



“Do not remember the former things, or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honour me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people, the people whom I formed for myself so that they might declare my praise.”

- Isaiah 43: 18-21, NRSV

Annual Report 2017

From Nicole Havelka,
Designated Minister for Resourcing, Networking and Creativity



Hannah Cook, Heidelberg Youth Leadership Team, leads worship at Trinity UCC, Tiffin, during our August 2017 gathering.

In my years serving the wider church, I have often turned to the scripture passage above for inspiration and sometimes solace. The passage reminds me that creativity is less about my efforts to make something new, but more about perceiving where the new thing is springing forth. I learned the hard way many years ago that I should put my energy into the ministries and projects that bring me and others positive energy. Positive energy always yields more energy. But, putting energy into a black hole of resistance or indifference rarely yields any fruit. I am very happy to say that there has been much positive energy in my ministry this past year.

I have been blessed to witness several places where God's New Thing is springing forth. Let me tell you a story about one of them. I think our learnings from this project has implications for much more of church life than only youth ministry or camping.

About two years ago, Rev. Paul Sittason Stark, Chaplain and Director of Religious Life at Heidelberg University, approached me



Our team explored spirituality and nature at the Franciscan Earth Literacy Center in June 2017 during our modified “camp” event.



with an idea for starting a camp on that campus. Because I knew some of our leaders were interested in experimenting with youth ministry or camping programs at a variety of sites, I began exploring this possibility. Early on, we decided that adults alone should not design a program for youth, but rather invite youth to lead the design, planning and leadership process themselves. That is when the “Heidelberg-UCC Youth Leadership Initiative” (as we are now calling it) was born.

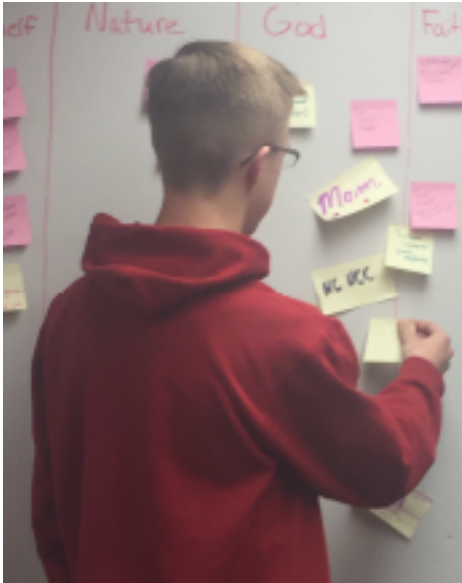
In Spring 2016, we called for applications for up to 18 youth to be part of a 3-day “design camp” that summer during which these young people would design and lead a camp for high schoolers held at Heidelberg the following year. We received applications from five of the most amazing and talented high schoolers you could have asked for and we were off. We modified the gathering and design process to accommodate the smaller-than-anticipated numbers and busy schedules of high school youth and adults. We met several times at Heidelberg’s campus — developing our community, building our leadership capacity (youth and adults) and forming faith, all while planning a week-long camp for Summer 2017.

This intergenerational leadership team was a wild success — we created one of the most empowered, creative and engaged intergenerational groups of which I have ever been blessed to be part. As one of our youth participants, Megan Vessely, said of our experience: “I find myself having to limit my creativity at school. When I’m here, I learned to expand on my ideas, not restrict them. I can just talk and say anything.”

So, if God is doing a such a wonderful new thing through this group, it begs me to ask, “What if the church could become this kind of space for creativity all the time?”

This creative space that we fostered with a few pioneer youth and adults has yielded a lot of learnings that we can apply not only to the future of this project, but to how we do wider and local church. Here’s some of what we learned makes this kind of group fun and effective:

- Creating intergenerational groups that honor the gifts and ideas of all participants takes adult leadership that is willing to both



Our gatherings often look like a mess of Post-It notes packed full of our ideas for our next gathering or project. Eric Winter (above) organizes them (his special talent) for our original week-long camp. Ingrid Gillies (below) steps up to do one of her favorite things – make schedules.



guide the process, get out of the way of others' ideas and lift up others' gifts for leadership.

- Communication Skills are a Must. Youth and adult participants named using technology (videoconferencing, project management tools, group texting, etc.) as one of their greatest learnings. Good communication is key to fostering community and getting the work done between in-person meeting.
- Intense, in-person brainstorming and planning sessions are effective at getting projects done. People respond well to the time limits and get it done in the time they have available.
- Starting a new thing is hard. Our group was able to design a wonderful camp program. We even surveyed youth about what kind of camp they would prefer. Still we didn't get enough registrations to hold the original camp we planned in Summer 2017.
- We learn from failure. From the beginning, our group embraced this idea as one of our core values. Instead of giving up when we didn't get enough registrations to hold the original camp, we learned from that failure and adapted.
- We adapt and change based on learnings. Instead we held a shorter gathering at Heidelberg University in June 2017. We spent some time regrouping as a smaller team and then leading part of our originally planned program for the high schoolers who came up for a day from our Music, Mime, Arts, Dance and Drama Camp being held the same week at Pilgrim Hills. The youth from our Leadership Team even led a workshop teaching them about the design process we'd been using.

The team is now going to lead an extended version of that workshop at Fall Youth Event Nov. 18-19 at Pilgrim Hills. We are also creating a new version of our summer event (in partnership with some additional community-based partners) — an application-based Youth Leadership Initiative sponsored by the UCC and Heidelberg University. (Flyers about these events are in your packets.) Do you have youth who would want to attend one or both of these innovative programs?

What we've learned and experienced here leads me to believe that this model of intergenerational collaboration can and should be



Along with participants from our MMADD Camp, we combined old camp favorite like songs around a campfire (above) with activities only a university could provide like completing a vocational assessment (below).



done in all places in church life. What if your local mission team included a wide range of ages, gifts and abilities? What if our Conference Board of Directors created intergenerational teams to creatively address challenging issues facing society and the church? What if our Outdoor Ministry and Faith Formation program was constantly reinventing itself using these teams? What if adults were equipped at our colleges, universities and seminaries to empower other peoples' leadership and ministries? What if a team like this were allowed to envision our wider church structure?

The possibilities seem endless.

Where do you see God's new thing happening? How can you help make a way in the wilderness for it? Come talk to me! I'd love to explore the possibilities with you and your church!



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