

Subgroup 8: YOUNG ADULT INVOLVEMENT

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a.) Definition of your theme area:

- "Young adults" are persons 18 to 35 years old. Students (undergraduate or graduate school), who typically are 18 years through 25 or so, form one distinct subgroup. Older young adults, or those who are working full time or are married, would form a different and distinct subgroup. The interests of individuals within the young adult group may vary greatly. For example, singles will have different interests and needs than married couples. Young parents have different needs and interests, many of which are already being met through RRUC's strong religious education program.
- Involvement should mean at least that level of involvement that will keep young adults who are new to RRUC from drifting away. For students in particular, membership may not be a realistic or necessary goal. For all young adults, the focus should be on getting individuals involved in activities at RRUC and meeting new people, eventually leading to membership. A common wisdom is that a new person should meet six new people in their first six months in order to cement their connection to the new community—the same is true for young adults. Involvement may include becoming involved in existing activities in RRUC. However, there is an expectation that in order to attract some young adults, we may need to incorporate new activities.

b. 1.) Stakeholders involved:

1. RRUC ministers, especially Amanda Poppei, as a young adult herself, to plan activities and support the effort;
2. Members and friends of the congregation who support young adult involvement and will be available to provide support, attend activities, etc.;
3. SJC and the social justice task forces, the music program and the choir, and the RE program - to provide (perhaps new and exciting) opportunities for young adults to get involved;
4. Other UU congregations in the greater metro area; and
5. Resources to provide ideas and networking for campus ministry and young adult ministry - Kim Mason (UUA - JPD), Darrel Dwayne (All Souls Unitarian Church), Rob Keethan (UUA D.C. Office for Advocacy), and Charlotte Carroll.

b. 2.) Changes in structure & processes that would need to happen

- One strategy for attracting young adults is to come up with programming and activities focused on this age group, for example, a young adult group, activities for young adults only, a contemporary worship service targeted to young adults. It is difficult to implement some of these changes especially since we do not have a "critical mass" of young adults at RRUC. In addition, some young adults may be turned off by structures that segregate them from the rest of the congregation and make them feel as though they are not a welcomed part of the RRUC community.
- Another strategy for attracting young adults is to implement changes to existing programming and activities to make them more appealing to young adults, and to add new activities and programming that would be open to all members and friends, but which would hold a particular

appeal for young adults.

- With these dual approaches in mind, there are several broad changes to structure and process at RRUC that could be made in order to facilitate young adult involvement:
 - Hire a new associate minister who is a young adult, to send a symbolic message, and with the idea that this new minister would take on a special role in facilitating young adult involvement.
 - Create a young adult group and programming designed for young adults, e.g. a covenant group, CC&C, adult education courses.
 - Add new activities that we think would hold a particular appeal for young adults, but which would be open to and attended by members and friends of different generations. For example, an active social justice project or a fun outing on a weekend afternoon.
 - Adopt more of a "cafeteria" approach to various activities at the church, with flexibility to allow for varying degrees of involvement and time commitment. For example, ensure that individuals can become active in social justice without having to attend lengthy, monthly committee meetings, which may hold less appeal for young adults.

b. 3.) Actions that need to be taken

[In addition to those specific items mentioned in the above response.]

- Add something to the guest book to indicate interest in young adult activities or the individual's age range.
- Train greeters so that they know to focus on young adults when they come in to the church, e.g., introduce new young adults to specified individuals (ministerial intern, other ministers, other young adults) and make sure young adults sign the guest book and indicate age / interest in young adult activities.
- Pay for a demographic analysis to learn about young adults in the area. Alternatively, organize a survey in which members and friends of RRUC will identify and interview a sample of young adults about their interests and needs for a church (for ex., young adult children of current members and friends, even if they would not be interested in RRUC). Also, interview members and friends who came to RRUC as young adults to find out what attracted them to the church.
- Change the schedule of meetings and activities to make them more flexible and available for young adults, e.g. fewer meetings during the work week.
- Talk to other churches about what they do to involve young adults, what has worked and what has not worked, and how we can partner with them to facilitate young adult involvement.
- Get YRUU more involved and visible in all church activities.
- Provide transportation to make it easier for college students to attend RRUC.

b. 4.) Actions that are low effort, high impact?

- Changes to the guest book and training for greeters.
- Talk to other churches.
- Pay for demographic analysis / conduct a survey.

c.) Provocative Proposition statement for our group:

RRUC has a critical mass of young adults who are members and friends of the congregation. We have a regular schedule of activities, several times a year, which are well-publicized, intergenerational, and hold a particular appeal for young adults. RRUC is known as the church for young adults in the Maryland suburbs / Montgomery County area.

d.) How we will know/demonstrate that this provocative proposition has become a reality:

- Greater number of young adults who are involved on some level with RRUC - a list of between 50 and 70 young adults who are connected to RRUC on some level.
- Well-attended activities that appeal to young adults.
- Individuals at other churches recommend RRUC as a place for young adults to attend.

e.) Plans/thoughts for integration with other themes:

Excellence/Worship/Programs	Possibility of adding a "contemporary" worship service or changing elements of the regular services to make them more appealing to young adults.
Membership	Build membership interest once young adults begin a relationship with RRUC.
Social commitment/action	Organize social justice activities that are available to young adults.
Fun and enjoyment	Organize fun events that will hold particular appeal for young adults.
Religious values made manifest	
Communication	
Building diverse community	
Young adults involvement	
Intergenerational	Organize intergenerational events that will hold particular appeal for young adults.
Financial stability/Stewardship	

-- MORE --

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON YOUNG ADULTS, By Beth Harrison

One of the critical themes that emerged at the Strategic Planning Summit was an expressed desire to increase the involvement of young adults at RRUC. The topic has been addressed by one of the strategic planning subgroups, and no doubt will figure in the strategic plan ultimately adopted by the Board of Trustees. I hope the following information may prove useful in understanding the problem that RRUC faces, how RRUC fares compared to other congregations, and the possible relationship between the demographics of the congregation and the area in which we are located. This information is not intended to be comprehensive or to provide definitive answers to the questions we face, but instead to provoke additional thoughts, questions, and responses.

I consulted several surveys and reviewed Census data on the Bethesda area, described in further detail below. In sum:

- UUs in the U.S. tend to be older adults; relatively few are young adults.
- The membership of RRUC is older than the profile for UUs in the U.S. overall.
- UUs, and especially RRUCers, are much more weighted toward older adults than other faiths in the U.S.
- Most large UU congregations, i.e. RRUC's size, have some kind of young adult programming.
- A limited survey of UU congregations with 61% or more young adult membership found a number of differences from the average UU congregation in worship styles and other characteristics.
- Overall, the population of Bethesda is older than the population in the greater D.C. area, and the population of RRUC is older still.

Results of UUA Surveys

In recent years, the UUA has sponsored several demographic surveys of UUs and UU congregations in the United States. The results give a couple of indications about young adult involvement in other UU congregations.

Who Are UUs?

First, it appears that the UU faith overall is weighted toward older adults. A 1997 national survey of about 10,000 UUs revealed the following results on the age of the respondents,¹ which I have compared to RRUC's recent survey results:

UUA Survey (1997)		RRUC Survey (2005)	
Under 18	0.5%	18 or under	2.4%
18-25	1.4%	19-29	1.6%
26-35	7.4%	30-39	4.7%
36-45	18.1%	40-49	24.4%
46-55	23.0%	50-59	26.0%
56-65	18.7%	60-69	18.9%
66-75	20.4%	70-79	14.2%
76-85	8.8%	80 or over	7.9%
Over 85	1.7%		
Percent 66+	30.9%	Percent 70+	22.1%
Median	55.7 years		

In both surveys, the percentage of individuals under age 35 is low. Because the two surveys use slightly different age groupings, direct comparisons are not possible. Even so, the imprecise comparisons that can be made suggest that RRUC's age profile is weighted slightly more toward older adults. Individuals between 18

¹ Source: The 1997 Unitarian Universalism Needs and Aspirations Survey, available at <http://www.uua.org/archive/promise/results.html>.

and 35 years make up 8.8% of the UUA survey respondents, while individuals between 19 and 39 (an even wider age range) make up 6.3% of the RRUC survey respondents.

The results of a more recent nationwide survey of 523 UU congregations, the Faith Communities Today Survey, likewise indicate that RRUC may be more tilted toward older adults than other UU congregations.² RRUC appears to fall—just barely—into the category of congregations with about half (41% to 60%) of their regularly participating members at age 60 or older. Only 26% of UU congregations fall into that category; 63% of UU congregations report that individuals age 60 and older constitute 40% or less of their regularly participating members. The fact that RRUC falls on the dividing line between these two groupings is suggestive of an older membership.

How Do UUs Compare to Other Faiths in the U.S.?

The American Religious Identification Survey (ARIS)³ is a comprehensive survey of over 50,000 Americans, performed in 1990 and 2001 by CUNY, which asks (among other questions) “What is your religion, if any?” The survey results provide a rough estimate of the age profile for different faiths. There are limits to the data—it is based on general religious identification rather than church membership or involvement. It is likely that the profile of individuals who are active church members would be different in many respects, and it might be more weighted toward older adults. Even so, a comparison of the ARIS data to the data for UUs overall, and for RRUC in particular, confirms that our age profile is more weighted toward older members.

One tool used by the ARIS survey for looking at age profiles is to calculate the ratio of believers who are 65+ years old to those who are young adults, which ARIS defines as 19-29 years old. The chart below lists this ratio for major religions in the U.S. The age ranges for the RRUC survey do not line up precisely. For RRUC, the ratio of 70+ year olds compared to 19-29 year olds is 13.8:1, i.e. for every young adult RRUCer there are about 14 RRUCers who are 70+ years old. If RRUCers who are between 65 and 69 were included, the ratio would be even higher. Even if we assume that actual membership figures for the other faiths would be more heavily weighted toward older adults than the ARIS figures suggest, RRUC is an outlier. The same appears to be true of UUs overall. Using the 1997 UU survey, the ratio of UUs who are 66+ years old to those who are 18-35 years old is 3.5:1.

RRUC	13.8	Church of God	1.2
UU	3.5	Baptist	0.8
Congregational/UCC	3.2	Catholic	0.6
Presbyterian	2.9	Mormon	0.5
Episcopalian/Anglican	2.8	Non-denominational	0.5
Seventh Day Adventist	2.6	Assemblies of God	0.5
Methodist	2.3	Evangelical/Born Again	0.5
Protestant	2.3	Pentecostal	0.4
Jewish	2.0	Jehovah's Witnesses	0.4
Lutheran	1.5	Christian	0.2
Church of Christ	1.5	No Religion	0.2

What Do Other UU Congregations Do For Young Adults?

Overall, only 30% of UU congregations in the Faith Communities Today Survey reported having young adult programs during the past twelve months. By contrast, most large congregations—similar to RRUC in size—reported having young adult programs of some kind. Ninety-two percent of congregations with 600 or more members and eighty-seven percent of congregations with 350 to 599 members had young adult programs. However, 12.5% said these programs had been one-time or short-term and 3.6% indicated the young adult programs were seasonal. Only 12.3% of congregations reported ongoing young adult programs throughout the year.

What Characterizes Young Adult Populated Congregations?

² Source: Understanding Ourselves: A Report on the Faith Communities Today Survey for Unitarian Universalist Congregations, available at <http://www.uua.org/cde/education/fact.pdf>. Additional publications from the Faith Communities Today survey are available at <http://www.uua.org/cde/education/>.

³ Source: American Religious Identification Survey, The Graduate Center, City University of New York, available at http://www.gc.cuny.edu/faculty/research_briefs/aris/aris_index.htm.

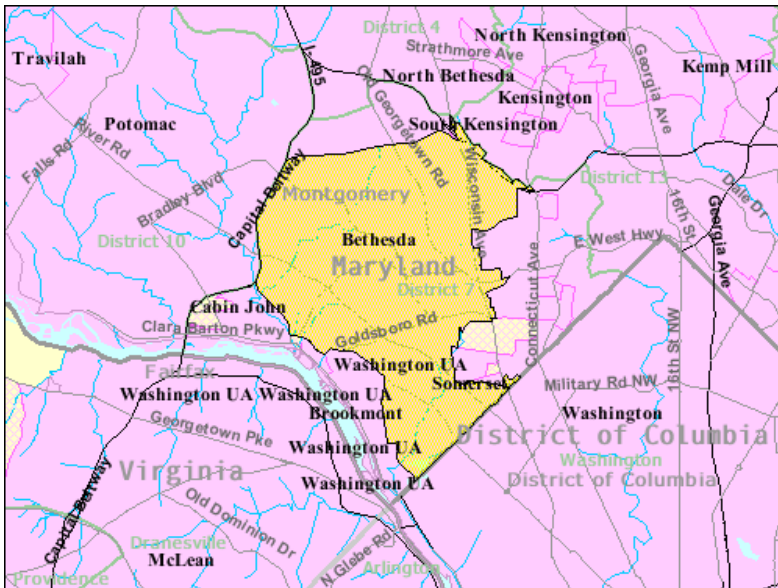
The Faith Communities Today Survey also presents results from congregations in which 61% or more of regular participants were young adults (18 to 35 years), referred to as young adult populated congregations. The survey included only nine such congregations, so these results may not be statistically significant. And, of course, RRUC does not have the goal of achieving membership that is predominantly young adults. Nonetheless, the practices of young adult populated congregations might be suggestive of the kinds of changes that young adult members might want to see in any UU congregation.

The survey asked all congregations how well certain statements describe them. Young adult populated congregations are more likely than UU congregations overall to report that (1) their congregation is working for social justice; (2) they are trying to increase their racial/ethnic diversity; (3) they welcome new ways of doing ministry and worship; and (4) their members are excited about the future of the church. The young adult populated congregations are less likely to report that (1) their congregation is like a close-knit family; (2) their congregation helps their members deepen their relationship with God/the holy; and (3) new members are easily incorporated into their congregation.

The survey also asked congregations about different qualities in their worship services. The young adult populated congregations were more likely than UU congregations overall to report that their worship services are joyful. They were less likely to report that their worship services are reverent, exciting, give a sense of God’s presence, and provide a sense of expectancy. Young adult populated congregations are more likely to allot time during the service for members sharing about their faith and for greeting of one another. They are less likely to use candles or incense in the worship service. Young adult populated congregations are more likely to report sermon topics focused on practical advice for daily living and personal spiritual growth. They are less likely to report sermon topics focused on God’s love and care and the mystery of the holy. Finally, services in young adult populated congregations are more likely to include string or wind instruments and electric guitar.

Census Data – Bethesda, Maryland

The Census reports data for the Bethesda area, shown in the following map:



The following table compares the age profile from RRUC, based on the RRUC survey, and the age profiles from the

Bethesda area and the greater Washington, DC area, based on the 2000 Census data. Overall, the population of Bethesda is older than the population of the greater Washington, DC area, and the membership of RRUC is still older.

	RRUC Survey (2005)	Census – Bethesda CDP (2000)	Census – Washington D.C. PMSA (2000)
19-29	1.6%	9.9%	14.9%
30-39	4.7%	15.1%	17.8%
40-49	24.4%	16.2%	16.4%
50-59	26.0%	14.5%	11.8%

60-69	18.9%	8.3%	6.1%
70-79	14.2%	8.5%	4.1%
80 or over	7.9%	4.8%	2.2%

Part of what may be driving the older age profile of the Bethesda area may be the housing market. Owning a home in Bethesda has become increasingly out of reach for young adults, who typically are new entrants into the market. According to the Census 2000 figures, the median home value in Bethesda is \$396,400. A quick glance at current listings shows that single family homes in Bethesda start at this price range. Overall, 70% of Bethesda residents own their own home—but only 30% of young adults age 25 to 34 who live in Bethesda do. This likely is related to the income gap by age. Households with householders age 25 to 34 have a median annual income of \$76,365, while the overall median for Bethesda is \$99,102 per year.