

Finding a Spiritual Home

Unitarian Universalism for Young Adults

Michael Tino

Transitions

New schools, new jobs, new relationships and new communities—the lives of many young adults are filled with transitions, each of which adds both new possibilities and new needs to our lives. In this time of great change in our lives, we often need a setting that nurtures and grounds us. Unitarian Universalism provides young adults with just such a place.

In our congregations and in the wider Unitarian Universalist community, we are simultaneously challenged to rigorously examine our faith and given the freedom to express it. Unitarian Universalism offers us somewhere to ask questions, to engage in dialogue, to meet others on their spiritual journeys, and to find our spiritual home.

Unitarian Universalism is important to me because it's revolutionary, magical, practical, welcoming, uplifting, mine. UU churches are where I find spiritual communities. My leadership is encouraged and nourished, not just by my elders but by my peers as well. I have made precious friendships with fellow young adults in church. I love UU young adults. As a whole, we're a vibrant, dynamic, caring group of people.
—Amy Strano, New York, NY

Living Spiritually

Are you searching for a community in which to explore spiritual questions without being given a set of “right” answers? Many young adults are. We seek a relevant and living spiritual environment in which we are free to question the answers that others have given us. For some of us, this means developing a faith that passes the tests of reason and logic. For others it means the freedom to explore new spiritual practices and approaches.

Unitarian Universalist spiritual communities are based on freedom in our searches for truth and meaning. In our congregations, diverse viewpoints are welcomed. We strive to create safe places for exploration as well as lively debate and discussion. Often, this means that Unitarian Universalist worship becomes a vibrant collage of different worldviews, spiritual paths, and practices.

At our best, Unitarian Universalists challenge each other to live out our spirituality and values in the world. Deep reflection leads to clarification of our values and, in turn, to

living out those values in the ways we connect with others, treat our environment, and choose careers. Many young adults need this connection between our faith and our lives.

I can't imagine not having a community in which I can be open and free with my thoughts and beliefs, surrounded by those who are also seeking to improve the lives of others in their community. My service to my community and humanity cannot be restricted to helping only those who agree with me.

—Christopher Wulff, Kingston, ON

Creating Community

Amid the transitions of young adulthood, we need a safe place to be ourselves—a place to meet others and create friendships and connections that will last a lifetime. In Unitarian Universalist congregations and on college campuses across the continent, young adults are coming together to get to know one another in support and friendship. These vibrant young adult groups are grounded in faith exploration, often gathering for worship in an intimate and experiential way that suits the spiritual and social needs of young adults. Many young adults find personalized worship experiences like circle worships and covenant groups meaningful in building community.

In addition, Unitarian Universalists strive to provide a social atmosphere that does not pressure them to conform to a perceived norm and provides opportunities to relax and have fun. In congregations and young adult groups, people from different backgrounds and with divergent philosophies come together to find and explore what we all have in common.

We are also a part of a larger movement that values the contributions of people of all ages. Unitarian Universalist young adults are invited to participate in an intergenerational movement that is broader and deeper than any one group or congregation. Members of the wider Unitarian Universalist community gather in many places and for many reasons—at meetings to develop a common voice, at conferences to learn from one another, and at camps to revive and sustain our spirit.

The members of the UU community here at Wellesley College have not only become my friends in a social respect but they are also my sisters in faith. While we love to discuss the latest hot topic on campus or moan about our exams, we also connect on a spiritual level. Even though we do not have the same beliefs or religious backgrounds, we share a way of thinking and looking at the world that allows us to understand each other through a common language.

—Anna Koteff, Wellesley, MA

Seeking Justice

Our Unitarian Universalist faith also calls us to understand the injustices in our society and to work to create a world community based on freedom and equality for all. We seek to be a faith open to participation from people with a broad spectrum of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives.

This work is a journey toward wholeness in our society and is ongoing at many levels. Many Unitarian Universalist congregations seek to engage in intentional work around anti-racism and anti-oppression, to understand the different levels on which power works, and to create structures to make our work accountable to people regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and class background.

This work is not easy, but we are committed to it as an integral part of our faith. Unitarian Universalist young adults continue to be at the forefront of this journey. Together, we are challenging our congregations and the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) to understand linked oppressions, to make our ministry available to all who seek it, and to consistently use open decision-making processes in our work.

Unitarian Universalism is important to me because . . . it is a religion that values freedom and justice. While some may say institutions are inherently corrupt, it is our duty as free thinkers to utilize the power of an institution for justice, liberty, and freedom of religion. I remain committed to Unitarian Universalism because it is an institution that can accommodate change.

—Natalie Brewster Nguyen, Chicago, IL

Cultivating Visionary Leadership

In our congregations, young adults are invited to be a part of the membership and the leadership that make Unitarian Universalism happen. Our movement is one of independent congregations, and our highest authority is the decision of a congregation. Our voices and votes, as well as our energy and commitment, are the building blocks of a free faith.

Congregations come together in various ways to learn from one another, provide efficient services, and raise their collective voice on important issues. Membership in an individual congregation may allow you to get involved in leadership at district, regional, or national levels. In addition, young adult Unitarian Universalists have come together to form the Continental Unitarian Universalist Young Adult Network, which works to provide programs and opportunities for young adults.

Unitarian Universalist young adults embrace new energies and new voices. Within this faith, your participation and your gifts of time, talents, and love will be accepted with open hearts and minds. We welcome new people into our communities and congregations because we understand that our own spiritual growth depends on the connections we make with others. We hope that this is a place where you feel comfortable exploring and that it one day becomes your spiritual home.

At church I feel connected to the wisdom and history of liberal religious people and membership in an intergenerational community that struggles with real life issues. My mind, heart, and soul are stretched to welcome new ideas, dreams, and passions for creating our beloved community.

—Joseph Lyons, Portland, OR

For More Information

Contact the UUA's Office of Young Adult and Campus Ministry at (617) 948-4273 or ya-cm@uua.org.

Visit the joint website of the Continental Unitarian Universalist Young Adult Network and the UUA Office of Young Adult and Campus Ministry at www.uuayan.org to learn more about young adult and campus groups and to get connected with the larger community of UU young adults.

For more information about Unitarian Universalism

Buehrens, John A., and Forrest Church. *A Chosen Faith: An Introduction to Unitarian Universalism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1998. A basic introductory guide to Unitarian Universalist philosophies and ideas. Includes a chronology of UU history.

Buehrens, John A., ed. *The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide*. Boston: Skinner House Books, 1999. Essays by contemporary Unitarian Universalists give an overview of our programs, practices, and history.

For more information about ministry to young adults

Lavanhar, Marlin, and Justin Schroeder. *Soulful Sundown*. Boston: Young Adult/Campus Ministry Office, UUA, 1999. A guide to presenting a young adult-friendly contemporary worship service in your congregation.

Beaudoin, Tom. *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998.

Robbins, Alexandra, and Abby Wilner. *Quarterlife Crisis: The Unique Challenges of Life in Your Twenties*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam, 2001.

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