

**Notes from the Prairie Star District Lifespan Faith Development Conference
Windom, MN
May, 2005**

Thursday evening: Prairie Star District Visioning

- This conference was called to prepare for changes originating at the UUA; changes that will be dictating substantial rethinking of both religious education and church structural dynamics
- Creating Lifelong Unitarian Universalists is Phil Lund's priority for the Prairie Star District.
- Support for the new vision from the UUA for congregations will come from the district offices.
- Helping families raise lifelong UUs is another deeply important factor.
- Relationships across peer groups and generations rather than raw knowledge is the touchstone of lifespan faith development program.
- This idea of lifespan faith development is not just another job for the religious education director of a church. It's very important to keep this in mind.
- Goal: keep 1/2 of UU children and youth within the faith
- Your faith at 13 will predict your faith in adulthood. If 90% of our UU congregation's membership came from outside the UU tradition, then we must admit that *a huge percentage of UU faith development takes place outside of the church!* This is why families, and ready resources for those families, must take center stage in the RE office.

Friday Morning: Faith Development

- Keep broader definitions of faith in mind. See B. Andrew's article in the Essex Conversations.
- Living tradition is also cumulative tradition
- Faith is an orientation toward reality
- Faith might be seen as a religious identity as well as a spiritual (personal, perceptual) orientation
- Individualism is basic idolatry. Individuality must work by negotiating with community. Our seventh principal calls us to this. All faiths point to the importance of community. Even the transcendentalists didn't work in a vacuum
- Faith is also the touchstone for social action: the why and the motivation
- It is incredibly important to support all the little bumps and joys of all our members, no matter their ages.
- The average age of UUs: 53. We ARE the target market for LL Bean catalogs!
- Ageism runs against the idea of beloved community
- Within 15 minutes of stepping through church doors, newcomers know if they feel at ease and if they will return again.
- A call for stewards rather than leaders
- Credo: What you set your heart to.
- COA programs coming from UUA eventually. All will be free on the web (no more buying expensive books) Work has started to "speed up" this practice at a district level.
- Suggest the book: Believe, Belong, Be Competent for youth
- Young adult OWL being prepared at UUA
- Theologically Welcoming Congregations...can we develop this? How about an All-Ages Welcoming Congregation? What would these work-shops, guidelines or materials look like?
- Although the new curriculum will cost around \$1M, that amounts to about \$7.00 per person now in the UUA. Watch for special fund raisers in the coming year to support the development of new UU curriculum.
- Lifespan faith development-friendly churches will:
 1. put emphasis on community and relationships,
 2. be family friendly,
 3. be growth-intentional (in terms of personal growth articulation and actions that arise from this understanding),
 4. focused and intentional about outcomes in the process.
- The language that should be used is: "60% of our congregations will be involved with social justice"

- rather than “we will be involved with social justice”. Clear goals and delineate how to reach them.
- Be clear about standards: did you know the Unitarian Church of Lincoln actually has standards for our education program?
 - Minister must be involved with the children and youth when thinking about lifespan religious education so these populations feel included in the whole life of the church.
 - Consider small group ministries with children. It’s being used for RE some churches!

How do you “market” Lifespan Faith Development to congregations?

- through sermons
- use the basic idea of lifespan faith development as a small group ministry focus topic
- credo/spiritual autobiographies that ask “where are you/we headed?”
- retreats focused on faith development
- newsletter and webpage editorials
- good ole’ fashioned word of mouth

Notes and Tools

- an on-line class could be used to create a district-wide discussion about LFD
- Both YAC (tentatively) and CORE are being phased out of the district program
- Special edition of Adult Our Whole Lives for young adults is being crafted at the national level
- Bad Art Nights: intergenerational time to come and make art.
- Can Ed Council chairs/committees be actually designated as LFD coordinators? Then the position would keep asking the question: what does this committee, this activity have to do with faith development? What activities or other resources can speak to faith development. What an amazing position this could be!