

Being an All-Ages Community: Providing for Families During Church Events
The Unitarian Church of Calgary
(Draft: May 6, 2009)

1) Why do we want to be an all-ages community?

We want to be an all-ages community because it is an expression of our principles: every person is important and valuable, whatever their age. At our January 2009 Growth Workshop, one focus was to reach out to parents, children, and youth. Not only is this in line with our principles, it helps us achieve another goal: to grow in numbers because we are walking the talk. We want parents and their children to be able to be involved in the church community in ways that are meaningful to them.

When parents consider coming to our church, either to Sunday services and church school, other programs, or congregational or committee meetings, they must also take into account the needs of their children. Parents may not attend a church-wide activity if it does not appeal to their children and youth. Parents may not attend adult-oriented activities if childcare is not provided. Therefore, ALL church events should consider the needs of the whole family. This is not to say that all church events have to be geared for children – certainly some will be adult-only – but that all church events should plan for childcare so that parents can attend.

It is important to realize that it may take time for parents, children and youth to recognize the all-ages programming that we are doing and to respond by attending regularly. This kind of shift may take a couple of years before we see the kind of results we hope for.

2) How can we include families' needs in church events?

- **Consider the day and time of day of your event.** For families, weekday evenings are often filled with children/youth commitments and earlier bedtimes. Weekend daytimes may be better time for parents to attend events (especially when they address childcare needs for their children).
- **If you are planning a church-wide meeting (e.g., AGM, townhall, workshop),** plan as well to have concurrent programming or babysitting for children (ages 0 - 12). Notify youth that they are welcome also at the congregational meeting (note: you can become a member at age 16 and vote at congregational meetings).
- **If you are planning a church-wide multi-generational event (e.g., a dinner, Cabaret, movie),** consider the needs of various ages. If there is a part that seems to be of less interest for children, plan to have babysitting or a concurrent program for children and youth for that part of the event.
- **When you are advertising your event, be clear about what ages would enjoy the event.** Parents need to know whether the event is suitable for children or youth and for what ages. If the event is only suitable for adults or youth, then parents also need to know that babysitting or children's programming will be offered.

- **Set a childcare registration deadline so that childcare or programming is provided only if there is sufficient demand for it.** Plan how to pay for the childcare: out of your committee budget, asking for a parental contribution with suggested donation, or pay-what-you can so all can attend regardless of financial means.
- **Good children’s programming attracts children and parents.** Parents are more likely to attend when the programming for their children is of good quality. So, consider having a special program (e.g., a drama teacher, special crafts). This applies particularly when the event goes on longer than 1 ½ hours.

3) How do you arrange for childcare?

- **Use a “Fun Box”:** If there are only a small number of children that prefer to stay with their parents during the event, then use of a “Fun Box” may suffice. Our Director of Religious Education (DRE) has created a “Children’s Fun Box” for parents to use for their children. One Fun Box is in the Barker Room closet on the main floor and another Fun Box is in the nursery closet downstairs (Room 2).
- **Arranging for childcare:** Our DRE keeps a list of people who offer childcare, both on a volunteer and paid basis. The “Guidelines for Organizing Nursery and Child Care for Church Events” explains the conditions for childcare, the hourly rate as well as how to provide the payment. The list of childcare providers and Guidelines are available in the “Being an All-Ages Community – Resources” binder (in the file holders above the work table in the office), so that you can contact providers directly. The list will be updated at the beginning of each church year in September, and sent to the Board, Committees, and office.
- **Arranging for children’s programming:** The DRE has a list of people and organizations that can provide programming for children. That list is available in the “Being an All-Ages Community – Resources” binder (in the file holders above the work table in the office), so that you can contact the people directly.