

Religious Exploration Program Evaluation: May 6, 2025

This year has been one of expansion with new directions, new participants, and new connections. Our biggest successes have been in expanding what we offer to different age groups and continuing to build on our multi-generational gatherings to foster a sense of shared community in the congregation.

We have 33 kids registered this year, and 15 of those are new this year. We have an average of about 15 attending every Sunday.

Offerings:

Wednesday Potluck and Dungeons and Dragons: Andrew White hosted a DnD campaign from January thru April for our middle schoolers (aka Junior Youth Group) that evolved into a weekly potluck for all ages. We plan to continue to have Wednesdays as an informal drop in and hang out time with crafting or games or organizing the space together. Andrew will continue to join them when possible and would like to offer DnD through the summer if there is interest.

The Breakfast Club: Also for our Junior Youth Group, this has been on the last Sunday of the month for the past two months, and will be through the end of the congregational year. The kids choose some kind of project to give back to the community, and then walk to the nearby cafe for some treats. There are three adult mentors who join them. It's a great way to build trust between mentors and kids and give back to the community. They also met up with kids from the Westminster Unitarian congregation last month for a beach clean-up.

The Wunder Academy of Metamorphosis: This week-long summer program that Lee and Rev Denis developed in 2024 in collaboration with volunteers from the congregation was such a success last year, we're doing it again this year. It will be held the week of August 4-8th with the same staff people, Kenneth and Jenny Rebecca and hopefully Simon as well.

The Wunder Explorers: This is a rite of passage of sorts for our 9-10 year olds. Rev Denis and Lee have met with them twice so far and will once more. The goal is to honor their growing and expanding minds and to practice and deepen our observation and reflection skills while starting to form big questions about ourselves and the world. We will honor them with an Affirmation Ceremony during service on May 18th.

Sundays: Sundays have evolved into three different age groups this year. We now have enough kids in each age group that the nursery kids mostly play in the nursery instead of joining our circle time. The Junior Youth Group sometimes begin in the opening circle and then branch off or do their own project the whole time. The elementary aged kids take part in the circle time and activity. Circle time includes a song, game and Roses/Buds/Thorns and then either opening the Wunder Box, listening to a story or an activity/craft.

Gatherings:

Wunder Revels: We have held three of these celebrations this year directly after Sunday

service: Samhain (Nov. 3rd), Imbolc (Feb. 2nd) and Beltane (May 4th). They are a way to celebrate the changing of the seasons and build on our Wünder culture together as a whole congregation.

Congregational Dinners: These continue to be wonderful as they evolve to include more people helping with food and clean-up. We held our Chalice Days dinner and our 3rd annual Everyone's Birthday Party dinner.

Solstice Spiral Labyrinth Walk: This continues to be a lovely UUCSC tradition, and this year we had many kids join us!

Funda Fest Storytelling Gathering: It was wonderful to host Len Cabral and two others in a storytelling and craft event. It was such a nice way to reach out to the broader community and meet new families.

Easter service, feast and egg hunt: This has been a sweet family oriented multi-gen celebration after service the last two years.

Community Old-Time Dance: This was so much fun! We had at least 75 people of all ages joining in these circle, square and contra dances. Lee met with Harry Buffum and Hank Chapin to plan for next year. We're thinking of one in October and one in February.

Challenges:

Providing the right mix of freedom and structure for Junior Youth Group: This is an ongoing process of finding the right balance. The junior youth group really loves hanging out together and having unstructured time. But we'd like to offer them some structure to explore their identity, their faith, and other moral/ethical/political questions that are relevant to them. For example, they love building weapons, so we are going to engage in some conversations about the ethics of having fake weapons, as well as their motivations and fascination with them. We would really benefit from having adults with them each week, leading discussions and activities.

Creating the feeling of being a whole congregation, not segregated: Same as last year, sometimes it feels like there are two different worlds upstairs and downstairs. We will continue to work in Time for All Ages (TFAA) one or two times per month, multi-gen services 3-4 times per year and all congregational celebrations. We also could have more collaboration on topics and themes that carry over between the two groups. We are also moving forward with listening sessions to engage the whole congregation in meeting our challenges together.

Creating a new structure for the RE Committee: Last year we moved away from monthly meetings but we still haven't figured out our new structure yet. We have had several "RE conversations" like long-term planning meetings throughout the year, open to anyone who would like to be involved. These have been great brainstorming sessions, but not task/volunteer oriented. We need to add in a way for people to help with tasks, projects and volunteering without being on the committee. Like being a "friend" of RE.

Keeping our space clean and organized: With the clean team in flux, it's been challenging to keep the space clean. The space also needs another intensive clearing out of stuff and organizing what we keep. This happened in 2021 and it's time again.