

From Kathy Underwood Director of Lifespan Faith Formation

Continuing to Share

Last month, I wrote about my concern regarding the loss of colleagues in their positions in the past few months and how shared ministry can help congregations in keeping staff and developing healthy working relationships. Since we are a covenantal community, we are all about relationships!

This past year, I finally felt like I was forming new relationships with members of UCE despite having been on staff for three years. The pandemic made it difficult to get to know folks during my first year here. I am still learning names and meeting people I haven't had the chance to meet in the past two years. It is a strange feeling to feel almost like a new hire after three years!

And so this lag in getting to know everyone has made a slight challenge in creating shared ministry within my area of faith formation. Networking is so important, and is best done when a relationship has already been formed. I rely on the staff who have been here longer to help me along the way, and of course, this is a part of shared ministry too.

With this said, I thought I'd take this opportunity to let you know about some of the key programs I coordinate with the support of individuals in the congregation, as well as the congregation as a whole. Those who are newer to UCE should find this helpful, and those who are long-time members might learn something new and learn more about what my role is as well.

- Lifespan Faith Formation – this is the umbrella under which almost everything we do falls – all that helps us to form our Unitarian Universalist faith: worship, learning/education, spiritual practices, social justice and action, stewardship, and community building. These are all things that we are continuously exploring, doing, and learning as we grow older, thus the term “lifespan”. My role is to guide and support you along the way, and to encourage you to find opportunities for sharing your ministry - which are almost boundless. This can be with adults or young people or intergenerational. It can be leading a small group of children on Sunday morning, helping plan a social gathering, or sharing your passion about a social justice issue.
- Faith Formation for Children and Youth – this is the one segment of my role that I spend a majority of my time coordinating, as there are many parts involved. Most of our programming for the younger members happens on Sunday mornings and requires about 15 adults who enjoy sharing their time and forming relationships with the younger generation. Those who work with children are called Leaders, and those who

work with our youth are called Youth Advisors. No matter the age group, adults are needed to help guide our youngest members! And while parents are often the ones to do so, my greatest hope and joy is seeing those who don't have young children become engaged in our program. If you would like to learn a bit more about what volunteering is about, feel free to watch this little [video](#) I made.

- Within the program for children and youth are two major programs that are run at different times depending on the year and how many young people participate:
 - Our Whole Lives Sexuality Education – this program is lovingly called [OWL](#), and is written for many ages and stages of the lifespan, beginning with kindergarten all the way through older adulthood. Yes, all ages and stages are sexual beings! Last year, I coordinated the OWL program for middle and high school youth with two other congregations. My plan is to run at least one program for the younger ages, either K/1st or 4th-6th grades. The biggest hurdle with OWL is getting adults trained who wish to co-lead a group. The training is held over one weekend, often requires traveling a bit, and is costly to my UCE budget. Because of this, I truly appreciate those who have been trained in the past and are willing to co-lead these efforts. If this is something that interests you, let me know and we can talk more about whether or not it is a good fit for your shared ministry.
 - Coming of Age – this is a program that aims to guide youth into exploring their UU faith more deeply. It involved learning about some of our history, traditions, theology, and exploring spiritual practices, ethics, and social justice issues. Having adult mentors is part of the coming of age program. These adults participate in many of the sessions that the youth do, so they learn along with them and form a bond in the process. A common misconception is that mentors need to be “seasoned” UUs, and that is simply not the case. They do need to be good listeners, willing to be challenged in their beliefs, and be genuinely interested in youth. Mentors often become a second trusted adult figure in their lives – and for many years. If this feels like your shared ministry, I would love to talk more with you.

While there are many other aspects to my role at UCE, this covers the major parts. Shared ministry is not just for adults, and happens at all ages and stages of life. Young people watch and learn from all of us. Yes, even you! They can share their voices as well as their helping hands just as much as us older folks, as long as they have good role models with caring human beings. By sharing ourselves, we are creating Beloved Community and a world made whole.

In Faith,

Kathy