

Promoting Dynamic Youth Ministry

A Response to the Youth Ministry Advisory Committee 2011 Annual Report to the President of the Unitarian Universalist Association – March 2012

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Introduction

The Youth Ministry Advisory Committee (YMAC) is an executive committee of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), which was tasked by the 2009 report of the Youth Ministry Working Group to support the vision of vibrant youth ministry by reporting on progress in implementing the recommendations of the Working Group in an advisory capacity to the UUA President.

The UUA embraces the YMAC's recommendations as one way to be accountable to the vision of youth ministry, set forth by the Working Group report, that is congregationally-based, faith- and spirit-centered, counter-oppressive, inclusive and multicultural, and rooted in multigenerational communities. Following its original charge, the YMAC has delivered an annual report and recommendations to the President of the UUA for each year since the Working Group completed its report in 2009.

Though the recommendations contained in the YMAC's 2011 report are not exclusively for UUA staff, the YMAC's primary role as an executive committee lies in advising UUA leadership and the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries (YaYA Office). As such, this responsive report describes the actions of the UUA in relation to these recommendations, but does not address actions taken by other UU groups and congregations. Key programs and initiatives have been highlighted in bold type for emphasis. Additionally, it should be noted that the UUA seeks to implement as many of the suggestions made by the YMAC as are feasible, but that not all recommendations will be implemented if they are not aligned with UUA leadership priorities or resources. In those instances, UUA staff will work to address the core issue that led to a particular recommendation in another manner.

Youth ministry is the responsibility of every Unitarian Universalist, and the YaYA Office is only the leading edge of that responsibility. UU leaders at every level are encouraged to engage with this report and with youth ministry in general as a core element of our faith.

For more information, contact the UUA Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries at 617.948.4350 or yayadirector@uaa.org.

Summary of Recommendations and Actions Taken To Date

I. Making our multi-generational communities safer for all youth:

1. Be as strategic as possible with regards to putting alcohol in its place...NOT in religious community
 - a. Set up policy/guidelines for dealing with drugs/alcohol use at UU camps, conference centers, and General Assembly.
 - b. Articles in Interconnections/UU World and a piece in (Adult) Lay Leader Development Curricula, Coming of Age, etc. on the destructive effect of alcohol on community.
 - c. Youth Advisor Manual: Include information about ministering to and with youth with alcohol and other addictions.
 - d. Chaplaincy Manual: Include information about ministering to and with alcohol and other addictions.

Actions: Information on ministering to and with youth who struggle with alcohol and other addictions has been added to the **new edition of the *Youth Advisors Handbook*** (note that the new edition will likely have a new title). Rev. Dr. Monica Cummings has offered webinars on addressing addiction in ministry with youth and created an addiction ministry [discussion video](#). Staff worked with the YMAC to draft an open letter that addressed the role of alcohol in multigenerational spaces, which will also be distributed to UU camps and conference centers. UUA staff members continue to promote awareness of addiction ministry through a variety of venues, including the Blue Boat blog for youth and young adult ministries.

2. Create “Covenant Template” for the creation of youth group covenants.

Actions: Information on how to create covenants, including suggested topics to address, is included in the new edition of the *Youth Advisors Handbook*. Additional information on building covenants for youth groups and youth events will be available on the redesigned “Youth” section of the UUA website.

3. Spread Conference Advisory Committees (groups who respond to violations of covenants in youth spaces), Commit 2 Community (General Assembly program on substance use and abuse), and caucusing (identity-based) to other districts/groups.

Actions: The YaYA Office distributes the CONTemplate Manual created by the Pacific Northwest District as the primary guide for creating youth conferences, and this manual includes information on conference advisory team-style groups. Similar to the addiction ministry discussion video, Rev. Dr. Cummings has created a [video on identity-based caucusing for youth](#).

4. Improve AR/AO/MC training for youth leaders and adults who minister to and with youth
 - a. Update Chrysalis training manuals for chaplaincy, etc., to integrate AR/AO/MC lens throughout.
 - b. Put online tools for painful discussions and techniques for being change agents.
 - c. Encourage congregations to engage in multigenerational AR/AO/MC work.
 - d. Youth invite elders to participate in “Building the World We Dream About.”

Actions: The Chrysalis Training manuals for the Leadership Development Conference and Spirituality Development Conference have been updated to integrate an antiracist and multicultural lens. In addition to the addiction and identity caucusing videos, Rev. Dr. Cummings has also prepared **videos with accompanying discussion guides for youth on [ethnic identity formation](#), [white identity formation](#) and [gender and sexual orientation](#)**. The UUA Resource Development Office, in consultation with the YaYA Office, is publishing a young adult-focused version of Building the World We Dream About with fewer workshops and updated references and stories that would make the curriculum more accessible to different generations.

The YaYA Office is collaborating with the Resource Development Office and the Multicultural Growth Office of the UUA to create an 8-10 hour curricular **program that introduces youth to multiculturalism and antiracist approaches and emphasizes the role these issues play in living out our UU principles and values**. The program will teach concrete skills of multicultural competency and incorporate multimedia elements.

II. Improving congregational youth ministry:

1. Develop system of institutional accountability
 - a. Create a survey on YMWG recommendations for use at General Assembly.
 - b. Create Youth Empowering Congregation and Youth Empowerment in Transition ribbons for people at GA (for now, based on score on the previously mentioned survey).
 - c. Create a process for congregations to go through en route to becoming truly Youth Empowering Congregations (similar to Welcoming Congregation).
 - d. Consider youth ministry when selecting Breakthrough Congregations.

Actions: Congregations, districts, governance bodies and other UU groups were surveyed on their practices with and participation from youth for the 2011 third annual report required by the 2008 General Assembly Responsive Resolution on Youth Empowerment. Input from youth and young adults was explicitly sought out in the most recent national survey used to complete a monitoring report for the UUA Board of Trustees. The YaYA Office is currently working with the Office of Congregational Life to improve youth participation and consideration in the Breakthrough Congregations program.

In general, the UUA has shifted towards integrating youth ministry within our broader goals and promoting a vision of youth ministry that youth leaders and religious professionals understand and act upon, rather than following an independent model of governance and accountability on youth issues.

This approach, grounded in the model of mutual relationship, equips UU leaders of all ages and offers feedback and counsel when conflicts arise. It is in keeping with the UUA's overall focus on "growing leaders" and "getting religion."

In addition to providing a wide array of resources and communications, a **centerpiece project of promoting this vision of youth ministry will be creating a youth leader recognition program.** The recognition program will affirm the good ministry in which youth leaders are already engaged, connect youth leaders with opportunities on the national and regional level, and give youth leaders a tool for encouraging their own congregations to recognize and embrace them as capable leaders. The program is slated to open for applications in the summer of 2012.

2. Hold YMAC meeting concurrent with the first year minister training so that YMAC members can talk to them about ministering to youth.

Actions: Though the schedule did not allow these meetings to happen the same weekend, YaYA Office staff members did meet with the first year ministers at their annual conference in both 2011 and 2012 to encourage ministers to engage with youth and multigenerational ministry.

Additionally, the YaYA Office hopes to invest more resources in 2012-13 in working with ministers to further a dynamic vision of multigenerational youth ministry through outreach and peer advocates.

3. Send ministers to youth cons/camps.

Actions: Many ministers already attend popular UU summer camps such as SUUSI and Star Island. Though youth conferences are run at the district and local level, the YaYA Office generally promotes engagement between ministers and youth programs and has advised UUA field staff members of this recommendation.

4. Include information in the Youth Advisor training manual on different models of youth ministry (e.g. youth participating in small group ministry).

Actions: The YaYA Office hopes to update the Chrysalis training youth advisor manual in 2012-13. For districts and regions that request youth advisor training manuals before the updates are completed, YaYA staff will provide supplemental materials to ensure a diversity of approaches is part of the training. A broader vision of youth ministry that includes a variety of models is also integral to the new edition of the *Youth Advisors Handbook*.

5. Create a toolkit/rule book for parents on “Parenting UU Youth.”

Actions: In collaboration with the Resource Development Office, the YaYA Office will be posting resources for families and multigenerational congregations on the UUA website.

6. Recommend that youth groups meet separately so that youth and advisors can attend worship services (articles in Interconnections and LREDA newsletter, update Renaissance Modules, Chrysalis manuals, etc.).

Actions: This point will be highlighted in the redesigned “Youth” section on the UUA website. It was incorporated into the revision of the Youth Ministry Renaissance Module. In the new edition of the *Youth Advisors Handbook*, groups will be advised to consider this recommendation.

7. Integrate youth into small group ministry.

Actions: This point will be highlighted in the redesigned “Youth” section on the UUA website. It was incorporated into the revision of the Youth Ministry Renaissance Module. In the new edition of the *Youth Advisors Handbook*, groups are advised to consider this recommendation. The Tapestry of Faith series has published a curricular guide called “Sharing the Journey: Small Group Ministry with Youth.”

III. Improving our ministry to and with youth of color who are multi-cultural or transracially adopted:

1. Incorporate information on pastoral needs of multicultural families and transracially adopted youth into youth advisor and DRE (religious education professional) trainings and manuals.

Actions: The YaYA Office hopes to update the Chrysalis training youth advisor manual in 2012-13. For districts and regions that request youth advisor training materials before the updates are completed, YaYA staff will provide supplemental materials to ensure this information is part of the training. Multicultural competency in ministry to and with youth was incorporated into the revision of the Youth Ministry Renaissance Module. These issues are also described in the new edition of the *Youth Advisors Handbook*; groups are advised to consider this recommendation.

2. Create resources for parents of multicultural youth and transracially adopted youth.

Actions: Working with Rev. Dr. Cummings, the YaYA Office hosted a webinar on ministering to and with transracially adopted youth in 2011. In collaboration with the Resource Development Office, the YaYA Office will be posting resources for families and multigenerational, multicultural congregations on the UUA website.

3. When meeting with the first year ministers, YMAC members can talk to them in particular about the importance of ministering to multicultural families including those with transracially adopted children.

Actions: Though the schedule did not allow these meetings to happen on the same weekend, YaYA Office staff members did meet with the first year ministers at their annual conference in both 2011 and 2012 to encourage ministers to engage with youth and multigenerational ministry.

Additionally, the YaYA Office hopes to invest more resources in 2012-13 in working with ministers to further a dynamic vision of multigenerational youth ministry through outreach and peer advocates.

4. Make sure that there is a minister of color at all regional and district youth gatherings ready to support youth of color.

Actions: Though ministers are always encouraged to engage with youth in their congregations, districts and regions, this specific recommendation would likely prove to be an unfair burden on UU ministers of color.

The YaYA Office is working with UUA field staff and related UU groups to promote cluster gatherings of youth and young adults of color, as recommended by the Youth Ministry Working Group and Mosaic Project reports. These gatherings would hopefully offer supportive spaces that help address this concern.

5. Commission a UU “Chicken Soup” type book pulling together stories on transracial adoption (a la Gay Marriage, Real Life).

Actions: The YaYA Office has begun conversations with Skinner House Books about the possibility of publishing a book of stories of families with transracially-adopted youth.

III. Other recommendations:

1. Reform the process for choosing the Youth Observer to the Board and Youth Trustee.

Actions: The process for electing the Youth Observer to the UUA Board of Trustees was revised by the Board in 2011, and the new process is continuing for 2012. Rather than having the Youth Observer elected by attendees of General Assembly (GA) Youth Caucus, candidates are now elected by ballots submitted by congregational youth groups in the spring prior to GA.

The Youth Trustee position will be eliminated in the 2013 Board restructuring, which moves from a representative Board to at-large membership and shrinks the number of Board members. Part of the charge of the new at-large Board is for members to represent a diversity of identities, including age. YaYA Office staff members have met with the Nominating Committee, who will be putting forward nominations for the new at-large Board members, to discuss how to be more inclusive to youth and young adults on the Board of Trustees and other UUA Boards and Committees.

2. Invite youth to participate in choir at GA.

Actions: For General Assembly (GA) 2011, youth were invited to participate in the GA choir and a few chose to do so. This was made possible by ensuring the required Youth Caucus orientation no longer conflicted with choir sign-up and rehearsals. This schedule change to enable youth to participate in the GA choir will be continued for 2012. The YaYA Office remains committed to making General Assembly programs more welcoming for UUs of all ages, and works with the leaders of Young Adult Caucus and Youth Caucus to further this multigenerational approach.

3. Post questions on the UU Youth Facebook page to generate discussion.

Actions: In addition to an active UU Youth Ministry Facebook page and Twitter feed (@YAYAUUA), the YaYA Office launched a **new blog in 2011, [Blue Boat of Youth and Young Adult Ministries](#)**. Blue Boat includes a dedicated “Youth” section which is updated a few times per week with new articles and posts. Though only a few months old, Blue Boat has already seen tens of thousands of visits and become a great new venue for generating discussions and communicating stories about a diverse and multigenerational vision of youth ministry.