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## UU Expressions: Love in Real Life Episode 1: The Bridge

This groundbreaking 10-episode docu-series takes an inspiring and honest look at how Unitarian Universalism (UU) is evolving across Canada in 2024. This isn't just a celebration—it's an invitation to all of us to reflect on what it means to live our UU values in the diverse communities we call home, from bustling cities to small towns, and for diverse people to shape diverse expressions of UUism beyond congregations and, if so, what this means for our national identity.

In each episode, Erin Horvath and Amber Bellemare, the Canadian Unitarian Council's Justice and Equity team, interview Unitarian Universalists who have formed groups outside of congregations and are experiencing an alternative kind of UU community. The individuals share their perspectives and reflections on their experiences, and speak only for themselves. We thank them for their generosity.

### Transcript for Episode 3 - The Bridge

Our guests for Episode 3 include:

- Peter Scales, First Unitarian Church of Victoria
- Jim Sannes and Ellen Papenburg, Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice (CUSJ)
- Casey Stainsby and Reverend Danie Webber, former CUC Youth and Young Adult programming staff
- Camellia Jahanshahi, Rising Together host
- Z Brimacombe with Ilara Stafaniuk-Gaudet, Loving Justice group
- Brenagh Rappaport and Maya Ferguson Klinowski, hosts of Gathered Here
- Reverends Anne Barker and Linda Thompson, CUC's Congregational Life Team
- Robyn Newton and catharine strickland, UUs of the Salish Sea

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| Anne Barker | I don't want to infiltrate all the youth and young adult spaces so they have no space to themselves. But I want spaces where we can be together and I don't think we can take these things and make them one thing, but I think we can plant things in the center that will draw in both. |
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| Amber Bellemare | Welcome to UU Expressions: Love in Real life, a 10 episode docu-series that discovers, celebrates, and challenges how Unitarian Universalism is practiced across Canada in 2024.<br>I am Amber Bellemare.  |
| Erin Horvath    | And I am Erin Horvath  |
| Amber           | And we are the Canadian Unitarian Council's Justice and Equity Team. That was the voice of Rev. Anne Barker, calling us to imagine the proverbial well in the middle of the village. Intergenerational UU communities aren't just a beautiful aspiration, they are one key to a long lasting faith organization. And we know that it's possible to celebrate the differences between how each age expresses their UUism while at the same time bridging the cultural gap between them. We know this because there are wise folks in our midst who care deeply about this issue and have done a lot of thinking and experimenting around it. In this episode, we will learn about the realities that prevent engagement between older and younger adults, what's been working, what could help, and what still needs our attention. We'll look at the trend happening within larger society and how these are impacting UUism. You can find links for statistics, reports, and questions for further dialogue in our show notes. Also - you might hear some insider language from our guests. And these abbreviations are also in the show notes. |
| Erin            | This is a full episode, so let's delve in, starting with a misconception we noted related to volunteerism. Several older UUs said something like "Volunteerism isn't what it used to be." and "People are just so busy nowadays that they don't have time" as though people are not valuing pitching in to help like they once did. This sense of frustration, and in some cases exhaustion, comes with the reality that there are no longer enough people and energy to fuel the UU movement as it was once structured with various committees, roles, and tasks all run by volunteers. For those congregations still trying to work within this model the work of carrying on falls on a shrinking group of aging people. Ellen Papenburg and Jim Sannes, from the Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice (CUSJ) shared their experience with me.  |
| Ellen Papenburg | We don't have enough membership right now, as far as I'm concerned, to go on much longer than two or three years, even though the money would allow us that. But it gives us a cushion.  |
| Ellen           | I think it is necessary to get stronger. But we started out with about 90 people on the mailing list and now we have over 350. But those are not members.  |
| Jim Sannes      | Those people on the mailing list plus are Unitarians mostly.   |
| Ellen           | And but anyway, it is our goal to get more people representing Unitarians, but it's very difficult to get people on the board.   |



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| Ellen | And which is a shame. It seems that it is a problem with volunteerism. The people, even older people, say almost in their fifties, don't have the time to volunteer. And they're busy with their lives too much. And it is hard, even though with climate change you see so many young people. And that gives me hope but to pull them into our organization is very difficult because there is already the climate change groups and we have a hard time too and it's very difficult to get people to join us.   |
| Ellen | It's very difficult not to get burnout as a volunteer. And I think that is probably the case, no matter what organization you're with, if you're very involved, you have to sort of keep your mind on the goal, whatever the goal is, and then say, okay, that is it.   |
|       | And sometimes you get tired. Sure. I'm very curious if the youth feels that too, or that they all on going gung ho and if they don't feel that at all.  |
| Erin  | I heard similar sentiments from others who expressed feeling tired, trapped, and unsure of how to move forward. And people grieve deeply about this.  |
| Amber | And it makes sense for all that grief, these are movements and communities they have given their blood, sweat, and tears to create.   |
| Anne  | Our congregations are getting older, and that's across the board.   |
| Erin  | That's Rev Anne Barker, with the Congregational Life Team. She described what she is witnessing as she works with congregations across the country dealing with volunteer shortages.  |
| Anne  | Now, some still have multiple different generations represented, but all of our congregations, I think the majority of the people are in an older demographic. And those generations of people remember decades of how a congregational life has been. And sometimes it's hard to let go of. But this was so good when you're trying to imagine how to do things now.   |
|       | But also these people have worked really hard for decades, and it's their turn to attend and be cared for and not have to be 80 and be the president of the congregation again. And so that's a challenge as your congregation ages than your numbers of people available to do leadership work go down. And so we either have to have a more robust renewal of our humans or we have to figure out different ways to organize ourselves that don't require the same kind of volunteer contribution. It's a different time and a different culture and volunteering isn't the same thing it used to be. |
| Erin  | Many of these older people seem to be wondering, where are the young people? Why aren't they coming forward to help? Many have been making adaptations for years to compensate. For instance, people serve on boards for longer or on multiple committees.  |
| Amber | So where are our young UU volunteers then?  |



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| Erin          | That's an excellent question, and one that I asked several young people during the interviews. But Before we get there, it's important to recognize that lack of volunteerism is not something that is only being experienced within UUism. It is a far reaching issue across Canada (and beyond) that is impacting all sorts of organizations that rely on a robust volunteer base. In 2023, Volunteer Canada released the statistic that 65 percent of organizations have identified a shortage, attributing this in part to the fact that the demographic that volunteered the most prior to the pandemic were born before 1945. Fearing exposure to viruses, a considerable number did not return to their pre-pandemic volunteer levels. Also, the cost of living, child care, gas, and criminal records checks have been identified as prohibitive for some folks.  |
| Amber         | Ok, so this trend is definitely farther reaching than UUism and more complex than a simple lack of desire to volunteer.   |
| Erin          | Yes. On top of that, important trends in youth and young adult volunteerism in Canada impact what we are experiencing within UUism. Rev Linda Thomson with the Congregational Life Team pointed this out during our interview.  |
| Linda Thomson | Younger people in the 30 to 50 range volunteer at a very high rate.   |
|               | But they do it differently than older generations did. And it's hard for people to get their head around. How do we manage being an organization when volunteer practices and habits and engagement has changed as much as it has?  |
| Erin          | This prompted me to do some digging to find research that describes how younger people are volunteering.  |
| Amber         | Let's hear it.  |
| Erin          | Volunteer Canada reports that youth ages 15-30, who make up about 40 percent of the population are more civically engaged, digitally connected, and educated than previous generations. They will engage in formal volunteering in their younger years, likely due to school requirements, however this tends to decrease as they age. When they engage formally it is more likely to be for a shorter period or for a particular event, rather than long-term volunteering. Gen Z and Millennials were more likely than other generations to engage in informal volunteering with about 74 percent engaging in direct help to people in their lives. 30 percent took part in community improvement initiatives such as coordinating a group or event, fixing up a public space, developing an economic or social project, attending a public meeting, sharing information, and engaging in online awareness-building initiatives such as petitions, crowdfunding and hackathons. |
| Amber         | Ok, so younger people are generally more civically engaged and lean towards volunteer commitments that are short term and have impacts that feel concrete and personal.   |



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| Erin  | Which does not exactly align with the long-term volunteer commitments UU congregations have traditionally depended on - such as joining boards and committees for multiple years and at times, without strongly defined purposes.  |
| Amber | Yeah I can't see younger generations showing up for something that does not have a very clear impact on society. And they may not have energy to put towards the causes that older UU's feel are important. Maintaining a religious structure for the sake of it isn't quite a compelling invitation.  |
| Erin  | Right. There has to be a clear purpose for all that labour. But that doesn't mean they aren't invested. A young Adult who asked to remain anonymous said, "If what you want is people to continue to be UU's, that's very different than if what you want is the buildings to stay alive and the CUC to stay funded." (Amber reacts ouuuff!) So this young adult is an example of someone who is not prioritizing the established infrastructure while still being very invested in the values of UUism.   |
| Amber | It's a matter of priorities.   |
| Erin  | Yes. And this particular young adult was clear to say that just because they don't want to put their energy in something- say the refugee committee or to fundraise for the building- doesn't mean that they want those things to stop. It's just not what makes their heart sing, so they don't want to pour themselves into it.  |
| Amber | So where do they want to put their energy?   |
| Erin  | Some of this is seen in the things young adults are co-creating such as affinity groups for queer folks, UU's of Colour, Unicamp, Abolitionist work, and gathering online and in person that allow for deep personal connection. These are things they care deeply about and are willing to invest time in. Broadly speaking, the 2021 State of Youth Report named the priority issues for Canadian Youth are Truth and Reconciliation, the environment and climate action, health and wellness, leadership and impact, employment, innovation, skills and learning. |
| Amber | Well this is interesting because many older UU's would say that these are a priority for them too.   |
| Erin  | Exactly. So this seems like something worth investigating more because on an ideological level there seems to be a high compatibility between what Canadian young people say they prioritize and what UU's have a long history of caring about and advocating for.   |
| Amber | The next question is: what might help older UU's and younger UU's begin to understand so they can bridge the gap.  |



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| Erin                | Well one thing is we should not assume that young UU's are aware of the plight of older UU's and the congregational expression. There was a time when congregations were thriving and continued to function as they had been. While statistics are clear that membership in congregations have been declining for decades, it is only very recently that alarm bells have begun sounding loudly enough that people are speaking about it outside their congregational walls- but that does not mean that young adults are aware of this.   |
| Amber               | Right so young adults could assume that the congregational finances that have supported them (like CUC Young Adult and Youth staff and programming and subsidies) are still very much holding strong.  |
| Erin                | Yes. And I saw some evidence of this belief when some young adults I interviewed expressed a desire for the CUC to put more funding towards young adult programming- which is currently the main body supporting YA ministires across the country. Until it's communicated very clearly to younger UUs that collectively we have passed the point of being sustainable and renewable, then we can not assume they understand how much their involvement is critical at this point UU history. And, unless we communicate a willingness to release the leadership torch and use a considerable amount of remaining resources to seed the next generation of UU leaders, we shouldn't be surprised if no one shows up. It may not be a matter of not caring, as much as it is a matter of not knowing. |
| Amber               | This feels like a very important point.  |
| Erin                | I agree. And once all involved understand there is a need and there is a willingness to make room for other leadership then we have the starting point of WHY these two groups may want to engage at all.  |
| Amber               | WHY needs to come before the HOW.  |
| Erin                | Yes. And to understand HOW we could approach this let's delve into some of these other themes that arose. In my conversation with Camellia Jahanshahi, a Young Adult who facilitates Rising Together, the group for UU's of colour, I asked her how many youth and young adults she thought were connected to congregations and why there aren't more.   |
| Camellia Jahanshahi | And at least half of them are still going. Certainly more of them, especially some of our youth went more as kids and then, you know, the trend they leave when they're teenagers and they find other things that they're interested in, ways to spend their Sunday mornings and then they go join the workforce and then they don't have free time again until their forties.   |
|                     | And that's kind of how it works with the weekends. I haven't had a weekend since I was 18, like I'm 31, so, you know, like these things disappear. Hopefully I'll have one again soon, but. So a lot of it is scheduling. I mean, yes, the treatments and the perspectives and the topics and all of those things come into it.  |



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|       | <p>But a big chunk is Sunday morning is, you know, I'm either working or I'm desperate to sleep in before go to work. You know, I'm not going to make time to go to church on a Sunday morning. And with so much respect for my love for UUism and the love that I know, my youth and young adults have for UUism they also are either working or desperate for an extra hour of sleep before they go to work on a Sunday or catch up on their studies, or do other things.</p>   |
|       | <p>And that is a challenge. And, you know, I've been a DRE and I've been an RE assistant, and I worked in that world for a long time. And that was kind of always how it went. We would get a lot of younger kids, but by the time they're teenagers, they have jobs, they have soccer club, they have other things, and then we lose them unless they're really, really dedicated or come from families that are really, really insistent, which then those kids are kind of hit or miss as to whether or not they actually like it or not, because you don't want to force somebody to do anything.</p> |
|       | <p>But it really isn't until, you know, mid to late thirties and forties that people are, I think from my perspective, actually have some semblance of free time again. And even that it's only people who have the financial stability to have free time. That's a hard thing, which is why I think branching out of Sunday morning for UU affinity groups and expressions is really vital and important.</p>  |
|       | <p>It's not to say that scheduling has been easy. We've also changed dates a few times The few times now we're meeting on Wednesday evenings like 7 to 930, which, you know, it's not ideal, but it is what we could all fit together and that's just, that's just a hard part of things. I kind of wish church was like on a day, like a Saturday afternoon would be, you know, like a 1 to 3, something like that.</p>  |
| Amber | <p>Scheduling is a big deal. Hosting worship, which is basically the main event for most UU congregations, at the precise time that younger people are the least likely to make it is a barrier to their full inclusion.</p>  |
| Erin  | <p>So an older UU group that is wanting to be more inclusive of younger UU's might experiment with meeting on a weekday evening or during afternoon on the weekend, instead of the traditional Sunday mornings.</p>   |
| Amber | <p>Yes, <i>and</i> I can imagine our audience might be thinking, "We could move our weekly event to a weekday evening and still not have people show up if they don't prioritize spiritual community."</p>  |
| Erin  | <p>Let's tease that idea apart. If YA are not prioritizing weekly spiritual community, is it because they don't care about this, or is it that there is something more pressing? Or is it that the ways congregations do their get-togethers is not their cup of tea? Or perhaps they experience ageism? Or microaggressions?</p>   |
| Amber | <p>The Young Adults and Beyond final report speaks about each of these being factors for the young adults they interviewed.</p>   |



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| Erin  | On top of these known issues within our movement, we need to move back and consider this time in history with a wide lens to see what other trends are happening. And while many of us probably would like to forget about the COVID-19 pandemic there are important after effects that extend past whatever physical aftermath some of us are enduring.  |
| Anne  | COVID was a big interruption in congregational life.  |
| Erin  | That's Rev Anne again. In our interview, Anne and Rev Linda shared the lingering impacts the pandemic has had on the social fabric of our UU communities.   |
| Anne  | Our groups were really good at getting online so people could stay connected that was almost miraculous. But it works just like it did everywhere else in the broader community where if you were on a fence about anything, about a job, about where you lived, about your marriage, anything during the time of COVID, you made decisions and people went one way off the fence or the other. |
|       | There's very few people who just kind of hummed along as if nothing happened. And so if anybody was thinking about doing something else, then they might be gone. Linda: If anyone had habits that were pressing in on the "I'm going to be part of a congregation" habit, I think that got that was another part of the interruption.  |
| Linda | Families who used to make it a thing that they did is go to services on Sunday morning and engage and got used to hanging around on Sunday morning and going for walks in the park or whatever it is they did because kids did not want to be online during COVID for for UU community life. The number of children just dropped off really because they were doing it for school.              |
| Linda | So we lost a lot of kids and families got engaged in other ways and in some cases we've seen those families come back, but we've absolutely lost many because new habits have been formed.  |
| Anne  | But in talking to religious educators, which Anne and I do frequently, what we've heard in some of the congregations is we've got some older kids back and we've got babies happening. But there's this hole in the middle of the donut ring. I think those people have been lost. Anne: Youth have structures, right? Youth have structures that call them back.                               |
|       | So if they were involved, there's a structure that pulls them back. And if you have new young families you're looking for, how do you get together with people? it's a new habit that you're forming. But that in-between piece has really been interrupted. And we all know, like any habit you have, no matter how well-established it is, you start doing it for two years.                  |





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|       | <p>You don't suddenly flip a switch and start and you certainly don't pick up where you left off. One of the things religious educators have told us is they're noticing a totally different way of interacting amongst the children. They don't have the same social skill habits. And so a lot of them are focusing primarily just on connection, which is a thing we all need, because that's what the kids need, to figure out how to be connected.</p> |
|       | <p>They're not worrying so much about program and meaningful content. They're worrying about or working with connection.</p>  |
| Linda | <p>And teaching children how to be in meaningful relationship, how to make decisions grounded on values, all the things that we want for ourselves from a spiritual community. That's what mattered. Whereas earlier generations wanted their kids to learn when I was a kid, I memorized Bible passages. No one ever wanted UU kids to do that, but they might have wanted them to know funky little facts about Buddha or whatever.</p>                   |
| Amber | <p>Ok, so there's a lot in here. On one hand the routine of attending church has been interrupted and people are making other choices of how to spend their time. We do see some people re-emerging but the focus is different, especially where children and youth are involved. In those cases people are looking for opportunities to be together relationally- to practice relating.</p>  |
| Erin  | <p>I would describe it as a desire to be together not necessarily in the ways that people may have engaged before.</p>  |
| Amber | <p>And it isn't necessarily a bad thing that people are coming out of the pandemic with different priorities.</p>   |
| Erin  | <p>Covid has been a great disruptor, a great prioritizer, that has required us all to approach life intentionally. So there is an opportunity here for congregations to let go of busy doing and replace it with intentional being.</p>   |
| Amber | <p>Wow. Well said.</p>  |
| Erin  | <p>This is true not only for families with children that are trying to catch back up with socializing but with the various others demographics that have not come back yet. When we consider young people in light of the pandemic it feels important to recognize that they have not come out of this unscathed. Here's Casey Stainsby explaining what she is witnessing.</p>  |



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| Casey Stainsby | The young people are not okay. I don't think any of us are okay. You know, on a big, big macro level.  |
|                | But I think of young, young folks especially, and elders, too, as like the canary in the coal mine of the world that we're living in. And what I'm seeing with the young folks I work with more closely is that there's a lot of anxiety, depression, a lot of material needs, like young adults you know, on our Discord server recently, there's been a lot of conversation about housing insecurity.  |
|                | People are just really facing some very real material crises in their personal lives that are personal and collective. Income levels just to make enough money to live in this world that we're in right now, accessing health care, accessing mental health care, conflict with family. I could list a litany of things, but I think I just want to lift up that like our young people do have a lot to offer.  |
|                | That's always true. And they really need support. They really need care and attention from those of us who have some of that to offer some more stability in our lives, some more resources, some more just attention, relationship care. That's that's something that I want us to all hold to is not just what can we get from the young adults and the young people, but also like what do they need and how can we support them?   |
| Amber          | "The Young People are not ok". This time in history is tough for everyone, but especially our young people.  |
| Erin           | Yes, and we need to keep this in mind when we wonder why aren't they showing up at church or to volunteer on committee? When life becomes precarious then priorities shift to survival.  |
| Amber          | And like Casey said, there is an opportunity for faith communities to show up and embrace people who are struggling, but it might not be asking them to serve on a board or a committee.   |
| Erin           | It might look like not asking them to do anything at all. What they need is to be able to be present and share their needs in a vulnerable way so their faith community can hold them. They need a support system that will help them get through life. Part of the COVID disruption and reset is discovering what it means to be together in a meaningful way that meets each other's <i>deepest</i> needs. As a couple of young adults told me, volunteerism is an activity for those who have enough of their basic needs met that they have the time and resources to share with others. |



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| Amber | This may be a bit of a mindshift for those UU's who remember the days when one income was all a family needed to thrive and the general welfare of everyone was stable enough that asking people to volunteer their time was a reasonable thing to do. During those times it might have been common for people to have steady, good paying jobs that happen weekdays from 9-5pm, but that isn't the case anymore in an economy where casual and temporary work has become the norm. The cost of housing is out of reach for most of our younger people. |
| Erin  | And this is all true. But again, it's not without hope. Here's Casey again with a practical solution.   |
| Casey | Something I've noticed and is very true in my own life is that paying young adults to stick around and contribute to a religious community is a great way to get them to stick around.  |
|       | You know, for myself, like in my early twenties, I would not have been attending church regularly if I hadn't gotten a job in a church. And you know that all that experience led me down this path. I may or may not have ended up here otherwise or going towards professional ministry. But it's definitely helped and it's definitely kept it in my experience, the forefront of what I'm thinking about.   |
| Erin  | She went on to describe how the Canadian Unitarian Council has taken the approach of paying young adults to run young adult events.   |
| Casey | How many tiny contracts do we have for various things, for coordinating conferences and facilitating and coordinating food and, and various things like this that I think is just, just a real reality of young adults' lives.  |
|       | We need to prioritize the things that are going to put some money in our pockets. Doesn't mean that we wouldn't want to do it otherwise, but we just have to make that choice to prioritize things that are going to pay us. So the more we can offer that as a community, the better for everybody I think.  |
| Amber | We're doing a good job in that we are paying young people for their time, but we should be conscious that the piecemeal nature of the work lends to their feeling of instability and insecurity and mirrors the work environments many of them face in society.   |
| Amber | In your interviews, have you gotten a sense of whether UU's are interested in exploring ways to become financially sustainable to be able to pay younger UU's for their participation?  |



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| Erin  | Generally no, however in the upcoming episodes we will hear about two UU expressions who prioritize paying young adults good wages for their involvement. Even in these cases, however, there was some hesitancy to talk about things in terms of sustainable business models, employees, customers and other concepts more commonly used in business. In others I interviewed, there was an aversion to speaking about money as though it might corrupt the mission in some way or that emphasizing it too much could signal to others that ulterior motives were at play. |
|       | This is too bad because there is an opportunity to address the social justice issue of wealth inequality by providing good-paying jobs while meeting some of the unmet needs of UU young adults who are expressing how unstable their lives have become.  |
| Amber | Theologically speaking, I can see why it might feel like a big switch for UU's to imagine that creating good jobs could be one of the ways that we show up in a world where the gap between the wealthy and the poor is ever widening, and treating workers as dispensable is worsening.  |
| Erin  | Rev Danie Webber shared some history with me that helped me contextualize things.   |
| Danie | The split that caused the Reformation was the idea of separating being the good person and doing the work of being a good person. And so Protestantism, and Unitarian Universalism is a Protestant faith, came out of the Protestant Reformation, talks about doing the thing to be a good person. Doing good is a part of who we are as Unitarian Universalists.   |
|       | That's the part of that embodiment that I think Casey was talking about earlier, like recognition that doing the work is being Unitarian Universalist, not just showing up and attending and, you know, being present on Sunday mornings or what have you. Not that that's not important. I think it is important to be present for your community and be a part of the building of that community.   |
|       | But the way that you live your life outside of that community is going to be just as important as it is to being a part of that community.  |
| Erin  | How do we bridge this gap?  |
|       | We go back to that idea of the precariousness of life right now. I don't think that we can emphasize that enough. Like on a Discord channel that has 45 people, more than 10 percent of them are dealing with insecure housing like regularly being told that they are going to be evicted because of X, Y or Z like that is really, really 10% of your population That's huge.   |
|       | Let's not sweep that under the rug because I think that it's a big part of why people are not present. It's because they're dealing with navigating finances. They're dealing with going to the food bank, they're dealing with, you know, and the last   |



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|                        | thing that they're going to want to do is ask to be asked to join a committee or or whatever.  |
|                        | There is not a significant amount of people who are in my age range who feel like they have that kind of capacity to volunteer work hours. They're trying to figure out how to live and attempting to navigate and all of their emotional, physical, mental energy is going towards that. And then when you think about the other 90%, their housing is coming from parents or residences in colleges or like whatever else, right?  |
| Amber                  | There is so much potential for us to be innovative simply by applying our values to whatever unique circumstances our young people are facing right now.   |
| Erin                   | And it's something we'll delve into more in the upcoming episodes that explore potential paths forward.  |
| Erin                   | Ilara Stefaniuk-Gaudet from Loving Justice is someone who is consistently overcoming barriers in the world in many facets of life. And they have a passion for social justice causes and a real desire to experience deep relating. They spoke about their experiences trying to participate in congregational life. I feel Ilara's words are important for anyone who want to understand the culture gap more deeply.   |
| Ilara Stefaniuk Gaudet | When I'm creating stronger boundaries for myself from congregational life, which I often do, engaging less or engaging in very specific ways, ... it's because I feel like congregational community is work and not nourishment.   |
|                        | Because a lot of these social justice pieces that I'm passionate about, it takes work to light people up within those spaces. And I don't just get to move in that space and have that light and fire mirrored. It takes effort to bring it forward, which is not a bad thing. It's just that it's not a spiritually nourishing environment, because spiritual nourishing is when you see yourself mirrored in the collective.   |
|                        | So that's kind of my personal experience. So I'm pretty specific in how I engage with foundational community and UU community because of that, like I because they feel like workspaces, which is great. That's my calling. Like it's my calling to work in those spaces. And I'm grateful for the work that I do in those spaces. But it's a very specific when I'm in those spaces, I get and I have other spaces where I feel myself mirrored in much deeper ways that nourish me spiritually, where I'm doing work. But it feels like we're all doing the work together. |
| Amber                  | Ok, that's pretty clear- engaging with congregations feels like work for them, not nourishment.  |



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| Erin  | Right. And I heard similar things from many of the younger UU's I spoke with. In some cases, the challenge was around a feeling of being present but not having deep connections; other times, it was the challenge of having people use the wrong pronouns even after being told multiple times. In other cases, it felt like work to try to do things differently in a community that hasn't significantly changed anything in years. Whatever the experience, the overall feeling was of expending energy, not gaining energy through their involvement. Ilara had some great insights into some of the factors that contribute to UU congregations feeling like work instead of nourishment and how it shapes their ministry which started as a religious educator and has recently expanded to include being a Minister in training. |
| Ilara | Because we have focused so much on the individual, there is not so much a strong sense of a collective. And so that mirroring is less of a thing. Like you walk in and there isn't as much of a mirroring. It's like you are yourself in a collective. You are not actually into a collective energy as much.   |
|       | That would be the main thing. The interdependent web is another really big piece of our principles, but it's one that we take in like an intellectual way most of the time. We don't like to go deeper into that, what that connection actually feels like in the world, feels like within our community.   |
|       | So for me that's like a big piece of my ministry is like how do we feel that interconnectedness? And in order to bring that into my ministry, I have to have a source of understanding how it works. And UU congregations are not understanding how that works. Like indigenous circles and like my own dream work are higher sources of how that actually works and unfolds in the world.  |
|       | Like the deep feeling, understanding of everybody in the space being connected. It's not about being the same.  |
| Amber | This is an interesting piece because so much of UUism has become about each individual's personal quest for meaning, and here Ilara is saying they want to experience being a part of a collective, not just an individual within a collective. That's a subtle but important difference. They crave deep connection between diverse people, not sameness.  |
| Erin  | In this case we are experiencing what can manifest when people's attention is focused on creating what works for them and less on what's good for the collective. We have siloed expressions that work for the people in each silo. So young adults are doing what works for them but are not planning with older UU's, youth or children in mind. And the older UU's are doing what works for them but not necessarily planning for younger adults, youth and children.  |
| Amber | And I imagine that once this siloing goes on for a while, we can lose track of the needs, hopes, and dreams of each of the different people in these groups - which   |



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|                 | would make it even more difficult to find our way towards some expressions of togetherness.  |
| Erin            | Z shared in that interview that there is something tangible they are seeking in the nature of the relationships, that they are not currently experiencing in congregations but would like to.  |
| Z<br>Brimacombe | When you were talking about the classical theatre approach where it's like, we all come, we perform this, this play, and then we leave again. To me, that doesn't feel relational, perhaps, and as relationship building, because it doesn't have that element of creativity, which I highly value creativity. It's a very important value of mine. The ability of the worship spaces to be moving is important.   |
|                 | The ability to build community in meaningful ways is important. I'm someone who's typically had an easier time building community with people in my own peer group. So I know that for others, like Intergenerational community feels really exciting and accessible and I am interested always in building intergenerational community and I actually have more recently, not through UU spaces, but I'm in a choir and I'm loving connecting with people of different generations in that space. |
| Amber           | In my experience, it boils down to the depth of relating and the freedom to co-create together in a way that feels alive. Z is not the only young adult who has spoken this way. Was anyone able to articulate this with examples?   |
| Erin            | Rev Danie described areas of cultural differences that may explain the missed opportunities for connection between younger and older UU's.   |
| Danie           | Creating spaces where people can be held in the challenges that are happening in their lives, where they can be witnessed. I think that that's a big part of it. And often times it's considered inappropriate to get up during joys and sorrows and say how much you're struggling.   |
| Erin            | Danie goes on to reflect on the types of cultural tensions that can occur when some people value authenticity more than politeness and others value politeness more than authenticity.   |
| Danie           | Like that comes back to the authentic, polite situation. Like making people feel uncomfortable isn't polite. So we want you to be polite.  |
|                 | And one of the things that I've witnessed a lot is that an older generation, perhaps, perhaps the boomer generation, perhaps the silent generation, I'm not exactly certain, but they have this tendency of valuing politeness not rocking the boat. There's kind of like the sensation of like keeping everything on an even keel and being gentle in your language and all of those kinds of pieces.   |



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|       | <p>Whereas younger generations have a tendency to value authenticity over top of politeness. And so they will lean into an opportunity to be honest around what is challenging versus being polite and attempting not to rock the boat. And that feels to me like when somebody from an older generation is witnessing that authenticity or honesty, it can often be seen as being rude or impolite.</p>   |
|       | <p>And so I think that that's a pretty big distinction. And how do we witness those moments of authenticity and those moments of realness as as a skill or a gift that they can be bringing to the community and not just rude, inappropriate, attempting to rock the boat kind of situations?</p>   |
| Amber | <p>Ooof, we have seen this play out in our congregations, and I have even experienced this myself. Younger UUs share what is real for them, whether it's their experiences of exclusion within congregations, life challenges of extreme poverty, what they do for work, or some other thing they are experiencing, and they can find themselves on the outskirts very quickly.</p>  |
| Erin  | <p>And the following anonymous quote further emphasizes the point Rev Danie made above about politeness being valued more than authenticity. This is what this person said.</p>  |
| Erin  | <p>"The young adults and youth have been questioned about what it is that they want and what it is that their culture is seeking or asking for, and they're being honest and talking about their own personal interpretations of what they want, their spirituality to look like and what they want their faith community to do.</p>   |
|       | <p>And it's being perceived as impolite, it's being perceived as rude, it's being perceived as ungrateful. And I think that this is a really significant barrier in community building."</p>   |
| Amber | <p>I wonder if this feeling of being experienced as impolite, rude, and ungrateful may be one reason why many young adults lean into their affinity groups?</p>  |
| Erin  | <p>We won't know until we begin to inquire with an open heart to understand each person's unique experience.</p>   |
| Erin  | <p>Discovering a balance between authenticity and politeness is worth practicing, even if it might be difficult for everyone because, time and again, our interviewees expressed a desire to be in community. There was not one of the 27 we interviewed that said they were throwing in the towel, or even tempted to throw it in. In fact, people resoundingly expressed a desire to co-create UU communities as they felt they were needed more now than ever. Here's Z from Loving Justice speaking about their return to UUism after being disengaged from the Young Adult community for a while.</p> |





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| Z     | I hope to stay involved. Coming back a little bit, I've been becoming aware of how much responsibility I feel to this community and the work that I want to contribute to here feels important.   |
|       | And I feel like because I was raised UU being UU feels like part of my identity. I want to find a way to be in community. For me it was the community that brought me back into this space.... it was the accessibility of young adult community.   |
|       | There were kinds of support that I could only access from this community because it was like, these are people who will understand why this feels this way or will be able to put language to words in like a way that no one else could.   |
| Amber | Young people are willing to be deeply invested in meaningful causes that resonate on a personal level and result in direct change,  |
| Erin  | There is a willingness to be called back into UU community if there is something that engages them as co-creators. I'd like to share an exchange between myself and Ilara from Loving Justice because it touches on several of the things that bridge builders would be wise to consider.   |
| Ilara | That's one of the visions that I hold for UU spaces but it's not really alive yet, it feels aspirational, where there's this balance of powers where we can come back and reflect and be deeply connected with spirit, and we can go out into the world and be active political voices. A piece that is necessary is for young adults to understand the depth of the goodness that exists in our communities. I feel like there's a lot of assumptions about the generational divide that like, some are true and some aren't. We need to really center the willingness as young adults to be relational with people who have different ideas and opinions about the world. |
|       | And we need to really hold at the center, like the goodness and the love that exists within the communities.  |
|       | The biggest thing maybe is a willingness to show up and hear young adults because there are definitely structures within our religious systems still that to young adults look like barriers, like membership fees look like barriers to somebody who has accumulated student debt and can't afford a membership fee.   |
|       | That willingness to show up and like actually really hear each other's voices; Everybody coming to the table to have a conversation is critical and central to the possibility of that co-creation. Our culture right now in our churches but also in greater culture in Canada is a very individualistic culture.  |
|       | So like it, I often see that like when a barrier comes up to go deeper rather than being willing to work through it, we just stop because we're thinking primarily from an individualistic "How does this serve me?" perspective. Rather than how can I be of service to this community and how can we together move forward? Like there's a perspective shift that needs to come into play.  |



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|       | <p>And that perspective shifted in starting in a lot of the spaces There's so much beautiful potential with that, right? It's aspirational, but I do feel with society at large there's very much because it's how capitalism works, right?</p>  |
|       | <p>It's a systemic piece of like, how do I grow and progress? And if this group doesn't serve me and my growth and progression, rather than trying to work as a collective so that we can grow and progress together, we look for other groups.</p>  |
| Erin  | <p>Of course it would require some sort of a shift then an understanding of what does it mean when you say now UU youth and young adults, like what are we talking about and how do we address that? Right? But then if you're going to call people back in the truth, I think, I don't know. But I suspect that people don't yet realize what's happening.</p>  |
|       | <p>And that they once thought that the congregations were very strong and robust entities. And now as these people age, like they're 70, 80, 90 years old, so they're not in that place. And then these young adults left, but not far, far. But, you know, if you're calling them back in, do they realize that it's their time? You know, what UUism will be is going to be shaped by who shows up to co-create what comes next.</p>   |
|       | <p>I mean there are still very healthy congregations but more and more it's happening where, you know, every week people are dying and that's their end of life time. And we haven't discussed yet how to use that knowledge to fertilize what's coming next and the money and the resources and what have you. But I'm thinking a lot about that, like how do we call people in and then how do we help those people to realize if UUism matter to them, now's the time?</p>  |
| Ilara | <p>There has to be the space for something new to be birthed. So if we're wanting to be relevant and alive, like how do I guess how do we use the old structures to support something new coming forward rather than as a barrier. It feels like our structures are barriers to the vision rather than supporting the vision in a lot of ways, like and so how can we shift that, How can we shift it so that because we have visionaries like we have so many visionaries within UUism in Canada like dozens of visionaries, a lot of really beautiful positive vision, and we put those visionaries into like bits of menial jobs that instead of supporting the vision, depletes their energy, which doesn't move the vision forward. ... how do we shift it so that system is supporting the vision and moving that vision out into the world rather than depleting the energy of the visionaries?</p> |
| Amber | <p>There's a lot to unpack in this one. Both generations experience barriers that they need validated by the other. The only way to get there is through both parties' willingness to stay with the tough conversations, to not shut them down, but to find a way through the issues together. And then perhaps the most challenging, is</p>   |



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|              | the process of calling in the visionaries and equipping them with the resources they need to innovate.  |
| Erin         | And therein lies the challenge and the opportunity in co-creating the bridge. To move toward each other is a balancing act that involves immense trust. On one hand YA would be called in to take on the responsibility of upholding UU traditions, while OA do the challenging work of letting go of those traditions and entrusting the younger adults to care enough to keep their legacy alive. And when it comes to resources, OA could offer up some of their remaining resources to provide seed money for the next generation of UU visionaries to build what will come next. |
| Amber        | And all of that intentionality requires such courage.   |
| Erin         | Yes, and it's not for the faint of heart, that's for sure.  |
| Music bridge |   |
| Amber        | Ok so we are getting an understanding of the complexity of the Young Adult experience. What about the Adult Adults? Who is responding intentionally to the gap?   |
| Erin         | I had the pleasure of talking to two people who represent a group of UU's that have taken up the challenge and opportunity of co-creating a UU community centred around full inclusion of Youth and YA. catherine strickland and Robyn Newton of the newly formed UU's of the Salish Sea in British Columbia. Let's start with a conversation between catherine, Robyn and myself discussing what prompted their group to start on this adventure in 2023. Here's Robyn.  |
| Robyn Newton | It was the excitement of, in particular for me wanting to bring the youth culture of Unitarian Universalism into, you know, the intergenerational format so that there's just so much I admire and love about how Unitarian youth are together. And I also think it meets their needs. I think we've been hearing that what you graduate from youth group, it's not a bridge, it's a cliff.   |
|              | I think we want to be more responsive to how faith or religion or worship can be more responsive to the needs of young adults, youth. And we also I think a part of what we wanted to do is put children front and center as well. And I think it's really exciting. We have no idea of how we're going to do it, but and that's, I think, why it's taking us so long.  |
|              | But I don't think there's a problem with that. We're having worship services and we're having other gatherings. It's evolving and it's as catherine said, I think it's, you know, very much a co-creation.  |
| Erin         | And do you have young adults or youth or children helping you shape it at this point, or is that still to come?   |



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| Robyn                | We have a few I would say we're still working out the basics. And for example, catherine, I again, I think I want to give you credit for the session we had with young adults. We want to really focus. I think one of the recognitions is that they have busy lives, but we're very excited about the idea of working with Danie Webber and talk about how we can be more responsive.   |
|                      | Well, we're ready and we know the most effective way of involving young adults. We certainly will. But you know in many ways we have to get our house in order first.  |
|                      | I think I don't want to involve them in the details of like, for example, we've we've, you know, been working with Victoria Church as, as our, our mentoring church and, and working to get so that we can get donations, you know get a charitable tax receipt so that kind of logistics I think we do have people that I would call young adults that have been very involved in in helping us decide, you know, how to move forward.  |
| Amber                | I just want to point out a connection here: This is an initiative that Rev Danie has been supporting which makes total sense given their special passion and skills for building intergenerational spiritual communities.  |
| Erin                 | Yes. And Z , the young adult who is involved with the Loving Justice group, also spoke about being involved in the Salish Sea group as part of their return to UUism.  |
| Erin                 | The UU's of the Salish Sea were motivated by the fact that some young adults are reporting they feel they have no spiritual community to bridge into once they turn 35. One young adult at their previous congregation felt completely unheard when talking about their shared future. So, instead of continuing to push their congregation to make changes against their will, this group left to co-create the space for something new to emerge, even if it was not yet clear what it would become. When they began to really listen to the Young Adults they received some clear feedback that has directed them to include Youth and Young Adults strategically but not at every level. Here's catherine. |
| catherine strickland | One of the clear messages we heard from the young adults when we were asking them about, you know, what would a community and a worship and a Unitarian community look like that felt welcoming for you?   |
|                      | One of the clear messages was we don't want to have to do the labour to create that.   |
|                      | One of the things that young adults said, and this is a young adult who has put in a lot of energy and time in our group is that, you know, when we were youth, you know, we we did all these great things, but but we did a lot of the work and now we're out.  |



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|           | We're, you know, starting our careers where we're busy. You know, we want to be able to, you know, come and enjoy these events, but not have to do all the volunteer work to get them together. So I think that probably is a good insight to why we don't see a lot of young adults is because they're busy.   |
|           | Can we create something that is actually nurturing for them, given their busy lives and, all the challenges they're facing  |
| catherine | I think this is another innovation that we're trying to do, which is and this is not as much integrated yet into our culture, but this idea ...of creating the opportunities for people to contribute in the ways that make the most sense to them.   |
|           | And it kind of a bit goes back to the money conversation. It's sort of part of that conversation and it's this idea that this comes from another community that I'm part of, which is, things will happen if people have energy and commitment and want to make them happen. If that isn't there within your community, they're just not going to happen.   |
|           | Don't try to force somebody to peel potatoes and make sandwiches when that doesn't fit either with their desire and how they want to contribute or in their reality of what they've actually got to offer. And so I think that that's a way that we need to evolve, is to really let go. And this is part of whether you want to call it White supremacy culture or capitalistic culture or whatever. |
|           | It's the idea that we create a plan and then we implement it as opposed to this idea that things will emerge and come organically and we create space for them and we create a container for them and we create sort of like boundaries isn't the right word, but the values around them and allow them to emerge. That's where you get people engaged.   |
| Amber     | Adrienne Maree Brown refers to this approach as Emergent Strategy. The idea is that, through relationship building, you co-create, keeping in mind not only the vision but the capacity of all involved, recognizing that energy and availability fluctuate throughout different phases and stages of life.   |
| Erin      | catherine, Robin, and others in this group have the time and energy to invest into the initiative without asking YA to deal with the logistics.   |
| Amber     | It makes a ton of sense to focus on this then, even if it means letting go of some of the committee and yearly events older UU's have traditionally associated with congregational life.  |



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| Erin  | Here's the interesting thing though. I thought I would hear from the OA I interviewed that they valued the activities of being a UU over relationship building but that wasn't the case in any of the OA I interviewed, including those that are heavily invested in congregational life. In fact, when the key messages were distilled out, they said they craved the same things as YAs- which were relationship, conversation, and working toward positive changes in the world. Their strategies and approaches differed, but underneath it all, we have UUs of all ages saying they crave deep connection. Here's an example of what I heard in my conversation with Peter Scales.  |
| Peter | I became a Unitarian in my early thirties and I was looking for relationship more than anything. I wasn't looking for a liturgy, I wasn't looking for theology.  |
| Amber | So isn't that interesting. As different as we may feel we are at times, we're all crave connection. I'm wondering where we go from here, relationally speaking?  |
| Erin  | I asked Peter that question.   |
|       | How do we honour these amazing people in a relational way? Because somehow in this beautiful classical version of UUism where roles and creating the ceremony together. And somehow in that maybe some of this individuality is missing an opportunity to shine through in a way that would resonate with younger people in a different way than it is right now.  |
| Peter | Even if if alliances could be made, Alliance is probably not the right word, but mentoring opportunities so that if you've got someone who's a grad student, Unitarian and a grad student and wondering how to get it, get through the struggle of of a thesis, and if they don't ask, they will never know that four of their congregants are professors and that the number of PhDs in UU congregations is higher than in any other congregation, in any other denomination, that we've got loads of smart people who on Sunday morning just sort of shuffle in and or bicycle or stride in get through the service because they love the community and don't talk about the fact that they were a distinguished professor or a war veteran or a nurse during the HIV AIDS crisis. |
| Erin  | Yes. And then to add to that, then we have younger people who don't like they're not in the congregation at all. And so they don't necessarily connect with with those folks, period. And at the same time, like what we're hearing from I shouldn't say just UUs.   |
|       | Right. But just in the world. Well, there doesn't seem to be a leaning towards being a part of religious institutions as a whole. There are some exceptions. You know, for example, some of the really charismatic or Protestant Baptist type things, Those those seem to still be holding strong. Right. But generally speaking, what we see and what I see in the world, in my own life, right, is people who really do want to  |



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|  | make a difference, people who understand that they have the ability to make a difference and have values that would align with UU values.  |
|  | But they're never going to walk in the door to a church or anything that looks like a church and within UUism today, right in this moment as we're speaking, there are people that have a wealth of amazing knowledge to share. Is there a way to to connect these. So where the the elders can feel like they are helping to equip the next generation, whether they identify as UUs or if there are other folks who uphold values that are, you know, aligned with UUs.  |
|  | As opposed to, like you said before, where people are not being trained to operate and fill the roles of people doing classical you you ism. Okay. So then do we just allow that expression to just die peacefully or do we do something to like, bring that that knowledge back in, to give a blessing  |
|  | Much like how in an indigenous community they don't mean to take away something from the elders in order to solve whatever the current expression will be. It's still, it's to honor the elders. But then there's this reciprocating of releasing the younger generation and believing that they have an approach that makes sense for their current world, whatever that looks like, right?   |
|  | We know that there are some people doing succession planning inside and outside of UUs and where they're consciously saying what they want to have done with their buildings and what they want to have done with their trust funds and, you know, these sort of things. And, you know, as we look at some of these questions that we had here. Is there a place for the UUs to support these transitions. I don't know why that image keeps coming to my mind, it's almost like fertilizing the next generation of what UUism is like, how can we create that as a practice where being an elder is recognized? |
|  | I'm remembering right now a conversation that happened with one of our Indigenous elders during a sharing circle. And I remember someone, a couple of someone's speaking in succession about the pain that they have in their heart, about becoming seniors and feeling like there's no recognition in their traditions for them. And so the only option they have is to hang on to the roles they had because once they let go, they've let go of their place.  |
|  | in the work world, many of them, right. And they've let go of or have been let go of their place in their families if people have died or whatever. And then the last thing they have to hang on to is their place within their faith community. And so, to your point earlier saying people are hanging on to that into their much elderly years to roles they played.  |
|  | Is it because we are not providing what does it look like to be a UU elder? And then actually naming it as such? Could we be doing something that would allow people   |



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|       | to age into the senior years knowing that there's a role for them to fertilize this next generation's coming up, right?   |
|       | And then, of course, teaching the 40 year olds, How do you fertilize the work of the 17 year olds and 18 year olds, how can we be doing that as opposed to holding the static understanding of who we are? You know, classical UUs putting on the Shakespearean classical UU production. And if you're not interested in classical UUism, then, there's nothing for you.  |
| Peter | We are the congregation who emotes. And if you're not emoting be gone, you go to the basement where the juice boxes are.  |
| Amber | This bit about formalizing UU eldership feels very significant to me. It feels like a path forward to offer UU Elders training because being an elder isn't just the same as just becoming old.   |
| Erin  | When it's done with intentionality there is often a mentorship component build into it- formally or informally - where relationship can be shared and teachings exchanged. A mentorship program is one of the recommendations that was put forth by Danie and Casey in the Young Adults and Beyond final report. A line in the report's closing paragraph states: "Perhaps one of the most important takeaways from this project is that CUC programs alone cannot meet all the spiritual and social needs of young adults." Connecting UU YA with UU Elders is one way to diversify and expand the support network for both YA and the elders. |
| Amber | That's a very exciting idea with lots of possibility. It helps us move away from siloing our groups, which is a recommendation that has come up a few times in our research.  |
| Erin  | Earlier, Ilara spoke about the need to move from extremes of individualism into collectivism, and becoming more intentional about roles could help people bring more intentionality into the way they are relating. Instead of being focused solely on what each person wants in their experience of spiritual community, there would be consideration of what is good for the whole.   |
| Amber | I could imagine some of our members being excited about experimenting with this. There is a curriculum called "The Wise Elders' Circle: A Spiritual Journey" by Audrey O'Callaghan and Laura McNaughton. I actually took the facilitator course (long story!) but what I remember was that it was more about helping folks navigate the world of aging, whereas what I see is an opportunity for something like a wheel of life, where everyone fully understands their particular role of say, the elder, or the youth, etc. within the UU community and that these roles are significant to the cultivation of the culture of the group.      |





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| Erin  | It's really great to know that eldership is already on some people's radar. Maybe this curriculum is something that could be built upon. Before we leave this section of the conversation, I'd like to go back to Peter one more time. He shared with me what First Unitarian Church of Victoria has been doing collectively to give recognition to people as they enter into their senior years. As we move forward as a national body to consider options like Elders Training and Life Cycle Training, it may give us some more ideas of what we could do. Here's Peter.   |
| Peter | At First Unitarian Church of Victoria. I don't know how long they've been doing this, but they do a recognition of elderhood and, and we're doing a lot of the past ten years because a lot of people have been hitting whatever the mark is to be an elder of the church. And in that ceremony, it's usually within a Sunday service, there will be a biography, so the person is asked to come forward and somebody reads their biography, a four or five minute biography, and it includes things like flew a bomber in World War II or was a nurse at St. Paul's Hospital in Vancouver in the 1980s or started childcare for First Nations kids or something. |
|       | So those elder ceremonies I love them. And then the write up the bio gets put in the newsletter, and and while the person is still alive, we get to recognize, "oh you fought against cruise missiles in northern Alberta in the 1990s." Are cruise missiles like fighting a pipeline. Well, kind of they are.  |
| Erin  | For this final example I want to share an excerpt from my conversation with Ellen and Jim from Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice. This segment came toward the end of our interview and we had been talking about Loving Justice, the social justice group initiated by Young Adults. Here's a snippet of that conversation.   |
|       | I'm just thinking about this group I'm going to interview later on this week sometime and they're young adults that are interested in social justice. Is there any way for them to be connected to CUSJ? They are going to have a totally different way, if they were to use Robert's Rules I would be astonished.  |
| Jim   | We don't use Robert's Rules.  |
| Ellen | We do.  |
| Jim   | We don't officially.  |
| Ellen | We have motions and seconds.  |



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| Erin | Any of that stuff, I can't imagine that being their cultural way of being. Is the way forward, and we'll see soon with CUSJ to do its thing until it folds and then the same this younger group does things however they do things. Is there a way that there's a merger here where it's almost like a handoff of CUSJ to say here's the entity, it's a legal entity, you don't have to form yourselves now but you might change your bylaws. |
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Jim: We'd love to do that.

Ellen: We'd love to hand it off, and we can learn from each other, because we are never too old to learn, we are learning all the time and maybe this other way of doing it is better than the very rigid way of motions. For legality, it is possibly necessary, I don't know if it is.

Jim: Well you have to have a treasurer you have to have someone who is making the agenda, not just someone who's doing the secretarial work, keep track of what's going on.

Ellen: It's a legal requirement for a not for profit is probably quite rigid but maybe I'm totally wrong and that would be good to find out from them how they are doing it and how they are legally involved in these things. But we are here, the wheel does not need to be reinvented all the time. So I mean it is a shame, but on the other hand that's life, we are outdated, we are the dinosaurs and the mammals come and they are very successful. The structure sometimes gets in the way, we have always done it this way so we will continue to do it this way and that is a very dangerous precedent.

Erin: Well yes, and in the case of these young adults that are organizing this is very personal, this is their friend that they're organizing around, that story, that influence. And so when we talk about them wanting to make an influence, they have probably little to no money to do anything to do with that, but they have a deeply personal thing. They may not take on all of the issues in all of the country, in all of the world, but they're starting with something that matters a great deal to them. And so as I'm talking to you I don't have any outcome required of this, it's just I'm curious, cause I'm like well is there anything that can happen to fertilize this next generation of young



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|       | <p>people cause they're not going to spend all their time figuring out the logistics. The younger people are about relationship typically, not exclusively, but they're highly motivated to do things relationally, and of course they use different streams like social media to enact change but many of them have said that they have a reverence for the activists that have come before them and they don't want to cut that off and they see that as their elders that could be mentoring and teaching, but right now there's a disconnect.</p>   |
| Amber | <p>What a great example of the sense of humour and humility needed to balance out the honour of Eldership. It's not a matter of being above the young ones but being with them recognizing that you may have lived more years but that doesn't mean that you know everything or that the learning has stopped.</p>  |
| Erin  | <p>Exactly. There needs to be a willingness to discover what comes next together.</p>   |
| Erin  | <p>During the "Young Adults and Beyond" interviews that Danie Webber and Casey Stainsby conducted recently, young adults shared some of their thoughts about the gap and potential approaches to bridging the divide.</p>   |
| Amber | <p>One topic of conversation was whether to change the age range of young adults so it doesn't go as high as 35 years. Here's one person's thoughts on that: "If we lose the large YA age range, I worry that we will further separate our young people from the old, deepening the wounds of the bridge to nowhere. The long YA period did not heal those wounds, it's just a bandaid until we figure out a better way to really bridge the communities and provide multigen and intergen opportunities to connect regardless of age, shortening the age span of YA is tearing off the bandaid without any plans to actually address the injury. I think in general, we need the transitions between age groups to be less abrupt, with more overlap and fuzzier edges, to make the transitions less traumatic."</p> |
| Erin  | <p>Another Young Adult said: "An essential precondition to changing the age range for YA programming is to make big changes that encourage connections and getting to know one another across age categories, within our congregations and across the country. Having age-cohort-specific spaces can be really special, but you inevitably age out of them, and finding kindred spirits in the larger congregation and organization can be really hard, especially if we haven't had any practice in how to actually become friends with people in different generations."</p>  |
| Amber | <p>Based on all the feedback they received, the report emphasizes the importance of building intergenerational relationships.</p>   |
| Amber | <p>And for sure there are communities doing intergenerational relationship building. I know that there is some excellent programming happening in the Vancouver area.</p>   |
| Erin  | <p>Right! and learned about it from catherine and Robyn who were inspired by the way North Shore reimagined what worship could look like.</p>   |



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| Robyn | Jessica and Bill have been offering what they call the “inquiring souls” process which is to take a topic and then it's just like what are all the questions that you have about this?   |
|       | And just and it becomes very much just an open and inclusive like there's no hierarchy of questions or like ideas or like it's very much this opportunity to just like be really creative in exploring these things, these different big ideas. At North Shore they condense the kind of formal part of the worship and had added on this what they called spirit zones.   |
|       | So for 45 minutes there were four or five different options that you could attend. One would be like a crafty kind of thing. One would be maybe a movement, one would be more like a meditation. And this inquiring souls, one was one that was often very popular. And again there was a lot of excitement and participation from the older children and the youth in this.   |
|       | They really enjoyed that format.   |
| Robyn | There were fewer and fewer children and teens attending the congregation, we had to, you know, Sunday school, we had to rethink Sunday school completely. And so that was how we evolved into having a somewhat shorter service and then spirit zones. So the beginning of the service was very inclusive and then the kids would go down and have a snack and then we would, you know, like the adults, they got to choose from a number of different options for the spirit zones. |
|       | And certainly the the inquiring souls I think was originally created for young people, but really adapts well to all ages above I don't know, I would say even six year olds could probably participate. You actually brainstormed the questions you're going to you want to discuss and Jessica and Bill have been really great at giving the kids leadership roles because they would kind of everybody gets to offer questions.   |
|       | The question gets chosen. People get a chance to respond. And then the the young people were taking notes and got to summarize it up at the end. And it was just a really interesting, engaging exercise.  |
|       | There's a little bit of tension right now between the idea that the youth and the young adults, the youth in particular, need their own space in their own group, as well as participating with the larger group.  |
|       | And I think part of it is the recognition that sometimes when you have adults in the room, they end up dominating the conversation. And we'll learn, but I don't think we're quite there yet.  |
|       | When Jessica and Bill are facilitating, I think they do a really good job of giving the youth a lot of this the this stage.  |



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| Amber | You have to appreciate the ingenuity of these UUs - they didn't see a lack by any means - they saw an opportunity to bring youth into some central roles. I would think that the balance of power develops a sense of trust between the youth and adults. If we keep practicing and experimenting, truly, we can be a living example that there is a place for everyone.   |
| Erin  | It really is wonderful to witness that type of creativity. In the Young Adults and Beyond Report I saw another creative solution lifted up by a Young Adult this time. Someone suggested " YAs could self-organize and craft bids to bring young adult conferences to churches – perhaps with the goal of building capacity with specific congregations? I see a need for more grassroots work from YAs." So here is another option for beginning to bridge that divide, but this time from the perspective of young adults reaching across. |
| Amber | And I'm pretty confident that once we release these episodes we will begin to hear more and more about creative experiments and ideas that are taking place to build the bridge toward intergenerational communities.  |
| Erin  | It's challenging work, but it's meaningful work, especially when we hear quotes like this from a young adult who participated in the Young Adult and Beyond research: "My heart and soul still feel deeply rooted in Unitarianism, my youth there, and I know all those people are still out there. All that love is immense, like amazing. And I think it's probably more than a summer camp kind of love, but I just don't know how to bring it into my life."   |
| Amber | How touching is that?!   |
| Erin  | It is. It actually brought tears to my eyes the first time I read it.  |
| Amber | I'm so motivated hearing that young adult's desire to bring "More than a summer camp kind of love" into their life. There is a desire to connect, we just need to release our creativity to make it happen!  |
| Erin  | I'd like to finish this section with the words of two of our staff members: First, Casey who worked directly with youth and young adults and then Anne, whose focus is congregations comprised mostly of older adults. In both cases they use natural imagery to draw our attention back to the interconnection of all things.   |
| Casey | I do for one, I really, really appreciate that kind of, that stability in my life, that sense of being connected to like a tradition that goes further back than me, you know, and my little life. And so, yeah, I don't want to pit that against young adults or against young adult culture or younger, younger folks in like a versus kind of way.  |



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|       | <p>Those event spaces being temporary by nature, is that because of that, like we we need congregations, we need institutions that can be the the constant. The rooted. I think of this as like an ecosystem. That is an image I got from Liz James podcast that, you know, we think of our culture as like a forest system and like you need all kinds of different life forms to make that ecosystem healthy and strong and thriving and I think of the institutions, you know, the CUC , you see the congregations as like the trees, the old growth trees that are like</p> |
|       | <p>solidly there. They're there for decades to hundreds of years. They're got deep roots. They reach up high and they're fairly solid. They don't last forever. Right. Like they're all part of a a cycle. But it's a different timeline to the moss, to the flowers, to the birds and the insects and everybody else who's crawling around. And we kind of rely on those bigger structures to do what we need to do in other ways.</p>   |
|       | <p>We need all kinds of different formats to make this possible. And like, like the, the events that we run for youth, young adults from the CUC wouldn't be possible without the institution, right? And the institution wouldn't be possible without congregations. It's all part of this big network. The nature of being a young person is that you aren't don't often have the resources or the stability in your life or the skill set yet sometimes or the resources, the financial resources to be able to make those things happen yourself, like maybe</p>            |
|       | <p>you can once in a while. And that's awesome. And I've certainly seen and experienced that and it's been extremely magical, like really like self seeded events that, that don't, that are, aren't initiated by one of the institutions. They're really like initiated by a bunch of young adults just being like, let's just get together and see what happens. That can also happen and that is awesome and beautiful and it's not we can't rely on that being the format, right?</p>   |
|       | <p>Because it's just not, not really sustainable.</p>   |
| Anne  | <p>You asked, "How do we take like youth and young adults and seniors, right?" How do we bridge this gap? I don't know if we can have a direct path, and that's a really hard thing to say.</p>   |
|       | <p>So I would love artificial age boundaries to just gracefully erode like the sand on the beach and that we honour and respect and pour energy into everything that has a life. If a congregation has life, Linda and I are here to help them along in any way we can.</p>   |
|       | <p>It's not one thing. I'm not going out to force young adults into congregations, and I'm not going out to force seniors into being a young adult thing.</p>   |
|       | <p>There's a vitality. Let it not be limited by ages.</p>   |
| Amber | <p>Powerful words to end with. There may be a culture gap, and there are people on both sides building bridges across the divide.</p>   |



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| Erin | In the next episode, we will take a little detour down a path that revealed itself by way of the Young Adult culture. What does it mean to show up exactly who you are? Stay tuned to find out! |
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End of Episode 3 transcript

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