

**Final Report**  
**Religious Exploration at**  
**First Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg**

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# Introduction

Like most faith communities the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg has experienced significant challenges during the nearly three year time of COVID-related isolation. The church has been holding services almost exclusively through social media delivery since early spring 2020; the religious education director departed the church; other staff members were laid off or left employment. Other issues in the church focused on conflicts with the minister have been of concern, but they have been worked with separately from the work which GIRE Consulting Services were engaged for. The GIRE consultant's focus has been on understanding the congregation's interests in, and willingness to support, a sustainable and engage religious exploration programme. (See *"Charge to the Consultants" section below*). We began work with the congregation in the winter of 2022. This report details the scope of work, feedback received from members of the congregation, and recommendations for offering curriculum, funding and support for a dynamic religious exploration programme that would begin in the early fall 2022.

## About the Congregation

Although we recognize that no UU congregation has a solid sense of its current numbers of adults or youth, the congregation reports (UUA 2022 certification) membership of 175 adults and at least 30 children and youth engaged. As of 2021 connection with families suggested that the number of children and youth in the community might be in the 30-40 range. The congregation has been meeting remotely, for the most part, for over two years. People are anxious to return to live gatherings although there is concern (as in the rest of the country) about covid spikes. The church has focused grant monies and effort into not only re-envisioning its mission but supporting and implementing a robust and wide-reaching distance ministry for those who are too far or too isolated to travel to Winnipeg.

## Charge to the RE Consultants

The consultants were engaged in winter 2022 with the following charge:

- Help identify a vision for the congregation's religious education programme and build support for a programme that will excite and engage the congregation.
- Provide support for Religious Exploration programme and explore new visions for

religious education

- ~ Identify, through conversations with some of the congregation's current and recent families and members, what excites them about the congregation.
- ~ Identify a variety of religious education methods and formats that might present models useful for the congregation.
- ~ Help determine if/how in-person RE gatherings will occur
- ~ Support the Religious Education Committee in making plans to implement a new vision for the programme.

## **Mission Into Action / Connection to RE Programming**

The consultants developed a plan for outreach to the families connected to the church to learn about their needs and expectations with regards to RE; Interviews were conducted with parents, teachers, and leaders of the congregation, including the congregation's minister, Rev. Meghann Robern (who has been on sabbatical returning in July 2022).

Guiding these conversations on Religious Exploration, we turned to the congregation's [Mission Statement](#) which recognizes the congregation as a "*learning community open to evidence and varied insights that encourages reflection and exploration...*" In April the board adopted the [Mission Into Action](#) plan to help guide the church's programmes going forward. To this end, mission-focused action includes offering "*learning experiences for children, youth, families, and adults*" and "*adopt[ing] a mutual learning model of leadership...*" We have used this call to action in our work as a lens to help begin to envision the future RE programme.

# PART 1: Gaining Congregational Input and Feedback

## The Interview Process

We hosted four online focus groups, two of which were specifically geared toward RE families -parents, caregivers, children & youth. The first two sessions took place in February and two in May. In addition, for those who did not or were not able to attend a group session, we met with a number of people individually over that course of time. Input was drawn from approximately 23 families, with 13 families currently in the RE cohort, representing needs of children and youth in all age groups. We solicited input, additionally, through online surveys which helped to provide a basis for the questions we then explored in our interview process. We heard from a number of lay leaders, former teachers, and those who used to have children in the RE programme. Their input was used to develop recommendations for this report.

## Findings from the interviews:

A number of patterns, values and dreams emerged from our interview process. The end objective is to recommend programmes and approaches that will be sustainable by the congregation and that are most likely to encourage continuing engagement on the part of the congregation's community. We categorized the input into the following sections: past programmes to keep or support; wishes; concerns about the programme going forward; and dreams for the future of RE. What follows are some of the statements from interviewees about elements they identified and programmes that have been, and/or might be, attractive.

### ➤ **Past Programmes to keep or support:**

Those interviewed spoke about the memories they held of successful, energizing programmes and learning opportunities offered by the church. These included:

> Multi-gen worship services presented by young people. Comments included: *"I enjoyed when kids were involved in the service": "There were some good storytellers"; "The tradition of singing the kids out was special part of service."*

> Appreciation for "the ritual parts" of worship - chalice lighting, joys & sorrows. One such comment: *"Our children enjoy story time."*

>The “Spirit of the Christmas Tree” (Joyce Poley) presentation - an inclusive undertaking

>The hospitality and feel of the child care room for nursery and young children received attention: *“It was amazing... for the first time not having hands on with kids while I was awake”*

>Fondness about a variety of activities. People specifically mentioned the following: *Talent shows, Family fun nights and crafts, Solstice celebrations, music and potluck, Penpals between kids and adults, “Everybody’s birthday” (a big hit)*

>Must-keep Curricula, according to respondents, include: Neighboring Faiths (current version is *Building Bridges*); Coming of Age: “[I] really enjoyed watching the teens of church speak in front of the congregation. They are wonderful ...[I have hope] that my son could be like that.”

>OWL at multiple levels (middle and elementary). There were MANY comments about OWL, including: *“I wanted [my kids] to stay for the sexuality programme because lots of people come [to the church] to get their kids into that programme”*; *“OWL & COA [Coming of Age] are brilliant and central to teenage kids.”*

### ➤ Wishes for the Future

During the interviews people expressed a number of wishes and desires for the RE programme. High on the list was the opinion that for most, programmes be offered in person and on site, however a small number of congregants who live at a distance hoped that some media-based options would also be available (this is probably increasingly so during winter months).

#### >Need to offer valued programmes (Our Whole Lives and Coming of Age)

Several representative comments received: *“We discussed COA as a place for [one of our children] to learn”*; *“[Our child] said he wishes that there was more activity and that he would like to learn about religious things [like other religious practices]”*

#### >Yearning for UU values as presented through RE programmes:

Programmes specifically for middle and high school youth (e.g., junior and senior youth groups); Grounding and context for development of critical thinking skills;

Development of a ‘moral compass,’ spirituality learning that is on a different level than at school; A focus on the truth and reconciliation process. One person said, *“I would like to see more of building awareness for what we need to do to have reconciliation and how do we reach out to people who are coming on to our property and asking for water from our standing pipe to water the garden.”*

>A Need for Parent Connection & Support:

A number of people expressed a wish for a way of offering greater connection for parents (e.g., a parent support group). During this prolonged period of COVID-induced isolation and life in a geographical area where winters can be long and dark, there were many mentions of the need to support a “community for friendships, [to] learn about values, etc.” This is a wish expressed for both adults and youth. One person opined, “[There should be a] focus on offering a weekly coffee connection; with a theme, in a small group casual atmosphere. We need to be able to facilitate conversation, not just sit around. [Groups like this] need structure and support to create a spark for connecting.”

>Some Wishes Around Childcare:

There was wish expressed for offering child care for other church activities (e.g., choir) to allow those with younger children to participate and meet other adults. And it was mentioned that checking with families of younger children who might wish to participate in church activities would be appreciated to promote scheduling activities at times when all could participate.

>A welcoming space for children:

The importance of the role of the church in being a welcoming space for children (and families) which include transgender or LGBT++ members is significant.

>Multigenerational Worship

was identified as being valuable and important to those interviewed. We received multiple comments around the importance of there being an all-ages community in the congregation rather than one that is separated between adults and children. Generally parents reported positive experiences for their children when attending or participating in worship.

>Engagement /Remote Access to Church Programmes:

There were several specific comments about distance engagement in regard to the offerings of the congregation - both a way for people to be involved even if they live remotely and - related - the use of music, screens, and other technological resources that can engage people even at a distance. One person remembered,

with enthusiasm, a service where the presenter “wove into the service the thoughts he shared and how you can illustrate what you are talking about.”

## ➤ Concerns

As might be anticipated, there were some concerns expressed in the interviews - both related to past experience and what might be in place for the future. Those concerns focused principally on two key areas, as noted below.

### >Technical and Physical Access:

It was noted that there needs to be funding for tech support to meet the needs of children (and others) who are connecting with the church remotely. Additionally a number of people mentioned that RE programmes take place on the lower level of the church. One person said: *“Right now you have to go downstairs. I am on the accessibility committee. Hopefully we will get a lift in. Geographically there is separation. We need to provide accessibility physically and for kids and others with special needs. What if we said, ‘everyone who comes to the church has special needs’ - and we all carried that?”*

### >Timing of programmes:

One person said, *“RE did not work well for our family when the Youth Group was held after the services and led by the Minister. The youth would have to wait while their Mom taught OWL and the meetings weren't as interesting/ engaging as with the previous advisor. The minister made the youth write about their experiences of the worship... I want Youth Group to be during service or a different time, not Sunday after services.”* Several others also commented on the times when programmes were held (although most acknowledge that there is no ‘perfect’ solution to this concern.)

### >Urgency around returning; but also hesitancy about who will showing up:

A number of those we spoke with expressed yearning for programmes to resume on site at the church. The pandemic has taken a ‘hit’ on social interaction and engagement; children have returned to in-person education, and people have questioned why the church has not followed suit. Waiting longer will further impact participation and make it easier for some to not come back. At the same time, at least one family expressed concern about not having company as they participate in programmes: getting ‘critical mass’ to show up, is a key element, and so offering both attractive and robust programmes which are adequately staffed, is central to the vitality and future success of the RE endeavor.

## ➤ Dreams

A number of participants let their vision for the future inform their thinking. The idea of ‘dreaming big,’ and imagining programmes that haven’t existed before but might energize the congregation, came forward in our conversations. Here are some snapshots:

### > The need to learn about other faiths:

One respondent and their spouse, who practices Hinduism, have both taught in the RE programme. They and others spoke of the importance of offering learning to youth that introduces them to the faith and practices of other religious communities.

### > Embracing all:

Part of the richness of a UU congregation can be its welcome to all. One person said, *“Our RE is a place where nerds can thrive. These aren’t the cookie cutter kids.”* Another multicultural family said, *“Giving [our child] an opportunity to find a different community than the one in our box that we are built into, and different than Catholicism [is critically important].”* And a third person noted the importance of living into a multi-generational congregation: *“Interaction between kids and adults on a regular basis [is key].”*

### > Living justice and social action:

There is no need to search far for opportunities to affirm UU values of justice and equity, given the large numbers of indigenous people who camp near the river or ask for food or water on or near the church grounds. One person also noted that the river offers learning opportunities for the community to connect to nature: *“so that the teachings touch the earth or the sky or the river.”*

### > Growing into being a learning community - together:

A number of respondents talked about their wish for more multigen services - not ‘sermon sandwich’ liturgies, but true engaged worship that involves participants of all ages, together. People also spoke of their wish for the church to be “Safe, accessible, [with] positive learning and interaction.” One person went so far as to imagine what this might look like: *“While being greeted, there would be a choice for parent and child of being together, or separately, go to the service, [or] the ‘sit down and listen’ space, or the ‘exploration space’. Not just [a space] reserved for parents and children, but for anyone who wants to spend their time in active worship.”* In other words, choices about how one engages, for the community - together.

Another person recalled a similar model of learning which came from their time in the UK. “[At] the Small School ...students were in charge of the curriculum and all that went on in the school. They told the elders, *‘this is what we want to do.’ The kids created their own books. If we did that around our principles or aspirations, or who has impressed the world with their unity of thought or action, I would like to see that.*” Another recognized the possibilities of engaging more with the members of the congregation: “[We could] *tap into the skills, experience, talent, insights of people in our church much more than we do now.*” Again and again, we heard the wish for embracing lifespan learning - across the ages - for those in the congregation, rather than an ‘upstairs/downstairs’ model where the big people sit and hear a sermon and the small people go downstairs for activities.

> A wish for wider connection to other Canadian UUs:

A number of respondents yearned for involvement with young adult ministries in Canada, team building with youth across Canada, attendance at UU gatherings in other parts of the country - a deeper connection to our faith in this country.

> And a few ideas for deeper engagement and re-building of community:

Lots of people are yearning for a return to ‘normalcy’ (which comes in many stages) and the events that can bring people together. One person suggested music programmes that are open to the public or sponsored by the church, to bring more people in. Another suggested that there might be a *“large event (like a homecoming) or maybe lots of smaller events... with options for small groups.”* Another person observed, *“If there were events happening with a solid core of families I was interested in connecting with, then there is a chance my family would make the drive out [to the church, from a distance] - especially as our own children get older and start asking more questions about spirituality.”*

Clearly there is energy for growth and change, and ideas of how to bring that into existence - with a plan for curricula, programmes, and a commitment from the congregation to see itself as including people of ALL ages. What follows are our recommendations regarding best programmes and practices for implementing change, as well as a suggested timeline for implementation.

## PART 2: Recommendations

### General Observations

Having reviewed the commentary we received, we want to offer some recommendations for programming that we think has the best opportunity to serve the Winnipeg congregation. There are multiple options in this report; many of these are related programmes. But first, a note about physical space:

We recognize that the space in which the congregation gathers is not physically accessible to all, and that this has been a conversation of importance for the congregation for some time. Providing accessibility to those currently in the congregation *and those who have not yet arrived* is a way of living our UU faith AND offering support for all to participate. We hope that the congregation will prioritize the need for accessibility (through a chair lift between floors, for instance) as a matter of faith and values that is key for the church. We also want to recommend consideration of moving spaces, so that some RE programming is held on the main floor. There is a strong “upstairs/downstairs” sense in the church...the big people stay upstairs, the little people go downstairs. Changing that paradigm will encourage the congregation to think about what it means to be a WHOLE congregation, living, worshiping and celebrating together.

#### **A. Funding for programmes for 2022-23**

There has been no professional religious education staffing in the congregation since early Fall 2021. For the coming church year the congregation reports that it has allocated \$9,100 specifically for children and youth programmes and activities. In addition the congregation wants to restore a half-time position for a Director of Religious Education or similar title, with job description under development. This appears in the budget on page 3 of 6 under payroll at \$19,000 per year. Additionally the Board recognizes that programming of all types could be focused on supporting outreach beyond the congregation’s current membership - providing both a public service and a pathway for new membership.

***Editorial Note:*** *It should be mentioned that the compensation cited is significantly less than denominational fair compensation standards and therefore there are concerns that it will be attractive to qualified candidates. As a point of reference, on 6/20/22 \$19,000 CD = \$14,620 USD, which would be at the level of, roughly, a ¼ time DRE (or equivalent) position.*

We recommend reconsideration of the current budget allocation for RE staffing. While balancing a budget is obviously an important goal for any organization, offering compensation at a level so low that qualified applicants do not apply, defeats the desired outcome.

### **B. Re-Entry Planning for RE**

In planning for re-entry for children and youth, it is important that the RE Committee and/or someone knowledgeable about guidelines relating to children/youth, review the congregation's COVID policy and make any recommendations as applicable to children's programming, such as determining space occupancy of classrooms. We recommend that decisions around occupancy, in person programmes, and worship participation be made in balance with the Provincial and city health standards being used.

An intentional process of re-examining all aspects of congregational life in which families, children and youth might engage, is highly recommended for the leadership of your congregation. If having a vital, multi-generational congregation is a high goal for your mission and vision to be fulfilled, intentional thought around the adjustments, shifts and innovations that might serve this goal, are of critical importance.

### **C. Optimal teaching models for your congregation**

We recommend moving out of the traditional 'Sunday School model' (text-heavy, teacher instruction, solely located in the classroom) and moving to a newer model that fits the needs of today's families. The previously-quoted comment from one member, imagining a variety of connections for those coming into the church, illustrates one approach: *"There would be a choice for parent and child of being together, or separately, go to the service, [or] the 'sit down and listen' space, or the 'exploration space'."* Many others talked about multi-age programmes or the hope that ALL would be included in learning opportunities, no matter their abilities or ages. In order to implement such wishes, we encourage you to think not only about moving the location of RE programmes from the way that they were formerly offered, but also imagining the entire church and its grounds as your learning laboratory.

We believe that your congregation is ready to make some shifts which will not only offer a fresh perspective on RE, but also offer options for children, youth, *and* adults that will feel engaged, creative and inspiring. As you grow your learning community, you also are in a position to offer programmes, for the church community you currently have and

those who have not yet entered your midst, to serve their needs and enrich your congregation.

Teaching Methods and Formats for RE programmes vary. In the appendix, [Rev. Mr. Barb Greve details a variety of approaches](#) that could be considered. Your consultants’ sense, from our conversations, is that interactive, multi-age ‘workshop models’ of RE may hold appeal for children (roughly in grades 3-6), perhaps with the possibility of them being able to select an outdoor experience (weather permitting) or nature-focused activity, a multi-media experience of learning using video, audio and interaction through iPads or ChromeBooks with learning material, an experience with meditation, yoga or a calming and healing practice guided by an adult, or a creative practice (e.g., writing poetry or creating art, focused on a particular theme or spiritual value). The youngest and older (middle school and above) grades have specific recommendations for curricula that may require contingent learning styles.

**D. Curriculum Recommendations:**

Below are our suggestions for curricula which we believe will be attractive for the children, youth and families of your congregation.

<p><b>NURSERY</b></p>	<p>Having a clean and attractive nursery/preK space is a key point of contact for those visiting the congregation. Take the time to freshen the nursery/PreK space and make sure that it is not only safe but inviting. In general people have many choices about where their children may spend time, and ensuring that your space is welcoming, clean and well staffed will encourage visitors with very young children to feel like their children will be well cared for.</p>
<p><b>YOUNGER AGES</b></p>	<p>The Montessori-based curriculum <a href="#">“Spirit Play”</a> offers the strongest opportunity for UU-informed learning for young children (Age 4 through grade 2). Children learn about being in community, share a story that relates to one of the UU principles (called the “promises”), have free time to imagine how to connect to the Promise and the story they have heard (called “work time”), share a “Feast” together, and through their engagement, grow deeper connection to UUism. The programme requires training of facilitators (at least two) who then have access to the Spirit Play materials and support documents.</p>

<p><b>YOUNGER AGES</b></p>	<p>Nature-based and grounded programming and programming that explores different faiths and cultures is of significant value to this congregation, given your own identity and location in the province. <a href="#">“Circle of Trees”</a> is a multi-age programme of eight workshops that nurture deep connections with trees, nature, and all of earth’s living creatures. The programme uses trees as an entry point to understand and connect with life on earth. Across many cultures, trees are recognized as a symbol for life on earth—for example, the biblical Tree of Life. Even young children understand trees as sustainers of life, fundamental engines of life on earth as we know it. Trees create and purify the air we breathe. They house and provide resources for myriad creatures, including humans. They bring us peace, joy, and delight.</p>
<p><b>OLDER ELEMENTARY YOUNGER MIDDLE SCHOOL</b></p>	<p>“<a href="#">Earth Circles</a>” is a programme for 5th-7th grade youth developed by educators to help children learn about the ways in which nature is interconnected. The goal is for children to develop both understanding of and caring for the natural world we share with all living creatures. Children need to learn through experiences that are meaningful to them, as such experiences promote understanding of their environment and valuing of its connection to their own lives, their community, and worldwide events. Lessons focus on connections between people, other forms of life, and the natural resources that sustain us all, and commitment to maintaining a healthy environment for all of life.</p>
<p><b>YOUNGER MIDDLE SCHOOL</b></p>	<p>”<a href="#">Building Bridges</a>” (earlier known as “Neighboring Faiths”) is a programme for middle school youth that builds understanding of, and appreciation for, the wide panoply of faiths in our world. Leaders can identify the faith explorations that will be of greatest relevance to youth who are participating; generally we advise beginning with a study of Christianity, Judaism, Catholicism and Protestantism which then branches to UUism. Progressing to Eastern religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, Muslim) and then to Indigenous faith would be a progression that would serve the community. This curriculum holds enough materials for two year alternating programmes, or it can be focused on a one year learning arc.</p>

	<p>A Soul Matters version of this programme, called “<a href="#">Crossing Paths</a>,” is also available and recommended as an alternative with similar goals.</p> <p>Also related to these themes, with a focus on High School aged youth, is “<a href="#">A Chorus of Faiths</a>,” which explores the ways in which engaging in different faith communities helps to develop interfaith youth leadership. This curriculum was developed with collaboration between the UUA and the Interfaith Youth Core (founded by Eboo Patel). Youth explore values of service to our community and religious pluralism through stories from our Sources and personal storytelling, and coordinate an interfaith service.</p>
<p><b>MIDDLE SCHOOL</b></p>	<p>Numerous interview respondents talked about the importance of “<a href="#">Our Whole Lives</a>” (OWL) as being valuable and important for children and youth. The programme is recommended for younger elementary (<a href="#">grades 4-6</a>, but we encourage its use for grades 5-6 - a 9 week programme) and most critically, the middle school curriculum (for <a href="#">grades 7-9</a> - we believe grade 8 is the optimal grade for the material presented). This values-based human sexuality education programme is highly acclaimed and is a popular draw for those in the larger community who want their children and youth to have sexuality education that is grounded in respect, solid communication and values). Trainers must have received the UUA OWL education that is available in person or online.</p>
<p><b>OLDER MIDDLE SCHOOL/ YOUNGER HIGH SCHOOL</b></p>	<p><a href="#">Coming of Age</a> is another cornerstone of UU religious education. The programme can be (and has been) adapted by a number of UU congregations, however the basic programme book is available through <a href="#">the UUA Bookstore</a>. The programme companions youth (optimal grades 9/10) through discovery of their own values, sense of faith, engagement in social action, sometimes supported by an individual or group of mentoring adults. Coming of Age also helps youth develop leadership skills and a deeper commitment to the beliefs that will guide them into young adulthood. Typically the programme concludes with the development of a ‘credo’ or statement of faith, frequently offered at a worship service for the entire congregation.</p>

<p><b>HIGH SCHOOL YOUTH GROUP</b></p>	<p>Many models for youth groups, and their programmes, exist and while having a <a href="#">team of at least 3 adult youth advisors</a> is essential to support this programme there are many variations on the theme including guides to <a href="#">social justice engagement</a>, <a href="#">mission or service learning trips</a>, and fun and games that are key to engagement of youth. (For more information on youth ministry <a href="#">visit the UUA's website</a>).</p>
<p><b>WHAT HAPPENS AFTER HIGH SCHOOL? YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY</b></p>	<p>When youth leave high school (and frequently life as they have known it since childhood) their faith needs don't end. <a href="#">Connecting young adults with lifespan faith formation resources</a> can help them remain grounded in Unitarian Universalist values, friendships and resources during a time of continuing growth and change. <a href="#">The Blue Boat Blog</a> is specifically focused on the young adult community. More information about young adult-focused resources, trainings, gatherings is <a href="#">available on the web</a>. The CUC offers a monthly <a href="#">young adult gathering online</a> ("Gathered Here"); <a href="#">pastoral care</a>, and <a href="#">much more</a>. Sharing information with young adults in the community will help ensure that they remain connected to our faith - if not to the Winnipeg congregation (young adults tend to be geographically mobile). Supporting them is worth the investment of time and treasure.</p>

## E. Timeline for Implementation

The time for being geographically separate has been challenging for all members of the congregation. In order to implement a renewed religious exploration programme beginning in late August or September of 2022, we want to recommend the following key priorities for implementation:

<p><b>June/July</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Complete job description for staffing. Revisit funding allocations to bring compensation to Fair Compensation standards (and increase attractiveness of the position).</li> <li>● Reach out to engage additional members of a reconstituted RE team. Use messaging to the congregation that “this is about ALL of us” to start to reframe thinking of the “upstairs/downstairs” model we discuss in our report.</li> <li>● Convene RE committee to discuss the report and (most immediately) curricula recommendations.</li> <li>● Meet with Rev. Meghann regarding the report and interface with worship elements (e.g., true multigen worship, other programmes that involve the whole congregation)</li> <li>● Focus on outreach and hiring for RE programme.</li> <li>● Review space allocations for programmes (and perhaps, move them around, per suggestions in our report).</li> </ul>
<p><b>August</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Interview candidates for RE position.</li> <li>● Review COVID policy as it relates to children and youth.</li> <li>● Clean RE spaces and re-stock for in person use.</li> <li>● Identify a platform to use for virtual access to RE for areas you have identified.</li> <li>● Train volunteer leaders: highest priority for OWL leaders, also Coming of Age</li> <li>● Engage in outreach to the congregation to promote involvement in RE programmes</li> <li>● Late August: settle new RE staff and begin on-boarding process of orientation, covenanting with Rev. Meghann and new staff, etc.</li> </ul>

<b>September</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Plan a “welcome back” social event outside for families.</li> <li>● Prepare and launch a registration form so that you know how many people you have - plus contact info and more about the families</li> <li>● Work with RE staff to hold a teacher training event which includes info on socialization of children and youth following prolonged isolation, best practices for classrooms, etc.</li> <li>● Plan several multi-age programmes for the fall (e.g., spaghetti supper, autumn apple harvest event, or whatever)</li> <li>● Calendar the RE schedule</li> <li>● Support RE staff in planning multigen programmes with Rev. Meghann</li> <li>● Support Ingathering Sunday (multigen)</li> </ul>
<b>October</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Run class and hybrid programmes</li> <li>● Hold RE team meeting with teachers to check in on how things are going, particularly with new curricula</li> <li>● Implement Thanksgiving multi-gen worship</li> </ul>
<b>November</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Work with the minister and other lay leaders to plan winter holiday celebrations including Christmas pageant, solstice celebrations, or other events that will attract a range of ages and participants</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Conclude Term 1 programmes with celebration, preview what will come in January and beyond</li> <li>● Plan date for evaluation meeting and publicize</li> <li>● Implement pageant and other seasonal celebrations, and an all ages Christmas Eve worship service that uses children and youth in multiple areas (e.g., candlelighters, readers, actors or singers, etc.)</li> </ul>
<b>January 2023</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Plan evaluation meeting for term 1 of RE and family ministry programmes, including RE professionals and Rev. Meghann.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Offer several all-ages programmes in January (school vacation? Post-holiday so attendance may be less?) that will attract youth and maximize staffing with fewer adults needed</li> <li>● Prepare to fine-tune curricula and programmes based on feedback received.</li> <li>● Reach out to new teachers (if needed) and offer training; answer questions that have arisen during Term 1 from teachers or families</li> <li>● Prepare for and implement launch of Term 2</li> </ul>
<b>February - April</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Carry forward Term 2 activities, engage new teachers in class schedules as appropriate.</li> </ul>
<b>May</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Finish the year with a celebration and begin the planning cycle for the next year</li> <li>● Open registration for the following church year</li> <li>● Produce an RE brochure that can be publicized online and in the community to invite newcomers to your programme</li> <li>● Reach out to those who might act as teachers, mentors, advisors for the next church year.</li> </ul>
<b>June and summer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Schedule dates for teacher training, RE team meetings, and ‘ingathering’ or ‘welcome’ activities for the summer and fall.</li> <li>● THEN take a break and rest, congratulating yourselves on work well done!</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

As with most faith communities that have survived the pandemic there are both challenges and opportunities ahead. We hope that the findings of our interaction with nearly one-third of the congregation, and application of their hopes, dreams and concerns to the larger field of possible programmes for RE, will be a helpful guide in planning your religious growth and learning for the next months and years to come. We are excited to learn of the next elements that will hope translate your dreams for this church and its learning programmes, into reality.

In the Appendix, we have included some good articles that address the changing needs of faith formation for today's families. In the *Multi-National Children's Ministry Report 2021*, research has revealed areas of concern in ministry amongst children and families, with indications that for the majority of children, the pandemic adversely affected their faith formation. Therefore, there is an urgent need for church organizations to lay out clear and effective strategies for the future.

Additionally, we have included an article which outlines 10 points brought up by the *Multi-National Report* and suggestions for developing a new plan for children's ministry. Being proactive, creative and willingness to take some risks will help take important steps in developing new ways of children's faith formation for the future.

It has been an honour to work with you. Thank you for this opportunity.

- *Deborah Weiner and Lily Rappaport, consultants*  
GIRE Consulting Group  
June, 2022

## Appendix: Additional Resources

First UU Winnipeg's [Mission Into Action statement](#)

First UU Winnipeg's [Living into Mission resources](#)

For additional thoughts on differing models of religious education programming, the Rev. Mr. Barb Greve [has shared some models](#).

[Multi-National Children's Ministry Report 2021](#) A report on Christian ministry based on research in Brazil, Canada, UK and US in later pandemic stages, researched and written by a team of academic researchers and ministry practitioners.

[Developing a New Plan for Children's Ministry](#)