

Newsletter - December 2009

Massachusetts Bay District of Unitarian Universalist Congregations



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In This Issue

Partnering With Youth

Youth Ministry Training

Youth Social Action Conference

Books on Youth Ministry

Upcoming Programs

[O.W.L. TRAININGS](#)

(January 8 to 10 - full)

(January 22 to 24)

[YOUTH MINISTRY TRAINING](#)

(January 23)

[LEARNING CONGREGATION WORKSHOPS](#)

- Appreciative Inquiry (January 23)
- Ministry Across the Generations (February 27)
- Claiming Our Joy: Spiritual Leadership for Social Change (March 13)
- Creating Sanctuary: Best Practices for Safe Congregations - a UUA New England Region workshop (March 27)
- Strategic Planning (April 10)

[RENAISSANCE MODULE](#): UU History (March 31 to April 1)

[SPRING CONFERENCE](#): Spreading the Good News through New Media and Social Networking

Partnering with Youth



by **Greg Buckland**
Youth and Young Adult Ministries

Like adults in our congregations, youth come to church from a wide range of backgrounds and experience. There is one thing, however, that separates youth from the majority of adults in UU congregations: by and large, they are not refugees from other faiths or seekers from no faith. Mostly, they have been raised by the gentle and nurturing hands of our congregations. Much to the credit of Lifespan Faith Development programs and congregational communities, they have learned to approach their own faith and that of others with respect and curiosity.

I experience UU youth as passionate and open-minded. They have come to a place in their faith development where they are ready to step forward into what's next - even though they may not always know what that is. They yearn for authentic connection with other youth and with adults. Instead of the usual "teacher / student" or "parent / child" relationships that fill their school and home life, they seek the "mentor / journeyer" relationships of mutual respect, learning and questioning.

Entering such relationships with them requires understanding how they see and experience the world. Like their peers, UU youth tend to be over-programmed. Their schedules are filled with track practice, orchestra, school trips, standardized tests, music lessons, science projects, plays & performances, youth group, family vacations, baby-sitting, and on and on. Many attend type-A high schools where their experience is often competitive and harrowing. Having opportunities to slow down and check in with their

(May 1)

deeper selves is a gift that their worshipping community offers them.

Youth need caring adults to co-create experiences with them. As adults, we can offer insights and questions that allow youth to learn and grow. They need us to provide both a ladder to climb and a safety net should they fall. Though they clamor for autonomy without accountability, youth need us to support them to set boundaries as they take risks. Successful youth ministry depends on our ability to do this.

Youth today are not interested in adult obsessions with "left vs. right" and "liberal vs. conservative." In fact, they are less interested in creating or maintaining dichotomies in general. They wish to engage difference respectfully to see what they can learn. In partnering with them, we stand to learn new ways to bridge and value difference.

We would do well to remember as well that today's youth are coming of age at one of the most challenging times in human history. The systems that have supported life, climate, economy, and religion are all faltering. The next few decades will require drastic changes to our collective way of life if we are to survive. Young people will soon be the leaders of these changes. In preparation for that prophetic role, they need a strong kernel of faith and grounding in community.

It is important for us to be careful of our tendencies to bemoan and catastrophize the state of world affairs; we often spout rants, issue diatribes and list desperate catalogs of suffering. Young people will be alive for many more years - some of them may make it into the 22nd century. What they need from their faith community is hope.

Nurturing that hope may require redesigning worship to better address the needs of the whole person. Youth yearn for embodied worship. It is often said that one of the gifts of UU worship is that "you don't need to leave your brain at the door," but in creating intellectually palatable worship, we sometimes ask people to check their hearts and bodies at the door.

Congregations are one of the few places in our society where we connect across generations. The place of youth is to push us, to pull us in new directions, to explore new avenues and chart new paths. As we partner with them in that exploration and deepen our relationships with them, let's be mindful of the gifts we offer each other.

Youth Ministry Training

January 23, 2010

9 AM to 3 PM

[First Parish in Sherborn](#)

Successful youth advising is akin to holding a bird - loose enough to not break it but firm enough to keep it from flying



away. In this workshop, participants will learn how to advise youth groups using a model that brings adults and youth into partnership.

Clara Barton and Mass Bay Districts are excited to host a training for adults who are involved with or want to support Youth Ministry in their congregations. The training will cover:

- **Youth Ministry: Theory & Theology** - teen development, group dynamics, youth movements (past, present & future), empowerment, freedom, accountability, and boundaries.
- **How-To's & Best Practices for Effective Youth Ministry** - meeting structure, managing adults, actualizing the components of a balanced program, expectations, YAC and evaluating your program.

Youth Advisors/Coordinators and Religious Educators are the primary audience for this training. Ministers and lay leaders interested in youth ministry may benefit from this training as well. Both veterans and newcomers will have much to gain.

Fee: \$60 per person (if two or more people attend from the same congregation, the fee will be \$50 per person)

[REGISTER HERE](#)

Youth Social Action Conference



February 5 to 7, 2010
Friday evening to Sunday midday
[First Parish in Belmont](#)

A conference for youth and adults who work with youth. The focus will be Social Action, and how to apply our UU principles to the work of making a better world. This conference will be hosted by the youth and adults at First Parish in Belmont, MA.

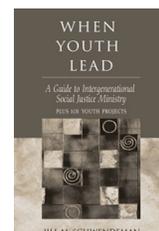
Advanced registration will be required. More details and registration info to come, but mark your calendar!

Books on Youth Ministry

When Youth Lead: An Intergenerational Guide to Social Justice Ministry

by Jill Schwendeman

Offers guidance, suggestions and advice for constructing and maintaining a healthy and spiritually vital youth ministry. Seeing youth as equal participants in congregational life, Schwendeman demonstrates how teens are an enormous generative force for our faith communities and how adults have much to learn from youth about passion, friendship,



discrimination, equality, faith and more. Social justice work is an effective tool for bringing the generations together and the items included in this excellent resource have the potential to build rich partnerships among children, youth, adults and elders. Includes practical tips for 101 social action projects. (Available through the [UUA Bookstore](#)).

Contemplative Youth Ministry

by Mark Yaconelli

Writing from a Christian perspective, author and youth-worker Mark Yaconelli describes his own struggles to connect with and create space for youth. He offers theological or theoretical grounding for youth ministry, reminding us that youth are people, with many of the same aspirations and hopes as adults. Additionally, he offers suggestions for creating spaces for authentic connection, across generational divides, and with the divine. ([Google Books](#))

[Meck Groot](#), Editor
[Massachusetts Bay District of UU Congregations](#)

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