



**A NEWSLETTER FROM SYLVIA BASS WEST— DIRECTOR OF LIFESPAN LEARNING
NOVEMBER 2006**



COMING OF AGE

The Coming of Age program serves a real goal to keep the youth involved within their home congregation. Coming of Age programs include rewards for ALL.

Coming of Age (COA) ceremonies marking the transition from childhood to youth are as old as history. They have included vision quests, bar and bat mitzvahs and confirmation classes, all to help youth learn about themselves and prepare for adulthood.

I came home from Stan Crow's Coming of Age leadership and mentor training believing even more strongly that we have an obligation to offer meaningful, faith based preparation for this huge life stage transition between childhood and youth.

Coming of Age is about the future of your faith community; raising up young people to give them a vision of what can be in the congregation!

Coming of Age programs are designed for Junior Youth in grades 7 and 8. Coming of Age can be offered weekly for a full year, or for part of the year with a few weekend retreats, or once a month, for 6 or 8 months. A COA program is designed with intent to provide opportunities for young people to deepen their sense of spiritual identity in the context of the congregation they attend. The program can inspire and challenge the adult members of the church to examine their own spiritual values as well.

Your congregation decides which age grouping is most appropriate, and no more than a 2 year spread is

recommended. This allows you to effectively run junior high OWL one year if this is your practice, and Coming of Age the alternate year.

If we provide this transformative experience for the junior youth group this then creates the potential nucleus for a youth group that feels more fully engaged with their faith and their own congregation.

COA programming opens a place of safety and trust where the participants respond to big life questions, and evolve as they answer questions such as:

- What is of ultimate value?
- How will I face difficult choices?
- Who can I turn to when I mess up?
- How does change affect me?
- What do I hope to do with my life?
- Who will I be close to?
- How can I define and live from a personal value base?

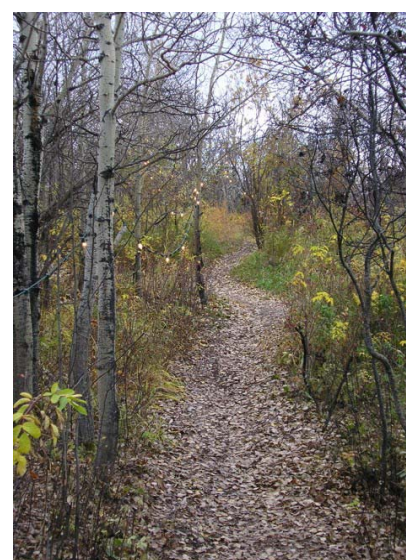
What a gift for a community to offer a young person! A full COA curriculum, developed by the UU Church of Greater Lansing is available for loan through the CUC Lifespan Learning Library. Just ask!

ICA Rite of Passage Journeys web site is www.icajourneys.org

With love for the children and encouragement for learners of all ages,

Sylvia

*Photo by Diane Bosman,
LL SC retreat Calgary AB
October 2005*





The Importance of Ritual

There are various types of rituals honouring the rites of passage of our lives.

The four major rites of passage are:

- 1.) Beginnings- birth, new stages of life, new adventures
- 2.) Initiations-coming of age, entering puberty, time of learning new skills, being tested
- 3.) Partnering- marriage, committed relationships, business partners
- 4.) Endings- divorce, rituals of endings, death, ending a stage of life.

When have you experienced a ritual related to a life transition or passage, and what was the impact of the ritual on you? Often they are very memorable.

Enacted Ritual in COA Ritual can be a part of many aspects of the COA program—the beginning with a ritual of severance, the building of trusted community with the ritual of covenanting, a vision quest, the making of masks or treasure boxes or walking sticks as part of the empowering story.

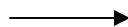


Vision Quest

After a Coming-of-Age ritual the youth engaged will be treated differently. Ritual should be developed by the group to ensure it has meaning, but drawing on ancient and modern traditions is encouraged. Choose activities that you know everyone will remember. The more the ritual is filled with mystery, the more it goes to the heart.

Enacted ritual takes on religious significance when we dramatize the compassion, concern and joy of caring in a faith community. Ritual makes possible the sharing of deeper meaning in common experiences.

Junior Youth participating in COA ceremony under youth bridge at ACM 2006 in Saint John



Question for the Month:

What do young people need these days to “Come of Age?”

What kind of Coming of Age program would we create if we could create one?

It can be anything you wish as a community, as long as it is intentional, safe and purposeful. Consider:

1. A set length of time and number of gatherings are planned.
2. Covenant and a commitment to attend (similar to OWL).
3. Parent/Youth Orientation.
4. Mentor recruiting, screening and training process.
5. Youth/Mentor Orientation.
6. Mentor Support, including mentors writing their Credo .
7. A Ropes Course or similar group bonding and stretching experience.
8. Weekend in nature – camping is good!
9. A relevant community service project.
10. Time with the Minister.
11. FUN TIMES!
12. Parent support.
13. A community celebration!





CIRCLES OF INTERCONNECTION

A Look at Organizational Structures of Your Community

An activity to bring a visual perspective to a beginning discussion around effective organizational framework and shared leadership in faith community follows. **It shows current reality visually, displayed with circles and connecting lines.**

Supplies: circles of various sizes and colours of construction paper – enough for up to 20 per group. Large newsprint sheet. Glue Sticks. Markers.

Each small group chooses to represent their various operational system functions and roles on their circles. (Committees, Board, Task Forces, groups, staff, adult members, children, youth)

Name, then place the circles on the page, in relative proximity to represent their current circles of connection within the congregation's operational structures. Glue circles to paper. (There are no set rules here – you decide what and how to represent the congregation, people and structures.)

Lines are then drawn on with markers to connect the circles

- **solid line indicates clear and effective connection, good communication**
- **broken line, there is some connection, but less effective, needs clarity**
- **blank spaces show no connection or direct communication between these**

This exercise may show us

- ✦ what currently works well and what needs clarity
- ✦ who regularly communicates and liaises with whom,
- ✦ where connections and lines of communication are clear and how we can build more of this,
- ✦ where connections are needing clarity – we can then discuss who we can ask for clarity,
- ✦ where there are NO connections - is this holding us back, or perhaps no direct connection is needed.

Who are the “others” missing from the picture? Have children, coming of age youth, youth, youth advisors, young adults, elders, visitors, renters, custodians, grounds people, administrator, choirs all been represented? Canvass committee? Membership? Ministerial Search Committee? Social Justice? Building and Grounds? Long Range Planning?

If you are doing this exercise in small groups, share your created models back to the whole group and comment on your connections.

As a whole group you may try this again, working to include new ideas for effective communication and connections for the organization.

WE ARE PROUDLY ENTERING OUR FIFTH YEAR OF SERVICE DELIVERY FROM THE CUC!

For program staff support for your congregation, you are invited to contact:

- Linda Thomson, Director of Regional Services East; linda@cuc.ca or 905-332-3851
- Sara McEwen, Director of Regional Services West; sara@cuc.ca or 866-877-7787
- Sylvia Bass West, Director of Lifespan Learning; sylvia@cuc.ca or 519-472-7073



Mentored Learning- Mentored learning is an essential component of COA and teaches many things about the skills one needs to be a part of the community. Mentors and youth ideally meet as a group, so that risk is minimized in this high trust ministry. Potential mentors are named by the youth—what a privilege to serve in this capacity!

What does a COA mentor do? A mentor helps the youth gain a sense of pride in the community and a connection to the past. A mentor can help the youth learn to recognize his or her role in the life of the community. A good COA program will teach youth about the history of their religious traditions and encourage them to be involved in church life, so that they understand how our living tradition manifests on a daily level!

Spiritual Journey In the mentor relationship a youth can explore their own spiritual development with a caring adult who is a committed UU. The minister can play a key role in helping the young people articulate their UU faith also. COA programs ensure there are times for regular reflective encounters. Meditation, wisdom circles, journaling, and ritual can offer the youth time to process their learning on this journey. Role play can give practice for dealing with situational ethics.

Physical Skills Mentors work with youth in helping them try on skills that will bolster their self-confidence. Ropes courses and other types of physical challenges encourage a youth to rely on their inner and outer strength and can build self-confidence and provide a opportunity for youth to test themselves. At least some outings in nature are important – they can have these type of physical challenges, or other group building exercises. Building community and having FUN together are a big part of COA.

The History and Heritage Mentors provide a personal context for the youth to explore the institutional knowledge and history of the community. To learn about the heritage of the community is to explore the identity and principles upon which the community is founded. It can be a time of profound learning and great pride. This is the time to learn the stories of the congregation, - many radical and inspiring people graced our hallways and continue to lead our congregations in social reform and just relations.



Junior Youth participants ACM 2005

Personal Credo Statement Most UU churches encourage youth to write a credo statement as part of COA. This is a part of their empowering story. Being able to reflect with an older and trusted member of the community (who has also written their personal credo) makes it easier to process newly forming values and ideas.

Social Realities Part of the mentor's job is to open the eyes of the youth to the social realities and innocent suffering of the rest of the world. This means engaging in some sort of social action project. By working as a team on a project that makes a difference in the world, both the mentor and youth can put their faith into action. Blessed be!



Junior Youth participants ACM 2006