through the appropriate channels. These channels are often defined in advance of the overnight and include both youth and adult leaders (like the Spirit Committee).

Fire safety policies and procedures as well as parental permission procedures must be followed with youth groups in the same way that they are with children in the church school. Please see "Healthy Religious Education Community" for guidelines in this area.

Education plays a role both in preventing unsafe situations and helping people know how to respond if one does arise. The Our Whole Lives sexuality education curricula can help young people recognize and respond to sexual harassment and sexual assault. Congregations must recognize, however, that even the best sexuality education program does not inoculate a person from being a victim or a victimizer in the case of sexual assault and harassment. Teaching the curriculum is not enough. Education must be partnered with clear codes of ethics, expectations, and policies.

Clearly stating expectations and policies at the outset of events serves both to educate and to prevent. If the “no drugs” rule is written in the registration materials and announced at the beginning of a conference, youth are far less likely to use drugs because the expectation that they will not is clear.

### **Youth Safety at Programs Beyond the Congregation**

Most Unitarian Universalist youth groups engage in activities beyond the walls of their own church. These outings may be related to subjects they are studying in their religious education programs or they may involve participation in denominational activities at the regional or national level. In either case, taking field trips and attending conferences with young people requires sound planning and firm safety rules. The essential safety elements of field trip planning are five-fold. They involve safety on the trip itself, emergency contact information, parental permission, communication with the congregation, and liability issues.

To make the trip as safe as possible, the first step is to assess the risk level of the planned activities. For instance, a field trip to a Buddhist temple will clearly involve a different level of risk than a three-day wilderness backpacking trip. Assessing the risk in advance can help the trip’s leadership plan appropriately.

Some safety elements to consider when planning a field trip include:

- written permission from parents or guardians (see the sample permission form included at the end of this book). For trips involving physical challenge, include a clause indicating parental understanding of the risk and releasing the congregation from liability in case of injury or death.
- emergency medical information for each participant that includes signed parental consent for emergency medical treatment, emergency contact information, and health insurance policy information. Keep a binder with this information on hand at all times during the trip and leave additional copies in the church office.
- signed code of ethics forms for all adults accompanying youth on the trip.

- drivers' names, license information, insurance information, and license plates on file with the church office
- Further, congregations may want to set:
  - a required adult-to-youth ratio for off-site trips
  - a minimum age requirement for drivers (may be required by congregation's insurance policy)
  - a requirement that trip leaders carry first aid supplies, and that at least one participant is certified in first aid and CPR

Youth conferences, gatherings of Unitarian Universalist youth from multiple congregations, are typically held under the auspices of a sponsoring organization such as a district youth steering committee or continental Young Religious Unitarian Universalists. These organizations all have their own safety policies and guidelines for behavior. Sometimes the conference site has its own policies and guidelines, depending on whether the site is a church building or a privately owned camp. It is the responsibility of the conference's planning committee to negotiate the differences and similarities in the sponsoring organization's and hosting site's policies, creating a unified set of policies, procedures, and guidelines for behavior.

Most youth conferences have trained youth and/or adult YRUU chaplains. These chaplains are caring, understanding, and compassionate listeners who offer personal care-emotional and spiritual-and attention to members of the conference community. Chaplains serve the conference community with active listening, responsive awareness of ethical behavior, and their ability to refer members to certified professionals when appropriate.

Congregations can set policies concerning transportation to conferences. Because some youth will be old enough to drive themselves and others will be too young, the possibility of youth driving is an issue to consider. Additionally, congregations have an interest in establishing the safety and insurance coverage of drivers and vehicles transporting youth, regardless of age.

University Unitarian Church in Seattle, Washington, requires drivers to hold automobile liability coverage for a minimum of \$100,000 per person and \$300,000 per accident. Further, drivers are asked to sign an understanding that their own insurance will provide primary coverage in case of an accident and that the congregation will not compensate them for the use of their vehicle. Drivers are then required to fill out a form with the following information, which is then verified by the director of religious education:

- driver's name and address
- driver's children's names (if enrolled in church school)
- driver's license number, state of issue, and expiration date
- auto insurance carrier and policy number
- whether the driver has been convicted of a moving violation within the past three years
- description of the vehicle: make, model, year, registered owner's name and address, license plate number and state registered, number of seat belts, whether there is a passenger-side airbag, and whether an insurance card is kept in the vehicle

This information is kept on file with the church office for the duration of the trip. Some congregations (and some district youth steering committees) have created policies requiring youth drivers to be eighteen years of age or older and/or stating that youth can drive themselves but not other youth. The policy that works well for one congregation or one district may not meet the needs of another. It is advisable to consider the length of the trip and the type of driving involved in attending conferences. The ten hours of mountain driving required to bring youth to some conferences in the Mountain Desert District is different from the thirty minutes of interstate and city driving required to bring youth to a typical conference in eastern Massachusetts. Both types of driving have their dangers—your congregation can take these factors into consideration when drafting a policy. Congregations may want to look into what coverage, if any, is offered by

their congregational insurance policy for volunteer drivers traveling on church business.

Like all adults working with youth, congregations are well advised to ask adults who drive youth to sign a code of ethics. Congregations that do not permit youth-adult one-to-one time in regular contexts need to consider whether they will permit one youth and one adult to travel together to a conference. Some congregations find this situation acceptable as long as the adult signs the code of ethics. Others would seek travel alternatives.

Youth conference safety begins long before arrival at a conference, or even registration. Safety at youth conferences requires careful planning. First, registration materials must include parental permission forms with emergency contact information, health information, insurance policy details, and a signed release authorizing emergency medical attention. Second, registration materials need to be up front in presenting a code of ethics for adults (and youth in leadership positions like the conference dean or the worship coordinator). The signed parental permission forms and codes of ethics must be prerequisite for participation in the youth conference. It is important for the conference registrar to make sure that these materials are obtained from all participants.

The book *How to Be a Con Artist: Youth Conference Planning Handbook for Unitarian Universalists* gives more suggestions and details about the conference planning process and is available online. This resource shares the following wisdom on creating guidelines for behavior at conferences:

One of the most important tasks for a conference staff is the creation of a safe, nurturing environment in which the community can flourish. The creation of a safe environment requires the creation of rules. Keeping in mind the age and needs of the conferees, brainstorm a list of rules that will allow them to feel safe and cared for. Some districts have established rules for youth conferences. Looking at your list, ask yourselves if the conferees, both youth and adult, are likely to agree to these rules.

- The rules should be stated clearly and concisely on the conference flyer and listed and explained at orientation. Many conference registration forms ask participants to sign an agreement to abide by the rules, listing the consequences of violating rules (being sent home, for example).
- Sometimes an Energy Committee or Rules Committee is formed at the conference (composed of one person from each touch group, the chaplain, and another adult or two). This committee should meet regularly to touch base, to share their perceptions of how the conference is going, and to deal with any rule infractions that come up.
- Clarify among the staff how you will handle rule violations before they occur. Who will be responsible? What will be the process for decision-making? Where will you meet? If you decide these things when you are cool, calm, and collected, in the frenzy of a conference you can easily follow your established procedure.
- A sense of responsibility to the community and to individuals and a willingness to make compromises to maintain peace in the community are essential to conference unity.
- As a committee, decide what rules and policies will be necessary to hold your conference successfully, peacefully, and with unity. Whatever you decide, the rules must be wholeheartedly supported by the planning committee.
- Part of the Planning Committee's role is to have a good relationship with participants, let them know what's going on, listen to their concerns, and be involved in the community as regular conferees as much as possible.
- The key to gaining support for behavior guidelines is for the community to have a sense of ownership of them. If conferees feel responsible for their own rules and policies, they will be more likely to uphold them rather than if they feel they must live under oppressive rules handed down from a faceless source. The process of creating behavior codes is one of the most crucial aspects of allowing conferees to feel a part of the community.

Further, How to be a Con Artist suggests firm enforcement coupled with creativity to address rule infractions:

When conference rules include consequences such as being removed from the conference community, “safe houses” are sometimes established. These are homes where the offenders can stay for the remainder of the conference, removed from the community but without the hassle of arranging transportation home. Creative thinking often can solve difficult problems, and keeping minds and hearts open to alternatives can produce amazing results.

Youth safety and youth empowerment can co-exist in an environment that nurtures religious and moral growth. When congregations and conference communities uphold the notion that everything we do is religious education, the opportunity to create and enforce safety policies is an opportunity to strengthen Unitarian Universalism.

# **Reader 10-1: Mission Workshop for an Empowered Congregational Youth Group**

## **ATTRIBUTION**

By Jan Taddeo (2006); used with permission.

## **OVERVIEW**

This is a guide for creating an energizing time of visioning, goal setting, and covenanting for a congregational youth group.

The minimum time to complete the mission statement and create 3-5 specific, measurable, and achievable objectives is three hours. Larger groups may need four or five hours.

Youth really appreciate this process and the work they do in this workshop. They feel great about what the group is able to create and they come out of the workshop feeling empowered and energized. Don't underestimate their capacity to take this work seriously, in a fun way.

Invite the youth and advisors to schedule this workshop outside their normal meeting time so it feels special. Combine it with a pizza party, an overnight, or some other fun event so it feels celebratory and fun.

## **SUPPLIES**

- Chalice, candle, and matches
- Reading for opening circle
- Easel
- Flipchart – prepare pages in advance. Be sure to leave at least one blank sheet between each prepared page. See Facilitator Resource: Flipcharts.
- One flipchart page with your congregation's mission statement
- Flipchart markers
- Tape

- Participant journals – one for each participant
- Pens or pencils – one for each participant
- Sticky notes – about 1/3 of a pad for each participant
- Sharpies – one for each participant
- Sticker dots – five per participant
- Refreshments – snacks and drinks

## **SECTION 1: GENERATING IDEAS**

### **Opening Circle (20 minutes)**

Light the chalice and share opening words or a short reading.

Share introductions around the circle. Invite each participant to share their name, their best memory related to their congregation, and their favorite cartoon character (including why it's their favorite).

### **Review Agenda (5 minutes)**

Refer to Flipchart 1, which you prepared prior to the workshop. Read through the agenda so everyone is clear about the plan.

### **Process Agreement (5 minutes)**

Explain that the process agreement is a list of what we can expect from one another during the workshop to make it a positive and productive experience. Present the process agreement on Flipchart 2, and ask if anyone has questions or ideas to add.

### **Why Are We Here? (5 minutes)**

Referring to Flipchart 3, review why doing this workshop is worth their time and energy. This leads into the first stage of the process.

### **Guided Meditation (15 minutes)**

This brings the group into a quiet space and helps everyone focus. It is also the foundation for creating the mission statement and objectives. Invite participants to relax, breathe deeply, close their eyes or keep them slightly open and focused on the floor or the chalice. Read the script slowly, giving participants time to breathe and reflect:

*Imagine that it is June and you are all attending the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). You are in a very large convention center room filled with 4,000 Unitarian Universalists of all ages...*

*The president of the UUA, [insert name], is speaking. You are all on stage behind the president. The president is giving national recognition for the youth ministry at your congregation...*

*The president is telling Unitarian Universalists from all over the continent what makes your youth ministry so successful...*

*Listen closely. What is the president saying?*

*What adjectives does the president use to describe the qualities of youth activities here?*

*What actions have occurred that make you proud to be representing your congregation?*

*What values are expressed in your congregation's youth ministry that make it extraordinary?*

*How does it feel to be an exemplary organization that others admire?*

*What images, thoughts, feelings, or words occur to you as you imagine this scene?*

### **Personal Reflection and Journaling (10-15 minutes)**

Invite participants to bring their consciousness back to this time, this space, this room with these people. Distribute the Participant Journals, and ask them to jot down some of the key words and images that came to them during the meditation. Explain that they do not need to write sentences or paragraphs, just words, pictures, ideas, and notes to help them recall the images from each set of questions. Use verbs, adjectives, and values to

describe thoughts. Tell the group they will have 10 minutes to collect their thoughts and make notes in their journals. Encourage them to maintain a quiet space until everyone is finished.

### **Pair Sharing (15 minutes)**

Pair participants to share their personal reflections. Pair people who may not naturally choose to be together. Ask the pairs to write on sticky notes the key words from their reflections. The words should be verbs, nouns, adjectives, and values. They should write no more than six notes per pair.

### **Post Notes (15 minutes)**

Ask each pair to give you their sticky notes following these steps:

1. Two most important
2. One that is most different from the others that were posted
3. One that hasn't been posted yet
4. The last two.

As they give you the notes, put them on a blank flipchart page or on the wall. Start looking for patterns and grouping like items. Ask for more information about notes that are unclear or might have several meanings. Engage the group in the process of looking for patterns and grouping them. Look for a value that might fit in the middle as an overarching theme such as love, friendship, justice, caring, or freedom. When all of the notes are grouped, ask if there is anything missing.

## **PART II: CREATING THE MISSION STATEMENT**

### **What is a Mission Statement? (5-10 minutes)**

Using Flipchart 4, review the elements of mission.

Purpose:       What needs do you meet?

Business:     What do you do to meet those needs?

Values:        What values guide your action?

Share some statements from other organizations, written on Flipchart 5. Then share the mission statement from your congregation. This will help them see they are part of a

larger whole. Encourage them to consider how the youth group's mission is a subset of the mission of the congregation.

### **Small Group Mission Statement Development (20 minutes)**

Break into groups of three or four. Ask each group to create a draft mission statement using as their inspiration the words and phrases on the sticky notes, conversations during the process, their personal notes, and the sample statements. Give each group a sheet of flipchart paper on which to write their statements.

### **Share Small Group Mission Statements (10 minutes)**

Ask each group to read their statements to the larger group. Start listening for "energy" around certain words and phrases.

### **Combining the Statements (20 minutes)**

Once all the groups have shared, ask each group to identify words and phrases from the other group statements that appeal to them. Circle these words and phrases as they are identified.

Working with a blank flipchart sheet, start crafting a combined statement using the words and phrases the participants like. This is still a very rough draft, with lots of crossing out and inserting words and phrases.

Look for creative ways to combine elements or offer new phrases and words that might capture the feelings of the group.

In creating the final statement, think outside the box of what the small groups first created and guide them toward something new.

When they have a final statement you will feel it. Using a blank sheet of paper, write the mission statement big and bold. Ask one of the youth to stand up and read it to the group with power and excitement. If they don't cheer and make lots of noise, it isn't done yet. Keep working it until the energy is clearly positive and enthusiastic.

## **PART III: DEVELOPING MISSION OBJECTIVES**

**Mission Objectives: Overview (5 minutes)**

Explain to the group that the mission statement will have energy for three or four years. They may choose to review it each year to make sure it still feels good. But to make the mission statement truly effective and real, they need to set some goals for the year.

Refer to Flipchart 6, and explain that goals or objectives are: specific, achievable, and measurable. Read aloud the examples of what mission objectives are NOT, and what they are.

**Mission Objective Process – Individual (5-10 minutes)**

Ask each person to write five possible objectives or goals, one each per sticky note. When they are done, tell them to throw away two of them.

**Mission Objective Process – Small Groups (10-15 minutes)**

Have participants form groups of three or four and invite participants to share their ideas in their group. Ask the groups to come up with no more than five items from the group. Have them write each one on a sticky note.

**Mission Objective Process – Whole Group (15-20 minutes)**

Ask each group to share an objective, one at a time. Stick the notes on a blank sheet or on the wall and start grouping similar ideas together.

The task now is to combine or eliminate items to form no more than five objectives for the year. There may be items that are too specific and could be used as an activity within an objective. If it is not possible to combine them or to eliminate any, then the group should vote.

Dot Voting: Give each person five sticker dots and ask them to vote for objectives.

**Review Next Steps (10-15 minutes)**

Refer to Flipchart 7.

Discuss with the group how they might share the mission statement and objectives with the congregation, the leadership, and others who might be allies in helping them to accomplish their objectives.

Encourage them to post their mission statement and objectives in a prominent space in their meeting room as a point of focus during the year.

As soon as possible, create a covenant together so they can affirm their commitment to fulfilling the goals they have established for themselves.

Work out an implementation plan over the next few weeks, either as a group or with the Youth Ministry Committee/Youth Adult Committee. Consider:

- What activities will achieve these objectives?
- Who will be responsible for managing these activities?
- How will the group evaluate their progress during the year?

### **Closing Circle (15 minutes)**

Use the four questions on Flipchart 8 to process the workshop. For the first two questions, you may let people answer as moved. Then for the last two questions, you might go around the circle and invite each person to respond or pass. If pressed for time, omit questions 1 and 3.

“What have we done today?” is asking for very concrete descriptions of what happened: we ate pizza, we created a mission statement, we stayed in this room for 3 hours, etc.

“What have you learned?” asks what do you know now that you didn’t know when we started: Joe likes to watch The Simpsons; Sarah really cares about homelessness; Sam volunteers every week at the soup kitchen, etc.

“What hope do you have for the future?” asks where you hope this work we have done today will take us: We’ll earn an award, we’ll accomplish all our objectives, we’ll be more integrated in the congregation, we’ll have more fun this year, etc.

“What action are you committed to as we leave?” asks for individual commitments to make real the work done this day: I will call the church office to schedule a car wash; I will write an article for the church newsletter; I will go to the next Board meeting and present our mission statement and objectives, etc.

## **Facilitator Resource: Flipcharts**

### **INSTRUCTIONS**

Prepare these flipcharts before the workshop. Be sure to leave at least one blank sheet between each prepared page.

### **FLIPCHART 1 TITLE: Workshop Outline**

Spiritual Opening

Introductions

Process Agreement

Envisioning the Future

Creating a Mission Statement

Developing Mission Objectives

Next Steps

Closing Circle

### **FLIPCHART 2 TITLE: Process Agreement**

- All ideas and perspectives are welcome
- Listen attentively and respectfully
- Respect our time together
- Trust the process
- Practice self-care
- Each person is responsible for success of the workshop

### **FLIPCHART 3 TITLE: Envisioning the Future – Why Are We Here?**

Mission can...

- Focus energy and activities
- Express the group’s relationship with the congregation

- Articulate the group’s purpose
- Develop clear objectives
- Establish expectations
- Identify accountabilities

**FLIPCHART 4 TITLE: Creating a Mission Statement**

Why do we do what we do and what difference does it make?

- Purpose: What are the opportunities or needs that we exist to address?
- Business: What are we doing to address those needs?
- Values: What principles or beliefs guide our work?

**FLIPCHART 5**

UU Congregation of Frederick: The UUCF YRUU is a balanced religious community committed to creating a better world. Through love, respect and fun we learn and grow together.

UU Church of Cherry Hill: The UUCCH youth group mission is to empower youth to create a welcoming space and build friendships through community activism, learning together, and becoming moral, compassionate people who model UU principles.

River Road Unitarian Church: The mission of the RRUCYRUU is to empower youth to be lifelong Unitarian Universalist leaders unified by friendship, trust and common values, through transformative social action and enticing group events that spawn deeper sharing.

**FLIPCHART 6 TITLE: Developing Mission Objectives**

- Specific
- Achievable
- Measurable



**FOCUS ON THE MISSION**

NO: Many happy helpful youth.

YES:

1. # community service hours
2. youth participate in # Sunday services

1

3. # youth in \_\_\_\_\_ program
4. # visitors to youth group events

### **FLIPCHART 7 TITLE: Next Steps**

Ownership:

- Share the mission statement and mission objectives with other youth, congregational leadership, and congregation
- Post the mission and objectives in a prominent place where youth meet regularly

Create a Covenant:

- Expectations for self
- Expectations of others
- Consensus agreement

Implementation:

- Identify needs, allies, resources
- Develop strategies
- Implement strategic plans
- Evaluate progress regularly

### **FLIPCHART 8 TITLE: Closing Circle**

- What have we done today? (concrete, tangible, descriptive)
- What have you learned? (something you didn't know when we started)
- What hope do you have for the future?

What action are you committed to as we leave?

# Youth Group Mission Workshop Participant Journal

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

The president of the UUA is telling Unitarian Universalists from all over the continent what makes your youth ministry so successful. What is the president saying about you that sounds good?

What adjectives does the president use to describe the qualities of youth activities here?

What actions have occurred that make you proud to be representing your congregation?

What values are expressed in your congregation's youth ministry that make it extraordinary?

How does it feel to be an exemplary organization that others admire?

What images, thoughts, feeling, or words occur to you as you imagine this scene?

# Sample Youth Group Mission Statements & Mission Objectives

## **UU CHURCH OF CHERRY HILL**

The UUCCH youth group mission is to empower youth to create a welcoming space and build friendships through community activism, learning together, and becoming moral, compassionate people who model UU principles. January 8, 2005

## **JPD YOUTH STEERING COMMITTEE**

The mission of the Joseph Priestley District Youth Steering Committee (JPD-YSC) is to empower youth to:

- develop vibrant local youth groups,
- facilitate spiritual growth, and
- be active Unitarian Universalist leaders

through:

- stellar youth conferences,
- effective outreach, and
- unified District experiences that embrace multiple communities with respect and compassion.

### 2005-2006 Mission Objectives

- 50% increase in Con attendance with emphasis on under-represented areas of the JPD
- One HUGE JPD Youth Social Justice event and three simultaneous local/cluster events
- Communications that effectively express our UU values/principles AND provide timely, accurate information about JPD youth activities
- 20 youth participate in the JPD Annual Spring Conference Bridging program in April 2006
- JPD Youth Steering Committee conducts 5 Caravans by SpringCon 2006

## **RIVER ROAD UNITARIAN CHURCH**

The mission of the RRUCYRUU is to empower youth to be life-long Unitarian Universalist leaders unified by friendship, trust and common values, through transformative social action and enticing group events that spawn deeper sharing. June 12, 2005

The mission objectives for the year are:

- Leadership: Restructure the Youth Ministry Committee to operate more efficiently. Congregational Activities: Conduct at least four intergenerational events with the congregation.
- Social Justice: Raise at least \$6,000 for social justice causes to be determined by the entire group at the September youth retreat.
- Denominational Connections: Be involved in District and Continental youth events including Cons, General Assembly and United Nations Spring Conference
- Community Building, Learning, & Spirituality: Experience escalating participation in RRUCYRUU: Social Justice Saturdays, Retreats, Sunday morning youth group, and other events.

### **JPD UU YOUNG ADULT NETWORK STEERING COMMITTEE**

The Joseph Priestley District UU Young Adult Network Steering Committee (JPD-UUYANSC) affirms and promotes welcoming, diverse and connected young adult faith communities. We support age-centered programs through increased visibility and effective use of resources. We are guided by love, justice, respect and our UU principles as we nurture spiritual homes for young adults. August 27, 2005

#### UUYANSC 2005-2006 Mission Objectives

- Have 30 Young Adults participate in Young Adult Leadership training.
- Retain current Young Adult and Campus Ministry groups and establish five new groups.
- Initiate five new Outreach mechanisms including:
  - UUYAN visits to or contacts with every congregation;
  - UUYAN link on all congregation websites; and,
  - At least one UUYAN article in one newsletter in every congregation.
- Provide at least one affinity gathering for YAs (other than Mayhem).

- Have at least 25 new, diverse Young Adults attend at least one UUYAN event during the year.
- Establish Young Adult programs consistent with JPD-UUY ANSC budget.

### **WASHINGTON ETHICAL SOCIETY**

The Washington Ethical Society Teen Group creates an inclusive, safe haven while having a positive impact on the community and upholding ethical values. January 23, 2006

### **UU CONGREGATION OF FREDERICK**

The UUCF YRUU is a balanced religious community committed to creating a better world. Through love, respect and fun we learn and grow together. September 10, 2006

### **UU CHURCH OF THE WYOMING VALLEY**

The Youth Group at UUCWV is a welcoming and growing group of friends guided by our UU Principles to develop social responsibility and leadership with the help of great mentor involvement in an active and fun environment. Adopted on 10/15/06

#### UUCWVYG Objectives for 2006-07:

- 1) To have 3 or more youth group members participate in a gathering with other JPD youth.
- 2) To increase the number of youth participating in the youth group from 3 to 5.
- 3) To raise \$500 for charities.
- 4) To plan and carry out 3 outdoor activities.

#### UUCWVYG Next Steps:

To form a Youth Ministry Committee with adults who might be allies in helping to accomplish these objectives. To develop an implementation plan with activities that will meet the objectives. To determine who will be responsible for managing these activities. To evaluate progress during the year.

# Additional Resources: Tapestry of Faith Programs for Youth

## Youth (Junior High and High School)

### **A Chorus of Faiths**

By Renee Ruchotzke and Hannah McConnaughay; 8 workshops

Part of a joint venture of the UUA and the Interfaith Youth Core (founded by Eboo Patel) and funded by the Shelter Rock congregation, these sessions develop UU youth as interfaith leaders. Youth explore values of service to our community and religious pluralism through stories from our Sources and personal storytelling, and coordinate an interfaith service.

### **Exploring Our Values through Poetry** (high school)

By Karen Harris; 15 workshops

Youth engage with and respond to poems concerned with elements of the spiritual life: acute observation, conscious; inquiry, the unveiling of reality, hope and hopelessness, the afterlife, and the tenderness of the human condition.

### **Families** (junior high or high school)

By Helen Bishop, Susan Grider and Tracey Hurd; 12 workshops

Family diversity is the norm. This project gives youth a leadership role in creating a multigenerational look at the congregation's families through photography and oral testimony. Youth also explore the meaning of family in their lives.

### **Gather the Spirit** (multigenerational)

By Richard S. Kimball and Christine T. Rafal; 8 sessions

With a focus on water, explores stewardship in many forms: donating money to causes we care about; volunteering; helping to meet the needs of others and working to protect our shared local and global community resources.

### **Heeding the Call: Qualities of a Justicemaker** (junior high)

By Nicole Bowmer and Jodi Tharan; 12 workshops

Youth are encouraged to view themselves as agents of change in the world as they develop qualities crucial to justice work.

### **A Place of Wholeness** (high school)

By Beth Dana and Jesse Jaeger; 12 workshops

"We are part of this living tradition. Through it we become whole, and through us it becomes whole."

This program nurtures youth as inheritors and co-creators of our Unitarian Universalist faith tradition and supports them to live their faith with integrity.

## **Sharing the Journey: Small Group Ministry with Youth**

By Jessica York and Helen Zidowecki

Many UU congregations have embraced small group ministry, or covenant groups, for adults. Yet congregations are only beginning to use small group ministry with youth. This resource has guidance and encouragement for congregations seeking new ways to engage Unitarian Universalist youth.

## **Resources**

Tapestry of Faith also includes *The Coming of Age Handbook*, the Toolkit book series to support effective leadership of faith development programs, and the UUA series of Our Whole Lives sexuality education programs, currently being updated—all available from the UUA Bookstore.



**[www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith](http://www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith)**