

Hello wonderful Beacon! So sorry that I was unable to change my commitments to be with you this weekend! I am putting into words what has happened over the past few weeks, as we try to move forward to District Assembly.

At the last Council meeting, (BRUU CON, 2/21-2/23), we had learned that we were invited to plan and carryout a 30 minute worship service after lunch on Saturday, as well as put on a workshop that carried out the theme of the gathering. We voted to do both and worked on a plan for the workshop.

On March 4, I found out through discussion with our DA contacts (Sarah Ritzman and Maggie Lovins) that there was housing/meeting space for up to 30 youth and advisors. Hannah and I worked hard to determine if there were any other options, (including camping, other churches within an hour, other spaces at the site) over the next couple of weeks. Those options were exhausted and the bottom line was that they had limited space (another choral event is scheduled for the same weekend) and the Vero church was unwilling to allow any camping on their site; no other churches responded to our inquiries and campgrounds were determined to be an unviable option. We got the word out that there would be limited space and that we would have to limit attendees...not knowing who was planning to attend DA, an estimate was 6 congregations with 5 attending. We asked that you all have a discussion about it and let us know your thoughts.

On March 9, Sarah R. let Hannah know that we couldn't conduct anymore DA business through email, they wanted to sit down face to face, but weren't available until the end of March. I sent a note back to Sarah and Maggie, saying we couldn't wait that long to get answers to our questions, as we had the last CON before DA coming up on the 21st. On March 11th I was contacted by Margie Manning of the FL District Board, she is the incoming President. She asked that we have a conversation, as there were concerns about whether we met the Southern Region Youth Safety Policies...the first we heard of them. She attached a 28 page document for me to look at. We had a 45 minute conversation 2 days later. In the meantime, I contacted Ila Klion, the current FL Dist. Pres. to find out more about the Board's understanding of the situation. Apparently the FL Board was not aware of this policy until we all became aware of it, none of us were consulted about it or made aware of it and it has been in place for about a year. The policy deals with how we keep our youth safe at So. Regional events and covers youth advisors in some detail. Most could have been taken word for word from our advisor training. The problem is that they could not determine that we followed these guidelines by looking at our Beacon website or reading the agreement of how we covenant to be together on our CON forms. They require advisors to submit an application for consideration to attend a So. Region event, have the support and clearance of their congregation and have an interview by a So. Region representative and either have in place or submit their form for a background check. The application covers the experience, training, etc. of the person, as does the interview.

I explained that we only allow trained advisors to accompany youth to any event and that our training was provided by a UUA trained person; that the training encompasses all (and more) of

the subject matter they described; that we have practices and procedures in place for all of the situations they are concerned about and that we have been doing this for many years. That neglecting to share this information with us either during creation or after adoption was very difficult to accept, we are the largest and most active youth group in the region, as far as I can determine. Asking us to prove our compliance at the last minute, (4-5 weeks before DA), is less than welcoming and I found it insulting.

We understand that the goal here is to be functioning in a safe manner with our youth, to provide ministry to our youth, to invite deep connection with our faith, to invite deep connection with other youth, and to invite them into community with our District. We think that to exclude them from District Assembly dis-invites them from our faith community, and may do irreparable harm to the future of *these* youth and their connection to our faith.

I asked that they accept our trained advisors, that we understand the requirement for background checks (our congregational policies are included below) and accept the limit of 30 youth and advisors, as well as the 1:5 advisor/youth ratio, since we encompass youth aged 12-20. That any other requirements are unfair and unnecessary at such a late date. Ila has been working hard with her Board and is trying to set up a conference call between So. Region, FL Board and UUA folks, and Hannah and myself to see if we can arrive at an agreement. We have thus far been unable to schedule the call prior to this CON, so have no final answers.

We are still trying to resolve the issues. It is my belief that the members of the FL Board who have been helping us are very committed to you all, to a better relationship with Beacon as we all move forward, to solving this situation for future events as well. They do value you, your ideas, your creative processes, your energy, what you all bring to our faith...and they consider it our faith, not theirs and yours.

Phew! What a challenging few weeks...wish it was resolved. Thank you all for your support, ideas and love!

Congregation's policies regarding background checks for youth advisors:

BBUUC (Jax): all screened
Clearwater: not required for advisors
Gainesville: all screened
Miami: all screened
River of Grass: all screened
Sarasota: not required for advisors
Tallahassee: all screened
UUUS (Orlando): not required for RE teachers or advisors

It is evident that we have more than enough screened advisors to fulfill the requirements of a 1:5 ratio for a group to attend DA. (Based on the limit of 30 total, with 25 youth and 5 advisors.)