



UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST
FELLOWSHIP OF CORVALLIS

Explore. Love. Act.

Religious Exploration Council Newsletter, Sept. 2020

Sept. 2020

**Inside this issue:
Updates on the vision
and work of the RE
council, new RE
alliance, programs for
this year.**

Welcome.....	1
Interim Director.....	2
RE Survey.....	3
AFIRE.....	3 and 4
RE Library Renewal.....	5
RE Council.....	6
Get Involved	6
Pandemic Programs and Connections.....	7
Survey Reminder and Guide	8

2945 NW Circle Blvd.
Corvallis OR 97330
541-752-5218
office@uucorvallis.org

Welcome to a New Year for UUFC Religious Exploration

We feel a change in the air as the new church year is upon us. The cooler mornings usually coincide with freshly sharpened pencils and pristine notebooks. We anticipate a return to two Sunday services, the gathering of the waters ceremony, and children's programming in the RE wing.

This year, however, the chill in morning air signals something different. Instead of loading backpacks, we're preparing to connect with teachers remotely. In place of singing the children to RE classes, we join congregations across the country for a remote religious exploration called AFIRE. Different, yes. But the practice of connecting, of exploring what makes us fully human is no less sacred a calling than before.

In January, Rev. Israel Buffardi assembled a new Religious Exploration Council and invited us to imagine radically shifting the way we gather as a community. In the months since, we have shifted in ways we could not have imagined or prepared for.

As the pandemic continues to shape the ways that we connect, and Rachel Kohler steps into the role of Interim Director of Religious Exploration, the RE Council is exploring new ways our community can grow together, thrive across the distance, and return to our building stronger than ever when it becomes safe to do so.

Below you will find exciting details of what you can expect from adult and youth RE programming in the new church year, updates on our RE Library plans, an invitation to complete a short survey, and details of some of the work the council has been engaged in over the last several months. The vision is big, and you are a vital part of it! Thank you for being a part of this community that Explore, Loves, and Acts together.

Skyla Christison, RE Council Co-Chair

Welcome! From Rachel Kohler – Interim Director of Religious Exploration

Everyone is tired of hearing the word “unprecedented,” but here we are in a pandemic world of unprecedented disruption. It’s confusing, chaotic, and more than a little bit lonely. But disruption forces innovation and change, and this church year will be one of unprecedented change, in the ways we function as an organization and interact as a community.

Our Religious Exploration program is especially poised for change in this brave new world. I’m here to welcome you to this RE newsletter, the purpose of which is to explore some of these changes. Many of these new frameworks have been in discussion for *years*, and yet they have never made it over the gap between idea and implementation. The advantage of wide-scale disruption is that it allows for wide-scale reinvention, and that’s exactly what the RE program intends to do, so that when we can come back together in a physical space, we can do so in a more meaningful and connected way.

We’re excited to embark on this adventure with you all, as we pivot our programs into a digital space, forge new collaborative partnerships, revamp our library, and explore ways to increase the intergenerational aspects of our programs. Change is scary, but change can be good. Especially when we change together.

Please Take Our Short Survey

While we tend to think of “RE” as simply the children and youth sessions on Sunday morning, Religious Exploration in fact includes programming for the entire lifespan, across all ages. However, we are often quite good at keeping to our own age group, and find it challenging to include and welcome a lifespan of ages into the same UUFC activities and programs.

As a congregation, we have desired more multigenerational programming for at least a decade, and yet we have much to learn about how to do this well and consistently. The good news is that we as a community are willing to learn and experiment with new ways of being together. The RE Council needs your help--in the form of a survey--so that we can understand where we currently are in terms of intergenerational togetherness as a Fellowship. When we understand where we are succeeding and where we can improve, we then have a clearer understanding of how to focus our efforts toward intergenerational community building.

Our goal is to have at least 100% of the UUFC community complete the the RE Intergenerationality Survey! Sharing *your* perceptions of intergenerationality here at the UUFC is vital to our work in guiding the Religious Exploration program, and it will require only about 5-10 minutes of your time. Please click on this link: [UUFC RE Intergenerationality Survey](#) to take the survey today!

Multigenerational togetherness is so important!

I have been longing for ways to connect with children, teens and young people since I moved to Corvallis 26 years ago. I don’t have grandchildren, and my two Boomer children are not in Corvallis. I value my circle of close friends, which is mostly within 10 years of my age. But I feel more connected with the world when I relate to others in a wider span of generations. I want to hear, and partner with, experiences of others who are in school or still working for pay. If they value hearing of my past learnings and experiences, that really lifts my spirits and gives value to my life. In this time of social isolation, I would especially enjoy and benefit from interacting with those of younger ages at the Fellowship. I don’t think I’m alone in these feelings.

I’ve been working with the R.E. Council, and in looking back we see that the goal of more intergenerational activities has been around at the Fellowship for a long time. I’m excited that now we have new ideas on how to make this happen, especially after the COVID pandemic lifts. One idea is for volunteers to be able to help in R.E. classes for the children on one Sunday, or intermittent times basis. We’ll be reaching out to get your ideas too.

Janet Farrell, RE Council

UUFC RE Programs for 2020-21: AFIRE: Alliance for Inspiring Religious Exploration

AFIRE is a collaborative lifespan RE program, jointly planned and led by staff and volunteers in five congregations in Oregon, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Kansas. The offerings include the following classes and curricula. For each offering, we hope to have at least one Fellowship member as the “point person.”

Parents of Preschoolers (ages 2-5)

POP (Parents of Preschoolers) is an at-home, video-based curriculum designed especially for parents of kids ages 2 to 5. Each short lesson guides you as you step into your role as your child's most important spiritual teacher and supports you in making life with young kids just a little bit easier.

Each month from September 2020 to May 2021, participants will get access to four videos on the theme of the month. You'll engage with the videos at your own pace, and then have the option to gather on Zoom at the close of the month with POP creator Jen Shattuck (Director of Family Ministry at First Parish Kingston) and other parents to talk about what you've learned and discovered. To learn more, watch the POP curriculum trailer below.

Link to trailer: <https://youtu.be/NM4NAarNZk4>

Living the Stories (grades 1-3)

For children in grades 1-3, we have storytelling podcasts accompanied by simple crafts and activities that you can access for your children when it fits in your schedule. The stories in the podcasts, often adapted from the UUA's Tapestry of Faith library, invite children and their families to enter into deeper consideration on a variety of themes. Plus, they're full of fun sound effects and music.

Along with these podcasts, Interim DRE Rachel Kohler from the UU Fellowship of Corvallis will be providing videos that discuss children's books through anti-oppression lenses, providing age-appropriate ways to open conversations about representations of race, gender, and more.

Harry & UU (grades 4-5)

For 4th and 5th graders, a teaching team anchored by the UU Society of Fairhaven will engage children and their parents in magic hands-on activities and projects. This program is designed to empower kids to fight horcruxes (enduring evils) such as illiteracy, hunger, discrimination, and other social ills. This program also addresses some of our own individual struggles with fear, anxiety and depression, and how tackling these issues with others makes us stronger and deepens our relationships in community. While many of our UUFC children attended our own auxiliary Hogwarts campus a few years ago, the Wizarding World continues to reach out to UU congregations to establish subsidiary programs all over the world. Fairhaven's program gives our own young wizards a chance to study abroad and meet new fellow practitioners of the magical arts on the other side of the country, fighting some new and different horcruxes along the way. Time to dust off those wands!

In addition, this chance to re-enter the Wizarding World will acknowledge and explore the fact that Harry Potter is a beloved text from a creator who takes problematic positions here in the Muggle world, this program also helps 4th and 5th graders begin to wrestle with what it means to value stories for the meaning we give them and to draw on them as we seek to help each other and the world.

Crossing Paths (grades 6-8)

Youth in 6th, 7th, and 8th grades are invited to be part of an online program of interfaith learning and UU identity formation. Youth will explore Unitarian Universalism, Judaism, Christianity, Catholicism, Christian Evangelicalism (Mega Church), Quakerism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Paganism. This online adaptation from the Soul Matters Sharing Circle is designed so that youth can learn about the various religions through videos, webpage visits and online

zoom conversations with religious leaders, rather than in-person visits. It also includes games and activities that can be done together online. This program will be anchored by a team at BuxMont UU Fellowship in Warrington, PA.

COA (grades 7-8)

Coming of Age as a young Unitarian Universalist involves central questions like these: Who are you and how do you tell your story? What are your values? What are you capable of doing and what's important to you to do? How do you relate to adults and the world without your parents' mediation? Anchored by a teaching team at the UU Fellowship of Corvallis, the 7th and 8th grade cohort will address these core questions online and with in-person one-to-one mentoring.

Youth will work through the *To This I Give My Heart* Coming of Age journal as they connect with their mentors and each other, work together online to complete challenges and service projects, and ground themselves in UU identity and practices. The Coming of Age program culminates in writing credo statements, in which youth articulate how they understand the work of being human, and sharing those statements with their community in a worship service.

COA (grades 9-12)

Coming of Age as a young Unitarian Universalist involves central questions like these: Who are you and how do you tell your story? What are your values? What are you capable of doing and what's important to you to do? How do you relate to adults and the world without your parents' mediation? Anchored by a teaching team at the UU Society of Fairhaven, MA, the high school cohort will address these core questions online and with in-person one-to-one mentoring.

Youth will work through the *To This I Give My Heart* Coming of Age journal as they connect with their mentors and each other, work together online to complete challenges and service projects, and ground themselves in UU identity and practices. The Coming of Age program culminates in writing credo statements, in which youth articulate how they understand the work of being human, and sharing those statements with their community in a worship service.

Youth Group (grades 9-12)

Led by Rev. Aisha Ansano and youth advisers from each participating congregation, our high school youth group uses monthly themes to support youth in deepening their UU identities, connecting with their own spiritualities, and working for justice. Youth group will meet twice a month as a combined group, with the other two Sundays each month spent in their home congregation cohorts. Youth will also have discussion questions, opportunities for reflection, and other practices available in their dedicated space on our AFIRE Mighty Networks site.

Because youth group is a valuable space for youth leadership, additional components of our youth group will develop over the course of the year, including possible online worship services and midweek events. Youth will also create a worship service to be shared with the AFIRE congregations in the spring of 2021.

Parenting Support

Parenting during a pandemic is hard! Fortunately, you don't have to do it alone. When your family is part of AFIRE, you are part of a community of UU parents across the United States. Our POP (Parents of Preschoolers) group will have monthly parenting support calls throughout the year, and we'll be running a small group ministry for parents of youth who are in Coming of Age. Interested in other groups for parents and caregivers? Let us know! We'll do our best to provide online spaces to connect around the challenges and the joys of parenting, both those that are specific to this pandemic time and the perennial challenges and joys that always come with the territory.

Adults: UU University <https://uu-university.mn.co>

Adult RE classes and groups will be offered by ministers and RE leaders from all of the congregations, using **Mighty Networks** as the communication platform. Classes planned so far include Poetry, World Religions, Nature Writing, UU History, Context of Theology and Place, and discussion of "The Good Place." More to come....

Books Tell More Than One Story: Our RE Library Renewal Project

A library is not only a beloved and useful resource, it is also an historical artifact of the time and place out of which that particular collection of books grew. The details of each book's publisher, author, and illustrator reveal something about culture, power, and difference. The words found on the pages of each book help shape who we are as readers and how we see the world. As a whole, the books within a library's collection (and those that are absent) can provide a snapshot about the community the library serves, whose voices and stories are important to them, and what they value.

As perspectives and cultural assumptions shift, it is necessary to update a library's collection on a regular basis. Physical space is almost always limited, and so updating must include not only new acquisitions but also a process through which to cull books out of the library. The RE Council has begun that very process with the children's section of the UUFC library, and similar work is happening in the adult section as well. The overarching guidance for this library update comes from **our new mission statement for the RE library**:

The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Corvallis Religious Exploration Library provides an accessible collection of stories and resources for all ages across the lifespan, in line with our UU Principles and Sources. It strives to highlight and center diverse voices and experiences, in an effort to support our members, families, and visitors as they explore the UU faith and live out our congregation's mission to Explore, Love, and Act.

Earlier this year a beautiful and generous donation of \$5,000 was given for the purposes of acquiring new literature to help the UUFC library support and reflect our current understandings of anti-racism, social justice, and diversity. To make room for these exciting additions, we began by removing from the library books that are no longer in line with our mission and our understandings of racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc. as they are today. The RE Council has completed an initial sorting of our children's library collection: books that we know we will keep, those we are fairly certain we will be letting go of, and those that require a more nuanced evaluation.

The set of criteria libraries often use to determine what to "weed" out of their collections has an acronym: MUSTIE.

M- misleading of factually inaccurate

U- ugly (worn beyond mending)

S- superseded by a newer edition or a much better book on the subject

T- trivial (no discernible merit to your collection)

I- irrelevant to the needs and interests of the library's community

E- easily attainable from another library

The stories we tell, the stories we read, and who gets to tell those stories, matter. Whose stories are we leaving out? Which voices are overrepresented?

Guided by these standard criteria, the RE council is also taking a close look at authorship and representation through asking guiding questions such as these: Is a book about a marginalized group of people, but authored by a white person? Does the book's illustrations reinforce racialized stereotypes? Overall, do we have an overabundance of stories that center the experience of a white character? How can we shift our collection as a whole to better reflect our values around anti-racism and our current understandings of why representation matters? The stories we tell, the stories we read, and who gets to tell those stories, matter. Whose stories are we leaving out? Which voices are overrepresented?

We must acknowledge that every book brought into our collection was done so with care, good intentions, and in line with the Fellowship's ideas about justice and diversity at the time. And yet, we must also acknowledge that our understanding of justice and diversity have changed. We understand that as a predominantly white congregation, we must be actively anti-racist. We understand that many of the books acquired in the past--even though they appear to be about fighting racism or celebrating diversity--reflect inherent racism and white supremacy. As such, they represent who we *were*, but they no longer represent who we must be now, who we want to be in the future, or how we want to teach our children to be in the world. Our library update process is exciting and challenging. We look forward to sharing more updates with you as we continue the process.

Rachel Brinker – RE Council Co-chair

UUFC Religious Exploration Council 2020-21

The RE Council has seven active members; co-chairs Rachel Brinker and Skyla Christison, plus Janet Farrell, Rachel Ozretich, Mali Gottfried, Jesse Ford, and Beverly McFarland. The Council works collaboratively, with quite a bit of friendly discussion. Notes are taken during the meetings, and posted on our Google page.

We've embarked on a big, visionary project of moving toward a much more multi-generational RE program and Fellowship life in general. Current projects include updating the RE program mission statement and the RE library, and involving more RE youth in our deliberations and decision-making. We are working on the process begun by Israel Buffardi to sort through the current RE library in preparation for substantively enhancing this library with some wise new purchases funded by a grant, and reducing the number of books that currently seem inappropriate.

We've been introduced to the AFIRE multi-congregation RE program for this year, we've appointed a volunteer Youth RE liaison, and we've developed a survey for the Fellowship regarding RE as related to intergenerationality. Please take our short survey (page 2)! We live in new times, changing times, and our understandings and practice of religious exploration at the Fellowship are changing too!

Rachel Ozretich, RE Council

Get Involved!

There are several low-commitment ways that you can help with the RE vision for the coming fellowship year.

First, you are invited to **participate in a short survey** (page 2) designed to help the RE Council collect baseline information about how we perceive the fellowship is currently functioning in a few key areas. Some goals, such as inter-generational ties, have been articulated by RE participants for over a decade. In order to know if we're making progress on those goals, it's important to know where we stand. Your feedback will be invaluable in the effort to start measuring our progress.

The second way you can help is by participating in meetings that will be held in the fall centering the topic of intergenerationality. We hope to learn with and from one another about what builds strong ties between varying age groups and what obstacles have hindered our growth in this area in the past. We want to hear YOUR thoughts! Watch for meeting announcements in the coming months.

What is Unitarian Universalist Religious Exploration?

~We draw inspiration from many different sources of wisdom: all the great religions of the world, scientists & humanists, social activists & reformers, traditional indigenous cultures, nature, poetry, art, and our own direct experiences.

~We strive to be a safe place, physically and emotionally, to learn, to grow, to express, to worship, to question...

~We honor diversity and inclusion, recognizing multiple intelligences and ways of being.

~We ask the BIG questions: who are we? where do we come from? where are we going? what are we here for? And, we encourage taking your own answers seriously!

~We make connections: within ourselves--heart/body/mind; with others--through making friends, and building bridges of cross-cultural understanding; and with the natural world--plants, animals, land, and cosmos.

~We promote critical thinking, values clarification, & ethical decision-making skills.

~We cultivate compassion, kindness, wisdom, understanding, peace, love, and beauty.

~We offer support for dealing with hard times: grief, pain, loss, depression, and anxiety.

~We work to instill hope, faith, and empowerment.

Praise and Appreciation for UUFC Pandemic Programming

The RE Council recently asked a few Fellowship members about intergenerational programming during this pandemic. Responders gave lots of praise and appreciation. Beverly McFarland summarized what we heard:

The Religious Exploration programs delighted and enriched both children and adults. One adult responded “ I have enjoyed the videos and podcasts produced by Rachel Kohler for the Time for All Ages, particularly the ones addressing racism and white supremacy. These videos highlight the inherent racism in otherwise beautiful books with valuable moral tales, and they shed light on the issue of ‘whose stories get told and who is telling those stories’ in a kid-accessible way. By modeling how to ‘ask questions about books,’ Rachel is teaching us all how to ask these questions, and showing us how asking these questions is the first step in dismantling white supremacy. I learn something new every time I watch these ‘deconstruction’ videos because issues that adults tend to see as overwhelming are discussed with such simplicity, even while acknowledging how complex these issues are.”

Several people listen to Rachel Kohler’s Sunday RE programs before listening to the Sunday services, delighting in the stories and trying some of the all-ages crafts. “We never miss the RE offerings--sometimes we listen before the regular service and sometimes afterward. Bobbi’s MacBook goes onto our dining table after breakfast and we listen/watch faithfully, usually late Sunday mornings.”

Many noted a major feature about the video of the Sunday service—one can listen to it at home, whenever is convenient, drinking coffee, eating a meal. Similarly for other activities: “I have enjoyed regular online meeting of UUFC Justice teams, I’m taking meeting notes on my computer and can still participate. And, “I was impressed with the Women’s retreat, the program was wonderful on-line. Plus the Services Auction – beautiful offerings as always!”

Some responders are participating in almost every offering! One wrote, “I watch the services, read Jill’s Daily Practice, attended the Women’s Retreat, and attend several group meetings on zoom. I am impressed at the number of online connections which are being offered.” Others are grateful for the weekly Wednesday Coffee Hour and Friday kirtan.

Some are connecting when and how they can, as they juggle on-line or in-person work, families, school, and the weight of these strange and challenging times. One wrote: “Our family situation makes it hard to participate in much online, so we haven’t taken advantage of as many things as we might like. But we’ve really appreciated the commitment and great work of everyone who have kept things going.” Another summed up the grateful appreciation for the offerings: “My experience of staying connected to the Fellowship in new ways has been and gratefully continues to be rewarding. I’m learning more about acceptance, about giving to help others, and the comfort of love. The connection is stronger each day, even now. I daily practice the UU Principles in ways to help others know what my heart feels.”

We do not divide experiences into compartments and say, "These are religious; these are secular. These problems are in the realm of ethics; these have no ethical implications." Life becomes religious and ethical whenever we make it so:

- when some new light is seen,
- when some deeper appreciation is felt,
- when some larger outlook is gained,
- when some nobler purpose is formed,
- when some task is well done.

The function of the church for both young and old is not to give us on Sunday certain religious kinds of experience different from the experiences of every day. The function of the church is rather to teach us how to put religious and ethical qualities into all kinds of experience.

~Sophia Lyon Fahs, early UU religious educator

Reminder: Please Take Our Short RE Survey

Our goal is to have at least 100% of the UUFC community complete the the RE Survey! Sharing *your* perceptions of intergenerationality here at the UUFC is vital to our work in guiding the Religious Exploration program, and it will require only about 5-10 minutes of your time.

Please click on this link: [UUFC RE Intergenerationality Survey](#) to take the survey today!

Survey Reference Sheet for Rating Intergenerationality – Use this guide for your answers

For this survey we are defining a generation as roughly a 20 year chunk of time:

Ages 0-19

Ages 20-39

Ages 40-59

Ages 60-79

Ages 80+

In the survey, we will ask you to choose one of the following responses for various categories of Religious Exploration. You will also find places on the survey where we ask you to type specific RE activities in which you have been directly involved, and rate the intergenerationality of each of those using the same criteria.

Don't worry if you can't quite remember or you don't know people's specific ages. Your best guess is all we need!

0: N/A, I did not participate in this activity.

1: Not Intergenerational. Everyone involved was in the same twenty-year generation.
(*Example: leaders and participants were all between the ages of 40 and 59.*)

2: Barely Intergenerational. Leadership OR participation included TWO generations
(*Example: leaders and participants included ages 40-59 and 80+, and all participants were between ages 40-59.*)

3: Slightly Intergenerational. Leadership AND participation included TWO generations
(*Example: leaders were between the ages of 40 and 79, and all participants were between the ages of 40 and 79.*)

4: Fairly Intergenerational. Either leadership OR participation included at least THREE generations, but not leadership AND participation.
(*Example: leaders were between ages 40 and 79, and participants were between the ages of 20-79.*)

5: Very Intergenerational. Both leadership AND participation included at least THREE generations.
(*Example: leaders were between the ages of 40 and 80+, and participants were between the ages of 0 and 59.*)

Explore. Love. Act.

We gather as an inclusive religious community to search for meaning, build deep connections,
and inspire action toward a better world for all.