

# WORKSHOP 8: Building Multigenerational Connections

## Introduction

*We need to remember across generations that there is as much to learn as there is to teach –  
Gloria Steinem*

This session brings youth and adults in the congregation together to get to know each other and discover the importance of multigenerational relationships. At least two weeks before you facilitate this session, connect with the director of religious education or minister to make a list of ten or so adults in the congregation from multiple generations who may be willing to participate in this session. See Leader Resource 1, Invitation to Join our Multigenerational Discussion for more information. Once you have identified the adults who will be joining this session, invite visitors to consider the Spiritual Preparation section of this workshop.

## Goals

This session will:

- Demonstrate to participants the value of having people from different generations in their lives
- Create a welcoming space for youth and adults in the congregation to get to know each other
- Explore the qualities of healthy multigenerational relationships

## Learning Objectives

Participants will:

- Think about and share their life experience as belonging to a specific generation
- Learn about the life experience of people from different generations
- Find common ground and celebrate diversity with people from different generations
- Learn how to recognize healthy connections between youth and adults

## Workshop-at-a-Glance

ACTIVITY	MINUTES
Opening	10
Activity 1: Generational Stories	15
Activity 2: Multigenerational Fishbowl	25
Closing	10

## Spiritual Preparation

Read Handout 1 American Generations and reflect on how the political and economic climate, popular music and technological inventions when you came of age may influence who you are today. Reflect on what you have learned from your elders and from those younger than you. Reflect on what you have taught your elders and those younger than you.

## Opening (10 minutes)

### Materials for Activity

- Leader Resource 1 Invitation to Join Our Multigenerational Discussion
- Name Tags for everyone
- Chalice, candle, lighter or LED/battery-operated candle
- Newsprint and markers
- Chalice lighting words: Worship Web [We Come to Love a Church](#) by Andrew C Kennedy

*We come to love a church,  
the traditions, the history,  
and especially the people associated with it.  
And through these people,  
young and old,  
known and unknown,  
we reach out --  
Both backward into history  
and forward into the future --*

*To link together the generations  
in this imperfect, but blessed community  
of memory and hope.*

- ❑ Group covenant (from Workshop 2 Living in Covenant)
- ❑ Check in question:

*Adults: what was your favorite music genre/artist when you were in your teens/20s?*

*Youth: what's your favorite music genre/artist?*

## Preparation for Activity

- At least two weeks in advance, identify one or two people from each generation listed in Handout 1 (if possible) in your congregation or UU community who are willing to hear and share stories about generational differences and similarities. Invite them to join the conversation with the group by using Leader Resource 1 as a template.
- Post the chalice lighting words on newsprint and post.
- Post the group covenant developed in workshop 2.
- Post the check in question in the designated place.

## Description of Activity

Welcome first-time participants and guests and hand out nametags. Give visitors a moment to read over the covenant and ask if your guests have any questions about the covenant and if they agree to abide by it for this session. Invite participants and facilitators to go around the circle and say their names and briefly answer the check in question (in 3 or 4 sentences). Remind participants that check in is not a time for cross talk - clarifying questions can be asked if necessary. After everyone who wants to has had a chance to check in ask for a volunteer to light the chalice.

## Including All Participants

Let participants know they have the right to pass or pass for now. For participants who have trouble being concise you can ask them "how would you sum up your experience in one sentence?" For participants who have trouble refraining from cross talk remind them of the group covenant and to be respectful of their peers' time to share and the leaders' time to facilitate.

## Activity 1: Generational Stories (15 minutes)

### Materials for Activity

- Handout 1 American Generations
- Leader Resource 2 Generational Questions
- Newsprint and markers

### Preparation for Activity

- Write the questions from Leader Resource 2 on newsprint and post.

### Description of Activity

In this activity participants learn about generational characteristics and learn about people from different generations.

Begin by saying something like:

*Churches are one of the few multigenerational spaces we have left. Places like school or work, where we spend the majority of our time, are usually segregated into peer groups. Sometimes churches can get segregated into peer groups as well. It's healthy to want to spend time in peer groups or identity groups and it can also be very beneficial to build relationships with people from different generations. Today we have people representing [X number] of generations in our discussion and we're going to share what it's like to be part of each generation.*

As you pass out Handout 1 American Generations, name each generation and ask participants to raise their hand for the generation they belong to. Give one brief fact from the list that puts that generation in context. If the group has completed Workshop 5: Active Listening, remind participants they can employ the techniques they learned in that session for this conversation. Then begin a discussion using the questions in Leader Resource 2 as a guideline. You will likely not get through all seven questions.

At the end of the 15 minutes or when the discussion naturally comes to a close, whichever comes first, say something like:

*Now that we've listened to how belonging to a generation is part of what make us who we are, let's mix it up and practice being in conversation with one another.*

### Including All Participants

If the group has been meeting for a long time and are tightly bonded it will be important to remind them to be welcoming to their guests. If your group has completed Workshop 6 Creating Inclusive Community, remind them about going back to the bonding stage of community building

when newcomers arrive and reminding them of the conversation on mattering. Help regular participants let their guests know they matter. If you notice that one generation or peer group is dominating the conversation, refer back to the covenant and invite those who haven't spoken to speak if they like.

## Activity 2: Multigenerational Fishbowl (25 minutes)

### Materials for Activity

- A box, hat or basket that can be used as a “question box”
- Index cards
- Pens or pencils
- Newsprint and markers
- Optional depending on room set up: enough chairs for half of the participants

### Preparation for Activity

- Pass out the index cards and pens or pencils.
- If room set up allows, move chairs into a circle in the middle of the room, enough for roughly half of the participants. Otherwise, the people in the center circle can sit on the floor.
- Write “Healthy Multigenerational Relationships” at the top of the newsprint. Along the left hand side write “Feelings” “Behaviors” and “Differences” with enough space between each word that you can fill in responses from the group.

### Description of Activity

In this activity, participants practice conversation to find common ground and celebrate diversity with people from different generations.

Invite participants to write a question they would want the group to answer about their church experience. Provide some examples to set the expectation such as “What’s your favorite thing about coming to church?” or “What are your thoughts on the way we do worship services?” Pass around the “question box” and collect the index cards.

Invite participants to think silently to themselves whether they prefer salty snacks or sweet snacks. Tell the group that they are to raise one finger if they like salty snacks and two fingers if they like sweet snacks. [You may choose to use another arbitrary method to break the group into two, multigenerational groups]. Ensure that the groups are fairly even and that there are representatives from multiple generations in each group.

Tell the group they are going to participate in an activity called a fishbowl and that this is a tool they can use in the future to create dialogue and practice active listening between two groups, perhaps about difficult or complex topics. Say that usually the group is divided into two identity groups or opinions, the inner circle discusses amongst themselves while the outer circle actively listens, then the groups reverse positions. Inform them that at the end it's important to debrief, so people can share what they learned while listening in the outer circle.

Invite the people who like salty snacks to sit in a circle in the middle of the room, either on chairs or on the floor and the people who like sweet snacks to sit in a circle surrounding them. Tell participants that you are going to draw a random question from the "question box" that the inner circle is going to freely discuss while the outer circle will remain silent. The outer circle should observe the conversation and notice not just the content of the conversation but the process of the conversation. If the group has done Workshop 7 Leadership Styles, remind them of the process observer role they learned about. Ask participants to think about how people are connecting with one another across generations. Remind participants that just because someone from a generation makes a statement doesn't mean that all people from that generation would feel the same way.

After about five minutes of conversation switch the inner and outer circles and draw another question from the "question box."

After about five minutes of conversation invite the inner circle to join the outer circle. Ask:

*When you were in the inner circle, what was it like to share your ideas with someone who was not your peer?*

As people are speaking about what it was like to have a conversation with people of different generations, write on the flip chart any feelings they mention under or next to "Feelings". Then ask:

*When you were in the outer circle, what did you notice about the way people behaved in this multigenerational conversation?*

As people are speaking, write on the flip chart any behaviors they mention under or next to "Behaviors." Then ask:

*How might we behave differently in multigenerational conversations than when we're in conversation with our peer group?*

Write on the flip chart any notes about how multigenerational conversations may be different from conversations in a peer group under "Differences."

Mention to the group that being in a multigenerational space does not mean that youth have to act more "adult-like," nor does it mean that adults should act more "youth-like." Say something like:

*Whether we're in peer groups or in multigenerational spaces we can be authentic and vulnerable. A large part of being in relationship is sharing of yourself and learning from*

*others. That said, it's important to be aware of the context you're in and the people you're around. Youth may choose to keep some games, traditions or conversation topics to just their peer groups and advisors. Adults should choose to keep current emotional struggles, complicated personal histories, drug use or sexual experiences to their peers and not share them with youth. If you are unsure whether or not it's appropriate to share something in a multigenerational space, feel free to check in with your peers or an advisor to get their opinion before sharing.*

For the remainder of the time for this activity draw more questions from the question box and invite participants to share freely.

Conclude by saying something like:

*Having multigenerational conversations may be different than having conversations in your peer group but hopefully these conversations got you excited to reach out to people of different generations more often. All these questions in the comment box could be questions you ask one another during coffee hour or other congregational events to get to know one another better.*

## **Including All Participants**

Youth may want to just sit on the floor in the center circle. If all adults are okay with this, the group can sit on the floor. But if one person wants a chair, invite all participants to sit in chairs so that there is not a height discrepancy, which makes it hard to hear and converse. Remind participants in the inner circle that they'll need to project their voices so that the outer circle can hear them.

## **Closing (10 minutes)**

### **Materials for Activity**

- Leader Resource 3 Lemonade Adventure
- Taking it Home sheet

### **Preparation for Activity**

- Make copies of Taking It Home for each participant

### **Description of Activity**

Invite participants to gather in a circle. Read the story in Leader Resource 3 to the group then invite participants to go around the circle and say one thing they are grateful for in this session. Thank everyone for their contributions to the group. Pass out Taking It Home and explain that it

contains ideas for ways they can continue to explore workshop topics with family and friends.  
End the workshop with what you are grateful for in this session.

## Leader Reflection and Planning

As adults working with youth in a Unitarian Universalist context, this workshop offered an opportunity to learn more about the American generations alive today and have conversations with people outside their peer group. What did you learn about generational differences or similarities that surprised you? How do you think this lesson will impact the multigenerational ministry of your congregation or community? What did you as co-leaders learn from your co-facilitator?

## Handout 1 American Generations

As a generalization, each generation has different preferences, attributes and worldviews. Because of their collective experiences, people from the same generation may share ideals. Of course, a person is not just their generation. Sex, gender, race, ethnicity, upbringing, family situation, religion, class etc. will all influence a person's worldview. Below are the generational markers for mainstream culture in the United States.

For more information, review The Strauss–Howe generational theory, created by authors [William Strauss](#) and Neil Howe. [wikipedia.org/wiki/Strauss–Howe\\_generational\\_theory](http://wikipedia.org/wiki/Strauss–Howe_generational_theory)

### GI/Greatest Generation - Born 1901-1926

**Political & Economic Climate:** Children of the WWI generation & fighters in WWII & young during the Great Depression.

**Popular Music:** Big Band and Jazz on vinyl record and the radio.

**Technological Inventions:** airplanes and the radio. Most folks grew up without modern conveniences like refrigerators, electricity and air conditioning.

**Common Values** Excellent team players, community-minded, sense of civic duty, loyalty, savers.

### Mature / Silents - Born 1927- 1945

**Political & Economic Climate:** Economic boom, women entering the workforce in specific jobs, Korean and Vietnam wars, beginning of civil rights movement.

**Popular Music:** Swing, Blues, Jazz on vinyl record, radio and TV variety shows

**Technological Inventions:** sliced bread, television.

**Common values:** job loyalty, avid readers, disciplined, self-sacrificing, cautious.

### Baby Boomers - Born 1946 - 1964

**Political & Economic Climate:** Vietnam war, hippies and yuppies, civil rights movement and feminism, two-income households.

**Popular Music:** Rock & Roll and Soul on vinyl record, radio, TV variety shows, cassette and 8track.

**Technological Inventions:** credit cards, space exploration.

**Common Values:** Optimistic, driven, team-oriented.

### Generation X - Born 1965 - 1980

**Political & Economic Climate:** Idea of “think globally, act locally” takes root, working parents and/or divorced parents, AIDS begins to spread, Cold War ends, North American Free Trade Agreement and Globalization picks up speed.

**Music:** punk, alternative, hip hop, R&B on radio, cassette, CD and MTV

**Technological Inventions:** personal computer, video games, Walkman

**Common Values:** Entrepreneurial, individualistic, misunderstood, desire a chance to learn, explore and make a contribution

### Millennial - Born 1982 - 2000

**Political & Economic Climate:** 9/11 and the war on terror, mounting college debt, housing market crash, climate crisis, first “digital natives,” rise of the creative class and YouTube stars.

**Music:** pop, rap, indie and niche music genres on radio, streaming and mp3 players

**Technological Inventions:** Internet, Google, Hubble telescope.

**Common Values:** optimistic, focused, overscheduled, pressure to succeed, expected to save the world, collaboration

### Generation Z/Boomers/iGen/TBD - Born after 2001

**Political & Economic Climate:** First African American president, 49% of those born in 2006 were Hispanic, more births than the start of the baby boom generation, web based learning.

**Music:** niche music genres from Progressive Heavy Electro Rock to Space Trap to who knows what will come next on mp3 players and streaming.

**Technological Inventions:** Smartphones/portable computing devices, virtual reality, Facebook....

**Common Values:** maturing at a younger age, eco-fatigue, too early to tell.

## Leader Resource 1 Invitation to Join Our Multigenerational Discussion

At least two weeks before you facilitate this session connect with the Director of Religious Education or minister to make a list of ten or so adults in the congregation from multiple generations to whom you can email the letter below. Consider that some people may not have or be responsive to email and may need a phone call. In that case, use the following letter as a script for your call. You may also choose to ask the youth who will be participating in this session which adults from the congregation they would like to invite. Ensure that you and the DRE or minister screen the adults you will be inviting. Coming of Age mentors, committee or ministry team members or parents may make good candidates.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

On \_\_\_\_\_(date) at \_\_\_\_\_(time) our high school class/youth group will be doing a workshop on Building Multigenerational Relationships from the UUA's *Bringing the Web to Life* curriculum. They will be learning about the value of having non-parental adults in their life, sharing their own stories with and hearing stories from members of the congregation about generational experiences and exploring the qualities of healthy multigenerational relationships.

Would you be willing to be with our youth group on this day for a discussion about generational differences and similarities? I am looking for a few other congregants to join the discussion as well.

There are usually \_\_\_\_\_(number) youth at youth group with \_\_\_\_\_(number, percentage or ratio) freshman and sophomores and \_\_\_\_\_(number, percentage or ratio) juniors and seniors. This is a(n) \_\_\_\_\_(adjective that best describes your group) bunch who is eager to get to know the adults in the congregation better and to have adults get to know them better.

Thanks for considering it. I'd love to hear a response either way by \_\_\_\_\_(date), so that if I need to find others I will have enough time to do so.

In Faith,

## Leader Resource 2 Generational Questions

1. How would you characterize your generation?
2. What major events did you live through?
3. What is the work ethic of your generation?
4. What is your generation's views on authority?
5. How do you think other generations characterize you? Others, is this how you see them?
6. What ideas about social justice did you grow up with?
7. What was the religious climate of your generation? How did/does being/becoming UU fit into your generation's religious climate?

## Leader Resource 3 Lemonade Adventure

Story By [Naomi King](#)

Once there was and once there was not a town on the edge of the swamp in the sultry summer weather of far south Florida, between the alligators and the ocean. In this town there were two amazing friends, Sam and Joseph. They were a lot alike. They liked the same foods. They liked the same books. They liked the same movies and music and games. They even liked the same class in school. Yes, they liked math, if you can believe such a thing.

But two weeks into summer vacation, Sam and Joseph were bored. Bored, bored, bored, bored, bored. Bored for supper, bored for lunch, bored for breakfast, and bored in between. Bored with books and bored with movies and bored with television. Bored with games and bored with music and bored with the internet and definitely, oh most definitely bored with each other.

“I’m bored,” Sam said.

“I’m bored, too,” Joseph said.

“Why am I here with you?” Sam asked. “You’re so boring.”

“Why am I here with you?” Joseph asked. “You’re so boring.”

But they were too bored to move away from each other. Each boy sighed. Sam grabbed another bag of chips and Joseph grabbed another fizzy drink and they lay down on the floor unable to open those chips or drink because the boredom prevented their fingers from moving.

Then, Joseph’s father’s car pulled up, and quick as a flash, the door was open, and Joseph’s father shouted out quickly, “Hi boys! Gotta run, but just dropping Grandpa Jeff off. Or maybe it’s Grandpa Jerry. One of the J grandpas. Gotta go. See ya later. Have fun all y’all! Bye!”

By the time these words had even made it to Joseph and Sam’s ears, Joseph’s father’s car was pulling out of the driveway and Grandpa Jeff or maybe it was Grandpa Jerry was sitting on his suitcase with his cane, blinking a little, and cleaning his spectacles with an embroidered kerchief.

This was something new. Sam and Joseph propelled themselves from their prone positions to investigate this new J Grandpa. They poked. They prodded. Finally, Grandpa J said, “Ouch! Stop that! Were you raised by wolves? No, I suppose not. You’d have better manners.” Red splotches broke out all over Grandpa J’s neck. He sighed. “That wasn’t nice of me, either. Allow me to introduce myself.”

Grandpa J introduced himself and Sam introduced Joseph and Joseph introduced Sam and then they stood there, looking at each other. “So, it’s summertime, boys, what are you doing for fun?”

Sam and Joseph just looked at one another. “Fun? We had fun. But it is gone now. Now we’re just bored.”

“Boards?” asked Grandpa J. “Yes, you should probably get some boards. Also, some hammers, some nails, some paint. C’mon boys. Let’s go find what we need.”

A brief while later they were hammering boards together and painting. The boys asked Grandpa J what they should paint. He shrugged his shoulders and said, “I don’t know what you should paint. You have colors and patterns and ideas of your own. Show them to the world.” They did, and as they did, Joseph and Sam realized, they were not bored. They were excited.

That evening, they ate delicious smoked tempeh and tomato sandwiches and laughed and talked with Grandpa J about heroes and movies and transforming action figures. “Grandpa J, we love adventures! Tell us some of yours!”

And so Grandpa J did. He told of fixing engines and of splitting wood, of wandering lost in a desert, and of meeting his true love. Joseph and Sam hoped their lives might be as exciting as Grandpa J’s was. At the end of the day, they thanked Grandpa J for all these grand adventure gifts. But he said to them, “Boys, every person has gifts and ideas and stories. Every person has adventures. Some know how to tell ‘em and some have a special gift of coaxing them out of someone else. But an adventure is always within your power.”

The boys went to sleep, having stored these words somewhere, but dreaming of the adventures they had told and heard. The next day, Sam and Joseph asked Grandpa J what they would do with what they built.

“Do? What do you think we should do?” The boys dreamed and they thought and they talked. And then they set up a lemonade stand. One by one kids came by that stand to talk and tell jokes and buy lemonade. Then the utility crew working on the electrical lines stopped at lunch and bought lemonade and talked about their boys and when they had lemonade stands. And so it went.

The weekend zipped by. It was time for Grandpa J to leave. He took each boy’s hand in his to shake “goodbye”. Sam and Joseph each said, “thank you, Grandpa J, and goodbye. Come back again! We hated being bored and you fixed that.” But Grandpa J put down their hands and looked at them steadily. “Boys, boredom is a choice. You each have gifts and ideas. So did all those people you met. You each have stories. So did all those people you met. The beginning of an adventure is always within your power. When I came here I had forgotten that and you reminded me. Thank you, and goodbye.”

We may have to say goodbye at times, but when we have gratitude, we can remember the ways each person's life touches ours, and continue to live with that gift.

## Taking It Home

*We need to remember across generations that there is as much to learn as there is to teach –  
Gloria Steinem*

**IN TODAY'S SESSION...** we learned about the GI/Greatest generation, Silent generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X, Millennial and Generation Z/Boomers/iGen and got to speak with people from many of these generations. We practiced being in multigenerational community and noticed the conversation strategies that help us be in community.

**KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN:** When you are in public spaces, **notice** when you are surrounded only by your peers, notice when you are the only person from your generation, and notice when you are surrounded by people of multiple generations. Pay attention to how behaviors may be different in different contexts.

**GET CURIOUS: Ask** a family member or someone you know well from a different generation to tell you a story about what the world was/is like when they came of age or are coming of age.

**FIND COMMON GROUND:** During coffee hour or another multigenerational gathering time at your congregation or community, **start a conversation** with someone from a different generation. Find three things you have in common.

**ENGAGE IN SPIRITUAL PRACTICE:** Ask someone from another generation what songs take them to a spiritual place. Find the songs and lyrics online. **Listen to the songs** and/or read the lyrics and reflect on what parts of the song connect to your spirit.

# Facilitator Feedback Form

We welcome your critique of this program, as well as your suggestions. Thank you for your feedback! Your input improves programs for all of our congregations.

You may choose to [complete this feedback form online](#).

Otherwise, please forward your feedback to:  
Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries  
[youth@uua.org](mailto:youth@uua.org)

OR

Office of Youth and Young Adult Ministries  
Ministries and Faith Development  
Unitarian Universalist Association  
24 Farnsworth Street  
Boston, MA 02210-1409

## Workshops You Field Tested: \*

- Workshop 1: Web of Youth Ministry
- Workshop 2: Living in Covenant
- Workshop 3: Meaning of Leadership Worship
- Workshop 4: Shared Leadership
- Workshop 5: Active Listening
- Workshop 6: Creating Inclusive Community
- Workshop 7: Leadership Styles
- Workshop 8: Building Multigenerational Connections
- Workshop 9: Conflict Resolution and Transformation

**Number of Participants: \*** \_\_\_\_\_

**Age Range: \*** \_\_\_\_\_

**Did you work with (a) co-facilitator(s)? \***

Yes       No

**Congregation: \*** \_\_\_\_\_

**Overall, what was your experience with this program?**

**What specifically did you find most helpful or useful about this program?**

**In what ways could this program be changed or improved (please be specific)?**

**Did you enrich the program with any resources that you would recommend to others?**

**What impact, if any, do you think this program will have on your life going forward?**

**What impact, if any, do you think this program will have on your congregation going forward?**

**Your Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Email: \*** \_\_\_\_\_

# Participant Feedback Form

We welcome your critique of this program, as well as your suggestions. Thank you for your feedback! Your input improves programs for all of our congregations.

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## Workshops You Participated In: \*

- Workshop 1: Web of Youth Ministry
- Workshop 2: Living in Covenant
- Workshop 3: Meaning of Leadership Worship
- Workshop 4: Shared Leadership
- Workshop 5: Active Listening
- Workshop 6: Creating Inclusive Community
- Workshop 7: Leadership Styles
- Workshop 8: Building Multigenerational Connections
- Workshop 9: Conflict Resolution and Transformation

Your Age: \* \_\_\_\_\_

Congregation: \* \_\_\_\_\_

**Overall, what was your experience with this program?**

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**Your Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Email: \*** \_\_\_\_\_