

UU District of Metro NY – 2008 Annual Meeting May 2-3, 2008 – Stamford, CT

A Whole Congregation Approach: Components of Healthy Youth Ministry

Workshop Description: Unitarian Universalist youth programs are founded on a model of six balanced components – worship, leadership, community building, youth-adult partnership, learning, and social action. This workshop will explore these components and engage participants in thinking about how to take a whole congregation approach to youth ministry.

Facilitators: Beth Dana, MNY District Youth Ministry Consultant, and Kyle Reaves, YAC Youth Senior Co-Chair

Workshop Outline:

The Six Components of Balanced Youth Ministry

Worship

Red is for worship; the heart, compassion, and love we share together. Don't forget, the "R" in YRUU is for "religious." YRUU is a spiritual and religious home for youth. Worship is an important and sacred part of many UU youth events. Youth worship tends to be interactive and nontraditional. It often takes place in a circle, with sharing as a focus. Many youth groups also put on Youth Sunday worship services in congregations. Worship is a time and place where we can share YRUU spirituality and caring with the larger community.

Leadership

Purple, the color of royalty, represents leadership and self-governance. One of the biggest contributions YRUU makes to our denomination is the development of youth leadership. YRUU is primarily a youth-led organization in which youth have the opportunity to learn and practice their leadership skills. Leadership in YRUU is different from other models of leadership in our culture. In YRUU, leadership is about learning how to work together, facilitate, reach consensus, foster cooperation, and make sure every person gets heard.

Learning

In some eastern philosophies, blue represents intellectual growth and mental energy. Almost every aspect of YRUU can provide learning experiences for youth. RE curricula are great resources for learning in YRUU. However, curricula do not provide the only learning opportunities for youth. YRUU is a great place for discussion — sparked by the topic of a guest speaker, movie, or from youth's own experiences. YRUU is a safe place to expand our horizons and to learn more about the world around us.

Social Action

Green is the color for treating the earth and each other responsibly. Green is for social action. Because youth have passionate opinions about social issues, the youth in this denomination have been at the forefront of social action activities. YRUU is a place for youth to express and explore our values, to put action behind our concerns. Social action projects are an important way for YRUUers to put hands and feet on our principles while having fun.

Community Building

In literature, yellow is the color of memory and reminiscence. It honors our friends and loved ones, and the social aspects of youth programs. Community building, or socializing, is a time for people to get to know one another, time devoted to "hanging out." Some of the most valuable experiences in YRUU happen during social activities. This is the time to bond together, share values, establish trust, generate intimacy, and practice acceptance. Community building is the time to share our liberal religious values by getting to know one another.

Youth-Adult Relations

Orange is for the warmth of the bond between youth and their elders, essential to youth empowerment. YRUU communities where youth and adults work together and have power with each other have huge potential. Intergenerational environments encourage all of the other components of youth programming. Youth and adults can learn from each other, experience youth worship, build community, empower each other to lead, and make a difference in the world through social action.

A Whole Congregation Approach – Discussing the Connections

The six components of balanced youth ministry are widely applicable in UU communities. They can be used as a framework for looking at congregational life, the connections between youth and congregational life, and the ministry of youth advisors. A congregation with active social action, learning, community-building, worship, leadership and intergenerational programs is a truly balanced, thriving congregation. It is critical to identify how youth can connect into all of these areas.

We discussed the ways that youth worship, leadership, learning, community-building, social action, and intergenerational connections contribute to and support congregational life. Then we thought about ways that each of these components provides a connection point for youth and adults.

The following is a summary the ideas that workshop participants offered in the areas of leadership and worship, which were recorded on the flipchart.

Leadership:

- Youth-initiated projects become larger, embraced by entire congregation

- Inspiration, self-efficacy
- Risks, being emotionally open
- Self-reflection
- Connection, connectedness, sharing
- Lasting relationships
- Committee representation

Worship:

- Youth do own worship AND share worship with the congregation
- Youth worship draws people in
- Once a month family service
- Youth-led evening service – open to all
- Many adults yearn for youth-style worship, interactive
- Need to consider: are youth services ministry or performance? (how do youth AND the congregation perceive it?)
- Need to bridge/blend “circle” and “square” worship

Closing Thoughts:

- Youth advisors are an important point of connection between youth and the rest of the congregation, youth advisors should be part of the congregation’s ministry team (along with DRE, minister, etc.)
- Congregations can use the six components framework as a tool to evaluate themselves