

## Beacon Conversation

### 8 Mar 2015, Buckman Bridge Unitarian Universalist Church

Sarah Ritzmann: Florida District Board Trustee,

Maggie Lovins: Congregational Life Consultant, Southern Region.

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## Beacon Conversation

11 people present

Hannah: Few things to address. Don't want to address letter yet. Had webmaster look up new rules for youth (child safety). Nobody told me they changed again. No communication. That was the problem before.

Morgan: Youth Safety guidelines. [www.uua.org/documents/yaya/youth\\_inclusion\\_guidelines.pdf](http://www.uua.org/documents/yaya/youth_inclusion_guidelines.pdf)

Hannah: Discovered issue before going to DA last year. Were informed that they had to follow those rules. New version closer to what currently followed.

Sarah: Were able to address everything outlined to them except for age range.

Hannah: Only difference is that a special form for people over 18. That is not a problem, conforms with practice for other UU groups. Problem was that if people are in college, they are not youth any more. Some 14 year olds in college.

Maggie: Youth inclusion guidelines for UUA, for GA.

Hannah: Isn't that the relevant set of guidelines?

Sarah: That policy has existed for a long time.

Maggie: That is the policy for attending GA.

Dani: That is why we did Trail of Tears instead of GA.

Chris: Two things came from meeting: The letter that came out is specifically an insurance issue. When we have an event in our building, we are fine because our insurance policy written that way.

Sarah: And doesn't say Florida District or Southern Region event.

Chris: If region/district decides insurance only covers 14-18, comes down to what those organizations are willing to pay to cover.

Sarah: Also worth knowing that this is elected leaders making decisions based on cost/benefit. Not being dictated.

Linda: Many churches have made same decision.

Chris: We are lucky our congregation decided to keep things that way.

Sarah: Primary purpose of letter was to clarify affiliation status.

Chris: Beacon not affiliated with UUA Southern Region.

Sarah: District Board wishes to ensure congregations have accountable relationships.

Linda: Some parents have withheld children due to concerns about age ranges.

Chris: Parents/families to decide whether/when to enter.

Linda: We have made a decision, based on our strong structure of oversight, mentoring. 20 years from now, a different decision may be made.

Sarah: A lot of things housed at congregation level to be able to tailor to specific needs.

Morgan: Would a 13 year old with parent be covered?

Sarah: With parent, yes.

Morgan: But not with notarized permission?

Sarah: No. With parent only.

Maggie: Not a norm to have larger age range. If a different denomination, things would be different, would not have youth empowerment piece. Need recognition of real-world piece.

Dani: Young life does separate by age range. As a result of age range, have extensive requirements of advisors. High level of training, always have an awake advisor.

Maggie: Who is ultimately accountable? Who are advisors accountable to? DRE?

Linda: Board of Directors of church.

Morgan: Not only are advisors accountable, but older youth also holding them accountable. During advisor training, training makes the point that the youngest people need closest supervision.

Hannah: At beginning of Con, vote in advisors from home/away church and youth from home/away church to decide what to do with issues that arise. Always have a safe house nearby where people can be removed if needed, with a 2-1 youth to adult ratio.

Dani: Asking about legal liability.

Maggie: Part of letter was to remind congregations that they have ultimate responsibility. That is part of the conversation that needs to take place.

Dani: Some people had misunderstanding that line of responsibility ran to Florida District. Needed clarifying.

Maggie: Needed to clarify.

Dani: People do not have a problem with the substance of the letter, but with the way it was described.

Morgan: Described program as immoral.

Maggie: Talking about perception outside, wrt sharing air mattress space, etc.

Lisa: As a parent who appreciates program, since problem provoked by letter from District Board, will an apology come from the Board for the misunderstanding?

Sarah: Write a formal communication back to the Board. So that it can be addressed.

Linda: BBUUC Board writing a letter.

Sarah: Communications from District Board need to be voted on. I alone cannot speak for the board.

Morgan: Who would the letter go to? Would the letter also go out to the congregational presidents?

Sarah: Respond to the people who sent the letter.

Lisa: Maybe cc presidents.

Maggie: Would not cc presidents.

Chris: Ask your congregation where you stand, ask for a letter of support.

Morgan: Who does the letter go to.

Linda: Will write letter from BBUUC to District Board.

Maggie: Your letter needs to go to Florida District Board. They would send a clarification to the recipients of original letter. To be in a position of trying to respond to all other presidents may not be the best way to address that relationship. Your conversation sounds to me like it needs to go to the Florida District Board.

Morgan: What if the relationship between Beacon and another church is destroyed as a result of the original letter? How is that addressed? Eg, issues in Orlando as a result of the letter.

Maggie: Start the conversation with Margie. They are hoping to repair relationships.

Sarah: Letter like that not done lightly, Board processes were followed. Part of that letter was asking them to verify strong accountable relationships with Beacon groups.

Chris: Insurance restriction is going to stand. The way the letter is written, and the way it is stated, does not clarify that insurance needs to be verified. Added that to Frequently Asked Questions to make sure insurance addressed. The way it was stated was offensive. Letter used litigation, accountability fears to address issue rather than discussing what insurance was required. If Florida District had just said that rather than talking about immorality and lack of accountability, it would have avoided a lot of the problem. Churches will decide age range of their groups. Ask Florida District to re-write letter to say what they mean so that when presidents of congregations speak to Ken Hurto, they are not told Beacon is dangerous. Wouldn't it be better for relationship for Hurto to discuss actual issue. The Board needs to reach out to youth to repair relationships.

Dani: Our congregation is asking Sarah as a representative to take issue back to Board.

Sarah: Will take it back.

Maggie: Criteria for supporting like minded or affiliated groups is support ideals, do not place staff in a position of allowing to occur illegal, immoral, imprudent, unwise activities.

Linda: Some congregations do not have properly trained advisors.

Morgan: If not trained, not allowed on communication media.

Chris: Not allowed to be advisors at cons.

Sarah: Not able to say from a legal perspective that 12-20 cannot result in those types of things.

Maggie: In making legal policies, would not normally address minors or non-affiliated groups. Information not passed to non-affiliated groups. Part of the piece missing is a relationship piece.

Dani: As DRE, we take youth on trips. Wanted to take kids to GA. After a lot of effort planning trip, told "no" at last minute. So not entirely a result of not being affiliated. Can't bring 13 year old to GA. Information was not accessible on web a year ago. Affiliation does not guarantee communication.

Maggie: People need to talk to teachers, DRE when establishing policies affecting youth.

Hannah: Letter generated fear. A lot of people look up to people in leadership positions, hard to be heard as a youth.

Maggie: Can understand hard for youth to be heard. Thank you for sharing this.

Linda: Beacon group accountable to congregation only, how can we engage other congregations with same issues? Want to continue to enable youth to stay connected. How do we re-engage youth after Regionalization?

Maggie: Would like to avoid silos, break down walls, engage with each other.

Chris: Beacon goes forward as one.

Maggie: Why don't you attend as members of congregation?

Chris: Many parents can't attend. Youth can bunk together, use fundraisers to defray costs.

Dani: Many kids come to Cons whose parents are not UUs.

Maggie: For many youth group activities, only members of congregations attend.

Chris: Part of building relationship is to raise issues now.

Will: If you connect people with like interests, what would you tell people looking for a youth group spanning multiple congregations.

Maggie: All youth groups are internal to congregations. Events are made up of participants from multiple congregations.

Scott: How about a relational cluster with active youth groups?

Maggie: Such a cluster could be created.

Will: Different congregations have different policies. Beacon organizational structure allows coordination of events. Have permissions of boards of host congregations.

Dani: Hosting congregation decides rules for cons.

Morgan: At beginning of con, go over rules at host location.

Will: As part of planning process, verify in compliance.

Chris: Advisors of home congregation communicate out rules of the road.

Chris: New handbook and P&P not on web site. Beacon works on consensus basis.

Maggie: Anyone who can laugh together can work together.

Chris: Beacon are so passionate because they want to be in covenant, adults can make that difficult.

Morgan: Last year with DA, it was made impossible. New requirements kept emerging.

Chris: Action plan?

Hannah: Communication. Not supported due to age range, but just because of legality?

Maggie: Highly motivated by legalities. Safety the underlying concern.

Dani: Concerned about 20 year old not hurting 12 year old.

Hannah/Chris: Can communication from Region be less fear-based and more fact-based?

Hannah: To allow youth to become leaders, need to allow Beacon to show who they are.

Sarah: Will bring language question back to Board.

Chris: Needs to go to Southern Region.

Lisa: Proof of how Region/District feels about youth will be revealed by how they respond to requests for clarification going forward.

Maggie: Proof is in the pudding, but can't point to an unaffiliated group.

Chris: Need more relational language from Region. Stop using relationship-breaking language with the youth.

(Conclusion)

Scott: Process note: please use the link for the pdf, don't send the file around. That way readers will see the most correct version of the notes.