**FF-YM Zoom Gathering Notes from 7-2 & 23 & 30-2020**

**Did you know?** The 30th anniversary of the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act will be on Sunday, July 26th. This is a great opportunity for congregations to focus on that theme and work on “widening the welcome”! For help, check out the UCC Disabilities Ministries. They have a lot of information and resources: <https://www.ucc.org/disabilities_and_mental_health_justice>

Liz K at First Congregational Oshkosh is developing a **virtual mission trip** around the theme of diversity in their community. They will explore the struggles of being an immigrant, especially with the current COVID-19 situation.

* They will research their own family histories- why did their ancestors come here?
* Why do they have different populations in their community and did it affect these people to settle in that particular community?
* She will share the story of a relative who is an immigrant and came to this country to escape genocide.

Another focus will be on the environment. Here are some resources around environmental justice were shared during our gathering:

* The **Environmental Justice Foundation** has some great short films (some only a few minutes long, others about 10-12 minutes long) that can be shown to youth.

<https://ejfoundation.org/>

* Rev. Dr. Terry Gallagher is a UCC minister who is focused on environmental justice. He led a popular workshop at the Great Lakes Regional Youth Event at Elmhurst College in 2018. **Sustaining Creation** is his 8 session video series that is a “Faith Journey for Small Groups”.

<https://sustainingcreation.org/?page_id=38>

**Many in our group were looking for ideas to engage youth… if trying to gather outside:**

* Go on a hike
* Walk a labyrinth
* Have a campfire with appropriate spacing….individual s’mores kits could be packaged in resealable bags
* Meet in a large space (ie: parking lot) and sit in a circle in chairs (measure distance between chairs for appropriate spacing). Have everyone bring a sack lunch/dinner or order subs from a local restaurant.
  + Samantha has been doing this with her youth and she gives each youth a bag with a clipboard\*\*, markers, index cards, paper and dice. Her church packs lunches as a mission project so the youth use the markers and index cards to write notes to put in the lunches. (Youth could also write notes to be sent to those who are isolated, sick, etc…) The dice are used to play Tenzi. (Sam mentioned that it took the kids about 4 weeks of meeting before the youth began talking with each other the way they normally would.)
  + Other ideas for activities in a circle include:
    - Bingo
    - Trivia
    - Pictionary
    - Buzzword
    - Taboo
    - Charades
    - Scattergories

\*\* if you have the funds, 8X10 whiteboards could be used in place of clipboards

Here are some links to resources for games to play with youth:

* <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1GaOzVigUNQR8NajutTZ1fXXSoO1gO2I6?usp=sharing>
* **Mad Gab** on Google Slide <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1pq84Tcuy66YjYdk4gMPZ0t6c8Y4m34vaY-ucB_2-IUE/edit?usp=sharing>
* **Scattergories** <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1CecfPMbB-AERJJR6LasN7YCucVISKG3iqDH4ayQjxuk/edit?usp=sharing>

Many of these games can be played online, too.

**Bingo Fun!**

* Some churches are doing Parking Lot Bingo…having families gather in the parking lot to play Bingo together. (Think family tailgating with bingo!)
* One church sent Bible Bingo materials home in activity bags for families to play.
* Backyard Bingo:
  + Make your own cards to send out
  + Have the players
    - listen for certain sounds (birds chirping, water bubbling or running, dogs barking, etc….)
    - Have them mark something they have seen (grass, rainbow, fluffy clouds, purple flowers, etc…)
    - What have they touched? Smelled? Tasted? (if it is safe to taste 😊)

(We seemed to have quite the “Bingo” theme going on last Thursday! 😊)

**Activities that can be done from home…for a variety of ages:**

Have youth (or families) do a **scavenger hunt with pictures**. They can send you pictures of the completed items on the list. The first to complete all items would win a prize. Or… you could provide a prize to anyone who completes the items by a certain date.

Another idea shared is to do **“Story Hour”** on Zoom or other online platforms:

* Jenn is doing a Racial Justice Story Hour and it is going really well. Books are read on Zoom and then there is a Facebook Group for resource sharing. (these are not being recorded to protect the privacy of youth who participate and due to copyright issues for recording)
* Liz is asking teens to read stories for the little kids in the congregation. They will be recorded on Facebook or some other platform.

First Congregational in Oshkosh has a **Kids & Family Activities page** on their website. Each day, Liz posts different activities:

* One day is games (ie: hula hoop games): For some outdoor fun…here are instructions for making your own hula hoops! <https://rubyhooping.com/how-to-make-your-own-hula-hoop/>
* Another day she might post recipes (ie: for the 4th of July she posted the recipe for Red, White and Blue Dessert).
* She asks them what creative things they are making and invites them to share a picture.

**VBS Updates/Ideas:**

Quite a few churches are trying a virtual or hybrid VBS this year.

Darci (Middleton, WI) is using the curriculum from Group Publishing. They are setting up 3 rooms with 3 sets and will record videos to post online. They are making their program available online for 2 weeks. The first week, Darci will post one video per day. The videos will then remain online through week 2. This allows families to do the lessons when it is convenient. They are sending packets with all of the hands-on elements to the families who are enrolled in VBS. This will include all of the activities and themed snack instructions.

Carmen (Marshfield, WI) is going to use the Bolt Curriculum. This is a 3 day program. <https://www.gocurriculum.com/bolt-vbs>

Carmen’s pastor is also doing an 8 week sermon series on the Beattitudes. Carmen has put together a Beattitudes Activity Packet that was sent out to the kids in the congregation.

Samantha (Louisville, KY) is using Illustrated Ministry’s Compassion Camp (a virtual/at-home VBS): <https://store.illustratedministry.com/products/compassion-camp>

There are 5 videos for each of the 5 sessions:

* The opening with Bible Story
* Slow movement yoga
* Craft lesson/activity
* Music
* Closing/Send off & Prayer

(I may not have this exactly right…so check out their website!)

Sam will offer this over 5 weeks. She plans to post one lesson per week. Every family will get a folder with the resources needed for use at home during VBS.

**Additional Curriculum Resources that were mentioned:**

**Sparkhouse** has summer curriculum, including:

* *Spark All Kids*/Year Green/Summer…for Grades K-5: <https://www.wearesparkhouse.org/store/search?ss=summer+curriculum>
* *ReNew: The Green VBS* for PreK-Grade 6: <https://www.wearesparkhouse.org/store/product/ITEM008146/ReNew-The-Green-VBS>

**Cokesbury** now has a curriculum called *Celebrate-Wonder*: <https://www.cokesbury.com/celebrate-wonder>

**Update on Michigan Conference UCC project for youth:**

I am grateful to Jenn for sharing a lesson she and her colleagues learned this past week. They originally were planning to launch a project for youth in the Conference called “The Experiment”. When they shared their ideas and received feedback, they became aware that the word “experiment” often has a negative connotation in Black communities. This was a valuable lesson to learn…something that many of us are, too often, unaware of. In response, they have decided to call their project **“The Exploration”**.

They are in the final stages of putting together packets that will be sent to youth in the Michigan Conference. They will be encouraged/challenged to engage in spiritual/faith practices and then reflect on their experience. Imagine if we each did this with the youth in our setting…

Hope to see you online on Thursday, 7/9/2020…. We’ll have more details about registering for the NYE2020 virtual experience that will take place on 7/25 & 726.

**FF-YM Zoom Gathering Resources and Notes**

from **7-23-2020**

Just a reminder that if you haven’t signed up for **Treasure Box Tuesday emails** from Traci Smith, you should. 😊 This week’s email included a link to ***15 Back to School Prayers and Blessings*** from Traci. She encouraged us to share them with our congregations and our colleagues. Here’s the link: <http://www.traci-smith.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Back-to-School-Prayers-and-Blessings-for-Families_TraciSmith_2020.pdf>

And…last week, I forgot to include the information Kim Looney (Plymouth Congregational Church in Syracuse, NY) shared with us on 7/9/2020. She is part of a collaborative group called **“A Time for PK-5th Children”** They have created a **free online curriculum** for a 5 day program called ***“Where in the World is God?”***. While it would be perfect for an online VBS, I can also see using it for 5 weeks of a virtual Sunday School. The curriculum is geared for upper elementary children, but can be used/adapted for younger kids. You can find this resource at: [www.whereintheworldisGod.com](http://www.whereintheworldisGod.com). Be sure to check it out!

Liz Kaprelian (First Congregational in Oshkosh, WI) reported that the **virtual mission trip** that she and a colleague planned for their youth was a huge success! They focused on immigration in their community. Liz is writing up a summary of the experience and will share with us when it is complete. Her biggest take away from the experience: “Maybe youth don’t need a ‘social’ youth group, but do need a ‘project-based’ youth group.” (The culmination of the mission experience was for the youth to create a sustainable project. They have decided to start a website and hold monthly Zooms to highlight the stories/experiences of immigrants in their community.)

Hope Sabbagha (IL) has been doing a **puppet ministry** during the pandemic. She has a kangaroo puppet named Henry. She and Henry travel the world on a magic carpet.

Karen Smith (Consultant with **Practical Resources for Churches)** shared that PRC has a collection of puppets that subscribing churches can borrow. We can mail them to long distance subscribers. For a list, visit our website ([www.prcli.org](http://www.prcli.org)) and scroll down to the link to our online catalog. for more information, just email her at [Karen@prcli.org](mailto:Karen@prcli.org).

Mary Burkett (First Congregational UCC in Menomonie, WI) has a group of youth who were moving on from middle school to high school. The youth in middle school and those moving on to high school wanted to continue to meet. She has started a group called ***CAFÉ (Creativity, Acceptance, Food and Everyone)*** for these youth.

**NYE2020 UNITE! (National Youth Event)** was held online this past Saturday and Sunday (7/25 & 7/26). The workshops and virtual mission/service project are still available on the NYE2020 website. Here is the link: <http://www.uccpages.org/nye2020/>

The **No Justice No Peace Youth & Young Adult Racial Justice Rally** (previously referenced as the Youth & Young Adult Town Hall on Racial Justice) was yesterday (7/28). This event was excellent! If you missed it (or if you just want to watch it again), you can find it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G2R-GzVgkyg>

The event was a special edition of the United Church of Christ’s **Tuesdays for Nurture** program.

The second part of the program will be offered this Thursday (7/30) at 3:30 PM EST (2:30 PM CST) as part of the UCC’s **Thursdays for the Soul.** This event is the **Youth & Young Adult Racial Justice Rally: White Silence is Violence.** You can register for this webinar at: <https://www.ucc.org/thursdays_for_the_soul_youth_young_adult_racial_justice_rally_white_silence_is_violence>

I have been receiving a lot of inquiries about what people are doing with **Confirmation programs** this year. Cindy Birkner (MO Mid-South Conference UCC) has offered online conversations about Confirmation, so I decided to do the same. The first conversation will be held on Zoom on Wed. August 12th from 10 AM-- 11 AM CST. You are welcome to join us. Advanced registration is required…

*You are invited to a Zoom meeting.*

*When: Aug 12, 2020 10:00 AM Central Time (US and Canada)*

*Register in advance for this meeting:*

[*https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcrc-qspjksH9Hp\_35l\_bITcU91bEdPWJJ1*](https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcrc-qspjksH9Hp_35l_bITcU91bEdPWJJ1)

*After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the meeting.*

I plan to offer this opportunity again, but have not yet scheduled the dates and times. I will let you all know when I do.

We had a conversation about the **Our Whole Lives** curriculum from the United Church of Christ and the Unitarian Universalist Association. There is curriculum available for Kindergarten through Older Adult and is taught by trained facilitators. For more information:

<https://www.ucc.org/justice_sexuality-education_our-whole-lives>

<https://www.uua.org/re/ow>***Our Whole Lives,****together with*[***Sexuality and Our Faith***](https://www.ucc.org/justice/sexuality-education/sexuality-and-our-faith.html)*, helps participants make informed and responsible decisions about their relationships, health and behavior in the context of their faith. It equips participants with accurate, age-appropriate information in six subject areas: human development, relationships, personal skills, sexual behavior, sexual health, and society and culture. It provides not only facts about anatomy and human development, but helps participants to clarify their values, build interpersonal skills and understand the social, emotional and spiritual aspects of sexuality.*

The website contains links to information about what to do while your program is on hold due to COVID-19, as well as information one restarting your program.

Jenn Ringgold (MI Conference staff) shared these thoughts about OWL:

The program is so in-depth that it is recommended that facilitators be specifically trained before teaching the course. It is also imperative that before beginning offering OWL that SAFE Church plans be in place...

More than 50% of our participants tend to be community members and not church members, so the outreach ministry!!

**VBS Online**- Here is an e-mail I sent out with an invitation to use the virtual VBS that was created by 3 churches in the Northeast Association of the Wisconsin Conference UCC:

Dear Faith Formation friends,

I wanted to let you know about a cool thing that three churches in the Wisconsin Conference (Northeast Association) UCC are doing together to contribute to two of the Three Great Loves (children & neighbor) during the time of the pandemic.  Laura Yurs, pastor of one of the churches, sent the following message and invitation:

*My congregation (Immanuel UCC, Plymouth), my husband's congregation (St. Peter's UCC, Kiel), and Bethel UCC, Ada have been working together on a Virtual VBS experience for the children of our churches.  The experience begins tomorrow, July 27th and runs through Sunday August 2nd.*

*Our Virtual VBS week features the theme "God's Wide Circle."  The staff of these churches have worked together to create a 20-minute YouTube video for each day that corresponds to the theme.  The videos include songs, prayers, a Bible story, and a craft.  My dog, Silas, my husband, Chris, and I are the story-tellers.  Silas was a good boy and let me dress him up in all sorts of strange costumes to help tell the stories.  I think the videos turned out pretty cute.  We also delivered craft and snack kits to all of our participants (about 30 from each church) with all the supplies necessary to follow along with the craft portion of the video.  The week will also include two zoom sessions - a prayer, popcorn, & pajama party on Thursday and a Show & Tell pizza party next Sunday to wrap up the week.*

*I wanted to share with you, first, because I think it's cool how these three churches have worked together on this to make something really special for each of our communities.  Our churches are all small enough that independently, especially during the pandemic, it would have been nearly impossible for us to provide this opportunity to our congregations, but together, we all have something for the youngest members of our congregation who certainly are in equal need of care and support and fun during these difficult days.*

*I share with you also because we would like to invite any other church that might have interest to view the videos.  If it could be of any use or provide some respite to exhausted parents, we are glad to share our joint effort as widely as possible.  The videos can be accessed via either the Immanuel UCC YouTube channel:*[*https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC\_A\_ESSlmChzU61\_P4HVhyw*](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_A_ESSlmChzU61_P4HVhyw)*or the St. Peter's UCC YouTube channel:*[*https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqYMZ0ZLbjmJ4XK5y5qgPyw*](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqYMZ0ZLbjmJ4XK5y5qgPyw)

*The videos are set to "premiere" one each day at 10:00AM CT rom July 27 through August 1st.  After the initial 10:00AM CT premiere, the videos will be available to watch anytime, whenever it's convenient for families.  Although families outside of our congregations won't have the craft kits, pretty much all the supplies in them are ordinary things most folks have around the house, so if kids wanted to try making some of the crafts, most would probably have what they need at their disposal.*

If you, or the families in your congregation, are looking for a VBS experience, please consider using this resource.  If you have a group from your congregation that decides to do this, you might consider offering a virtual “Prayer, Popcorn and Pajama Party” on Thursday and a “Show & Tell Pizza Party” on Sunday.  I shared the text of Laura’s email because I wanted you all to not only have the links to their program, but also to understand what it is about, what their hopes are in sharing this resource, and to inspire you to think about what is possible in your setting.  If anyone has questions for Laura, I would be happy to help you connect with her.

Blessings,

Lisa Hart

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**The latest recommendations on “Returning to Church” were released by the Wisconsin Council of Churches on 7/30/20:**

<https://www.wichurches.org/2020/07/30/returning-to-church-july-2020-recommendations/>

While these recommendations were written for Wisconsin churches, the information and recommendations may be helpful for people living in other states, too.