



Welcoming Young Adults - Guidance for Membership Committees

‘Come, come, whoever you are,
Wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving,
Ours is no caravan of despair, Come, yet
again, come.’

A favourite among UU youth and young adults, we sing that all are welcome, whoever you are, whatever identities you hold, whomever you love, wherever you are on your journey of faith. But just how welcoming of young adults are our congregations?

If you are part of your congregation’s Welcome or Membership committee, you have an opportunity to help young adults feel more welcome and included, and model that inclusion for others in your community. Read on for useful information and tips about making your congregation an even more welcoming faith home for young people.

What is a young adult?

Young adulthood is not a fixed category, but within Unitarian Universalist communities, a young adult is usually between the ages of 18 and 35, inclusive. Your congregation may choose a different age range, or choose not to specify at all. Young adulthood includes a lot of different life stages and diverse needs: some people are doing some or all of going to school, moving out and/or changing cities, starting new jobs, dating, partnering, and parenting. Young adulthood is the age range most often absent from faith communities, including Unitarian Universalist communities, but young adults have important voices and contributions to make within Unitarian Universalism and in society as future – and present! – leaders. They are essential to a vibrant multigenerational congregation. Some UU young adults find connection in congregations; some find meaning in other gatherings (for example camps, conferences, retreats, online, and small groups), and some are active in both congregations and other settings.

Help young adults get connected!

At its core, Unitarian Universalism is about connection: connection with ourselves, with others, with all life, and with the “more” that has many names (god, spirit, grace, mystery, purpose, love, to name but a few). As a membership and/or welcoming committee, you can help young adults get connected with each other and people of all ages in your congregation.



Young adults who grew up UU:

Although there is more of a Canadian young adult community now than 10 years ago, there are many youth who find they bridge from UU youth community into an abyss. Some return to a congregation in adulthood, but it's estimated that up to 90% do not come back.

To help bridging or returning UU young adults to find their spiritual home in your community, it can be helpful to:

- Inform other congregations if one of your young adults is moving to their area
- Reach out to young adults who have newly moved to your area (hopefully other congregations will inform you!)
- Don't assume that new visitors are necessarily new to UUism - they may have been here for 20 or more years and may be well acquainted with our faith.
- Engage people who grew up UU in spiritual discussions more than small talk. Many young adults report wishing for more meaningful conversations with people in their UU community. (Try talking about the service - it's a great opener!)
- Offer opportunities for people to grow in their spiritual journeys, including spiritual practices, more advanced adult religious education, etc. Many raised-UU young adults are looking for spiritual growth opportunities beyond what they learned in religious exploration classes and youth group.
- Be aware that many raised-UU young adults enjoy participatory and/or circle worship. Having evening services or integrating ritual, sharing, and other participatory elements into Sunday services may help them feel more spiritually connected to worship.
- Help them get familiar with how your specific congregation works, and how they can get involved in ways that meet their spiritual needs.

Young adults new to UUism:

It is increasingly common for people in Canada to identify as "spiritual but not religious" and refrain from participating in religious communities. Young adults coming to UUism for the first time are more likely than ever to have little or no experience with a religious community. As Unitarian Universalists, we offer community for people who don't want to be "spiritual but not religious" alone.

For young adults new to UUism, it can be helpful to:

- Learn what sparked their interest in UU community, what their hopes are as they consider involvement in your congregation, and how you can support them.
- Ensure your congregation has structured ways to learn more about UUism and your congregation, and that they are invited to participate in these courses/programs.



For both young adults who grew up UU and young adults new to UUism:

- Create safe space for them to ask questions about UUism and how your congregation works, including ways to connect with your minister, other young adults, and people of all generations, leadership opportunities, small groups and committees, etc. Don't assume what they know or don't know; both can be damaging to a potential relationship.
- If you have a minister, an invitation from the minister to meet to get to know one another can make a huge difference in helping young adults integrate into the congregation.
- Talk to them! Many of our young adults report standing alone before and after services and in coffee hour.
- Always ask open-ended questions rather than questions that make assumptions about who people are or why they're here.
- Help young adult parents connect with your religious exploration programs. Include children and/or offer childcare at all congregational events so young adult parents can participate.
- Support young adult activities in your congregation. This may include logistical support, organization, preparation of food, or even participating in young adult gatherings (ministers seem to host particularly successful young adult events!).
- Respect young adults' diverse identities, including sexual orientation, gender identity, race, ethnicity, language, life stage, socioeconomic status, physical and intellectual abilities, etc. Ask which pronouns to use for them. Respect people's privacy about their various identities, letting them take the lead on what they would like to share.
- Offer opportunities for leadership *that are connected to young adults' passions and skills*. Be mindful of when and how to invite young adults into leadership; some may want to be involved right away, others may want to take time and simply get to know the congregation.
- Offer connections to regional, national, and international UU groups and events where young adults can connect to our wider movement (see resources in the next section).

Resources for helping young adults get connected:

If you have a young adult group, wonderful – make sure any new young adults know about the group (recognizing that not all young adults are looking to connect with other young adults, especially right away). Also ensure young adults know about ways to connect with other UU young adults online and in- person.

A good place to start is giving them the Canadian Unitarian Council postcard about ways to connect, which directs them to the Canadian Unitarian Council young adult ministry page, which has up-to-date resources for young adults and young adult ministry (www.cuc.ca/community/young-adults).



For your information, here is a short-list of resources available on that page:

Online Connections:

- Gathered Here: monthly online check-in for young adults, generally on the 2nd Monday of each month at 8pm Eastern Time. [See upcoming dates here.](#)
- Canadian Unitarian Universalist Young Adult Facebook Group: www.facebook.com/groups/canadianuuya
- UU Young Adult Connections: www.facebook.com/groups/698574876830392
- Other Facebook groups (search both “UU” and “Unitarian Universalist” and many groups come up. Lots are congregation-specific or serve a particular group of people – see if any spark your interest!)
- Sign up for the Canadian Unitarian Council monthly eNews, including articles, reflections, and events from across the country (visit www.cuc.ca to sign up)
- Church of the Larger Fellowship: An online UU community open to all (www.questformeaning.org)

In Person Gatherings:

- National and regional gatherings of the Canadian Unitarian Council: Events are listed at www.cuc.ca, and often have young adult participation and/or specific YA activities.
- Chorus: the annual, national young adult conference takes place in a different location every year. [More information here.](#)
- OPUS – An annual spiritual retreat led by and for UU young adults, held each August in Canada or the U.S. Find out more by emailing young-adults@cuc.ca.
- Unicamp in Honeywood, Ontario (www.unicampofontario.ca) offers programming throughout the summer, including the annual [Unicamp Young Adult Retreat](#).
- Eliot Institute Camps in Seabeck, Washington (<http://www.eliotinstitute.org/>)
- Northwest Wilderness Society Camp on Kootenay Lake, BC (kootenaywildernesscamping.org)
- General Assembly, the annual conference and meeting of the Unitarian Universalist Association in the United States (www.uua.org/ga)

If you have further questions or want more guidance:

Contact the CUC’s Youth and Young Adult Ministry Staff - young-adults@cuc.ca