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**USH Strategic Plan Update****Life Span Religious Education**

**Vision:** The Life Span Religious Education programs of the Unitarian Society of Hartford reflect and embody our commitment to lifelong, intergenerational pursuit of spiritual learning and growth. Our curricula for children, youth, parents and adults in common reflect and honor the UU principles and heritage. Characterized by experiential learning, our curricula and programs focus on what UU's are and may be. We apply and refine our spiritual growth, integrating the values and fruits of our learning in our worship, our life together, and in our projects within our congregation and in the larger community. Our physical plant and facilities provide adequate and suitable space to support and enhance our Life Span Religious Education programs.

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**Strategic Initiative (SI)****Progress To Date**

#1: Create and put in place a spiritual, dynamic, experiential, integrated and intergenerational program.

Given the absence of hard data on the dynamics of the program between 2002 and 2007, progress can only be substantiated from 2007 to present. Due to frequent staffing changes and the challenge of moving to two services in 2006, the stability of the program in May, 2007 was less than optimal. Efforts by both staff and volunteers to create a foundation from which to promote growth have resulted in the progress outlined below.

The curricula used in our program are frequently reviewed for appropriateness, diversity and quality. New materials are introduced each year in concert with traditional and beloved lesson plans. Multigenerational worship services occur regularly throughout the church year, and an effort is made to integrate the theme of the adult services in the classrooms. Collaboration between the RE representatives and other councils and sub-councils has increased significantly over the last two years, resulting in increased visibility of the children and families in the congregation. Both the Child Advocate position and the Children's Issues Sub-council have been eliminated this year, as it was determined that the RE program

**Is SI still relevant and useful?**

This work remains relevant and ongoing. An attempt to more clearly define the parameters of this initiative would be helpful.

**Recommended Next Steps**

Next steps include:

- Change the language of the strategic plan to reflect current scholarship using the term 'Multigenerational' rather than 'Intergenerational';
  - Increase the number of social justice service projects incorporated into the classroom lesson plans, as well as an environmental focus in collaboration with Green Sanctuary efforts;
  - Explore the relationship between the Religious Education Sub-council and the Adult Programs Sub-council for ways to collaborate and move toward a lifespan development focus, for example OWL for all ages;
  - Investigate opportunities for worship and music experiences designed
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serves both purposes.

#2: Identify, acquire and develop adequate human resources, both paid staff and volunteers, to implement the vision.

As noted in the previous initiative, there have been considerable staffing changes since the strategic plan was created. Staffing patterns and registration numbers are outlined below.

**2002-05:** 02-03: **175** 03-04: **140** 04-05: **107**

- Minister of Religious Education-FT
- Religious Education Assistant-PT
- Youth Advisor-PT
- Nursery Staff-Hourly

**2005-06: 93**

- Director of Religious Education-FT
- Youth Advisor-PT
- Nursery Staff-Hourly

**2006: 69**

- DRE-PT (20 hours/week)
- Youth Advisor-PT
- Nursery Staff-Hourly

**2006-07: 69**

- RE Administrator-Volunteer
- Youth Advisor-PT
- Nursery Staff-Hourly

**2007-08: 72**

- DRE-PT (33 hours/week)
- Youth Advisor-PT
- Youth Assistant-PT
- Nursery Staff-Hourly

**2008-Present: 94**

- DRE-PT (33 hours/week)

This work remains relevant and ongoing. A review of the vision for Religious Education is in order. Are our goals being reached with the current staffing levels? Have the goals changed, making current staffing sufficient?

Next steps include:

- specifically for children both in and out of the classroom;
  - Review curriculum mapping for varied learning styles and approaches, with particular emphasis on kinesthetic learning opportunities.
  - Research documents related to the decision to call a MRE in 1999. Compare to current congregational needs and best practices of other churches, particularly those who were of comparable size who have experienced growth;
  - Review/develop position descriptions focused on implementing the vision for current and future volunteer and staff positions. Collaborate with the HR Sub-council in this effort;
  - Work in cooperation with the Finance Sub-Council, the Board and the staff to make budget decisions that will support the congregation's vision and planning;
  - Recruit additional volunteers for the RE Sub-Council.
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- Youth Advisor-PT
  - Nursery Staff-Hourly

Staffing in Religious Education is significantly less at present than when the Strategic Plan was written. In addition, our volunteer staff is reduced from sufficient teachers to fill eight teaching teams to four teaching teams, and from ten members of the RE Sub-council to four. Although some progress had been made with the creation of a Youth Group Assistant position, current budgetary constraints make filling that position improbable in the near future. Our current staff and volunteer levels are adequate to continue the program at present attendance and productivity, they are not sufficient to implement the vision, or to support growth in the program.

#3: Accomplish the portion of the vision related to life span education-related physical plant and facilities needs.

Over the last two years, two classrooms and the nursery on the lower level have been fully renovated. Given that the rooms used for classrooms on the upper level are also used for meeting space, any renovation of those spaces would require collaboration with other interested parties. Currently, there is no plan to significantly alter the structure or appearance of those public spaces. At this time, the classroom space is sufficient for our level of attendance, and any short-term effort would be focused on replacing furniture and equipment, while improving the aesthetics of the classrooms using impermanent means. The installation of a new heating system that reduces the size of the heating zones has significantly improved the working conditions in the classrooms. Like our staffing levels, the classrooms are sufficient for our current attendance but there is not much

This work remains relevant and ongoing.

Next steps include:

- Continue to make the best use of our space and resources to create a welcoming environment in each classroom;
  - Investigate the feasibility of a multigenerational outdoor facility/space for worship/recreation/experiential education;
  - The maintenance and efficiency challenges of the physical plant are not unique to Religious Education, and are best addressed by other portions of this report dedicated to that purpose.
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room for an increase, particularly at the high school level, without reclaiming rooms currently serving other purposes for classroom space.

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