

Report from the ReVision Team – January 2021

Originally facilitated by Rev. Cyndi Simpson, a 'ReVision' team was formed in March 2020 to reimagine religious education at Second Unitarian Church. Members include DRE Ashleigh Fuson, Jaime Short, Janet Nichols, Pam Miller-Jenkins, Pete Miller, and Anita Jeck. Through research and discussion, the goal was to envision a program of religious education that was more effective and sustainable than our current model. During this time a vision for religious education has been coming into clearer focus, and the team is ready to present our vision to the Board of Trustees; and with their approval, to the congregation.

Defining the problem with the traditional Sunday School model

- The traditional Sunday School model is labor intensive and ineffective – only 12% of our UU youth remain UUs. This is the very lowest of any denomination.
- Throughout many denominations across the country, many churches (including Second Unitarian) are finding Sunday School unsustainable in our changing culture. It is becoming harder to find volunteers to staff Sunday School and many parents are making tough choices with their limited family time available.

What we know and what we have learned

- Sunday School is a relatively modern development popularized in the 1950's. Prior to this, religion was imparted in the home and through worship. It has long been recognized that parents and families play a significant role in faith development.
- The traditional committee structure is also increasingly difficult to sustain.
- Faith formation is a life-long journey.
- Sometimes it seems we are "two churches" – the upstairs and the downstairs
- "If we are to bring the love and grace of this faith to our families' lives, we must intentionally support the faith formation of children and adults." - *Kimberly Sweeney, The Death of Sunday School*
- "Faith development is all we do. Unitarian Universalism is the faith we teach. The congregation is the curriculum." – *religious educator Connie Goodbread*
- Children (and adults) learn best by doing and participating. Children (and adults!) need rituals. Rituals help us to find comfort and wisdom in the celebration of our faith and the ups and downs of life. Rituals help us to celebrate who we are as Unitarian Universalists.
- We all need a Beloved Community where we 'belong,' and a community of good role models in life. We also need special time with our UU peers of similar age.
- As noted in a recent town hall, many of our most active congregants "have a lot of grey hair." There is a strong need for intentional ministry to young families, for their sake as well as for the future of our church.
- *Beloved Community* encompasses all ages and abilities.

Our Religious Education Vision Statement

From our research, reflection, and discussions, we developed the following Vision Statement for religious education at Second Unitarian Church. Please note this a vision statement for members of all ages:

Unitarian Universalist religious education grows and strengthens connection to our UU history, rituals, values, and community. It is the nurturance and development of one's own religious self as we explore and honor our UU principles and sources. It empowers us to think critically to discern our personal beliefs and live our values.

Religious education is not just learned, but lived. Religious education happens through active participation in our Unitarian Universalist rituals, worship, and celebrations at home and at church. Religious education happens when we hear our stories over and over, explore religious ideas together, and are challenged to reflect thoughtfully on religious meaning. Religious education is seeing and living our values in action. Religious education happens when people in our church listen, value, and encourage us toward our better selves.

The vision – what we expect religious education in action to look like

- **Supporting faith development in the home:**
 - Families are encouraged to have a revered family Chalice that they light on a regular basis with a family meal and for special occasions.
 - Families are encouraged to celebrate our UU principles in the celebration of Chalica each December.
 - Parents will be supported with supplemental resources such as Chalice Home and Soulful Home to support faith development at home as desired and as fits into their lifestyle.
- **First of the month Sundays:**
 - The monthly Soul Matters themes will be used in worship and supplemental curricula. Children will be introduced to the monthly theme the first Sunday of the month with special time and activities downstairs with their age peers. (The first Sunday of the month will be a good Sunday for particularly adult themed worship.)
- **All ages worship:**
 - Children and adults of all abilities will be welcomed as part of the Beloved Community in worship all other Sundays.
 - It will be helpful for worship to be especially engaging with music, videos, and stories. It is also helpful to break the sermon message into segments. (These suggestions are helpful to engage people of all ages.)
 - There will be 2-3 small areas in the sanctuary where children can play quietly on the floor if they like near their parents with quiet hand activities available for those of any age to help them listen quietly.
 - Children will be involved in such rituals as welcoming, providing orders of service, offertory, chalice lighting, chalice extinguishing
- **Monthly evening vespers:**
 - On the last Friday of the month, September – May, we will have an evening meal and short vespers service, followed by related activity options to close out the worship theme for the month.
 - This is intended to be for all ages, and it is especially intended to be parent friendly. Parents merely need to show up – they will not be expected to ‘work.’ A meal will be provided, and their children will be engaged in themed activities after the vespers while parents have special time with other adults, perhaps in a class or support group.
- **Social Justice**
 - Children will be welcomed to participate in Social Justice causes to live their faith and be with role models that demonstrate living our faith.
 - Children would be involved in activities connected to the church as appropriate, such as helping to maintain the free library/pantry, Church clean-up Saturdays, pledge drive, hospitality, wrapping holiday presents. Activities directed toward families in need may be of special interest to children.
 - We hope to incorporate social justice projects into the monthly activities after vespers or on First Sundays.
- **Adult religious education**
 - There will be a variety of faith formation opportunities for adults.
 - The DRE will be involved in overseeing religious education for all ages, including adult programming.
- **Teen Ministry**
 - We will continue to participate in the joint YRUU with First Unitarian Church
 - We encourage teen/adult groups such as a “Popcorn Theology” movie discussion or book discussions.
 - We encourage Coming of Age programming culminating in a service where teens have an opportunity to share their Credo statements.
- **OWL Classes**
 - Our Whole Lives sexuality classes will be offered periodically for the different age ranges K-adult.
- **Vacation Summer Camp**
 - It would be delightful to offer a week-long summer ‘day camp’ with an emphasis on the history of our faith with lots of play, acting out of the stories and fun activities.

Committee Structure – the How

- We will be utilizing a ‘team approach.’ The oversight committee will meet with the DRE 2-3 times per year to prioritize the calendar and projects.
- Two person teams will be designated to handle specific activities and projects, called ‘portfolios.’ Some portfolios will be deemed core or essential. Others will be considered optional and will be designated only after the core teams have been filled and as there is interest.
- Examples of potential core portfolios: Vespers, First Sundays, Adult RE
- Examples of potential optional portfolios: Popcorn Theology, Social Justice projects
- Team leaders will be responsible for recruiting other helpers as needed.
- It is expected that members will be more willing to commit to short term definitive projects.

The Roll-Out

- The strong support of the Board, the congregation, the minister, and especially the Music & Worship committee, will be critical to the success of this transformation. There will be a need for collaboration between RE, the minister, the DRE, and the M&W committee.
- It will be beneficial to have conversations with a number of committees regarding what this new vision will look like and how it might impact operations and culture, as well as to address concerns.
- We hope to roll out this vision as an important part of the vision derived from the Meaning & Purpose process.
- Along with written communication, we can envision presenting the vision that the Board and NLD hopes to present to the church, including the RE vision, in a series of three Sunday worship services.
- The theme for April is “Becoming,” and this seems like an especially opportune month to present all this VISION.
 - One suggestion is to use the overall idea of “It Takes a Village”
 - First Sunday – “It Takes a Village to Transform the World” which would look at ministry, connection, and reflecting our values
 - Second Sunday – “It Takes a Village to Raise Us All” which would be the RE vision
 - Third Sunday – “Who is the Village?” which looks at the organizational structure and function of the Beloved Community.
- We hope to start the monthly Friday Vespers in September.

Thank you to the Board of Trustees for your time and thoughtful consideration of this proposal!

The ReVision Team

Resources:

The Death of Sunday School and the Future of Faith Formation, by Kimberly Sweeney.

https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/t/the_death_of_sunday_school_and_the_future_of_faith_formation_ksweeney_june2017.pdf

Family Ministry at UUCB – the Birth of the Binghamton Model, by Ann Kadlecek, UUCB Transitional Director of Lifespan Faith Development 2016-2018. The White Paper https://www.uua.org/files/pdf/f/family_min_binghamton_kadlecek.pdf

Nourishing Your Child’s Soul, by Rabbi Harold S. Kushner. https://www.rockcreekschools.org/pages/uploaded_files/fall08.pdf

“The End of iChurch.”

By The Reverend Frederic Muir, from his Berry Street Lecture, GA, 2012.

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/end-ichurch>

[History of RE video](#)

“Faithing Family.”

https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/190620_223_faithing_family.pdf

“Building A Community of Communities.” Paula Cole Jones.

2019 Sophia Fahs Lecture, General Assembly 2019. <https://www.lreda.org/sophia-lyon-fahs-lecture>

“Reimagining Sunday: The Future of Faith Formation.” By Kim Sweeney, General Assembly 2018.

<https://smallscreen.uua.org/videos/ga-2018-235-reimagining-sundays-the-future-of-faith-formation>

The Fahs Collaborative Laboratory for Innovation in Faith Formation
Meadville-Lombard Seminary.

<https://www.meadville.edu/fahs-collaborative/>

Dan Harper's Faith Development Tasks

<https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/youth/wholeness/workshop2/handout2>

Stages of faith development. It's rare that people get past stage 4. Why is that? What can we do?

<https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/youth/wholeness/workshop2/167602.shtml>

Adapting Small Group Ministry for Children

https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/documents/mpl/adapt_sgm_children.pdf

Full Week Faith by Karen Bellavance-Grace

<https://www.uua.org/pacific-western/resources/faith-formation-and-re/full-week-faith>

[Wrought Faith: Minding What we've Missed in Faith Development](#)

Shifting faith formation

<https://www.congregationalconsulting.org/do-mainline-protestants-need-to-be-more-home-made/>