

YOUTH SUNDAY

I have mentioned some things about Unitarian Universalist youth services previously in sermons, but today I wanted to try to give you more of a feel for how youth experiences at camps and mini-cons are different from what we do in most UU Sunday Services. Hopefully we will actually have youth helping to lead future youth services, but I thought this might be a valuable way to talk about the needs of youth.

At youth camps and mini-con weekends, the worship experiences tend to be sometime after sundown and often at the end of the evening, in dark rooms with lots of candles or around the fire or just out under the stars. Such experiences are almost always shared in a circle and tend to be interactive and more intimate than church worship usually is.

I still remember similar experiences when I was a youth at Methodist camps and retreats. My youth group usually had one or two retreats a year either at the Indiana Dunes or the Warren Dunes in Michigan along Lake Michigan. The Northern Illinois Methodists owned one camp on Lake Geneva, Wisconsin and another larger one along the Rock River on the prairie near Dixon, Illinois. I remember camps and retreats at both as well as in other locations. I loved being outdoors and I loved the worship experiences held after dark.

Through the years of my Ministry, I have also been privileged to share wonderful youth worship experiences at beautiful camps in Wyoming, Montana, and California as well as a few elsewhere, along with at churches hosting mini-cons.

The arrangement of chairs this morning is an attempt to bring us closer together, to experience something of the intimacy shared in youth circle worship experiences. Youth worship experiences don't tend to have a single sermon, but instead to include shared readings, songs, and sometimes meditative thoughts by many of the youth. They often give an opportunity for anyone wishing to share something to do so.

Sometimes they include experiences like hugs shared in silence or quiet affirmations whispered as one circle moves slowly around another. I have seen very similar services shared in successive summer camps as well as new experiences created. Such services often include readings, songs, and a sharing of ideas as in our Sunday services, but the setting is more intimate and egalitarian. When an offering is taken, it often is to support scholarships to camp. Sometimes there are prayers, or hopes and dreams shared popcorn style, and often there may be one-word check-ins or check-outs to which everyone contributes. Sometimes there will be things to write and burnt to let go or treasured for the future. Sometimes there will be sheets of affirmations for each person to which everyone adds something.

Such camp and con experiences are often grounding for those youth who participate, safer places for youth even than UU Sanctuaries. These are often places where lifelong friendships are formed, life's pathways chosen, and decisions made for the future. Not every youth goes to camps or cons, but for those that do, the experiences are often significant.

With this introduction to youth circle worship, I invite us to spend the rest of our time this morning sharing our awareness of the needs of youth and the ways that we might better address them as a Unitarian Universalist congregation.