

## **TIPS FOR NEW RELIGIOUS EDUCATORS PLANNING TO ATTEND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EVENTS**

By Laurel Amabile, Lifespan RE Program Consultant

**In identifying the programs and trainings options you have available to you, consider your answers to the following clarifying questions:**

- ~What are your professional development goals for the current year?
- ~What are the themes or emphases in your congregation and RE program for which you may need to develop some specific skills or knowledge?
- ~Are there historical events or issues in your congregation or RE program that might inform your decisions? For example, safety issues, conflicts, new structures, growth, challenges.
- ~What are your preferences, needs or limits around home hospitality, sharing sleeping rooms, accessibility needs, phone/Internet access, child care, dietary considerations, schedule flexibility, and interpersonal interaction?

**You have found a training program or conference you would like to register for,**

***Now what?***

- ~Make sure you get as much information as you can about the event, dates and site as you need to plan for your schedule, travel and other expenses. Some registration fees include room and board, and others do not. Arrival and start times vary, so depending on the distance you are from the site, you may need to travel there earlier.
- ~Complete the registration form and arrange for registration or deposit payment. In situations where you must pay the costs, then submit for reimbursement, know the process for doing so. If you will be arranging for a congregation check to be written, submit your request early. You will not be able to count on all sponsoring organization taking a credit card payment. The same goes for scholarship applications—send them in well in advance, if you depend on the the funding support.
- ~If you are feeling anxious in anticipating this experience, ask for the name of someone who might be willing to talk with you in advance about what to expect and who might be there.
- ~Before mailing, make a photocopy of the completed registration form and check to keep for your records, just in case.
- ~Book flights and overnight accommodations, allowing plenty of time to arrive before the event begins.
- ~Read up on the topic, program or speaker, so that you have a basic familiarity with the program content. If there are readers or book recommendations provided in advance, get them and read through them.
- ~Gather materials that you can bring with you to share, use or sell. There are often display tables at these events for participant handouts, sample materials, and resources. Label any books or display items you don't intend to give away, so that you can locate them more easily afterwards. If you are not sure about these options, contact the event coordinator or registrar.

## **What To Expect Once You Get There**

- ~In most cases, RE training events and conferences are structured programs with full schedules: morning, afternoon and evening. These are full days, and there may be limited time rest and privacy.
- ~A sense of community forms very quickly due to the intentional group-building processes, shared interests of the participants and “close quarters” of the site. The experience of this fast relationship development may range from, “Wow! Now I have a great network of new friends!” to “I feel like everyone else knows each other, and I’m not sure where I fit in.” to “EEK!, I need some alone time!” depending on your individual personality.
- ~Week-long conferences are often full and intense, and you can anticipate an emotional high or slump, or feeling of tiredness by the end of day three. By anticipating this possibility, you can prepare to take it a little easier on day three—bring something to treat yourself. Realize also, that others around you may be experiencing similar reactions to the week. Practice Understanding and compassion with yourself and others throughout the week.
- ~The temptation is often present to do everything that is offered at a training or conference. By assessing your goals, preferences, needs, and limits BEFORE the event, you can better pace yourself during the event. It is very easy to get overwhelmed or exhausted by trying to do too much!

## **Follow Up: What to Do When You Get Back Home**

- ~Report back to your staff colleagues, relations committee, board, RE committee or program council in some way after your return. Summarize what you experienced and articulating what you have gained from the training event or conference you have attended, as well as the potential benefits to the congregation. In doing so, you can illustrate the value of your the congregation’s continued funding and support of further professional development and training. Think of ways to share what you’ve learned: in reports, newsletter articles, handouts, designing programs, and planning processes.
- ~Save copies of the flyers and schedules for professional development programs you attend and of your follow up reports, including any certificates, credit hours, or continuing education units you receive for participating. These should be compiled as part of your professional development portfolio. Your portfolio serves as a record of your professional development and experience for any credentialing work you do or future positions you seek.
- ~Plan ahead for next year. It never hurts to think ahead to what professional development experiences you will want in the future, and the goals you have for yourself in skill-building, leadership, and expanding your knowledge base. This advance planning and goal-setting will help with budget and calendar planning. Your professional development efforts may also be considered in any performance evaluation that is conducted for you in your role.