

March 2009 - Newsletter

Massachusetts Bay District of Unitarian Universalist Congregations



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Greg Buckland Where There Is Caritas...

by Greg Buckland

Coordinator for Youth, Young Adult and Campus
Ministry

*Ubi caritas et amor
ubi caritas Deus ibi est.*

-Taizé Chant ([Listen Here](#))

Echoing high off darkened chapel walls, a choir of fifty voices lifted these lyrics heavenward one cold January night. From the [Taizé Community](#) in France, the melody is both beautiful and haunting. The voices were those of young adult Unitarian Universalists gathered at First Church in Boston for the third annual Young Adult Winter Conference. We had gathered in the "depth of winter for the warmth of community, connection, and spiritual renewal."

The lyrics roughly translate to "where there is [caritas](#) (loving-kindness) and love, God is there." Theist or not, just soaking in the beautiful sound ([listen here](#)) and the feeling of connection was sustaining. This simple mantra, repeated over a simple, even melody, could not have been more apropos for many of those gathered.

Between the ages of 18 and 35, we belong to a demographic in transition. Some of us are in school, others working. Some are starting families or careers, others seeking to put down roots into community. Yet we seek the same things that all people seek: a sense of belonging and meaning in our lives.

Recently, I reflected on my own "young adult" experience in the fall of 2007. My temporary and intense campaign job demanded seven long days a week, with only a brief break on Sunday mornings. I found I needed somewhere to be still and be touched; to connect with human beings, if only briefly, outside the context of work. This need brought me through the doors of the First UU Society of Exeter, NH one Sunday morning.

The relatively accommodating hours allowed me flexible access to the worship (the congregation offered 9 and 11 AM services). I found warm smiles welcoming me at the open door. The people there didn't assume I was new, only that they hadn't met me and maybe they had something to learn.

We worshipped together. The music was varied and thoughtfully chosen. The congregants were engaged in multiple ways: from singing with heart, to sharing stories of joy or sorrow, to being both centered and challenged by the sermon. I had to rush off after the service, but from that point on I dedicated that space and time on Sundays. Nine out of ten Sundays, I was there.

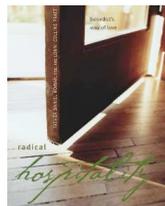
Campaign life is extreme, but many young adults are in a similar place. Overworked, facing student debt, a poor economy, a society focused on TV and consumption, we are seeking connection to others, wisdom to understand, and strength to persevere. Most of us are no longer living in the communities of our youth. Work may be frantic or dehumanizing. Early Sunday morning may be a time to sleep in or to recover.

What I found in New Hampshire though was *caritas*. That congregation comprised a strong community of caring, where members took good care of each other, but also they welcomed the stranger with loving-kindness, willing to accept me just as I was. I was a part of the church for only a few months before I was transferred for work. But the welcome, the respite and the warmth I found there helped ground and center me.

The same desire for grounding and centering drew young adults from around New England together for Winter Conference a few weeks ago. We sang to each other "Where there is love, there is God." It is beautiful message to carry with us through uncertainty and transition, but it can only carry us so far without the support of an ongoing community. Many young adults yearn for that community, and, as the First UU Society of Exeter showed, Unitarian Universalist congregations can create that community. Are you ready to foster *caritas* within your congregation? Are your doors and hearts open to people whatever their stage of life?

I hope in the process of opening doors and hearts and developing *caritas*, that we, the [District Staff](#), can be of service.

Resources for Developing Caritas



Radical Hospitality: Benedict's Way of Love by Daniel Homan and Lonni Collins Pratt

The authors share the wisdom of the Benedictine monastic tradition of "radical hospitality." They illuminate the power of hospitality toward the stranger by telling real-life stories from their own lives and from the life of their own monastery. Welcoming the stranger, loving-kindness, generosity and "holy curiosity" can each transform our congregations and our relationships. The authors make the practice plain with clear examples and compelling stories.

"Today's culture is increasingly hostile and suspicious toward anyone who appears to be different - especially when tragedy strikes. Our instinct is to bolt our doors and protect the ones we love. But deep within the heart of Benedictine spirituality lies a remedy to hatred, fear, and suspicion: hospitality. At once deeply comforting and sharply challenging, true Benedictine hospitality

requires that we welcome the stranger, not only into our homes, but into our hearts. In Radical Hospitality, with warmth, humor, and the wisdom of the monastic tradition, Lonni Collins Pratt and Fr. Daniel Homan present a radical vision for a kinder world." ([Google Books](#))

Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation by Carol Howard Merritt



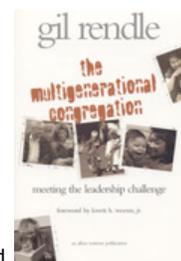
"Carol Howard Merritt, a pastor in her mid-thirties, presents a vision of the "tribal church" that intentionally reaches out to the nomadic culture of young adults and responds to their special gifts and needs. Merritt's metaphor of a tribe describes the close bonds that form when people of all ages decide to walk together on their spiritual journeys. Merritt points out that mainline churches have much to offer young adults as well as much to learn from them. By breaking down artificial age barriers and building up intentional relationships, congregations can provide a space for all people to connect with God, each other, and the world. With few places left in society that allow for real intergenerational connections to be made, Merritt suggests a compelling way for churches to be able to approach young adults on their own terms. Outlining the financial, social, and familial situations that affect many young adults today, she describes how churches can provide a safe, supportive place for young adults to nurture relationships and foster spiritual growth." ([Google Books](#))

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.

Multigenerational Congregations: Meeting the Leadership Challenge by Gil Rendle



"Congregations need to learn new cultural languages and practices in order to speak to and be heard by new generations of people. According to author Gil Rendle, most congregations are not discrete groups with uniform values and behaviors that can be targeted to the exclusion of all other audiences. Therefore, leadership in congregations is not a matter of marketplace savvy but

of spiritual authenticity, where leaders must continue to shape faith traditions to be heard and understood by a changing culture. Rendle shows how to talk with and really understand one generational cohort while another cohort is "looking over one's shoulder." ([Google Books](#))

[Boston Area Young Adult announce-list](#)

Are you a young adult UU in the Boston Area? Do you know someone who is? Sign up for the Boston-Area UU Young Adult announcement list on google groups. It's a low traffic list to learn about upcoming events, conferences, trainings, and opportunities to connect. Follow the link to sign up, and click "join group" on the right-hand side.

[Mystery Worshipper Program](#)

Would you like your congregation to receive a visit from a "mystery worshipper" and receive constructive feedback on how well you welcomed the stranger? The feedback you receive can be a tangible resource in your development of caritas and hospitality. [Click here](#) to sign up.



[Taizé Community](#)

The Taizé Community is an ecumenical Christian monastic order in Taizé, France. It is comprised of a little over 100 brothers who come from Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant traditions. It's founder, Brother Roger, started the community in 1940 to be a peaceful counterbalance to the war and chaos that was storming Europe at the time. Through the 1960s it grew as an international spiritual center for young adults and pilgrims. Today, over 100,000 young people from around the world make pilgrimages to Taizé each year for prayer, religious study, sharing, and communal work.

-Adapted from [Wikipedia.org](#)

[MBD News Editor](#)

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