

# Full Week Faith

**Rethinking Religious Education and Faith Formation Ministries  
For Twenty-First Century Unitarian Universalists**



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## Gratitude

bestows reverence,  
allowing us to encounter  
everyday epiphanies, those  
transcendent moments of  
awe that change forever how  
we experience life and the world.

~ John Milton

With reverence and deep gratitude for their many and varied ministries,  
for the power of example they provide to me and countless others,  
for the patience, grace, and thoughtfulness of their feedback on  
this work in progress, I acknowledge the collective wisdom  
that deepened my thought and enriched this work from  
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Thank you.



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# acknowledgements

Some of our congregations are already actively experimenting with new ways of engaging religious education, but many more are struggling to understand why their RE attendance has dropped and wondering how they can get more families to come to church. Routinely, District field staff hear the laments of good-hearted congregants –

*We just need to hire a really good DRE to bring families in, and then we can grow.*

*I don't know why parents don't make their children come to church. I would never have gotten away with that.*

*We cannot find enough volunteers for all our classes. So many parents are asking for waivers from participating. They have good reasons, but we need a certain number of teachers!*

*I just don't understand their priorities. If we make people pay for RE, maybe they'll make a point of showing up.*

Over and over from Religious Educators and lay leaders alike, we hear the stories, the sorrows, and the desperation. We also hear the litany of technical fixes congregations try in an effort to stem the decline in participation. Paying classroom teachers. Hiring a dynamic new Religious Educator or Youth Director. Tying incentives and punitive measures to RE registration and attendance. The fact that the technical fixes have not turned the tide indicates a deeper, adaptive challenge.

I want to acknowledge the deep sorrow these challenges bring to so many of us who have worked so hard, for so many years, to build up and affirm the ministry of religious education. I need to acknowledge that many ideas contained herein are inherited directly from colleagues and ancestors; I have credited those I am able to trace to their source. In addition I must give special thanks to my colleagues Cindy Beal, who knows exactly how to challenge me; Mr. Barb Greve, for countless hours of meticulous proofing; Rev. John Gibb Millsbaugh, who really does work magic; Jessica Ferguson for sharing her graphic gifts; and Kimberly Paquette, whose support and encouragement are so strong. There are dozens of other everyday heroes whose stories have served as living inspiration and given me permission to dream big dreams. May all praise go to them if anything in the pages that follow can be of service in our shared work.



**“You don’t know where you’re going,  
but you’re on your way.”**

*~Angus MacLean*

# introduction:

The world of church is changing. And why not? The world of medicine is changing. The world of journalism is changing. The way we govern, teach, communicate, learn, the way we buy and read books is changing. There's no good reason to believe that changes would not also impact the way we understand worship and Sunday School and every other aspect of congregational life.

Religious professionals are noticing the changes. Lay leaders feel the tension between fidelity to their congregation's traditions and the call to something new. Our people are taking small steps, making faithful leaps toward the future.

In 2012, the Sophia Fahs Center at Meadville Lombard Seminary transitioned to the Fahs Collaborative, which launched the Fahs Fellows. In partnership with the Liberal Religious Educators Association and the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock, the Fahs Collaborative invited three Fahs Fellows to explore innovation in our Faith Formation ministries. We were invited to focus on areas of passion and expertise, and to make use of our resources to think broadly outside convention and tradition to suggest innovations that address some of the pressing issues our congregations are facing. Through this project, we are inviting the conversation about faithful innovation into the public square, "offering pedagogical strategies that have potential to breathe fresh air into how we teach, learn, and grow."<sup>1</sup>

Full Week Faith is a result of this invitation to engage the adaptive challenges our young century is bringing to our ministries. It is not intended to be the one 'right' answer or the only way forward. I hope it invites our religious professionals, our lay leaders, and our families to imagine a ministry of faith formation that is not Sunday School-centric, but rather engages all generations in living Unitarian Universalism in everyday lives and times. Rather than answering the question, "*how do we get families to come back to church,*" it's an invitation to ask instead, "*how do we get our church to meet people in the places out in the world where their lives are happening?*"

I confess to being no closer to knowing what faith formation might look like in 100 years for having done this work. But I invite you to imagine one possibility – vibrant congregations full of Unitarian Universalists living Full Week Faiths, returning to our church on Sunday – or Tuesday, or Friday. Returning to our faith in their hearts every day; keeping the living tradition alive in our homes, workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods.

Dr. Viktor Frankl wrote, "*Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom.*" Consider this your invitation. Join the conversation – together let's imagine vibrant faith formation ministries in congregations living their missions in the world. Invite conversations about the "way we have always done religious education," and keep those things that are good and faithful and that continue to serve. Help our congregations to retire those practices that no longer serve our families, our faith, or our world, and to do so with grace and gratitude for having been a faithful response in a different time, for a different people. And let us bring these questions, musings, worries, and joys more and more into the public light. Let us be a catalyst for denomination-wide reflection, innovation, and renovation.

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1. "The Fahs Fellows," Meadville Lombard Theological School, 2013, <http://www.meadville.edu/Fahs-fellows/>, paragraph 1.

# why rethink religious education?

Why rethink RE? Our religious education ministries are significant cornerstones of congregational life. We have the blessing of high quality curricular resources available free and online through our UUA. We have gifted and creative Religious Educators and a veritable army of dedicated volunteer teachers staffing our Sunday mornings all across the continent.

At the same time, in most of our congregations, we have a model of religious education that focuses almost exclusively on the Sunday morning classroom experience. And we have families who are no longer coming to church every Sunday.

Many (perhaps most?) of our congregations have a traditional Sunday School model of RE that is based on the public education model, which itself arose from the social and economic context of the Industrial Age, although we spend the rest of our week firmly grounded in the digital/information age. Certainly, we have made technical adaptations to our RE programs – perhaps we use both Spirit Play and Tapestry of Life – but we still center our RE programs – and the work expectations of our religious educators – chiefly on that Sunday morning experience.

Anecdotally, we hear over and over from religious professionals that increasingly sporadic RE attendance creates a significant challenge to making sure all children receive the same lessons. We hear that the pressures on contemporary families make volunteer recruitment and teacher retention more and more difficult.

We know the world has changed much more drastically than our church programs have over the last half-century. So when the Fahs Collaborative asked me to think about Innovation in Multigenerational Faith Formation, I began by thinking about some technical ways we could address one or another of the myriad challenges facing our ministries. Instead, I decided to step back and ask *what if*...

What if our ministries of Faith Formation did not center on Sunday mornings?

What if RE classes were more widely viewed as only *a piece* of our Faith Formation programs and ministry?

What if religious professionals believed that the product of their collaboration enabled the spiritual deepening and faith formation work of the whole congregation?

What if our congregations intentionally commissioned religious educators and ministers to spend as much time supporting and equipping our people to live faith-filled lives on all the other days of the week, as they currently spend shaping a single Sunday morning experience?

These are the questions that framed my thinking, and led me to dream a model of congregationally based faith formation ministry I call Full Week Faith. It can be described as a sort of mash-up of family ministry and first century mission-driven Church, with a faithful leveraging of technology and social media to magnify the breadth of our ministries.

And it is only one possible path to our shared future.

# why full week faith?

Full Week Faith is offered as one faithful response to what I sense the world is calling us to as Unitarian Universalists. In working on this project, I consulted colleagues, listened to religious professionals, read the ample documentation and discussion about faithful responses from our own people, and in the books and white papers published by our siblings in other faith traditions. It may not work in every context. It may not work with every size program. It certainly is not presented in perfected form on immutable stone tablets. This is an age that calls us to *experilearn*.

I first encountered the term *experilearn* in UU circles in a Tweetchat<sup>2</sup> among religious professionals in the summer of 2011<sup>3</sup>. I use the word here to define a faithful experiment in our religious lives together, which is:

- ✓born of and informed by a passion for our faith;
- ✓subject to intentional discernment;
- ✓allows room for Spirit and transcendence to attend;
- ✓and uses theological reflection to evaluate and assess what works well in order to craft the next *experilearn*.

Experilearning is a process and not an end. No single *experilearn* will capture the one great answer to any of the challenges our churches face. I'm not convinced there *is* a single answer. The answers we find may have common elements and similar shapes, but will be deeply connected to and reflective of the cultural and community context from which they spring and in which they will live. If we have done our work well in planning and preparing, our experiment cannot fail; it can only provide us with important learnings that will help shape our next steps together.

I well understand that the idea of decentralizing the Sunday morning experience will seem quite a radical *experilearn* to many. We also know how people – and how systems – tend to react to change. But not all change is unwanted, unnecessary, or doomed to failure. And certainly, change does not come overnight.

## how to use these resources

A good number of us religious professionals have been grappling with making faithful responses to the new realities of 21<sup>st</sup> century life. We have read books, shared collegial conversations, and attended workshops (over 200 UU's attended John Roberto's Faith Formation 2020 workshops over the course of a recent single church year). But in our faith, our ministries are shared with the congregations we serve. And the lay leaders of our congregations, though faithful and devoted servants, generally also have their own full time jobs in other fields. They are not reading the books we are reading; they are not in our collegial conversations. They have not been invited onto the proverbial balcony to view the lay of the land.

This paper has been written for an audience of religious professionals, but it is my hope that other stakeholders in congregational faith formation will still find it accessible and useful. The first section is constructed to lay

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2. A Tweetchat is a virtual gathering on Twitter where participants contribute to the conversation in 140-character tweets using a hashtag (#) to identify their topic of conversation.

3. The Rev. Phil Lund actually used the word “*experifail*,” to express the feeling that congregational leaders should be willing to acknowledge that some of our experiments in 21<sup>st</sup> century faith formation will fail, but we should experiment anyway. In subsequent months, the Rev. Janet Bush and DRE Cindy Beal of the Unitarian Society of Northampton and Florence suggested a tweak to “*experilearn*,” shifting the emphasis from the potential failure of an experiment to the potential learning that can be gleaned through experimentation.

out some of the most significant cultural, social, and demographic changes in American<sup>4</sup> society over the last couple of generations, and to make visible the implications of these changes on the life and work of the church. It is written not so much to inform ministers and religious educators of these trends – many of us are already well aware of the literature. I hope this survey of cultural dynamics will be a useful tool to make the case to lay leadership for a dramatic shift in our ministries, and to help translate a vision of a shared future to the wider congregation. Religious professionals serve important roles in congregations; they are at once prophet on the hilltop and partner in the trenches. Their work in the future of faith formation in our churches (and beyond) will be to both help frame the vision of what comes next, as well as to walk through the sometimes sloppy, sometimes rocky path toward institutional change.

If the first section of this paper could broadly be understood as the “*What*,” setting forth the context for rethinking religious education, then the second section might be the “*So What?*” What implication do these new realities have for our common lives? How might we be called to respond? In this section, I ground the model of Full Week Faith in our history, traditions, and the legacy of our good thinkers and forebears.

The final section describes Full Week Faith in greater detail. It describes some of the qualities of a congregation well suited to *experilearn* together, and suggests ways forward to implement right-sized moves in its direction. In addition, I have included some sample activities that religious and lay leaders might undertake to support a Full Week Faith model of faith formation, activities that could be incorporated into existing programs with relative ease.

In addition to this paper, at the 2013 LREDA Fall Conference in St. Paul, I will provide a set of cards with sample Full Week Faith activities that conference participants can bring back to their work in their home congregations. Each card includes the faith formation goal of the activity; the role of the religious professionals in implementing that activity; how a family might take it home; and how a congregation might take it further. These cards will be available online as a resource in late October 2013.

Finally, I will present at Fall Con, to accompany this paper, a model of a smartphone / mobile app that congregations could customize and use to support the development of a Full Week Faith model in their own congregations.

It has been a privilege to spend this year in reflection, study, and dreaming. Always, I have asked for Spirit to guide the work that it may serve our people and our world. With no small measure of joy, I turn it over to minds wiser than mine, and to the hands and hearts that will truly shape the future of Unitarian Universalism.

May we be not afraid. All that we will need, we shall have it.

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4. It should be understood throughout this report, I am writing from the perspective of the United States of America. It is my hope that the work will be relevant to our Canadian siblings in faith as well, and leave to their good judgment the extent to which it succeeds.



*“Every 500 years, give or take a decade or two, Western culture... goes through a time of enormous upheaval, a time in which essentially every part of it is reconfigured.”*

*Phyllis Tickle,  
Emergence Christianity*

## how times have changed!

There is no question that the position of the institutional church in American life has changed radically in the last half-century or so. Indeed, there is hardly any aspect of our common life that has not undergone profound changes. At the risk of sounding hyperbolic, these changes truly are historic in scope. Author and theologian Phyllis Tickle writes about this time as a “Great Emergence,” noting that every 500 years or so the institutionalized Church undergoes radical transformation that remakes the faith. The last such time was when Martin Luther posted his Ninety Five Theses in 1517. Now is another such time. In the course of developing a faithful proposal in response to our current circumstances, it is useful to look a little more closely at some of our contemporary sociological and demographic changes and consider their impact on our lives and our work as people of faith.

A number of books and reports have been written to document what ministers, religious educators, and other religious professionals have remarked on anecdotally. The last half of the 20th century and the early years of the 21st in the United States have been marked by changes that catapulted us from the Industrial to the Digital age. Changes in demography and family structures have moved at an astonishing pace.

Here are just some of the changes noted in the literature, changes that have significant impact on our traditional religious education programs, and which carry implications for the role of church in American life into the future.<sup>5</sup> These are broad-brush descriptions of general social and demographic trends; there may be multiple exceptions to each general sketch, but the trendlines are clear.

## from modern to postmodern

We are standing in the midst of a shift in culture and thinking from Modernism to Postmodernism. Modernism arose out of the Enlightenment and spawned an Age of Reason, of ultimate confidence in the power of science and rationality and skepticism. The source of authority in modernism is the free individual. All truth can be both known and proven. Contained within modernism is an assumption of the inevitability of human progress - defined as Western progress - and a presumption that the rest of the world inevitably strives to be like us.

Postmodernism, as a thought response, affirms the diversity of human cultures and experiences and posits that there is not one, knowable, universal Truth. Human beings exist in community; communities create culture; cultures breed stories that tell real and knowable things about people in particular places at particular moments in time. What is true and good in one community may not be so in another corner of the world.

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5. John Roberto, *Faith Formation 2020* (Naugatuck: LifelongFaith Associates, 2010); Rev. Kristina Lizardy-Hajbi, *Foundations, Findings, and Futures: Christian Faith Formation and Education in the United Church of Christ* (United Church of Christ, 2012), <http://uccfiles.com/pdf/UCCChristianFaithFormationandEducationReport.pdf>; and from anecdotal conversations with Unitarian Universalist religious professionals.

Postmodernism opens minds and hearts to wonder, allows room for mystery, and acknowledges there will be questions our sciences and studies may never be able to answer. We are called to neither worship nor reject science as a sole source of authority, but to make use of its elucidating powers as we discern those questions and concerns that call our spirits and bodies to their service.

Unitarian Universalism is well suited to serve this paradigmatic shift. Our faith draws from many sources – Jewish, Christian and Humanist teachings; wisdom of the world’s religions; and our direct experiences of transcendent mystery and wonder. We are practiced in holding two seemingly opposing things to be true at once. If we embrace the *both/and* nature of our faith, we will be better positioned to serve neighbors and seekers in a postmodern world than some of our siblings in other faith traditions with more staid dogma.

## influence of individualism

With roots in the consumer-oriented culture that rose following World War II, and coming of age in the so-called “me generation” of the 1970’s, there has been an increasing focus on customization, commoditization, and personalization in our lives in general. We have gotten used to being marketed to in increasingly diverse ways. Our ideas, values, and opinions are now understood to derive from our *own* experiences and preferences, and not necessarily or even primarily inherited from familial or community expectations.

After World War II, American men returned to work in force, and manufacturing technologies evolved rapidly. For the first time in our nation’s history, luxury items became available and affordable on a large scale and Americans were encouraged to consume in order to contribute to a thriving economy. Consider how we came to expect customization and personalization over the decades through the example of the humble telephone. In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, if a home had a telephone it would look pretty much identical from one home to the next – the standard issue black model from good old Ma Bell. By the 1950’s and 1960’s, a lightweight version of the phone was introduced and it became possible to have multiple telephones in a single house. Not only that, each phone could even be a different color to match that room’s décor. Today, those of us who carry smartphones – roughly half of all Americans<sup>6</sup> - have the option of decorating its home screen with our family photos, a level of customization not imagined fifty years ago.

This kind of personalized marketing has been honed to a fine point online. Search engines, email hosting services and social media platforms “optimize” our online experiences by using our own words and browsing habits to provide us with ads for our favorite beverages or our preferred political candidate, and to suggest to us new friends and people we may want to ‘follow.’ Youth and children are considered a consumer market from an early age.

Now consider how this expectation of customization and personalization extends to our religious lives. Americans who grew up in a religious tradition are increasingly comfortable rejecting elements of their doctrine that don’t align with their personal beliefs, essentially customizing their faith experience to fit their personal needs and interests. A good example of this phenomenon is reflected in recent reporting that the majority of American Catholics believe they can be good Catholics “without obeying the church hierarchy’s teaching on birth control (78%).”<sup>7</sup> Adults raised in a church do not feel the same loyalty to remain in that church or even within the same faith tradition as their grandparents did. Adults who come into a new church

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6. Ingrid Lunden, “Nielsen: Smartphones Used By 50.4% Of U.S. Consumers, Android 48.5% Of Them,” *Tech Crunch*, Mar 7, 2012. <http://techcrunch.com/2012/05/07/nielsen-smartphones-used-by-50-4-of-u-s-consumers-android-48-5-of-them/>.

7. Michele Dillon, “What is Core to American Catholics in 2011,” *National Catholic Reporter*, October 24, 2011, <http://ncronline.org/news/catholics-america/what-core-american-catholics-2011>.

may feel no compunction about leaving the congregation after a single negative experience there, perhaps to seek another church that might ‘fit’ them better. We refer without irony to ‘church shopping,’ conflating the process of finding a home for one’s soul with seeking out one’s preferred cola, or looking for a good deal on a pair of sneakers.

In some families, children and youth are catered to not only by retailers and manufacturers, but also at home by parents who are willing to make ‘deals’ with their children about when they can skip Sunday School or quit coming to church altogether (often after Coming of Age). There are numerous pressures on families, some described below, that may lead them to think of church as one more optional extracurricular activity among others to choose from and make deals around. Children and youth are under a lot of pressure and have highly scheduled lives. Many may be quite effective in arguing that their needs are better served through time chilling with friends, gaming, or watching YouTube videos. Certainly the entertainment industry and its marketers make the newest video game or new series on Netflix look a lot more appealing than a morning at church!

These same parents would likely not make deals about skipping their Monday-Friday schools, or allow their children to quit seeing the dentist when they turn 13, but we do not have a cultural ethos that teaches us it is as important a responsibility to tend to our children’s spiritual health as it is their medical, dental and emotional health. As a general rule, we should ask if we have done enough to explicitly lift up this communal responsibility or to equip young parents with the language and resources to feel capable of caring for the spiritual well being of their families. The challenge in our work is to resist the popular view of church as commodity and lift up church as community instead.

## choice over chance

A century ago, it was largely a foregone conclusion that a child born into one faith community would remain a member throughout their whole lives. The teachings and values of that faith community would define the choices they made, even to the extent of choosing a spouse. It was a given that the faith community would continue to play a prominent role over their lifetime, and likely that their children would grow up worshipping in the same congregation as their grandparents. Today, Americans are much more transient and mobile. For many it is simply not logistically possible to remain in the church one grew up in. People are also increasingly comfortable shopping for a religious home that most closely suits their individual needs instead of remaining in the church of their childhood. Alternatively, many people feel increasingly comfortable cobbling together their spiritual lives with elements of various traditions that speak to them personally, rather than choose to align with any one faith tradition or congregation. They may attend Catholic Mass on Christmas and Easter, resonate deeply with the Passover story, and study Buddhist meditation year-round.

Once again, as a faith tradition that honors the sacred center of other world religions, Unitarian Universalists may be uniquely poised to serve this cultural shift. The challenge, however, is that even seekers who find their way to us may still have no interest in being identified as a Unitarian Universalist or in being part of a congregation – even a congregation which embraces diverse theological outlooks. And those who may decide to align themselves with a Unitarian Universalist congregation may have no lived experience of participating in congregational life. The invitation is for us to create accessible entry points and intentionally equip our laity for spiritual leadership. The Rev. Peter Morales opened up an important conversation with his white paper, *Congregations and Beyond*<sup>8</sup> inviting new thinking and attention to serving seekers beyond those who ‘belong’ to congregations in the traditional sense. Our challenge and our invitation for the ministry of faith formation is

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8. “Congregations And Beyond,” Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, April 27, 2013, <http://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/officers/president/morales/192145.shtml/>.

to draw an expansive circle of *us*, and develop faith formation resources, events and practices to meet people where they are – inside our church buildings and beyond their walls.

## family structure: end of the nuclear age

According to the US government's 2010 Census, the iconic American nuclear family comprised of a married mother and father and their children accounted for 20.2 % of all American households, down from 23.5% in 2000, and stunningly down from 45% in 1960.<sup>9</sup> In little more than a half century there has been a radical diversification of family structures.

A number of factors contributed to this diversification. We have seen an increase in single-parent families through both choice and divorce, which has become less stigmatized and legally easier to obtain. Technology has made it possible for more single individuals to become parents through *in vitro* fertilization and surrogacy, and medical advances make pregnancy possible much later in life. Globalization has contributed to a dramatic increase in cross-cultural adoptions. There are more couples choosing to raise children together without marrying at all, and there are more same-gender couples choosing parenthood and where available choosing marriage as well. Overall, adults are waiting to begin families until later than their parents, and much later than their grandparents did.

These changes contribute to a decline in family religious socialization. Traditionally, marriage and parenthood are milestone moments that draw young adults back into active participation in their church. Delaying marriage and parenthood delays the return to the church and weakens any lingering connections to the faith tradition they grew up with. At the same time there has been a radical increase in the acceptance of interfaith marriages, leading to a decline in participation in some faith traditions when one partner of the couple leaves the faith of their childhood and adopts that of their spouse. In other cases, the couple may choose a new faith tradition together, or may choose to remain unchurched. Unitarian Universalism, with its liberal theology and its affirmation of the sacred center of the world's diverse faith traditions, is in theory well suited to serve interfaith families.

## our networked world

Humans have always created social networks. Through the use of social media, we have the ability to build expansive networks that cross all kinds of boundaries. These networks can be leveraged in ways that were not possible before the advent of these technologies. Networks of families, friends and colleagues can instantly share joys and sorrows. Crowdfunding sites can raise thousands of dollars in a matter of days or weeks with the support and promotion of friends, and friends of friends.

Christian author and children's pastor David Csisnos sees implications for the way churches approach faith formation by recognizing that "formation is no longer about forming an individual person, but forming a member of a community that will, in turn, influence the wider world. In

*Formation is no longer about forming an individual person, but forming a member of a community that will, in turn, influence the wider world...*

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9. *Households and Families 2010*, 2010 Census Briefs, Lofquist, Lugaila, O'Connell, and Feliz, issued April 2012, United States Census Bureau.

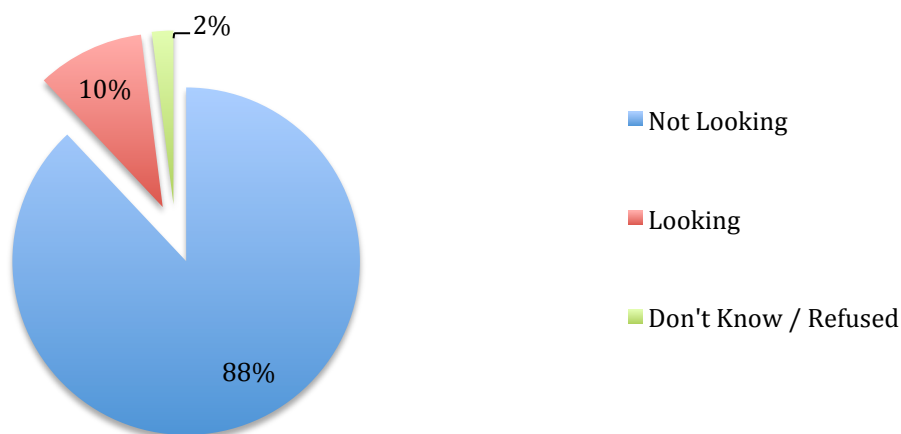
the postmodern world, all people have the power to form one another's faith."<sup>10</sup> This is also good news for Unitarian Universalist religious leaders. We have long affirmed each person's free and responsible search for truth and meaning. A challenge for us moving into the future will be to create safe spaces and structured opportunities for seekers to come together and share the search by leveraging the networks people already belong to, and nurturing new networks both among parishioners and between congregations. As much as individuals will trust in their own experience of wonder in the world, they will also seek a community in which to make meaning, to co-create the stories that are carried out into the world, and to help transmit the stories of who we are as a people of faith into the future.

## rise of the 'nones'

The Pew Forum on Religion and Family Life<sup>11</sup> reports a steady rise in the number of "Nones," that is, Americans who report no religious affiliation in its annual survey. In 1972, those reporting no religious affiliation accounted for 7% of all surveyed. In 2010, in the span of just over a single generation, that number had more than doubled to

*...the "nones" are overwhelmingly not going to come looking for us.*

18%. There has been a commensurate decline in the number of Americans identifying with Protestantism (which would include Unitarian Universalism) from 62% of Americans surveyed in 1972 to 51% in 2010. Many people increasingly define themselves as "spiritual but not religious." For some, this represents a rejection of sectarianism and what they see as the evils that have been done in the world through religious fundamentalism. For some this is a reflection of the increase in religious pluralism and the invitation to 'try out' different houses of worship and faith practices. Some of the "nones" piece together a spiritual life that draws on multiple traditions and practices and some of the "nones" are content to live without explicit spiritual beliefs and practices. As a faith tradition that does not require a belief in God or ascription to any creed, Unitarian Universalism again seems well positioned to serve the growing number of "nones." But another stark statistic from the Pew Forum makes it unlikely that we should expect significant growth from this quarter. According to its report, among those surveyed (summer 2012) who identify their religion as "nothing in particular," only 10% say they are actively looking for a religion that would be right for them.



*Pew Research Center Survey, June 28 – July 9, 2012  
Based on those who say their religion is "nothing in particular"*

10. David M. Csinos, "Questioning the Right Answers: Faith Formation in the Postmodern Matrix," in *Shaped by God: Twelve Essentials for Nurturing Faith in Children, Youth, and Adults*, ed. Robert J. Keeley (Grand Rapids: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2010), 160.

11. "Nones on the Rise," The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, October 9, 2012, <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>.



If we believe that Unitarian Universalism has a saving message and a vital mission in the 21st century and beyond, our challenge in response to the growing number of “nones” is to magnify our footprint in the world, to raise our visibility in our communities, to move beyond our congregational walls to meet people where they are, because the “nones” are overwhelmingly not going to come looking for us. Encouraging our current members and religious professionals to adopt a more evangelical relationship to our faith is one way to raise the profile of Unitarian Universalism in the tens of thousands of networks that our members and friends already belong to. Some may argue that evangelism is inherently contrary to our Unitarian Universalist commitment to respect other faith traditions and the religious choices that our friends, families and colleagues freely make, but I contend that this is a both/and proposition, and not an either/or. Sharing the good news of our own faith tradition, and how it guides us in living lives of meaning, and supports us through challenges is quite different from trying to persuade people to forgo their own beliefs and adopt ours as the only road to salvation. We have been careful to not disparage the spiritual paths of others; sometimes so careful that we feel shy or embarrassed to even talk about faith in public. We have long been encouraged to develop our “elevator speeches” – brief explanations of Unitarian Universalism that could be shared over the course of an elevator trip. In an era when many are questioning the very purpose of religion and with the loudest public voices of faith tending toward extremism, fundamentalism and exclusivity, we have a unique opportunity and an obligation to lift up our truth that religion can be and is a source of good and comfort in a broken world.

Nurturing faithful and life-affirming partnerships with other houses of worship, non-profit agencies, arts organizations, or government entities in our local communities will be another way to bring our churches and

*...religion can be and  
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comfort in a broken  
world.*

our faith to the public eye by meeting our neighbors in the public square. Already, rich partnerships are being explored denominationally between Unitarian Universalists and our brethren in the United Church of Christ. Our co-authored Our Whole Lives curricula stand as a tribute to the great gifts we bring to the world beyond our congregational walls when we do not fear to live our values out loud in public.

## finding meaning in a ridiculously stimulative world

Author and education/creativity expert Sir Kenneth Robinson has noted that we are living in the most richly stimulative time in human history. Our children “are being besieged with information and calls for their attention from every platform – computers, from iPhones, from [advertisements], from hundreds of television channels.”<sup>12</sup> He further notes that the current system of public education “was conceived in the intellectual culture of the Enlightenment and in the economic circumstances of the Industrial Revolution.” The Sunday School model of most Protestant churches, including most Unitarian Universalist congregations, arose from similar circumstances. Meanwhile, the rest of our culture has shifted radically and rapidly into the Information Age through the Digital Revolution. Information is ubiquitous and democratized. If previous generations worried that the telephone would be the death knell of polite conversation, today’s parents bemoan texting, tweeting, and instant messaging with equal fervor. Parents who were chided as youth for watching television or listening to Walkmans while doing homework, now try to limit the screen time of children and youth who may have television, radio, three conversations with friends and homework happening simultaneously on the same laptop computer.

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12. Sir Ken Robinson “Changing Education Paradigms” (video), October 14, 2010, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player\\_embedded&v=zDZFcDGpL4U](http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=zDZFcDGpL4U).

The late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries have also seen the rise in childhood diagnoses, in particular of ADHD, Asperger's Syndrome, and other Autism spectrum disorders. Anecdotally, religious educators have noted dramatic increases in numbers of students with one or another of these diagnoses, as well as an increase in the number of students with stress and anxiety related disorders, and of children and youth with multiple diagnoses.

Another related phenomenon might be called the Overscheduled Child Syndrome. Childhood play once occurred spontaneously and organically in homes and neighborhoods populated by larger families, many of which had mothers at home who kept watchful eyes on all. As more women entered the paid workforce, and as family sizes shrank, these organic opportunities gave way to scheduled 'play dates.' At the same time, the American economy increasingly assumes a college diploma for even entry-level positions, leading to increased competition for acceptance into colleges. Families have increased the expectations that their children and teens will participate in extra-curricular activities, and everything from Little League and soccer practices to play rehearsals; from regattas to piano recitals are routinely scheduled throughout the week. In the years since Title IX passed in 1972, more and more girls are participating in organized sports, which has led to even greater demand on limited municipal recreational resources. Communities have felt the pressure and responded to the need by expanding practice and game times to every day of the week. In an increasingly secular country, Sunday mornings are no longer held as a universally sacred time, and extracurricular activities are regularly scheduled in conflict with our traditional Sunday School time. Religious professionals have noted the more sporadic attendance of families on Sunday mornings because of this, and because of one-week-on/one-week-off shared custody arrangements, among other scheduling demands on our families.

Religious professionals have also reported a sharp decrease in the number of parents who are willing - or able - to participate as volunteers in their congregation's Religious Education or Sunday School programs. Religious educators running cooperative Sunday School models are increasingly granting exemptions to the 'mandatory volunteer' rule. Among the most common reasons for granting exemptions are overextended and highly stressed parents who may –

- be single parents holding multiple jobs, or
- have one or more child(ren) with special challenges, or
- be actively caring for aging and ailing parents in addition to their young children.

The needs of families coming through our doors and the scheduling pressures upon them are so much greater than they were even a single generation ago. We have made some changes around the edges of our traditional Sunday School model over the years. Some congregations are returning to a "one-room schoolhouse" multi-age model of religious education. Some use Spirit Play<sup>13</sup> which is more interactive than some traditional curricula. The UUA has published a series of curricula, Tapestry of Faith,<sup>14</sup> that is available online for free. This allows parents as well as teachers and religious professionals to have access to all the lessons. Theoretically, at least, students could access lessons shared on the days they could not attend Sunday School in person.

These changes, adjustments and improvements have been good and valuable steps, but many of our congregants continue to expect that the most significant faith formation their children and youth receive will occur in an hour or two on Sunday mornings, through religious education classes.

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13. Spirit Play is a Unitarian Universalist Adaptation of Jerome Berryman's *Godly Play*, based on Montessori principles, developed by Nita Penfold, D. Min., Rev. Ralph Roberts, and Beverly Leute Bruce.

14. "Tapestry of Faith," Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, September 16, 2013, <http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/>.

# sustainability

Anecdotally, a number of religious professionals are reporting Sunday School programs that are struggling under their own weight. In many churches, Religious Education programs are the largest single area of ministry when measured by number of volunteers and participants. Between teaching teams for every grade level, youth group advisors, coming of age mentors, and Sunday morning nursery staff, as well as volunteers for annual events like a holiday pageant or teacher recognition day, or those RE programs which offer adult educational activities, the Religious Education program engages a significant percent of adult congregants. As families and the demands on them have changed, our Sunday School models remain heavily volunteer dependent and some are finding that model increasingly unsustainable.

In the world of secular education, the same kinds of shifts and pressures on families and students are being noticed, and in many arenas, shifts in approach and pedagogy are being experimented with. Respected college professors such as Harvard physics professor Eric Mazur are giving up lecturing in favor of peer instruction.<sup>15</sup> Esteemed institutions like Harvard, Princeton and MIT are offering a number of their courses online for free.<sup>16</sup> And in public schools, many districts are experimenting with technology like smart boards and tablets. Still others are experimenting in more low-tech ways, such as replacing desks and chairs with tables and balance balls.<sup>17</sup> Although it is still too early to gauge the efficacy of MOOC's (Massive Online Open Courses) or other recent innovations, these feel like well-discerned experiments in response to specifically identified social and demographic trends from which we might be able to take lessons.

# inheriting the unchurched

Many of our churches' newest members, and current Religious Education students, have come to us after years (or even lifetimes) of not belonging to any house of worship. As one UUA district staff member put it, "they don't have any sense of how we do things around here - a blessing in that they aren't held captive to any particular model, but a curse because they don't necessarily understand church or (congregational) commitment." And those who come to us from other faith traditions do not necessarily understand how a covenantal tradition differs from a creedal one. Our curricula and Religious Education ministries have been largely created and supported with a goal of helping children and youth grow into Unitarian Universalist adults. At the same time, we know that an excellent indicator of youth and young adult religiosity is the consistent religious practice of their parents. A sizable number of our current RE students are not coming to us from homes with a history of consistent Unitarian Universalist religious practice.

Still, rather than focusing our faith formation efforts on building adult and family Unitarian Universalist identity and faith formation, we focus instead on religious education programming that teaches children curricular content in traditional Sunday School classes that meet a maximum of 30 – 40 times per year. Actually, many religious educators would put the maximum number of Sunday School classes closer to 25-30, and that presupposes perfect attendance, which we know is extremely challenging for today's families. When you factor in absences for illness and other family or team obligations, one religious educator routinely tells

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15. Emily Hanford, "Rethinking the Way College Students Are Taught," American Radio Works, <http://americanradioworks.publicradio.org/features/tomorrows-college/lectures/rethinking-teaching.html>.

16. The first online course offered in the spring semester of 2012 by MIT on Circuits and Electronics drew some 120,000 online students. Tamar Lewin, "Harvard and M.I.T. Team up to Offer Free Online Courses," The New York Times, May 2, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/03/education/harvard-and-mit-team-up-to-offer-free-online-courses.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/05/03/education/harvard-and-mit-team-up-to-offer-free-online-courses.html?_r=0).

17. Kathy Matheson, "Teachers Ditch Student Desk Chairs for Yoga Balls," Yahoo! News, February 20, 2013, <http://news.yahoo.com/teachers-ditch-student-desk-chairs-152403408.html>.

parents that he has about one full day a year (24 hours) to impact their children's spiritual development.

The most consistent example of congregational adult faith formation tends to center on Sunday morning worship. A small percentage of our congregants avail themselves of Adult Education classes (in the congregations that offer them) on topics that are already of interest to them. A larger number of congregants have engaged in recent years in Small Group Ministries, a very successful model of spiritual growth and deepening which also builds community and strengthens congregational and associational identity. The model has been adapted for use with children and youth as well.<sup>18</sup>

While some congregations hold new member classes for adults, we have no denominational requirements of membership. Most of the explicit Adult Faith Formation opportunities favor a traditional teach/learn paradigm, and privilege academic learning styles and preferences. By and large, we have not treated the faith formation of parents and other adults with the same priority as the faith formation of children and youth. Increasing the diversity of opportunities and providing easy access points and multiple modalities for a range of learning styles may contribute to a culture change in our congregations, wherein Unitarian Universalists take it as a given that our faith calls each of us to be engaged in our own spiritual development, no matter what our age, how much information we know, or how many classes we have already taken. The journey does not end at high school graduation, or at the end of the membership journey class, just as our faith doesn't stop when the chalice is extinguished at the end of Sunday morning worship. Unitarian Universalists, no less than any other people of faith, yearn for deep connection and community throughout our lives.

Many of us strive to be held to account for living good lives and serving the cause of Justice in some small way every day. Others of us feel the need to return to our spirit's home in times of especial joy or challenge. When we encourage one another to live a Full Week Faith, our spiritual connections deepen with regular practice and it becomes a core marker of our identity and orientation in the world, as opposed to merely a title we don on Sunday mornings with our church clothes.

## growing unitarian universalists

*(children) do not have to wait until they grow up to know themselves to be part of our Unitarian Universalist faith community.*

When I make the assertion that the goal of religious education is forming the current and future generations of Unitarian Universalists, I am aware that I am making some assumptions. It is my strong assertion that this is deeply in the core of our work as religious professionals, and that is as it ought to be. However, I am also aware that this may not be a shared assumption among our laity. One religious educator conveyed a heartbreaking conversation with a parent who did not want the congregation's RE program to "make her children think they were Unitarian Universalists." She wanted her children to be free to make that decision themselves when they grew up. It struck me as a profound distortion of our covenant to support the "free and responsible search for truth and meaning." Yes, we value, promote, and affirm our children's rights – and the rights of all – to faithfully and freely engage in the spiritual search for what is right and true. But I want our children to know that *by that very act*, they are part of our religious community of seekers. This very act is part of how we know ourselves to be Unitarian Universalists. I want them to know we are their community and we have promised to be their spirit's home. And I want them to

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18. Gail Forsyth-Vail, "Adapting Small Group Ministry for Children: An Implementation Plan with Sample Sessions," Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, [http://www.uua.org/documents/mpl/adapt\\_sgm\\_children.pdf](http://www.uua.org/documents/mpl/adapt_sgm_children.pdf).

know they do not have to wait until they grow up to know themselves to be part of our Unitarian Universalist faith community.

I have heard similar heartbreaking stories from other religious educators, stories that sadly betray what is almost a fear of indoctrination (for lack of a better word) from some of our members. Perhaps it is connected to the generalized secularization of American public life. Perhaps it is related to some parents' painful experiences of strict faith communities in their own childhoods. Whatever the reasons, there seems to be a reluctance on the part of some parents to see themselves as caretakers of their children's healthy *spirits*, in addition to their healthy minds and bodies. This is part of a culture much larger than our own associational or congregational cultures. We will not single-handedly change it. We can, however, focus more explicitly and intentionally on including parents and extended families in our faith formation ministries – not merely as volunteer teachers, but as *recipients* of faith formation ministry themselves.

We have a responsibility to provide resources and mentoring to equip parents to truly embrace their role as their child's first and most consistent religious educator, and caretakers of their children's minds, bodies **and** souls. To paraphrase Mahatma Gandhi, if we want a vibrant Unitarian Universalism for the next generation, we shall have to begin with the *parents*.

*If we want a vibrant  
Unitarian Universalist for  
the next generation, we  
shall have to begin with  
the parents.*

## generational theory

In 1992, Neil Howe and William Strauss published a definitive work, *Generations: the History of America's Future, 1584-2069*, in which they described generational patterns in American society and from which they predict how society may be shaped in the 21st century.<sup>19</sup> The work has been widely digested and applied to congregational life. We are currently in a moment of transition between generational leadership in many areas of our communal lives. We are witnessing the waning of the Baby Boomer generation, whose members are reaching the age of retirement at a rate of 10,000 individuals each day, and the ascension of the Millennial Generation, whose members are reaching the age of majority at roughly the same pace. Members of Gen X and Millennials are on the whole more fluent and comfortable in the emerging digital landscape than their Boomer and Silent Generation elders, even though the clear majority of our elders are adopting cell phone and internet technologies as well. Our congregations remain intentionally multi-generational, and yet our institutional structures maintain models created by the Silent Generation, and struggle to find ways to invite Millennials or even Gen X-ers into congregational leadership. Briefly, drawing from the work of UUA field staff Kimberly Paquette and Renee Ruchotzke, the following are broad descriptions of the generations likely to be represented in our pews.

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19. Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Generations: the History of America's Future, 1584-2069* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1991).



GENERATION NAME	BORN BETWEEN... <sup>20</sup>	WHAT THIS GENERATION SEEKS FROM FAITH COMMUNITY
Silent Generation (archetype: Adaptive/Artist)	1925-1942	This generation was generally overshadowed by their predecessors (the GI Generation) and their successors (the Boomers) and seeks tolerance, inclusivity, and a sense of fairness from congregations. They're builders of institutions and fiercely loyal to them. They are consistent financial stewards. Growing up in troubled times, they believe in the ethic of personal sacrifice. They value being wise elders and the institutional memory of their churches. As this generation ages and steps down from leadership, they would appreciate recognition of their contributions.
Baby Boomers (archetype: Idealist / Prophet)	1943 - 1961	This generation loves big ideas and believes in the power of individuals to create change. Growing up in peace and prosperity, they had freedom in their youth and young adulthood to pursue individual dreams. The majority of Boomers today are living in times of major personal transition, either becoming empty nesters or entering retirement. They are looking for a sense of purpose and willing to take leadership to advance big ideas in service of grand ideals. They would be happy to inspire and mentor the next generation of dreamers and doers.
Gen-X (archetype: Reactive/Nomad)	1962 - 1981	This generation seeks practical solutions to big picture problems. The cohort is about half the size of the Baby Boomers on the one side and the Millennials on the other. They were the first of the "latchkey" children, coming home to empty houses while their parents were at work. Left to fend for themselves in some ways, they are realists and pragmatists. They also highly prize diversity in all areas, from food to friendships, to worship styles.
Millennials (archetype: Civic/Hero)	1982 - 2000	Millennials are not 'joiners' in the traditional sense. They are not joining social clubs or community institutions in any significant numbers. In terms of congregational stewardship, it is noted that the loss of one Silent in a congregation requires the addition of 15 Millennials to make up the same level of financial support over a lifetime. <sup>21</sup> They are coming into their own as a societal force and seek encouragement and guidance of older generations as they ascend to leadership. They are more likely to create their own spaces in church (i.e., beginning young adult social groups) than to join established boards and committees.
Homeland or i-generation (archetype: Adaptive/Artist)	2001 -	Although they spend more time online than other generations, they value connectedness, intimacy and authenticity. They are optimistic, energetic, and driven by their passions. They will be vigorous builders of new institutions – virtual, physical and hybrid – that will shape the rest of the century. They are more likely to commit to congregations that recognize that they have gifts to bring, and that support them in developing their skills and talents in service to the world.

Churches are one of the last places that are multigenerational. Today, we may have as many as 5 generations

20. Different theorists may place the generation breaks in different years, give or take a few years on either end. These dates are meant to be merely illustrative and not definitive.

21. John Roberto, "Faith Formation 2020" (workshop, 2012).

worshipping together. In order to intentionally support the faith formation needs of all of our people, we need to attend to all of these generational differences when planning holistic faith formation ministries.

## **in summary**

There are a number of other important signifiers of dramatic change in the last 50-100 years that could be documented here and analyzed for their impacts on faith formation ministry and other areas of congregational life. Suffice it to say that we find ourselves presented with stark choices. We are in that space Dr. Viktor Frankl wrote of, that space between stimulus and response, inviting the thoughtful use of our freedom and power. We can wait and watch to see what comes next, or we can engage the challenges and changes so that we decide with intention how we will faithfully respond.

## seizing the moment of change

We know that Unitarian Universalism has been experiencing a period of decline in membership, as have our siblings in faith across denominational lines. We know the myriad ways our world is changing and recognize the need to harness and shape the changes. Earlier this year, the professional organizations of our religious educators, musicians and ministers co-authored the Excellence in Shared Ministry report, in which they state, *“We are listening for what new thing Spirit is calling us to do as a people of faith.”*<sup>22</sup> They set forward a vision of collaborative and covenantal shared ministry steeped in mutual respect and enabled by an intentional discipline of sharing deeply in the expertise of each area of ministry. This approach to congregational ministry is also a critical element to a Full Week Faith model.

The fact is that we are too deep in the dense and dim forest of change to know exactly what congregational life and faith formation will look like in the future. The folks sitting next to Martin Luther and John Calvin could not have imagined Shakers, Quakers, speakers-in-tongues, or mega-churches with movie screens. We are still deep in the forest of a societal change of enormous proportions. But we are at least awake in that forest, even if we cannot see *all* of the trees yet. Given what we do know, we can craft a faithful experiment with willing partners and learn some things that may inform how we support our churches and our faith in the near-term, whatever our role.

*We are  
listening  
for what  
new thing  
Spirit is  
calling us  
to do...*

## awake in the forest

The way that we approach faith formation in our congregations has to shift radically, and soon, in order for our ministries to remain relevant to the students, parents, and extended families coming through our doors today, and those we hope to welcome in the future. At the same time we know that institutions and the emotional systems that govern them resist radical change and tend to adapt at roughly the pace, as my grandmother used to say, of molasses rolling uphill in January.

Many of our religious professionals spend significant time reading and thinking about church and big balcony pictures. They come to District and nationally sponsored professional development opportunities through their professional groups - the UU Ministers Association (UUMA) and the Liberal Religious Educators Association (LREDA), and the Unitarian Universalist Musicians Network (UUMN). Some join study groups that convince them that our work must change in response to emerging calls in the world. They are inspired by visions of future congregations full of life, love, Spirit, and joy; places of powerful witness in a wounded world.

They leave conference rooms, book groups and creative conversations alive with possibility, and they return to congregations where a single individual might start a petition for their dismissal if they propose even the most modest of changes.

In some ways, the landscape is not safe for our religious professionals to make bold changes on their own, nor is it appropriate for the changes to come solely from them. Our religious professionals and lay leaders must work together to build and sustain the health of their congregations; they must create a mutually supportive leadership team. Our UUA and District field offices have implemented some good programs to help develop balcony vision among our lay leaders and to give them information, tools, and inspiration to become not only

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22. LREDA/UUMA/UUMN Task Force for Excellence in Shared Ministry, “Final Report,” April 2013, [http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.uuma.org/resource/resmgr/files/lreda-uuma-uumn\\_task\\_force\\_r.pdf](http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.uuma.org/resource/resmgr/files/lreda-uuma-uumn_task_force_r.pdf).

effective stewards but visionary spiritual leaders. UU University<sup>23</sup> attracted hundreds of lay leaders who wanted to delve more deeply into their faith, to understand it more fully, and to meet other lay leaders to compare notes. Some of our Districts hold residential leadership schools that provide an immersive experience for lay leaders coming together in a particular region. The Leap of Faith<sup>24</sup> pilot introduced a structured way for congregations to learn from one another and to imagine ways of being church and doing church work beyond the “way we’ve always done it” by learning about how others have also done it.

The more opportunities we can take to invite laity onto the balcony with us, the better. Lay leaders in congregations often hew to the systems and structures that have served them thus far, and rarely have the opportunity to examine best practices in congregational life beyond their four walls. Lay leaders don’t generally subscribe to Alban Institute, or read emergent church books in their spare time. Most are serving in leadership roles out of love for their church and obligation to their fellow parishioners, though they are often pleased and surprised to find a deep connection between their service and their individual faith journey. Their service is fervent, their decisions deeply considered, their leadership faithful. And their congregational work often happens largely on the margins of lives full of other significant obligations: jobs, which sometimes require travel or continuing education; family members and friends who sometimes struggle and need focused care and attention; and other community service obligations from the PTO, to serving on school boards, from soup kitchen volunteering to legislative activism. It is no wonder that even our most dedicated and long-tenured lay leaders seldom have the time or opportunity to get a balcony view about the shifting role of church in the twenty-first century! By and large, our congregants may not even be aware of the challenges in our current structures, much less feel they have either desire, capacity, or authority to respond to them.

Our religious professionals spend all of their professional lives and much of their remaining waking hours (and many of their dreaming hours, too!) thinking about congregational life and the role of church in people’s lives and in the fabric of their community. Whatever *our* role – judicatory staff, religious professionals, lay leaders – we need to empower our professionals to claim the leadership we need for our faith to adapt to and thrive in the new century. We need to intentionally review our training and formation processes to equip our next generation of leaders with the skills they will need to lead. And we need to support our lay leaders as full partners in the work, whose gifts and commitments are absolutely essential to building a Unitarian Universalism today that will live into the future. We need every gift that each of our people can bring to the service of our shared faith. We can spare no one.

## defining the scope of faith formation

People frequently come into our congregations with a preconceived picture of what Religious Education (and youth ministry) looks like, often based on their own childhood experiences or popular media characterizations. The general expectation is that religious education is what happens to children during Sunday School. Religious professionals can help break through these expectations by sharing a more robust understanding. A fully developed ministry of faith formation can be imagined through the metaphor of a table – and why not? Vigorous, intentional faith formation *is* nourishment for the soul.

Four essential elements of Unitarian Universalist faith formation are the legs supporting the table: Content, Community, Covenant, and Context. In creating the structure of the Full Week Faith model, care has been taken to include opportunities that intentionally address each of these. This is something that our religious

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23. UU University was a specialized leadership development track offered in the days leading up to General Assembly from 2006-2009. For more information, <http://www.uua.org/governance/leadership/uuu/>.

24. *Leap of Faith* is a congregational mentoring program. The pilot ran over the 2011-2012 church year. For more information, <http://www.uua.org/news/newssubmissions/171892.shtml>.

educators and ministers know both instinctively and by education and training. When preparing our congregations to engage in *experiential learning* with a new paradigm, we have a responsibility to help them understand the dimensions of a fully developed ministry of faith formation that serves all generations and also that it is work that we all share.

*... it exists to connect this moment's generation of Unitarian Universalists to our own history, and it equips us to carry Unitarian Universalism into the future.*

**Content:** A critical end of religious education is to transmit our faith's traditions, symbols, theology, history, heroes, values, and practices. This is the curriculum of faith formation programming, predominantly delivered through religious education classes for children, youth, and adults. This is Sunday School – what we know as the largest and most visible manifestation of our faith formation ministries. Unitarian Universalist religious education curricula may include lessons from and appreciation of other faith traditions, and may draw upon the sacred texts of multiple traditions, but it exists to connect this moment's generation of Unitarian Universalists to our own history, and it equips us to carry Unitarian Universalism into the future.

There is flexibility in curricular resources for our congregations to choose the most relevant, based on their unique culture and contextual history. For example, some of our congregations

identify strongly with our Christian roots and this identity may be reflected in their choice of curricula that focus on Biblical literacy. A number of high quality curricular resources and religious education models exist for the customization of curriculum delivery, but the goal of forming the current and future generations of Unitarian Universalists is the consistent focus.

In addition to print and online curricula and structured classes, faith formation content also includes the rituals and milestones we celebrate as a community, such as baby and child dedications, coming of age recognitions, bridging ceremonies, marriages, funerals, and memorial services. The chalice we light during worship, the stories we share of Unitarian Universalist forebears, the plaque on the wall with our congregation's founding statement, these also are pieces of content that support Unitarian Universalist identity and faith formation.

**Community:** *Who are we?*<sup>25</sup> is one of the core questions that healthy congregations engage with and know how to answer. There are several layers of understanding this question from the viewpoint of our faith formation ministries.

- ✓ *Who are we as Unitarian Universalists?* Are we fluent in our theology and strong in our associational affinity? Do we understand ourselves to have siblings in faith around the world?
- ✓ *Who are we as a congregation?* Can we complete the sentence, '*Ours is the church that....?*' What defines our congregational identity and has inspired (or could inspire) our mission and leadership?
- ✓ *Who are we theologically?* Is there a predominant orientation in our congregation? Toward which of our historical and theological ancestors does this draw us? Toward what mission does it direct us?
- ✓ *Who are we as adults in a mix-it-up multigenerational community?* Who are we in huddles of youth? Children? Retirees? Emerging or young adults? What can we offer and seek from those who come before and behind us?
- ✓ *Who are we individually,* as members of this committee, or of that affinity group, or of this classroom? Do I see myself as capable of spiritual leadership? What is my individual role in this time and space?

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25. The core questions, *Who are we?*, *Who are our neighbors?*, *What is our purpose?* are derived from the work of Alice Mann and Gil Rendle in *Holy Conversations* (Alban Institute, 2003).



How can I live into my own responsibilities, share my own gifts and also support my peers in developing and bringing their gifts to our common work?

Some of our faith formation activities will provide participants the opportunity to build connections between and among people of all ages and across the spectrum of our diversities - theological and otherwise. We must be able to see ourselves as the creators of, the beneficiaries of, and most importantly, as proud, participating *members* of this unique and evolving community.

**Covenant:** The Rev. Alice Blair Wesley wrote,

“The root idea of our entire tradition is the covenant. A covenanted free church is a body of individuals who have freely made a profoundly simple promise, a covenant: We pledge faithfully to walk together in the spirit of mutual love. The spirit of love is alone worthy of our religious loyalty, our ultimate loyalty. So, we will meet often to take counsel concerning the ways of love, and we shall yield religious authority solely to our own understanding of what these ways are, as best we can figure them out or learn or remember them, together.”<sup>26</sup>

Covenant is definitional to our ministry of faith formation. It is what makes our enterprise expressly Unitarian Universalist, and not merely the good works and deeds of committed individuals moving in a common direction. Covenant requires us to bring our best selves to our faith community and invites us to a radical practice of forgiveness each time we commit to begin again in love.

*{covenant}  
invites us  
to a  
radical  
practice of  
forgiveness*

In most of our human relationships – with co-workers, peers and neighbors – we strive to follow the Golden Rule, but when others fail to treat us as we would be treated, we can usually exercise the option of disengagement. In a covenantal faith community, we no longer have the easy option of disengagement. We remain obliged by our promise to bring our best selves to stay in relationship with *all* of our siblings in faith; we are not excused from our commitment to remain in right relationship.<sup>27</sup>

**Context:** Where are we and who are our neighbors? A vibrant ministry of faith formation is grounded in, and responsive to, its physical and cultural context. Understanding the dominant culture of your community in relation to your congregation’s theology and identity will help identify a rich faith formation mission. For example, a congregation located in a community or state with anti-gay marriage laws may exercise their spiritual muscles through multigenerational engagement with the Welcoming Congregation program. This good work is not only justice making, it is faith formation.

Being a presence in your community requires congregational leaders to be *present* in the wider community. When religious professionals and laity alike participate in community life, the areas of deep need which are close to home will quickly and naturally become apparent. In this way, faith formation activities arise which respond to real needs and carry the spiritual work of community building beyond the church’s walls and into the world. Being present in your community also allows congregations to identify who are their partners in the work of building a more just world, be they interfaith partners, service agency partners, campus groups, or “spiritual but not religious” individuals seeking personal growth and allies in creating change.

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26. Alice Blair Wesley, “Updating the Cambridge Platform” (lecture, The Lay and Liberal Doctrine of the Church: The Spirit and the Promise of Our Covenant, The Minns Lectures, 2000).

27. This cursory treatment of Covenant in Unitarian Universalism should in no way be interpreted to mean that individual Unitarian Universalists should be encouraged to put themselves in harm’s way when they have experienced physical, emotional or spiritual trauma at the hands of another.

Understanding our context also requires us to examine *all* of our resources – our church buildings and property, the skills and gifts of our staff and lay leadership, our endowments and investments – and to make faithful decisions about how these gifts may be leveraged for our communal faith formation and justice building ministries.

## doing *something*. the full week faith

We have no road map or blueprint for how the future might shape our faith. But we can choose a direction, make some choices and strengthen our position as we stand at the fork of a multiple-choice path. The time is now to choose one way and try it out. *Experilearn*.

Full Week Faith is one proposed direction.

This proposal asks us to carry forward the best of our current Religious Education programming and to let go of those pieces that are unsustainable or no longer serving our families well. It invites religious professionals to reimagine roles and responsibilities and shared ministries. It dares our congregants to put the *Living* into the Living Tradition by supporting one another to *live* as Unitarian Universalists seven days a week, intentionally and interactively, and not just on Sunday mornings.

Consider suspending your traditional every-Sunday-morning religious education program, and engaging in a model of faith formation ministry that is intentionally multigenerational and which will include multiple points of congregational engagement throughout the week. Congregational and associational leaders may together curate resources that support such a shift, so that professional staff will not be required to invest significant hours in creating new material as they experilearn with their congregation, and will be able to focus primarily on community and relationship building.<sup>28</sup> Congregations that take on this adventure should commit to faithfully engaging in the experiment and thoughtfully assessing its impact on the life of the congregation and on the spiritual formation of the individuals and families who participate. Let us willingly, and gratefully and joyfully acknowledge that there are siblings in faith among us who are doing these things already, and to great effect. Thank G-d for them and their power of example! They have much to teach us. The invitation from this Fahs Fellowship project is to imagine our world if such intentional faith-driven lives were more the norm than the notable exception; a world in which *this* is our denominational reputation.

## what is this ‘full week faith?’

Full Week Faith can be described as a mash-up of good old-fashioned family ministry, first century-style mission driven church, and a faithful leveraging of technology and social media to expand the reach and breadth of our ministries. Obviously, on their own, none of these things is at all new or innovative. My hope is that Full Week Faith pulls these strands together in an innovative way and expands the conversations, which have been bubbling among a minority of Unitarian Universalists to a much broader crowd of participants. It brings together the best of our collective thinking about faith formation, both from our ancestors and our contemporary colleagues, and it will benefit enormously by the reflection, adaptation and experilearning of many more partners.

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28. This is already beginning to happen in regional field offices, in the office of ministry and faith development and the resource development office of our UUA, among other places. It is my hope that these curation efforts will be strengthened and more widely publicized and accessible in coming months.

## a focus on family ministry

We know from research that family religiosity can be a powerful predictor for youth to remain religious themselves as they enter adulthood. We know that Unitarian Universalists who come to our churches as adults have had little, if any, exposure to our religious education curricula, theology, or history. We know that a number of writers in the mainstream Christian community identify a focus on Family Ministry as one faithful response to 21<sup>st</sup> century realities.<sup>29</sup> In light of all this, incorporating an intentional strengthening of family ministry seems a faithful direction to lean.

Family Ministry identifies the role of the church as a chief *support* in the spiritual development of congregants of all ages. With particular respect to children and youth, the congregation's role is to provide support and partnership to parents, who own the primary responsibility for their children's spiritual growth. It requires us to live into a belief that our religious education programs are *supplemental* faith formation programs and not intended to be the sole system of delivery. Changing the Sunday School-centric model of religious education creates space for our churches and religious professionals to intentionally and explicitly equip parents to be their children's first and most consistent religious educators all week long.

In Unitarian Universalist congregations, we routinely make commitments to share in the growth and development of children and families in our baby dedication and child naming ceremonies. Full Week Faith challenges us to live into those covenants, and discern our role in equipping parents to be religious educators in their homes. It invites congregants of all ages to be active participants in their own faith formation journeys, and to be both witness and support to their siblings in the pews. Encouraging the practice of a Full Week Faith helps deepen and solidify religious identity between worship times, and invites congregations to lower their church's walls and to explore relevance and presence in the places where our people live, work, and learn.

## mission driven church

Some first century church practices and characteristics may serve our contemporary congregations quite well as we move forward into an uncertain future. Here are some of those characteristics, and how those principles apply as part of a Full Week Faith approach to our faith formation ministries.

One of the characteristics of the first century church was a first-hand experience of transformational ministry. Some of those church leaders actually witnessed Jesus' ministry, or perhaps knew someone who had. Those stories of witness to the transformational power of acts of faith were incredibly powerful. We have those stories too. Not stories of changing water to wine, no, but stories of the transformative power of love in action; powerful stories of the saving Grace of Unitarian Universalism. Part of the work of religious professionals in a Full Week Faith paradigm is to find ways to lift up those stories not only as part of a Sunday School lesson, but through a variety of means, in varied places and platforms.

The early church met in small groups, in intimate gatherings in homes where members were comfortable and connected as family. Providing opportunities to know one another deeply is one of the hallmarks of our Small Group Ministry programs, whose materials have been developed to be used across generations. Being part of a small congregation, or intentionally creating small touch groups within a larger congregation, enables us to

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29. Some examples of this are John Roberto's *Faith Formation 2020* and his companion website <http://www.21stcenturyfaithformation.com>; *Intergenerational Faith Formation* by Mariette Martineau, Joan Weber, and Leif Kehrwald; Reggie Joiner's *Think Orange* books and complementary web-based resources and conferences; and *Christian Faith Formation and Education in the United Church of Christ* (United Church of Christ, 2012), <http://uccfiles.com/pdf/UCCChristianFaithFormationandEducationReport.pdf>.

hold each other closely in support, accountability, and fidelity to our spiritual growth.

First century church leaders knew exactly what their call was – to go forth and spread the Good News. For Full Week Faith to be most effective in our congregations, each of our churches must be able to identify their call as well. In their book, *Holy Conversations*, Alice Mann and Gil Rendle aver that healthy congregations will be able to answer three questions: *Who are we? What is our purpose? Who are our neighbors?* Knowing your congregational mission is essential to faith formation ministries. Each of our churches will have a unique answer to these questions. Out of their engagement with these questions will emerge with more clarity what that congregation's call in the world might be. From there, our religious educators can choose appropriate curricular materials and the entire staff team and lay leadership can lead the congregation in identifying its gifts and bringing them to the world. Connection to Spirit, one another, and our own faith journeys will be deepened.

Then, as now, people experience a deep craving for intimacy, authenticity, and for the opportunity to be of service. Our people today are yearning to make a difference, to be part of something that *matters*. There are myriad ways that one may choose to enact those yearnings. Our faith offers opportunities to create beloved community while we grow as moral and spiritual beings. Our faith has a saving theology and stories that this world needs. There are many voices clamoring to be heard out there in the world, and we must not be shy about adding our own if we hope to not only survive, but thrive; to be faithful to our ancestors and relevant to those who will take up and light the chalice for generations yet unborn. We, too, have Good News to share.

## **faithfully leveraging technology**

Today's technology allows us to make our social networks more visible, and gives us access to networks we might not otherwise have. Social media has tremendous potential to deepen connections and to magnify ministries, but it is important to engage these tools *faithfully*, to remember that those of our siblings who do not have access to technology, either by circumstance or by choice, must not be left behind.

Millions of people around the country access social media sites every day, and they do so at least in part out of the deep human craving to see and be seen; to know and be known. Social media technology allows loved ones separated by long distances to be in one another's company again. It enables circles of love and support in times of a health crisis. It crowdsources funds for everything from heritage trips, to justice projects, to building repairs. It provides a platform for our message of love and faith to be part of our people's everyday lives. It lowers our congregation's walls and invites others in. It democratizes our experience of faith and anoints us each to be messengers of a saving and transcendent Love.

Living with intention as a family of faith, learning to seek and accept the mentoring of generations both before us and behind, meeting the world in all its hurt and need and potential for transformation out where it lives: these are the values served by Full Week Faith.

## *“If history gave us nothing, wherein our roots and confidence?”*

~Angus H. MacLean

There are critical understandings about our ministry of Religious Education and Faith Formation from leaders past and present that remain vital, relevant, and worthy of carrying forward in our new cultural and religious context. Core to the development of Full Week Faith are Sophia Lyon Fahs’ call to experience, and Angus MacLean’s observation that our method is our message.

Sophia Fahs was a proponent of experiential learning. She helped shape our current understanding that children are quite capable of theological reflection and spiritual practices – ideas that were not at all commonly held in the early years of her work. A child’s natural curiosity and wonder, she felt, are essential tools for the experience of transcendence and the human work of meaning-making. Our contemporary Religious Education programs that encourage children to express their spiritual selves and inspire our youth to write credo statements are the clear inheritors of her stubborn commitment to this belief. It was worth noting that in her time, her work was considered experimental and even quite radical.

Angus MacLean, in his noted address before the Universalist Sabbath School Union in 1951, noted that “although we have difficulty in being certain about the nature of man or God, or in even finding grounds for hope for the peace of the world, we have discovered assured ways of addressing ourselves to life, and these should be recognized as being at the very heart of our religion, and of our religious education efforts.”<sup>30</sup> How true those words still are. MacLean claimed in that address that *our method is our message*, asserting, “the effective method of teaching values is itself the living exercise of such values.”<sup>31</sup> It is with some confidence then, that Full Week Faith proposes that a worthy and effective way to share and grow our faith is to *live* our faith in the world. Every day. Every place. Whatever our age and circumstance.

## **families are the first beyond<sup>32</sup>**

Early in 2012, UUA President the Rev. Peter Morales published a white paper called *Congregations and Beyond*,<sup>33</sup> in which he described a two-prong strategy for the UUA to grow Unitarian Universalism in the 21st century by 1) strengthening congregational health, and 2) creating UU alternatives to congregations by using third spaces. Places beyond traditional congregations include online ministries, like the reinvigorated *Quest For Meaning* (offered through the Church of the Larger Fellowship), as well as ‘pop-up’ ministries pioneered by The Sanctuary in places like Washington and Boston, and other non-traditional emerging expressions of our faith in the world.

Following Rev. Morales’ work, UUA Growth Specialist the Rev. Tandi Rogers posited that “family is the first beyond,” the first people among whom we practice what it means to be human. Christian family ministry author Reggie Joiner would agree. In his book, *Think Orange*, he notes that churches alone only have roughly 40 hours of opportunity in a given year to impact the spiritual growth and development of children and youth. Parents and families, by contrast, have over 3,000 hours a year in which they might influence their children’s spiritual development, and therefore, our ministries call us to a deeper more intentional partnership between

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30. Angus H. MacLean “The Method Is the Message,” Pacific Unitarian Universalist, November 13, 2006, [http://pacificuu.org/publ/univ/education/maclean\\_method\\_message.html](http://pacificuu.org/publ/univ/education/maclean_method_message.html).

31. op. cit.

32. Tandi Rogers, “Curious Facebook Phenomena,” Growing Unitarian Universalism, November 19, 2012, <http://growinguu.blogspot.com/2012/11/curious-facebook-phenomena-a-thanksgiving-assignment/>.

33. “Congregations And Beyond,” Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, April 27, 2013, <http://www.uua.org/uuagovernance/officers/president/morales/192145.shtml/>.

church and home.

We routinely tell parents in our congregations that they are their children's first and most important religious educators, but are we doing as well as we could to equip them to embrace that role? Full Week Faith includes resources to equip parents and other adults to play an active role in the faith formation of children and youth. By removing Sunday School as the central vehicle for faith formation, we make room to bring the family closer to the center of a faith formation ministry that remains congregationally connected. Additionally, it will be alive in homes, and neighborhoods, and dance recitals, and all the other places our people spend their non-Sunday days. This reorientation carries a hope that our congregants of all ages will find ways to live out their faith all week long. A hope for our people to experience deepened connection to Spirit; stronger congregational and associational identity. Hope that we will find more seekers to share our good works; hope that our children and youth will carry us into the future; hope that an enlarged, enriched, and energized Unitarian Universalism is alive, awake, and acting in the world in ever more visible ways.

## keyword: sustainability

We would do well to examine what we currently offer that has served us well, and discern what limitations in our current offerings might be undermining a more vital ministry of faith formation in the twenty-first century. We should do this on both the micro and macro level. We can – I think we must – engage this conversation denominationally. Each of our congregations can identify their own unique RE-related events or traditions that they believe are integral to their congregation's identity. Those contextually significant gifts should be incorporated into any proposed experilearn. At the same time, we must acknowledge the realistic capacity of our religious professionals. They cannot faithfully take on new things without the understanding that there will be a commensurate freeing up in other areas of responsibility.

Harvard professor Ron Heifetz has written extensively on adaptive leadership. When working within emotional systems like congregations to tackle adaptive challenges, Heifetz advises leaders to manage the size of the proposed change.<sup>34</sup> To attempt to change an entire system all at once is to set the stage for mutiny and failure. Case in point, those of us of a certain age will remember when the Coca Cola company announced that it would reformulate its popular flagship soda and that very week ceased production of the original Coke formula in favor of what came to be known as "New Coke." The attempt to throw out 100% of the old and familiar and replace it with something completely new proved to be one of the biggest business debacles of the latter half of the century.<sup>35</sup>

*Unitarian  
Universalism  
will not survive  
if we pin all  
our hopes on  
Sunday  
mornings...*

While Full Week Faith proposes to re-envision our faith formation ministries so that Sunday mornings are not in the *center* and Religious Education classes are not at the *core*, it is by no means a call to close our doors on Sunday mornings altogether. We will continue to meet on Sunday mornings for worship. We will continue to provide opportunities for people of all ages to learn and connect with others of their own ages and life stages – just not *only* on Sunday mornings. Full Week Faith invites us to *begin* making a cultural shift away from congregational thinking that faith formation happens only (or primarily) on Sundays and that religious education happens only (or primarily) in Sunday School. It means taking a portion of our

34. Ronald A. Heifetz, Marty Linsky, and Alexander Grashow, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2009).

35. "New Coke," Wikipedia, September 29, 2013, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New\\_Coke](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Coke).

resources – both financial, and staff, and volunteer time – away from planning and implementing Sunday activities and redirecting them to building community, connections, and intentional practices on each of the other days of the week. This means helping our congregants understand the imperative call we feel to live our faith in the world as it is evolving. Our theology holds strengths and gifts essential to navigating our complex and quickly changing world, but Unitarian Universalism will not survive if we pin all our hopes on Sunday mornings.

### **The Four Strands of Tapestry**

When the UUA launched its search for authors for the adult Tapestry of Faith curriculum, the call described a “series of programs woven around four strands: Unitarian Universalist identity development, faith development, ethical development, and spiritual development.”<sup>36</sup> We now have excellent curricular resources for child, youth, and adult religious education experiences, and even some that are well suited, and indeed designed, to serve multiple generations learning together. Tapestry of Faith provides an excellent resource for a Full Week Faith approach.

*“If the kingdom of God had departments, we’d want to work in research and development.”<sup>37</sup>*

## **choosing to experilearn**

For the practical application of Full Week Faith, congregations should consider their relative health, the working relationship among paid staff and between staff and lay leaders, and the laity’s willingness to be open to an experiment of this scale in their congregational life. These congregations will have some shared core qualities. Internal discernment and/or conversations with professional colleagues or UUA regional staff may help assess a congregation’s tolerance for change and the extent to which the enthusiasm for trying something new may counterbalance any resistance that inevitably accompanies an experiment of this scale. In short, how might you know if your congregation might be part of the Unitarian Universalist division of God’s department of research and development?

The bullet points below represent a (not exhaustive) list of some of the core qualities a congregation might exhibit or cultivate before undertaking a significant shift in ministry:

### **shared qualities for experilearning congregations**

- Staff regularly engages in spiritual practice together, has a current staff covenant, and intentionally embraces collaborative practices.
- Religious professionals exhibit a commitment to continuing education and at least some exposure to the

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36. “Tapestry of Faith,” Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, <http://archive.uua.org/re/other/tapestry.html>.

37. Mark Betterson, as quoted by Amy O’Leary, “Building Congregations Around Art Galleries and Cafes as Spirituality Wanes,” *New York Times*, December 29, 2012, [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/30/us/new-churches-focus-on-building-a-community-life.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/30/us/new-churches-focus-on-building-a-community-life.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

ideas around Faith Formation 2020, and other 21st century church theory.

- The congregation values spiritual depth, healthy governance and communication practices.
- Lay leaders exhibit commitment to attending leadership schools, General Assembly, or other District learning and leadership opportunities.
- There is a sense of partnership and shared leadership between the religious professionals and lay leaders.
- The congregation has at least a website and Facebook page, and safe congregations policies that extend congregational accountability in virtual as well as physical space.
- There have been positive experiences of intentional multigenerational worship.

### **return on community vs. return on investment**

Every good experiment has articulated goals and a way to assess and evaluate its relative success. If ‘growth’ is one desired outcome in undertaking an experiment, congregations should think carefully about how to assess and evaluate measures of growth in spiritual depth, or growth in congregational and associational connections, and not just think about growth in terms of attendance numbers. Thinking about the results the congregation hopes to see in the short run, as well as mid-term and long-term goals, will help them craft good metrics to measure the impact of their work. In her book, *Holy Clarity*, Sarah Drummond quotes evaluation experts warning, “Do not assume that because your work is urgent or even sacred that you do not need to provide evidence of competence or effectiveness. You do.”<sup>38</sup> It may be harder to develop tools to measure a strong return on community, as opposed to a fiduciary return on investment, but it is not impossible. If a shift to a Full Week Faith paradigm is to be effective, we will need to have barometers to measure our expectations and how nearly we are achieving what we hope to do. Both quantitative and qualitative measures matter. Collect the data you can count – the number of congregants attending worship or family potluck and homework help nights. Also account for the stories. Talk with people about how they are carrying our faith with them to work and school and the myriad other places life takes them. What from your ministry goes with them when they travel outside your church walls? What do they wish they had? These, also, are valuable data points.

### **a well grounded partnership**

Congregations considering shifting their faith formation ministries away from the Sunday School only model towards a Full Week Faith, should provide some trainings on systems theory with their lay leadership to help them recognize unhealthy responses that sometimes accompany change. Remember that when people resist change, it is actually *loss* that they are grieving, and that loss may be real or perceived. There are a couple strategies that can help religious professionals and lay partners prepare for and perhaps head off some of that resistance.

Understand how innovation grows in human systems. Sociologist Everett Rogers developed a model to describe how innovation is adopted. The model has been used to describe all kinds of cultural shifts and adaptations in a variety of fields. It has more recently been adapted by Patrick Scriven to describe how innovations are best adopted in congregational settings.<sup>39</sup> The model suggests that significant innovations in congregational life require the collaborative support and promotion of both lay and clerical leadership.

Briefly described, Rogers’ description of the diffusion of innovation identifies a small percent of the population as innovators – he puts this at about 2½% of the population. Innovators have the big, bright, fresh,

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38. Marcia Festen and Marianne Philbin, *Level Best* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), quoted in Sarah B. Drummond *Holy Clarity* (Herndon: Alban Institute, 2009), 4.

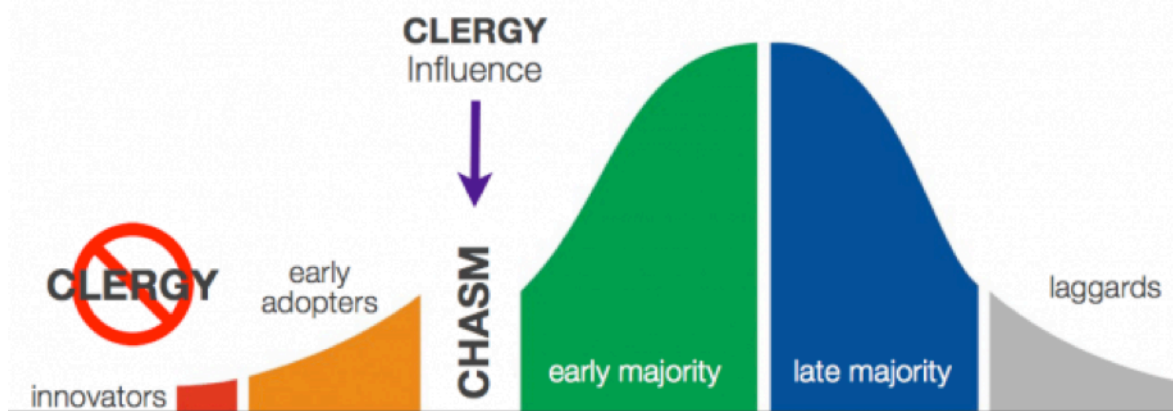
39. Patrick Scriven, “The Church Needs More Innovative Pastors Like MTV Needs More Twerking\*,” *The News Blog of the Pacific Northwest Conference of The United Methodist Church*, Pacific Northwest Conference, August 28, 2013, <http://www.pnwumc.org/news/the-church-needs-more-innovative-pastors-like-mtv-needs-more-twerking/>.



out of the box ideas – think of the first people to imagine phones you could actually walk or drive around with.

The next group is made up of early adopters – people who see the bright new shiny idea and decide they want in! Early Adopters account for about 13½% of a sample group. These are the folks who walked around with mobile phones the size of shoe boxes, back in the day. Their early support of the innovation creates excitement for it and directs resources toward it that makes the innovation stronger and better.

Rogers describes the large middle group broadly as early majority and late majority adopters; those who to a varying degree hang back and jump on the bandwagon after a sufficient number of others have proven it is safe to jump. Rogers named the final group ‘laggards,’ which is not a name I would use in a faith setting. Despite the somewhat negative connotation, the model merely suggests that there will be some number in any population that does not adopt the innovation. There will always be those holdouts who will proudly say they won’t have a computer in their house, or they will never get a cell phone. There will always be some people who will not adopt whatever innovation is presented, and yet they still remain part of our communities. We just have to call them on their landline or knock on the door to say hello.



This particular illustration has been specifically adapted to illustrate how innovations take hold in congregations. While it has not been subjected to the rigorous testing of Rogers’ original model, it suggests that innovation is more likely to thrive when it is not seen as being imported to the system by the minister or other religious professional. When the innovators are already part of the church family, the innovation is more likely to be taken up by their close friend and family networks within the congregation. The religious professionals in the building have an important role to play in identifying the innovators and partnering with them to shape appropriate experiments, and also in lending their enthusiasm and authority in support of the innovation. Religious professionals can encourage early majority adopters to get on board. Congregational innovations like a shift in paradigm to a Full Week Faith model require the early selection of innovative partners who can craft a congregationally specific model with the highest chance of success. Religious professionals seeking to make change in congregational ministries would do well to know who their innovators and early adopters might be before they bring ideas to a wider congregational audience.

### **strategic disappointment**

Together with lay partners, imagine what would be essential to your congregation’s ministry of faith formation if you were creating it from scratch today. What is it that speaks to and serves your church’s families best today? What do they most wish they had that you don’t presently offer? What seems to be a fading ministry, or a habit born of long ago generations? The congregation will need to let go of some of what is currently expected on Sundays in order to free up time, energy and resources to support faith formation on the other six

days of the week. What you keep should align with your church's mission and help you answer the *Who are we?* and *What is our purpose?* questions.

Keep the baby, and the tub, even if you do end up tossing out some of the bath water. Shifting the centrality of Sunday School in your faith formation ministry does not mean eliminating Sunday School and religious education classes altogether. It may mean holding 2 Sunday School sessions a month instead of 4. It may mean trying Wednesday evening faith formation potlucks and Religious Education. It may mean offering some curriculum in a hybrid model using both face-to-face and online platforms. Whatever it might look like, someone will undoubtedly hear "*You are getting rid of something I love(d).*"

Whatever gets decided about which pieces of your current ministry will be retired with grace and gratitude to make room for something new, know that someone will notice, and feelings may be hurt. The Rev. Tandi Rogers, of our UUA's office of Growth Strategies recounts her time serving as Interim Director for the Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries. She knew when she took the job that she could not continue to run all of the programs the office ran in a single year **and** have time and space to do the Interim work of preparing the office for new directions and new leadership. She made some decisions about what she would *not* do that year, and consulted with her supervisor, one of our UUA's vice presidents, to learn who would be most deeply upset by her decisions. She then made personal calls to each one of those stakeholders, and very forthrightly told them, "I have made a decision to strategically disappoint you this year." She laid out her well- discerned reasons for not running their beloved program. She acknowledged their likely disappointment and sense of loss. She gave them space to share with her how meaningful those programs had been to them personally and grieve what they would miss. She invited them to remain connected to see what would come of the new directions.

Know who it is in your congregation who will likely be most upset by the loss of long-held traditions and expectations. A personal conversation like Rev. Tandi's "strategic disappointment" calls could go a long way to defusing any behind the scenes resistance to the change. More importantly, it affirms the congregation's commitment to travel together, leaving nobody behind, even in times when things are changing. It opens space for pastoral response to sadness and uncertainty and opens possibilities for unexpected partnerships.

## full week faith: a sample week

Our contemporary challenge is to provide examples and opportunities for our people to bring the learnings and insights they share in more traditional religious education settings to the rest of their weeks; to integrate their minds, bodies and spirits in work as well as worship, in soccer playing as well as Spirit Play-ing. How is Unitarian Universalism relevant to where I shop or how I pack my school lunches? How can my faith help me navigate my teen's – or my own – social media use? What lessons from Tapestry of Faith follow me into the boardroom or behind the cash register at work? How might I speak to my cousins at the upcoming family wedding if I imagined they were part of my covenant group? Professional religious educators and ministers occupy an exciting role akin to midwifery, easing our people into self-realization as people of faith, not just members of congregations. What follows are some concrete examples of what a Full Week Faith might look like in the week of a real congregation.

### SUNDAY

Multigenerational worship on the theme of “Being Home/Belonging.” The responsive reading this morning has a simple response – “I belong here. You belong here. We all belong together.” This is a theme that will be revisited throughout the month.

There is a video meditation, “Wholetime in America,”<sup>40</sup> created by UU seminarians, available on YouTube, also running on a loop during coffee hour, and shared with the Youth Group in the evening. Before leaving the church on Sunday, the Minister will post a link to the video on the congregational Facebook page, with a brief pastoral message inviting members to reflect on a particular question inspired by the video or the morning worship service for members and friends unable to attend.

After the multigen worship, the DRE leads a one-room schoolhouse activity for children and tweens that reinforces the message of belonging. Before leaving on Sunday, he communicates with the Youth Advisors. Tonight, the Youth Group will be asked to design a Wayside Pulpit message on the theme “We are all loved beyond belief!”

The Chair of the RE committee writes an email that will go out to the Faith Formation listserv with a suggested weekly mealtime Grace that families are invited to practice together this week. He uses a subject line that references “Love Beyond Belief!” from the Wholetime in America video, and includes a link to find it online, for those families who could not be at church this morning.

40. theradicalspirit “Wholetime in America” (video), Feb 14, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIhZocknKuM>

# MONDAY

	The Administrator checks the church's Facebook page for the message the Minister posted after church yesterday. She makes sure to "like" all the responses from congregants. If there are questions or comments from the Facebook page that might need follow up, she'll make a note for the Minister, pastoral team, or board president.
	The Music Director posts a link on the church Facebook page and website to a favorite recording of one of the pieces she played on Sunday, with a brief reflection about why it inspires the stirrings of her heart, and its connection to the theme of belonging.
	The Music Director sends an audio link to the Minister and DRE who will be at the church potluck tomorrow night. It's a simple to teach hymn that members of all ages can learn pretty quickly and connects to this month's ministry theme.

# TUESDAY

	The social justice committee has asked the local library for recommendations and agrees to use the children's book Who Belongs Here as their recommended source of study and reflection. It connects to the worship theme and also to our UUA's immigration justice work.
	The pastoral care team has followed up appropriately with questions and concerns on the church's Facebook page and left the Minister a message about what they learned.
	The Administrator has posted the Sunday sermon on the church website and updated the service times on Yelp. She's also checked into Foursquare. She's aiming for Mayor of the church this week.

# WEDNESDAY

	The Minister and DRE attend the weekly Family & Friends Pizza & Potluck faith formation event from 5:30 – 7:30. The church buys pizza, and families bring what/if they can. All ages together say grace, using the words some of them practiced yesterday at home. After dinner, youth and young adult tutors help younger children with homework. The Minister shares a story on the monthly theme from Tapestry of Faith with the preschoolers.
	After dinner, the DRE leads a conversation with adults, sharing a reading or poem inviting people to reflect on the first time they felt they truly belonged to this faith community. What changed for them at that moment? How might they invite newcomers to experience that same sense of belonging? How can we share the blessings of belonging in the world?
	The Parenting on Purpose group, which pairs young parents with grandparents, takes some time over dinner to talk about the pitfalls and the privileges of raising UU children, as UU parents. Tonight’s conversation includes cutting sandwiches into chalice shapes and sending your kid to the bus stop with one of the seven principles instead of “Have a nice day!”

# THURSDAY

	The Minister writes a brief blog post (2-3 paragraphs) for the church website (and provides a link to it on the church’s Facebook page) describing an interaction at last night’s potluck. It ends with a reflection question or an idea for sharing Spirit’s love at work, school, or home.
	The Music Director has a short day at the office today, because it’s Third Thursday, when a small but dedicated group of young adults meets for appetizers after work for fellowship and some deep conversation to go with the deep fried mozzarella sticks. The professional staff rotate their visits. Tonight, they are talking about Music and Meaning, and whether they can in good conscience go to the concert of an artist who has been accused of domestic violence.
	The DRE sends out a church wide email with a reminder that this coming Sunday, worship will include the Blessing of the Backpacks. Children, youth, and adult members who are school teachers are encouraged to bring their school backpacks to church. The Minister and DRE will share a blessing and the community will lay on hands to embody the congregation’s commitment to support each other in learning together (third and fourth principles), and to being there for each other when we need help with homework – or with anything else.

# FRIDAY

	In addition to all the usual Friday worship prep, the Administrator double checks the church website and Facebook pages for the correct sermon title. He also posts the hymns for those who like to look at their home hymnals before church.
	This is a big football town. Every Friday night in the fall, the Minister, DRE, and Music Director bring their hot chocolate thermos and sit in the stands rooting for, well, everybody. Sometimes parents of the players sit with them. Other nights, members of the youth group stop by the bleachers and visit during a break in the action.

# SATURDAY

	The Helper Elves – which includes a college student, two parents, and one of their preschool daughters – come to the church to put together the art and snack supplies for Sunday School teachers. They do this on the 1st and 3rd Saturdays of each month, the weekends when formal RE classes are held. They love being able to serve the RE program in some way and are grateful it is not through teaching – something none of the adults feel called to or particularly comfortable doing.
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This is merely an example of what a Full Week Faith framework might look like. It is intended to be descriptive and not prescriptive. It is meant to give examples of faith formation activities that can happen outside of classrooms. There is attention to the four legs of faith formation – curriculum, community, covenant and context – and that there is a role for both lay and professional leadership.

The Appendix of this paper contains several examples of Full Week Faith style activities that can be brought back to your congregation and implemented with very little disruption into existing programs. Along with a description of each activity is the faith formation goal that is being served; the role of the religious professional in implementing the activity; suggestions for parents to take the activity home; and ways the congregation might choose to take it further. They are examples of the kinds of resources, which might one day be curated and shared much more broadly across the denomination.

# make glorious mistakes

The essence of the Full Week Faith *experilearn* is to identify good, reasonable, and faithful experiments in changing the “way we’ve always done things,” with a commitment to learning from them, whatever the outcome. In that spirit, and in the spirit of our radical ancestor Sophia Lyon Fahs, participating congregations will be reminded of this good advice from the author Neil Gaiman:

“I hope that in this year to come, you make mistakes. Because if you are making mistakes, then you are making new things, trying new things, learning, living, pushing yourself, changing yourself, changing your world. You're doing things you've never done before, and more importantly, you're Doing Something. So that's my wish for you, and all of us, and my wish for myself. Make New Mistakes. Make glorious, amazing mistakes. Make mistakes nobody's ever made before. Don't freeze, don't stop, don't worry that it isn't good enough, or it isn't perfect, whatever it is: art, or love, or work or family or life. Whatever it is you're scared of doing, Do it. Make your mistakes, next year and forever.”<sup>41</sup>

Amen.

May our ministries be abundantly blessed.

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41. Neil Gaiman, “My New Year Wish,” *Neil Gaiman's Journal* (blog), December 31, 2011, <http://journal.neilgaiman.com/2011/12/my-new-year-wish.html>.

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