

Youth User Guide to the Youth Ministry Working Group Report

Introduction

Welcome to the Youth User Guide for the Youth Ministry Working Group's Recommendations! This guide is primarily for youth in our congregations though youth advisors and parents may find it helpful as well. As you may know, these recommendations come out of a multi-year process in which youth and adults at every level of our Association gave feedback, shared ideas, and crafted a new vision of youth ministry that was congregationally based, multigenerational, spirit-centered, counter-oppressive, multicultural and radically inclusive. These ideas and visions have been captured in a document outlining the concrete steps our Association needs to take to make that vision a reality. To do so will require all our efforts, including yours.

To be clear, these recommendations are designed to enhance and supplement already existing, exceptional youth programming. So, if there's something you do in your congregation or district that you absolutely love, do not panic! These recommendations aren't seeking to replace those programs. They are, in the simplest of terms, recommendations that we all do more to involve youth even further in the life of our congregations and our Association.

The recommendations themselves may seem a bit daunting or confusing, so we've put together this guide to clarify parts and facilitate further discussion. While we encourage you to read the entire report, the guide below highlights sections of particular interest to youth as a place to start. There is also a list of discussion suggestions to assist you if you choose to engage in a conversation about these recommendations and their relation to the youth ministry you would like to strengthen or create. Finally, there are strategies for talking with people in your congregation to help make your vision of youth ministry a reality.

Highlights and Clarifications

I. STRUCTURE AND SCOPE

A. Focus the Youth Ministry Age Range

1-2. The age-range for "youth" has been redefined to be those in high school in grades 9-12 or the equivalent for home-schooled youth. The bridges into and out of this age range for middle school/junior high youth and bridging youth also require special attention and their own resources and programming. This recommendation particularly targets the national level, though congregations are encouraged to examine and make clear their own age-ranges.

B. Create New and Enhance Existing Opportunities for Youth

1. There are so many realms of congregational life including worship, music, religious education, spiritual development, pastoral care, committees and boards, and social justice. Youth should feel free to explore and participate in these realms that exist outside of their youth group so that they can minister and be ministered to in their faith communities. This recommendation encourages congregations to make these opportunities available to youth.

2. Social justice, witness and action often play a large role in our youth communities. This recommendation instructs the UUA to partner with congregations, districts and organizations to provide opportunities for service that are connected with spiritual and faith development.

3. This recommendation calls for a grants program, administered nationally and delivered locally, for youth who want to engage in a project or internship involving growth in faith, deepening in spirit, development of skills, and service to UU communities. Youth would work with the sponsoring group to plan the project or internship and they would jointly apply for the grant.

C. Widen Youth Voice and Participation

1. Some congregations already allow youth to become full members; others have different membership categories for youth. All congregations are encouraged to examine their membership policies and their local and state laws to open membership to youth.

2. Every committee, task force, and group at every level of the Association, including congregations, should be open to youth membership. Youth should not serve on committees alone, but rather in groups of two or more. They should receive support from each other and from adult mentors. Opening up to youth membership does not only mean saying we allow youth to join. Required term lengths, meeting times and locations, transportation issues, and meeting styles can all prevent youth from participating and therefore these must be carefully assessed.

3. Youth can and do provide important perspectives on areas that relate to congregational life, district activities, and UUA staff work and that input should be solicited by those groups not only for youth-related topics, but for all areas including worship, pastoral care, program development, field testing, event planning, strategic planning, leadership development, and program evaluation.

D. Welcome and Serve Youth of Diverse Needs, Abilities, and Identities

This section of the report addresses a variety of identities, abilities and needs that youth may have. In an effort to be as inclusive as possible with our youth ministry, specialized resources, opportunities and programs need to be developed and provided. Read this section closely for resources and opportunities for youth of color and bisexual, gay, lesbian, transgender and queer youth, as well as recommendations for congregations around ability and able-ism, socioeconomic class and classism, and a variety of often silenced issues and circumstances such as addiction, abuse or assault, and involvement in the prison system.

E. De-Centralize Youth Ministry Service Delivery

This section primarily addresses staffing and trainings. The goal is to provide more services locally so they reach youth in congregations more easily. One recommendation encourages congregations or clusters of congregations to hire paid youth ministry coordinators or directors to make opportunities available to you and help plan youth events and programs. This recommendation also calls for the UUA to create a grants program to help finance those positions.

F. Enhance Communication and Increase the Use of Technology

The first recommendation in this section calls for the UUA to create and support a UU social networking site! Think Facebook plus a message board, but entirely for UUs to talk and exchange ideas about youth programming, spirituality, Cons, etc. To make sure you hear about it when it is created, join the [YouthNews email list](#). That list will also tell you when the newest newsletter is ready. And you can always get updates on youth ministry at www.uua.org/youth.

II. RESOURCES

While section A deals with revising existing resources and B with developing new ones, both sections focus on providing congregations and individuals with a large variety of resources that enable youth and adults to come together and minister to and with each other in a variety of ways. Some highlights are: a revision of The Welcoming Congregation program to include youth-specific and multigenerational content, the development of an Anti-Racism, Anti-Oppression, Multicultural program for congregations modeled after the *Our Whole Lives* program, and a Bridging curriculum for those transitioning into young adulthood. There are many other resources outlined in this section and we encourage you to take a look at them.

III. RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

Sections A and B provide the adults in your congregation (your minister, your DRE, your youth advisor, etc) the best youth ministry training possible. Section C, however, is completely directed at developing *your* skills as a religious leader in our Association, including youth-specific leadership development opportunities, interfaith work, and the inclusion of youth in District leadership development opportunities.

IV. ACCOUNTABILITY

This section outlines who is responsible and in what ways for making all this happen. Get involved in your congregation and encourage your congregation to take responsibility for assessing its youth ministry.

Discussion Suggestions

The suggestions below are to help guide conversations about these recommendations as they relate to you as a youth and to youth ministry in your faith community. If you are interested in having a conversation about youth ministry in general, you may want to see the Congregational Conversation Process Guide available at www.uua.org/youth.

Reflecting on Youth Ministry in your Congregation

To start, it may be helpful to reflect a bit on youth ministry in general in your congregation. How have you or other youth been involved in your congregation? In the choir? Helping out at coffee hour after worship? As a youth chaplain? Directly in Sunday worship? On the congregation's board? In the nursery or with children? In the youth group?

What areas do you feel are already open to youth? Are there some that you feel are not? How might the culture, traditions, or organization of your congregation play a role in this?

What would it mean for youth to be involved in all or most aspects of congregational life?

How might having multiple pathways of involvement for youth change the relationships between youth and adults, including your minister, in your congregation? How might having multiple pathways of involvement allow youth to explore the many ways of expressing their Unitarian Universalist faith and feel more included in your congregation and the denomination as a whole? How might having multiple pathways of involvement enrich your personal experience in your congregation and strengthen your Unitarian Universalist identity?

Reflecting on the YMWG Recommendations

Which recommendations excite you?

What is your congregation already doing? Can it be better?

What do you think your congregation should focus on first? What opportunities can your congregation create or enhance so that this happens?

How can the need for a youth community, such as youth group, and the need to be included in congregational life be balanced?

How can youth participation and voice in your congregation be widened? What needs to change and how might this happen? What can you do to help make it happen?

What Now?

If you've come this far, you probably have some ideas about what your congregation should be doing. So, how to make that happen?

First, you need to talk with some people. This may be your youth advisor, but we would also suggest you talk with your minister or director of religious education, as well. They may already be thinking about these recommendations, and if so, getting in touch with them is a great way to get involved. If they aren't aware of these recommendations, then your conversation could start great things in your congregation!

If you're interested in particular opportunities, like serving on certain committees or singing in the choir, for example, you'll also want to talk to the leaders of those groups. If you don't know who they are, that's fine. You can generally find out simply by asking another member of the congregation or the lay leaders in your community. Lay leaders are those members of the congregation who have stepped forward to take on leadership roles in committees, on task forces and as volunteers.

So, now you know who you need to talk with. If you're worried about talking one-on-one, think about bringing a friend or inviting the minister or DRE to a youth group meeting to discuss youth ministry as a group. Try approaching your minister or DRE after Sunday services and ask for a contact e-mail. Let them know you want to talk about youth ministry and ask if they've had a chance to look at the Youth Ministry Working Group's recommendations. If not, tell them you will e-mail them the link (point them to www.uua.org/youthministry) and find a time to talk. When you get home, send that e-mail! Set up a time together – between half an hour and 45 minutes is probably a good length – and reiterate that you want to talk about the Working

Group's recommendations and how you can implement them in your congregation. If you have specific points you know you want to cover already, share that in your e-mail as well.

Before the meeting, highlight some of the specific recommendations you think the congregation should focus on first. Think about your reasons for wanting that change and how you think it would help the congregation as a whole. If you have ideas for how to make that happen, make notes about those, too. Remember, the people you meet with will have different ideas about the best way to do things. This meeting should be a starting place for conversation and collaboration.

As you meet, share your thoughts and ask if they have any suggestions or feedback. You may want to suggest a much larger conversation in your congregation involving parents, other youth, lay leaders and staff, etc., or you may suggest the formation of a planning team to help implement changes. Remember, one of the boldest statements coming out of this multi-year process was that youth ministry is the responsibility of ALL Unitarian Universalists. The more people you involve, the better.

Follow-up after the meeting on any items that need it and thank people for their time. If we all work collaboratively, we can bring this new vision of youth ministry to life. It will require time and patience, but together we can do it.

Resources

There are several resources available to you throughout this process. To talk with other youth and adults about these recommendations and youth ministry, you can join our discussion list, [YouthMinistry-Discuss](#). You can also become a fan of our Facebook page. As always, www.uua.org/youth has links to a number of resources and you can search the [Leader's Library](#) for youth related content as well.

You can also contact the UUA's Youth Ministry Office at youth@uua.org.