

Annual Report: Religious Explorations, 2014-2015

1. List committee members and officers.

RVUUF's Religious Explorations program is staffed by Lead Teacher Liz Bianco (pre-Kindergarten to second-grade), Aleyda Mark (nursery), Debbie Orr (nursery), Margaret Mason (third- to fifth-grade), Bob Cogliser (sixth-grade and older) and Administrative Coordinator Cynthia M. Parkhill. Its board liaison is Courtney Bucolo and its personnel committee liaison is Alexander Lukacs.

2. What has your committee accomplished in the past year?

R.E. activities supported goals adopted by the broader congregation.

Goal 1: Strengthen the Beloved Community -- Religious Explorations promoted multi-generational connections through participation by adult volunteers in R.E. classrooms. Teachers also tied Sunday worship themes into classroom curriculum/activities. Some of these themes were the subject of student art exhibited in RVUUF's Great Hall.

Goal 3: Leadership Development -- By empowering its teachers to select and modify curriculum, R.E. made a direct investment in leadership development.

Goal 4: Create a Culture of Generosity -- In spring 2015, R.E. embarked on a service campaign that encouraged children and adults to donate their spare change toward a service project that the children chose democratically. The children voted to support the care of animals at Wildlife Images Rehabilitation and Education Center in Grants Pass. The remaining funds were donated for habitat conservation or restoration efforts.

Goal 5: Shared Ministry -- R.E. efforts that tied in with Goal 1 were also very closely aligned with those in Goal 5, again through the tying of themes to those addressed in the "Great Hall." We felt that volunteer participation also reflected shared ministry.

3. What obstacles did the committee encounter in the accomplishment of these goals?

Volunteers did not always follow up with their commitments and did not communicate in advance when they were not going to show up. While the

Neighborhood Team system is so much better than the issue we had with constantly having to recruit, we suggest the need for clearer communication so that teachers are prepared to deal with an absence of volunteers.

4. How did the Board empower your committee in the past year or how would you have liked the Board to empower your committee?

The board gave staff the freedom to do our jobs; we felt supported in our work.

5. Have you written your one-year objectives? YES; See below
6. Did the committee present your one-year objectives at the July 9th Committee Night meeting? YES
7. Does the committee have a covenant? YES

We work as a team. We hold space for each other, make each other a priority and support each other in doing our best jobs.

8. Does anyone keep minutes of the committee's meetings? YES

Liz Bianco and Cynthia M. Parkhill take notes during weekly teachers' meetings

9. On a five-point scale how well do committee members follow through on action steps assigned them? (0 =never and 5 = always) 4 or 5
10. In what ways is the committee in compliance with the committee's charter as listed in the RVUUF Operations Manual located in the front office?

The Religious Explorations Cooperative Committee, which formed our R.E. teaching and administrative model, disbanded in June 2014. R.E. staff deal with all matters related to program operations.

11. Does the committee charter need to be updated? YES

12. Please attach your one-year objectives.

R.E. will continue to support the broader congregation's five goals.

Goal 1: Strengthen the Beloved Community

One objective for R.E. is to continue building relationship between the fellowship and R.E. Action steps identified to work toward this objective include:

Bring together neighborhood teams with spontaneous volunteers. This is being accomplished. Board President Delores Nims supplied me with a schedule and contact information for the neighborhood teams, so if a parent or other supporter expresses interest in volunteering, we can connect them either with the team that corresponds to their geographic area or that is in charge of lining up volunteers during the Sunday that they want to contribute.

Strong communication with committees in the church that promote intergenerational activities (e.g. the Fellowship Fun Committee)

R.E. classes will share their activities during the "Time for All Ages." This will be an ongoing project, instead of something that has a finite completion date. As the opportunity presents, we will continue to exhibit student work on Religious Explorations bulletin boards and in RVUUF's Great Hall.

Goal 2: Governance and Operations

During the coming year, R.E. will experience a major shift in demographics. There has been/will be an influx of four new babies, plus a group of children will reach 4 years of age: traditionally the age that they advance from the nursery into "Level 2" pre-kindergarten to second-grade R.E. classes.

Do R.E. policies need to be revised to reflect these changes? Issues to be addressed include whether to determine a minimum age limit for children to be left in the nursery. Should parents who drop off their very young children be asked to sit in the library, so that an R.E. representative can easily locate them if their children begin to cry?

Should R.E. develop a list of supplies that parents need to bring to address nursing and diapering, along with ensuring warm outdoor wear if the children go outside? Do we need to invest in rocking bassinets or cribs to accommodate the infants? Should we even subdivide the age range of children, given the broad developmental span that ages 0 to 4 encompass?

R.E. will also look at age divisions in the other classrooms. Should children automatically advance to the next class when they reach chronological age, or should we identify developmental milestones that the child needs to have reached,

and hold informal assessments for each child that include communication with the parent(s)?

Goal 3: Leadership Development

By empowering its teachers to select curriculum and modify it for classroom and student needs, R.E. will continue to foster leadership development. One specific goal for the coming year is to increase teachers' visibility so that they receive direct appreciation for the work they do in our classrooms.

Goal 4: Create a Culture of Generosity

For this goal, we set an objective to connect R.E. with the congregation's fundraising auction (scheduled for Nov. 7, 2015), through an auction of children's art. Other possible actions include an art exhibit and a calendar of children's artwork. R.E. will also continue with its service projects, at least one project per year, and encourage members of the congregation to donate their change for the projects.

Goal 5: Shared Ministry

R.E. will continue to tie themes in R.E. classrooms with those addressed in the Great Hall and among members of the broader fellowship. Resources that will support this effort during the coming program year include "Soul Matters," a group of more than 90 UU congregations that follow the same monthly worship themes, and the "Touchstones Project," produced by the First Universalist Church of Denver.

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