

Adult Spiritual Development in Life Span Education ANNUAL REPORT 2013-2014

The philosophy of Spiritual Development at the UU Church of Nashua is to assist members of our congregation in their questioning and ongoing search for truth and meaning, and to encourage them in their support for one another in each their individual journeys. Last year we renamed the Adult Religious Education Program *Spiritual Development* to reflect this developmental approach and define a more contemplative, collaborative mode of learning. To accomplish this we offered programs providing information and opportunities for interaction along four dimensions:

Spiritual Development. Developing a deep, reflective and expressed response to the wonder of being alive; defining and enhancing our relationship with the spirit of life, however one understands it.

Ethical Development. Examining ethical and moral issues that may confront us in our lives; exploring the possibilities of acting in accordance with the seven principles of Unitarian Universalism.

Unitarian Universalist Identity Development. Providing information about Unitarian Universalism as a religious tradition, its history and heritage, its identity as a faith community and relationship to other faith communities.

Faith Development. Developing as “meaning-makers,” both as individuals and as members of a spiritual community. Faith is about embracing life's possibilities, growing in our sense of being "at home in the universe" and a part of the interconnected web of existence.

This included the following activities and programs:

Small Group Ministry. By far the greatest expenditure of time and effort this year was in the expansion and re-energizing of our small group ministry or covenant group program. Covenant Groups explore issues of “intimacy and ultimacy” in ongoing groups of 8-10 people. In concept it is shared ministry, presenting to group members the opportunity to build more intimate and meaningful relationships with each other while bearing witness to the personal challenges and joys in their lives that members choose to share. Additionally, it is a time in which members can explore together the questions they encounter in their personal search for truth and meaning. Finally, the SGM program also exists for the purpose of building connections and sense of community among members of the congregation as a whole.

We began this initiative last summer, under the guidance of Interim Minister Rev. Holmes, by offering a time-limited Covenant Group for new and potential members of the congregation. The group met biweekly from May through September and was facilitated by Jerry Ross. Then in the fall we engaged Rev. M'Ellen Kennedy, a leader

in the Covenant Group movement and co-founder of the U.U. Small Group Ministry Network, to consult on the development of a new small group ministry framework. Rev. Kennedy conducted a Sunday Service on October 6, 2013, entitled “Intimacy and Ultimacy” to introduce the congregation to the basic concepts behind small group ministry. That afternoon she held a more focused workshop that included the unique opportunity actually to experience a one-time covenant group session. Rev. Kennedy returned in November to offer a day-long workshop for those interested in learning how to facilitate covenant groups. This workshop was offered on a UUA Northern New England District-wide basis. Later that month, we held an organizational meeting to implement the new program, with four new groups beginning in January added to the three continuing groups. By spring we had over 50 members of the congregation participating in small group ministry.

An important part of the program has been the development of the Small Group Ministry Team consisting of the covenant group facilitators, Jerry Ross as Coordinator of the program, and Rev. Olivia Holmes consulting and providing ministerial input. This team has met monthly to guide the ongoing evolution of the program, including the development of a basic SGM covenant of right relations and a mechanism for getting new members into groups. Members of this team have periodically offered a “Sample Covenant Group” or introduction to Small Group Ministry to members and potential members of the congregation who might be interested in joining a group.

Two concepts somewhat new to covenant groups at this congregation --- but basic to most UU small group ministry programs elsewhere --- were also introduced. One has been the concept of service, with all groups selecting a service project that benefits the congregation or the wider community. Secondly, in order to foster relationships among all members of the congregation and to build community, the new groups are time-limited in nature. The plan is for these groups to conclude by the end of the year, at which time the program will be re-organized with new facilitators and new groups.

The following members of the congregation served as covenant group facilitators during the year:

Barbara Berrios
Bob Coulter
Gail McMorrow Donahue
Jameson Gagne
Ellen Gaimari
Bob Keating
Hilary Keating
Bill Kennedy
Jerald Ross
Barbara Spitz
Monica Staples

Introduction to Unitarian Universalism. The committee revised the “UU 101” sessions for visitors and friends to a monthly format offered by co-leaders, with Rev. Olivia leading the first session, followed by other sessions led by June Haskell, Sherri Woolsey, Bill Kennedy, Chris Parker and Jerry Ross. These sessions were designed to give newcomers a brief orientation to Unitarian Universalism, offer participants an opportunity to begin exploring their own spiritual journey, and provide practical information about ways to become involved in the congregation should they wish to do so. Participants were encouraged to get to know Unitarian Universalism and the congregation before making any decision about joining. Toward the end of the year, we proposed partnering with the Membership Committee to offer these sessions in the belief the objectives of the sessions addressed issues relevant to both committees.

Movies, Trips, and Other Events. Throughout the year our committee held periodic events designed to inform or stimulate thought about issues relevant to being a UU in today’s society. We offered three Popcorn Theology movies. These are “main-stream” movies followed by a discussion of issues stimulated by the movie. Jerry Ross showed “Snowmen” in June at the Ferry Beach Retreat, John Brobst showed the film “Defending Your Life” in September, and Bill Kennedy showed “The Inn of the Sixth Happiness” in October. Last June we visited the soon-to-be-relocated UUA headquarters in Boston, and attended an innovative Sanctuary Boston service held at First Parish UU in Cambridge. In November John Sanders held a workshop on “Story Telling.”

Workshops and Faith Development Activities. The committee also worked to support “adult programs” led by others in the congregation but which were consistent with the mission of Spiritual Development. Lori Lerude has provided the following summary of these programs.

Deeper Than Coffee (DTC) A new effort in 2014, this series of 4-5 offerings (ideally held once a month) were held right after the service. DTC is based upon small group ministry listening, that offers a quiet space for reflection on the sermon topic, and an alternative to gregarious coffee hour. A group covenant, which is explained and used at every meeting, is used as a framework that asks for deep listening, limiting judgements and very limited discussion. The goal is to give attendees experience with a group covenant, a chance to learn, a safe place to share, and an opportunity to make deeper connections and spend more time spiritually exploring sermon topic. The Worship Associates, Rev. Holmes, and church leaders, have supported this effort as facilitators.

NonViolent Communication Workshop After interest was expressed at the first Covenant of Right Relationships meeting in February, a day long workshop was held in April. NonViolent communication is based upon non-judgemental observation, recognizing feelings and needs, and introduces compassionate communication tools as a way to “be in relationship with one another”. It is especially useful in situations such as Pastoral Care, conflict resolution, or whenever deeper listening is appropriate.

Covenant of Right Relationship – Kathy Fletcher and Lori Lerude, directed by the Board of Trustees to address the growing edges of conflict management/communication within the church, held three meetings during the course of the year working to develop the covenant. Over 30 church members attended the meetings. The purpose was to

explore the idea of a Covenant of Right Relationships, read covenants of other churches as well as those in place in our church, with the ultimate goal of presenting a draft Covenant of Right Relationships at the 2014 June Congregational Meeting. One key to writing our Covenant of Right Relationships was to individually do the work of thinking hard about the promises we want to make to one another whenever we are together at this church - together in our spiritual journey of searching for truths, together doing the work of this church, together being vulnerable with one another, and together being called to be our best selves. Hopefully, by adopting a simple covenant, we can improve upon this church being a space where people feel safe to do the work of their own transformation.

Additional spiritual and personal development activities were made available that operate within the purview of the Life Span Education program but without direct involvement of the Spiritual Development committee. These included:

The Nashua Buddhist Meditation Group. The Group offers a regular space for UU Church and Nashua community members to practice meditation and study the dharma with longtime practitioners and students of Buddhism. The group met regularly on Wednesdays from 7:00 – 8:00 pm throughout the year. Programming for the group consisted of periodic open house book discussions, opportunities for in-depth study of Buddhist teachings, and monthly dharma talk. Group sitting and walking meditation is practiced in the auditorium. The NBMG developed a new website this year, <http://nashuameditator.org/> which is the best place to find out information about the group. Facilitated by Martha Roberts (coordinator) and Karen Fitzpatrick (church liaison).

Reiki Drum Circle. Once each month, the Reiki Drum group has gathered to share Reiki healing and a spiritual meditation journey ending with community spirit drumming. Participants bring their own percussion instruments to play and share if they wish and all are welcome to participate by taking an active role. All spiritual practice has been welcome. The group facilitators are Anya Zakiewicz and Robin Panousis, both Reiki Master/Teachers and Reiki Drum Master/Teachers.

The Spiritual Development Program is overseen by Chris Parker, the Director of Life Span Religious Education, and the Spiritual Development Committee is chaired by Jerry Ross. Members during the course of the year included Frona Avery, June Haskill, Bill Kennedy, Diane Lyons and John Sanders.

Jerry Ross, Chair
Spiritual Development Committee
5-12-14