Growth & Learning Circle Annual Report
2025-26

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

The RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM had three age groupings this year. As a result of our program and staff and volunteers our program doubled in size! In September 2025 we had about 12 children and youth registered and we now have 25 regular attendees.

Play Group
We are so grateful to Katie McDonald, Rafael Reyes and Annet Ramirez for their commitment to the children in our Play GroUUp. They cared for our youngest UUs each week.

Chapel Service
Our Chapel Service Children (ages K-6th grade) met each week to learn and explore and wonder and make new friends. This year focused on the seven values named in the UUA Bylaws Article II as well as some of the "big questions" that children wonder about. The overall theme of the year was "How do we UU?". We thought a lot about how UU is a verb as well as a noun. Lessons explored core UU values and highlighted inspirational figures that are UU as well as other voices, aiming to present a wide range of identities.

Youth Group
With a couple of years experimentation with combining junior and senior high school students I can say it has been a success. Last spring the youth group consisted of a core of five youth with two occasional youth attending sporadically. This year we now have a core of 10 youth with the possible occasional attendance of two more. From two volunteer work parties at Bemis Woods last year, we have expanded too three volunteer work opportunities with the addition of volunteering with Feed My Starving Children in Aurora. We will probably add another service project next year. Last year we had two lock-ins. This year we will have had three.

In youth sessions we have discussed social change with youth and adults working together. Next year we will work with a curriculum that mirrors the monthly themes at church services. With that in mind, Reverend Beth will help

instruct and mentor youth to participate as worship associates and perhaps to create a youth service. This will allow the youth to have a more visible presence in the adult church community. We are still formulating a revised Coming of Age program for the youth and will have a retreat at the end of the church year. Because of the expanding group and the activities planned we will be adding another adult advisor. Megan Griffin has agreed to come back and work with the youth. Her experience and enthusiasm are greatly appreciated. The coming year looks to be very exciting, and the youth group continues to grow and expand its horizons.

ADULT PROGRAMS

SUNDAY DISCUSSION GROUP

This has been a banner year for the UU discussion group because as usual, we solved a myriad of problems. The discussions ranged from the war in Iran, woke politics, media and its effect on its audience, and most recently AI. Attendance ranged from 8 to 12 with both men and women participating. Discussions were lively but respectful with most of the group participating. We look forward to new and exciting discussions for the coming year and welcome topic suggestions from the congregation.

BUDDHIST MEDITATION GROUP

The Buddhist Meditation group met weekly on Mondays via Zoom. Each meeting began with participants sharing personal updates, followed by a 20-minute meditation session. Afterward, the group read aloud and discussed the book *Why Buddhism Is True* by Robert Wright. Since completing the book, we have been listening to and discussing talks on Buddhist philosophy and practice. We are currently in the process of selecting our next book.

All are welcome to join in. Please contact Len Edgin (ledgin72@gmail.com) with any questions.

WISE ELDERS

The Church sponsored Wise Elders has been meeting weekly, via Zoom, since 2020. It began when the rise of Covid was making in-person meeting challenging. About 25 UCH members have been meeting together for the one-hour informal chats about issues and concerns crossing their collective minds. To reflect on six years of weekly gatherings, the group met together in-person at the church, earlier this year, for a celebratory 6th Anniversary luncheon. Whether wise or elder, or neither, church members and friends are invited to join in on the weekly discussions to share their thoughts and memories.

Respectfully submitted,
Pam Fodor