

How We Do What We Do in Religious Education

Some Thoughts on Possible Models and Structures
For Programs in Unitarian Universalist Congregations
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Twenty-five years ago when I began this work, I thought there was a real right way to do religious education, and that I knew what it was and how to do it. I no longer believe that to be true. I have learned that despite the similarities in our congregations, there are differences as well, and these differences influence our programming. I have learned, too, that while there is broad general agreement among religious educators on the philosophy which guides us in our work, there is not a consensus that one model is the right one, nor that there need be.

Lively discussions on the Unitarian Universalist Association's (UUA) electronic forum for religious educators, the *Reach-List*, in January and February of 2003 indicate a growing interest in and concern about the concept of religious education models. Margaret Levine Young has established a web page on alternative methods of religious education to further the discussion (www.cvus/re/workshops/html). Explorations of this subject by the leadership of the Liberal Religious Educators' Association (LREDA), the professional organization for Unitarian Universalist religious educators, resulted in the announcement of three planned events related to the topic. A LREDA-sponsored workshop at the June 2003 General Assembly focused on "Changing Paradigms for Religious Education," and *Godly Play* author Jerome W. Berryman delivered the Fahs Lecture at the same General Assembly. LREDA's annual fall conference in 2004 will focus on alternative models of religious education.

There appears, however, to be little agreement on terms and words used in the discussion. Similar differences in the usage of words may be noted in the literature of religious education and in the greater religious education community. The word "model" has many different definitions; the unabridged *Random House Dictionary of the English Language*¹ lists twenty-five (pages 1235 and 1236). Several of these have been used in ongoing discussions of religious education. Because I have been working with the concept of models for more than ten years, the discussion has been of special interest to me and I hope to further our understanding of the terms we are using and how we use them.

Models as Standards

The first given definition—"a standard or example for imitation or comparison"—is one that has been used frequently in the past. In "Tomorrow's Children and Today's Heritage," a paper presented to the Harper's Ferry Ministers' Study Group and published in *Unitarian Universalism Selected Essays 1996 (pages 82-94)*² I used "model" in this sense:

... We still tend to think in terms of the model of schooling, with closely graded classes and texts (or curriculum guides) written for a fairly narrow age range. And our thinking about schooling may be based on an old model of schooling itself. Since old ways die hard, even in our time some children are still being taught by teachers who are seen (and see themselves) as imparters of knowledge, rather than as companions on a journey, and whose ways may be somewhat rigid. I am aware that this is a slightly exaggerated characterization of a model which does in fact offer rich possibilities.

In that discussion the term "schooling" was used as it has been for more than thirty years in the literature of education and religious education, referring to the most traditional of models which suggest using outmoded teaching methods and techniques, not the concept of school itself, which (as I pointed out) offers "rich possibilities." I went on to identify other models we should consider: the library, the museum, the home, the church (or more inclusively, religious institutions), and the pilgrimage (as in trips to Boston or other historical Unitarian Universalist historical sites).

Models as Theory

*Models of Religious Education*³ by Harold W. Burgess, one of few current books dealing with the subject of “models” in the field of religious education, approaches the subject from a theoretical framework. Burgess writes:

The thrust of the term “model” is closely related to “theory.” In fact, some writers employ them interchangeably. However the notion of change seems more integrally related to modeling than to theorizing. For more than fifty centuries, possibly beginning in ancient Egypt, models have been employed *first*, as keys to understanding the past and *second*, as bridges leading to the future. Through their focus upon structures rather than subject matter, models tend to evoke consciousness of relationships, particularly the relationships that pertain among any given model’s variable elements. In addition, because of their dynamic organization of data, models are exceptionally useful in communicating specific properties that affect relationships among variable elements. (page 22)

The models Burgess discusses in the book are: the historic prototype, the liberal model, the mid-century mainline model, the evangelical/kerygmatic model, and the social-science model. He describes the historic prototype as reflecting “the prevailing worldview and religious convictions of the church during the first nineteen centuries of its existence as those were applied to the related problems of (1) educating succeeding generations for vital Christian living and (2) incorporating individuals into the church.” He further says that matters were decided on “the basis of constructs that presupposed a God who had spoken to humankind through a ‘word-oriented,’ saving message. Teaching practices commonly included a strong element of verbal transmission.” (page 23)

The liberal model, he writes, “is rooted in the classical, liberal theology characteristic of the early twentieth century” and is “buttressed by the progressive educational theories explicated in the writings of such theorists as John Dewey, George Coe, and William Clayton Bower. (page 23) “A primary difference,” says Burgess, in this model “is that salvation is believed to occur through processes solely or almost solely of this world; and it is for *the many*, as contrasted with the *individual*.” Theological judgments, he suggests, are “transferred from a metaphysical to an empirical perspective” and practices “are typically oriented to life through social action.” (page 25) Sophia Lyon Fahs is one of seven theorists of this model whom Burgess mentions. He says that she articulated and promoted “causes closely linked to the application of liberal thought in religious education settings. She was more adventuresome in spirit than some whose seminal work architected the framework of the liberal model from which she worked and the educational practices she advocated.” (page 86) Fahs is the only Unitarian or Universalist religious educator referred to in this work. Many in the Unitarian Universalist religious education community relate to this theoretical model.

The mid-century mainline model, Burgess writes, grew out of a reassessment of the assumptional underpinnings of the liberal model...this perspective perceives religious education to occur most effectively through a dynamic interaction within the Christian (religious) community. Practices developed directly out of this model typically feature relational group activities. The group is often considered a microcosm of the church.” (page 26) Theorists Burgess places in this category include several who have strongly influenced Unitarian Universalist religious educators: John H. Westerhoff Jr. (page 119), Gabriel Moran, and Maria Harris, although he says that neither Moran nor Harris fits this model “at all points” (pages 120 and 121), and I agree.

When Jean Starr Williams, then director of the religious education section at the UUA wrote “Let us move away from the Sunday School classroom paradigm toward a paradigm of living in religious community” in the September 1979 REACH Packet, she was reflecting the influence of John Westerhoff and his theories on enculturation and socialization.⁴ Moran and Harris have led workshops and programs for Unitarian Universalists and Harris was the 1982 Fahs Lecturer.

The evangelical/kerygmatic model, according to Burgess, is “energized by the vision of a revealed message that must be faithfully communicated” and “gives rise to the lecture, even preaching, as the ideal teaching paradigm.” (page 26) The social-science model is “rooted in the teaching-learning process. It consciously sustains a value-free relationship to theology, but accepts and inserts it, as appropriate, into the process of teaching religion. ...practices generated by the

model have a high degree of specificity to individual situations.” (page 26) While this model has influenced Unitarian Universalists, no theorist included in this section has been particularly influential for us.

Burgess is an ordained minister in the Brethren in Christ Church and teaches at Asbury Theological Seminary. This book discusses religious education theory and models only in the church and does not include Jewish or Muslim perspectives.

Models as Methods

R.E.Y. Wickett, in *Adult Models of Religious Education*⁵ focuses more on practice, although he discusses theory as well. He begins with the definition of educational models advanced by Bruce Joyce and Marsha Weil in their book *Models of Teaching*, “a plan or a pattern that we can use to design face-to-face teaching.” He lists eleven models: andragogical (based on the work of Malcolm Knowles in adult education, focusing on adults as self-directed learners), intergenerational, independent, covenant, nondirective, “Tip of Iceberg,” Interdependent, Study Circle, Freirian (group learning), Action research, and distance. He says that the facilitator should “choose the model which is right for the learner, the content, the context, and you.” I believe that the importance of teaching methods or models cannot be overstated, and are properly considered in decision-making about structures and models; but that they are in a different category than structures.

In the Sixth Edition of *Models of Teaching*⁶ Joyce, Weil, and Emily Calhoun discuss four “families” of models: social, information-processing, personal, and behavioral systems. In a beginning section titled “Frames of Reference,” the authors say “we survey the available models, examine them as models of learning for students, and consider how to build communities of learners...these tools we call models of teaching are one way to organize intelligence-oriented education. Among those discussed are: cooperative learning (dyads through group investigation), role playing, direct, non-directive, enhancing self-esteem, mastery learning, simulation, task performance reinforcement, inductive, concept attainment, mnemonics, advance organizers, synectics, and various inquiry methods. “Models of teaching are really models of learning. As we help students acquire information, ideas, skills, values, ways of thinking and means of expressing themselves, we are also teaching them how to learn.” (page 6)

The Montessori method, a structured approach to learning, involves the use of hands-on materials in prescribed ways (differing in this respect from other early childhood approaches which offer many concrete objects for use in free play.) Berryman’s *Godly Play* approach to religious education is a version of this. The Godly Play website (www.godlyplay.org) gives this description: “Godly Play is a method of Christian education and spiritual direction for children ages 2-12. The goal...is to teach children the art of using religious language—parable, sacred story, silence, and liturgical action—to help them become more fully aware of the mystery of God’s presence in their lives.” It teaches through Bible stories and the use of story boxes with materials for telling retelling each story. It prepares children for the sacrament of the Eucharist. Unitarian Universalist variations of course do not follow this in every detail. One of these is *Spirit Play*.⁷

Descriptions of these and other methods (such as brainstorming, videotapes, case studies, learning centers, computer and internet learning) may be found by doing an Internet search.

The American public school and liberal religious education are branches of the same tree, growing from the same roots and sharing a body of knowledge, experience, methods, and models. There are differences, however: in the amount of time children spend in its sphere, the ultimate aims, and the limitations on each. The language we share can be quite useful, but our scope and purposes are different. Because most adults are more familiar with lecture and discussion as teaching strategies than any other, there is a tendency for volunteer teachers to draw on these exclusively. For more than a century, however, there has been an understanding present in both of these forms of education that people (especially children) learn far more by doing than by any other method. The oldest book on teaching methods in religious education in my library is *Method in Teaching Religion*⁸, published in 1925. The methods suggested include: problem-project teaching, discussion, question-and-answer, story, dramatization, and manual arts (page 8). Care is taken to emphasize that the manual arts are not to be a distinct or separate course, but that “handicraft work...should spring out of and relate itself directly to the lessons being taught.” (page 238)

In his book *Shared Faith*⁹ Thomas Groome calls “shared Christian praxis” a “metaapproach” to religious education and says that “it is not simply a teaching *method* in the typical sense of the term...one can use many different methods and teaching models to effect its commitments and movements” (page two). It would perhaps fit better into a discussion of curriculum design, but that is beyond the scope of this paper. And it does relate to the methods we may use in our programs. The basic approach may be used without the emphasis on “Christian.” Groome describes this process in *Christian Religious Education*¹¹, but *Shared Faith* expands upon the approach. After a focusing activity, participants are asked to name their knowing, engage in critical reflection, hear the community Story, engage in a dialectic of that Story with their own and that Vision with their own, then to make a decision for the future...(pages 147-149).

Our planned teaching methods will influence our choice of structural models for religious education, as will the numbers, ages, and developmental stages of learners, and the space available. In small congregations, the challenge may be to plan appropriate groupings that do not result in less than optimum size classes. Other factors affecting these decisions include the availability of volunteers and opportunities for them to learn about the many possible methods of teaching. One of the major problems Unitarian Universalist congregations face is the lack of time for volunteer teachers to become sufficiently familiar with the material they are using and the time and opportunity for orientation to make it possible for them to use the broad range of possible teaching approaches.

Other Kinds of Models

Other dictionary definitions of “model” include “a typical form or style” and “a pattern of structure or formation.” In *First Steps. Planning for Adult Religious Education*, I listed the following “Structures and Models in Adult Religious Education”: Sunday School, Sunday morning forum, Adult School (evening and Saturday classes and workshops), weekly evening of classes, lecture and/or film series, adult retreats, intergenerational classes/workshops/retreats as present in our congregations. (page 35)¹¹

As a result of insights gained at the 1999 Meadville Winter Institute program on “The Congregation as Theological School” and practices observed since then, the list I now use in workshops and programs includes these additions: Theological School/Basic Seminary/Graduate-Level Church, Social Action as Educational Practice, Small Group Ministries, and combinations of all of these. They fit into the definition of “a pattern of structure.”

Many of the online discussions about models have focused on the ways participants are grouped (closely graded, loosely graded, mixed-age, multi-age, intergenerational, multigenerational). As any of these may be used with most structural

Models, these distinctions do not seem to be appropriately called “models.” It’s usually better to group broadly if necessary to have eight or ten children in each class. One way of grouping participants worth mentioning in the context of models, however, is the intergenerational approach, which does have implications for how programs are structured. In his book *Intergenerational Religious Education*¹² James W. White lists six basic intergenerational program paradigms: the family group, a weekly class, workshop or event, worship service, worship education program, and the all-congregation camp or family retreat (page 33).

Other discussions among us have focused on the way content is organized: each grade or age level has its own subject matter which is used regularly or the curriculum is organized by themes, with all or most groups focusing on the same subject. This sometimes called the “unified curriculum.” Programs around themes may be organized horizontally, with rotations covering several years, or vertically, with each theme touch on each year, often called “pillars.” A non-systematic survey of web sites and brochures for many congregations indicates that these themes usually include

Unitarian Universalism (religious identity or history, or both), world religions, Jewish and Christian heritages or Biblical materials, and often include social justice, ecology, and others. Some postings on the *Reach-List* in these discussions have implied that certain models preclude the presence of content. Almost any subject matter, however, may be addressed in any of the structural models discussed here.

Although most of our programs for children are held on Sunday morning, there are other possibilities. One non-Sunday morning program is the relational small group ministry program for children whose parents are in their own small groups, developed by Helen Zidowecki in Augusta, Maine. In a personal communication, she indicates that the same plan could be used for Sunday morning. For further information and lesson plans, see www.hzmre.com.

When the question “Alternatives to what?” was posted on the *Reach-List* with reference to discussions of “alternative models,” most who responded to the list or privately to me said “school” or “schooling.” Many respondents were critical of this, at least by implication. However, Michael Malone, Director of Religious Education in Miami, Florida, was not. He wrote: “The classes scheme and school model—albeit modified—really works for us and does not inhibit us in any way from incorporating worship.” Other religious educators have commented that worship is an important part of their programs. They see this as making it different from secular education.

Some were quite specific in their descriptions of what is seen as “the UU model:”

- “School model of religious education...I am talking about a Religious Education ‘program’ that divides children ‘by grade’ into ‘classes’ led by ‘teachers’ using ‘lesson plans’ in ‘curricula’ in ‘classes’.”
- “‘School’ model”
- “The UU model also calls for a presentation of some sort followed by a craft project, all indoors and mainly quiet.”
- “A few age-grouped classrooms which meet during the service for Story-talk-craft-snack.”

Structural Models for Religious Education

We will do well to clarify our meanings and work toward some common language as we discuss issues of models and paradigms, content and method, as we move into a new era in religious education in our movement. I suggest using “models” to mean the structures and designs we create for our programs. Where, how and when they will be carried out should be part of the discussion, although most of our discussions have centered on Sunday morning programs for children and youth. Here are the structures, or models, I see in our current Sunday morning programming for children ages three through eleven or twelve, in actuality, by intention, or in our dreams.

Classroom-Based

This structure, also called “Self-contained Classroom,” may include participants grouped by any method—age, gender, interest, or random assignment. While it may suggest a traditional Sunday School to some, the model in itself does not imply any particular method of instruction or theoretical model. The room may be arranged in a variety of ways, including as an open classroom with learning centers or stations. Berryman’s *Godly Play* and Unitarian Universalist programs that follow his lead, such as *Spirit Play*, are classroom-based. Many innovative and exciting methods of teaching may be, and are, used in this kind of setting. Participants have a sense of being at home in the congregation when they meet in the same place most of the time, especially if they are able to post their own materials and projects. Problems arise when the classrooms are too small, too full of furniture, and too crowded to allow participants and leaders to move around. When rooms are set up for other purposes religious education groups may have to contend with too many distractions and too little sense of ownership of their space.

Educating Congregation

The concept of learning communities has come to us from the field of organizational development. Charles Foster’s book *Educating Congregations*¹³ is one of several published in recent years on the possible use and impact of this approach in congregations. Foster suggests that Christian education (let’s translate that as religious education) be designed around *preparation of events* in the life of the church, such as worship, Christmas, Easter, and other liturgical seasons. The Christian liturgical year may require translation as well, but all congregations have a rhythm of events and celebrations throughout the year. The four kinds of events Foster discusses are the paradigmatic, the seasonal, occasional, and unexpected events. The paradigmatic events Foster discusses include baptism and communion, but Unitarian Universalist congregations might include dedication of children and infants, coming of age ceremonies, membership Sunday, and the like. “The education of a community around the events that give structure and momentum to its life involves three movements,” he says. These are “preparation for participation, engagement in the event, and mutually critical reflection...The structure of an event-full education is not complex, but if taken seriously, it could radically alter the way congregations order their educational ministries.” (pages 40-49)

“Some teaching/learning groups may be organized by age. Many will be intergenerational,” says Foster. (page 139) In a section on “Making Decisions about Educational Structures for Event-Full Education,” Foster says that

“traditional educational structures need not be eliminated...if re-directed to equipping people to participate in significant church events” and further “classes that are not recast as times of preparation for specific events of worship and mission may become occasions for enriching the education people receive elsewhere in the life of the congregation” (page 15) Other writers on the congregation as educating or learning communities are not specific about structures but focus on the concept, as a philosophy of, or approach to, religious education.¹⁴ This attractive philosophy may seem difficult to put into practice in most congregations.

Home and Family Education

William Ellery Channing’s famous 1837 Discourse on religious instruction includes these words “whether in the Sunday-school or the family.” The Seder and other Jewish home festivals have long been an important component of religious education which takes place within the context of the family. These have been important in keeping the faith alive through times of persecution when public religious observance was not possible. Christian practice has long included family devotions, including Bible lessons as well as prayer and song. It has been clear for a long time that most of a child’s religious education takes place at home. While this should not deter us from planning the best possible programs for children and youth in our congregational settings, it suggests that we offer programs and materials for use by parents.

The UUA’s Family Network offers resources to congregations and families who participate. Information may be found on the UUA website www.uua.org. Betsy Hill Williams’ little book *Religious Education at Home*¹⁵ published by the Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF), “is intended as both a guide and a reference for the family’s spiritual journey” and suggest activities and resources for use at home. It includes guidelines for talking about religion with children, graces and prayers, and ideas for celebrating special occasions, such as holidays. Another book offering practical suggestions as well as philosophy is Jeanne Nieuwejaar’s *The Gift of Faith*.¹⁶

Roman Catholic educator Gail Thomas McKenna devotes a chapter to “Family-Centered” approaches in her book *Models and Trends in Religious Education*¹⁷ that gives ideas for setting up family programs in the church and offers suggestions for families at home. Many Unitarian Universalists now educate their children at home and it seems natural to them to include religious teaching in the curriculum. Local congregations as well as the UUA providing resources and education for parents may help families in this endeavor. The popular program *We Believe*¹⁸ was created for the CLF and works well in families. Nita Penfold suggests, in a personal communication, that *Spirit Play* could easily be used in a home schooling setting.

Learning Centers/Stations; Workshop Rotation

Melissa Armstrong-Hansche and Neil MacQueen introduce and describe “Workshop rotation” in their book *Workshop Rotation: A New Model for Sunday School*¹⁹. MacQueen says, in an article on the website www.rotation.org:

Here’s the Workshop Rotation Model in a nutshell: Teach major Bible Stories and concepts through kid-friendly multimedia workshops: an Art workshop, Drama, Music, Games, A-V, puppets, Storytelling, Computers, and any other educational media you can get your hands on. Teach the same Bible story in all of the workshops for four or five weeks rotating the kids to a different workshop each week. And here comes the extremely teacher friendly part: Have the same teacher in each workshop for all five weeks teaching the same lesson week after week to a different class coming in.

Obviously most Unitarian Universalist congregations will not teach only “major Bible stories,” but any content may be used with this model. Makaanah Morriss and September Gerety have both posted to the *Reach-List* their good results using this model with a “pillars” curriculum plan in Cheyenne, Wyoming. They and others have stressed the importance of having “journey guides” with each group as they move through different workshops, providing a continuity of adult leadership. In Cheyenne “we use the same story in slightly different variations for the workshops so children hear and experience the story in three different ways over three weeks. They basically explore three stories for each theme,” Morriss writes. (*Reach-List*. January 25, 2003.)

The exploration of the same story through different approaches over a period of time is not new to us. The workshop approach has been used under the name of “Centers” or “Learning Stations” in many Unitarian Universalist congregations, especially during special programs such as spring festivals or “mini-mesters.” (This is an expansion of the learning center as a method.) Library and museum education approaches are evident in different manifestations of this model: use of storytellers, resources, guides, hands-on exhibits, audio-visuals.

In *The Creative Process and Religious Education*, published in 1964, Dorothy Tilden Spoerl describes a proposal a religious educator wanted to institute in one Unitarian Universalist congregation. It involved elimination of age-level and grade-level classes for children, and adoption of a “program of interest groups in which any child might enroll if he chose to do so...there would be a dance group; an art studio with a wide variety of available media; a dramatic group; a science corner or a laboratory where children could follow the dictates of their own curiosity; a library filled with many books which children could read, or from which they could be read to.”²⁰

Way Cool Sunday School/Religious Education Without Walls

Greg Stewart and others developed the Way Cool Sunday School model at the Second Church, Chicago. Writing about this model in *Essex Conversations*, Stewart says:

...we put lived experience before the dissemination of information, took Sunday School out of the church’s basement and into the city’s streets, eliminated age divisions, used curricula as a resource rather than a recipe, intentionally invited (and transported) non-UU children to Sunday school from area shelter and group homes—yes, we became both missionaries and evangelists—and we confused social action with religious education. We called this approach “Way Cool Sunday School.”²¹

Stewart noted wryly that he had “got hold of the wrong reading list,” referring to the philosophical books generally recommended by Unitarian Universalist religious educators, and tried to put into practice what he read there. He has since used this model in congregations in Cleveland and Pasadena and other congregations are using it on their own. Margaret Levine Young’s “alternatives” web page describes it this way:

The first Sunday of each month is an all-children worship. The second and third Sundays have age-based classes. The fourth Sunday of the month is reserved for a social action project. If there is a fifth Sunday, it is reserved for exploring spirituality through the arts. Children younger than six meet separately, because they need a smaller, simpler program.

Some elements of this model have been used in other Unitarian Universalist congregations for special spring programs or “mini-mesters” and in some cases at intervals throughout the year. This plan is related to the concept in secular education of “schools without walls.”

Worship-Education

“Worship which is an end in itself, is also an occasion for intergenerational learning. For many churches and synagogues, age-inclusive worship is an on-going unself-conscious practice. These faith communities have never considered doing anything else,” writes White in *Intergenerational Religious Education* (page 46). “One model intentionally integrates worship and education and...facilitates a wide variety of growth experiences. It brings all ages together for worship and learning, separates younger learners from adults for activities in different settings, and brings them back together for celebration and sharing.” (page 50) Close coordination between worship leaders and those planning activities is necessary for this to work.

In a posting to the UUA’s *Reach-List* in December 2000, Lisa Elliott, Director of Religious Education at the Unitarian Society of Fairhaven, Massachusetts, suggested: “Another alternative to the school model for religious education...is expanding the worship time and then supplementing our chalice lighting/singing/storytelling/talking/ being

silent/laughing/dancing/chalice extinguishing children's worship circles with 'classroom' or small group (perhaps based on age/grade or learning styles) discussion and arts/crafts and service projects."

In June 2001 Mark Gallagher received the Unitarian Sunday School Society's Adult Sermon Award. In his sermon he proposed a new format for religious education of children at Michael Servetus Unitarian Universalist Church in Vancouver, Washington. It included elements such as retreats, social action, and at-home family practices, but centered on a Sunday morning program consisting of "a mixed age children's worship service—what we might call Children's Chapel" for forty minutes "spent in making *music*, in *dynamic meditation and prayer practices*, and in engaging *rituals*. It would also include a *lesson*." This would be preceded by fifteen minutes in the sanctuary with adults, as they were doing already and followed by twenty minutes of activities in smaller Friendship Groups. In a personal electronic communication in February 2003, Gallagher indicated that the model has not proved to be entirely successful so far. He speculates that forty minutes is too long for the chapel service and suggests that some parents find the program lacking in content. Director of Religious Education Barbara Stevens agrees that results have been mixed. Some of the challenges she cites, also in a personal communication, are: disjointed curriculum, insufficient resources for developmentally appropriate-chapel services, not enough hands-on time, difficulty of bringing new children into the group, and lack of enthusiasm on the part of adult volunteers.

Others are using variations of this approach. Director of Religious Education Gail Forsyth-Vail writes, "We at North Parish have been using a model which includes a half-hour worship followed by small group ministry groups. We've done it for two years, with really good results. The content piece comes through a wisdom story told during worship. The adult group leaders are responsible for encouraging and facilitating connections in their groups, and with facilitating the children's engagement with the spiritual questions raised by the worship service. Social action is also located in the small group, and each Sunday has a 'carrying our faith into the world' component." At a workshop at the 2003 General Assembly, she noted that hers is a full-time position, and that she spends "considerable time on worship preparation and on preparing suggested reflection questions and activities." A booklet explains the process that North Parish went through to transform their program and contains a year's worth of sample sessions.²² Forsyth-Vail comments that they "find that adults don't feel so inadequate if their job is to get to know children and help them talk about their lives in light of their faith, rather than being the 'teachers' of material they don't feel prepared to teach."

Youth Program Models

There are many variations of programming for teenagers within our congregations. Models that have proved effective include these three:

- **Integrated Program.** In this model, the Sunday morning religious Education class and the young group are the same. A formal program with a curriculum plan is followed most Sunday mornings, with one Sunday morning each month devoted to planning activities and projects. Announcements and necessary follow up are carried out through Sunday morning classes in intervening weeks. Adult leaders may be the same or different for classes and for activities.
- **Traditional.** There is a Sunday morning program of classes and youth group meetings (regular or sporadic) and activities are held outside Sunday morning. The classes may be during, before or after, or between services.
- **Youth Adult Committee.** The YAC, made up of about six youth and four or five adults, has responsibility for youth activities and classes. The committee meets monthly and serves as a clearinghouse for activity planning and keeping a calendar to avoid conflicts. This committee has responsibility for planning and reviewing the curriculum for Sunday morning classes (junior and senior youth) and recruiting adult leaders for activities and classes.

How to Decide

As congregations consider which structures or models to develop for religious education, what methods of teaching are to be encouraged, and the content to be explored, there are criteria for the process. Are these models, methods, and content congruent with our Unitarian Universalist principles and with the religious education philosophy of

our larger movement? Are the strengths and limitations of the congregation taken into account? Are there resources available for instituting such a plan? Decisions should be made by a broadly inclusive group: parents, congregational leaders, staff, and all who are interested. Older children and youth can participate in the decision-making. *Philosophy-Making*²³ by Elizabeth Anastos and David Marshak is a guide for such a process.

In the late 1970s, Eugene B. Navias, then on the UUA staff, wrote “Checkpoints for Teachers,”²⁴ in which he says:

One way to look at a lesson plan—a session, a Sunday morning experience—either in advance or in retrospect, is to ask whether it involved all of what I call “The Four Levels of Teaching.” I have borrowed the idea from Harmin, Kirchenbaum and Simon who describe three levels of teaching in their book *Clarifying Values Through Subject Matter*. The authors claim that complete learning experiences include: 1) the facts level, 2) the concepts level, and 3) the values level...”the facts level includes the teaching and learning of specific information, facts, details, occurrences, events, and actualities. It also includes the basic rudiments of learning a skill...” At the concepts level, the principles behind the facts are explored... “Abstractions and ideas are entertained... on the values level, students explore the connections between the subject matter and their own feelings, opinions, and behavior.” In religious education, we may well broaden this third level of teaching to include questions that religion eternally and universally asks: “Who am I? What is it to be human? Who are you? How do we get along together? Does life have meaning, and if so, what is it? What do I believe? What do my beliefs say to my actions?”

In the church, we have still another level of teaching available to us—that of celebration or worship. Through experiences of worship or celebration we may consider, lift up, dedicate ourselves anew to values that we hold in common...The biggest question for me as I think of planning programs every Sunday is “How do I reach the level of valuing or personal meaning every time?”...Each session needs to invite children to look for meanings and personal applications and thus be “religion making.”

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