

Adult Spiritual Development in Life Span Education

Edith Hunter, 20th-century Unitarian religious educator, said “Isn't half the job of becoming educated learning to ask the right questions? The philosophy of Adult Religious Education that has guided our program offerings this year has been based upon asking these questions, on assisting our members in their ongoing search for truth and meaning and encouraging support for one another on each their individual journeys. We renamed the Adult Religious Education Program *Spiritual Development* to reflect this developmental approach and encourage a more contemplative and collaborative mode of learning. We have tried to offer a variety of activities designed to further each person's exploration and understanding of Unitarian Universalist history and principles and their application to living in today's world. Utilizing the organizing framework of the UUA *Tapestry of Faith* Programs (see the UUA website: <http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults>), we provided learning opportunities within each of the following contexts:

Spiritual Development. Developing a deep, reflective and expressed response to the wonder, joy, and pain of being alive; defining and enhancing our relationship with the spirit of life, however one understands it.

Ethical Development. Examining ethical and moral issues that may confront us in our lives; exploring the possibilities and challenges of acting in accordance with the seven principles promoted and affirmed by Unitarian Universalist congregations.

Unitarian Universalist Identity Development. Providing information and opportunities to learn about Unitarian Universalism as a religious tradition, its history and heritage, its identity as a faith community and relationship to other faith communities.

Faith Development. Unitarian Universalist faith development emphasizes each person's religious journey. When we develop in faith, we develop as meaning-makers. Faith is about embracing life's possibilities, growing in our sense of being "at home in the universe."

Believing that experience is the most powerful teacher, most of our Spiritual Development programs have been experiential in nature. Finally, we have tried to make these events interactive, providing participants the opportunity to learn from and reflect with each other.

These are the programs we offered this year:

Popcorn Theology. These have been monthly “main-stream” movies followed by a discussion focusing on issues stimulated by the movie that are relevant to being a UU in

today's society. They were generally shown at 7:00 p.m on the second Thursday of the month, in the cafeteria, but there were some variations. We presented the following movies:

September: *Happy!*

October: *Pay It Forward*

November: *The Curious Case of Benjamin Buttons*

December: *Raw Faith*

March: *The Five People You Meet in Heaven*

April: *Invictus*

June (shown at Ferry Beach): *Snowmen*

Trips and Discussions. There have been group outings to various places and events of interest to us as Unitarian Universalists. This year we took trips to:

Shaker Village in Canterbury, NH

King's Chapel and the UU Arlington Street Church in Boston

The UUA headquarters at 25 Beacon Street and the Sanctuary Boston Service at First Parish Cambridge

Each trip included additional information and/or time for sharing and discussion.

Pathways to Unitarian Universalism. The Spiritual Development Committee worked with our interim minister and other individuals and committees in the congregation to hold introductory workshops in October and March for potential new members or those interested in learning more about Unitarian Universalism. These were held on consecutive Sundays after service, and included the following presenters: Rev. Olivia Holmes, Gary Lerude, Chris Parker, Sherri Woolsey, Bob Sampson, Monica Staples, Jenn Morton and Jerry Ross.

Spiritual Development Workshops. The Spiritual Development program includes seminars and workshops offered at various times during the year to enhance members' understanding of Unitarian Universalist history and principles and to foster personal development in their beliefs, spirituality, and practices as Unitarian Universalists. This winter we offered a six-session series entitled, "The New And Not-So-New UU." The program was adapted from a Tapestry of Faith workshop and was designed to ground new members in the basics of Unitarian Universalism while re-igniting longer term members interest in various dimensions of our faith. Most importantly, the series offered an opportunity for new and prospective members to meet and get to know some of our long-time members. The series ran from January 31 through April 11.th It was facilitated by Jerry Ross and included 12 other guest presenters from the congregation, including our interim minister, Rev. Olivia Holmes. Sixteen members participated.

Spiritual Development Resources. At various times and through various media the committee members and Life Span RE Director Chris Parker have tried to make educational materials available to the congregation, drawn attention to external spiritual development workshops or activities, or convened congregational gatherings around spiritually challenging events in the wider world. We have seen this efforts as integral to

our mission to support members of our congregation on their personal and spiritual journeys.

Additional spiritual and personal development activities were made available that operate within the purview of the Life Span Education program but without direct involvement of the Spiritual Development committee. These included:

The Nashua Buddhist Meditation Group

The Group offers a regular space for UU Church and Nashua community members to practice meditation and study the dharma with longtime practitioners and students of Buddhism. The group met regularly on Wednesdays from 7:00 – 8:00 pm throughout the year. Programming for the group consisted of periodic open house book discussions, opportunities for in-depth study of Buddhist teachings, and monthly dharma talk. Group sitting and walking meditation is practiced in the auditorium. Facilitated by Martha Roberts (coordinator) and Karen Fitzpatrick (church liaison).

Reiki Drum Circle

Once each month, the Reiki Drum group has gathered to share Reiki healing and a spiritual meditation journey ending with community spirit drumming. Participants bring their own percussion instruments to play and share if they wish and all are welcome to participate by taking an active role. All spiritual practice has been welcome. The group facilitators are Anya Zakiewicz and Robin Panousis, both Reiki Master/Teachers and Reiki Drum Master/Teachers.

Covenant Groups

Covenant Groups are based on a model of “small group ministry” that offers members a chance to meet in a gathering of 8-10 people to connect with each other on a more personal level than is possible in other areas of congregational life. Group Leaders: Barbara Berrios, Bob and Hilary Keating, Barbara Spitz, and Bob Gamairi. Lori Lerude offered a Parents of Teens Support Group. Beginning in May, Jerry Ross convened a time-limited covenant group for newer members.

The Spiritual Development Program is overseen by Chris Parker, the Director of Life Span Religious Education, and the Spiritual Development Committee is chaired by Jerry Ross. Members during the course of the year included Monica Staples, Gary Lerude, Frona Avery, and Diane Lyons. Others not on the committee who helped with various events during the year included Elizabeth Zahn, Stu Davidson, Roy Goodman and Ellen Barr.

Jerry Ross, Chair
Spiritual Development Committee
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