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JESSICA YORK: So welcome everyone to the Innovation in Religious Education and Faith Development webinar. This is part of the webinar series presented monthly by the Faith Development Office. We're so glad that you could join us.

And I am Jessica York, your Faith Development Director, and currently interim Director of Ministries and Faith Development at the UUA. And I'm thrilled to be joined by two excellent religious educators, who are working in congregations doing their own innovative work. And helping us at the UUA try to spread this spirit of innovation in religious education.

So we have Joy Berry with us. She is the DLRE at the Unitarian Universalist congregation in Asheville and the Professional Development Coordinator for the Fahs Collaborative Center for Innovation. Joy also is on the LREDA 21st Century Committee.

And we have Tracy Beck, who is the Director of Religious Education at the First Unitarian Church of Des Moines. Kareem Watson was the person you heard earlier. He is the Faith Development Administrator. And he is providing tech support for us today.

I have some opening words for us. This comes from the Worship Web at uua.org. It is written by Naomi King, "Nurture This Precious Light." How should we begin to live out our free faith? Nurture this precious light. When we do, we are beacons of freedom, creating a safe space to rest, explore, and innovate.

Nurture this precious light. How we keep this lamp of truth and justice, affecgts fix how and whether we are transforming in equity through witness and action. Nurture this precious light.

As we nurture this precious light together, we become a light of hope, turning isolation into community, anguish into peace, sorrow into joy. Nurtured this precious light. As we do our faith burns a steady flame of innovation, banishing illusion, creating a new and renewing way together. Nurture this precious light.

With our living connections, with our glowing stories, with our flame of freedom moving hand to hand, we nurture this precious light. Together we turn this world from bleak to bright, one flame, one fire, one light at a time.

So we've been talking a little bit about innovation in the Faith Development Office. I hope that you have had some opportunity to have some input into some of these conversations. Or if you haven't, you've certainly got the opportunity tonight here with us. And there may be other opportunities coming forward in the future.

Part of the idea to start exploring Innovation and faith development came about because of the Entrepreneurial Ministry Initiative, which was a UUA initiative from a few years ago that supported projects that were primarily being shepherded by ordained ministers. Though, there was a musician, I know, who was also part of the program.

And the work that they were doing in entrepreneurial ministry is different from the work that we do as religious educators, for the most part. Many of those folks were looking to start new projects outside the walls of the congregation.

As religious educators, most of us are working within a congregation. And what we're looking to do is to bring some change, some transformation, some innovation to our labs education programs, to better meet the needs of our constituents.

So last April, we held an innovation roundtable. This photo here is a photo of the group from the roundtable. You can see it was a fairly small group. And it did represent people from all over the country, all five regions.

We had religious educators. We had ordained ministers. We had lay leaders. All coming together to talk about some of the innovation projects that they were involved in. And we learned a few things from that roundtable.

One of my most important learnings was that most people didn't see the work that they were doing as innovative. I think that word sometimes can be a little intimidating. If we say change, people can see, yeah, I'm trying to bring change about.

But sometimes those grander terms, like innovation and transformation, can feel a little bit intimidating. And people are like, who me? No. I'm not doing it that big, big work. But we encourage people to think big during the innovation and roundtable. And to think of themselves as innovators, as change makers in the world of Unitarian Universalist faith development.

I think another learning that we received from the roundtable was that many people had really never had the opportunity to talk about the innovation they were trying to bring to their congregation to anyone else. And so it was very exciting for many of these leaders to have that opportunity to share their idea, and how it is growing, and the challenges, also, that are involved with trying to implement their idea, and to get feedback from others.

And as we heard more and more people share their idea, there was just a lot of synergy operating there. You could feel people becoming excited as they heard about more and more projects that were happening. That work of the roundtable was funded by the UUA from some funding that I had the Faith Development Office.

And it just so happened that when it came to the attention of the panel on theological education, who has given us some additional funding to do more work in innovation. So this webinar is part of a continuum of innovation work that we're going to be doing.

I'm going to tell you a little bit more later on, about some of the additional opportunities that you may have to work with some of the innovation resources that we're trying to create. But first, I do want to go ahead and turn things over to Tracy and Joy.

JOY BERRY: Wonderful. Thanks for that introduction, Tracy, and for setting us up to think about the why of this whole webinar. I think one of the most important things we want to do, as we set the stage for this conversation, is to do a little bit of what Jessica was talking about.

When we recognize that we are never not innovating as religious educators, it helps us to name it and claim it. The nature of our work is that we work with so many diverse constituencies, and needs, and challenges. And needing to constantly think about different strategies to creatively solve problems that we really can't help but innovate.

And although, as Jessica said, the term innovation can seem a little frightening, the reality is that most of the innovation that's happening in faith development is happening right there in your little laboratories, in your little incubators, in your churches, and in your programs, and in the work that you are doing on a weekly basis.

We're constantly trying new things. We're taking small risks. And we are, sometimes, taking big risks and hoping that they work out well. And so knowing that it is what we do, by our very nature, can help us to recognize, even when we feel like we're just getting along-- just barely getting by. We may, indeed, be doing something that is new and that can be really helpful to others in our work.

It's also important to recognize, however, that innovation is a kind of landscape. And the last thing we want to do is act as if one is simply smart enough, clever enough, efficient enough, charismatic enough in your programs, that you're going to be able to change systems and change lives all by yourself.

Whenever we start to talk about change, we know that it goes hand-in-hand with anxiety. And the greater the change that you are hoping to effectuate, the greater the anxiety that you're going to have to manage. And so it's important to recognize that it's not just new ideas that makes up innovation, but also new ways of thinking about leadership, and resources, and communication, team building, and thinking.

So, yeah-- there is a lot to it. It is pretty complex, but we also recognize that innovation is not just what we do. And it's not just something that is complicated. It's also essential.

For this faith to survive, we're going to need-- I really believe, and I think a lot of people also are seeing this, we're going to need to be able to adapt. And adaptation is innovation. And of course, adaptation allows us to move forward into the future in the same way that evolution creates situations where those that are best suited to the environment, can carry on. So I'm going to let Tracy say a few words about what we've learned.

TRACY BECK: Thank you, Joy. Hello everyone. So, yeah-- as we were going through this process, we know every innovator, everybody had a gift to share, something that they had learned in the process. We learned from one another when we came together in April 2016.

One of the things about innovation that was a take away, or a learning, was really that it's taking a risk and remaining non anxious. Joy talked about having your team. And making sure that you have the right people in a committee or just on your side.

What I learned to ask is sharing the stories a lot, talking about processes with folks, so that they understand what's happening and also naming it as a risk. And trying to create a culture where that becomes OK.

I would say, when we were all together at the roundtable, the ideas that we came with were different than what we walked away with. We all had different learnings that we maybe didn't realize we were going to have from our time together.

So today, we're going to talk about some of the learnings. The projects were all varied. Some were within, more tools for self-development, self-learning. Some of their projects were more among, so multi-generational or development within just the congregation, systems thinking for teams, or for learning communities. And then some of the projects were beyond community-based models. And we're going to hear about one of them.

So here are the people who each presented. And Joy talked a little bit about who they were, and where they all came from, and who they represented. I'm just going to go through them. We had three folks that presented virtually, as well.

One of their presentations was by someone named Crystal Mann. And she is with the Sanctuaries, in Washington DC. The Sanctuaries is an interfaith community. This would be a good example of that beyond-- a beyond kind of project.

They are a community that focuses on spirituality and has a great depth in creativity. In fact, they were featured on CBS. This is a place where people are feeling heard and included. And they're coming together to experience spirituality in an interfaith community.

There's a video that Crystal shares more in-depth about her project. And the UUA is putting these together in a format that will be able to be shared with folks. So that if you're interested in learning more about specific projects, you'll be able to watch the videos. And Jessica will talk more about that later on.

JOY BERRY: Another project that we had the opportunity to learn from was Deborah Weiner's. She brought her really interesting strategy, I think, for what I would call, an among technique. So we talked about how some of our projects are within, some are among, and some are beyond. And this among technique was really about figuring out how to help your staff team work better together.

And the most interesting thing, I think, about Deb's project was that it sought to pull from the business world. Some of the techniques and strategies that have been shown to be most helpful in the startup sort of culture. That included lean experimentation and also included the Scrum approach-- the Scrum training and Scrum team approaches, which I learned that Scrum, apparently, was actually a concept that was come up by UU.

Did you all know that Did you know that Tracy? I just learned that recently. Yeah, and I've been hearing Scrum everywhere. And Jessica knew it. But it's probably somebody there at the office that I don't know yet. But that was a UU concept.

And actually, it goes both ways. We're taking in some things from the business world and, apparently, we're coming up with ideas that are going out too, which is a really neat concept. But this Scrum model and the lean experimentation model, Deb shared, allowed her team to make large changes in short periods, but still have a lot of buy in. And that was one of the ways that she described how it helped some of the greatest change in her congregation, without provoking as much anxiety.

And I would definitely refer to this as a kind of adaptive leadership technique because it really did diversify the approach, given the needs of the situation, and the goals that they wanted to reach. Again, there's a link here for Deb's clip, talking about her project in her church. And I would encourage everybody to take a look at that because it really, really is interesting.

JESSICA YORK: So just a reminder, folks, that as those links are posted in the chat box, you can cut and paste those links directly into a Word document, and save them, and then come back and watch them later. Or you can open them on your computer now and pause them if they're a video. A couple of different ways you can see those links.

JOY BERRY: So Tracy and I wanted to share with you a little bit about the projects that we took to the innovation roundtable and shared about there. And then sort of reflect a little bit on our takeaways after coming back from the innovation roundtable, with regard to our own congregations.

And so my project-- I feel like I've been doing nothing but innovation. I had trouble picking which project to take with me there to the innovation roundtable-- which is probably not something I would recommend everyone try to do is a lot of innovation at once. Definitely a learning that I've reached in the last couple of years.

But I decided to go for the gold, the big, big one, which was our congregational conversation, to really try to re-vision our understanding of faith development. And see that as sort of our-- to really live into the third and fourth principles. To remember that we don't just accept each other, but we should be supporting each other in our faith development journey.

And then for the fourth principle, to understand that it's not just about being a free search. It's also a responsible one. And kind of narrating for our congregation how that means we come together and learn together. The lead minister and I worked together over a period of four months, with four different conversations to which the whole congregation, eventually, was invited.

But we started just with parents. We wanted to understand their needs. We started thinking about using the term family ministry. And immediately, in the prep stages got some pushback. And learned that our congregation was not ready to think about family ministry. That was a divisive term for us. And so I came up with this very unwieldy, integrated faith development model, but it seemed to be one that our people could hear.

So tell you a little bit about where we were. The first thing I recognized was that in order to fully bring our whole congregation into an understanding of how siloed we were, and the effects of that siloing, I needed to not just use words with them, because they kind of glazed over after a certain point. And I realized that showing them a map that actually expressed how our congregation was separate, and very rarely together, would be a little more helpful.

And you can see here, that I showed them about how our upstairs and downstairs were very separate. And my picture there in the middle is not because I think I'm the most important person in the church, but because I was the only link or bridge between the upstairs and the downstairs experience for our children, and youth, and our adults.

And you can see that those two activities, Time For All Ages, once a month, just the beginning of service-- and then I did full worship four or five times a year. Those were the main elements where I helped to bridge between upstairs and downstairs.

You can see that All Ages is touching the lead minister and the associate minister there. So that's how they got involved. And Time For All Ages touched some of the folks upstairs as well, but for the most part, we were very, very separate.

And Asheville likes to think of itself as a very alternative, and hip, and progressive, and family friendly town. And it is. And the church is about 20 years behind. And so it was a harder pull than I thought. You can see, by the way, that adult [INAUDIBLE] is way down there at the bottom left corner, separated from everything.

And one of the things I wanted to share with our congregants is that if we really, truly wanted to live into our third and fourth principles, that we would seek to have opportunities for faith development for adults. And opportunities for worship. And full faith engagement for our children. And so that meant adults coming downstairs and children going upstairs. So what this meant was that we worked hard to create an all ages RE. We have two services on Sunday morning. And so we began having all ages RE fully multigeneration religious education program every morning at 9:15, which has included yoga, hymn sing, so that we had a chance for our kids.

And don't let them fool you, a bunch of adults needed this too, learning the 15 most common songs, which we now use every Sunday morning in the beginning of our services. As we expanded our time for all ages, as well. So adults coming downstairs at 9:15, if they so choose. We've had about 40 sign-up.

And then we expanded time for all ages to every single Sunday, kept the same amount of time that we had. But we changed it around a lot to take out all the boring parts. Announcements, welcoming of visitors, and the soliloquy of the worship associate, which was pretty pedantic, is now all after the children leave.

And we instead changed that to having a hymn together, one of those 15 songs that they can learn downstairs, and a ceremony, a ritual, that has to do with the sharing of the flame from upstairs downstairs, as well as an actual story, or wonder box.

In this process, I felt, I was able to help our congregation see a little bit about faith development. They were not ready for a long seminar. But I was able to share with them, like, the pre-K version, I guess, of James Fowler Faith Development Stages. They liked it that they could just have the rhyming parts. So you know adults sometimes need a lot of help, and little tips and tricks for faith development.

So they liked learning that faith stages could be seen as faith being caught, taught, bought, and sought. I only took them up to stage four, cause that seems to be where most of our churches get stuck. And I helped them to see that there was a piece of this that we were really missing, and that was that faith should be created together, or wrought.

It's an old English word for worked. Sorry, it was the best I could come up with for the rhyme. But it worked, because faith is a lot of work. And if we don't know how to do it together, not much chance of us becoming a covenantal people. And the idea that we all pick up our own tools.

And that this is foundational to who we are as a faith. And that we should be starting it from a very young age. So using multigenerational approaches. And ways to really bring people into the process of learning and leading from a young age, I believe, will help us get further along.

And so there were some concepts that we really wanted to get across. We had some big successes. Just the very concept of having multigenerational RE at one of our services has been huge. We've changed the dynamic of the 9:15. Almost no one around at church except for the very old people, the elders. Just our elders. And at the second service we had too many folks.

And so one of the biggest takeaways was that offering more at 9:15, and changing the way that it looked, we were able to actually change the population, which was something that we didn't quite know what happened, but it was something we really thought was important. By offering 9:15 things it allowed us to start offering things by AL for parents at 9:15, parent covenant groups at 9:15.

And so we've changed the culture a little bit, in that adults are starting to see church as an opportunity to do some faith development. And more families are staying for both services now, because they have the option to have great resources and great engagement.

There have been parts of it that have not been so positive. One of the biggest surprises, I think, was that, although, in general we have had a huge increase in attendance, we've doubled our attendance in religious education, every single Sunday, over comparing it to last year. And ostensibly, that was what the church really, really wanted to see.

But it turns out that even though that happened we still have a lot of pushback and resistance from some key people. And I think that's the important part. Some key, powerful folks, mostly older, who really don't like children being present on Sunday morning in the sanctuary, despite all of our work on that.

And that's something that we're just holding space for letting them have their anxiety about. We keep inviting them to lean into their discomfort and saying that if we're not willing to expand the circle of church for worship to include everyone then we're not really doing church. So I appreciate that the lead minister is very much in with us on that.

So there was a lot of learning, for sure. Some things have gone well. Some things, I've felt like I was crazy for taking on so much. So some of the best learning that came out of this for me was not, essentially, about the specifics of how we changed, but about the big system dynamics. I'll give you one example before I let Tracy go on.

And that is-- you know that old saying, when you pull one thread everything's connected? I found that if your system is siloed and you start to un-silo it, you're going to find silos all the way down. You're going to find 1,000 silos you never knew existed. The entire pattern will replicate throughout the system. You're going to find silos everywhere.

And so when you start pulling on that thread you start recognizing just how separate you are. And it turns into a lot of extra work to try to break down every single silo. So that was one of the key learnings that I certainly would have never gotten if I hadn't started doing this work.

TRACY: Thank you, Joy. Today I'm going to share my story about how I accidentally have created an evening of faith development here, and it's Wednesday evenings. So today's Wednesday. I literally went from having a roomful of children in my office to jumping online and doing this. So bear with me. It's 8:30 at night here in Iowa. And you know, I have had like, three hours of children everywhere. So I want to tell my story.

We started Wednesday night programming as a time for fellowship and community building in 2009. And our attendance increased 55% from that year to 2010. It began with a dinner, some adult book clubs, and small group ministry meetings, as well as childcare for all ages of children. In 2010 we added the adult faith development component, Wellspring, and also, Our Whole Lives for seventh and eighth grade. As I had determined that having the class on a Wednesday night was not very welcoming.

2011 and 12 brought the addition of three children and youth choirs to our programming. And we called them Sparks, Chalice Choir, and The Flames. We had 39 children and youth participating on Wednesday nights. Adult choir also moved to Wednesday nights.

And programming was still very adult education centered. But this year we did add some affinity type programming to the menu for our elementary aged children. For example, we had a month of art, a month of tumbling, a month of basketball.

This year, I also moved Coming Of Age to Wednesday nights for the same reason that I had put OWL on Wednesday evenings, to make Sunday mornings more welcoming to visitors. And at that time I was holding coming of age an OWL on a rotating basis for our middle schoolers. And here in Iowa, seventh and eighth grade is middle school. So that would be every other year.

2012-2013 brought the addition of Soul Matters groups for adults, as well as a 10 week's session of OWL for our fifth and sixth grade on Wednesday evenings. I had also attended training the previous year for Spirit Play. We began offering a third service on Saturday evenings and had a section of OWL for our middle schoolers, and also a Spirit Play class happening on Saturday nights to try to draw families in.

Well, in November 2013, remember what I said about taking a risk? We ended Saturdays, because they were abysmal in attendance. On Wednesday nights there were 30 youth in the coming of age class, and so all of their siblings and family members were also attending. We still had our children's choirs, some childcare, and then OWL for fifth and sixth grade, but only for 10 weeks.

So it was time to take advantage of the number of folks in the building. Plus I have this entire Spirit Play program that had gone away in November, right along with the Saturday service. So in January we started offering Spirit Play for preschoolers through second grade. And it was a hit. We had 15 children consistently attending. And they came every single week.

I also thought, we need to do something for our upper elementary age children. So the intern minister that we had at the time and I decided to take that group on. We just tried a small group ministry style and called UU Explorers. And they loved it. So in that group we had 15 to 20. And again, they came every single week.

So all of the sudden, I had full programming in the church on Wednesday nights. Also Wednesday nights had fallen to the congregational life professional. She dealt with the dinner. She greeted folks, and kind of helped with making sure everybody knew where to be.

2014-2015 we did the same thing. We had all the same groups, and a very successful year. 2015-2016, in response to the OWL and coming of age rotation getting a little bit out of control, like I said 30 in the group, I split them. So now I have, coming of age is for eighth graders. And every seventh grader takes Our Whole Lives. So now they're happening every year.

I also added kindergarten, first grade OWL. Again, I had Spirit Play, fifth and sixth grade OWL. The upper elementary group I created, we started calling it UU Kids Club that year. And then that year the Kids Club became my problem. There were 25 to 30 kids in the group. And it was just way too big for any volunteers to take on and work with.

So last semester I sent invitations to all the fifth and sixth graders in that group and said, come to my Soul Matters for Kids Group starting in January when you come back to church after break. And at the time, we had, still the intern minister. So she and I took that group on. And we used the Soul Matters materials that is the same for the adults, and led in a small group ministry style. And it was a hit.

So now the other side of the story. The past three years, I have seen a decline in Sunday morning RE attendance. to the point where I have had to go from having grade level classes at both our 9:15 and 11 AM services to multi-age programming at 11, and even grouping the kids into smaller and smaller groups at 9:15.

So attendance on a Sunday has gone from upwards of 90 to 100 children at the church to 40 to 50 in the church. If you asked folks what regular attendance would be they'd say, once a month. So I have had growth on Wednesday evenings from the 10 to 15 coming for the first OWL or Coming Of Age class to 80 to 100 coming for all of the offerings now on Wednesday evenings.

So I didn't set out to innovate, or make this change. Like Joy was talking about, I was responding to what I was seeing, that there were folks coming together in the church, and I wanted to meet the needs. So I measured the impact via metrics, of course, and I feel like you can see the success there.

My important learnings I want to share, a lot of families called Wednesday nights their day of church. There are a lot of adults, though, that maybe are not attending any sort of service on a Sunday, or anything any other day of the week.

Because of the growth that we've seen with all the children and youth programming we've, sort of like, pushed the adult programming out of classrooms and out of spaces. So a lot of adults are, maybe, not being fed spiritually. They enjoy coming together and hanging out with one another. But I feel like there's a missing component there.

I would say too, I need to speak to the dinner piece. Two years ago, we had the addition of an associate minister. And then we had, kind of, a strange pledge drive and didn't meet goals. So we had to change some hours.

And we did have the resignation of our congregational life person. And so we had to do a lot of shifting of portfolios. And the dinner portion and the hospitality, if you will, portion of Wednesday evenings went back to the lady, and is all volunteer run now.

And I would say it really could use some attention, although there's not enough staff resources to lend to that. I could definitely overwork and try to take that on, but one thing I learned is, I've had to let other things go to pay attention to this, again, like Joy said, responding.

[AUDIO OUT]

JESSICA: You're muted, I think, Joy.

JOY: Dang it. We wanted to kind of summarize some of the takeaways and the learnings that have come from our own experiences from the round table conversations, and from conversations that happen after the roundtable. And those continued at the LRDA Fall Con via an Infinity Table, and some conversations there asking some of the same questions.

So we feel like we've begun to get a little bit of foundational understanding of some of the learnings about innovation. We definitely want to ask you to give your input. At the end of this webinar, you'll see some questions, and you'll get a link to a big old form, as Kareen mentioned, so that we can add to our understanding.

The first thing that's so simple, but very important, is that innovation is change, and everything you'll ever read about change means innovation. So be aware that you need to get clarity on systems, thinking with regard to anxiety, and how change provokes it.

Having said that, then there are some more specific things. Change just doesn't happen in a vacuum. And it absolutely can not fix everything. So innovation is not going to be a silver bullet. It's going to bring with it its own challenges. So it doesn't happen in a vacuum.

And when innovation stands alone in a vacuum, and doesn't have, sort of, the networking connections to other parts of your system-- and I'm not even talking about allyship right now, which Tracy is going to speak to. But if innovation is not integrated into other parts of your system, then it's going to be unsustainable.

So related to that, it cannot be championed by just one person. And again, not even speaking of allyship. Just remember that if you're the only person who's chopping the wood, and hauling the water for innovation, it is not going to be sustainable for you, as an individual, for you, as the religious educator.

In order to be able to innovate you absolutely must have room to breathe. Just like a fire is not going to burn without oxygen coming in, so to, too much innovation is going to kill you. And you've got to have room to breathe, and think, to discern, to observe.

It's very important to recognize that, in order to innovate, you're going to have to be doing some stuff in addition to your daily work. And the last thing we want to do is valorize the fact that we already have too few resources for the work that we do.

So innovation, in and of itself, as an end to itself, is not what any of us want to reach for, because innovation has to happen on top of, already your job description. So it's important to recognize that, yeah, new ideas may take some extra time and energy. But you need to be adaptive in the way that you work. So that's why we say integrative strategies can reduce burnout.

So for example, if you're seeing a problem in one part of your program and an innovation, a new strategy or technique can, in addition to being a new way of doing things that might be more theologically sound, and better for families, et cetera, et cetera-- if it can also solve the issue that you're having in one other part of your work, the more you can integrate so that you're two birds one stone, basically. Innovation, on top of everything else is going to be very difficult to maintain.

Just one example here. I'm having a lot of trouble recruiting adults for my summer programming. We have a really popular Maker Space Program every summer. This is our third year. And so this year I don't know whether it's brilliant or just sad but this year I'm crowdsourcing the kids to lead it.

It works, theologically. It works with the concepts maker culture. But it's also, very honestly, in part because I don't have enough adults to be recruited. And so I'm innovating, but it's also to solve a problem. So be aware that integration is important.

TRACY: So I want to share a little bit about making sure that you have committees and folks that are just on your side, and next to you, that can speak the language of what you're [AUDIO OUT] and be your cheerleader.

And also help spread the message within the congregation about what's happening. And speak about everything positively. And also take on some of the other tasks that you need to push away in order to focus on the innovation that you are creating.

And also, letting go of the idea that everything needs to be perfect. That's a hard one. But you really have to stick with that, and know that taking a risk could mean falling down. And you might have to keep falling down and just keep getting back up.

Also, keep your non-anxious presence. Just keep that all the time. Close your office door and let it out. And try to make sure that you use your other staff members too, and keep telling your story about what's happening. And use them for problem solving and when new things pop up, because you're taking care of something else. Make sure you just keep everyone close to you. And don't try to go it alone

JESSICA: And the work that we're doing in the Faith Development Office is its own type of innovation. We are trying to support religious educators who are trying to bring changes into their congregations to adapt to the challenges that they're experiencing.

And this is a field that is still fairly new to us. So we're figuring some of it out as we go along, trying definitely to get input from people who are directly affected. That's a piece of the learning that we are trying to make sure that we keep in place.

I mentioned earlier how the Innovation Roundtable that was held in April of last year was funded by the UUA. And that, as a result of that, we actually received a grant from the panel on theological education to continue doing work in innovation, specifically for religious educators. So I find that very exciting.

The panel has given the Faith Development Office funds for the Renaissance Program for many years. And once they knew that we were having this Innovation Roundtable they happened to be having one of their yearly meetings on the same floor, at 24 Farnsworth, that we where.

They said, oh, well we haven't given any new funds to the Faith Development Office in a while. And it's really pretty exciting that religious educators are talking about innovation, and change, and transformation. So with the grant that we have received from them we are going to be holding another training that will happen in June of this year.

Some of you folks probably saw the email on the Reach or the LRDA list, asking for people to email me directly if they were doing something innovative within their congregation. So from that, and from hearing in from others in the field, like Congregational Life Staff, and from folks in LRDA, and some of our LRDA chapters, and some of the other staff at the Faith Development Office, we have assembled some folks that we're going to be inviting to a training that's going to happen in June.

It will be using some of the tools from the entrepreneurial ministry initiative that are being adapted specifically for religious educators, and reverends. Emily DeTar, and Brock Leach are doing some of that distilling of those materials down, for us, to find the pieces that are most relevant to religious educators working in congregations.

Paula Cole Jones will be part of that training, and Reverend Peter Coutts, who is a Presbyterian Minister in Canada, who has written a book called Choosing change, and who does work on motivating people, and ways to motivate people to be more receptive to change.

The people who are going through that training are going to become innovation coaches. And our hope is that those innovation coaches will go out and conduct Learning Circles that will help spread the spirit of innovation throughout the UURE world.

So be on the lookout for announcements about Learning Circles. And some of those Learning Circles may take place physically within LRDA chapters, or within clusters. But some of those Learning Circles will also certainly be virtual learning circles so that anybody can take part in them.

And our hope is that we will be able to, using the training in June as a prototype, develop a new structured learning opportunity for religious educators so that the coaches who are trained in June will be going out and leading trainings, pretty much in the same way that we have Renaissance trainings right now, right? So that a cluster, or a chapter, or even a congregation could contact these innovation coaches, and say, hey, would you come do a training for us in our area?

So that's basically what we are working on trying, to make that as available to people as possible. We are in contact with LRDA, and I hope that LRDA will be a partner with us in some of this innovation work. And I would love to see some of our LRDA chapters have innovation specialists, or innovation coaches as part of their boards, working with that.

And trying to make sure I haven't missed anything. So we expect to have some of the grant monies not being spent on the training to make available as small C grants for people who are doing projects in innovation. We would give preference in these grants to religious educators who are working with other religious educators. So one congregation working with another congregation, or a cluster of congregations, like in Houston, Katy, or a LRDA chapter.

I know at least one LRDA chapter that's already talking about doing a project together. So keep a lookout in May for announcements on Reach, and LRDA, and on uaa.org under What's New For Religious Education, for us to announce a application process for these grants.

They're probably going to be anywhere from maybe $250 to slightly upward of that. And it may be a quick turnaround time for the process, because we have to get some of it done this fiscal year. So I wanted to give you a heads up during this webinar that it's coming. You can go ahead and start having conversations with folks about it.

And you know, your project could be sort of different things. It doesn't necessarily have to be everyone who is a part of the project working on the same innovation, as long as you are finding some way within this project to support each other on innovation, OK? So do be on the lookout for more information to come about ways that you can be involved in the innovation work that we're doing.

JOY: Well, I think we're really excited. Sorry, do you hear an echo? OK. Great. I think we're really excited to hear about what's happening coming down the line from LRDA, and from UUA working together to create some of this stuff. It's so exciting to hear about the future plans. I do know that, as of right now, we do have a few resources that are available for innovators.

One of the most, I think-- for me it's most exciting. Maybe it's just because I've been on this committee now for about 17 years. Actually, I think it's just a just about five, but it's almost time for me to go. So one of you should be excited about taking my place.

21St Century Committee of LRDA is a committee that seeks to serve the field of religious education, and to, sort of, reward ideas and projects that are innovative and that will serve all religious educators. So not just about things in one person's congregation, but ideas that can be generalized, and put into place all over.

So the committee is able to give away several thousand dollars each year from the interest that is shed from the endowment of LRDA. December 31 is the deadline. And you can find information about how to apply for one of the 21st Century grants via link that will probably show up in the left hand chat box at some point soon.

And then there's the Unitarian Sunday School Society. It serves religious educators with new ideas. Used to be mostly about new curriculum. But they are expanding, just as 21st Century is, in this, sort of, new world, to think about different ways that we can help support the field, and to support innovation, and new ideas in the field.

Another important thing to know is that one of the biggest takeaways for me-- I left the Innovation Roundtable determined to do what I could to provide some support for religious educators, because I heard real clearly that innovators were overworking, and that they didn't have time for a covenant group. While it may be true that if you can't meditate for an hour a day you should meditate for two most religious educators, especially those that are overworking, would laugh in your face.

About that idea. So we recognize that the regular covenant group might not be the best fit for a DRE who's innovating. And so this is a particular kind of group that's happening once a month, first Mondays, called Change Maker Mondays. It's a hands on, how-to innovation circle for religious educators.

And it's all about learning to do something new, bring your handwork with you, any projects that you're working on. It's totally OK to be busy during this covenant group. And have a chance to talk with other folks who are trying new things in their congregations. And we have a different theme each month. And I would love to have some other voices besides mine to share some of your ideas. So feel free to check in about that.

And finally, we have been asking the same questions since LRDA Fall Con, trying to understand what faith innovators need, specifically, and about how they understand the nature of faith innovation, and about their experiences with it. And so by getting answers to the same questions from a whole bunch of people in the field we can really build our understanding.

And I'm hopeful that this data will be helpful to the Faith Development Office, and others who are trying their best to support us in our work. So I hope that you'll consider filling out that Google form when you get it. It's not quite ready yet. Too many things on my plate. But I promise, it will be coming out soon in an email to all of those who participate in this webinar.

JESSICA: Well, thank you Joy and Tracy, not only for sharing something about your innovation, but also for the picture you've given us of some of the learnings from the Innovation Roundtable, and a personal thanks from me for putting together this webinar. You did a fantastic job of organizing it, and getting so much information into less than an hour's worth of time.

We do still have some time available for questions. So if you have a question for any of us, you can type that into the chat box right now. We will try to get that question answered for you. And then after we answer questions we'll have some closing words. But I'm going to leave a little space here for people who might want to type in some questions.

And this is the slide with the questions on it that we're going to have in the Google Doc that you'll receive a link to shortly. But if there's something here that really inspires you, and you want to type it into the chat box, then go ahead and do that too. We do have a remark here from Leah that says, not a question, but I so appreciate the sharing about change and cultivating a culture of failure.

Yes. You know, I know we've been talking about that at the UU for at least the last four years. Some of us have gone through that Scrum training that Joy mentioned earlier that was part of Deb Winer's presentation. You can find out more about that by watching Deb Winer's presentation, or by googling Scrum. But part of Scrum is that you want to try to act fast and leave room in there for failure. And that can be so hard to embrace in our culture. It goes against the dominant paradigm, which is all about success.

And as we are trying to innovate and make changes, as Tracy mentioned, it's very risky. This is very risky work. And in order for you to want to take that risk you definitely need to feel like you are in a culture where it's acceptable for you to fail right, or for the results to not be exactly what you thought the results were going to be.

As religious educators we know that you're going to learn something from that anyway, right? And the learning is a really important piece of it, maybe more important than just the success of it. But that is absolutely crucial. Thanks for lifting that up. And there's a question here from Liz that says, Joy mentioned Maker Space as a summer program. Could you elaborate and tell us what that looks like?

JOY: The great thing about this is that I don't have to say too much, because there's a pretty good blog, Call and Response. Actually, you can search on the UUA web page, or you can Google UU Maker Space RE, and you'll find an article that I wrote about it that kind of showed up in some different places. So you can read a lot about it there.

I'll just say one thing. And this really, kind of, goes right along with what Jessica was just saying. The most important thing that I think Maker Space has done for us, theologically, is that I've been able to connect it-- Thank you, Leah. You're so great. I've been able to connect it, not just, oh, it's something cool that we're doing in the secular world, although it is happening in public libraries, and public schools, and after school programs.

But if we expect children to change the world, and to bless the world, as Rebecca Parker says, then we need to be able and willing to give them real tools, and I do mean real tools. So for my Maker Space program I have an altar all summer long. It has wires, and screwdrivers, and dentures, and all kinds of things that human beings have created, and tools that we have used to help make our lives better.

And I bring children into that concept that they are change makers, and that we should always be looking for the helpers. And we should be growing into them as well. And so it absolutely promotes a culture of failure. The hardest part about Maker Space is getting adults to lean out, and let kids fail, because it's the best way that they will learn.

But I do believe that it's theologically sound, and that we are, absolutely, called to let our kids do real work in the world. So my kids have been building little free libraries, and little free blessing boxes, and distributing those in our community. Working with the youth, working with the adults, working with the itinerant farmer community.

And just really doing some stuff not connected to the adults in our church, but themselves. They researched. They figured it out. They mapped it out. And then they are doing it. So Maker Space gives us a lot of opportunities to really help them live the faith.

JESSICA: Thank you, Joy. And thanks, Liz. For that question. Thank Leah for getting that link up there quickly. Any other questions? Well, since we are approaching the top of the hour I am going to share some closing words with you. These are from Mary and Rod Macher.

This is the role of a teacher, to awaken. This is the role of a leader, to incite. This is the role of a student, to learn the answers within and without. So may we all be teachers, and leaders, and students in this work of innovation that is important work for us to do to keep our faith alive and relevant.

So I do want to remind you that there is another webinar coming up in May. It is, What's A Religious Educator to do in the summer. And we will have a panel of religious educators talking about the various activities they take part in the summer, which range from professional development, and some of our camps and conference centers, to developing week long summer camps in their congregations that welcome in the kids from the community, to just taking some real time for self-care. Leah's on the panel. Thank you, Leah for accepting that, and being part of that webinar. It's May 16th, May 17th. And you can register for that online at uua.org/re/teachers/webinars. Or

I want to give one last thanks to Joy and Tracy for being on tonight's webinar. I want to remind you that these webinars are recorded. We have an archive of them that, I think, go back, at least to maybe almost three years, by now. So there's lots of information there. If you haven't checked out the archive recently you may want to go and check that out.

Give us a few days and this webinar will also be posted there. If you are looking to get together a team of folks, like on your RE committee, or if you want to watch this as a staff team, and have some discussions about innovation, maybe watch the webinar together. That might be a useful thing to do. So thank you all so much for being here with us tonight. And until next time, keep the faith.