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Introduction to Religious Education

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Joan of Arc: Teenage Prophet and Abandoned Youth

A Liturgy for Neighborhood Unitarian Universalist Church

Neighborhood Church is a multi-building facility in a high-end residential area of Pasadena, CA. The parking lot is often full of hybrid cars and other vehicles with liberal bumper stickers. The grounds and facilities are well kept, and we often sacrifice our "Fair Share" contribution to the UUA in order to pay all our staff a living wage for southern California. The congregation presents itself as: (1) a well-off organization: multiple buildings, both historic and new, on landscaped property in a high-end residential neighborhood; (2) a liberal community that desires inclusion for the LGBTQ community: a permanent sign on the road that says "Support Marriage Equality"; (3) a community open to outsiders: before the service, the minister preaching that day stands out on the walkway from the parking lot to greet people walking in; the Welcome table is next to the main entrance and staffed with at least two people every week in addition to having printed materials to take home; and an entire page of the order of service is reserved for "welcoming newcomers," including our mission statement, the UUA covenant of principles, and a list of ministers, staff and their positions, and the board of trustees. While our ministers dress well and robe, the congregation itself is a mix when it comes to physical presentation. Someone coming for the first time who is unable to afford more than a single set of clothing would not feel out of place either in the sanctuary or on the lawn for the coffee and cheesecake hour afterward. Ultimately, we are a loving community that honestly tries its best to be welcoming to all people. For all of our welcoming, however, youth classes and activities are housed in a building on the opposite side of campus from the Sanctuary, and have little to no input or participation in the regular Sunday worship service.

Previously, I examined (1) the lens many members carry as that of refugees from an abusive Christian tradition or specific community;¹ and (2) the cognitive dissonance in this particular congregation between the explicit intent to be welcoming and the null presentation of a welcoming space for youth to be included now as opposed to when they have "grown up."² For this case study, I chose to address this glaring example of Null curriculum³ by creating a Sunday service that would ask our congregants to think about their own perceptions of youth--specifically teenagers--while examining our larger faith organization's attitude toward youth from an emotional distance, codified in the exclusion of youth as a legitimate prophetic voice in our second source of faith: "Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love."⁴ This service needs to be done because Unitarian Universalism suffers from a huge gap in membership from high school graduation until the tail end of the "young adult" time period.⁵ Due to the segregation of the youth from the main services, by location, by liturgy, and by denominational literature, the youth have no emotional, physical, or mental link with what it means to worship as a UU in the main body of the congregation, and so we lose them once we kick them out of the senior high group at seventeen or eighteen. If we are lucky, they come back in twenty years when they have kids.

¹ Paper #2

² Paper #1

³ Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, "Curriculum" (handout, Introduction to Religious Education, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, 22 January 2013).

⁴ *Singing the Living Tradition* (Boston, MA: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1993).

⁵ Defined as 18-35 in the UUA

This service is designed to meet existing congregants in their established comfort zone-- not just by choosing a physical location in the Sanctuary, but also using a liturgy form they are familiar with and readings from sources they trust. It utilizes the trust instilled in the pulpit by UU congregational polity and aims to recognize that the congregants themselves have the highest authority in our congregation. Toward that end it seeks to provide a spiritually uplifting change of perspective on the issue of how our youth are treated as opposed to a soapbox lecture, which would be a violation of the comfort zone I am attempting to both use and preserve. The core concept is to introduce the idea that our youth are a population that is marginalized and oppressed, due to what Elizabeth Caldwell describes as "the tension present in this border time between developed bodies, developing brains, and the lack of place or role in the culture for adolescents."⁶ The Sunday service environment was chosen because small groups or other events planned outside the Sunday service are self-selecting, and this service is designed to reach those who have never considered how our youth are perceived as sub-congregants. The goal is that after this service, they will be more likely to self-select other events that promote youth inclusion into the larger body of the congregation.

Our membership spans the entire age spectrum, from newborns to the elderly who can no longer leave their homes without difficulty. While the membership is predominantly white, we have a minority population who organize within the congregation as People of Color and sponsor events in addition to socializing. We have a thriving LGBTQ population that is not just congregants, but also a community outreach in the form of an LGBTQ task force that provides a safe space to youth in the neighborhood, regardless of their or their parents' affiliation with the

⁶ Elizabeth F. Caldwell, *Leaving Home With Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of our Youth* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2002) 14.

congregation. We have openly transsexual congregants and possibly some not open for whatever reason; as far as I know everyone in the congregation currently presents as either male or female by choice. We claim to support people anywhere on the gender spectrum, but we only offer gender neutral restrooms inside the administration building. The services are only in English and incorporate other languages only on holidays associated with the culture attached to the language or if it is used in a reading/song chosen for the service. Rarely are worship materials used for a learner who is not auditory or for someone who does not have some form of higher education. For all its isolation of location, however, we accept anyone willing to make the trek to our door. Our family in particular can never pledge more than a small amount each year--nowhere near the \$1800 a person required to keep the church going--and we have never been made to feel like we do not belong. We have congregants who struggle to afford food. The experience is meant to remind congregants of how inclusive we are at almost every level except age.

This congregation follows the model of Servant Spirituality⁷ and the Social Justice Movement, with a side of the Word-Centered Movement⁸. The effort to be as inclusive as possible of the many religions and traditions of the world, without continuing the misappropriation of oppressed people by a traditionally white denomination, while at the same time providing a home for atheists, sometimes leaves us with social justice work and doing good in the world as our only common thread. The Word-Centered comes in with the emphasis on written works, fictional or otherwise, as the source of wisdom and learning as presented in the services. Using Joan of Arc as the cypher allows me to link to the community in all three ways:

⁷ Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, "Spirituality Styles of Faith Communities" (handout, Introduction to Religious Education, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, 29 January 2013).

⁸ Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, "Six Spiritual Movements (Traditions)" (handout, Introduction to Religious Education, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, 5 February 2013).

(1) Word-Centered Movement via carefully selected hymns and readings from trusted literary sources; (2) Servant Spirituality via the story of Joan of Arc's devotion to her calling and the greater good of her community; and (3) Social Justice Movement via reminding the congregation that if we do not tend to the needs of our youth, someone else will, and that someone else might not have a vision that aligns with our covenanted seven principles. Of relevance here is Caldwell's description of a type of faith identity that leads to a sense of homelessness: "people who rely on one hour of worship a week to provide what they need for growing in the life of the Christian faith."⁹ I would argue that is true any tradition, and is a primary reason why seeding the change in the primary service is so important--many of our UU population only come for that one hour with no other significant ties, and they would deny our youth even that experience of formation. By the same account, their weekly attendance is spotty, so not even are their youth not getting the weekly infusion that would ground them in a home faith, but the parents are sending the message that the faith itself is not important. As Caldwell says in her other book on youth formation: "Too many youth are literally left alone, unattended by parents, taking care of themselves."¹⁰ This applies to soul care and growth as much as it does to social and physical development. If we do not take care of them, they will not grow into a generation that takes care of the world.

Due to the use of the Transformative Learning Model of Confirmation, Contradiction, and Continuity,¹¹ the symbols (ex: flaming chalice), ritual (ex: chalice lighting, prayer), and

⁹ Elizabeth F. Caldwell, *Making a Home for Faith: Nurturing the Spiritual Life of your Children* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2002) 5.

¹⁰ Caldwell, *Leaving Home With Faith* 16.

¹¹ Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, "Some Definitions" (handout, Introduction to Religious Education, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, 12 February 2013).

liturgy (ex: hymns, readings) will remain in the same format and order that is usually seen on Sunday mornings. This supports both the Confirmation and Continuity stages. The symbols will not be affected, but the rituals will have a topical emphasis on youth as opposed to a personal emphasis on one's individual journey, and the content of the liturgy will be directly Confrontational. In particular, while the readings are from trusted literary sources Mark Twain¹² and Eboo Patel¹³, the hymns selected are from the "other" hymnal,¹⁴ of which Neighborhood does not own congregational copies. A musical counterpoint to using an unfamiliar hymnal is the music selections for the choir: the pieces are topical to Joan of Arc, but are in a classical style that the older generations of the congregation like to hear in Sunday service.¹⁵ The ultimate goal is for the liturgical experience to provide a sensory comfort zone while the content of the liturgy asks difficult questions.

As I discussed in my paper on our congregation lack of outreach to the Christian community, it sometimes can seem as if we spend so much time reaching outward that we do not spend enough time looking inward. Before we can truly be a united congregation being a force for good in the world, we must secure the future for our youth, giving them a strong foundation upon which to stand when trouble comes, either for them or for others in their care. This task can be made especially daunting when teenagers are involved, as adults tend to think of them as alien and/or volatile, and not "ready" for participation in society. This, combined with an existing

¹² Mark Twain, *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc* (Public Domain Books, 2004) Kindle edition.

¹³ Eboo Patel, *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2010) Kindle edition.

¹⁴ *Singing the Journey: A Supplement to Singing the Living Tradition* (Boston, MA: Unitarian Universalist Association, 2005).

¹⁵ Richard Einhorn, *Voices of Light*, (Sony BMG Music Entertainment, 1995). <<http://itunes.apple.com/us/album/einhorn-voices-of-light/id262936981>>

history of exclusion and possibly judgmental behavior towards the youth, would make any transition to a holistic congregation a hard and painful one regardless of how much love is made a part of the process. Scott Alexander reminds us that "A final danger arises when we begin to think that because words like *love*, *relationship*, and *dialogue* sound pleasant, they refer to work that is easy and safe. It is neither."¹⁶ Ultimately, the content chosen for the service is tailored to present Nancy Lesko's model for adolescence as described by Caldwell:

"[She] argues for a different conception of adolescence, one that recognizes their abilities to be responsible contributors to society[...] Lesko believes that by assigning youth to a period of waiting and watching them as they become developmentally mature, we have condemned them to 'an "expectant time"--a moratorium of responsibility and of power."¹⁷

The content has been carefully selected to point out as Explicit curriculum what exists in our congregation as Implicit and Null curricula¹⁸: the exclusion of youth from full inclusion in our congregational polity and worship. For the readings and chalice lighting, authors were chosen who would be trusted authorities by the congregation: (1) Thoreau, a beloved historical figure that UUs love to claim as our own; (2) Mark Twain, a favourite of the American Literature canon; and (3) Eboo Patel, whose book *Acts of Faith* was the 2011 UUA One Read selection and is the Ware Lecturer for this year's General Assembly. In particular, Twain's fictionalized account is on point because he has Joan's childhood friends follow her into leading the French forces, a necessary element to arguing that all youth are capable of leadership and prophecy, not just the

¹⁶ Scott C. Alexander, "Knowing and Loving Our Neighbors of Other Faiths," in *On Our Way: Christian Practices for Living a Whole Life*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Susan R. Briehl (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2010) 165.

¹⁷ Caldwell, *Leaving Home With Faith* 17-18.

¹⁸ Sheryl Kujawa-Holbrook, "Curriculum" (handout, Introduction to Religious Education, Claremont School of Theology, Claremont, CA, 22 January 2013).

rare exception.¹⁹ Patel's book identifies abandoned youth as not only a tragedy, but a serious problem for the safety of our civilizations and cultures if their need for community and purpose is not fed in our home communities.²⁰ The hymns were chosen as deliberate deviation from the expectations of the congregation; for everything else I have attempted to stick to the liturgy and content that the congregation is used to, in order to maintain a feeling of familiarity and tradition while broaching a challenging new direction of thought. However, as the subject of the service and sermon was looking at new things, particularly the ideas and contributions of youth, I decided to take the risk of using the supplemental hymnal.²¹ For those who learn/transform by auditory means, this is counterbalanced by the choice for the choral anthems; My knowledge of choir music is limited, but I wanted to make sure the music selections were inclusive of Neighborhood's talented choir and respectful of its love for traditional music. Richard Einhorn's *Voices of Light*,²² a contemporary score to *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (1928), was perfect.

The liturgy structure was chosen specifically for use at Neighborhood UU Church of Pasadena. I would expect to review and make any changes necessary if this service were used somewhere else. The most likely area where changes might need to be made is in the music to be performed, as not every congregation has a traditional choir or a music director so well versed in traditional and historic compositions. For congregations who lean towards more contemporary selections, I would suggest these songs:

"Joan of Arc" (Leonard Cohen)

"Love and Happiness" (Emmylou Harris & Kim Richey)

¹⁹ Twain.

²⁰ Patel.

²¹ *Singing the Journey*.

²² Einhorn.

"With minds capable of abstract thinking and bodies fully developed, yet having brains still being wired for controls related to emotions, impulse restraint, and rational decision-making, it does seem a miracle that many make it through unscathed."²³--Elizabeth F. Caldwell

"It was an ogre, that war; an ogre that went about for near a hundred years, crunching men and dripping blood from its jaws. And with her little hand that child of seventeen struck him down; and yonder he lies stretched on the field of Patay, and will not get up any more while this old world lasts."²⁴--Mark Twain

Service Outline

Prelude: *Voices of Light*, "II. Victory at Orleans"²⁵

Chalice Lighting: "In Wildness in the preservation of the World."²⁶

Leader: What could be a better example of wildness found in the human condition than the vibrant exuberance of youth? I light our chalice today that we may recognize wildness for the blessing it is.

Hymn #1: 1006 "In My Quiet Sorrow"²⁷

I am worn, I am tired, in my quiet sorrow
Hopelessness will not let me be; help me
I won't speak of this ache inside, light eludes me
In the silence of my heart, I'm praying
I keep on, day by day, trusting light will guide me
Will you be with me through this time, holding me?
You're my hope when I fear holding on, believing
Deep inside I pray I'm strong; blessed be

²³ Caldwell, *Leaving Home With Faith* 14-15.

²⁴ Twain, 204-206.

²⁵ Einhorn.

²⁶ Henry David Thoreau, *Walking* (1862).

²⁷ *Singing the Journey*.

Reading #1: selection from *Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc*, Mark Twain²⁸

Anthem #1: *Voices of Light*, "VIII. Sacrament"²⁹

Prayer: "Prayer for Our Children," Robert F. Kaufmann³⁰

Leader: The prayer today was written for our children, but as I read it I would also like you think of it as a prayer for your inner child: that beautiful dreamer who has too often been hidden away under the clouds of disappointment and betrayal.

Hymn #2: 123 "Spirit of Life,"³¹ the Neighborhood UU doxology that is sung at every service.

Offertory: *Voices of Light*, "IX. Abjuration"³²

Reading #2: selection from *Acts of Faith, The Story of an American Muslim, in the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation*, Eboo Patel³³

Anthem #2: *Voices of Light*, "IX. Relapse"³⁴

Sermon

Hymn #3: 1028 "The Fire of Commitment"³⁵

From the light of days remembered burns a beacon bright and clear
Guiding hands and hearts and spirits into faith set free from fear
When the fire of commitment sets our mind and soul ablaze
When our hunger and our passion meet to call us on our way

²⁸ Twain.

²⁹ Einhorn.

³⁰ Robert F. Kaufmann, "Prayer for our Children," (UUMA Worship Materials Collection, 1997). <<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/readings/submissions/5865.shtml>>

³¹ *Singing the Living Tradition*.

³² Einhorn.

³³ Patel.

³⁴ Einhorn.

³⁵ *Singing the Journey*.

When we live with deep assurance of the flame that burns within
Then our promise finds fulfillment and our future can begin
From the stories of our living rings a song both brave and free
Calling pilgrims still to witness to the life of liberty
When the fire of commitment sets our mind and soul ablaze
When our hunger and our passion meet to call us on our way
When we live with deep assurance of the flame that burns within
Then our promise finds fulfillment and our future can begin
From the dreams of youthful vision comes a new, prophetic voice
Which demands a deeper justice built by our courageous choice
When the fire of commitment sets our mind and soul ablaze
When our hunger and our passion meet to call us on our way
When we live with deep assurance of the flame that burns within
Then our promise finds fulfillment and our future can begin

Benediction: Responsive Reading 463, spoken together instead of as a call and response³⁶

My heart is moved by all I cannot save:
So much has been destroyed
I have to cast my lot with those who, age after age,
Perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world.

³⁶ Adrienne Rich, *Singing the Living Tradition*.

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