

International Programs Staff Consultation on Youth Ministry

January 23, 2007; 2:00-3:30 p.m.

Participants: Cathy Cordes, Adam Gerhardstein, Barbara Wilson

Facilitators: Beth Dana, Jesse Jaeger

Welcome and Introductions

Cathy Cordes, Interim Director of the UUA International Office and Part-Time Executive Director of the Partner Church Council

- Works with independent affiliates and congregations around the world
- Trying to refocus their efforts and figure out how to best and most effectively relate to all these groups with limited staff

Beth Dana, Youth Ministry Associate in the UUA Youth Office, coordinate the Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth

Adam Gerhardstein, Legislative Assistant for International Issues in the UUA Washington Office for Advocacy

- Represents the views of the UUA to Congress and the U.S. Administration with a focus on international issues
- Iraq War, genocide in Darfur, HIV/AIDS pandemic, trafficking, torture

Jesse Jaeger, Youth Programs Director in the UUA Youth Office, works with Beth on the Consultation on Ministry To and With Youth

Barbara Wilson, works part-time with the UU Holdeen India Program and Kathy Sreedhar

- UU Holdeen India Program began more than 20 years ago. Supports leaders organizing in India to help the most marginalized/oppressed communities.
- Has run education programs, worked with scholars coming to the U.S. from other countries, and spent lots of time in the developing world.
- Member of the Cedar Lane church in Bethesda, MD where she has worked with youth.

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.

Objectives for conversations with UUA staff groups:

- Engage UUA staff groups in visioning and goal-setting for the delivery and support of youth ministry. The input of UUA staff will help shape the outcomes and recommendations of the consultation.
- Share with staff groups what the consultation process entails, how it impacts their constituents, and how their constituents have been involved so far.
- Many of the constituencies of the staff groups are also stakeholders in the consultation process, so we want to learn what the staff groups think their role and their constituents' role could be in youth ministry.

Share Stories of Youth Involvement in International Issues

Cathy:

Every year for the past six years the Partner Church Council has organized a trip to Transylvania for youth. The group size ranges from 8-23 youth. She has chaperoned these two-week trips. They come to Boston first and spend a night at Cathy's house before traveling abroad. Most of the youth don't know each other ahead of time, but they get to know each other very well. They spend time with Transylvanian youth. The youth services they've done, which are sometimes just an informal conversation around fears/hopes/etc., are fabulous. The trip is life-changing for many of the youth. Have had ministers travel with the group in the past (including Marc Loustau and a minister from Transylvania).

Beth:

Reid Robinson, a youth from the Shelter Rock congregation, interned at the UU United Nations Office. He has put a lot of work into outreach to other youth, trying to set up structures for youth involvement in UN issues, and provide resources/education. He presented a resolution to Youth Council, the governing body of YRUU, recommending that each district elect a youth envoy to the UU-UNO. These envoys would be liaisons between UU-UNO/international work and the youth in the district, would provide education and resources to youth in the district, and would attend the Spring Seminar. The resolution passed. He has since reached out to each district's staff and youth leaders encouraging them to create this position.

Adam:

At General Assembly last year there was a workshop, organized by the youth contingent of the UU Global AIDS Coalition, which was supposed to be a viewing of a film on global AIDS issues. It was well attended but the technology didn't work. Rather than watching the film the group had a discussion, Adam presented on legislative stuff going on, and others spoke about congregational organizing. Adam was impressed by the attentiveness of the group and the questions they asked. It was apparent that there were youth engaged with international issues and that they were eager to learn what the UUA was doing on these issues. The youth section of the UU Global AIDS Coalition is struggling right now to find new youth leadership – symptomatic of challenges we face working with youth, lots of turnover and transition. Also, the Washington Office does a fair amount of outreach to district/regional gatherings using the “Inspired Faith, Effective Action” workshop. They are in the process of modifying that workshop and developing materials geared more towards youth.

Jesse:

A few years ago there was a Peace Tour trip that came out of partnership between International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF), the UUA, and Rissho Kosei-Kai in Japan. This trip brought Buddhist young people and UU young people together in the U.S. to tour sites related to peace, and then the group traveled together to Japan (including Hiroshima and Nagasaki). This program was a very powerful cross-cultural collaboration between two faiths and experiences.

Barbara:

When we talk about UU young people gaining international experience or awareness, what we're talking about is lots of different things. Being aware of situations in developing countries – injustice, poverty – is one thing. Working toward peace among others faiths on an international level is another thing. Working together in the U.S. on issues that are international is yet another thing. We also do international relationship-building activities. Am realizing it's much more complicated than it seems on the surface, and it's also very exciting.

This story is about my son, and it goes to my belief that a lot of this work can happen at the congregational level. I also believe that when you want to turn someone on to international issues, they need the experience of physically being in a place that's different from the U.S. or from where they grew up. This experience can truly change them. River Road Unitarian Church runs an incredible program where they work with a group in El Salvador. Her son went on a trip when he was 15, with an intergenerational group. The group lives in a village, does a service project, works with teacher education groups, and learns what it's like to live in a place that experiences poverty and social injustice. It's important to hold up models that come out of our congregations like River Road. UUSC Just Journeys, Partner Church Council trips, River Road trips – these are all ways that individuals within groups have the chance for transformation.

Brainstorm: Current State

What are some current international opportunities for UU youth? In what ways are youth currently involved in international issues?

- IARF Congress
- Partner Church Council summer youth trip
- Congregations organize their own trips to partner churches
- Congregations organize other international trips (e.g. River Road to Santa Marta, El Salvador)
- UUSC Just Journeys
- UU-UNO internship program
- UU-UNO Spring Seminar
- Opportunities to partner with UUA Washington Office on advocacy campaigns
- Youth programs and RE classes that touch on international projects or issues
 - Ex: 7th graders organized Heifer International education program for church around the holiday season, made posters, set up something in the lounge, organized education for other kids, lobbied Board to donate money from offering to Heifer International
- Tulsa, OK – youth started microcredit program
- Washington Office internship/legislative assistant program

The group identified three larger categories that these activities fit in:

1. Experiential trips and travel
2. Social action
3. Education and advocacy

What are some strengths and challenges associated with each of these types of youth international involvement?

1. Experiential trips and travel

- Biggest obstacle is the cost, logistics
- Challenging to let people know that these opportunities exist
- Positive opportunity for youth to transform themselves, develop their identities, develop their faith in an international setting
- Direct experiences shake youth free from preconceived notions of what this world is, create a global consciousness
- Difficult to take a group to a developing country, a lot of responsibility, safety concerns
- Few adults willing to take on this level of responsibility for young people
- International travel brings out the best and the worst in people

2. Social action

- Model of congregational social justice (Social Justice Committees, etc.) is a comfortable model for UUs, our strongest suit; it's also something that adults more easily get involved in, leadership is easier to find
- Important part of our identity as UUs, part of our culture to pass on
- Experience very little inclusion of youth in congregational social justice work
 - Youth are most involved in social justice work in their youth groups, direct service, mostly one-time projects
 - Not integrated into broader work of the church

- Projects like 7th graders doing Heifer International program – most prevalent in congregations that are already doing international work
- Darfur Sunday – a congregation-wide commitment, lots of people involved in different ways, but it only lasts one day
- Are larger congregations more able to take part in these programs? Or does it depend on having a small but devoted group of people?
- UUA initiatives need to include a youth component to make sure youth are included in congregational projects and commitments

3. Education and advocacy

- UU United Nations Spring Seminar has significant youth participation and focus
- Washington Office and UU-UNO websites have resources for education
- Affiliate and volunteer organizations could be approached about specific educational endeavors, e.g. Global AIDS Coalition workshop at GA
- UU-UNO internship program
- There is high interest and desire among youth to understand international issues

Brainstorm: Possibilities

What opportunities for international involvement could we offer to UU youth? What are some possibilities?

- Develop a model/template for a multigenerational congregational program that everyone could embrace, and in which everyone participates and educates one another (across the ages). Could be adapted to a variety of international issues, e.g. global warming or fair trade. The program would encompass the three components – experiential, social action, education.
 - Focus on a model that can be replicated with different topics
 - Connect with other organizations working on a particular topic
 - Marketing to congregations and youth groups – if this is your area of interest, here are multiple ways you can approach this and here are resources you need to do something on this issue
 - Youth may be the best people to work on some issues
 - Participate in experiential trips and educate the congregation about issues
 - Possible issues: UU faith, water, fair trade, Heifer International, global warming
 - Make sure you choose issues where experiential piece would work
 - This could be proposed as a curriculum for the UUA's Tapestry of Faith curriculum project
- Promote Partner Church Council youth trips, increase youth participation
 - Currently send flyer to all DREs in the country, but doesn't always filter down to the youth
 - Need to figure out what does/does not get youth's attention
 - Didn't have enough youth to do the trip last year
 - Could also send to newsletter editors, International Issues list run out of the Washington Office, reach people through other channels that already exist
- Gather info about congregations already doing international work, catalog that, reach out to these congregations for involvement and outreach

- International Office just did questionnaire to all congregations about this, got 750 responses, currently trying to figure out how to make this data useful
- Should build on this information, follow-up about what they're doing with youth
- Talk to Marjorie Matty about this
- Partner with small congregations in New Zealand and Australia
 - Some youth aren't ready for experience in developing countries, but can handle travel to places like Europe or Australia/NZ
 - Could organize trips to these small historically vibrant long-lived UU congregations
- Holdeen Trust – funds and supports leaders and organizations in India
 - Involving others in this organization takes time away from organization and work they're doing, already do spend time with visitors every year/6 months
 - Difficult to imagine how partners there could actually involve UU youth
 - But could educate youth about this, youth fundraising for these partner organizations
 - Was a feature in UU & Me, engaged children
- How can we use technology?
 - MySpace page, periodic updates about what organizations are doing
 - Use social networking opportunities that exist among youth to network, connect, spread information
 - Use technology to connect with UU youth in other countries – Philippines, Khasi Hills (India), etc.

Priorities

The group decided to focus on these three strategies:

1. Multigenerational congregational program for engaging with international issues:
 - Hands on, engages youth, young people can teach old people a new way of running the world
2. Create more opportunities for youth to do experiential international travel
 - Look at what works and what doesn't work, promote things that do work well
3. Use technology to communicate more effectively (this area could use more thought)
 - Promote opportunities that exist
 - Use technology that youth use e.g. MySpace
 - Use channels that other offices have to get your word out there
 - UUA needs to get the results of congregational survey on international work out there – this could drive the direction of our work and the work of congregations

Closing – What Are We Taking Away From This Conversation?