

# Young Adults Seek Unitarian Universalist Community: Congregations Can Help

**Tip #1: Build strong youth ministries.** Youth whose leadership and faith development are valued are more prepared to become active Young Adult leaders.

- **Ask for and give energy to youth ministries.** High-commitment programs like Our Whole Lives and Coming of Age are worth the investment. Young Adults look back on these experiences as being transformative moments that shaped their Unitarian Universalist identity. Congregational support for these programs (in the form of funding and in the form of broad adult volunteerism) communicates to Youth that they are valued members of the intergenerational community. This feeling of inclusion can carry over into young adulthood.
- **Nurture youth leadership.** Participating in church leadership is a necessary skill for being an active member of the congregational community. Recruit Youth to serve on the Board and other key leadership teams. Youth leaders will bring a fresh voice to congregational life. Their experience will equip them to continue in UU leadership as Young Adults.
- **Raise the visibility of youth ministries.** Everyone benefits when Youth and Young Adults are included in the intergenerational community. In addition, when young prospective members visit the congregation in search of a spiritual home, active and visible youth ministries will help the congregation communicate its warm welcome.

**Tip #2: Mentor Young Adult leaders.** Young Adult ministry in a congregation often begins with one or two motivated leaders. When they come forward, be prepared with leadership support.

- **Make it easy for leaders to learn the ropes.** How do new groups get started at your congregation? Who edits the newsletter? When are meeting rooms available? Publicize the procedure for starting a new group on the church website. Set up a mentoring system. Encourage other committees to co-sponsor programs with the Young Adult group.
- **Take Young Adult leaders seriously.** They have more experience than one might assume. Resist the temptation to respond to new ideas with, "We've always done it this way." Every leader has wisdom to share.
- **Pay special attention to younger Young Adults, age 18-25.** Younger Young Adults are less likely to have stability of residence, transportation, and relationship. Be proactive about inviting them to participate.
- **Focus "Young Adult" ministry on participants within the 18-35 age range.** Members in their mid-thirties may need help finding new UU outlets for their energy or starting a new peer group.

**Tip #3: Create innovative programs.** Some programs that are attractive and spiritually fulfilling to Young Adults can be initiated and shared by people of any age.

- **Schedule a diverse worship calendar.** Contemporary worship is one of many options that may appeal to Young Adults. Other options include a liturgical dance class, drumming circle, sacred text drama troupe, or Taizé music service. These programs need not be age-exclusive.
- **Research Young Adult needs in your neighborhood.** Find out what people age 18-35 in your congregation and in the neighborhood need and want for their spiritual lives. A rock-and-roll worship service on Sunday nights may or may not be what they are looking for.
- **Build on your congregation's strengths.** What does your congregation already do well? Is there a way that your existing skill set can be applied to the spiritual needs of Young Adults? Get excited about your congregation's mission and vision. The enthusiasm will spread.

**Tip #4: Institutionalize financial support.** Don't let registration fees be a barrier to enthusiastic leadership.

- **Fund the Young Adult group.** Money for chips and soda may seem like small change for other affinity groups, but it adds up. Include funding for spiritual items like a chalice and an altar cloth. Be forgiving about the deadlines for submitting budget requests.
- **Send Young Adults and Bridgers to denominational events.** Large events like the District Assembly and the UUA General Assembly are important times for Bridgers (age 17-19) and Young Adults to claim identities as UU leaders. Consider subsidizing all delegates and reserving space for Youth and Young Adult delegates on the roster.
- **Provide scholarships for major Young Adult events.** Include a line in the regular operating budget to send Young Adults to events such as district-wide Young Adult conferences and continental UU Young Adult leadership development events. These events energize leaders for a renewed commitment to the spiritually alive, radically inclusive, and justice centered UU movement.

**Tip #5: Apply for a grant.**

- The UUA YACM office offers a number of grants for local congregations and groups. Congregations in the Joseph Priestley District (JPD) may apply for additional grants from the JPD YACM program. Both grant programs require fair share contributions from congregations to the UUA and to their district. Within the JPD, visit <http://campuus.org/grants/> for more information. Continentally, visit <http://www25.uua.org/ya-cm/resources/index.html> for information about UUA grants.