



October 2017 Report to the Board of Trustees
First Unitarian Society of Westchester
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Summer Childcare Of the 13 summer Sundays, we had children in the nursery on five Sundays. On three of those Sundays there was one child. The other Sundays, there were three and seven children.

Meetings, Training & Outreach

Weekly and Monthly

- Weekly with the Minister
- Weekly with staff
- Monthly Religious Education Ministry Team
- Monthly Board of Trustees
- Monthly Committee on Ministry
- Monthly Metro NY LREDA Chapter
- Monthly PrideWorks Board

Others

- Youth Advisor meeting
- Teaching team meeting
- Safe & Sacred team meeting
- LREDA & UUMA Professional Day about changing needs in faith formation
- Twice Monthly “Death of Sunday School” webinar series
- Zoom discussion about the new Crossing Paths curriculum
- Fuller Youth Institute webinar about youth ministry
- Zoom meetings with the UU White Supremacy Teach-In planning group

Highlights from the Past Month

Managing e-mail traffic is an ongoing challenge for me. Understandably, much of our work takes place over e-mail but there are days when I have not been able to get to the work on my ‘to do’ list because of the amount of e-mails. I am working on ways to manage this.

In preparation for upcoming conversations about the future of faith formation at FUSW, I have been participating in the “Death of Sunday School” webinars with Kimberly Sweeney, which are based on her article, "[The Death of Sunday School and the Future of Faith Formation](#)." I shared notes after the first two sessions, which you will find in [this blog](#). I am also participating in the Leading Adaptively course with Rev. Renee Ruchotzke.

I was asked to provide current and historical perspective on RE attendance for the October small group discussions. It took a significant amount of time to prepare this information and since much congregational energy is focused on this conversation, I am including notes about RE attendance and volunteerism at the end of this report.

I supported the youth advisors as they planned for the overnight retreat, and was present to open the building and close the building. Nine youth attended.

I met with the RE class teaching teams to discuss curriculum, the class schedule and volunteer recruitment. The Passport to Spirituality and Building Bridges (Neighboring Faiths) classes require a lot of planning to schedule guest speakers and site visits. I am grateful to Irene Jong for managing this.

I am coordinating Children’s Chapel for the 2nd to 5th grade class with Vicky Nunez.

I am in regular contact with Svitlana about use of shared space and small ongoing challenges.

I am working on a childcare and classroom ‘intake’ sheet to make sure we collect information about visiting children and youth.

Denominational Service

- I serve as a [Good Officer for LREDA Continental](#) and provided support for two religious educators in the past month.
- I am a member of the UU White Supremacy Teach-In planning group and wrote process notes for congregations participating in Teach-In 2.
- I was a guest speaker on [The VUU: A UU Talk Show](#), episode #191, White Supremacy Teach-In 2, September 21, 2017

Upcoming Schedule

- November 5-9, I will be in Denver, CO attending the Multicultural RE Renaissance Module. [Renaissance Modules](#) are trainings for religious educators in core aspects of UU faith formation.

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## Addendum: Report on RE Attendance & Volunteerism

The numbers in RE this year surpass the age demographics for our surrounding community. Looking at age distribution alone for Hastings-on-Hudson per [neighborhoodscout.com](#), and recognizing that we draw from more than just Hastings but the numbers likely do not shift significantly for the surrounding areas, we see:

|                        |                      |                       |
|------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| under age 5 = 4.7%     | ages 5 to 17 = 21.1% | ages 18 to 24 = 5.1%  |
| ages 25 to 34 = 6.0%   | ages 35 to 54 = 28%  | ages 55 to 64 = 16.2% |
| ages 65 and over = 19% |                      |                       |

Ages 17 and under make up 25.8% of the population. The census site records persons under the age of 18 as 25.4% of the population in Hastings as of 2010.

For the first week of RE, we had 30 children and youth: 3 in the nursery, 7 in the PreK - 1st grade class, 6 in the 2nd - 5th grade class, 4 in the 6<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade class, and 10 in Friday night youth group. The numbers in RE at the start of the year pretty well reflect the age demographics for our surrounding community.

Youth group meets Friday evenings so we may not see youth Sunday mornings but we do have a strong youth group that meets on the youth's schedule with a core group of ten youth participating and two adults who are committed to supporting the youth this year.

We could not offer OWL this year because only two of our trained facilitators were available. We had a small class and would have opened it up to friends of our youth and the neighboring community but we can't offer it if we don't have volunteers to lead it. We will be spending money this year to send adults to be trained so we can explore offering it next year, likely not during the same hour as worship.

It is increasingly difficult to get volunteers for RE. We are hearing that many of our adults feel the need to be in Sunday morning worship to build spiritual reserves for what feels like an increasingly chaotic world, which is understandable. If missing worship is part of the challenge, we may want to consider offering RE outside the hour of worship.

The strongest RE class is Prek-1st, where we have a paid teacher. It's the best attended class and is growing, yet the teacher's small salary is challenged every time there is a budget discussion. The other children's class and the middle school youth class do not have full teaching teams, despite repeated asks.

We have families who only bring their children or youth if it's a topic that specifically interests them, and what interests one family is often different from what interests another. It's hard to build sustainable

classes, cohorts and community that way. We also compete with Sunday morning sports and other activities.

We have families who will not attend on Sundays when we offer multigenerational worship services because we hear that the sanctuary is sometimes not welcoming for fidgety children.

### **Calculating RE Attendance and Enrollment**

Enrollment and attendance are different. 30 was the number of children and youth who \*attended\* RE the first week. I recently took children and youth off the roster who we haven't seen in a while. We currently have 36 enrolled or who we expect to enroll and we have had 12 new/visiting children and youth in the last year that I know of. That puts our enrollment potentially around 48 at the moment. In January 2016, we certified with the UUA that we had 51 children and youth enrolled.

The previous DRE kept registration numbers differently and include children and youth who may have submitted a registration form whether they attended on a regular basis or not. When I arrived, there were several children and youth on the registration spreadsheet who teachers said did not attend so I stopped counting them. From the moment I arrived, the numbers would have been less because I counted differently.

I count the children and youth who attend pretty regularly. That leaves out children and youth who we see only sometimes and it leaves out visitors who have visited a couple times over the past year but it's not clear yet if they will become more active. We cannot go by registration forms because it's an enduring challenge to get families to submit forms, which is not unique to this congregation. I have also not been successful getting regular attendance in the classrooms, and RE numbers are not counted when the worship count is taken.

I went through some of the previous DRE's rosters, which I have back to 2011, hoping this will help illustrate the challenge in providing numbers and tracking realistic attendance over time:

In 2011, there were 4 classes (K-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8), nursery and youth group. The previous DRE recorded 60 children and youth but 11 have no birthday listed which makes me think he didn't have registration forms for them, and no attendance is listed. The actual number is more likely in the high 40s or low 50s.

In 2013, there were 5 classes (PreK, K-2, 3-4, 5-6, 7-8), nursery and youth group. Every name on the list was counted for a total of 55 (5 less than two years before). Again, there is no list of actual attendance.

When I started in this position, the previous DRE provided a 2014 projected roster and suggested 5 classes (PreK, 1-3, 4-5, 6-7, 8-9), nursery and youth group. He also tried to provide a more accurate picture of attendance for me and ranked each child and youth according to a percentage he estimated they actually attended each week:

- 100% = 1 child (Peggy's son)
- 75% = 28 children and youth
- 50% = 14 children and youth
- 25% = 3 children and youth
- 0% = 5 children and youth

The 2014 roster I inherited would have put the number at 51 (9 less than in 2011) but you can see that 22 of those 51 only attended 50% or less, and 8 of the 51 attended 25% or less, which means there were several classes but they were small. Because of feedback from the teachers that small classes were difficult to sustain, I collapsed grades together so teachers weren't leading classes for only a few children.

## Summary

It is a challenge to provide specific numbers of enrolled and attendance, which are different, and there are different ways to count.

The numbers in RE at the start of this year reflect the age demographics for our surrounding community.

Given that this year we had 30 children and youth attend the first week of RE, it is fair to state that attendance over the past several years has remained relatively stable. It may feel to people like there are less than recent years because we have moved youth group to Friday night, at the request of the youth, and the children's classes go directly to class, at the request of families. Last year, only 1 children's class started in worship so only that class of children was being sung out.

Volunteerism has changed, in part because the Baby Boomer generation was significantly larger than the Gen X/Baby Bust generation; we do not have the same pool of adults from which to draw. We are hearing that our adults need to attend worship for their own spiritual sustenance, especially during this time when the world feels chaotic and taxing.

Fewer parents means fewer children and youth.

The needs of children, youth and families have changed and congregations have been slow to change along with them. The Sunday morning Sunday School model is failing congregations across denominations.

As we hear from other congregations, across denominations, that are struggling with the same challenges, changing our model of religious education will require no less than a shift in congregational culture in terms of understanding what present-day participation looks like, how we approach faith formation, what we ask of volunteers, and how we welcome families. It will also require discussions about vision rather than simply naming and implementing small changes in systems and practices that no longer meet the needs of this congregation and community. There is historical resistance to conversations about mission, vision and covenant in this congregation, which points to a core cultural shift needed before the other work can ensue in any meaningful way.

I hope the urgency that seems to accompany concerns about membership, attendance and pledging will be met with commitment to a long-term process. Small, quick changes will not yield the results needed. We must take the time to understand the context in which changes have occurred, to learn from the wisdom of others who are further along in responding to these changes, and to participate in the deep work of articulating a new vision for the future of faith formation at FUSW.