

May 2009 - Newsletter

Massachusetts Bay District of Unitarian Universalist Congregations



March with MBD in Boston Pride Parade

If your congregation is not already marching together at the June 13 Boston Pride Parade, please consider marching under the Mass Bay District banner. To sign up and for more details, email [Meck Groot](mailto:Meck.Groot).

OWL Trainings

2009

September 11 to 13
September 25 to 27

2010

January 8 to 10
January 22 to 24

[REGISTER NOW!](#)

Become an MBD Chalice Lighter!

The Chalice Lighter Program allows individual UUs to support exciting and innovative projects in our District's congregations.

For more information and to join, [click here!](#)



Greg What's Next for our Buckland Youth?

by **Greg Buckland**

Coordinator for Youth, Young Adult and Campus Ministry

I want Unitarian Universalist youth to grow up to be lifelong Unitarian Universalists. Maybe that's a provocative statement, but provocation is in order. Each year in our denomination, approximately 4,000 youth reach age 18 and "bridge" into young adulthood. Currently between 85 and 95 per cent of them do not find a congregational home after they leave the congregation of their youth.* After years of RE classes, OWL, Coming of Age, and vibrant youth programs, most of our 18-year-olds "fall off the cliff" and are never seen or heard from in our congregations again. By contrast, the UCC (Congregational) church, our denominational cousin, retains about 50 per cent of its youth into adulthood, while Evangelicals and Catholics fare better still, retaining upwards of 60 per cent.

"Why such a dramatic drop off?" some might ask. Others might reply, "We should be proud of our youth choosing to spread their wings and seek other opportunities for growth" or "Why should we impose our faith tradition on the young?" To the latter, I say: we do not seek to impose anything. Rather, we seek to create space, resources and opportunities in our congregational life for those youth who choose to maintain a UU identity and remain part of a UU community.

It is often said that we must "build a bridge" for graduating youth so that they don't fall off the proverbial cliff. As a senior "bridging" youth, I believed the bridge led to a community of young adults, the logical next stage of development. The older I get, however, the clearer I am that we are not building a bridge merely to a new developmental stage but to life-long Unitarian Universalism that supports the ongoing faith development of young UUs.

Join us @ G.A.!

General Assembly is June 24-28 in Salt Lake City and [registration](#) is still open. Come see a new UUA President elected and enjoy [UU University](#) as an integral part of GA programming.

Salt Lake City was such a wonderful site for 1999 GA that we are back again! The city isn't what many think. A majority of the population is non-Mormon, 40% are people of color, and three state legislators representing the city are openly gay or lesbian. Beautiful pre/post GA vacation opportunities abound!

We hope to see you there.

Building such a bridge is complex and ongoing, but here are some steps our congregations can take:

- Integrate youth into the life of your congregation now. Though all age groups need opportunities to be together as peers, too often, youth and youth groups are relegated to be "in the basement" or "out of sight, out of mind." How are the youth involved in the life of the congregation? Are they empowered to participate in the work of the church? Are they included in the planning and visioning of worship? Are staff and volunteers who work with youth equipped for success? This hard work requires patience, time, and dedication, but the more integrated and supported youth are now, the easier the transition to adulthood will be.
- Develop and offer resources for Bridgers, and young adults raised in Unitarian Universalism. Religious Educators in our faith are doing an excellent job. They put enormous resources and research into designing excellent curriculum for younger UUs. RE classes, Neighboring Faiths, Coming Of Age, and Our Whole Lives (OWL) are excellent programs tailored to developmental needs of children and youth. Fewer curricula exist, however, for older youth and young adults who are facing myriad transitions in their lives. Additionally, folks who grow up in a UU context are often at a different place in the context of Lifespan Faith Development than adults coming to UUism from other faiths or no faith. Many youth and young adults seek deep connections and opportunities for "Faith Development 202."
- Grow awareness in our congregations about Bridging and transitional age. Take a look around your congregation this Sunday. There are likely some folks there that fall into this stage of life. If you do not already, have a Bridging Ceremony or Bridging Sunday for them. Some of the resources listed below can help you develop a Bridging curriculum for your senior youth.

None of this is simple or easy, but the sooner we start and the more we invest in young people and support their transition to adulthood, the richer and more vibrant our faith movement will become.

* Statistics on retention of young UUs into adult membership: Each year in our denomination, approximately 4,000 youth reach age 18 and "bridge" into young adulthood. Additionally, on average, Unitarian Universalism is growing by about

1,200 adult members per year. Assuming that these adult members roughly reflect the makeup of our congregations, about 12.5%, or 150 of them, were raised UU. (Sources: Office of Young Adult Ministries, Rev. Christina Wille Mcknight.) If we are truly only gaining 150 adult members who were raised UU each year, that reflects a 96% drop-off rate from the 4000 bridgers each year. It is possible that a higher percentage of new adult members each year were raised UU, but even if we quadruple that percentage to 50% (or 600 new members per year) this is still only a 15% retention rate (85% drop-off) from the 4000 bridgers.

Resources for Bridging

NEW: Bridge Connections Program

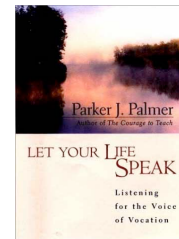
You may know a young adult, or a youth approaching adulthood in your congregation. Too often we lose track of our young adults in the shuffle of their life transitions. The Office of Young Adult Ministries at the UUA is unveiling a new "Bridge Connections" program to help us maintain connections with youth who have left the UU homes of their youth. Please see the UUA's [Bridge Connections](#) webpage or email [Greg Buckland](#) for more info.

It is time for us to build a bridge to lifelong Unitarian Universalism for those youth who choose to cross it.

Let Your Life Speak

by Parker Palmer
Jossey-Bass, 2000.

One of the great spiritual teachers, Palmer explores how we might discern our personal call.



[Available through the MBD Library](#)

Backpacker's Notebook

Youth and young adults travel a metaphorical faith journey in this unique and personalized notebook. Includes activities and space for journaling. A great gift for Bridging youth.

[\(Details\)](#)

Crossing the Bridge from Youth to Young Adulthood: Designing and Implementing a Bridging Ceremony in Your Congregation

Formerly called *Bridging Ceremony Resource Pack*, now revised and updated. Comprehensive resource guide for congregations planning a Bridging Ceremony. Focuses on the ceremony itself - the liturgy, the underlying philosophy, and ways to connect new young adults to UU communities after the ceremony. Also valuable for planning youth and young adult-oriented worship services throughout the year.

[\(Details\)](#)

Children of a Different Tribe

A self-described "anthropology of UU young adult developmental issues," Children of a Different Tribe is the reflections of one UU young adult raised within the faith, who wrestles with the transition into adulthood, what it means for her faith, and her spiritual development.

[\(Details\)](#)

[MBD News Editor](#)

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