

**Essay Title:** We All Come to Make a Community

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IN THE YOUTH WORLD, we talk a lot about the six components of a balanced youth program. These are Worship, Leadership, Community Building, Learning, Social Justice, and Youth-Adult or Intergenerational Relations. Youth groups with all six components in a healthy balance really thrive. In my time in congregational leadership I have found that these six components can also be seen in a balanced congregational community. I'd like to tell you how all ages can come together to make a rich and vibrant spiritual community.

Let's start with Worship. Worship is often the central experience that brings our communities together—an experience from which our children and youth are too often left out. It is easier than you think to bring generations together in worship. Invite a young person to light the chalice or do a reading, or to perform a prelude and postlude. Have the youth group plan a worship for the whole congregation. Or ask one of the elders in your church to tell a story from their childhood during children's chapel.

Congregational Leadership is also a place to think about intergenerational community. There are youth who could be interested in serving on such committees as membership, worship, religious education, finance, and even the board of trustees. Young people should also learn to commit finances as well as time. After they have gone through the Coming of Age program, give your youth the opportunity to sign the membership book and to make a pledge. A twenty dollar pledge can start a lifetime of dedication to stewardship.

Community events are almost as central to our church lives as worship. It is the time we come together to learn more about each other, to celebrate and to mourn. Mix up the ages at tables at the next church potluck. Plan game nights and invite the singles as well as the families.

We are always learning in our faith communities. When we bring different ages together we can increase the depth of what we learn. Children, youth, young adults, mid-lifers, and elders can all learn new and inspiring things from each other. Think about the powerful family conversations that could happen if your church ran all five levels of *Our Whole Lives*, the UUA's sexuality curriculum.

Social Justice activities are another place to get all ages involved. Often the youth group or the social concerns committee will plan a justice event without letting the other group know about it. But powerful community, vital inspiration, and meaningful justice happen when these groups collaborate on justice work, and learn more about each other and their world.

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Intergenerational relationships are the linchpin that holds the whole community together. Our most vital and vibrant congregations are those that bring people together across age groups to laugh, learn, worship and serve. They create justice between each other and in the world around them. We need people of all ages to support us in our spiritual journey. We can grow from our interactions with a 5 year old and a 95 year old. We all come to make a community.

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