



GUIDELINES
for Leading Your Congregation

YOUTH MINISTRIES

Ministries for, by, and with youth

Written by Terry Carty

General Board of Discipleship

YOUTH MINISTRIES

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Our Identity, Call, and Mission

About now a small voice in the back of your mind may be whispering, “What am I doing here? To what have I said yes? What is my role?” At the same time you may be aware that your congregation has extended to you a *call*—a *call to serve*. And you have said *yes*—*yes to leading in a vital mission*.

The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ. You have agreed to serve as a leader bringing your unique passions, gifts, and abilities to the church. When the leaders focus on the church’s purpose—*its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ*—and link that purpose to the passions of the people, amazing things can happen.

The fundamental way we fulfill our mission is to reach out to people in the name of Jesus Christ, to relate people to God, to nurture and strengthen them in their journey of discipleship, and to send them into the world to be the church—inviting and receiving others in the name of Jesus Christ. We call this the primary task of The United Methodist Church. Effective leaders keep the whole of the primary task in their sight, working to keep all of its aspects in concert.

Leaders in the church must be first, and foremost, spiritual leaders who model and embrace Christian discipline and teaching. *By practicing the means of grace*—prayer, fasting, studying Scripture, corporate worship, celebration of the Lord’s Supper, Christian conversation, and acts of mercy—*church leaders stay tuned to the mission of the church and live out the primary task.* Members and would-be members should be able to look to a congregation’s leaders for spiritual example and direction, because true leaders are known by their fruits. People’s lives are changed through their influence.

Leaders use their gifts and talents to enable others to use their gifts and talents to the fullest potential. The flow of information, inspiration, guidance, and vision from leaders is an encouragement to others on their spiritual journey. Leaders help others to see new possibilities. When leaders are focused on the mission of the church, community is built and ministry occurs. The church focused on God is alive with creative energy aimed at transformation.

Four Essential Leadership Functions

Church leaders support and strengthen the church when they pay attention to these leadership functions: (1) help people discover the current reality in which they live; (2) bring together the congregation’s understandings of current reality and desired reality into a shared vision; (3) develop

the plans to help the community move from current reality toward the reality of its shared vision; and finally, (4) monitor the whole work of the church as the congregation moves with God's guidance toward its vision.

1. Discovering Current Reality

Accurately describing current reality—the way things are—may be the most important function of leadership. The booklets in this Guideline series offer suggestions for leaders to pay attention to the various committees of the church's ministry. In addition, it is critical for church leaders—lay and clergy—to spend time together discussing the ministry of the whole congregation. The conversation needs to include attentiveness to God's guidance and everything that describes a congregation's "what we are, here and now." Because God is always doing a new thing, this job is continuous. When we pay attention to change, we provide a base of integrity and strength from which to move into the future. Faith in Jesus Christ and a spiritual centering in God offer the strongest foundation to move people fearlessly through the massive changes of the twenty-first century.

2. Naming Desired Reality and Molding the Shared Vision

Ask the question, "What do you want more than anything else in the world?" and most persons will give a response that indicates that they want to live in a world filled with love, faith, security, and meaning. Because persons desire a positive future, they are willing to invest themselves in organizations that are committed to it. By its very nature, the church is devoted to the creation of a better future. When the church promises to move people personally and corporately toward their desired reality, people will invest time, energy, and resources into the church. As people see their own desires linked to the congregational vision and deeper understanding of God's future, they deepen their commitment and involvement. Building this link is a vital role of leadership.

This is accomplished by asking people about their lives and their faith, and listening very carefully. By listening, we mean deep listening—the kind that requires setting aside our own agendas and entering into the worldviews of others, and listening for God through the conversation. It is a significant shift in our understanding of leadership in the church to move from telling people what we think they need to know to listening to people in order to find out who they are and what their desired realities are. Effective spiritual leaders listen to the hearts of people and begin to articulate a shared vision.

3. Developing Bridges

To span the gulf between our current reality and the hope expressed in the shared vision, leaders must build a bridge. The third critical function of

leadership is to plan actions and develop systems that create the bridge across this gulf. Leaders who are elected to administrative and program committees are responsible for the ongoing work of the church and must pay attention to the present. At the same time, leaders *must* be focused on the future—keeping today and tomorrow in tension—ensuring that the church doesn't get stuck in the past, present, or future.

Church leaders who are attentive to God's leading and who can hold the tension between today and tomorrow are *visionary leaders*. Visionary leaders see it all—current reality, desired reality, and the bridges to get from one to the other.

4. Monitoring the Journey

Perhaps the most critical task for leaders is keeping an eye on the whole of the faith journey of the congregation. When leaders are constantly caught up in “doing” the administrative and program work of the church, there is not any time left for “being” with God in prayer to discern the leading of the Spirit for the congregation. Leaders must step back from “doing” constant activities in order to pay attention to the total direction of the church's mission and ministry. All elected and appointed leaders must spend time together listening to God in prayer, Bible study, conversation, and other means of grace in order to lead the entire community in the work of Christ. Anything less is not Christian spiritual leadership.

What's My Job as Coordinator of Youth Ministries?

You are the layperson in the congregation who holds the “big picture” of the congregation's ministries with youth. The congregation looks to you for resources, understanding, and direction in its ministries with youth. Depending upon the size of the congregation, your position can become quite demanding. You will work together with your church's pastor, staff, and others who have a passion and calling to be in ministry with youth to promote the development of a comprehensive approach to youth ministry in your church.

Responsibilities: Coordinator of Youth Ministries

According to *The Book of Discipline* (§255.2):

- Recommend to the church council activities, program emphases, and settings for youth.

- Use available resources and means to inform youth concerning the Youth Service Fund [*see* page 18] and cultivate its support.
- Challenge youth to assume their financial responsibilities in connection with the total program and budget of the local church.
- Be accountable to the charge conference through the church council.

Responsibilities That Are Usually Included:

- Help your congregation to be aware of the hopes, concerns, and needs of youth in your community in order to determine how to serve them as Christian disciples and good neighbors.
- Help others understand their roles in ministry with youth. These others include Sunday school teachers, adult workers with a youth group, youth who are leaders, parents, congregation members, and so on. For more about these roles in ministry, see the following chapters of this publication or consult the *United Methodist Youth Handbook*, by Michael Selleck, Discipleship Resources, 1999, available from Cokesbury, 1-800-672-1789, or Discipleship Resources, 1-800-685-4370.
- To keep your congregation focused on the primary task of youth ministries (*see* pp. 10-11).
- Encourage inclusion of youth in the goals of the congregation.
- Encourage the inclusion of youth in decision-making committees of the congregation.
- Support and guide the work of a council for youth ministries (if organized; *see* pp. 15-17).
- Help plan and carry out a varied and wide-ranging program with youth, which includes settings for worship, study, fellowship, and service.
- Ensure that every group related to ministry with youth is organized for youth and adult participation in decisions related to its ongoing life.
- Be aware of resources for developing programs for youth and participate in training experiences.
- Be a liaison with organizations, people, and resources that relate to youth and youth ministries.

Responsibilities Sometimes Included:

- The Coordinator of Youth Ministries may serve as convener of a council for youth ministries, or it may be co-convened by one youth and the coordinator.
- Organize parents and other congregation members in youth ministry support activities (meals, transportation, fundraising, and so on).
- Mentor youth as they emerge as leaders.
- Coordinate church school curriculum and recruit teachers.
- Keep records of youth participation and manage youth ministry funds (where there is a separate account).

- Serve on committees as needed (for example, age-level council, staff-parish committee, and other appropriate committees and task forces created by your congregation).

Getting Started as Coordinator of Youth Ministries

1. *Pray to God for guidance.* Sense God's closeness as you embark on this new, exciting ministry. Ask God to provide you a mind open to learning, a heart ready for loving, and arms receptive to embracing.
2. *Listen to youth.* This step is the most important: ask the youth of your congregation (those who are active and those who are not!) to tell you about themselves—their struggles, hopes, dreams, daily lives, fears, and desires. This conversation will take time to develop; many youth believe that most adults do not want to listen to them honestly. Be patient. As youth discover your willingness to be open, receptive, and caring, they will share more of their life stories, narratives rich in meaning and full of faith. Meet with any existing youth council to learn about and gain appreciation for the existing youth ministry.
3. *Talk to other adult workers with youth.* Discuss the tasks of the youth coordinator with other adults who have worked extensively with youth. Your search for these persons may take you to other local church communities. Recognize the importance of developing new relationships with other adults who engage in youth ministry: other communities can be exciting centers of support, strength, ideas, and guidance. To be sure, spend time talking with parents of youth; these adult workers with youth have much wisdom to share!
4. *Talk with the pastor and other church staff.* Ask your pastor, Christian educator, church musician, or other staff members who work with youth to share their experiences, insights, resources, and suggestions. They probably can show you some printed resource materials that you will find helpful in designing sessions, teaching other adults about the diversity of adolescence, and inviting youth to participate in the life of the church.

Questions to Ask in the Community and Congregation:

- Where do we find youth in our community when they are not in school?
- What three concerns and what three hopes do you believe youth have about their community and their faith?
- What three experiences might help youth understand more about how the Bible and the Christian faith can be resources for daily living?

- How could the quality of life be improved in our community? For at least one specific group of youth in our community?
- What existing or new programs should our congregation sponsor for youth?

5. *Develop a team of adult workers with youth.* Call an initial meeting of all adult workers with youth. Spend time sharing experiences, telling stories, and developing a sense of shared mission to youth. Pray with one another. Study Scripture with one another.
6. *Develop a leadership team which includes both adult workers and youth.* Begin planning a comprehensive approach to youth ministry at your church using the primary task of youth ministry (*see pp. 10-11*). Make sure that your approach promotes ministries in the following areas:
 - *Teaching/learning.* Where will youth learn the stories of faith? How will youth learn to be teachers of the faith?
 - *Community life.* Are youth invited into every aspect of the life of the congregation? Do they serve on all church committees? Do they know what it feels like to belong to a loving community of faith?
 - *Worship.* Do youth regularly participate as leaders during Sunday morning worship? Do most youth gatherings have a time for worship, prayer, and celebration?
 - *Outreach.* Do youth take an active role in serving others, proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ, and seeking to make their community and world more loving and just?

Guiding Youth to Thrive as Disciples

To put it simply, *The United Methodist Church sees youth thriving in the world as faithful disciples. It can happen! And you, the Coordinator of Youth Ministries, can make it happen!*

In youth ministry, an emphasis on “following Jesus” (discipleship) provides youth with a model of being in the world that is understandable and transformational. Discipleship in Christ is based on identifiable practices and disciplines that can be learned, enhanced, and redemptive in daily living. Youth ministries that focus upon discipleship help youth face life and make sense of their daily experiences. Youth ministry in The United Methodist Church can help youth follow Jesus by connecting youth to practices and disciplines of the faith:

- worshipping God together,
- telling the Christian story to one another,

- interpreting Scripture in the midst of a confusing world,
- praying,
- suffering with and for each other,
- providing hospitality and practicing tolerance,
- struggling together to form a community,
- working together to create patterns and relationships that build sustainable lifestyles for the future,
- the pattern of John Wesley, practicing acts of piety and compassion.

Youth ministry is a process, not a program, by which youth are led to a deeper relationship with Christ and a deeper commitment to the work of the church in the world. It is a process that transforms people from being willing participants in church programs to being people whose lives are committed to being the body of Jesus Christ.

The Primary Task of Youth Ministry

There shall be a comprehensive approach to development and implementation of youth ministry programming at all levels of the Church. The comprehensive approach is based on the understanding of the primary task of youth ministry:

- to love youth where they are,
- to encourage them in developing their relationship to God,
- to provide them with opportunities for nurture and growth, and
- to challenge them to respond to God's call to serve in their communities.

from *The Book of Discipline*, ¶1118.2

There are many ministries that fit the primary task of youth ministry. You will need to examine the resources of your community and congregation to decide what will be best for the youth in your area. Some examples that have worked for others include:

To Love Youth Where They Are—

- Basketball league (or other sports)
- May Day picnic in the park
- Ski trip (or other adventures)
- Periodic recreational-oriented UMYF for bringing unchurched friends
- Panel discussion of careers
- Lock-in at the church

- Pastor and/or adult youth workers visit students during lunch at school or attend students' ball games

To Encourage Youth in Developing Their Relationship to God—

- Church worship services
- UMYF sessions about who God is and other fundamentals of faith
- Spring retreat focusing on God's creation
- Mission trips
- Involvement with adults who live out and can talk about their faith
- Sunday school and/or UMYF sessions that help youth know how to tell others about their faith; how to describe God
- District and conference retreats
- Youth choir that (at least occasionally) sings during worship services

To Provide Opportunities for Nurture and Growth—

- Youth leadership in worship services
- Sunday school sessions about famous and/or little known people of faith
- UMYF sessions about the history and structure of The United Methodist Church
- Sharing groups based upon everyday experiences
- Good, communicating relationships between younger youth and older youth, and between youth and adults (especially mentoring ministries)
- An overall leadership attitude that it is OK for a youth to be at any stage within the faith-development process (nonjudgmental)
- Discovery sessions about mission possibilities for individuals (and possibly ministry careers)
- Spiritual-discipline retreats (silence, fasting, prayer, journaling, spiritual creativity)
- Leadership positions for youth in the youth ministry and service on committees within the local church

To Challenge Youth to Respond to God's Call to—

- One-on-one ministries specially tailored to youth's needs
- Specialized training in small groups (faith sharing, ministry skills, leadership skills, mission skills)
- Assistance for youth in finding personal mission opportunities
- Reflection groups (reflect upon mission/ministry experiences)
- Leadership positions for youth in the local church and beyond

Where Youth Ministries Happen

The term *youth ministry* is an inclusive title, encompassing all the concerns of the Church and all activities by, with, and for youth. The youth ministry of The United Methodist Church shall include all persons from approximately twelve through eighteen years of age (generally persons in the seventh grade through the twelfth grade, taking into account the grouping of youth in the public schools), who are currently or potentially associated with the church or any of its activities. Youth who are full members of the church have all rights and responsibilities of church membership except voting on matters prohibited by state law.

The Book of Discipline, ¶255.2

Obviously, youth ministries can happen anywhere there are youth. Most youth ministries are one-on-one connections between people. But there are some structures within United Methodist churches that make organized youth ministries possible.

Worship Services

The primary entry point for people into the life of the church is the worship service. The main worship services at a church are a focal point of the ministry effort of the church, and should, therefore, address the concerns and needs of youth in their design.

Although it is good to involve youth in the leadership of worship (reading Scripture, leading responses and prayers, and so on), this does not ensure that the service speaks to youth needs. It is important that youth are involved in planning for worship, so their understanding of true worship can be considered. Meetings of youth with the pastor to discuss the meaning and design of worship can be helpful to pastor and youth alike. Including one or two youth on the worship committee can provide opportunities for both input and learning.

Church School/Sunday School

Almost every church has a church-school ministry on Sunday mornings. This is a prime time to teach youth about faith.

Make the most of the church-school hour by deciding exactly what you want to accomplish in the time. It is probably the best time to teach the Bible or religious history. It may be a good time for a pastor's faith and membership enhancement class. When a goal is set for church-school teaching, stick to it.

There is plenty of good church-school curriculum material available from a variety of publishing companies, but The United Methodist Publishing House provides the only curriculum that is prepared especially for United Methodist youth. It is biblically based, Wesleyan in theology, and United Methodist in its worldview.

United Methodist Youth Fellowship (UMYF)

The UMYF is more than just an evening of food, fellowship, and fun. It is one of the primary settings where youth can take seriously their journey of faith: to encounter the living Christ. Through building relationships, asking questions, worshiping God, and transforming lives, UMYF members learn what it means to be the Church.

The UMYF experience stands as one of the most significant influences available to local church youth. As youth grow from junior high to senior high to young adults, those who are involved in UMYF learn to live lives of faith, mission, and Christian values as they spend time together with other youth.

UMYF usually meets at least once a week, for many groups on Sunday evening. The format varies, but often includes a light meal, a recreation time, and a session about some facet of Christian living. The session time can be designed and led by an adult leader, a youth leader, or a combined team. It can be an activity leading to a discussion, or it can be a guest speaker followed by a question-answer time. It can be a field trip, or it can be a worship service. Most UMYF sessions end with a closing worship time or at least the UMYF benediction.

Many UMYFs are the core of a complete system of youth ministries that also includes mission trips, service projects, recreational activities, Bible studies, camping trips, special interest studies, and mentoring arrangements. When this is the case, it is important that there is planning and coordination of activities.

***NOTE:** It is Christian worship and mission that sets a Christian youth group apart from social or service clubs. These are crucial to a UMYF.*

The UMYF Benediction

The UMYF benediction as a closing ritual for youth groups has been a tradition followed in many congregations of our denomination for many years.

Group members stand in a circle, crossing their right arms over their left arms and then joining hands. Some groups bow their heads and close their eyes, while others keep their eyes open and look around the circle at each person.

In unison (often in response to the first seven words offered by a leader) the UMYF says: “The Lord bless you and keep you: The Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you: The Lord lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace” (Numbers 6:24-26, RSV). Some groups add: “Amen.”

Then while continuing to hold hands and lifting their right arms over their heads, the entire group turns to their right to face outward.

Hearing The Voice Of God

Kevin is in the tenth grade. While occasionally teased for his lanky looks, his peers think he is ambitious and outgoing. He joined the UMYF group last year when several of his friends kept inviting him to attend. Since then, Kevin has felt affirmed for his leadership abilities. Just elected as a representative to the Council on Youth Ministries, he has been talking with UMYF members about session ideas, worship opportunities, and potential service projects in their town. When asked about “hearing the voice of God,” Kevin quickly replies, “The hearing is in the doing. I feel God when I make a difference in the lives of others.”

Study Groups

UMYF sessions and Sunday school generally speak to the needs of the majority of the youth. Special study groups offer small-group settings in which youth disciples can work through details of faith development. Bible studies are always a good choice for study groups. Studies can be designed for youth of different ages and to address different issues. Many Bible study resources are available commercially. *Disciple: Becoming Disciples through Bible Study, Youth Edition* (information and training available through the Disciple Office at The United Methodist Publishing House) is a study opportunity for advanced young disciples.

The Book of Discipline recommends a pastor’s class on faith development. Such a class should be for senior highs. Emphasis should be on the doctrines of The United Methodist Church and the nature and mission of the Church, leading to continued growth in the knowledge, grace, and service of Christ.

Many junior highs have missed the opportunity to participate in confirmation training. A confirmation/church membership class for those people is needed.

A study group for the purpose of training youth for leadership will be extremely helpful.

It shall be the duty of the pastor, the parent(s), guardian(s), sponsor(s), or godparent(s), the officers and teachers of the church school, and all members of the congregation to provide training for the children of the Church throughout their childhood that will lead to a personal commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, to an understanding of the Christian faith, and to an appreciation of the privileges and obligations of baptism and membership.

The Book of Discipline, ¶225.4

Develop a high-touch, relational style for congregational youth ministry:

- Emphasize caring relationships among youth
- Emphasize small group possibilities
- Focus on life issues of youth
- Explore new teaching and learning forms
- Connect Bible study to critical issues

Council for Youth Empowerment

The council (changed from Council on Youth Ministries by the 2000 General Conference) oversees all youth ministries of the congregation and advocates for ministry with youth in the total life of the church. These are important and necessary tasks for your church, regardless of its size.

Smaller churches may wish to do this task by occasionally calling together youth and adult leaders of various youth activities of the church. With six to twelve youth in the total church membership, you can function as a unit to plan, implement, and evaluate all aspects of your ministry with youth. Procedures can be kept flexible. Responsibilities can be rotated and shared with ease. As you reach out to others and your group becomes larger, you will need to develop additional structures to meet your changing needs. Larger churches, therefore, usually find it very beneficial to establish a Council for Youth Empowerment to make sure all parts of youth ministry are cared for.

Often the council in a larger church does not do detailed planning for the component groups within youth ministry. Junior high and senior high UMYFs, the church-school classes, and other groups for youth (youth choir, study groups, cell groups, mission groups) have their own ongoing planning groups and designated leaders. These all are usually accountable to and represented on the council.

Responsibilities of the Council

The Book of Discipline (§255.2) states that there may be a council for youth empowerment, with the coordinator of youth ministries, to:

- Recommend to the church council activities, program emphases, and settings for youth.
- Use available resources and means to inform youth concerning the Youth Service Fund and cultivate its support.

Responsibilities that are usually included are:

- Evaluating the youth ministry and making recommendations so that present and future needs of youth are addressed (such as addition of new ministry settings).
- Serving as a clearing house for coordinating and scheduling all youth events.
- Keeping the various groups for youth informed.
- Reporting to the church council.
- Planning special events or projects to include all youth related to the congregation's ministry (a youth-led worship service, for instance).
- Supervising designated ongoing activities.
- In cooperation with the committee on nominations and personnel, designating youth members to other official groups to fulfill disciplinary requirements (remember that youth may serve on all boards and committees except for trustees—the law requires trustees to be of majority age).

Organization of the Council

It is important that your youth ministry leadership decides what kind of coordination you need. *The Council for Youth Empowerment is one possibility, but there are many other ways of organizing. Another organization that can be particularly effective is forming "ministry coordination teams" in fellowship, service, worship, study, and outreach. Develop an organization designed to meet your own situation. (See United Methodist Youth Handbook and other youth ministry resource books for additional possibilities.)*

The first tendency is to elect officers. This means that some win and some lose. Whenever someone really wants help with planning or implementing ministries but is not elected to the council, everyone loses. Some ways of forming your council or teams *without holding elections* are:

- *By Invitation.* Form a volunteer committee to invite the individuals who exhibit leadership traits to serve.
- *Open Invitation.* Invite anyone interested in providing leadership to a meeting to form a council.
- *Sign-Up.* Develop a sign-up board or list to allow youth to volunteer.
- *Discernment.* Meet as a total group, discuss the work to be done, read

Scripture that gives guidance about maturity and wisdom, pray for God's guidance, encourage questions of clarification and exploration, spend time in silence, ask for insights gained (in this case about persons to serve as ministry leaders).

Getting a New Council Started

- Gather interested youth and adults from the congregation to consider the same questions and issues found in "Getting Started as Coordinator of Youth Ministries." Your purpose is to determine realistic ministry goals. Spend time in prayer for God's direction in your task.
- Decide what type of council structure would be the most effective in your circumstances (representative council, task forces, ministry coordination teams, elected, volunteer, selected, and so on).
- Consider how you will handle issues of money, communication, accountability for program, calendar coordination, and other issues.
- Spend time with the church staff and with lay leaders in the church discussing your proposed ministry goals and council structure. Listen closely to their suggestions and recommendations.
- Develop job descriptions for proposed leadership positions.
- When you are satisfied with your proposals, take them to the church council for approval. There will be a better partnership in youth ministry if the various councils and committees in your church fully understand each other's goals and structure.
- After your council has been established, make it a point to constantly evaluate its effectiveness. Make modifications where necessary by adding short-term committees and task forces. More permanent modifications should be made each year before selection of new leaders.

Other Involvement in the Church

There are many other ministry settings within and beyond the local church that can meet the specific needs of individual youth. Pastors, church professionals, adult youth workers, and other youth can help individuals find the ministries they need. Possibilities include:

- United Methodist Women, United Methodist Men;
- boards, councils, committees of the local church;
- the larger Church: district, conference, jurisdiction, general UMC, interdenominational youth and adult ministry opportunities.

Mission Projects

It is sometimes easier for youth to enter the mission field through organizations like Appalachia Service Project or Mountain T.O.P. Local churches can involve youth in Volunteers in Mission projects or Habitat for Humanity.

After “learning the ropes,” youth groups should begin to seek out mission opportunities on their own. Both The United Methodist General Board of Discipleship and General Board of Global Ministries have developed web sites that feature many mission opportunities as a resource for youth groups. Mission projects should offer youth a place to become involved, and they should help youth consider a lifestyle of helping other people.

Youth Service Fund

The Youth Service Fund (YSF) is money that is given by youth, administered by youth, and used to serve youth. YSF is more than simply raising money, however. YSF is a commitment made by United Methodist youth to serve those in need—in their own communities, across the United States, and around the world. YSF is the only authorized United Methodist fund directly related to youth. It is the only fund over which youth have primary administrative control. It truly can be considered second-mile giving, because it does not replace a young person’s responsibility for giving to his or her local church. *YSF works like this:*

1. Money is raised by youth in the church.
2. The money is sent from the church to the treasurer of the annual conference. Your pastor can supply the name and address.
3. Seventy percent of the money is retained in the annual conference:
 - one-third goes to projects within the conference;
 - one-third goes to projects outside the conference;
 - one-third is used for YSF education and administration.Youth representatives of the conference Council on Youth Ministries decide how grant requests will be funded.
4. Thirty percent is sent to United Methodist Youth Organization of The United Methodist Church to support projects across the world. At least 70 percent of this amount goes to projects selected by the Projects Review Committee of the Steering Committee. The balance is used for resource promotion and interpretation.

People Who Lead Youth Ministries

Youth lead youth. In his book, *Youth Ministry Handbook* (Abingdon Press, 1994, p. 21), Dr. Ed Trimmer says:

Youth ministry is accomplished by youth. God’s people, including youth, are involved with ministry in God’s creation. Youth are no exception to this. They can

minister to the church community, to the wider community, to the adults working with the youth ministry, and to youth themselves. Often, adults working with youth need to get out of the way and let them use the gifts God has given them. Youth, no less than adults, can be ministers in the New Testament sense of the word.

Youth in leadership participate. In order for youth to lead others, they must first have followed. We learn much of what we know by experience. We learn much of our leadership skill from having been led by others.

By participating in youth ministry experiences, youth have the opportunity to grow spiritually and to experience fellowship with other youth and adults without having to be responsible for the activities. They can learn what it feels like to be a part of a Christian community without knowing how to create the community atmosphere. Once youth leaders have experienced the growth, community, and fun of youth ministry, they are better prepared to learn leadership skills.

Identify youth leadership opportunities.

Peer Leadership. Youth have the ability to influence the way other youth think. As Christian leaders, they are expected to be examples among their peers.

Council for Youth Empowerment or Ministry Team Member. As a member of an elected council or as a member of a team, youth have the opportunity to guide the direction of the youth ministries in your church. Usually the older youth leaders tend to have more responsibility, while younger youth leaders have the opportunity to learn from the older youth. Each leader, older or younger, is expected to fulfill commitments he or she has made to the rest of the council, team, or youth group.

It is reasonable to expect the adult workers with youth to help youth get the training they need in order to be good leaders. The portions of these guidelines that are focused on adults apply to youth who are leaders, too. The same skills that are recommended and expected of the adults are skills that will make youth better leaders of your group.

Member of a Board, Council, or Committee of Your Local Church. The United Methodist Church recognizes youth as full and equal members of a local church. It also requires their presence as members of the planning and leadership groups within the church. *The Book of Discipline* requires that there be a youth (twelve to eighteen years old) on every committee in the church (except trustees), from the local congregation through all the general boards and agencies of The United Methodist Church.

Help your congregation seek to recognize the gifts of young people and invite them to be leaders. They are needed! Their energy, enthusiasm, and excitement bring newness to the wide variety of ministries that your church may explore and implement as expression of their faith in Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives.

Do not invite youth into leadership just to “fill a position,” or just do a job. Offer an exciting invitation—an invitation for them to serve as leaders in your congregation, an invitation to grow in their faith, in their ability to share with others, and as disciples of Jesus Christ! Great invitations can lead to great experiences of life and love. Help them serve with joy!

Adult leaders are essential. Effective youth ministry does not exist without adult leaders. In fact, the most critical factor in an effective, long-term youth ministry is the ongoing presence of adults who are caring, confident, competent, and committed in their work with young people.

The basic quality needed to be an effective adult youth leader is an appreciation for youth and what they can do. Other skills can be learned. The question for the adult who considers working with youth is not “What may I do for or to these young people?” but “How may I be present with these young people in an authentic, vulnerable, compassionate, and committed way?”

If an adult feels comfortable with youth, is excited about working with youth, likes the idea of being in ministry with young people, and sees this as an opportunity to share in a faith journey (that is, to walk alongside) with young people in an atmosphere free of self-righteousness or false piety, then perhaps God is calling that person to work with youth.

Since the UMYF is one of the cornerstones of youth ministries in United Methodist churches, the adults who work with the UMYF carry a great responsibility. These adults often spend almost all of their “free” time with the youth and become the most important nonparent adults in the lives of youth.

The responsibilities and expectations (by youth and by adults) of the adults who work with the UMYF require a team approach. “Big Star” youth leaders set themselves up for exhaustion and early burnout. Generally, the one-adult youth group is limited to the amount of activity that one person is willing to personally supervise. When that person leaves, the ministry is in danger of falling apart.

Some Guidelines for Building the UMYF Adult Team

- Aim for as much variety as possible regarding age, marital status, parenthood, career.
- Ask the youth to list desirable qualities and then to suggest adults in the church who fit the criteria.
- Look for young adults who bring energy and innovation.
- Look for middle adults who are able to give the advice of a parent without actually being the parent.
- Look for older adults who can provide wisdom and perspective.
- Consider parents and guardians; some become very effective UMYF leaders. *Always* ask the young person before inviting his or her parent to become a leader.

Give people a realistic expectation of the job. People want to know:

- What am I being asked to do?
- How much time will it take?
- How long will it last?
- Who will be working with me? Do they have experience?
- What resources are available to help me?
- What training is available?
- Will this job put me on other committees in the church?
- What other meetings will I be expected to attend?
- How are the youth ministry activities financed, and how does that affect me?

Skill Building for Leaders of Youth Ministry

Effective youth ministry usually does not just happen. It requires leaders who have worked to improve their skills as spiritual leaders. Skill building does not often come quickly; nor is it ever complete. There is always something new to learn. It seems that just when a leader thinks that he or she really knows youth ministry, youth culture changes and the learning begins again. Training is particularly helpful in the following areas:

- Theology and philosophy of youth ministry
- Youth culture
- Introduction to resources: finding them, adapting them, using them
- How to plan budgets, work camps, retreats, youth trips, parent training
- Risk management
- Relational, organizational, and spiritual guidance skills

The following lists of skill assets may be helpful as you seek to build leadership skills in youth ministry:

Relational Skills

Leaders (both adult and youth) are likely to be in several types of relationships—sometimes several types with one person in the group.

- *Person-to-person.* Adult and youth are both children of God. The only real difference is that one is older in experience than the other. Each has unique abilities and talents to contribute to the other and to the group. Each one needs to accept the other fully and with caring.
- *Adult-to-youth; youth-to-adult.* The adult is not a youth, and the youth is not an adult. Each should act his or her own age, with no apologies and with no resentment toward the other. Furthermore, nothing is phonier than an adult trying to act like a teenager.
- *One-to-one.* The UMYF is a fellowship of individuals. A leader relates to a group best by relating to the individuals in it.

All relationship building in youth ministry requires several skills. The adults may need to develop these skills and help the youth to do the same.

- *Listen.* For true communication, the speaker needs to feel that a leader is actively listening to what he or she has to say. When we truly listen, we use not only our ears but also our eyes, emotions, wisdom, and heart.
- *Respond.* After listening comes response, for it is only through a response that the person is sure he or she has been heard. *Respond* is an active verb, and we can respond through encouragement, affirmation, and nonverbal gestures. This opens the door to new ideas and new relationships.
- *Speak.* Sharing is opening and giving of oneself to someone else. The leader should never hold back appropriate sharing of ideas, concerns, and feelings with youth. However, this sharing should be done in the person-to-person mode and never as colonel-to-corporal.
- *Affirm.* Youth need to be appreciated for who they are and what they do. Such affirmation comes in the form of both individual and group acknowledgments (congratulations), sharing information with others who in turn affirm the youth, and recognition through use of their leadership skills, special interests, and talents.
- *Encourage.* Leaders can help youth grow by encouraging them to stretch their experiences, to try things they have never tried before that will deepen understandings, sharpen skills, and open doors into new worlds of discovery. The act of encouraging requires perception about where persons are in their development, sensitivity to their feelings and self-perceptions, and the willingness to be present with them in their ventures.
- *Enable.* Enabling means to assist youth by helping them see, act out of, and grow through their own abilities. Adults can best enable when they

stay in the wings and let the youth take center stage. Adults suggest, coach, encourage, congratulate, affirm, and support youth. When an adult is an enabler, he or she does everything possible to help the youth make decisions and plans that lead to successful conclusions.

- *Trust.* Youth need to know they are trusted and respected by both their peers and the adults whom they respect. This is usually communicated by attitudes and actions rather than by words. One way to communicate trust is to take seriously the things youth say.
- *Be approachable.* In either serious matters or simple concerns, a leader can contribute to the emotional and spiritual growth of youth by being a person who is approachable and available.

Caution! Be alert for problems beyond the limits of your counseling skills. When a problem calls for professional help, work with the appropriate persons to obtain that help for the youth. It is a good idea to check out the professional counselors in your area who work with youth so you will immediately know someone to whom you can refer youth if the need arises. Your pastor probably is trained in knowing how to find help in unusual circumstances.

- *Be trustworthy.* Adults do not have a greater responsibility to parents than they do to the youth. Do not betray the trust a youth might put in you by going to parents or to the pastor or to anyone else without permission of the youth. However, you do have a responsibility to the parents—they are now and have always been the primary source of help for the youth—and they love him or her. Your efforts to help a youth should include encouraging him or her to share the problem with the parents. If you feel you must reveal information to another person about a problem a youth has shared with you, be sure you have first told the youth of your intentions and your reasons.
- *Protect.* The church and the youth ministry should be “safe sanctuaries” in which youth can grow in their relationship with God without fear of being harmed or abused—physically, emotionally, neglectfully, sexually, or ritually. Many churches have developed policies to screen individuals who work with children and youth and safety procedures to be followed during activities and outings.

Safeguarding Youth Ministries

Some common policies for prevention of abuse include:

- *Two-adult rule:* There is never just one adult present with youth.
- *Five-years-older rule:* Workers should be five years older than the people with whom they work and never younger than eighteen years old.
- *Sleeping arrangements:* Youth and adult never sleep in the same bed and preferably not in the same room on an outing.

- *Counseling*: One-on-one discussions are held only with the door open.
- *Windows rule*: There should be windows in all classroom doors.
- *Screening procedures*: Adequate background checks are performed for individuals who work with children and youth.
- *Training about abuse*: Youth leaders must be aware that abuse can happen anywhere and know the facts about preventing it. Familiarity with the signs of abuse and knowledge of reporting procedures are essential for today's youth worker. A worker with youth must be prepared to tell if he or she suspects an abusive situation.
- *Physical safety issues*: Youth workers should be conscious of safety concerns when leading activities and games. Proper equipment and adequate supervision of the activity should always be in place—one adult per eight to ten youth in normal situations.
- *Safe driving*: A youth worker who transports youth should be a safe driver and have proper credentials in the state of residence. The use of seat belts should always be enforced.
- *Insurance*: The church should be adequately insured for the scope of its youth activities.

For additional information, *Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church*, Joy Thornton Melton (Discipleship Resources, 1998). Available from Cokesbury or Discipleship Resources.

Organizational Skills

Organizational skills can make the difference between an average youth ministry and an exceptional one. Here are some functional skills needed for ministry with youth.

- *Planning*. A good youth ministry requires sound planning and efficient implementation.
- *Gatekeeping*. In order to ensure that all youth have the opportunity to participate in discussions and other activities, a leader may need to monitor a situation, making sure that some youth (or adults!) do not dominate while others are excluded. The leader can “open the gate” to those who are unsure and temporarily halt those who tend to take over.
- *Providing resources*. Youth leaders often need help in discovering resources that will provide sound content for youth ministry. Curriculum materials, books, videotapes, CDs and cassettes, movies, resource persons, games, drama supplies, and so forth, all need to be located. The adult leader is directly involved in providing the resources as well as suggesting sources to the youth. Learn to adapt resources to meet the abilities and interests of the group.

- *Selecting and scheduling.* A group that is very active tends to bite off more than it can chew. A leader can advise the group about the number of items it can handle at one time. Scheduling events on a central calendar during planning sessions will be helpful in developing an effective youth ministry.
- *Training.* Help inexperienced youth develop leadership abilities and participatory skills. Some areas for training are: session planning, building agenda for meetings, leading sessions, working on committees, care giving, peer counseling, asserting positive influence.
- *Advising.* Adult workers are not meant to be passive observers, and advising is a part of their job. Although a youth group is primarily the property of its youth members, adults are there to provide knowledge, skills, and appropriate advice that will help the group members grow as Christian disciples and make the group a forum for examining Christian values.
- *Seeing the whole picture.* In order to ensure a well-rounded ministry of service, worship, fellowship, outreach, and study, the youth group members must occasionally remind themselves of their reasons for being a group. The leaders are the key people in helping youth see the whole picture as they evaluate, discover strengths and weaknesses, dream, and plan. Mature abilities to observe, weigh options, keep track of plans, and evaluate in terms of variety, balance, and sound content are crucial to the group's well-being.
- *Requiring appropriate behavior.* For any group to function responsibly, productively, and enjoyably, appropriate behavior is required. The most desirable discipline comes from within people; it is not superimposed from the outside. Discipline is not the responsibility of the adults alone, for they are advisors, not police officers.

Youth and adult leaders together, however, are often the ones who must enforce the rules and hold the youth accountable for unacceptable behavior. For times like these, be sure that the rules and the consequences have been made clear in advance. Act in a caring manner in all instances. Always explain to the youth involved why the rules or guidelines exist and why they must be adhered to. Take every instance seriously so as to uphold the expectations for the rest of the group. Also, allow for some mistakes to be made, and be willing to practice forgiveness in the deepest sense. These will be opportunities for you to model God's grace.

Spiritual Guidance Skills

In order to be prepared to guide youth in the spiritual disciplines of Bible study, prayer, and meditation, leaders should set aside some disciplined time each day to be alone with God. They should use this time to be more regular about the practice of these spiritual disciplines in their own lives. One cannot effectively guide others where one has not been.

It is recommended that leaders each find someone in their congregation or community whom they trust and respect as mature Christian disciples. Then they should ask these persons to be available for conversations and to act as guides during the time the leaders are seeking to guide the youth. Those who are not being spiritually nurtured soon deplete their resources to nurture others.

Adult leaders who are new to youth ministry often are not very much more mature in their faith than the youth with whom they work. Some of these adults will have awakened their spiritual growth while experiencing youth group activities. It is important for these adults to find spiritual growth groups with people their own age. That way they will be able to cope with issues facing them as adult Christians.

Leaders in youth ministry should develop their ability to use the traditional spiritual disciplines:

- Prayer
- Bible study
- Worship (especially the Lord's Supper)
- Fasting
- Christian conferencing (gathering together with other people to carefully seek God's will)
- Acts of mercy (helping other people)

Training Opportunities

One of the primary sources of training for youth ministry is *the youth themselves*. Adults who open themselves to these children of God will be amazed at how much they learn from them. A second source is *other adults who are experienced as adult youth leaders*.

Contact your *district and conference coordinators of youth ministries* for a schedule of upcoming training events. If you have special training needs, let them know. These persons may be able to plan a training event to include your needs.

District and conference coordinators are usually available for *onsite training* in churches. If they cannot come, they can probably recommend other persons qualified to do such training.

The General Board of Discipleship sponsors *CONNECTION (formerly FORUM)*, a national event for adult workers with youth offered every other year. CONNECTION offers training, inspirational and informative speakers, meaningful worship, and networking with other United Methodist adults

who work with youth. Contact your Conference Youth Coordinator or CONNECTION, P.O. Box 340003, Nashville, TN 37203-0003, 615-340-7134.

Don't overlook training opportunities right in *your own community*. Hospitals and other social service agencies frequently conduct workshops and seminars pertaining to youth ministry. Call these agencies and get on their mailing lists.

Take advantage of *events offered by other churches* in your area. Join with them to bring in professionals that your church might not be able to afford by itself. Capitalize on the event later by creating an interdenominational support group of employed and volunteer youth leaders in your community that meets on a regular basis.

If you are planning to do your own training of new adult youth leaders, consider the following:

1. Invite these persons to sit in on several sessions of UMYF or another ministry with which they will work. This will help them begin to know the youth and to become familiar with the format of the ministry.
2. Provide resource materials (to be used in training as well as in the ministry) well in advance, so that persons can become familiar with the resources and refer to them easily in the training event itself.
3. Explain the steps in planning (long-term, short-term, session, and special event).
4. Explain the work of the planning groups in the leadership model you are using and the adult worker's relationship to these groups.
5. Provide time for the new leaders to ask questions and to react to experiences.
6. Let the new leaders know who is available to support them as they learn this new job.

Resources

The Bible. The heart of youth ministry resources is the Bible. Biblical understanding confronts us with what it means to be God's people, provides guidelines for living responsibly in our world community, and is an essential resource for whatever we do through the church.

The United Methodist Youth Handbook. Discipleship Resources, Nashville, 1999. This handbook is written as a guide for youth ministry leaders, youth and adult, as they build and enhance the ministries of a United Methodist congregation. It is helpful for volunteers and professionals, laity and clergy. *The UMY Handbook* has an interactive appendix Web site at www.gbod.org/youth/UMY_appendix.html.

The Godbearing Life: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry. Upper Room Books, Nashville, 1998. This is a working theology of youth ministry for United Methodist youth leaders.

Foundations: Shaping the Ministry of Christian Education in Your Congregation. Discipleship Resources, Nashville, 1993. This is the educational philosophy and approach for educational ministries based on “Our Theological Task,” which appears in *The Book of Discipline*.

United Methodist curriculum resources. The United Methodist Publishing House develops and produces curriculum resources for congregations of various sizes. Consult *Forecast*, which is mailed to all United Methodist churches quarterly, call Curric-U-Phone at 1-800-251-8591, or e-mail curricuphone@umpublishing.org.

People in your congregation and community. Members of your congregation and community are rich resources that can strengthen your youth ministry. These persons have much to offer by way of experience and skills. Use them in your UMYF sessions, Sunday school lessons, small group studies, and so on. They can also be helpful advisors in fundraising, financial responsibility, resourcing, and leadership training.

Ordering Information and United Methodist Nonprint Resources
Office of Youth Ministries, General Board of Discipleship, P.O. Box 340003, Nashville, TN 37203-0003. Telephone 615-340-7200. E-mail umyouth@gbod.org, Web site: www.gbod.org/youth. www.umyouth.org is a “gateway” Web site offering links to denominational Web sites related to youth ministry.

Cokesbury bookstores. Cokesbury is the official book and supply store for The United Methodist Church. Stores in many cities in the United States offer a wide variety of religious books from most publishing companies and supplies for ministry. For the location of the store nearest you, call 1-800-672-1789. Or visit their Web site, with lessons available to download, at www.ileadyouth.com. Cokesbury Service Center, 1-800-672-1789; www.cokesbury.org.

Curric-U-Phone, 1-800-251-8591; e-mail: curricuphone@umpublishing.org. Offers consultation with a Christian educator about curriculum resources offered by The United Methodist Publishing House.

EcuFilm, 1-800-251-4091. EcuFilm offers an extensive catalog of ministry-related film/video resources for rent or purchase.

Discipleship Resources, Distribution Center, P.O. Box 6996, Alpharetta, GA 30239-6996. Telephone 1-800-685-4370. FAX (404) 442-5114. Web site www.discipleshipresources.org. Order official publications of the General Board of Discipleship for faith growth and leadership development.

General Board of Global Ministries Service Center, 7820 Reading Road, Caller # 1800, Cincinnati, OH 45222-1800. Telephone 513-761-2100. Offers official mission-oriented publications of the General Board of Global Ministries and United Methodist Women.

United Methodist Communications, P.O. Box 320, Nashville, TN 37202. Telephone 615-742-5400. UCom offers a variety of resources explaining the work of The United Methodist Church.

The Upper Room, P.O. Box 340004, Nashville, TN 37203-0004; www.upperroom.org. The Upper Room publishes devotional magazines and spiritual formation books. *Devo'Zine* is a devotional magazine written specifically for youth. A companion *Devo'Zine Guide for Mentors and Small Groups* is also available.

United Methodist Youth Organization (formerly National Youth Ministry Organization) or NYMO. Its biennial convocation gives youth across the country the opportunity to understand and influence the direction of The United Methodist Church. Administration of the Youth Service Fund (YSF) is one of its major responsibilities. YSF is the mission fund of United Methodist Youth. These funds are raised by youth to benefit youth. For information and resources, write United Methodist Youth Organization, P.O. Box 340003, Nashville, TN 37203-0003.

General Print United Methodist Resources

Safe Sanctuaries: Reducing the Risk of Child Abuse in the Church, by Joy Thornton Melton. Discipleship Resources, 1998. This book helps congregations develop policies to prevent child abuse and provide safe environments for children and youth in their ministries. Available from Cokesbury or Discipleship Resources.

The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2000. The United Methodist Publishing House. *The Book of Discipline* is our book of covenant for The United Methodist Church. Available from Cokesbury.

Guidelines for Leading Your Church: 2001–2004. Abingdon Press, 2000. Available from Cokesbury.

Job Descriptions and Leadership Development for Local Church Leaders. A set of sheets describing the positions of all local church officers. Contains a manual for leadership development that includes training designs. Available from Discipleship Resources.

The Interpreter. The official journal for United Methodist leaders. Issued eight times a year. Subscription rate, \$8.00 a year. Seven copies provided free to church officers selected by the pastor. Available from United Methodist Communications.

Forecast. An annual catalog of United Methodist curriculum resources and other helpful Christian education materials. Free; mailed quarterly to each local church. Additional free copies may be ordered from Cokesbury.

The Structure and Organization of The United Methodist Church is a brief but very helpful description of the United Methodist Church system. Available from United Methodist Communications.

Program Calendar shows special United Methodist dates and the Sunday lectionary passages as well as other helpful denominational information. Available from United Methodist Communications.

Devo'Zine. Upper Room. This is a devotional publication to help teenagers develop a lifetime pattern of prayer and spiritual reflection. Subscription available from Upper Room.

There may have been some changes in *Discipline* paragraph numbers or wording after this Guideline was printed. We regret any inconvenience.

Notes

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