



# UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST

CONGREGATION OF FREDERICK

## Fast Future

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[frederickuu.org](http://frederickuu.org)

The Sixth Source of Unitarian Universalism is “Earth-centered Traditions.” And part of the wisdom we draw from that source is the importance of “Seventh-Generation Thinking”: considering the impact of our actions even to the *seventh* generation to follow. Or I have sometimes heard this perspective phrased: seeing yourself as in the *midpoint* of a seven-generation span — such that ethical decisions should try to honor the wisdom of the *three generations that preceded you* (back to your great-grandparents) and to consider the legacy you are leaving for the *three generations that will follow you* (your great-grand children).

Our annual Transitions service is an ideal time to consider the ripples that flow from generation to generation. In particular, this morning is a time for honoring of high school graduates. And one of the tools I have found most helpful in shifting my perspective to keep current with each new crop of graduates — since they are always around 18, and we all keep getting older — is the “Mindset List,” which is released every August by Beloit College to help professors “be aware of dated references.” The most recent Mindset List included 60 “cultural touchstones that shape the lives of students entering college,” but I’ll share only a few of them: For current college freshmen, keep in mind that:

1. Eminem and LL Cool J could show up at parents’ weekend.
2. GM means food that is Genetically Modified.
3. As kids they may well have seen *Chicken Run* but probably never got chicken pox.

4. Having a chat has seldom involved talking.
5. Gaga has never been baby talk.
6. They have known only two presidents.
7. Threatening to shut down the government during Federal budget negotiations has always been an anticipated tactic.
8. With GPS, they have never needed directions to get someplace, just an address.
9. They have never attended a concert in a smoke-filled arena.
10. Their favorite feature films have always been largely, if not totally, computer generated.
11. Their parents' car CD player is soooooo ancient and embarrassing.

For myself, at age 36, I'm twice as old as our eighteen-year-old high school graduates. And generationally, I am part of the tail end of Generation X, having been born in 1978, the year *after Star Wars* came out.

Ben, Glenn, and Will, our high school graduates, were born around 1996, and are solidly in the middle of Generation Y, also known as the “Millennial Generation.” But, Ben, Glenn, and Will, don't get too cocky about your youth. Our Child Dedication is a good reminder that Generation Z is coming for you. Gen Z is the first generation that will be fully digital natives, growing up never knowing a world without smart phones and tablet computers. As David Burstein writes about in his important new book *Fast Future: How the Millennial Generation Is Shaping Our World*, the rest of us, even our young graduates, are “digital immigrants” (56-57). But Generation Z will never know a print edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* — only Wikipedia (86). And Gen Z will also never know a world in which only white men can be President.

And it is important for us to take a step back sometimes and reflect on how a “Seventh-Generation Perspective” might inform our understanding of Unitarian Universalism both now and where it is going, especially as leadership roles continue to be filled by Millennials and eventually those digital natives of Generation Z and beyond.

The merger of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America into Unitarian Universalism happened in 1961, and in many ways the predominant UUism most of us know has been heavily influenced by the Baby Boomers, who came of age in the 60s and 70s. Perhaps significantly, some demographers see the Millennials as an “echo

boom,” because many of them are the children of Boomer parents (xv): “Worldwide, there are 1.7 billion Millennials — almost one-third of the people on earth” (xvi). So it is fascinating to watch the evolution from *Boomer* Unitarian Universalism to Gen-X into *Millennial*-influenced UUism and beyond.

For most Millennials, the defining event of their early lives were the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. And as a generation deeply shaped by social media, they have also grown up knowing both the promise and perils of an increasingly globalized and interdependent world. One piece of advice, I would offer our graduates is to not only leverage technology to stay connected and create social change, but also to find times and places in which you can embrace the luxury of *unplugging* from technology to be fully present to the world without the filter of technology.

Speaking of social change, I’ll move toward my conclusion by quoting State Representative Boyd Brown, a Millennial elected to the State house in my home state of South Carolina:

My generation acknowledges science, and we want to protect our planet.... My generation does not hate gay people. We don’t hate any people.... My generation does not fear the future.... We welcome change. And, ladies and gentlemen, as a word of caution to you, my generation is sprinting this way. (124)

Ben, Glenn, Will, we have been honored and privileged to accompany you up to this point on your spiritual journey through this life. We — the three-plus generations who precede you — have sought to create a liberal religious community that would nurture you in the best sense of that word *liberal*: open to new ideas, generous, openhanded, open-hearted, and open-minded. As you go out into the world, we charge you with living out of the UU values you have been taught — freedom, reason, tolerance, standing on the side of love, building the Beloved Community — and hope that you will pass these values on to the generations to follow you. We look forward to seeing all that you will do with your lives. And know you that whether you are near and far, our hearts and best wishes go with you.