

Faith Formation Town Hall Discussion meeting

Sunday 27 March 2022, immediately following the Sunday Service

Prayer for Living in Tension By Joseph M. Cherry

If we have any hope of transforming the world and changing ourselves,
we must be bold enough to step into our discomfort,
brave enough to be clumsy there,
loving enough to forgive ourselves and others.
May we, as a people of faith, be granted the strength to be
so bold, so brave, and so loving.

Introduction: John Redemske, Board President

The last two years have been a difficult time for the adult members of our congregation. COVID has caused us all to experience isolation and diminished relationships between us. As bad as it has been for the adults, the situation produced by COVID has been even more difficult on the families, children and youth of UUFD. The isolation has shut down most of the opportunity for our UU children to develop relationships with each other and with the adults in our congregation. Although a valiant attempt was made to try to make faith Formation work on Zoom, Zoom fatigue from remote school classes and other isolation from children's normal activities caused our previously robust Faith Formation program to diminish rapidly. Our congregation is losing families and youth because of it.

After almost two years of COVID restrictions and the turmoil associated with it, our memories of what kind of robust Faith Formation activities our congregation used to have started to fade. In addition, this fading of memories is even greater in our members who, for whatever reason, were not involved in or aware of our Faith Formation activities in past years. Lisa McCorry will give a historical perspective of what our congregation's Faith Formation program used to be like.

Historical perspective: Lisa McCorry, previous DFF, 2013 to 2019

Timeline:

San Juan Drive UU Fellowship (UUFD): Vanessa Self, parent and educator, becomes first paid Director of Religious Education (DRE). 10 hour per week paid position. Sunday morning programming with occasional special events.

2011 (about) Terri Reheman becomes DRE at 15 hours per week. Youth Group started by Kathleen Adams, Lisa McCorry, assistant youth advisor. Travel to youth "Cons" begins. 100+ person youth conferences for high school and, less often, middle school youth.

Spring 2013 Lisa McCorry becomes DRE at 15 hours per week. Rev. Katie arrives August 2013. Position title changes to Director of Faith Formation (DFF) and increased to 25 hours per week. Participation grows and programming expands across the Lifespan.

Spring 2019- Serving over 30 families and 55+ children and youth. 6 paid staff including one youth advisor and two childcare providers for infants and toddlers, 30 volunteer teachers, 7 Trained OWL Facilitators, 6 Faith Formation Team members, 1 data entry volunteer, Covenant Group Coordinator, 15 middle and high school youth.

This was a Lifespan position: 2019 Adult Ed offerings included courses such as: Faith Like River: UU History, What Moves Us: UU Theology, Christ for UUs, Introduction to UU, White Fragility (HRT), and programs such as Salsa, Spirit and Soul: Leadership for a multicultural age, Mindfulness Meditation, Tai Chi, Common Thread a knitting and fibers group, Yoga, Game Night, Poetry Circle, Sage Circle on Aging, CUUPS (Covenant of UU Pagans) Outdoor Adventures Group, The CIUUb FLC affinity group (10 members, 3 faculty advisors)

FF Staff wages, \$7500 (including youth advisor added in FY18 or 19), on call childcare for team/committee meetings, adult ed offerings and special events through DFF

FY20 FF Budget \$7800 not including childcare expenses and 4 hr. a week youth advisor or director salary

DFF, 22K+ plus \$2400 in Prof Dev.

The current modern economy of working doesn't allow working members and mothers to be fully running programs on a volunteer basis. UU values of economic justice and economic equity supports paying FF directors a living wage and pay young adult youth advisors fairly.

August 2019 Sara Sauter becomes interim DFF. Spring 2020 brought the Covid shutdown, all church services and programming move to virtual/remote. Children and youth participation wanes/declines rapidly due to zoom fatigue for parents and children doing remote learning 5 days a week. Sara makes valiant efforts to keep families and children in the loop and participating in alternative ways in and outside of Sunday mornings.

Fall 2021 In-person worship resumes but children's FF classes remain online via zoom led by paid teacher Kiara Stacey. Rev. Leah Ongiri is hired as (remote) Family Ministry Coordinator for remainder of the fiscal year.

My vision for FF:

I believe we have an opportunity to transform the future of UU in the Four Corners. Remember, we are not just a Durango church. We serve the region with members from Bayfield, Farmington, Aztec, Hesperus, and Mancos. This is vital ministry. Families and children are a vibrant and necessary part of our congregation.

I think we really missed out on opportunities for connection with parents during the pandemic. It was a fraught time for so many and parents were so isolated and exhausted, in need of genuine connection, even on zoom. We let a lot of people slip through the cracks. And we have an opportunity NOW as we emerge from the pandemic to provide a supportive and inclusive space of learning and deep exploration. A place of belonging for all ages, races, ethnicities, a multifaith home. In fact, UU churches can be a landing ground for interfaith families and couples. But we must welcome them before they arrive. Examples might be the books in our children's library; faces of different races, stories of adoption, are we ADA accessible (no but getting there and actively improving), baby dolls with different skin tones, dark skinned band-aids in our first aid kits, multicultural symbols, or artwork, culturally respectful or allergy-friendly snack options for children, the list goes on.

Many of our activities become points of entry for how people become interested in UUFD. Some examples are: OWL (Our Whole Lives, FF program), community engagement, electric charging station, STAR/Transgender support group, 4 Corners Rainbow Youth Center, FLC Real History of the America's Day/Indigenous People's Day, The yellow shirt people, Snowdown Parade, Creating Change document: Hanging on to "tradition" vs. Embracing Diversity. Pine Song UU 4 Corners Retreat all day children's programming, 1st Sunday Family Breakfasts.

We shouldn't have to fight for this. This is one of the reasons we exist, to guide, nurture and care for our children. It is what we promise to them during their child dedication.

Facilitated discussion topics: Sherrod Beal, facilitator, Chair of HCC

1. How do you feel about how FF was operating in 2019?
2. Do we want to re-start that kind of Faith Formation program?
3. How can we re-engage families and children? How will we staff the effort to re-engage families and children as well as to re-start lifespan FF programs?