

Report to the Board of Trustees – Religious Education Attendance Review – May 12, 2015

The RE Department has done a review of attendance per your request after the steep drop in attendance in February 2015. This report was written by Mary Collins.

The following people have looked at the numbers, in depth and discussed what we feel are the reasons for such a drop: Felicia Keeton, Youth Circle Director, Cal Wacker, Youth Program Director, Hayden Parker, RE Assistant, and Mary Collins, Director of Religious Education

Felicia Keeton used graphs to analyze the data and concluded:

- **The overall numbers improved in March – but not as strong as in September. Her analysis is that weather did indeed play a factor.**
- She suggested that we should look at how we take attendance, noting some holes in the attendance summary. (Some teachers may not have taken attendance at all or put in a guestimate rather than an actual number. Teachers have been reminded of the importance of accurate attendance figures.)
- Attendance Distribution: ***Any significant change in attendance needs to look at what is happening in the particular cohort. The cohorts with the largest participation are:***
 - ***Youth group (including 9th grade when they joined youth group in January 2015 after Coming of Age).***
 - Cal Wacker added that Youth Group attendance on Sunday (on-site) is 15 + on average and 20 + when we have on-site overnights or events not on Sundays.
 - ***DRE: Youth Group attendance has been consistent*** - plus we have increased attendance at Youth Conferences and district trainings.
 - ***5th grade*** is the group that invited the most guests. The UUA *Tapestry of Faith* curriculum Toolbox of Faith is engaging.
 - ***8th grade*** Our Whole Lives (Sept - March) the weekly 2 hour Sexuality class is always the best in overall attendance. Participation from this age group drops off precipitously afterwards when they feel that Coming of Age is not as important to the TUCW RE experience.

Hayden Parker – prepared an analysis May 5 2015

- ***Logistics changes*** - This year the K-7th children started in the sanctuary and their clip boards were on a table in the foyer. This setup (not starting in their rooms, or in the chapel) could be the source for some of our drops in numbers -- 3rd and 5th graders in general bring friends more than any other grades, but it's much more likely that in the rush the guests don't get signed in, and parent just check off their children's names. In general, families running late and parents of 6-7th graders were the least likely to be checking off attendance.

- **Teachers in the semester format** (Fall -January and January – May) The second semester teacher transitions meant some more drops in attendance especially in February. Teachers in their eagerness to start the lesson & manage the room would forget to check the attendance.

2013 - 2014 - Last Year Data

- 273 unique individuals
- 92 children and youth weekly average attendance
- 120 families regularly attending
- 208 children and youth regularly attending
- 64 families officially registered
- 119 children and youth officially registered

2014 - 2015 - Current Year Data (at 5-3-15)

- 255 unique individuals
- 87 children and youth weekly average attendance
- 123 families regularly attending
- 171 children and youth regularly attending
- 94 families officially registered
- 137 children and youth officially registered

DRE thoughts:

- **UNIQUE INDIVIDUALS** we have served on Sunday morning –The number is down. We are following trends that people are making different decision with their family time on Sunday mornings.
- **AVERAGE WEEKLY ATTENDANCE** – 5 children less per week than last year.
 - *FYI Attendance in RE is always strongest in September – October* until sports, holidays, cold & flu season and it's hard to recover attendance Spring sports, vacations, special events at school.
 - Hayden notes details on particular age groups:
 - **The largest group of children, other than high school, are Pre-school-aged**, and several will be graduating to kindergarten next year.
 - The K-3rd grades (**mostly 2-3rd**) **have some of the strongest regular weekly attendance records compared to other grades** and it's likely we will have many familiar faces next year.
 - One particularly small individual grade: Virtually no 1st graders attend regularly
 - We have a **large 11th grade class** compared to 10th and 12th, which seems to be an anomaly due to the traditional drop-off of high school aged children. The 11th grade bunch is a very close-knit and dedicated group **but there may be a future decline in high school attendance next year when they become seniors.**
- **NUMBER OF FAMILIES ATTENDING REGULARLY** - increased by three.

- **REGISTRATIONS – UP from last year, but we still have more people attending than officially registered.** Hayden Parker: The increase in registrations is evidence that families and children are enjoying RE and want to be officially brought into the program. Almost every registered child is a regular attendee, with the few exceptions being families that have moved away. *High school, as well as new Pre-K families, are the most likely to not be registered and their rosters should be monitored next year so we can remind parents.*

DRE Notes:

- **Weather DID play a factor** two closures and many more icy mornings where teachers called in they weren't coming (which means their children too).
- **More Schedule Changes Due to: Candidate process & events more Multigenerational Sundays, weather related rescheduling**
 - On multigenerational Sundays all of the children and youth above pre-school are in the service. They are presumably counted in with the adult attendance that the ushers take care of. A good example was May 10th – originally I had full classes scheduled – then all went to the “Three Questions Musical upstairs. It may appear that attendance is down in RE that day but it is not accurate.
 - Feb. 8 –no RE classes were scheduled so youth could attend the Youth service but that service moved to March 8th.-
 - Moving the Coming of Age Trip from March to May – I sent the youth to the service that Sunday since there were no teachers for them. Once again they would have been counted in adult rather than RE attendance.
- **Semester Schedule Change of teachers + Winter/Spring Volunteer teams less cohesive – in Feb they were:** less experienced with group & attendance process.
- **Still in the “waiting for the new minister” period** - one parent called it “transition fatigue.”
- **Reverberation effect –** *In the groups with higher attendance, i.e. Youth Group, Cal notes that positive reinforcement occurs when youth live in the same town and attend the same schools. Youth group 11th grade has two major hubs in Wilton & Fairfield from which we draw consistently on Sundays.*

DRE & RE COUNCIL to-do-list

- **Work with Rev. John on Thematic or exploring Full Week Faith Ministry** – so we can engage families with our UU community not just on Sunday Morning.
 - **Monthly/ Weekly readings, places to visit together that reflect UU values (justice & love)**

- **Explore meeting time options for multi-age learning outside of Sunday morning timeframe**
- **Educate Families – what is coming & communication** – i.e. working now with families on the format they want for Coming of Age – may improve their attendance after OWL and before Youth Group.
- **Reach out to Neighborhood Circles / Small Group Ministries & RE Connections** – Offer RE Family focused and family friendly opportunities.
- **Improve instruction on attendance & who is in the group**
 - New Realm system may assist us in better attendance keeping,
 - Encouraging families & teachers to update database & use directory
 - Identifying target areas to promote for RE Events