

# **Evaluation of the UUCF RE Program**

*(From 2s & 3s Through Sixth Grade)*

## **Table of Contents**

### **Executive Summary**

- 1) Introduction**
- 2) Description of the UUCF Religious Exploration Program**
- 3) Organization of Professional Staff**
- 4) Organization of Volunteers**
- 5) Parent and Student Feedback**
- 6) Profiles of Other UU Congregations**
- 7) Intergenerational Worship**

### **Appendices**

- A. Method**
- B. Membership and RE Attendance Charts**
- C. Sample UUCA Lesson Plans**
- D. UUC Asheville Intergenerational Worship Pamphlet**

## Executive Summary

This report presents the Program Evaluation Committee's (PEC) assessment of the Religious Exploration Program from 2s & 3s through sixth grade at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Fairfax (UUCF). The following questions framed the evaluation:

1. What is the current status of the RE program?
2. What are the needs of the congregation with respect to RE? To what extent are these needs being met by the current model? To what extent are these needs not being met?
3. What are the expectations of parents? How do these map onto the performance of the program?
4. Are there other models or best practices that UUCF should consider?

UUCF maintains one of the largest Unitarian Universalist (UU) RE programs in the country every Sunday across two services during the September-May congregational year. A smaller RE program attracting 25-30% of a typical "congregational-year" week is held during the summer. The RE program's three goals are to teach UU's seven principles in an age-appropriate way, explore diverse spiritual practices to support each child's development and bring children into community with each other, the congregation and the world.

A variety of specific curricula are used for each age level or grade for 2s & 3s through sixth grade. Some curricula come from the UUA's Tapestry of Faith, some were written by members of UUCF and some from other UU congregations or sources. Our Whole Lives (OWL) modules are also taught to first and fifth graders for a portion of the year and to eighth graders for the entire congregational year. Special RE classes, involving combined classes and off-curriculum topics, are held around holiday periods when RE attendance is traditionally low.

Analyzing the RE population and identifying relevant trends is difficult due to a current lack of consistent, detailed data, although efforts are underway to address the problem. Data from 2011 to 2017 that does exist shows that RE attendance was highest in 2011, hit a low point in 2013, rose again in 2014 and 2015, and then fell somewhat in 2016 and 2017. Given that the data are not particularly reliable and the differences in average attendance do not vary much by year, it is difficult to derive much meaning from these small shifts. These small shifts in RE numbers stand in contrast to a consistent downward trend in worship attendance and membership since 2012.

The RE program is overseen by Senior Minister David Miller. Four UUCF paid staff members run the RE program on a weekly basis. They include a full-time director of religious exploration (DRE), a part-time education assistant (most directly involved in the RE program for 2s & 3s through sixth graders), a part-time nursery coordinator and a part-time youth ministry coordinator for high-school youth. The size of the RE staff is consistent with other UU congregations with similarly sized RE programs.

Both the number and variety of duties for the DRE and the education assistant are extensive, akin, we believe, to running a small elementary school for a half-day every week. The stability of part of the RE staff continues to be in flux following the departure of long-time DRE Linnea Nelson in the fall of 2017. Diana Tycker is serving as interim DRE through the spring of 2019. A search for a new permanent DRE will take place early in the 2018-2019 congregational year.

The RE staff receives critical support each year from more than 100 congregational volunteers who serve as teachers and RE greeters (to welcome new families and serve as extra hands for teachers or staff, as needed). Additionally, a formal Religious Exploration Committee (REC) meets regularly to support the RE staff and RE volunteers; collaborate with the DRE on the RE program's philosophy, programming, policies and relationships

with parents, teachers and children; and recruit RE volunteers and support volunteer recognition events. Each REC member carries out multiple, often time-consuming, tasks during the congregational year, enabling the RE program to run on an uninterrupted basis.

Both experienced and new volunteer teachers have positive and some negative things to say about the current RE program. On the positive side, teachers, overall, believe that the RE program serves the needs of most children well. The RE program has a good infrastructure with adequate supplies and classrooms and communication between RE staff and teachers are extensive. UUCF's campus is conducive to outdoor learning. Teachers enjoy getting to know children and their parents better (to the extent that the current RE program allows them to). Experienced teachers appreciate the opportunities for growth and community building in the Program Building, though many new teachers find it isolating from the Sanctuary community they are used to.

However, teachers also voice frustrations or challenges with the current program. These include: RE curricula for some grades that are content-heavy, making it challenging to prepare lessons, gather materials easily and avoid requiring children to sit in class for extended periods of time; the challenge of serving children with special needs or those who are challenging to manage in a classroom setting; the challenge of establishing deeper relationships with children and parents beyond what can currently be done; and an inability to be connected to adult worship services and a more intergenerational community.

Parents and children also generally express positive, if wide-ranging, views of the current RE program while identifying areas for improvement. Overall, parents believe that RE does a good job of teaching UU principles and values to their children and that their children are learning these principles. Children in RE express a preference for hands-on activities, stories, time outdoors and opportunities to make friends and share their thoughts and experiences (and – unanimously – all children interviewed want snack time to return).

Both parents and children express a wide range of opinions on what the RE program could do better. In the survey and in conversations, they mention diverse and sometimes opposing opinions; for example, some expressed a desire for more playing and breaks, while others wished for more curricular content such as more games, stories and teaching of spiritual practices. Parents are also mixed in their views on the requirement that they serve as RE classroom teachers once every three years, with key concerns involving congregants who are uncomfortable in a classroom and the difficulty of single parents or adults whose partners do not attend UUCF to fulfill the requirement.

RE programs of larger, smaller and equivalent size are run by other UU congregations around the country in ways similar to UUCF. All are cooperative programs administered by a combination of full- and part-time staff and rely heavily on congregational volunteers to organize and teach RE classes.

Other congregations also use specific best practices that have translated into successes for their RE programs. These best practices include: choosing or creating RE curricula tailored closely to their RE program needs; using a “workshop method” to simplify lesson planning and promote experiential learning for students; combining grades to reduce the need for teachers (or, at least teacher prep time) while simultaneously helping to build relationships between children of different ages; providing spiritual support to volunteer teachers; and supporting families with programming outside of the classroom.

Other UU congregations also experience key RE program challenges that are similar to UUCF's challenges. They use a variety of initiatives to help mitigate these problems. The most notable ongoing challenge involves recruiting sufficient numbers of teachers annually to serve their pre-kindergarten and elementary-age children. To help solve this challenge, other UU congregations intentionally recruit teachers from the entire congregation to draw both their young adult and retiree populations into the classroom, while also simplifying lessons and

taking steps to reduce the amount of lesson planning. Other challenges include making intergenerational worship work for their congregations, resulting in a variety of approaches among different congregations; and empowering DREs to be in shared ministry with their senior ministers, using UUA resources to help avoid dysfunctional hierarchical relationships.

A consistent issue across myriad facets of the RE program involves UUCF intergenerational worship; specifically, how and to what degree children should participate in Sanctuary worship services versus classroom RE lessons. There is currently no uniform vision for intergenerational worship, with a wide range of opinions expressing both advantages and disadvantages for either approach across RE staff, teachers, parents and children.

Throughout the report, the PEC includes findings and recommendations for next steps to improve the RE program. The organization of the findings and recommendations mirrors the organization of the report. Overall, the PEC finds that the RE program enjoys a solid foundation and its weekly activities are in line with the program's mission and goals. The PEC also finds, however, that the RE program is experiencing challenges that, if not addressed, will likely erode its success.

While all challenges merit follow-up action, there are several in particular that the PEC feels, if addressed, can result in the largest amount of positive improvement for the RE program. These include: a multi-pronged, sustained effort to emphasize teacher recruitment from the entire congregation, simplifying the RE experience for volunteer teachers and children (through a combination of curricula simplification and the organization of weekly classes), improving the RE program's ability to accommodate children with special needs as well as children who present classroom management challenges and deciding on a vision for the future of intergenerational worship.

# Religious Exploration at UUCF

## 1. Introduction

The UUCF Governance Manual states (section VII.E.2) that “[t]he Board shall engage in comprehensive review of programmatic areas of the Congregation on a multiyear basis. This Programmatic Assessment shall occur on a schedule adopted by the Board. In conducting the Programmatic Assessment, the Board may form a committee to assess a particular area, or it may direct a Board-chartered committee to assist it.” The Board and the Coordinating Team (CT) decided that program reviews should be conducted by the CT, with reports submitted to the Board for review. Thus, the PEC is a subcommittee of the CT.

The CT recommended to the Board that the RE Program from 2s & 3s through sixth grade<sup>1</sup> be made the subject of the current evaluation for several reasons:

- To inform the search process for a new Director of Religious Exploration following the departure of Linnea Nelson in the fall of 2017
- To explore how concerns throughout the UUA about the sustainability of the current/traditional model of RE may be manifesting themselves at UUCF

The Board approved the CT’s recommendation that the RE Program be evaluated. The PEC conducted this evaluation during 2017-2018 congregational year.

## 2. Description of the UUCF Religious Exploration (RE) Program

According to the 2018 list of UUA Certified Congregations, UUCF’s Religious Exploration (RE) program is the 6th largest RE program in the country in terms of number of children enrolled. The vision for the RE program is "Minds that think, hearts that love and hands that are ready to serve." According to its mission, the RE program seeks to:

- Present the Unitarian Universalist Seven Principles in an age-appropriate way,
- Provide opportunities to explore diverse spiritual practices to support the development of each child and
- Bring children into community with each other, our congregation and the world.

The program is a cooperative one that brings families, parents, members of the congregation and the UUCF staff together to develop and implement models to bring children into a meaningful participation in religious community.

RE classes meet in the UUCF Program Building during Sunday worship, normally at 9:15 and 11:15 a.m., from September through May, with a smaller summer program during summer worship at a single 10 a.m. service. RE activities are derived from a combination of UUA-generated and other curricula and individual planned activities. From fourth through sixth grade, children attend the first part of the service<sup>2</sup> in the Sanctuary before

---

<sup>1</sup> The nursery, which serves children aged 3 and younger not ready to participate in a classroom setting, was not addressed by this evaluation.

<sup>2</sup> The portion of the service that the fourth through sixth graders attend usually includes the prelude, one or two hymns and the chalice lighting. It may also include member testimony, a reading or a special ceremony such as new member recognition or child dedication.

leaving to attend their classes. Kindergarten through third graders attend chapel in the Program Building, except for the first week of every month when they attend Together Time in the Sanctuary. The 2s & 3s and 4s & 5s classes begin in the classroom each week.

What are generally designated "regular" RE sessions run for approximately 27 weeks from the third Sunday in September until the Sunday before Memorial Day in May. Interspersed throughout the year are several special weekends. "Special RE" is the term used for when many classes are combined due to traditionally low attendance. The 2s & 3s and the 4s & 5s meet together for play time, while K-6 gather for a non-curricular group activity. Traditionally, Special RE takes place five times: Columbus Day weekend, Thanksgiving weekend, Martin Luther King weekend and both weekends surrounding the Spring Break of Fairfax County Public Schools, one of which is Easter weekend. Additionally, three all-congregation services are held throughout the year. These include Ingathering (the second weekend in September), the Joy Service (the first weekend in December) and a Jazz service held on the concluding weekend of UUCF's week of hosting the Hypothermia shelter, usually in mid-February. Christmas Eve services are also all-congregation services, with the 4:30 service traditionally geared toward families with young children; the 6:30 service aims to draw families with older children and youth, while the 8 p.m. service is of a contemplative nature. No classes are generally held during Sunday morning services during the winter break of Fairfax County Public Schools, except for the Sunday immediately before school resumes.

Table 1 outlines the curricular offerings for the 2017-2018 congregational year.

<b>Table 1</b>			
<b>Service</b>	<b>Grade/Age Level</b>	<b>Curriculum</b>	<b>Curriculum Source</b>
<b>9:15</b>	2s & 3s	Hello, Friends!	Written in-house
<b>9:15</b>	4s & 5s	1 <sup>st</sup> half of the year: Chalice Children 2 <sup>nd</sup> half of the year: 7 Principles	Chalice Children is a heavily in-house modified Tapestry of Faith curriculum.  7 Principles was written in-house.
<b>9:15</b>	Kindergarten	Treasure Hunting—Take Two	Mountaingate Curricula  (written by Ellen Schneider and Gaia Brown)
<b>9:15</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> grade	World of Wonder	Tapestry of Faith
<b>9:15</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	Moral Tales	Tapestry of Faith
<b>9:15</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	Love Will Guide Us supplemented by A World of New Friends	Tapestry of Faith and Shawnee Mission Unitarian Universalist Church
<b>9:15</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> grade	Toolbox of Faith	Tapestry of Faith
<b>9:15</b>	5 <sup>th</sup> grade	Bibleodeon/UU Sources	UUC-Shelter Rock/teacher prepared material ad hoc
<b>9:15</b>	6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Riddle and Mystery	Tapestry of Faith
<b>11:15</b>	2s-5s	Hello, Friends	Written in-house
<b>11:15</b>	K-1 <sup>st</sup> grade	World of Wonder	Tapestry of Faith
<b>11:15</b>	2-3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	Love Will Guide Us	Tapestry of Faith
<b>11:15</b>	4 <sup>th</sup> grade	Toolbox of Faith	Tapestry of Faith
<b>11:15</b>	5-6 <sup>th</sup> grade	Bibleodeon/UU Sources	UUC-Shelter Rock/teacher prepared material ad hoc

### OWL

OWL (Our Whole Lives) modules are provided to first and fifth graders. These modules are presented for the last ten weeks of regular RE to the fifth graders and for the last eight weeks of regular RE to the first graders. OWL is the curriculum for the entire congregational year for eighth graders. OWL teachers receive UUA training in this curriculum. In the past, high school OWL has been offered, though not on a regular rotation.

### Attendance and Data Collection

This evaluation was limited by a lack of available numbers to assess important parts of the program and to understand its successes and limitations. UUCF does not have easily accessible data on attendance and enrollment by class, nor is there data used for tracking supplies and curriculum resources. The numbers available were either aggregated or fragmented over many hard-copy reports. It may be that these data are recorded somewhere but we were unable to unearth them. There is an effort underway this congregational year to implement a new system for tracking attendance that is promising; if consistently maintained, it promises to be a treasure trove of important data for detecting attendance trends over time.

Chart 1 shows the best-available data, with approximately average yearly attendance during regular RE sessions (Special RE and all-congregation services are excluded). Note that these numbers include both adults and children present for RE, and so actual numbers of children served are lower than what is shown in the chart. Data that gives attendance of children only, without the addition of adults present for RE, is only available for this year.

For example, on Sunday, April 22, 2018, attendance figures were as follows:

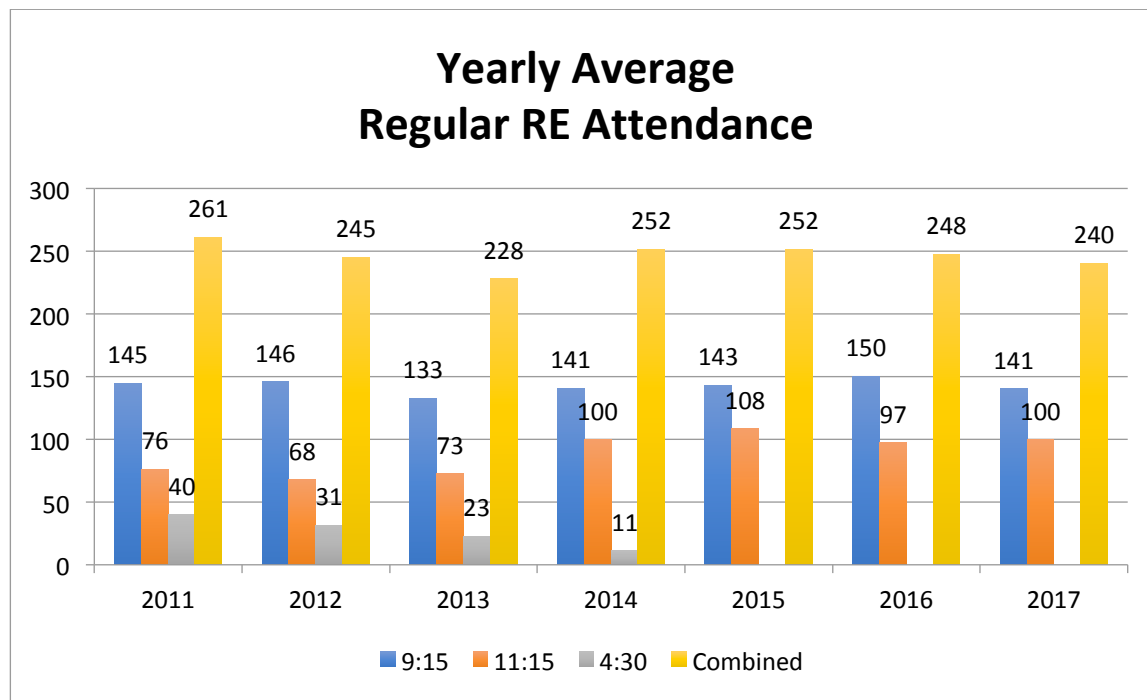
	<b>Children and Youth</b>	<b>Adult Volunteers</b>	<b>Staff</b>
<b>9:15</b>	93	33	3
<b>11:15</b>	82	25	3

While the reported RE attendance for that weekend is 233, only 175 were children or youth. When looking at the data below and in Appendix B, one should assume about 70% of the total listed in the chart are children and 30% are adults.

As shown below, total RE attendance has been relatively stable over the past seven years. There is a dip in 2013, then a rise in 2014 and 2015, then a dip again. The data show that when the 4:30 service was dropped, there was a similar-sized increase in numbers at the 11:15 service, suggesting that 4:30 families likely switched to the 11:15 service. There is not currently as wide a gap in sizes between the services as is perceived by some of those we interviewed, suggesting that they may be thinking back to several years ago and are unaware of the narrowing gap. Overall, the RE population at the 11:15 am service has recently been one-third lower than at the 9:15 am service. In contrast, while the 4:30 service existed, the 11:15 attendance was only approximately half that of the 9:15 service. As seen in Appendix B, the relative stability of RE attendance contrasts with worship attendance which has been steadily declining since 2012.

Month-by-month data for each year is available in Appendix B. In recent years, these data show high points for attendance in April and September.



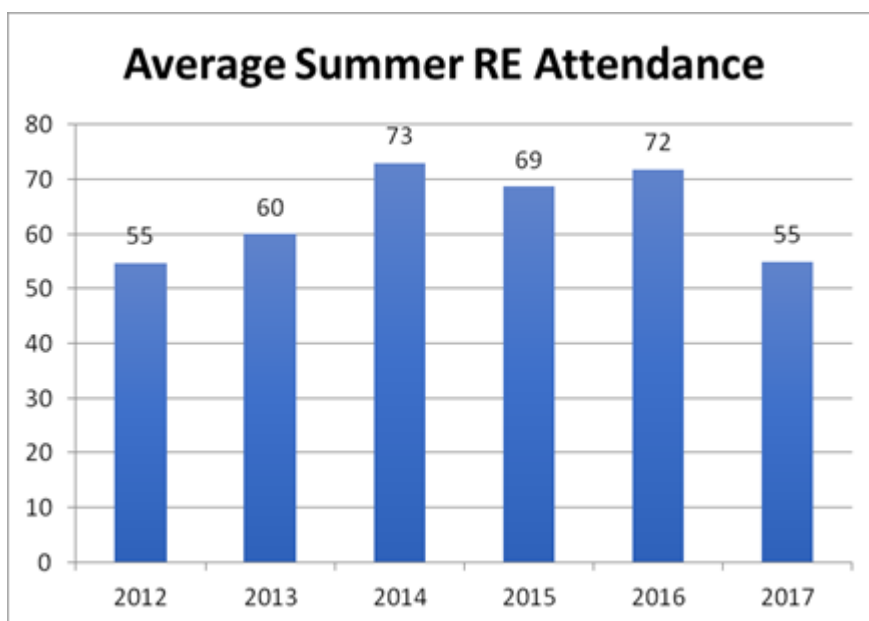
**Chart 1. Yearly Average Regular RE Attendance<sup>3</sup>**

As noted above, we do not have data on attendance by grade level, though undoubtedly that information would be useful for allocating volunteer teacher resources. Teachers and staff tell us that registration and attendance are high in first through third grade and decrease steadily in the fourth through sixth grade. The reason for this is unclear although some people interviewed attribute this to competing interests and activities in children's lives. A 2013 survey of parents, teachers and students up to eighth grade also found this result, attributing it to lack of interest in the programs and few bonds with peers and teachers.

#### Summer RE

An analysis of Summer RE attendance shows that, on average, Summer RE serves a population approximately one-fourth to one-fifth the size of the population that attends on a typical congregational year Sunday. Following several years of content-based curriculum, Summer RE 2017 was redesigned with a more "summer camp" type feel. In this model, fewer adults were needed to supervise different spaces where various activities were offered, including board games, outside time, arts and crafts, etc. The REC was pleased with the pilot year and plans to continue using this model. Chart 2 shows Summer RE attendance levels.

<sup>3</sup> All RE attendance figures include all the adults in the building as well as the children.

**Chart 2. Average Summer RE Attendance<sup>4</sup>**

### Findings and Recommendations

**Finding:** UUCF runs one of the largest Religious Exploration ("RE") programs in the country. It is staffed weekly with teachers, materials and curriculum and gives our children access to a beautiful campus. Parents are able to worship while their children are cared for and become familiar with UU principles and ethics.

**Finding:** The RE program has been maintained for many years. In 2017, average attendance across the two services was 240 children, youth and adult teachers, greeters and parent helpers.

**Finding:** It is unclear how many children are actively participating in the RE program. RE registration and weekly attendance records other than the composite attendance have not been consistently recorded electronically, and annual registrations have been rolled over for several years with no input required from parents. An effort is currently underway to overhaul RE record keeping and improvements have been made in recent months. The lack of available data has hindered efforts to provide accurate information and recommendations in this report.

**Recommendation:** The DRE and education assistant, together with the Religious Exploration Committee, should determine what information is needed to accurately report overall numbers to the UUA, to make informed decisions about volunteer needs and the combination or separation of classes and to provide appropriate amounts of materials for classes. In all likelihood, this will involve accurately tracking weekly attendance for each class and calculating monthly averages. The data can also be used to reach out to families not attending consistently and encourage them back or find out what their hurdles to consistent attendance are.

**Finding:** UUCF consistently provides OWL classes for first, fifth and eighth graders, committing the funds needed to ensure that volunteers are trained by the UUA's OWL Facilitator Training Workshops. UUCF has demonstrated a long-term commitment to the importance of this program and its values. Parents are happy with the program; children tolerate it and seem to recognize its importance in retrospect.

<sup>4</sup> All RE attendance figures include all the adults in the building as well as the children.

**Recommendation:** UUCF should continue to dedicate the time and resources to maintain a cohort of trained OWL teachers and to support them in the implementation of the OWL curriculum.

**Finding:** Safety in classrooms is an area of concern among the parent population as well as the staff of UUCF. Many of the core policies and procedures have been created in the last few years but are not all enumerated in the RE safety policy approved by the CT (8/31/17). Most notably, an active shooter plan is not included in this policy.

**Recommendation:** Safety and evacuation guidelines should be consolidated into one policy. Staff should ensure that this new consolidated policy is clearly communicated to teachers, greeters and parents. Safety and evacuation guidelines, including the active shooter plan, may also need to be revisited. Consider hiring an outside consultant to review the plan's efficacy, such as the one conducted at the Unitarian Church of Norfolk<sup>5</sup>.

**Finding:** On average, Summer RE serves 25-30% of the typical population of a “regular” congregational year RE Sunday.

**Recommendation:** Weekly Summer RE attendance should be monitored. If the average attendance continues to drop, consideration should be given to the feasibility of maintaining a program serving a small percentage of the children of the congregation and to whether this is an inefficient allocation of volunteer resources.

**Finding:** It is a challenge to properly store the RE program's materials. While the supply closet is a great resource, teachers and staff note that there is a lack of secure storage for materials for individual RE classes and that items have a tendency to disappear, which can be disruptive. This puts stress on volunteer teachers who must assemble materials each week.

**Recommendation:** Dedicate a locked closet or space in the supply closet for materials for individual classes, perhaps with separate bins for each teaching team. A way to track who has access to this space is essential.

---

<sup>5</sup> Their contact for this evaluation was a member of their congregation, Master Officer Allen Perry, who can be reached by email at APerry@vb.gov.com.

### 3. Organization of Professional Staff

Staff directly involved in the RE program and their responsibilities are shown in Table 2. Major responsibility for the RE program is held by the DRE under supervision of the senior minister. The DRE supervises three part-time staff, only one of whom – the education assistant – is directly involved with the 2s & 3s through sixth grade program that is the focus of this evaluation.

Each of the positions associated with the RE program has been in transition in recent years. Most significantly, the former DRE Linnea Nelson resigned in the summer of 2017 and was replaced by interim DRE Diana Tycker. Ms. Tycker has agreed to remain in this post through the 2018-2019 congregational year allowing time for a search for a permanent DRE to be completed in the coming year. Melissa Campos-Poehnert, the education assistant, is in her second year in this position. The nursery coordinator, Natasha Jackson, is in her second year of employment. Courtney Firth, youth ministry coordinator, is in her third year of employment.

Not counting the summer RE director, there are 2.45 full-time-equivalent employees that are involved in the RE program in some way. This appears to be adequate, based on quality of performance and absence of complaints about overwork and job stress. The UUCF staffing level is also consistent with similar-sized RE programs of other UU congregations interviewed for this report.

There has been some change over the past few years in regard to staff oversight of Adult Programs (AP). In the wider UU world, there has been a move toward integrating all learning and growth programs, often under the title lifespan faith development (LFD). In our survey of other congregations, only one congregation has moved toward this model; however, according to the director of lifespan and religious education at UUCA, "there's just not time for it all." For a brief time during Linnea Nelson's tenure, LFD did fall under her purview. Additionally, the job description of the education assistant includes support of Adult Programs. In reality, Adult Programs are not carried out by UUCF RE program staff, given the amount and variety of their RE duties.

<b>Table 2. UUCF Staff and their Responsibilities in RE<sup>6</sup></b>	
<b>Senior Minister (David Miller)</b>	Supervise DRE; provide spiritual direction and support to youth programs
<b>Director of Religions Exploration</b> <b>(Interim: Diana Tycer)</b> <b>Full-Time</b>	Director of all RE activities; supervise education assistant, youth ministry coordinator and child care coordinator; plan and conduct spiritual development for RE children; work with staff and volunteers to create opportunities for children and families to participate in social action; minister to parents and families; participate in strategic planning and implementation for RE; professional development
<b>Education Assistant (Melissa Campos-Poehnert)</b> <b>Part-time, 30 hours/week</b>	Support of education programs; order supplies; maintain forms, technology, scheduling, general administrative support of the RE program; provide Sunday coverage for RE
<b>Youth Ministry Coordinator (Courtney Firth)</b> <b>Part-time, 20 hours/week</b>	Responsible for RE at middle and high school levels and for youth programming outside of classroom time;  Not directly involved in this evaluation.
<b>Child Care Coordinator (Natasha Jackson)</b> <b>Part-time, 8 hours/week on average</b>	Manage nursery and childcare for some congregational activities.  Not directly related to RE program evaluated here.
<b>Summer RE Director</b> <b>Part-time, 10 hours per week, summer only</b>	Manage summer RE activities.

## Findings and Recommendations

**Finding:** UUCF is committed to staffing its RE program and has a number of full time employees similar to other congregations with similarly-sized RE programs. A full-time DRE, a 30-hour-per-week education assistant, an 8-hour-per-week (on average) child care coordinator and a 20-hour-per-week youth ministry coordinator comprise the current staff.

**Finding:** The RE program has undergone several staff transitions in the last few years and more changes are expected in the next 2 years. This year's staff have done a remarkable job of adjusting to the departure of the previous DRE with the interim appointment of Diana Tycer.

<sup>6</sup> These descriptions were gleaned from the following sources: personal interviews, the 2016 staffing report and RE promotional materials.

**Finding:** In addition to her other responsibilities, the job of the education assistant has begun to include assisting teachers with children who are having a difficult time in class.

**Recommendation:** Given the lack of comfort of many volunteer teachers with classroom management challenges and accommodating children with special needs, it would behoove UUCF to provide staff (and volunteers, as funding allows) with professional development opportunities in these areas.

**Finding:** Diana Tycker will conclude the second year of her Interim DRE tenure in June 2019.

**Recommendation:** UUCF should conduct a nationwide search for a new permanent DRE during the 2018-2019 congregational year. This candidate should have a background in education and an interest in engaging in shared ministry. Issues the new DRE will likely need to contend with, and therefore should have some familiarity with, include volunteer teacher recruitment and training, working with children with special needs and/or behavioral challenges, creating informal (non-school-like) learning environments, curriculum development, administration and management and intergenerational worship and learning.

**Finding:** In other UU congregations, adult programs are sometimes under the purview of the DRE, who may hold the title director of lifespan faith development. This is true for one of the four congregations interviewed for this report, although the demands of its RE program, which is about the same size as UUCF, preclude the DRE from devoting any meaningful time to adult education program.

**Recommendation:** We do not recommend that the DRE's portfolio be expanded to include adult programs without additional resources, given the amount of time currently needed to effectively lead an RE program as large as UUCF's.

**Finding:** The Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA) recommends as a "best practice" that ministers be in partnership with a DRE and work on the RE program as a shared ministry versus a traditional hierarchical relationship. LREDA recommends the use of the UUA's Excellence in Shared Ministry self-assessment tool to help create and deepen such a relationship.

**Recommendation:** The UUCF ministers and the DRE should discuss the nature of their current relationship and make use of the available self-assessment tool or undertake any other needed actions to help ensure that our RE program is carried out as a shared ministry.

## 4. Organization of Volunteers

In addition to the 2.45 full-time-equivalent employees required to run this program, four major volunteer groups assist in its operation. The RE program could not function without assistance from more than one hundred volunteer congregants.

### Teachers

This congregational year, 91 volunteer parent/congregant teachers signed up to teach the 2s & 3s through sixth grade students. It is a commitment to being present for about half of the regular RE Sundays (twenty-seven this year) and one Special RE. Each teacher could reasonably expect this year to lead teach seven times and assist eight times (once at Special RE). In this model, four regular, rotating teachers are required for each class. It has been the practice of the RE Program for the last decade to expect that parents of children in RE volunteer as a teacher or greeter once every three years; however, this is not currently a formal written policy. According to current Interim DRE Diana Tycker, a new parent guide is in the works for next year to clearly set forth this and other currently informal guidelines.

### RE Greeters

This congregational year, 10 people are serving as RE greeters with six people serving as substitutes. Each of the 10 people commits to serving two Sundays per month (when RE is in session). The primary role of the RE greeter is to welcome new and visiting families. They also serve as the point person in emergency situations and often help with minor first aid or behavior management situations when a child needs to be removed from a classroom. Other jobs include helping teachers navigate the supply closet, distributing snack to the lower grades and troubleshooting technology issues.

### Parent Helpers

Each parent with a child in grades two and younger are asked to serve as a Parent Helper four times each year in the second grade and younger classes. The parent helper serves as an extra pair of hands in the classroom to assist with snack, bathroom trips, arts and crafts and classroom management. According to the REC chairs, a policy change is planned for next year, requiring parents of all children in RE to serve as parent helpers, not only the parents of younger children.

### Religious Exploration Committee (REC)

According to the REC Charter (revised 2017), "The REC ensures that RE's strategic and annual goals are achieved while providing committee members with the opportunity to grow, connect and serve through meaningful and outcome-driven work." Its three primary duties are:

1. Directly support the volunteers and participants involved in RE (teachers, parents and children) and support the RE staff as needed.
2. Collaborate with the DRE on RE philosophy, programming, policies and relations with parents, teachers and children. As the "eyes and ears" for RE, the REC provides information that guides organizational decisions, policies and practices.
3. Recruit volunteers and support volunteer recognition events to meet RE goals set by the DRE and the Senior Minister and provide input.

The REC carries out a variety of activities that both directly support the weekly operation of RE program and help the program prepare for the future. Each REC member is assigned a list of extensive tasks that frequently require preparation months in advance or ongoing activity. These involve, for example, recruiting teachers (their most time-consuming activity), organizing summer and special RE programs, serving as a liaison to teachers for given grade level and carrying out teacher training.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

**Finding:** The RE Committee and volunteer teachers are the lifeblood of UUCF's RE program and they are to be commended for the work that they do for UUCF's children.

**Finding:** The most time-consuming and consistently pressing responsibility of the RE Committee is teacher recruitment. Similarly, all DREs at other congregations interviewed cite volunteer teacher recruitment as a significant challenge, with the majority stating that it's the largest ongoing issue facing their programs.

**Finding:** Other UU congregations recruit RE volunteer teachers from their entire congregations, leveraging young adults, retirees and other adults who do not have children in the RE program for classroom work to help alleviate teacher shortages. As a result, some congregations do not require parents to teach RE at regular intervals.

**Recommendation:** The whole of the congregation should feel called to participate in RE teaching, so the burden does not fall entirely on the parents. A culture shift at UUCF is needed so that the entire

congregation feels a connection to and responsibility for the children of UUCF. Consistent messaging from the pulpit and support from the Joy Team and other groups organizing fellowship events are needed to support this effort.

**Finding:** The volunteer requirement, especially for single UUCF-attending parents<sup>7</sup>, can be burdensome and, to some, a barrier to participation.

**Recommendation:** Adopt a more sensitive volunteering policy for single UUCF-attending parents. This will likely need to include individual conversations between parents and RE staff to determine what will work for each particular situation.

**Finding:** Some teaching teams are quite cohesive and provide a warm, loving environment for the children week in and week out. Some teaching teams struggle to provide consistency for their students, while some struggle to effectively communicate to parents and/or amongst themselves.

**Recommendation:** Provide clear expectations and best practices for communication during teacher training. Continue to implement and strengthen the liaison program to promote team unity.

**Finding:** Being an RE teacher is a time-consuming volunteer commitment and, to many teachers, it seems to take away time for their own spiritual development.

**Finding:** Other UU congregations have specific practices and programs in place to help RE teachers deepen their own spiritual practices during the RE school year. Such practices include parent-teacher support groups, dedicated social media pages and consulting regularly with the UUA's youth and young adult coordinator.

**Recommendation:** Consider whether more specific inclusion of spiritual practices in RE curricula would allow teachers to feel they were spiritually developing while teaching. Consider adapting chapel to be more meaningful for teachers and children to attend together, making it a more intergenerational experience from which teachers and children alike would benefit and grow.

## 5. Feedback from Teachers

We conducted two teacher focus groups, one specifically aimed at teachers in their first few years of teaching RE and another aimed at experienced RE teachers. We also solicited feedback via email and conversation with RE teachers. Despite varied outreach efforts, we were only able to gather data from ten teachers. This section also incorporates comments on the volunteer teaching requirement from questions on the parent survey (completed by fifteen parents).

Teachers voiced that overall, the RE program is a good one that serves most children well. Many teachers enjoy their role, though they also find the lesson preparation required to be burdensome. Teachers find classroom management a challenge and recognize that UUCF is not doing a good job at serving children who have special needs or who simply have trouble sitting still on Sunday morning. Teachers varied in their views on UUCF's volunteer teaching requirement, and a few voiced concerns that the requirement makes it difficult for some types of families to participate in UUCF.

---

<sup>7</sup> By "single UUCF-attending parent" we are referring to several groups: single parents, divorced parents in which only one parent attends UUCF and married couples in which only one parent attends UUCF.



### Benefits for teachers

*Experienced teachers were vocal about the benefits they themselves get from teaching and being in the RE community.* One said, “Most of my church experience that’s been positive has been in RE.” Another noted that “[what’s going on in the Sanctuary] is not as dynamic as when you’re down with the kids.” *New teachers, by contrast, noted they miss having time in the Sanctuary and a more intergenerational community in years when they are teaching.* New teachers said they teach because they want to contribute to the community and want to try something new.

*Teachers, both new and experienced, appreciate getting to know the children and their parents.* Experienced teachers elaborated; they enjoy helping children feel they belong at UUCF, building community, and helping children to learn UU values. *Teachers expressed some concerns with their ability to get to know children well and build relationships given the structure of UUCF’s RE program, with each teacher seeing the children only once or twice a month.* Several of the experienced teachers advocated for a teacher staying with a class for multiple years or being there every week instead of rotating. They noted that this would help in particular help build consistency for children with special needs.

### Areas of challenge

*Welcoming and accommodating children with any kind of special needs was mentioned by experienced teachers as an area of RE that needs more attention.* There are two groups of children of concern. The first is children with moderate to severe special needs, who for the most part we are not currently able to serve at UUCF. The second is children who have mild special needs or are challenging in terms of classroom management, for example, children who have difficulty sitting still for a class on Sunday mornings. Especially for volunteer teachers with only a few hours each month for relationship building, there is often discomfort with addressing the needs of these children, as they can be disruptive and require one-on-one attention. Having many inexperienced volunteer teachers, who do not have extensive classroom management experience or the ability to shift classroom practices on the fly to meet children’s needs, makes it difficult to serve all the children in our population. Presently this problem is often managed by finding someone who is free to work individually with these children, often the education assistant, Melissa Campos-Poehnert. A less-experienced teacher noted that it would be helpful to have more preventative ideas for helping children to expend energy in a confined space.

*RE curricula at times pose challenges for new and experienced teachers alike, particularly when they are content-heavy, difficult to prepare quickly, or require children to spend too much time sitting.* The experienced teachers noted that several of the curricula UUCF uses are user-friendly and easily adaptable to UUCF’s schedule and culture. However, others do not line up with the structure of our program, require a lot of preparation time, or are too school-like. New teachers agreed: the curricula often have too much content and don’t seem to mesh with the training emphasis on building relationships and focusing on the seven principles. New teachers need help dividing lessons into weeks and knowing what to cut (and wish they didn’t have to spend so much time figuring it out). One teacher said it was necessary to “basically rewrite” the curriculum every year.

### The Volunteer Requirement

*Views on the requirement that parents teach RE (or serve as a greeter) once every three years varied.* Some said it was enjoyable to teach, others said it was fine, still others found it burdensome but acknowledged its necessity (one noted that it was a good opportunity to model for your children that we all need to help each other out) and others simply found it burdensome. Several expressed surprise at the number of hours they needed to spend on preparation and teaching and noted that the time commitment made them think twice about volunteering again. Teachers would appreciate if the schedule were organized so that you did not have to teach for Special RE

sessions in a year when you are teaching regular RE. As noted above, many teachers miss having time in the Sanctuary and intergenerational connections in years when they are teaching. There is a general perception that some people volunteer often while others do not do what is asked of them. There is also a feeling that being a greeter is not equivalent to teaching, in terms of level of effort (however, some noted that for those who are really not inclined to teach, it is good to have this alternative option).

*There were a few parents with whom we spoke who had more serious concerns with the volunteer requirement.* One person noted that while she enjoyed teaching, her introverted partner had a very difficult time with the requirement. *Most importantly, a few people noted the difficulty of the requirement for single parents or those whose partners do not attend UUCF.* Some people noted that their partners who did not attend UUCF were continually signed up as parent helpers. One person with whom we spoke had actually left UUCF because of the volunteer requirement. One of her children attended RE, but the younger child preferred to go to the Sanctuary with her every week, making her unable to either serve as parent helper or as a teacher. She was repeatedly signed up to volunteer by UUCF staff, resulting in repeated awkward conversations about why she couldn't fulfill the requirement. She finally gave up and left the congregation, feeling that those who could not volunteer in that particular way were not wanted.

### Infrastructure

Finally, experienced teachers noted that the infrastructure of the RE program is in place. Teachers said communication from staff is extensive and sometimes hard to get through, but overall is useful. Teachers had mixed reviews on communication with teaching partners: some said it was great, others said it was a challenge area. Teachers expressed that they would like more hands-on, practical training, especially in the area of classroom management. They noted that it is helpful for new teachers to be paired with someone more experienced. They wish there were better means of transferring wisdom (regarding children and curricula) from year to year, rather than having to reinvent the wheel annually. They find the time spent preparing materials for craft projects to be burdensome. Teachers noted that UUCF's grounds offer great options for outdoor learning.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

**Finding:** Some RE classes have curricula that are fairly easily accessible to teachers. Other classes have curricula that require a fair amount of "massaging" to fit our congregation's schedule, culture and logistical constraints, and that are frustrating for volunteer teachers with little extra time on their hands. RE teachers comment that some curricula do not align well with the goal of building relationships and teaching UU principles.

**Finding:** Many RE teachers do not have experience teaching and find distilling the curriculum into a weekly lesson plan and navigating issues of classroom management to be a challenge for which they are not adequately trained.

**Finding:** Assembling materials for projects can be time-consuming. Teachers prefer the summer RE model of having materials assembled for them in advance.

**Finding:** Other UU congregations adopt several "best practices" to help alleviate the preparation and teaching burden on their RE teachers. These practices include: providing simplified lesson plans to teachers in advance of a given weekend; using a workshop method with existing RE teachers to reduce the need for lesson planning while increasing experiential learning for children; standardizing lesson planning so that one teacher on a rotating basis plans the lesson for an entire grade on a given Sunday; having RE staff provide materials for teachers; and reducing the size of teaching teams for a given grade. More information about these best practices can be found in Section 6.

**Recommendation:** Determine which of the currently used curricula are well received by teachers, parents and students. Commit to making those curricula as easy to use for teachers as possible by distilling them into a more-usable format which aligns with our congregational year RE calendar.

**Recommendation:** Research options for simpler-to-use curricula that clearly align with our programmatic mission (beginning with an exploration of Arlington's workshop model). Consider ways to reduce the planning burden by spreading it differently across the teaching pool (as is done in Portland). Focus teacher training on hands-on practice of teaching and classroom management. Consider again asking the Endowment Committee for funding if there is a need to develop new curricula or for funding to revise and "massage" our current curricula into a standard, more user-friendly format.

**Finding:** Welcoming and accommodating children with any kind of special needs or behavioral challenges is an area of RE that needs more attention.

**Recommendation:** A more formalized set of procedures for accommodating children with special needs or behavioral challenges is needed. Both parents and teachers need to be informed about what can be done in the RE setting and what cannot.

**Recommendation:** Basic classroom management should be offered at every teacher training and be required (or at least strongly recommended) for novice teachers.

**Recommendation:** Either the DRE or the education assistant (or both) should have a professional background and training in classroom management and/or in special education.

## 6. Feedback from Parents and Students.

This section includes data from 15 parents who completed an online survey about the RE program. Six of the respondents have one child in RE (age 2s&3s - sixth grade), eight have two children in RE and one has four children. All survey questions were open-ended. We have also incorporated data from five parents who participated in focus groups or interviews with PEC members, or who provided feedback on the RE program via email. To collect feedback from children in the RE program, we conducted focus groups during classes with the 9:15 fifth and sixth grade classes and the 11:15 fifth grade class.

Overall, parents and children varied widely in their feedback on the program, but a few consistencies appeared. Parents feel their children are learning UU values and principles. Parents and children prefer more hands-on activities and time outdoors, as opposed to more school-like learning. Social time with friends is also valued.

### Opinions about content and structure

*Most parents said the RE program does a good job teaching UU values and principles, for example, teaching children to be responsible, kind, compassionate, to have respect for self and others and to have a strong moral compass (9 parents). Smaller numbers were pleased with the variety of activities/topics (4), how inclusive and welcoming the program is (3), the crafts children do (2), the stories told (2), the curricula (2), that the program encourages asking questions (2), that their children had friends in RE (2), that it was fun or engaging (2).*

*Parents' responses about what their children are learning in RE were similar. Ten said their children were learning values and UU principles, including kindness, empathy, respect, social justice and caring for others. Three said their children were learning about other cultures and religions. Three said their children were learning Bible stories and two said their children were learning UU history and sources. Two said their children were learning stories.*

*Parents' responses to a question asking what they wish their children were learning in RE, but were not, were widely varied. Two said nothing was missing; two said more social justice. Also mentioned were team building, UU music, world religions and their scriptures, holidays and holy days, critical thinking and multicultural information.*

*Parents and children alike said that it's common for children to complain about having to come to RE but they have fun when they are actually there. One child said, "It's usually fun but every week seems like too much sometimes." There is generally a preference for hands-on activities, stories, time outdoors and opportunities to make friends and share with one another and a dislike for sitting and listening to adults talking. Children with whom we spoke would all like snack to come back. Sixth graders complained about how awkward OWL had been, but also noted that it had answered questions that were not answered in Fairfax County Public School's Family Life Education classes. Parents said crafts (6), seeing friends (4) and teachers (2) were favorites. Children concurred: they like play-dough activities, craft projects and other activities that involve making something (4). They also commented that they felt safe and trusted their peers and teachers (2) and they like learning about each other's beliefs and opinions (2). They also like going outside (2). When we asked students about their teachers, responses were quite positive.*

### Areas of challenge

According to parents, children's least favorite parts of RE are when other children dominate conversation or act out (2), when there is too much sitting and listening (2), going to the Sanctuary (1), lack of full discussion of stories they read (1), boring lessons (1), music and singing (1) and too many art projects (1).

*Asked about what the program could do better, parents and children offered a wide variety of answers with little consistency between them. Four parents said it would help for parents to have more information on the curriculum or better communication with teachers. Two noted that class sizes were too large. Children's responses about what could be improved included requests for shorter classes, more playtime and more breaks (3); more use of technology (2); more time outdoors (2); less use of tools like word-searches and crosswords which don't help them learn (2); more time spent putting ideas into their own words, writing stories or acting things out (2); more games and hands-on activities (2); and less time spent with adults talking at them (2). One child noted that the rooms are drab.*

A few parents discussed why their children do not attend RE. Reasons varied from the logistical (sports or late nights make it difficult) to developmental (a young child who is not ready for structured classes yet) to social (a child who doesn't have friends at UUCF) to spiritual (a child who is not interested in religious education). One parent said that she felt the curricula lacked depth and did not include learning spiritual practices. One parent was concerned about the inconsistency of which teachers children would see each week.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

**Finding:** In general, the students we talked to (fifth and sixth graders) have a positive-to-neutral opinion of the RE program. While they admit to preferring sleep or a leisure activity to getting up early on a Sunday morning, most comment that they enjoy themselves once they arrive and see the value of the program. The one piece of feedback we heard across the board from each group of students we visited was that we should, "Bring back snack!"

**Recommendation:** Consider starting the "Who's bringing snack this week?" rotation earlier than 7<sup>th</sup> grade.

**Finding:** Most parents report that their children are learning UU principles and values through the RE program. Aside from that basic agreement, opinions on what children are learning, what the program does well and what needs to improve vary widely. It is almost as if we spoke with a bunch of Unitarian Universalists.

**Finding:** The response rate to the PEC requests for input from both parents and teachers was very low, despite a variety of formats offered including in-person focus groups, email and a survey.

**Finding:** Parents do not have a clear understanding of the role the ministers play in the RE program.

## 7. Profiles of other UU Congregations

We interviewed the DREs at four UU congregations around the country to understand the organization of their RE programs, how they operate on a weekly basis, their “best practices,” which they view as significant successes, and their major challenges which they seek to overcome. Two of the congregations interviewed have an RE enrollment approximately the same as UUCF. One congregation has a smaller enrollment led by the current board member for professional development of the Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA), and one congregation’s RE enrollment exceeds that of UUCF.

Table 3 outlines the key features of each congregation’s RE program. UUCF is included for comparison purposes:

Congregation	Number of Members <sup>1</sup>	RE Enrollment <sup>2</sup>	RE Staff	Teacher Policy
<b>UUCF</b>	661	286	Four: a full-time DRE, a part-time education assistant, a part time child care coordinator & a part-time youth ministry coordinator.	Parents with children in RE are expected to teach or be a greeter one out of every three years.
<b>Albany, NY Unitarian Universalist</b>	366	150	One: a full-time DRE	Teachers recruited from entire congregation (there is no teaching requirement for parents).
<b>All Souls, Unitarian, Washington, D.C.</b>	1,104	300	Three: a full-time DRE, a part-time RE assistant, & a part-time youth coordinator.	Parents expected to meaningfully participate in RE on an ongoing basis, but no formal requirement to teach.
<b>UU Congregation of Arlington, VA</b>	800	330	Three: a full-time DRE, a part-time RE assistant, & a part-time youth coordinator.	No formal policy. Previously, parents expected to teach every other year.
<b>First Unitarian Portland, OR</b>	1,043	500	Three: a full-time DRE, a <u>full-time</u> youth RE & administration lead, & a volunteer coordinator.	Teachers recruited from entire congregation (parents are not expected to teach).

<sup>1</sup>Congregational size is taken from 2018 UUA Annual Congregational Inventory.

<sup>2</sup>RE enrollment size is approximate, based on information provided by DREs during interviews; 2018 certified data is as follows: UUCF, 396; Albany, 104; All Souls, 241; UUCA, 328; Portland, 378.

All four of the congregations interviewed organize and administer their RE programs in the same overall way as UUCF. All are led by a full-time DRE, who – for the programs that are the same size or larger as UUCF – is aided by either full- or part-time assistants. All are cooperative programs, in that they rely heavily on congregational volunteers to teach students or assist in related educational work, such as curriculum development or in helping new families settle into their program. And all have a dedicated RE Committee to assist the professional staff, although each congregation interviewed uses them in diverse ways.

For example, Albany UU's RE Council, numbering between eight and 12 members, helps the DRE in a range of activities to administer the RE program. Council members are selected by the congregation's Nominating Committee and approved (uncontested) at Albany UU's Annual Meeting. In contrast, each person on All Souls' eight-person RE Committee focuses mainly on serving as a liaison to a specific class and helping teachers with weekly lessons or workshops. First Unitarian Portland's eight-person RE Committee serves exclusively as "ambassadors" to new parents each weekend and does not involve itself in classroom work or RE planning. UUCA's six-person RE Committee is the most different from UUCF. At the request of the DRE, its members focus on classroom teaching and are currently inactive with respect to RE policy or administration. This is in contrast to UUCF's 10-person RE Committee, which works extensively with our DRE on volunteer teacher recruitment (its largest time commitment), curriculum review, serving as a grade level liaison and planning for special RE (among other activities).

Another significant difference between UUCF and other congregations has to do with volunteer teacher policies. All other DREs interviewed identify teacher recruitment as their most significant challenge, and none of the other congregations, other than UUCF, regularly have all the teachers they need at all times during the year. However, as table 3 shows (and unlike UUCF), several congregations do not require parents to teach RE at regular intervals. UUCA has no current formal policy, although in the past parents were expected to teach every other year. First Unitarian Portland's approach is perhaps the most striking relative to UUCF: while one of the largest RE programs in the country, Portland does not expect its parents to teach. Instead (as explained in greater detail later in this section), 60% of its teachers come from its young adult or retiree population.

### ***Successes/Best Practices***

All DREs identified a number of successes or "best practices" that continue to make a positive impact on their RE programs, especially around the goals of deepening relationships between its children and adults and creating a greater sense of UU identity before children enter middle school classes. Such successes are grouped, below, into specific subject areas.

#### Choosing the Right Curriculum for an RE Program's Needs

Among the four congregations interviewed, two use the current, UUA-promoted Tapestry of Faith (TOF) curriculum. One, however, has largely written its own for children up to sixth grade, while the fourth uses a combination of the TOF and curriculum written in-house.

Albany UU adopted TOF six years ago, believing it draws more directly from UU's seven principles and six faith sources than the older curricula that it replaced. Albany likes how it is more experiential, spiritual, meditative and does a better job of helping to create a UU identity for its children. However, the Albany DRE recognizes that TOF can be overwhelming to some volunteer teachers, given the amount of material available to choose from for a given week. To combat "data overload," Albany encourages its teachers to define ahead of time what "success" looks like vis-à-vis a given lesson on a weekly basis, with the option of simply not using the majority of a TOF lesson plan if it doesn't work for their needs. For example, for its "World of Wonder" class, the teachers are free to define success as doing something each week where the children are comfortable in class and learn a new thing about the natural world.

UUCA, however, took the opposite approach after volunteer teachers voiced their strong opposition to TOF. Although the DRE respects TOF, her "teachers hate it," given the "massive" amount of material presented and the accompanying long lesson plans. Trying to teach TOF was also getting in the way of UUCA achieving its three main RE program goals of instilling UU identity, building relationships and stressing social justice. To simplify things, UUCA uses Montessori-based Spirit Play for its first graders and younger children and created its own

curriculum for its second through fourth graders. Lesson plans for the latter are generally two pages long to reduce the amount of time teachers need to prepare for a class and all supplies are gathered ahead of time for teachers and in classrooms each Sunday (see Appendix C for an example of UUA's simplified curriculum). Fifth graders study bible stories, per congregational tradition.

UUCA also identifies as a key success its creation of a new curriculum for its sixth graders, called Maker Space. Developed with aid of two volunteer parents with backgrounds in technology, Maker Space combines UU lessons with experiential learning around art and technology themes, giving children the opportunity to physically make something each weekend. More information on UUCA's Maker Space can be found in a short video on its main webpage at [www.uucava.org](http://www.uucava.org).<sup>8</sup>

### Use a Workshop Method to Simplify Lessons and Promote Experiential Learning

Whatever curriculum is chosen, two congregations, UUCA and All Souls, point to the use of a Workshop Method as a best practice to help decrease the amount of time volunteer teachers need to devote to RE class preparation while also increasing the amount of experiential (versus more traditional didactic-based) learning for their youth<sup>9</sup>.

At UUCA, during the first Sunday of month, each second through fourth grade class gets the same lesson, with adjustments made for each grade (e.g., questions may be more sophisticated for fourth graders vice second graders). Then, on the second, third and fourth Sundays, each class has a "workshop" around the lesson. Workshop activities can include games, painting, "science experiments," or other modalities, with the emphasis on getting the children out of their chairs and interacting with each other and their teachers.

Workshops are rotated, so that each class is doing something different on a given day, but all three grades get to experience all three workshops for a given month. Workshop planning is done centrally by the DRE. Volunteer teachers only have to plan for one lesson a month, with the rest of the month supervising workshops. For example, on the first Sunday, the lesson could be on "finding your inner light." A story connected to the lesson is shared, linked to one of the seven principles. The next Sunday, the first workshop's activity could be candle making.

All Souls also uses a Workshop Method. For its K through fifth grade classes, workshops are based on a monthly congregational theme (e.g., awakening). Two volunteers from the congregation, both of whom are artists, assist the DRE in brainstorming and planning workshops around the monthly theme. Similar to UUCA, volunteer teachers focus on supervising pre-planned workshops, with the emphasis on experiential learning.

### Promote Relationships & Reduce the Need for Teachers

Several congregations use multiple "best practices" to foster and strengthen relationships between children and adults while also reducing the overall need to recruit volunteer teachers. Such practices include combining grades and reducing the number of teachers assigned to a given class.

Both All Souls and First Unitarian Portland combine grades to help build relationships between children and to somewhat decrease the need for volunteer teachers. Portland, specifically, finds that older children in a class tend to help the younger children and, in doing so, develop a sense of responsibility that they otherwise would not experience. All Souls combines kindergarten with first grade, second with third grade and fourth with fifth grade (sixth graders attend RE with seventh and eighth graders as part of its middle school program). First

<sup>8</sup> The video can also be found on YouTube at [www.youtube.com/user/UUCAPublications](http://www.youtube.com/user/UUCAPublications)

<sup>9</sup> Unity Church Unitarian, St. Paul, MN, also uses a workshop model in its program of 447 students.



Unitarian Portland is slightly different, combining first with second grade, third with fourth and fifth with sixth (Portland's program is so large that it has two separate first and second grade classes at both of its Sunday morning services, with each class receiving the same lesson, centrally planned by one teacher for a given Sunday).

Despite the size of its program, First Unitarian Portland only recruits for, and assigns, two volunteer teachers to each of its classes for the full RE year. Portland does this primarily to provide continuity between students and teachers week after week, helping to strengthen the relationships that develop. This practice also has the added benefit of reducing the number of teachers needed for the program. Portland's DRE acknowledges this practice may seem a bit "risky," but the RE program has not experienced significant problems and boasts an average annual teacher retention rate of 70%.

#### Provide Support to Volunteer Teachers

Albany UU recognizes that its volunteer teachers need to be supported out of the classroom to help deepen their spiritual practices as they teach UU spiritual lessons to children throughout the congregational year. Informed by best practices advocated by the Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA), Albany uses a combination of methods, to include a parent-teacher support group that meets throughout the year, along with a dedicated RE Facebook page. Bart Frost, a youth and young adult coordinator at the UUA, is also consulted on how best the congregation can help young parents involved in RE programs with their faith development.

#### Help Support Families Beyond the Classroom

Similar to supporting volunteer teachers with their spiritual needs, both Albany UU and UUCA sponsor events outside the classroom to help support families and build relationships between them. At Albany UU, the RE Council sponsoring a multi-generational game night and other similar events where families can come together outside of the formal RE program.

UUCA's Committee for Action, Social Justice and Education (CASE) sponsors events for children and parents in sixth, seventh and eighth grades. Described as an important "parent support component" of the overall RE program, CASE meets twice a month, on average, but not on Sundays (either a Friday or Saturday evening is chosen). CASE's starts the first hour by splitting parents & children into two groups: Parents spend time attending a group discussion, or similar activity, on a topic of interest, while children make dinner for themselves and their parents. A recent meeting was spent discussing how best parents can support the mental health of their children, with discussion leaders including an outside representative from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), and a social worker, a psychologist and a pediatrician drawn from the congregation. After the first hour, all come together for family meal, followed by something experiential, such as a movie or games.

#### ***Key Challenges & Mitigations***

Despite successes, all DREs identified several ongoing challenges to the health of their RE programs. These include the difficulty of recruiting volunteer teachers, conducting intergenerational worship services and empowering DREs within the congregation.

#### Lack of Volunteers to Teach RE

All DREs interviewed cite volunteer teacher recruitment and retention as a significant challenge, with three of the four DREs stating that it's the largest issue facing their programs. Described by one as "the worst part of the job," DREs cited several reasons why it's hard – and getting harder – to recruit volunteers to teach RE:

- Children are more heavily scheduled with more commitments on weekends than they were in the past. Activities that compete for time with RE on a Sunday include sports team practices and games, social events (such as birthday parties), music lessons or other related commitments.
- Many parents are employed outside the home, which may involve work on Saturdays (especially for those in retail positions), making Sunday their only day to relax as a family;
- Volunteer teachers are discouraged from continuing because of the amount of time needed to prepare lessons and materials in advance of classes.

All congregations interviewed depend on parents or other volunteers to teach RE. As shown in Table 3, some have formal policies mandating parents to teach at regular intervals, while some do not (the latter category includes First Unitarian Portland, with the largest RE enrollment of those interviewed). All DREs recognize that some parents are not a good fit as teachers and should be given the option to contribute to the RE program in another way.

Whether or not parents are technically “mandated” to teach RE, no congregation has enough volunteers on a sustained, ongoing basis to satisfy the needs of their programs, with 70% cited as the average figure for what they can achieve versus what they need. This puts greater pressure on the RE staff or RE Committee volunteers to fill in as teachers on a week-to-week basis to help solve any shortages.<sup>10</sup>

DREs undertake a variety of approaches and methods to help address the problem:

- Recruit teachers from the larger congregation, not just among parents. About 30-40% of UUCA’s teachers are not parents of children in the RE program but come from one of two groups: retirees (“we want the grandmas in the classes”), or from the young adult population. All Souls also uses volunteers from the larger congregation to help with workshops. First Unitarian Portland recruits heavily from among all its congregants, with 60% of its teachers not having children in its RE program (it also proudly says that 40%, overall, of its teachers are men). Albany UU also has teachers in its classrooms who are not parents.

While such outreach has not fixed the overall challenge, other DREs say it helps both to mitigate a lack of volunteer parents and to build relationships between RE children and other adults in the congregation.

- Keep things simple. Citing teacher retention as a factor, several congregations discussed ways they have attempted to decrease the amount of time volunteers need to spend preparing for Sunday classes. UUCA works to keep things simple for its teachers through the use of two-page lesson plans prepared in advance by the DRE and the RE assistant. Also, all materials needed for each class are gathered ahead of time and put in a box, making it more convenient for teaching teams. All Souls DC also takes care of materials for teachers each week.

### Making Intergenerational Worship Work

Three of the four congregations interviewed have some type of intergenerational service at least once a month. Only Albany UU does not (although it is considering adopting it). First Unitarian Portland has all its youth older than kindergarten (including its high school youth group) attend the start of services with adults once a month.

---

<sup>10</sup> Luckily, Interim DRE Diana Tyser reports that the situation at UUCF is very different. While, she notes, RE greeters often go into a classroom to sub for a parent helper, only once a month or so is an RE greeter needed to serve as one of the two teachers in the room. She reports that only twice this year has staff been needed to fill in a classroom.

All Souls does the same, although attendance only including kindergarteners through fifth graders. UUCA's youth, seventh grade and younger, begin each Sunday in its sanctuary with adults for the first part of the service.

First Unitarian Portland singles out intergenerational worship as a key challenge, given different attitudes among adult congregants about having youth in a service, the difficulty of making "15 minute" sanctuary experiences meaningful for youth, choosing stories that appeal to the entire congregation and the overall logistical challenge of having the majority of its RE program in the sanctuary at the same time. Portland's DRE doesn't have the space to have all the children come to the front for a traditional "story time" (a luxury, she says, of a small congregation). Instead, children sit with parents before being released to classes. Despite these challenges, Portland plans to continue with its current approach.

### Empowering DREs

Informed by her service with LREDA, Albany UU's DRE identifies the issue of power and authority between DREs and ministers as a key challenge for many congregations nationally. LREDA feels that ministers need to be in partnership with the DRE and work on the RE program as a team – as a shared ministry – versus a traditional hierarchical relationship. This is especially important if the DRE is involved in family ministry. The DRE needs the necessary authority and autonomy to achieve the goals and missions of the RE program. To help address this challenge, Albany UU recommends the use of the UUA's self-assessment tool on Excellence in Shared Ministry, stating that regional UU staff should also be available to help with using the assessment tool.

## **Findings and Recommendations**

Findings about and recommendations based on information learned from other congregations have been incorporated into their appropriate sections throughout this report.

## 8. Intergenerational Worship

An issue that cropped up during our data collection across many different populations of the congregation was how and to what degree should children participate in congregational worship as opposed to religious exploration in a classroom setting. An explicit part of the mission of the RE program is to “bring children and youth into community with each other, our congregation and the world through acts of love, justice and service.” But how can this mission best be served? Should we continue to educate children in the UU faith in an activity conducted separately with limited participation in congregational worship? Or is it better to maximize children’s participation in the congregational worship service while supplementing the teaching of the principles in some other way? There are, of course, numerous options in how we could combine these experiences.

Currently, as noted in section 2, from fourth through sixth grade, children attend the first part of the service in the Sanctuary before leaving to attend their classes. Kindergarteners through third graders attend the first part of service only on the first Sunday of each month. Generally, there are three all-congregation services each year. These include Ingathering (the second weekend in September), the Joy service (the first weekend in December) and a Jazz service the concluding weekend of UUCF's week of hosting the hypothermia shelter, usually in mid-February. Christmas Eve services are also services for all ages, with the 4:30 service traditionally geared toward families with young children, the 6:30 service aims to draw families with older children and youth, while the 8pm service is of a contemplative nature.

As discussed above, we also assessed the experience of other UU congregations with intergenerational worship. Three of the four congregations interviewed have some type of intergenerational service at least once a month. Only Albany UU does not, although they are considering adopting it. In Portland, all youth older than kindergarten (including its high school youth group) attend the start of services with adults once a month. All Souls does the same, although attendance only includes kindergartners through fifth graders. UUCA’s youth, seventh grade and younger, begin each Sunday in the Sanctuary with adults for the first part of the service.

Our findings on this issue at UUCF showed a diversity of opinion. Staff broadly endorse the presence of children in services, but no one seemed to have a clear vision of what changes should be made to the status quo, if any. Some staff and teachers felt that the brief exposure of children to the service gave them little understanding of what services are like. Experienced teachers told us that UUCF needed to do work around “envisioning and defining” what intergenerational worship means; one suggested that we need to “pick a belief and go with it” for a period of time, rather than switching to a new setup every year. Some children like it; others consider it boring. On the other hand, we heard from staff that some in the congregation find the presence of children in service a distraction.

Parent opinions varied widely as well. Some parents didn't see the value in sanctuary time and/or said their child didn't enjoy it, singling out the current weekly attendance of the fourth through sixth graders as not having a clear point or goal as well as all-congregation services, which some parents mentioned as a service they particularly avoid. Other parents emphasized the importance of the children being part of worship experiences in the Sanctuary, so they have a chance to see what being an adult UU is like. Some parents report that their children enjoy their time in the Sanctuary, especially the music and the more “kid-friendly” elements.

To summarize, arguments supporting the idea that children should be regularly included in congregational worship, perhaps with some supplemental activities, include:

- It would provide for better socialization into the UUCF religious community, perhaps improving the chance that they will remain or return when they are adults.

- It would reinforce the UUCF community. Some parents would like Sunday to be “family time.” They don’t really like being separated from their children on Sundays.
- It would reduce the “up the hill/ down the hill” problem for teachers, some of whom feel marginalized by the present arrangement.

Arguments for keeping children in separate programs apart from worship:

- Including children on a regular basis would require some adaptation of the order of service to bring them into the worship experience.
- There might be resistance from some members of the congregation who find children in the service distracting,
- Some parents might object to having their children with them in the service (although it is unclear how many parents find this scenario more burdensome than the current RE volunteer guidelines.)
- What would be done to deliver religious education in UU beliefs and activities?

Clearly this is a multifaceted issue involving complicated logistical as well as spiritual questions. Bearing this in mind, as well as acknowledging the varied opinions of parents, teachers, the congregation at large and staff and the reality that none of the congregations with whom we spoke seemed to have any best practices that we could suggest, the PEC does not have any recommendations at this time. Rather, we encourage further exploration of this issue as noted in the Findings and Recommendations.

## Findings and Recommendations

**Finding:** Intergenerational worship is a complex and possibly contentious issue.

**Finding:** There is not a cohesive, systematic vision or approach nor a united mindset and intention on the part of the ministers, the staff and the congregation to children’s worship or intergenerational worship.

**Finding:** Due to the size of our congregation and the physical nature of our campus, intergenerational worship and fellowship is a logistical challenge.

**Finding:** There is no consistent intergenerational worship practice used by other UU congregations interviewed. Some include children in its main service each weekend, some include children once per month and some do not practice intergenerational worship.<sup>11</sup> None of the congregations interviewed expressed particular satisfaction with their current intergenerational worship and several mentioned it was an area of challenge.

**Recommendation:** A discussion of the congregation’s desire for the future of intergenerational worship is needed on a large scale. Input from all stakeholders is essential in this discussion. Since this report focused on RE does not include the voices of a broad-enough cross-section of the population, the PEC does not feel it is their place to make a specific recommendation at this time. We suggest congregation-wide visioning sessions and perhaps a task force that includes current parents, teachers and older adult members of the congregation. Opinions of children should be solicited in some way, including if possible, children who are not currently enrolled in RE. The REC should also be involved in the decision-making process.

---

<sup>11</sup> One congregation visited by a member of the PEC, UUC Asheville, includes children regularly in its main worship service and publicizes “best practices” on how each congregant can be their best selves in intergenerational worship. This pamphlet can be found in Appendix D.

## Appendix A: Method

Research for the current evaluation of the membership function at UUCF included five major components.

### **UUCF Staff Interviews**

Rev. David Miller, Senior Minister  
 Rev. Sarah Caine, Assistant Minister  
 Diana Tycker, Interim Director of Religious Exploration  
 Linnea Nelson, Immediate Past Director of Religious Exploration  
 Melissa Campos-Poehnert, Education Assistant

\*We owe particular thanks to Diana Tycker and Melissa Campos-Poehnert for their willingness to respond to countless requests via email over the last six months. Thanks also to Director of Administration Jenice Jones-Porter for providing dozens of monthly board reports (2011-present) from which attendance data included in this report was derived.

### **UUCF Lay Leader Interviews**

Tom Crowley, Religious Exploration Committee Co-Chair  
 Laurie Cunningham, Religious Exploration Committee Co-Chair  
 Suzanne Leonard, immediate past Religious Exploration Chair

### **UUCF Religious Exploration Committee Focus Group**

Dillon Ginley  
 Maria Cox-Leow  
 Chris French  
 Tessa Grubb  
 Paula Prettyman  
 Christyn Levy

### **UUCF Experienced Teachers Focus Group**

6 teachers

### **UUCF Beginning Teachers Focus Group**

3 teachers

### **UUCF Parent Focus Group and Parent Survey**

2 parents in focus group, 3 parents interviewed, 15 parents surveyed

### **Fifth and Sixth grade RE participants focus groups**

9:15 fifth and sixth grade classes, 11:15 fifth grade class

### **Document Review**

RE Committee Charter  
 Lay Ministers Council Charter  
 Director of Religious Exploration Job Description  
 Education Assistant Job Description  
 Staffing Report, May 2016  
 Numerous articles about religious education at UUA.org, LREDA.org and other sites

### **Interviews Conducted with Religious Education Staff at Other UU Congregations**

The PEC appreciates the support, thoughtful insights and participation of these religious professionals:

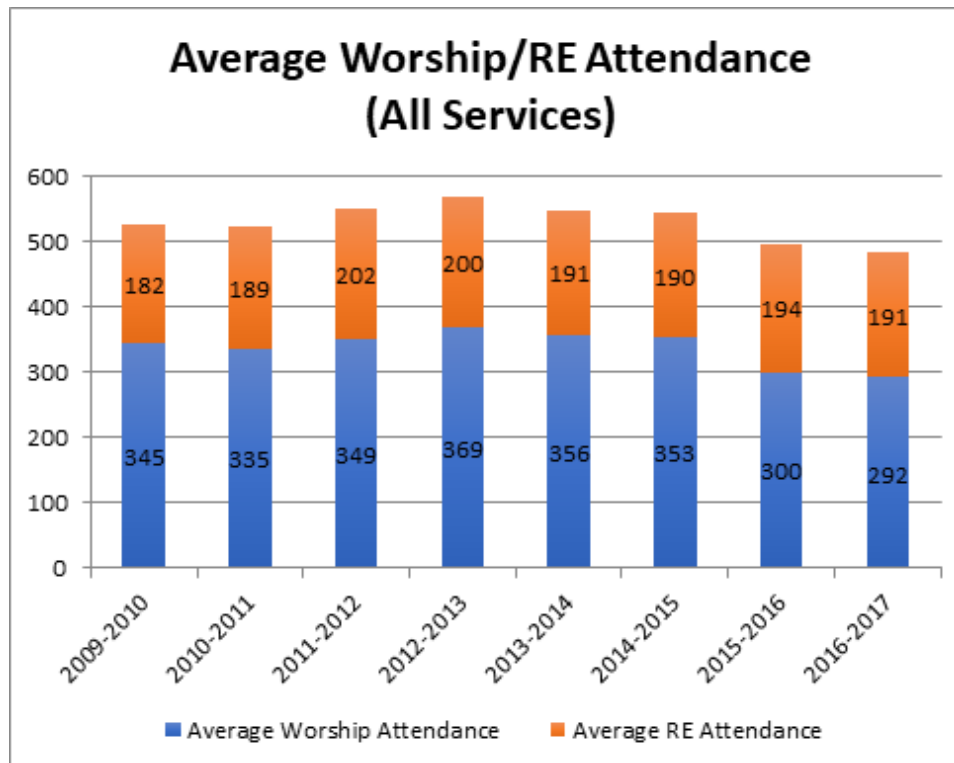
Cathy Cartwright-Chow, Learning Community Director, First Unitarian Portland, OR  
 Delores Miller, Children's Religious Educator, All Souls Church, Unitarian, Washington, DC  
 Leah Purcell, Director of Religious Education, Albany Unitarian Universalist, and Board Member  
 for Professional Development, Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA)  
 LeeAnn Williams, Director of Lifespan Religious Education, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Arlington,  
 VA

## Appendix B

### Membership and RE attendance charts

#### *History of Worship Attendance*

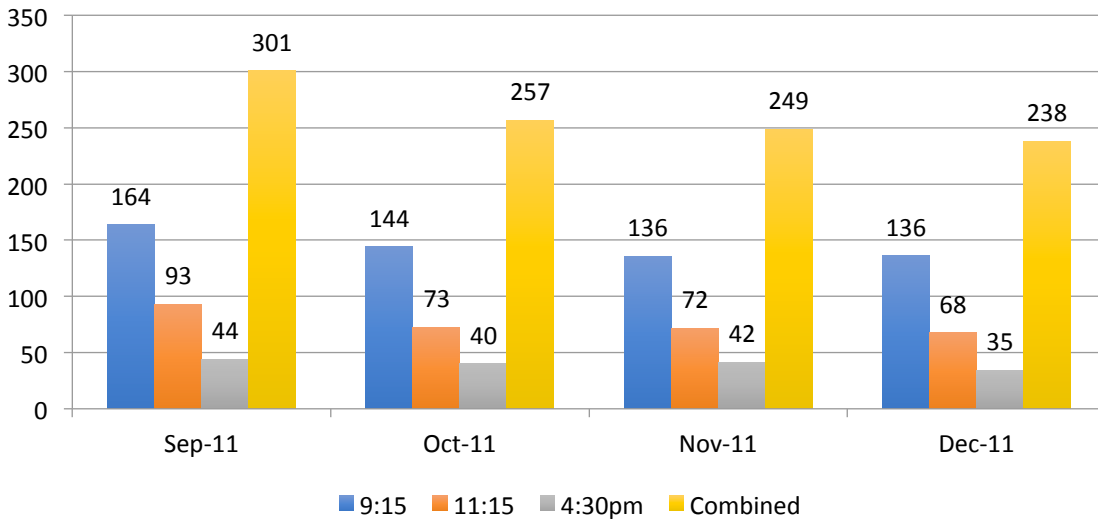
The chart below shows average worship and RE attendance by year, added together across the services (Saturday, when applicable, and two Sunday services). While RE attendance over the last seven years has generally held steady, worship attendance has been steadily declining since 2012-2013.



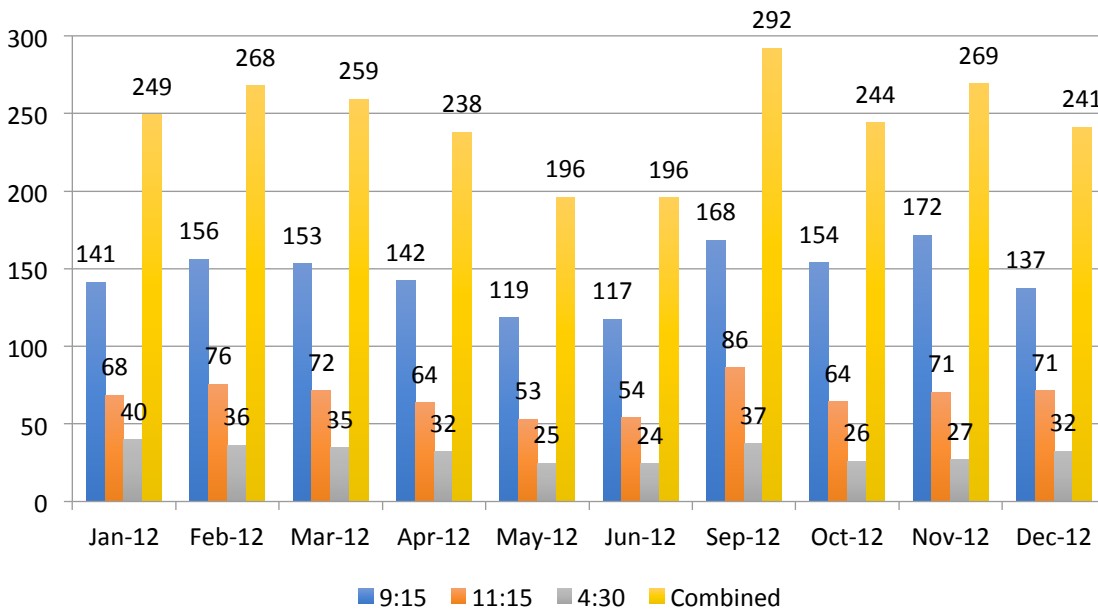
#### *Monthly RE Attendance by Year*

The charts that follow show RE attendance, including both adults and children, by month for each year. Numbers included are approximate, using the best-available data. Numbers include the 4:30 service when RE was offered during this service.

### Average Regular RE Attendance 2011

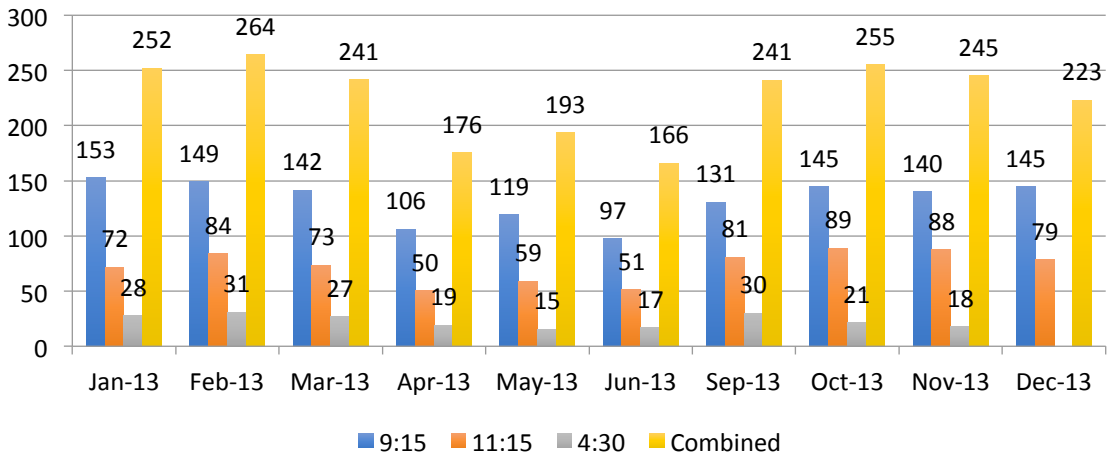


### Average Regular RE Attendance 2012

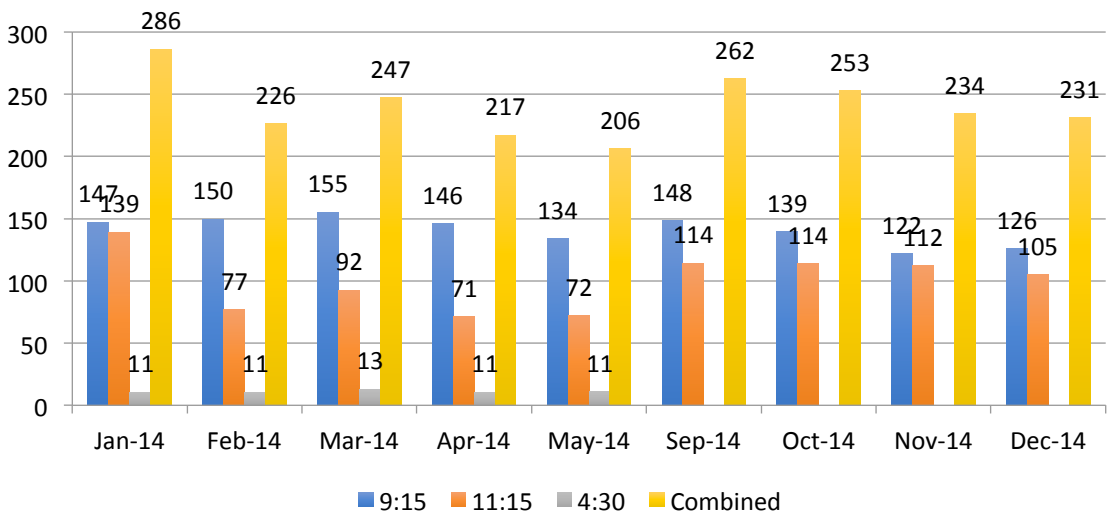




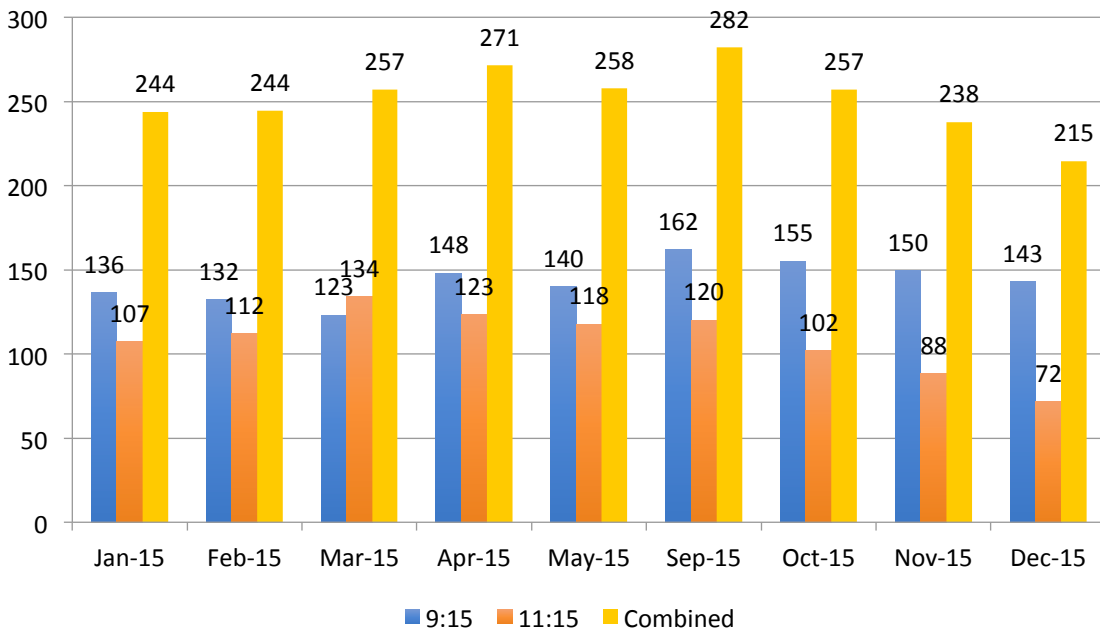
### Average Regular RE Attendance 2013



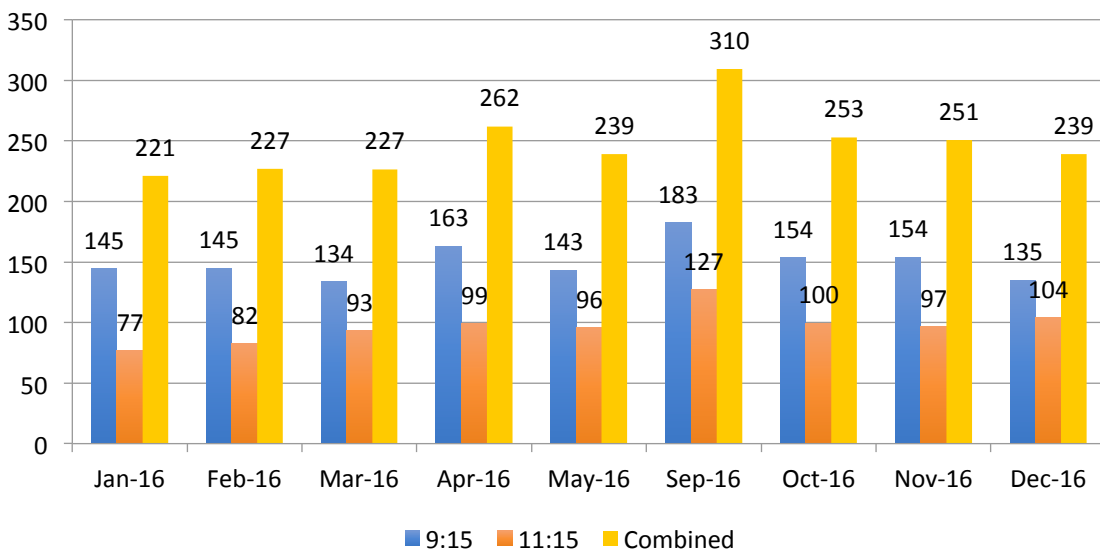
### Average Regular RE Attendance 2014

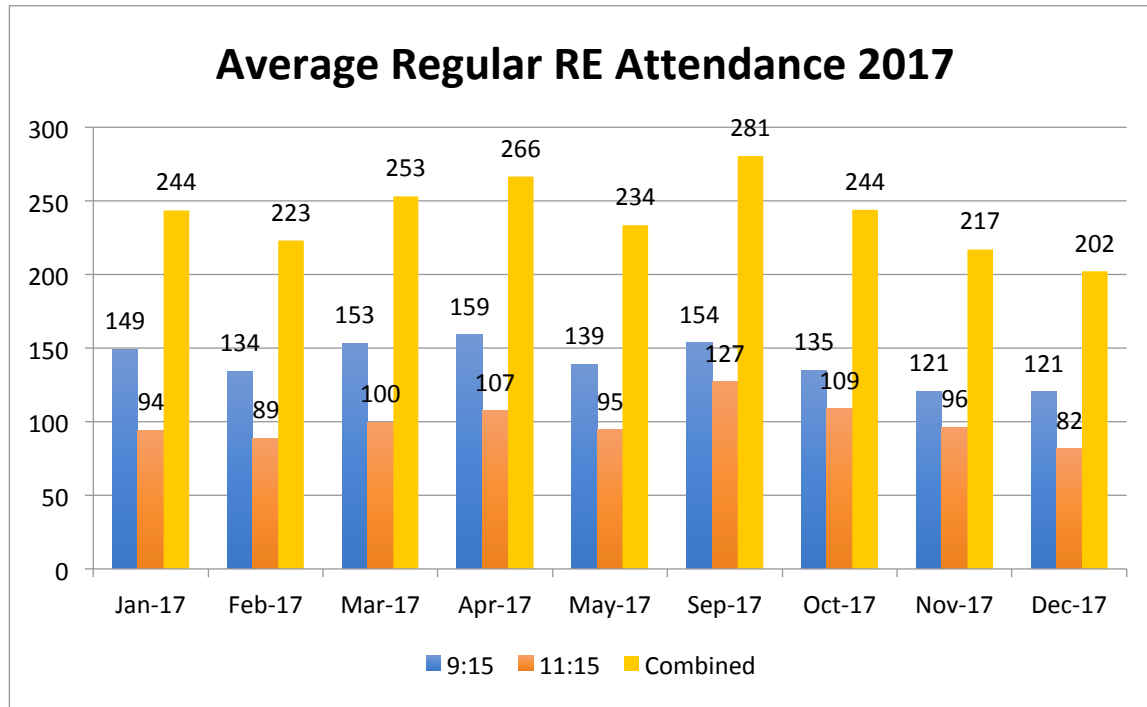


### Average Regular RE Attendance 2015



### Average Regular RE Attendance 2016





## Appendix C

### Examples of UUCA Lesson Plans

As described in the body of this report, UUCA created its own curriculum and corresponding lesson plans for second through fourth graders to reduce the amount of time its volunteer teachers need to prepare for weekly classes while simultaneously helping the program achieve its three main goals of creating and building UU identity among children; building positive relationships between adults and children; and promoting social justice. Lesson plans are provided to teachers in advance of a class (along with all needed materials), and contain simple, specific directions around a chosen theme.

Two lesson plans are included below. The first is a longer plan for a more traditional classroom period held at the beginning of each month involving a lesson (done via a puzzle activity) and a question-and-answer session. The second example is for a workshop-based class, where teachers supervise an experiential-based learning activity that ties back to the lesson taught at the beginning of the month.

#### UU Principles in Science

**Focus:** Learning about our Chancel

**Date:** Dec. 3, 2017

**Objectives:** Learn about our chancel, what it is, what elements of worship are located on it. And also a bit of UUCA history. This will serve as our introduction to Principle 3 which focuses on celebrating our community.

#### Welcome

- Welcome children and parents as they enter and introduce yourself
- Please have parents sign up for snack—great job for the co-lead!
  - **Teachers Complete Attendance Sheets. Teachers please double check the attendance at the end of class. We are working really hard to create accurate rolls. Thank you!**
  - Remember to flip your sign if you need snack
  - If time at the end of the class, quiz the kids using the quiz bowl practice cards.
  - Tell the kids that today we are going to begin our exploration of principle 3

1. **Chalice Lighting:** Light the chalice using words found on the poster in your classroom.
2. **Principle Check in or Intro (2-4 minutes)**  
Review the Principles using the hand motions and introduce the seventh principle. Check out the poster on your classroom wall for the hand motions. Using the hand motions really helps the kids remember.

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Meaning: We believe....</b>
------------------	--------------------------------

1 <sup>st</sup>	Everyone is important
2 <sup>nd</sup>	In creating a peaceful, kind, fair world
3 <sup>rd</sup>	<b>We learn best in community</b>
4 <sup>th</sup>	In searching for what is right and true and good
5 <sup>th</sup>	Everyone should have a vote about what's important to them
6 <sup>th</sup>	In working for a peaceful world
7 <sup>th</sup>	In caring for the earth

### 3. Opening (5-10 minutes)

#### Group Puzzle

Each class will have a picture of our chancel that has been made into a puzzle - thanks to Shutterfly! For a photo of this puzzle see the end of the lesson plan. However, for the kids keep the finished product a secret. You can say something like, "When we put together this puzzle, you will know what today's lesson focus is."

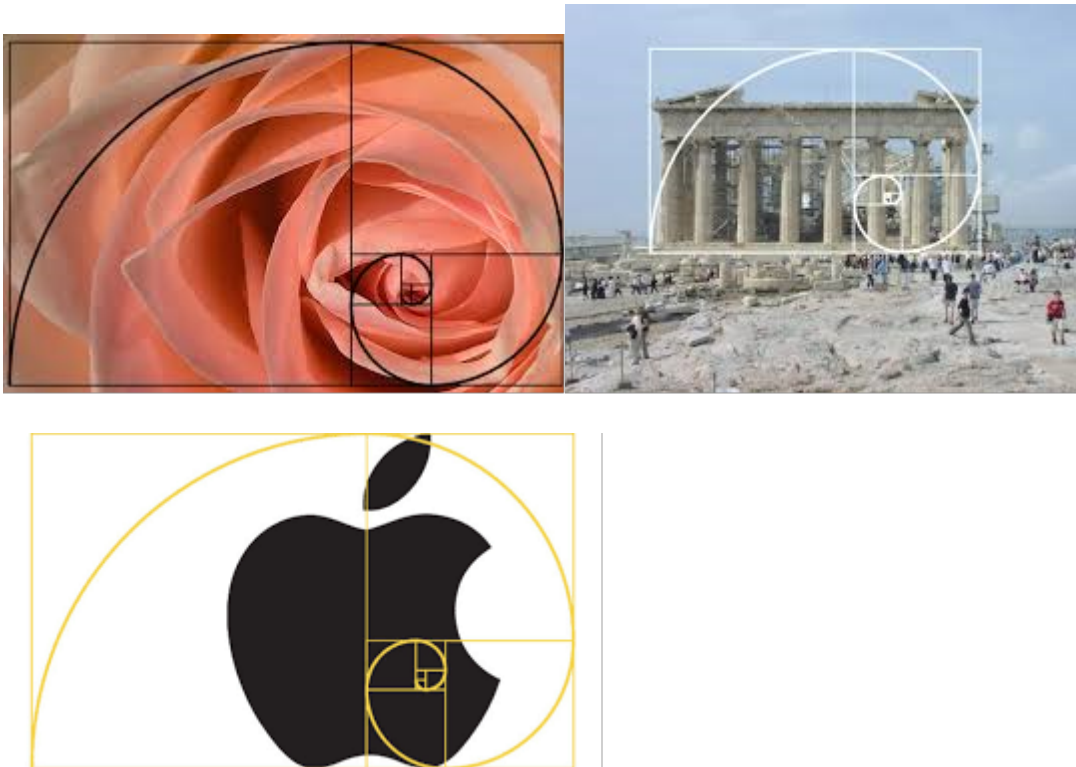
### 4. Exploring the Puzzle—and our chancel

Once the puzzle is assembled, explore the various elements/pieces/components with the group. Pull out the large mounted photo of the chancel (which is the same as the puzzle). You can have the kids point to and name the various elements they recognize. As you name the elements, share the following information.

These elements are:

- **The Chancel** - the raised platform located at the front of our sanctuary. Most of our worship happens on the chancel.
- **The Chalice** - the symbol of Unitarian Universalism. We start worship each Sunday by lighting the chalice. The chalice stands for light, truth and freedom. Our chalice was donated by our friend Dee Satella one of the Hopi Elders our youth group volunteers with on service trips.
- **Family Chalice Box** - this is a UUCA ritual. The family who lights the chalice each week has the privilege of taking home this box.
- **The Lantern** - each Sunday the Chalice Keeper uses the lantern to carry the flame to light the chalice.
- **Pulpit** - the speaking podium from where the sermons are given. Generally ONLY sermons are spoken from this podium. Notice the pulpit is located in the very center of the chancel. This is to highlight that the focus of worship is the spoken word (connecting us to our Protestant tradition).
- **The Lectern** - the smaller podium to the right of the pulpit. Generally announcements, words of welcome and stories are spoken—anything other than sermons.
- **Singing Bowls** - these two bowls are used to mark the start of worship and the end of worship. Think of them as bookends. Their calming, soothing sounds are meant to create a peaceful environment, preparing the spirit for worship.
- **The Ark** - is the large wooden structure located back, to the left on the chancel.

- **Book of Life** - technically not located on the chancel, this is still an important part of our sanctuary. The Book of Life is the large book where members and friends can record happy or sad things that happen to them, or prayers or intentions. We have a time in worship for people to come up to the front and perform this ritual.
  - **Candles of Joys and Sorrows** - people can also come forward and light a candle to represent a joy or sorrow. What classroom ritual we have is similar to this?
5. **A little bit of information about our Sanctuary**
- **Charles Goodman** - the architect who designed our church and sanctuary.
  - **Clerestory** - high section of a church that contains windows and allows natural light in.
  - **Brutalist** - the design style of our sanctuary. Term does not mean brutal but comes from the French brutalist meaning concrete. Typical characters of this style-
    - Use of plain concrete to give an “honest” presentation—nothing is covered up
    - Use of brick
    - Emphasis on function and practicality
    - Rugged and lack of concern for comfort and ease
  - **Bringing Outside In** - when Goodman designed our sanctuary he wanted to “bring the outside in.”
  - **The Golden Mean or Ratio** - our sanctuary was created using this principle--a common mathematical ratio found in nature that can be used to create pleasing, natural looking designs. Visual examples of this in nature and in ancient and current design are below.



### Examples in our Sanctuary/church

- The chancel, notice how the ark is offset
- The organ in the loft—notice again how it is offset
- There is an example of this in the entry way near the welcome desk. Take a field trip and go visit!

### 6. Questions for discussion

- Using the photo can you point out examples of the Brutalist design in our sanctuary?
- What does bringing the “outside in” mean? Where do you see that principle in our sanctuary?
- What about ways UUCA brings the inside out? Can you name examples? (think social justice)
- What about bringing the inside out? Examples?
- What ritual that is similar to candles of Joys and Sorrows do we do in our classroom? (answer: stones of joys and sorrows).
- For older kids - how does the design of our sanctuary express our UU values?

### 7. Teachers Learn More

<https://www.widewalls.ch/brutalist-architecture/>

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/the-case-for-preserving--and-improving--brutalist-architecture/2017/05/23/8f94d198-286a-11e7-b605-33413c691853\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.7cf54c73c4b5](https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/the-case-for-preserving--and-improving--brutalist-architecture/2017/05/23/8f94d198-286a-11e7-b605-33413c691853_story.html?utm_term=.7cf54c73c4b5)

<https://dc.curbed.com/maps/map-brutalist-architecture-washington-dc>

### 8. Exploration Activity

Using the blocks and or legos in your classroom, have the kids build any/all of the following---

- A chancel
- A sanctuary
- A clerestory
- Something in the brutalist design

### 9. Snack.

Teachers serve snack when you feel best fits in your Sunday flow or when the kids seem to need it. Weave the idea of hospitality into Snack Time. If one of the children in class brought snack, thank them and their family for being hospitable and kind.

### 10. Closing

Extinguish the Chalice.

### Extra Activities

If your class progresses faster than you anticipated—

- Information from today’s lesson is included in your Quiz Bowl Practice cards

- Play one of the games listed on the bulletin board
- Play one of the ice breaker/name games again
- Use a game found in your Games Bin



## Exploring Our UU Principles

Focus: Paint Sunday!

Date: Sunday, November 6, 2016

Objectives: To paint the batik heart they previously created

Special Notes: This is fun, lively and really, really messy!

### 1. **Welcome**

- Welcome children as they enter and introduce yourself
- Have kids put on name tags
- Teachers complete attendance sheets
- If you need snack, remember to switch the hanging sign outside your classroom
- Checkout the new SOS page on the flip signs. Put this sign out anytime you need extra help in class.

- ### 2. **Chalice Lighting:**
- Light the chalice using words found on the poster in your classroom. Invite a student to lead the lighting.

### 3. **Introduction/Directions for Painting (5-8 minutes)**

Start by reviewing our 2<sup>nd</sup> UU Principle - we believe in fairness. Tell them that today we will complete the hearts that we started in our last class - ours and the extras (for the kids who were absent) we made. If you have a kid in class who was absent last week, give them one of the extras to paint.

Here is the process we will be using-- <http://artfulparent.com/2015/05/how-to-do-glue-batik-with-kids.html> another example

<http://www.thatartistwoman.org/2008/07/kid-friendly-batik.html>

### 4. **Paint Time (15-20 Minutes)**

Today's project is to fill in the white space around the glue hearts (or other symbols) with paint. Kids can use one color to fill in or paint each space a different color.

However, batik usually involves at least three colors. Once the items have been painted put them aside to dry. Leave them in your classroom and RE staff will pick them up when dry.

### **Questions to think about...**

- Why is a heart a good symbol to represent fairness and sharing?
- What are some other symbols that represent fairness and sharing?
- How do you practice fairness and sharing at home/school/church?
- Can you remember a time when someone treated you fairly? How did that feel?

**5. Snack Time**

Serve snack. If there is no snack parent simply flip your sign outside the classroom and the Office Manager will bring you something. We always have backup snack.

**6. Wrap it up and clean it up**

Encourage kids to share something they enjoyed today.

**7. Extinguish the Chalice**

Call children to gather in a circle to blow out the candle.

**Extra Activities**

If your class finishing early...

- Play one of the games listed on the bulletin board
- If you have a lot of time, change the sign and go outside to the playground
- Play the Emotions Cards game (found in your classroom, cards in the marked envelope)
- Grab a story from the book cart in the hallway.

**Special Note for Teachers**

Each Sunday parked outside the classrooms in the Elementary Wing will be two small carts: one containing books and the other games. If you have a student who is having a hard time in class on a Sunday, please feel free to grab a book or game for this student. Sometimes kids just need a break and some time to themselves to refocus. Always, if a student is really struggling in class call me or the office manager for help.

## Appendix D

### UUC Asheville IG Worship Pamphlet

#### Suggestions for EVERYONE!

Adults, greet children and welcome them to worship. A warm welcome can help families and kids know they have a place in this community of faith.

No matter who you are, sometimes sitting in worship is just too hard. Whether you're an unhappy infant or an adult with back trouble, please feel free to leave the Sanctuary at any time. Seating and a few toys are available in the Sandburg Hall (across the foyer) where you can listen to the worship service.

When children have active roles in worship, show respect for their work. Yes, they ARE cute, but even well-meaning laughter can be confusing (or even hurtful), making it hard for that child to risk themselves again.



We know that some adults find this a difficult time in worship. We would ask you to remember that the UU faith is growing and changing—and so are we all!

Oh yeah. It's OK for YOU to pick up a Soul Work pack, too. Or bring your knitting. Just like we told the parents, sewing and coloring and playing with pipe cleaners can support calm and focus for all ages!

#### Families: Taking it Home

Our children attend worship and religious education classes for a total of 75 minutes a week. Clearly we cannot help them establish a faith identity without family help. Here are some ideas to help children experience rituals that they love while making the whole family's spiritual development more intentional, and enjoyable:

- Provide times of silent meditation, gratitude, or prayer before meals and at bedtime. Some families practice chalice lighting and songs, perhaps with a family chalice.
- Talk about your memories of church as a child. Share what you loved—and didn't like at all! How is our church different for your child?
- Create a Saturday night ritual—pick out clothes, talk about the story for all ages or worship.
- Talk about how different elements of our worship are important to you, and why.
- Take a tour of the church to help kids know where everything is.
- Attend worship regularly. If it's fun for you, try the multigenerational activities during the 9:15am service.



Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Asheville  
1 Edwin Place, Asheville, NC 28801  
(828) 254-6001 uuasheville.org

1709

## We Worship Together

A guide for being our best selves at multigenerational worship experiences



**For more information contact**  
Acting Director of Religious Education  
Linda Topp, [administration@UUAsheville.org](mailto:administration@UUAsheville.org)

## Worshipping Together

Sharing worship across the lifespan can be a valuable experience for everyone. After all, we are ALL growing in faith, together. At every "regular" worship service, we worship for 15 minutes together. Children and youth will have a chance to sing, light the chalice, and learn the rhythm and feel of UU worship, while the rest of the congregation gets a chance to know our children and youth. At multigenerational services, everyone is invited to stay in worship for the entire hour. Childcare is available for those 6 and under.



### Suggestions for Children

Take a Soul Work pack from the foyer BEFORE THE SERVICE STARTS! Color mandalas, sew or use pipe cleaners to help stay calm and focused. Coloring sheets and pipe cleaners can go home, the rest should be returned to your Soul Work pack and left where you found it.

Sit near the front with your family so you can see and hear everything better. During multigenerational services, sit with your parents.

Have an adult help you light a candle of joy or concern when something big happens in your life. Ask to volunteer to ring the chime or light the chalice.

Use your library voice if you need to talk at all during the service. Worship is a special, sacred time and place and we need to honor that for everyone.



### Suggestions for Parents and Other Family Members

Prepare your child before arriving. Review what will happen that day (Time for All Ages and class or full multigenerational service), and what you expect of them during worship. No one likes surprises.

Keep your child near you. Model your engagement in worship. Help them settle, stand and sit with the congregation, and sing. The songs we sing during this time of worship are the same ones that are sung at Hymn Sing as part of the Spirit Play classes.



Explain what is going on, help them follow the order of service and share the hymnal so they see the music and follow along if they are readers.

If your child isn't ready for worship yet, keep trying! Learning new habits is challenging for everyone. It's worth it, and we support you. Sharing worship with kids is a blessing to us all.