

# **A Few Good Ideas**

## *for what to do during youth group meetings*

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### **Introduction**

Local youth groups sometimes have trouble coming up with worthwhile and engaging programming for their weekly meetings. Gatherings that lack meaningful content may leave group members feeling unsatisfied and cause attendance to dwindle. The purpose of this resource is to provide some good activities for youth groups to do and to stimulate further thought about interesting ways of spending youth group time. The activities that follow are intended to have more substance than the games in such books as “Deep Fun”—to get youth to think a little, to foster a sense of sharing together, and to help them explore their spirituality. If you think of other ideas that belong in this resource, please email them into the youth office at [yruu@uua.org](mailto:yruu@uua.org), and we’ll help you share them with the rest of the YRUU community. Enjoy!

### **Openings and closings**

Many youth groups choose to accompany the lighting and extinguishing of the chalice with a brief song or reading. This can nicely frame the gathering and clarify exactly when it begins and ends. Keeping books of poetry, prose, and songs in your youth group room allows members to select openings and closings in the time before the meeting starts.

### **Check-in**

Beginning a meeting with a check-in—a time for each member of the group to speak a little about his or her week (or any other subject) while the group listens—can be a great way to start off a meeting, or even to spend the bulk of your time. You can liven up this activity by suggesting that youth describe their week as:

- a type of weather
- a food
- a painting
- a color
- an animal
- a street in the area they live in.

Another interesting twist is to ask youth to share something interesting about themselves along with their check-in. For example:

- What is the place that is most important to you?
- What is your personal spiritual practice?
- What have you gotten really worked up about recently?
- Tell how you received your favorite scar (a classic).

With these, the more original and interesting the questions/categories you come up with, the more engaged the group will be.

### **Quotation-Based Discussions**

The UUA Senior High curriculum *Evensong* offers a model for meetings that youth groups could easily fill out with content of their own. The activities focus discussion around a set of quotations on a particular theme. I have made my own example, below, on issues of race. Beforehand, someone should cut out all of the quotations and place them, folded, in a bowl or hat. Each group member draws a quotation and speaks about what the statement means to him or her. Responses should be reserved for a larger discussion after each individual has spoken.

In developing your own version, you might also consider finding one or two longer quotations, and having each group member speak on the same reading.

### Quotations about Race

“You can be up to your boobies in white satin, with gardenias in your hair and no sugar cane for miles, but you can still be working on a plantation.”

—Billie Holiday (1915-1959) American jazz singer

“Media mystifications should not obfuscate a simple, perceivable fact; Black teenage girls do not create poverty by having babies. Quite the contrary, they have babies at such a young age precisely because they are poor -- because they do not have the opportunity to acquire an education, because meaningful, well-paying jobs and creative forms of recreation are not accessible to them... because safe, effective forms of contraception are not available to them.”

—Angela Davis (1944- ) Professor of philosophy, activist

“Accomplishments have no color.”

—Leontyne Price: (1927- ) American opera singer

"We need to be clear that there is no such thing as giving up one's privilege to be 'outside' the system. *One is always in the system.* The only question is whether one is part of the system in a way which challenges or strengthens the status quo. Privilege is not something I take and which I therefore have the option of not taking. It is something that society gives me and unless I change the institutions which give it to me, they will continue to give it, and I will continue to have it, however noble and egalitarian my intentions."

—Harry Brod, Writer, professor of philosophy and humanities

“Politics, as a practise, whatever its professions, has always been the systematic organization of hatreds.”

—Henry Brooks Adams (1838-1913) American historian

“If you've seen one city slum, you've seen them all.”

—Spiro Agnew (1918-1996) Vice president during Nixon's presidency. That administration's record on race relations included strong opposition to enforcing desegregation and new civil rights legislation. Agnew himself was responsible

for using underhanded tactics to fuel racial polarization, jealousy between middle-class and poor African-Americans, and anger against blacks among whites.

"The trouble around difference is really about privilege & power—the existence of privilege & the lopsided distribution of power that keeps it going. The trouble is rooted in a legacy that we all inherited, and *while we're here it belongs to us*. It isn't our fault. It wasn't caused by something we did or didn't do. But now that it's ours, it's up to us to decide how we're going to deal with it before we collectively pass it along to the generations that will follow ours."

—Allen G. Johnson, Writer and professor of sociology

"I firmly believe that the Gandhian philosophy of nonviolent resistance is the only logical and moral approach to the solution of the race problem in the United States."

—Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) US civil rights leader

"We were trying to increase the conflict that was already happening... we felt that we would take the conflict to so high a level that some change had to come."

—Huey P. Newton (1942-1989) Co-founder of the Black Panther Party, an organization popular especially among urban blacks in the 1960's and '70's, which advocated and was involved in armed struggle. Their aims were to protect African-Americans, especially from racist police, and to bring about a socialist revolution.

*Evensong* can be purchased for \$16.00 US from the [UUA Bookstore](#).

### **Drawing Pictures**

Give each youth some art supplies and paper (newsprint will do), and suggest that each draw a picture of an abstract concept, such as the ones listed below:

- God
- Happiness
- Love
- Their world
- The future (you can specify how far in the future or leave it ambiguous)
- Their childhood

After an appropriate length of time, have everyone come back together to show their work and give a little explanation. After everyone has spoken, allow open discussion on the topic.

Some variations: Halfway through the drawing period, instruct the group members to pass their work to the person sitting on their left. The second person finishes the drawing, without consulting the person who originally started it. Or, place a large piece of newsprint on an easel, and have youth group members take turns adding elements.

### **Attending the Sermon/Service**

Consider going to your church's service and meeting afterwards to discuss the sermon. Below are a few guiding questions to help you get started.

- ❑ What was the message of the sermon?
- ❑ What implications do you think it has for you, personally?
- ❑ Did you think the sermon was valuable?
- ❑ Were there any major points with which you disagreed?
- ❑ How might one argue against the minister's ideas?
- ❑ What themes, ideas, or assumptions were beneath the surface of the sermon?
- ❑ How might the service apply differently to youth and adults?

### **Show and Tell**

Just like in kindergarten! Ask youth group members think seriously about an object that is important to them or that represents something important to them, and have them bring in the object the following week. Each member should show what they have brought, and talk a little about why it is important to them.

### **Host a Speaker**

Your church and community are full of interesting people. Invite someone from the church's social action committee to come in and speak about the social justice work going on at the church and in the UU community at large. Have one or several elderly members of your congregation discuss their lives, their successes and failures, and why UUism is important to them. Ask a community leader (political, social) to give a little talk about the state of the church's surroundings.

### **Silent Meeting**

Agree with the group beforehand that you will be silent as a group during a future youth group meeting. Everyone should enter and sit quietly. A period of silence as long as a youth group meeting is unusual for most people, and it may provide youth a chance for contemplation they would not receive otherwise. Performing an opening and closing ritual works especially well with this, as youth group members will want to talk afterwards, both about their experience and otherwise.

### **Circle of Appreciation**

This activity is best for well-established youth groups. One person starts by saying that they appreciate something about another group member. The recipient of the compliment then gives a compliment to a third person, and etc. Each group member need not get an exactly equal number of comments, but try to make sure that everyone feels included. Stop whenever the comments begin to seem forced.

### **Holidays and Holy Days**

At random times throughout the year, have discussions that would be appropriate around particular holidays, ignoring the fact that that holiday might be six months away. For example, in March, assess the previous year, and make resolutions for the year to come (as one would around New Years). Or, in June, have an earnest discussion about all that you are thankful for, which you otherwise take for granted. This principle works with any number of holidays.

## **Utopia**

If your youth group is large, you might consider breaking into groups for this. Start a discussion about what the perfect community might look like. What problems are there in the real world that you would solve? How would you solve them? Write down all the ideas on newsprint. If you so choose, make a mural depicting how this imaginary community might look and function. Then, if you split up, reconvene and share what you discussed. Finally, talk about how you might practically go about changing the present world to make it more like the ideal.

## **Current Events**

Simply by flipping through a newspaper, a UU youth group can often find plenty to talk about during a youth group meeting. In general, these discussions are a lot more interesting and valuable when there is some disagreement. As such, I recommend avoiding topics like “President Bush is Satan,” unless it is agreed that the purpose is venting, rather than learning and sharing ideas. During the discussion, try to explore the reasoning behind your own beliefs and understand the beliefs of others.

Although the hot topic of the day is likely to be more suitable, here a few ideas to start you off:

- ❑ The Palestinian-Israeli conflict
- ❑ Euthanasia
- ❑ Free trade policies
- ❑ Legalization of marijuana and other drugs (the proper place of drugs in society)
- ❑ Terrorism (i.e. Is it ever justified? How could it be stopped?)

## **Worship Service**

An occasional small worship service during youth group meetings can add considerably to the experience of the group. Include a variety of elements and focus on something deeply relevant to the individuals in the group.

Youth worship is generally quite different from adult worship. In small youth groups, it is common for every member to speak or play some part in the worship. By and large, the services involve the group sitting in a circle with a chalice in the center. Some may read a prepared piece, play a musical instrument, recite a poem, sing, or speak extemporaneously on whatever strikes them.

*Thanks to all who contributed activities for this resource. In creating this, I referred to Wayne Rice's Great Ideas for Small Youth Groups (Youth Specialties Books, Grand Rapids: 1986) and Growing Together by Greg Gale (The Food Project, Lincoln: 2000).*