Virtual Faith Development and Youth Ministry Programming

UUA Southern Region
Introductions
Covenant at the Center/Value Driven
UU faith development is all we do…. everything we teach is Unitarian Universalism…
the congregation is the curriculum!

The entire virtual experience religiously educates.

The goal is to find ways to strengthen and deepen virtual connections with youth, and with the whole church.
Covenant/UU Values/Relationships

• What if we sought to enable children, youth, and adults to be a part of a virtual UU community which seeks to manifest more hope, more love, more courage, more justice, and more joy in the world?

• With these values at the center, we would need to recognize that our work takes place in the context of interpersonal relationships.

• How can we maintain those relationships, especially between youth and their peers, as well as youth and adults in a time of COVID19?
What are you measuring?

• If it is a measure of attendance only, then you are missing the mark.

• The real measure are opportunities for **engagement**. All that your congregation is offering, from online fellowship opportunities, to Sunday morning worship, to small group check ins, are opportunities for faith development engagement.

• **Engagement** – in times of crises, and beyond, youth want to feel as if they are part of a trusted experience. This does not mean that we turn to them solely for responsive answers to the challenges of COVID19, but if we look back on this time and realize that the youth never felt needed in our congregational responses then we have made their lives and contributions superfluous.
What vital needs of youth during this time can churches meet?

• Pastoral Care
• Fellowship; safe and affirming spaces for checking-in
• Theological reflection (What does it mean to be a UU youth during this time?)
• Celebration of milestones
• Ritual and familiarity
• What else?
Identity Formation

• Dynamic youth ministry supports youth in their journeys to figure out who they are as spiritual beings, relational beings, racial/ethnic and sexual beings, people of faith, justice makers, lifelong learners and leaders.

• Identity in family/multigenerational community is vital.

• Virtual youth ministry helps youth develop a healthy identity in these areas and learn to live with integrity.

• How has your congregation provided virtual UU identity formation for youth?
Spiritual Development

• This is the intentional cultivation of spirituality through both individual and group spiritual practices. As spiritual beings, youth experience awe, gratitude, wonder, appreciation and “at-one-ness.” Youth ministry should encourage and offer opportunities for engagement in practices that nurture and enliven their spirits.

• How can we provide spiritually sustaining virtual youth ministry experiences in this time of COVID19?

• Virtual Circle Process,  
  www.uua.org/midamerica/events/webinars/virtual-circle-process
Pastoral Care

• Like people of all ages, youth have specific pastoral needs that are met in communities where people know how to listen deeply. Everyone works together to create a religious community that provides pastoral care with youth. This includes creating safe congregations, supporting youth who are in crisis, and celebrating their joys and accomplishments.

• Intentional wellness outreach to youth in this time of pandemic is essential. Recruit youth/adult partners to find ways to reach out...cards, messages, videos, and more.

https://www.uua.org/youth/library/bringing-web-life
Justice Making

• Youth practice answering our faith’s calling to work for justice and to be in solidarity with others who also work for justice in many settings, including in our lives, our local communities, and the wider world.

• **What are some of the ways your congregation has been able to virtually engage youth in social justice efforts?**

• UU The Vote
  College of Social Justice
  UU-United Nations Office
• Anxiety about school starting up
• Parents (primary religious educators) need particular support, faced with the choice of putting oneself at risk, or homeschooling, perhaps, for the first time in their lives.
• Youth ministry cannot bypass the role of parents. Effective youth ministry engages parents and supportive adults.
• What feedback are you getting from parents regarding their needs?
As Unitarian Universalist congregations who have continued to adapt and respond to our community’s needs during a time when social distancing is critical, how can we support families with children and youth?

- Giving children and youth something to look forward to in the near future.
- Offering relationships outside of the family, both with peers and other groups.
- Sharing narrative to help process these experiences.
- Creating opportunities for children and youth to participate virtually in whatever programs you are still doing.
- Giving children and youth something to do and be a part of that does not involve their families.

These five techniques can help your community grow in strength as well as provide much needed relief to caregivers during this very stressful time.
Safety in Virtual Youth Ministry

• During the COVID-19 Pandemic our UU congregations, regions and national youth programs have quickly shifted to online spaces. This is terrific! And we still want to make sure our youth are safe.
• The UUA’s Youth Ministry Roundtable and UUA Safer Congregations Team created guidelines for UUA sponsored youth events, which are also helpful for congregations, and clusters of congregations, planning online youth programming to adapt for their use.
• When we create explicit guidelines for appropriate behavior, we define the values that are important to us as religious people.
• Our statements about safe relationships create a structure in which our religious community can thrive.
• [www.uua.org/youth/adults-ministry/safety-guidelines/online](http://www.uua.org/youth/adults-ministry/safety-guidelines/online)
1. What has youth ministry been like in this time of pandemic?
2. What are ways you’ve tried to engage/support youth?
3. Any other victories or challenges?
Looking for ways to engage your youth and youth advisors in a virtual experience which connects them to other youth in their area, and is grounded in UU theology/values/spiritual deepening? If so, we are offering a variety of cluster virtual youth ministry opportunities this fall.

• “VirtUUally” - 4 sessions, Sundays, September 27, October 4, 18, and 25.  
  uua.wufoo.com/forms/avirtuuallya-youth-leadership-experience/

• UUntitled: www.uua.org/blueboat/announcing-uuntitled
When You Can’t Do OWL... Do This! Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education during the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Our Whole Lives staff of the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ empathize with those of you whose OWL programs were interrupted by COVID-related shutdowns and those whose new programs are on hold. In response to these challenges, we are developing solutions that are safe, accessible, creative, and values-based, such as: Curated resources to help you support program participants’ self-guided learning as well as the parents and guardians who are their children’s primary

Virtual Faith Development Resources

• Primary ongoing source, “LeaderLab”
  www.uua.org/leadership/library

• Talking with Kids about COVID19
  www.uua.org/leadership/library/talking-kids-covid

• “Simple Online Faith Formation”
  www.uua.org/leadership/library/simple-online-faith-formation

• Soul Matters
  www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/soulful-home.html
- Church of the Larger Fellowship
- CommunityNOWUU: fostering real connections in a virtual world. Crowdsourced links for experiences open to all == not bound by geography. Sign up for mailing list: https://mailchi.mp/dacb00e505d6/communitynowuu
• **YPP (Youth program possibility)**

• Virtual improv – watch the video on one word story narrative activity.

  [www.sbimprov.com/blog/2015/01/29/game-one-word-story](http://www.sbimprov.com/blog/2015/01/29/game-one-word-story)
Resources

• **UU Talks (Ted Talk model)**
  
  https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCd8Uxfh0CX63udofBF0M35A

• Create, with youth leaders, a Ted Talk type virtual series. Then engage the group to make their own UU Talk video.

• **Storytelling Congregational COVID19 Narrative** – invite youth to make short videos of the beginning narrative of how your community responded to COVID19.
For fun and fellowship:

- **The Traveling Church Mascot** (as chosen by youth) – example: UU Church of Lexington, KY has a traveling congregational gnome. The youth promote the traveling gnome, which magically shows up in congregant’s front yards to bring birthday/graduation/milestone greetings and love from the congregation. A photo is taken upon delivery, then posted on the congregational FB page. For more information: Stacy Stone, DRE, uucldre@uucl.org.

- If not a gnome, then how about an otter? Co-lead with a group of youth/adults a lively conversation on what a mascot for the youth group/church could be in this time of COVID19. Consensus does NOT need to be reached. Begin with some suggestions…otters hold hands while they sleep, etc…
• UU Theology/Values/Spiritual Deepening: Visio Divino
• **Group Spiritual Practice: 5 Smooth Stones Contemplative Photography**
• With the 5 Smooth Stones as inspiration, recruit a youth/adult team to coordinate a collaborative virtual photo project. Starting with the story of the 5 smooth stones, as inspired by James Luther Adams, “A Place of Wholeness” https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/youth/wholeness/workshop1/167560.shtml
• Then after some virtual group reflection on the 5 smooth stones, recruit youth/adult leaders to launch the 5 contemplative photo project, centered on values brought forth from the 5 smooth stones of “Hope, Joy, Love, Justice, Courage” – create stone activity packs for use at home – youth prep/create 5 smooth stone bags, delivered to participating youths home addresses. They then are asked to decorate with word or image each stone, for each of the 5 values; then place the stones in natural settings and take photo for posting on a thematic week collaboration.

• Congregation can also experience this photo journey; the photos could be utilized in worship; small group ministry, with a centering question (created by the youth). Such as for the “Hope” stone…*what unexpected sources of hope have you discovered in this time of pandemic?*