

Spiritual Growth & Development Annual Report 2016-17

Written by the Reverend Cassandra Hartley

Our program offers religious education opportunities for all ages - from toddlers to adults. In the 2016-2017 church year we have 298 registered children and youth who are served by 55 volunteer teachers and assistants, as well as three dedicated staff members: our SGD Assistant Debra Golden, our SGD Coordinator Mark Van Kempen (formerly Programs Coordinator Aaron Gibson) and Assistant Minister for SGD, Rev. Cassandra Hartley. The SGD Committee for 2015-2016 was: Lisa Kohn, Stephanie Surfus, Christine Pellar-Kosbar, Gregg Peterson and Michelle Avery-Ferguson.

The members of our Adult Education Advisory Team are: Charley Burleigh, Bruce Gibb, Bett Weston, Bev Black, Carol Acitelli and Sandy Eyl.

Summer Program

Our 2016 summer SGD session for grades K-5 reprised the "Bible Heroes and Beyond" curriculum. Ten teachers and assistants helped Debra Golden run the program and 48 children participated (an average of 14 attending each week). Highlights included acting out the story of Moses, playing jump rope as we learned about brave Queen Esther the hip hop queen, and doing yoga while talking about the Buddha.

Transitions

Rev. Cassandra Hartley came onto staff in July 2016 to fill the vacant DRE position; Julie Dybdahl stepped down as Lead Youth Advisor for YRUU in October 2016; Aaron Gibson took Julie's former position and combined it with his Programs Coordinator position, creating the new SGD Coordinator role (now a UUA recognized title and job description); Aaron Gibson stepped down as SGD Coordinator in February 2017 and Mark Van Kempen was hired to fill the role in April 2017.

General Program Updates

We've made several important changes to our SGD program this year, including creating a more comprehensive teacher's handbook, introducing a new background check system for volunteers, upgrading our files to Google docs, and having a consultation with the Washtenaw sheriff's department about our safety policies.

Children's Church Year

During the church year we returned to many favorite curricula such as "OWL," "Building Bridges," and "Peacemakers." We also experimented with new curricula such as "Harry Potter and UU" (a fun class that gets our 4/5th grade "wizards" involved in social justice projects) and "The Spirit of Adventure" (a curriculum to help 2/3rd graders learn about UU heroes in hands-on ways). Our children and youth have also completed many successful fundraisers, drives and social justice projects throughout the year, including: the YRUU service trip, the YRUU apple dumpling sale to support Peace Neighborhood Center, the 7th graders "Rockin' for the Hungry," and the 4/5th graders running the Giving Tree to support Alpha House.

Multigenerational Worship

We are beginning to introduce more stories into the beginning of our worship services, we have done multiple full multigenerational worship services throughout the year (including our Winter Solstice Pageant and New Year's Day service), we set up a children's book table with new

selections each month that relate to the worship theme, and we introduced our “Bringing it Home” publication, which offers ideas for how families can explore the monthly worship theme at home.

Coming of Age Changes

In the second week of May 2016, the Coming of Age program held its first co-ed initiation weekend. Out of both a recognition of the need of some of our youth and families to re-think gender binaries, and an increased mindfulness about resource use, past and current facilitators, mentors, and SGD staff created a single weekend for all the youth in the program. We received very positive and constructive feedback, and we will be repeating this model again this year. The 2016-2017 class includes 23 registered youth and 18 mentors.

Adult Education

Our Adult Education Advisory Team put together a wide variety of quality classes this past year. New offerings included classes such as “Financial and Estate Planning for Young Families” and “Examining Whiteness.” The Fall session had 18 classes in the catalog and the Spring session had 21.

Looking Forward

We have many goals going forward, including:

- Continuing to update our safety policies/procedures and making alterations to our building to improve security.
- Increasing the number of Adult Education classes and offering classes that appeal to all life stages.
- Finding ways to more effectively address the needs of the 20s and 30s group.
- Updating our playground area.
- Increasing our emphasis on family ministry and a “full week faith.”
- Offering children and youth more regular worship experiences.
- Rebuilding a robust SGD Committee.
- Continuing to find ways to integrate SGD with other church programs and groups.