

Prepared for the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Grand  
Traverse

## The Death of Sunday School

*Reflection on the UU Institute's Course by the same name and  
Considerations for our Congregation*

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## Abstract

“The Death of Sunday School” is a webinar course offered by the UU Institute, which I participated in as part of my professional development for UUCGT. Now that I have concluded the course and reviewed my notes, I present this report to the UUCGT Board along with my regular February 2018 Report. This course was authored and led by Kim Sweeney, a credentialed Religious Educator and independent consultant who worked for seven years as the Lead for Faith Formation and Safe Congregations on the UUA’s New England Regional staff team. In short, Sweeney makes a compelling case for a complete transformation of our approach to the future of Faith Formation as UUs, including discarding the traditional notion of “Sunday School”. She offers good evidence and research to support these ideas, as well as suggestions for going forward. Herein I have not only summarized the information she included in the course (and corresponding materials), but I have also provided my thoughts in terms of our congregation. This includes additional research and materials not provided in conjunction with the course, such as other UUA sources. In short, I fully agree with Sweeney’s assessment – our model must change to meet changing times.

## Introduction

“Religious professionals have been talking about the challenges of Sunday School for close to a decade, yet talking about it and acknowledging that things need to change has not made a measurable difference”.<sup>1</sup> This striking quote comes from the opening message of Kimberly Sweeney’s “The Death of Sunday School and the Future of Faith Formation”, a report published by the New England Region of the UUA, and the subject of a UU Institute on-line course. Throughout the report, as well as in the corresponding course, Sweeney offers the history of the concept of Sunday School, trends behind the declining numbers, demographics and other factors that challenge our current ideas about Faith Formation for families in UU congregations, and ideas for the future. While there is more work to be done in considering this topic, including participating in the follow-up course entitled “Future of Faith Formation” this spring, it is important that we as a congregation begin considering changes to our approach to ministry for all ages, especially in regards to Faith Formation for children and families. While responses to this notion will vary; anger, fear, uncertainty, concern, excitement, relief – we need to consider the fact that “...we don’t build programs or develop strategies with the intention that they will live forever”.<sup>2</sup> In order to stay relevant, in order to survive in fact, we are going to need to take a long hard look in the mirror, release nostalgia that holds us back, have some challenging conversations that will provided us with opportunities to grow and learn, and yes – we are going to need to make some changes.

## Historical Perspective and Current State

The concept of Sunday School in the Protestant tradition was actually born out of the need to offer reform opportunities for children in England in the late 1700’s. Accepted in the United States in the early 1800’s (pushed early on by Methodists), it wasn’t until the 1940’s and 1950’s that today’s age-segregated model was put into practice in a mimicry of the shift in public schools at the time. Here began the model of segregating congregations by age, and at this time

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<sup>1</sup> Sweeney, Kimberly. "The Death of Sunday School and the Future of Faith Formation." *New England Region of the Unitarian Universalist Association*, June 2017, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

they were frequently segregated by race as well.<sup>3, 4</sup> The era that followed this ushered in the Baby Boomers, and, according to Tim Wright in his article “Sunday Schooling Our Kids out of Church”, congregations in the 1960’s-1970’s were looking for ways to draw Boomers back to the church including

“...creat[ing] worship experiences based on the unique ‘personality’ of the Boomer generation. These churches went ‘contemporary’, ‘seeker’, and/or ‘seeker-friendly’. Because these were the primary parenting years for Boomers, these congregations recognized the need to not only provide Boomer-friendly worship experiences for adults, but the need to create dynamic experiences for their children as well, knowing that if the kids wanted to come back, the parents were more likely to come back”.<sup>5</sup>

It was through this that the shift was made from a holistic approach in which all ages worshipped together, to the offering of (hopefully) attractive Sunday School classes at the same time as, and *separate* from the adult worship. The result was, and has been that “...in Unitarian Universalist spaces, children and adults were/[are] having drastically different Sunday morning experiences in isolation from each other”.<sup>6</sup> At this time there was also increased emphasis on segregating our congregations in other us/them ways: singles groups, parent groups, women’s groups, seniors’ groups, etc.<sup>7,8</sup> In regards to children vs. adults in particular, the

“...long-term and unintended consequence of this strategy was a generation of young people who had no connection to their faith or congregation outside of Sunday School. The implicit message of this divergent approach was that what happened in the sanctuary was for adults; it was framed as being boring and unappealing for children”.<sup>9</sup>

*If you want to raise an adult who doesn’t worship raise a child who doesn’t worship.*

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<sup>3</sup> Sweeney, Kimberly. "The History of Sunday School." Lecture. Accessed January 17, 2018.

<sup>4</sup> This segregation is important to note as it continues to this day each time we assume that the Faith Formation of children needs to occur separate from the other members of their community, i.e. the adults.

<sup>5</sup> Sweeney, Kimberly. "The Death..." p. 6-7.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Sweeney, Kimberly. "The History..."

<sup>8</sup> While these kinds of focused groups are no doubt of benefit and interest, it is my opinion that groups like this would be better organized as small group ministry rather than the “us/them” learning communities Sweeney is referring to. Such circles can result in groups becoming more and more peripheral in a congregation, to the point where their focus/mission/vision no longer supports that of the whole congregation.

<sup>9</sup> Sweeney, Kimberly. "The Death..." p. 7.

Sweeney offers some other interesting insight regarding historical and current trends amongst children/youth, parents & young adults. For instance, one consequence of the age-segregated model has been that faith development, which was once a cornerstone of households and families in that children learned their faith at home, shifted to something that was done primarily in the Sunday School classroom. It's suggested that the current generation (and their parents) are not only disconnected with their faith because of its peripheral place in their lives, but that they are the "most un-churched generations in history".<sup>10</sup> While past cyclical trends would have seen more young parents returning to church to seek community for themselves and their children, more and more parents and children are able to find community in places other than congregations. You don't need a church to provide community for you when there are clubs and committees, support groups and circles, activities and the internet. Yes, the internet is playing a big role in the future of the ways in which people connect and view themselves and their connections. Sweeney tells us that teens are increasingly finding value in the communities they are creating for themselves that play by these new rules of instant, or near instant interaction – for better or worse.<sup>11</sup> And, while we can wish that things were different, and we can try to force a less plugged in model, the truth of the matter is that the rest of their world doesn't work that way. Bottom line – the needs are different, and a model that doesn't create appealing inclusion of all ages in worship perpetuates division.

### **Demographics, Sociological Factors and Economics – the Impact on Our Congregation and its Programs**

Changing needs, sociological factors, and demographics have contributed to the decline in participation in the outdated Sunday school model as well. In fact, Sweeney offers that just because a church is '*established*' doesn't mean it's reaching out and meeting needs actually based on the demographics of the area they serve. If we are thinking about enrollment in our programs, we need to shift away from comparing last year's numbers to this year's numbers,

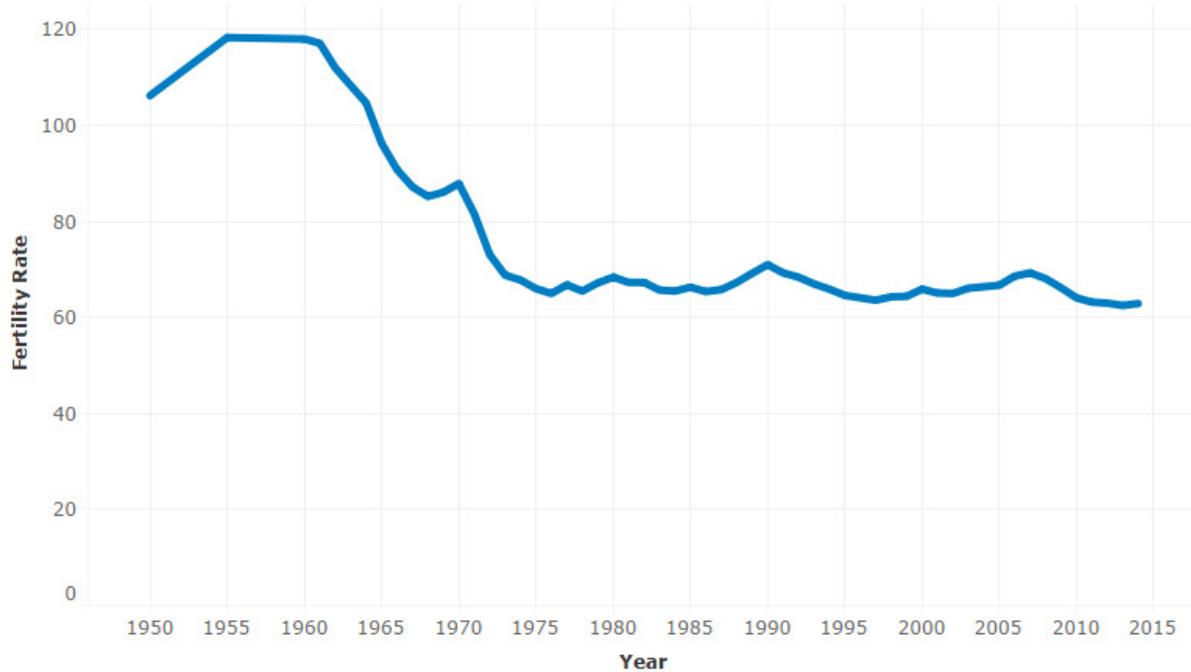
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<sup>10</sup> Sweeney, Kimberly. "The History..."

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

and this year's numbers to numbers from 6-10 years ago. Let's consider, for a moment, the fact that *there are actually less children being born in the United States today.*

### **Trends in the Fertility Rate (births per 1,000 women ages 15-44): Selected Years, 1950-2014**



Source: Hamilton, B. E., Martin, J. A., Osterman, M. J. K., Curtin, S. C., & Mathews, T. J. (2015). Births: Final data for 2014. National Vital Statistics Reports, 64(12). Hyattsville, MD: National Center for Health Statistics. Available at [http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr64/nvsr64\\_12.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nvsr/nvsr64/nvsr64_12.pdf). Table 1.

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If we are going to consider what we offer in terms of programming that supports our mission, we need to take into account that as of 'Generation X', there are literally not enough people being born to support the volunteer structures/rolls to be filled in our society – this includes our congregations.<sup>13</sup> Our changing volunteer base is tied to the death of the Sunday School model in that the age-segregated model itself requires a significant volunteer base. While many adults are required to staff classes for children/youth, "...the number of adults [since Generation X] has decreased by 50%.<sup>14</sup> Fewer children. Fewer volunteers.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Sweeney, Kimberly. "Who Are the People in Your Neighborhood?." Lecture. Accessed January 17, 2018.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Roberto, John and Katie Pfiffner, "Best Practices in Children's Faith Formation." *Lifelong Faith* 1.3, 2007

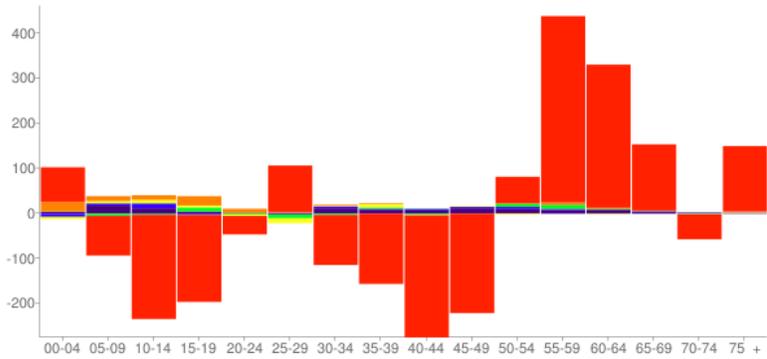
<sup>15</sup> This is something to consider more widely as well – our current structure/need for volunteers to staff most of the aspects of our congregation will need to be reevaluated. While lack of volunteers is a complex issue – available time, interest, energy are all factors – if there aren't enough people being born to fulfill needs in other areas of our society, there certainly aren't enough being born to become the kind of membership base we would need to support the current volunteer system.

In addition to birth rates nationwide, Sweeny encourages us to look at our own regional demographics, as well as consider the social and economic situation of those in our area.

Traverse City, Michigan - Overview	2010 Census		2000 Census		2000-2010 Change	
	Counts	Percentages	Counts	Percentages	Change	Percentages
Total Population	14,674	100.00%	14,532	100.00%	142	0.98%
<b>Population by Race</b>						
American Indian and Alaska native alone	260	1.77%	142	0.98%	118	83.10%
Asian alone	99	0.67%	72	0.50%	27	37.50%
Black or African American alone	103	0.70%	95	0.65%	8	8.42%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific native alone	5	0.03%	5	0.03%	0	0%
Some other race alone	76	0.52%	70	0.48%	6	8.57%
Two or more races	285	1.94%	198	1.36%	87	43.94%
White alone	13,846	94.36%	13,950	96.00%	-104	-0.75%
<b>Population by Hispanic or Latino Origin (of any race)</b>						
Persons Not of Hispanic or Latino Origin	14,394	98.09%	14,290	98.33%	104	0.73%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino Origin	280	1.91%	242	1.67%	38	15.70%
<b>Population by Gender</b>						
Female	7,725	52.64%	7,630	52.50%	95	1.25%
Male	6,949	47.36%	6,902	47.50%	47	0.68%
<b>Population by Age</b>						
Persons 0 to 4 years	815	5.55%	724	4.98%	91	12.57%
Persons 5 to 17 years	1,853	12.63%	2,223	15.30%	-370	-16.64%
Persons 18 to 64 years	9,552	65.09%	9,381	64.55%	171	1.82%
Persons 65 years and over	2,454	16.72%	2,204	15.17%	250	11.34%

Change in Population between 2000 and 2010, by Race - Traverse City, Michigan		
	Change	Percentages
American Indian and Alaska native alone	118	83.10%
Asian alone	27	37.50%
Black or African American alone	8	8.42%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific native alone	0	0%
Some other race alone	6	8.57%
Two or more races	87	43.94%
White alone	-104	-0.75%

Graph: Change in Population between 2000 and 2010, by Age and Race - Traverse City, Michigan



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As the data shows, there is a decline in the number of children and youth between the ages of 5-17 overall in our region by over 16%. The second figure likewise shows decline in white-only children and youth, as well as those in the age groups most likely to be young parents. The largest increases are in older, white-only individuals, presumably retirees moving to the region. While these numbers are based on comparisons between the 2000 and 2010 census, more recent enrollment numbers from TCAPS supports the fact that the number of children and youth in our area is changing.

<sup>16</sup> "Traverse City, Michigan Population: Census 2010 and 2000 Interactive Map, Demographics, Statistics, Quick Facts." Traverse City, MI Population - Census 2010 and 2000 Interactive Map, Demographics, Statistics, Quick Facts - Census Viewer. 2012. Accessed January 23, 2018. <http://censusviewer.com/city/MI/Traverse%20City>.

TCAPS student count data, all grades K-12	
Year	Students
2002-03	10,886
2003-04	10,790
2004-05	10,740
2005-06	10,627
2006-07	10,542
2007-08	10,356
2008-09	10,014
2009-10	9,859
2010-11	9,841
2011-12	9,769
2012-13	9,775
2013-14	9,776
2014-15	9,701

TBAISD student count data, all grades K-12	
Year	Students
2002-03	25,021
2003-04	25,153
2004-05	25,123
2005-06	25,131
2006-07	24,745
2007-08	24,524
2008-09	23,964
2009-10	23,647
2010-11	23,242
2011-12	23,013
2012-13	22,923
2013-14	22,873
2014-15	22,400

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<sup>17</sup> Merlin, Michelle. "TCAPS enrollment decline reflects statewide population trend." Traverse City Record-Eagle. December 27, 2015. Accessed January 23, 2018. [http://www.record-eagle.com/news/local\\_news/tcaps-enrollment-decline-reflects-statewide-population-trend/article\\_8d2eb389-6b65-5560-a1ab-c126bec59e89.html](http://www.record-eagle.com/news/local_news/tcaps-enrollment-decline-reflects-statewide-population-trend/article_8d2eb389-6b65-5560-a1ab-c126bec59e89.html).

More recent data for the 2017 school year does indicate an increase in enrollment in TCAPS by 190 individuals since 2016. However,

“District Director of Communications Christine Guitar said a good percentage of that boost comes from the Northern Michigan Partnership. This allows home-schooled students to take elective classes like art and physical education at a TCAPS school while taking their core classes like math and English at home.”<sup>18</sup>

We cannot assume therefore that numbers are up due to people moving into our region, or birthrate. While there could be a number of factors that are contributing to the decline in enrollment at TCAPS (increased enrollment in charter schools/private schools, more people homeschooling, etc.), it is clear that the demographics are shifting. To summarize: a) the region is made up less and less by white-only children/youth, families, and young adults b) most increases in the numbers of children/youth and those generally of parenting age do not consider themselves to be white-only, c) even these small increases in non-white only are not enough to equal previous population levels in these age groups.

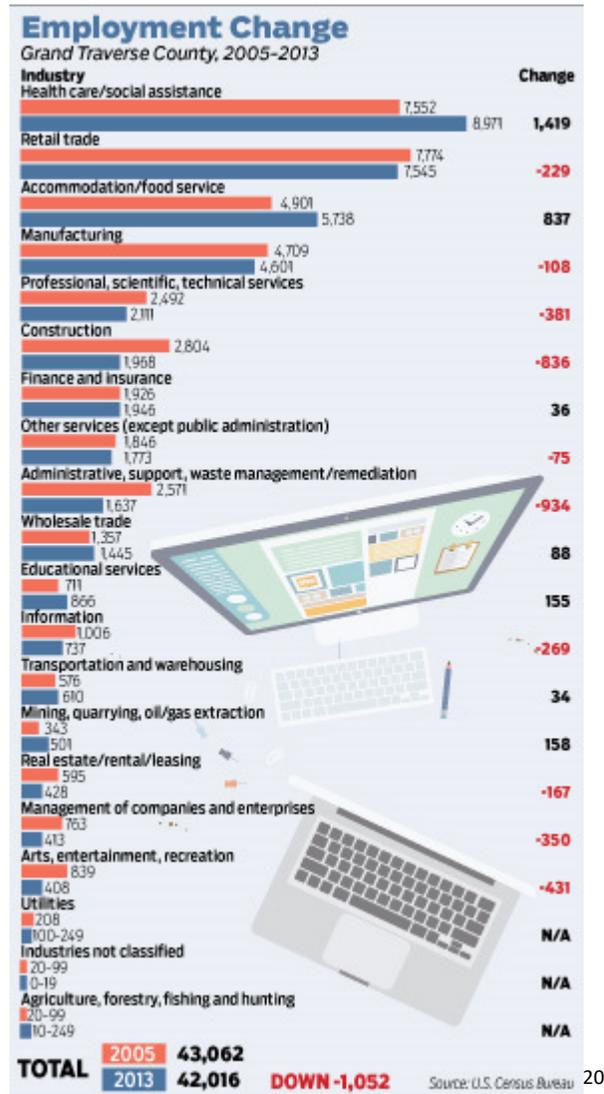
This brings me to the topic of gentrification as it appears in our community. Sweeney brings this up as a factor that has contributed, and continues to contribute to the declining number of families in certain areas. While she speaks specifically of urban areas experiencing the impact of gentrification such as increases in rent or property values of a particular area, an influx of businesses/attractions for new money, assumptions of levels of education, etc., I think this applies to our region as well.<sup>19</sup> Lindsey VanHulle, in her article for *Bridge Magazine* entitled “Traverse City’s Dilemma: Why This Hot Vacation Mecca Can’t Attract Young Workers” discusses just some of the things facing young adults and adults in the region (or those considering moving here). She states that “...although the local economy is thriving in many ways, the county is facing a looming attrition of baby boomers and stands a very real chance of losing the talent wars if it can’t figure out how to attract new, younger workers to live there full

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<sup>18</sup> Travis, Jordan. "Numbers Mixed: TCAPS sees rise in enrollment, others lose students." *Traverse City Record-Eagle*. October 06, 2017. Accessed January 23, 2018. [http://www.record-eagle.com/news/local\\_news/numbers-mixed-tcaps-sees-rise-in-enrollment-others-lose-students/article\\_c4e81aa5-46ff-59f9-81fa-345884f95c50.html](http://www.record-eagle.com/news/local_news/numbers-mixed-tcaps-sees-rise-in-enrollment-others-lose-students/article_c4e81aa5-46ff-59f9-81fa-345884f95c50.html).

<sup>19</sup> Sweeney, Kimberly. "Who..."

time. Low-paying jobs and a lack of affordable housing are two of the culprits.” (See figure below for numbers as of 2015).



Why are these important things to consider if we are thinking about the future of our congregation, especially in terms of children/youth, families, and young adults? Because the models we’ve had on life-support are ones that support assumptions of white-only, middle-upper middle class individuals. Because there are fewer children/families/young adults.

<sup>20</sup> VanHulle, Lindsay. "Traverse City's dilemma: Why this hot vacation mecca can't attract young workers." Bridge Magazine. September 13, 2015. Accessed January 23, 2018. <http://www.bridgemi.com/business-bridge/traverse-citys-dilemma-why-hot-vacation-mecca-cant-attract-young-workers>.

Because there are fewer volunteers. Because the population is more diverse. Because we need to be relevant to individuals from a wider socio-economic background.

How will the following serve us or benefit our congregations?

- Assuming that all young adults/families are able to have Sundays off to engage with our community
- Assuming that those who participate in our congregations have a level of education that enables them to feel included and welcomed based on the language that we use or the way we frame issues
- Assuming that everyone agrees that the most pressing issues for our congregations to consider are national/state ones (maybe those issues facing families such as job-loss, hunger, housing, and childcare are more immediate)
- Assuming that there are two working adults in a household
- Assuming that it is beneficial for every family to attend services on Sunday where they are separated from one another in age-segregated experiences

And these are just a few of the socio-economic considerations of the intersection between classism, elitism and ageism in this larger conversation.

### **Changing Needs and Ideas for the Future**

It is undeniable that the needs of individuals and families change from generation to generation, and this is something we need to take into consideration as we look long and hard at the future of our congregations. If we are going to attempt to meet these changing needs and expectations, we will need to consider our approach to ministry for all ages – faith formation, programs, Sunday mornings, congregational mission – everything. We need to ask ourselves: do we want to be relevant in the future? If so, do our current models support the kind of sustainability and growth required, and if not, are we willing to make changes?

One idea that Sweeney brings up is that of “Post-TV Era Worship”. According to her research, prior to 2005, more individuals (especially young people) were receiving their regular stream of information from TV and radio. In this one-way stream model, individuals would sit passively as *receivers* of information. Our congregations look like this on Sundays for the most part as well – congregants sit passively as one-way *receivers*. As of 2005, the consumption of information on the internet surpassed the TV/radio, leading to a different kind of information

consumption – a give and take, interactive, responsive system. Sweeney offers that given this expectation/need, some consideration needs to be given to the ways in which we approach offering our message. This is especially the case if we want to engage all ages in our sanctuaries – while the message doesn't need to change, the interaction does.<sup>21</sup>

If we are to deliver a clear message to all ages, we need to have a clear mission. Sweeney offers that we need to think about who we are called to serve and how we are responding to changes by asking ourselves if we are being responsive to the needs of today.<sup>22</sup> If we were to be a mission-focused congregation, we would not only have a clear vision of who we serve and how, but of the message and goals relative to those we serve – and those we would like to serve who are not yet part of our community. In the course of my research for this report, I have had the opportunity to speak with Rev. Theresa Novak, a retired UU minister currently living in California. Rev. Novak previously served the Unitarian Universalist Church of Ogden, in Ogden Utah. This congregation was identified as a “Breakthrough Congregation” by the UUA, and was mentioned as such by the UU World in 2012.<sup>23</sup> More than once in both the article, as well as our telephone conversation, Rev. Novak mentioned the necessity to know “who we are”.<sup>24</sup> With a clear mission we would be attractive not only to current members, but to new people of all ages. Clarity of mission would likewise ease transitioning away from an age-segregated model, in that we would be expending less energy on who/what we are and more energy on meeting the needs of our community and ministering to those with whom our mission resonates.

Many aspects of my conversation with Rev. Novak strongly supported the themes and information of “The Death of Sunday School” course. For instance, Rev. Novak supported Sweeney's assertion that all ages should be included in the entirety of Sunday services, and that “Religious Education HAS to change”.<sup>25</sup> Like Sweeney, she was not shy about stating that the

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<sup>21</sup> Sweeney, Kimberly. "The History..."

<sup>22</sup> Sweeney, Kimberly. "Who..."

<sup>23</sup> Skinner, Donald E. "UUA Breakthrough Congregation: UU Church of Ogden, Utah." UU World Magazine. June 28, 2012. Accessed February 05, 2018. <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/breakthrough-ogden-utah>.

<sup>24</sup> Novak, Rev. Theresa. "Worship for All Ages." Telephone interview by author. January 19, 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

message needn't change if children and youth are in the sanctuary. In fact, Rev. Novak offered that there are few better places for our young to hear about tough things than in the presence of their families, in the safety of our congregations. She offered that "...kids know it's all happening whether we know it or not – better that they hear it from us in church with their families...kids need to learn to engage with the world as it is".<sup>26</sup> While Sweeney focuses on the need to change the interaction style of Sunday worship, Rev. Novak expands upon this by addressing language and the structure of the service. When I asked her about a common rebuttal to having children in the entire service – the idea that language would need to be simplified (I've heard it expressed in less positive language) – Rev. Novak responded that we "...shouldn't be preaching over anyone's heads", and that doing so is not only ageist, but classist. We should, by her assessment, be defining language for everyone's benefit (not assuming a particular literacy or education level in our congregations). Some of the suggestions she had for creating age-inclusive, class-inclusive Sunday worship included restructuring the format of the worship to include two smaller teachings on a single theme that might be linked by song or story, the inclusion of more examples/stories in general, and creating intentional opportunities for children and youth.<sup>27</sup>

There are so many things for us to consider as we look at the idea of setting aside the traditional Sunday School model, along with addressing the idea of mission driven congregational life. For the purposes of this report, I have listed just some of the ideas generated by Sweeney, other UU professional educators who participated in the Death of Sunday School course, and Rev. Novak here. These are things that other congregations are doing, or have done relative to meeting the needs of children/youth/families/young adults, creating all-ages worship, and mission driven congregational initiatives:

- All ages included every Sunday in worship with a childcare (NOT religious education) option for ages infant-upper elementary – this meets the needs of adults who don't want to be separated from their children, as well as those who may need some space to themselves. In this scenario, education for all ages was/is offered twice/mo. following the service (with childcare for younger children).

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

- All ages could be asked to participate in the Sunday Service in the following ways: greeting, helping with the offering, lighting the chalice/candles, ringing the bell, choir/music, invite youth (high school and college) to learn and run the sound system, etc.
- A transition from Religious Education to Family Ministry (could be Family Ministry and Lifespan Programming) – see Sweeney’s job description/duties relative to the family ministry aspect of this transition<sup>28</sup>
- Outreach to families –
  - Creating afterschool programs in locations accessible to children/families (*in our case, not in our building which is too far out of town*)
  - Food bank in our building for our congregants in a place that is accessible at any time the building is open (*asking for permission/help can be difficult/shaming*)
  - Clothing swaps – bring items that are too small and exchange them with other people who have brought items (*this is a “green” idea too!*) This could be extended to items/toys/etc.
  - Offering a “meal with the minister” for families once/month
  - Offering an evening program/opportunity for parents to get some time to connect with one another and then leave their children in a childcare situation (*our Friday Night Out could be modified to accomplished this by having some sort of parent “mingle” at the beginning of the evening before they leave the building*)
  - Address the idea that parents should be doing more faith formation with their families by equipping them to do so in innovative ways (*maybe do something like the TADL lesson packs that can be checked out on various themes?*) and having them gather periodically for community.
  - Finding ways to include online community in our vision – has an appeal to young people/young parents
- Gradually transitioning to all-ages Sunday worship, rather than all at once (*moving from 1 Sunday/mo., to 2 Sundays/mo., then 3 Sundays/mo., etc.*)

While there is much to do if we are going to consider venturing down this path (which, in my opinion, is something that needs to be done), it all begins with a plan and the first step. Here are a few of the things I would propose as part of this much needed shift:

- DLE (myself in this case) completes the “Future of Faith Formation” course through the UU Institute (which is the follow up course to “The Death of Sunday School”)
- Our congregation adopts a mission that leads us to *real action* in our community, as well as *really* connecting with them/their interests/needs
- Our programs would include:
  - Family Ministry/Outreach

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<sup>28</sup> Sweeney, Kimberly. "The Death of Sunday School and the Future of Faith Formation." *New England Region of the Unitarian Universalist Association*, June 2017

- Faith Formation for families/children
  - Programs that support their needs, including small group ministry
- Adult Ministry/Outreach
  - UU Faith Formation that supports our mission and results in action – Tapestry of Faith programs, UUA congregational action issue education, etc.
  - Ministerial programs which could include contemplative/spiritual needs (small group ministry)
- Whole-congregation social justice action
- Whole congregation Sunday Services/Worship (*Consider a graduated model of Whole congregation Sunday Services/Worship – transitioning slowly*)
- Meet with families to find out what they would like Whole congregation Sunday Services/Worship to look like (*realizing that not all parents are going to be on-board with the idea*)
- Transition to a Family Ministry and Lifespan Programming model
- Agree upon a timeline for the initiation of this process, the transition, and what the end goal will look like. This will include congregation education regarding why this is important, and why change (*while uncomfortable sometimes*) is necessary. Materials could include handouts/slide shows from The Death of Sunday School course, and Tapestry of Faith curriculums on classism and ageism.

## Conclusion

Fyodor Dostoyevsky wrote that “Taking a new step, uttering a new word, is what people fear most”.<sup>29</sup> Make no mistake, what is being called for by Sweeney and those who view the traditional Sunday School model as long past due to be retired, is revolutionary. Sweeney herself tells us that there are no simple formulas, there will be no one way that will work for every congregation, and that it’s going to look different depending upon congregational needs. She offers that not only do we “need less fear and more hope” in this regard, but that “new strategies for action must be developed without any assurance that they are going to work”.<sup>30</sup> Change of this nature will undoubtedly bring up a lot of feelings and uncertainty. For instance, it was noted in one of our Death of Sunday School sessions that those who are “cradle UUs” – those who were raised UU themselves, and those who raised children in UU congregations themselves might have a particular aversion to this idea, or might be particularly resistant to change of this nature because of the positive memories and experience they had. While we

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<sup>29</sup> "Fear of Change." Fyodor Dostoyevsky. Accessed February 05, 2018. <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag?utf8=%E2%9C%93&id=fear%2Bof%2Bchange>.

<sup>30</sup> Sweeney, Kimberly. "Who..."

honor these as part of our past, our history and the threads that weave throughout our denominational history, it's time for new approaches – past time according to Sweeney and those who are likeminded. Rev. Novak said something in our conversation that I will never forget in terms of all-ages community, and all-ages Sunday Services/Worship in particular – we need to “love the children enough to include them”.<sup>31</sup> We need to take this to heart if we are going to develop models, missions, programs, etc. for our congregations that are holistic, inclusive, welcoming, and relevant. Ready or not, it's time to make a change.

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<sup>31</sup> Novak, Rev. Theresa.

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