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A SHORT SUBJECTIVE HISTORY OF THE UNITARIAN AND UNIVERSALIST YOUTH MOVEMENTS (given to the LRY Advisor's Meeting in Chicago, May 12, 1963 and last portions augmented in June, 1964)

LRY (Liberal Religious Youth) was born in 1953 but this ten year old movement had its beginning in the similar but separate Unitarian and Universalist Youth movements of the late 1800's. Both groups from the very beginning maintained elastic age limits (lowering the age limit to 35 sometime in the period of the first World War) and raised their own money. Since working men and women served as officers of these groups, there was no need to go outside of the organization for help or assistance. If the group needed a lawyer, it turned to one of its own members. If it needed a physician on the staff for a conference one of the practicing physicians attended. If it needed a minister to serve on a committee, one of its members serving a church in the Boston area would serve. Since "adults" were members, too, there was no "conflict" with them!

That the youth movements effected a "merger" almost eight years before the denominations as a whole is not surprising as the Universalist youth began talking of it as early as 1896 when the Unitarians organized their Young Peoples' Religious Union (YPRU) in Boston. It was mentioned again in the 1930's, eventually dropped and then brought up again in the late 1940's.

In the post World War II period the AUY (American Unitarian Youth as of 1941) and the UYF (Universalist Youth Fellowship as it was known in 1941) continued the practice of exchanging delegates to their respective conventions. They also jointly published The Young Liberal and a social action newsletter. In 1948 both AUY and UYF by-laws were amended to provide for exchange members on their respective governing boards.

To understand the present organization of the LRY governing body, "Continental Conference" and the LRY conviction that youth autonomy is an inherited right from past generations and built upon firm traditions (actually only a myth) it is necessary to examine the historical facts.

For instance, The Young People's Christian Union, the Universalist youth movement organized in Lynn, Massachusetts in 1889 could be interpreted as an adult sponsored organization for the "youth" of the church. Clinton Lee Scott in A Short History of the Universalist Church of America writes of membership eligibility.

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"It was not unusual for a person of thirty-five years to join and he was made to feel no embarrassment if he lingered on the roll until he was fifty."

The YPCU raised its own money, hired its own Executive Secretary and was completely responsible for its own program and activities. They took as a responsibility the raising of money to build churches, not only in the United States, but also, in Japan. Clint Scott also comments that "the YPCU was a force for leadership...and produced a significant number of recruits for the Universalist Ministry." In 1894 they organized a "Junior Union Department" apparently to serve those members in high school, or at least 20 years of age.

At the beginning of the second World War, the age limit was lowered (now the range to be from 13 to 25), the movement renamed to the Universalist Youth Fellowship (UYF), and a Director of Youth Education with part time responsibilities for UYF was hired. Alice Harrison filled this position from 1947 to 1953.

The UYF held an Annual Convention for delegates from groups and state conventions for the purpose of electing members and officers. (In the 1940's and 50's Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, Connecticut, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Illinois, and California had active state organizations. There were paper organizations in other states.)

The UYF administrative body was a Board of four officers and four board members. Each board member was responsible for a specific departmental activity (i.e. publications, conferences, social action, programs, etc.).

UYF activities above the level of the local group were centered in state organizations in contrast to federation organizations that were the practice of the Unitarian Young People's Religious Union (YPRU).

These federations had their greatest strength in New England. Each Federation President served with a Board of Trustees consisting of a President, Secretary, Treasurer and a number of vice-presidents. This Board met frequently, sometimes as often as once a month in Boston. Since no travel funds were available for the Federation Presidents or officers, the organization was chiefly Boston centered.

The YPRU raised its own money until Stephen Fritchman was appointed Director of Youth Activities in 1938. In 1941 he succeeded in widening the geographic participation in the YPRU resulting in a reorganizing into the American Unitarian Youth (AUY).

The AUY replaced the YPRU Board with a Council of four officers elected by the Annual Convention and fourteen Regional Representatives designated by their respective regions. (A Regional Representative might represent from one to three federations and was responsible for reflecting the concerns of both high school and college students.)

AUY staff members were part of the staff of the Department of Education and paid by the AUA. Steve Fritch also served as Editor of the Christian Register and in 1946 resigned as Executive Director; Dick Kuch who had served as AUY Associate Director since 1946 resigned a year later.

The present and future shape of LRY and of the Continental Conference as we know it today was cast in a meeting in Hinsdale, Illinois in December 1947. Ernest Kuebler, Director of the AUA Department of Education and Dr. Frederick May Eliot, President of the AUA, met with the American Unitarian Youth Council to discuss the future relationship of the AUY to the AUA and that of AUY's professional staff to the Association.

The AUA staff proposed a plan to the AUY Council: the Department of Education to hire a Director of Youth Activities to be paid by the Association and the AUY to hire and pay for its own staff from its own budget. (The AUY received funds from the United Unitarian Appeal.) The Council presented many reasons for rejecting this proposal but in the end accepted it. And this was the beginning of "youth autonomy."

Following the Hinsdale meeting, the AUA hired Clifton Hoffman as Director of Youth Education of the AUA with the responsibility of developing resource materials and representing the concerns of the denomination for youth activities; at the same time Paul Henniges was hired as Executive Director. In less than a year, Hoffman's position was discontinued for "lack of funds." Henniges resigned in June 1951. A year later Sam Wright became AUY's Executive Director.

Two years later (1949), at the AUY Convention at Lake Couchiching, Ontario, Canada a resolution was approved which invited the UYF to participate in a joint convention two years hence. The UYF accepted the proposal. Then the 1950 AUY Convention instructed the Joint Relations Committee (responsible for planning the meeting) to present to the 1951 Joint Conventions possible plans for merger of the UYF and AUY.

The first AUY-UYF Convention held at Lake Winnepesaukee, New Hampshire voted to continue to develop plans for merger. The Joint Relations Committee prepared by-laws and wrote materials to inform

groups, federations and state conventions of what merger would mean.

In 1952 and 1953 AUY and UYF again met in joint session, reviewed and refined by-laws and at the close of their sessions in 1953 voted in separate meetings to merge to form the Liberal Religious Youth. The merger was accomplished and LRY held its first Continental Convention in 1954. The governing body of LRY was a Council combining features of both the AUY and UYF: four officers and four trustees (serving two year terms, two elected each year) to be elected by the Convention plus seventeen Regional Representatives designated by their respective areas.

In merger the LRY adopted the staff pattern and relationship of the AUY established at Hinsdale in 1947. Sam Wright became Executive Director, Alice Harrison (UYF and UCA) Associate Director for the High School programs, and Eileen Layton (AUY) Associate Director responsible for College activities (Channing-Murray).

With the completion of a successful merger and augmented by an independent staff (responsible to the LRY Council) the theme of "youth autonomy" and "independence" became even stronger. Though the LRY received its funds from the UCA and AUA (United Unitarian Appeal) it attempted to be an independent self-operating agency.

Sam Wright resigned as Executive Director in the Fall of 1954. The following spring Bill Gold became the Executive Director, served for fifteen months and resigned in 1956. Executive Director Leon Hopper was appointed and started work in December 1957 and served until his resignation in August 1963.

A drastic cut in financial support from the UCA forced a change in program and policy. Alice Harrison left LRY to become the Director of the new Junior High program of the Council of Liberal Churches, and Eileen Layton terminated her work with LRY in June 1957. Peter Baldwin who was appointed Interim Director in 1963 accepted the appointment as the LRY Executive Director in May 1964.



### LRY Reorganization

During the period of 1957-63 LRY high school activities reflected the membership growth in the adult liberal religious movement. A number of federations "split" to accommodate this growth. The number of active federations increased from 21 to 33 in the six year period. The federation "splitting" was accompanied by cooperative activities between Federations and the establishment of regional committees responsible for coordinating federation activities and programs within a geographic area. The New England federations of AUJ formed the New England Regional Committee (NERC) to sponsor inter-federation summer conferences, service projects and leadership programs in 1946. Regional committees of federation representatives were also established in the South East (SLRY), Mid-Atlantic (MARC) and the Mid-West (MI-CON) patterned upon the New England experience.

The 1961 re-organization of LRY eliminated the Continental Convention and in its place established the Continental Conference as the emphasis shifted to program and ideas. The administration of LRY was by a Board of Trustees of four officers, three directors and the presidents of the respective federations and regional committees. The Board annually elects the officers and directors who then serve as the LRY Executive Committee. College students up to their sophomore year in college may serve LRY as officers, but groups and federation membership was to be limited to high school students.

A concerted effort was begun to establish and promote workshops for group advisors. Patterns were also established for District Youth-Adult Advisory Committees and following the formation of the UUA the LRY Advisory Committee was formed by the UUA and LRY. Leadership development programs with professional staff were also started.

### College Age Activities

From the end of World War II a new pattern in Unitarian and Universalist youth activities became evident. AUJ Federations and UJF State Conventions (and following the merger the federations) had become primarily for high school students.

Attempts were made to organize and serve college students, but the activities of the Channing "Foundation" established by the AUJ were limited because of lack of funds. At the suggestions of Dr. Eliot, AUA President, the Unitarian Women's Alliance Diamond Jubilee Fund was given to an AUA Committee for "College Centers Activities." The College Centers Committee was responsible to the

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AUA Board and pioneered in denominational college work.

Later the Unitarian Association Development Fund included a proposal for the establishment of a "College Centers Program" to be determined by the AUA College Centers Committee and not by the LRY. Nevertheless the LRY membership included college students and continued its concern for a student program. In 1959 Orloff W. Miller was hired as Associate Director of LRY with a major responsibility for college student work. Orloff served as Secretary to the College Centers Committee until 1961 when he was appointed the first Director of the UUA Office of College Centers.

In 1961 the LRY voted to (1) become an organization for high school students (later the college students voted to establish the Student Religious Liberals and to relate to the Office of College Centers); (2) change the organization and government of LRY and (3) to have their staff again related to the denomination through the Department of Education.

It is sad to note that from the close of World War II to 1963 denominational financial support for high school activities has remained static (constant) while activity, program and membership have more than trippled thus placing an excessive responsibility and expectation upon the LRY staff.

C.L.H.