

Full Week Faith

STUDY GUIDE

The following study guide is designed for religious educators to use to spark conversations with LREDA colleagues, open dialogues with the ministers, musicians, and youth directors they may serve alongside, and invite parents and other congregants to begin intentional conversations about the shape of their faith formation ministries in the 21st century. This study guide was authored by Mark Bernstein, the Regional Consultant for Growth Development in the Central Eastern Regional Group of the UUA (CERG); by Patricia Infante, the Regional Consultant for Faith Development, also serving in the CERG District; and Mr. Barb Greve, Interim Director of Religious Education.

General Study Questions

Many congregations are struggling to understand why their religious education attendance has dropped and are wondering how they can get more families to come to church.

What are the perceived obstacles in your congregation to greater or consistent attendance in religious education classes and activities? (What are the stories being told in your congregation about why religious education attendance isn't more consistent?)

The paper asserts that the goal of religious education is to “form the current and future generation of Unitarian Universalists.”

How does this goal relate to the teaching and practices in your congregation's Religious Education program? How would you articulate your congregation's goal in this area?

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.

What steps does your congregation need to take in order to effect this cultural shift? What resources need to be brought to bear? What should be the role of leadership in this process?

The paper lists several shared qualities that experiential learning congregations need to possess. They include: staff that have a covenant and intentionally embrace collaborative practices; religious professionals that exhibit a commitment to continuing education and ideas around Faith Formation 2020, and other 21st century church theory; a congregation that values spiritual depth, healthy governance and communication practices; lay leaders that exhibit commitment to attending leadership schools, General Assembly, or other District learning and leadership opportunities; a sense of partnership and shared leadership between religious professionals and lay leaders; website and Facebook page and safe congregation policies; and positive experiences of intentional multigenerational worship.

How does your congregation rate on each of these qualities? What is the congregation doing well? In which areas is there a need for greater attention?

Shifting to a Full Week Faith model requires innovators and early adopters who can maximize the chances of a successful change to this new paradigm.

Who are the innovators and early adopters in your congregation? How do you enroll them in this new model?

The paper offers some concrete examples of what a Full Week Faith might look like, incorporating the four legs of faith formation – curriculum, community, covenant and context.

Which activities resonate for you in your congregation? What might a Full Week Faith look like in the week of your congregation?

Author Neil Gaiman encourages us to make glorious, amazing mistakes.

How willing is your congregation to make mistakes as you try new things? What might be holding you back?

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.

What might you grieve as changes are made to your program? What might your congregation grieve as changes are made? Conversely, what might you celebrate as changes are made to your program? What might your congregation celebrate as changes are made?

Study Questions for Peer-to-Peer DRE Conversations

If I wanted to implement Full Week Faith in my congregation, who are the partners and allies that I need to reach out to?

My congregation operates in rented space with limited opportunities to connect in person beyond Sunday. Can you help me imagine how this program might work in my situation?

How do I build enthusiasm for Full Week Faith in a congregation rife with volunteers weary of anything new?

Are there ways the cluster can work together to create opportunities beyond Sunday? What are some possible ways we can use technology for connection and curation?

My congregation is lay-led. Can you help me imagine a process for introducing the idea to a group that doesn't have a deep understanding of faith formation concepts? Where would you begin?

Study Questions for a Ministry Team

How does a program like Full Week Faith fit into the bigger picture of our faith development program?

What networks already exist in our congregational structure? What new networks need to be encouraged and nurtured?

Who are the key leaders/stakeholders we want to include in this conversation? Who are our “innovators” and “early adopters?”

What expertise is needed and what piece of the puzzle does each of us bring?

Will the congregation be receptive to the concept of “experilearn?” What is the tolerance for failure?

Study Questions for Staff / Lay Leadership Teams

What are the resources we already have that can be leveraged to bring Full Faith Week to our congregation? What other resources will we need?

How receptive is the congregation’s culture to the concept of “experilearn?” How much time are we willing to give to this process of “learning by doing?”

What are the strengths we can leverage to support the spiritual development of all ages? What ages are we best equipped to support right now?

What are we willing to let go of to make room for Full Week Faith?

How would the roles of the DRE and RE leaders/committee change if we adopted Full Week Faith?