

Commission on Social Witness Consultation on Youth Ministry

January 26, 2007; 1:30-2:45 p.m.

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Facilitators: Beth Dana, Jesse Jaeger

Welcome and Introductions

Overview of the Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth

Desired Outcomes:

- More than just a one-size-fits-all youth ministry—a youth ministry that is robust, flexible, and diverse
- Denominational youth work that focuses on serving local congregations
- Mutually respectful and empowering relationships between youth and adults
- Anti-racism and anti-oppression work infused within every part of youth ministry, with a recognition that there is not one "right" way of doing the work—providing a forum for youth identity development and institutional change
- A youth ministry that meets the spiritual needs of youth and increases the spiritual depth of our congregations
- Effective communication within, between, and among all areas of the Association.

The Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth is a two-year process of gathering input from Unitarian Universalist youth ministry stakeholders. It will culminate in a Summit on Youth Ministry in July 2007, which will recommend changes to the way we do youth ministry throughout the Association.

Leading up to the Summit, we will gather input from:

YOUTH – In January and February 2006, 1400 youth ages 12-20 completed a survey about their experiences with UU youth ministry.

CONGREGATIONS – From April through September 2006, over 75 congregations held congregational conversations on youth ministry.

DISTRICTS – Every UUA district will hold a district gathering on youth ministry during the 2006-2007 church year. These will focus on how the Association and its districts can better serve youth at the local and district levels.

STAKEHOLDERS – Dozens of youth ministry stakeholder groups will also have conversations about youth ministry and contribute their input to the process. UUA staff are one of these crucial stakeholder groups.

Objective: To engage stakeholders in visioning and goal-setting for their ministry with youth. The input of stakeholders will help shape the outcomes and recommendations of the consultation.

What We Have Learned

Survey

- Social justice activities are #1 way respondents are involved in congregational life (34%)
- “Anti-racism and anti-oppression work are important in my congregation” (72%)
- “My youth group gives me opportunities to address significant social issues such as racism and oppression” (71%)

Congregations

- Youth justice work fosters leadership skills and strengthens youth ministry
- Need for youth social justice work to go “beyond self affirmation/ understanding to action”

Religious Educators (LREDA)

- Justice work connects youth and adults, youth interest with church need
- Youth get AR/AO training, and return to a congregation that has not done the work and is not prepared to support them

Young Religious Unitarian Universalists (YRUU)

- YRUU Working Action Issue (voted on by GA Youth Caucus) – Education Reform and Multiculturalism
- Annual Youth Social Justice Training focusing on the WAI
- Curriculum for congregational dialogue and action on Education Reform and Multiculturalism
- More structures, support, and resources for youth social justice work
- Desire to work intergenerationally and partner with organizations

Vision

Unitarian Universalist youth:

- Are actively involved in social justice work in congregations and throughout the Association. They act as agents for social change alongside other youth and in partnership with adults.
- Play a role in deciding the social justice priorities of the Association.
- Receive resources about how they can act on the Study Action Issue in their communities.
- See justice work as a central part of their faith and spiritual practice, and see themselves as agents of change in their communities.

Additions:

- Youth involvement in social justice work is an in-road to being more a part of the congregational community.
- Youth and congregations move from a focus on charity work to a focus on work for social change, justice, and action.
- Families see social justice as a part of youth faith development.
- Passion for social justice and an understanding of the history/heritage of UU justice work is passed on from generation to generation, developing new social justice leaders.

Brainstorm: Driving Forces

- Adoption of new bylaws extending Study Action Issue sponsorship to groups like YRUU

- Staff time dedicated to social justice work – Association level and paid youth staff in congregations
- Intergenerational social justice work in congregations – sometimes one of the few areas of intergenerational collaboration in congregations
- Focus on justice work in society at-large
- Emphasis on “minding the gap,” campus ministry
- YRUU volunteer leaders and support structure – Working Action Manager, Continental Social Action Coordinator
- Adult volunteers understand the importance of youth involvement in social justice work
- Technology enables communication – e-mail, internet, social networking sites, multimedia

Top Three:

1. Adoption of new bylaws extending Study Action Issue sponsorship to groups like YRUU
2. Staff time dedicated to social justice work – Association level and paid youth staff in congregations
3. Technology enables communication – e-mail, internet, social networking sites, multimedia

Brainstorm: Restraining Forces

- Parental expectations of youth (activities, time, priorities), particularly in congregations with families of privilege – lack of time for youth
- Some youth go to church without their parents, so they don’t have that support structure for getting involved in UU justice work
- Pre-existing structures that were not designed intergenerationally, and therefore don’t function intergenerationally
- Not knowing or realizing that doing social justice work can help youth achieve future goals, can be a “resume-builder” (pressure from parents to do things that will look good for college)
- Technology gap – generational, socioeconomic
- Events-based culture of social justice is exclusive/inaccessible
- UU youth in college or not connected to a congregation don’t have that connection to UU social justice work
- Many suburban churches alienate or are not hospitable to young adults
- Lack of clarity in social justice curricula, “a cliff”
- Some religious professionals do not have training and experience working with youth, especially youth social justice work – makes a big difference in congregation
- Experience of Youth of Color, racism and oppression in UU communities, hypocrisy
- Difficulties of connecting UU principles into action

Top Five:

1. Parental expectations of youth (activities, time, priorities), particularly in congregations with families of privilege – lack of time for youth
2. Pre-existing structures that were not designed intergenerationally, and therefore don’t function intergenerationally
3. Some religious professionals do not have training and experience working with youth, especially youth social justice work – makes a big difference in congregation

4. Experience of Youth of Color, racism and oppression in UU communities
5. Difficulties of connecting UU principles into action

Strategies

- New curriculum for youth social justice work
- Gather and share stories about models that work, success stories
- Adults doing social justice work share stories, model, mentor
- Start social justice work early (younger children)
- Resources about differences between charity and social justice/change work, how to distinguish, connect this to the UU principles
- Resource about how adults can better include youth and reframe their existing social justice structures to be intergenerational – why it doesn't work to bring youth into structures that exclude them and how to do this better
- Connect youth to new Study Action Issue process
- Washington Office staff work with youth on new Study Action Issue
- Eliminate Youth Office as gatekeepers between social justice work of youth and social justice work of the Association – direct communication between Association and YRUU social justice leaders (Continental Social Action Coordinator, Working Action Manager)

Closing – What Are We Taking Away From This Conversation?