



# Ministries with Young People

Engage and Empower Youth  
and Young Adults in Ministry



G U I D E L I N E S

# **Ministries with Young People**

**Engage and Empower Youth and Young Adults in Ministry**

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with thanks to past contributors  
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Discipleship Ministries

## MINISTRIES WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

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# “A Wreath for Your Excellent Leadership”

**T**hank you for assuming the important and awesome work of providing spiritual leadership to your congregation. The work of church leadership is shared and synergistic. Pastoral and laity leadership combine to provide the widest possible set of gifts, knowledge, abilities, skills, experience, and passions to fulfill our United Methodist mission to “make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world” (*The Book of Discipline*, ¶120). What you do as a gifted, spiritual leader is of vital importance.

Spiritual leadership differs from other forms of leadership in the foundational ways it allows us to live out the vows and promises we make when joining the church: to uphold The United Methodist Church through our prayers, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness.

The first work of all church leaders is to pray for the ministry of the church: local, denominational, and global. Our work is always worshipful work. Our ministry of presence strengthens our church’s ministry and mission. By combining our gifts, knowledge, experience, and passion we can achieve wonderful things together through the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit. Together, we strengthen our congregation for service to those within the community of faith and beyond. Accepting the mantle of leadership provides a powerful witness to the world of what it means to be a faithful disciple.

Together, we fulfill our mission of making disciples and transforming the world by reaching out and receiving people in the name of Jesus the Christ, relating people to God in covenant community, nurturing and strengthening people in their faith, and equipping and supporting people to live their faith in the world.

The *Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation* draw upon a wealth of experience and expertise to provide you with the basic resources you need to do effective, impactful ministry. Each Guideline focuses on a key area of ministry and church leadership, providing information and processes to help your working group—committee, council, board, or other configuration—excel and support all other working groups. See the accompanying Guide to the Guidelines for useful information on how the *Guidelines* and ministry areas work together.

We recommend that each group member read this Guideline and noted paragraphs from the *Discipline*. Take time at meetings to discuss ways to implement identified tasks and responsibilities, plan for the future, and assess and evaluate your work.

The apocryphal book of Sirach reminds leaders to be humble servant leaders, make sure the needs of others are cared for, and then receive “a wreath for your excellent leadership” (Sirach 32:2 NRSVue). We invite you to lead with humility, compassion, patience, and grace, that The United Methodist Church might be a witness to the light and love of Christ for all the world.

# Intentional Discipleship Systems

As we look out across our churches, the problem is not a lack of people, the problem is the church's inability to see and reach them. As leaders in the church our role is to find clarity in the who & what of discipleship, the how of discipleship formation, but most importantly, the why for being disciples and making disciples. This describes the work of intentional discipleship systems or pathways.

John Wesley said it best in *The Scripture Way of Salvation*: “There is a real, as well as relative, change. We are inwardly renewed by the power of God. We feel ‘the love of God shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us’ producing love to all humankind.”

This love for all humankind is what drives discipleship. A basic desire to love God, love neighbor, love self, and repeat. To go deeper and deeper into the love of God shed abroad in our hearts, and to offer what we have found to those that we meet.

How do we get back to a movement of a deep love for people that drives everything we do? How do we get back to seeing all the people that God calls us to reach?

The world, now more than ever, needs disciples of Jesus, growing in faith, growing closer to Christ, with a clear vision of the world and people as God sees them. Disciples who seek to use their God-given gifts to transform their communities and the world.

Early Methodists started a movement that was focused on growing as disciples, inviting others into a life following Jesus, and helping those in their communities that were hurting the most. At Discipleship Ministries, we believe that we need to get back to these basic understandings of church and discipleship, and back to a concern for improving systems that work for all God's children, moving us toward what God intends for all.

We invite you to explore the SeeAllThePeople suite of resources ([www.seeallthepeople.org](http://www.seeallthepeople.org)) designed to equip you and your church for intentional discipleship and community engagement. Although the forms and strategies change, the main goal of the church remains: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. It will always be about discipleship!

## A Ministry Model

Knowing and sharing your *WHY* of ministry with young people will naturally help a church leader build an intentional discipleship system (IDS). An IDS is a way to organize ministry ideas and strategies, the model upon which you base your ministry. Creating the framework of an intentional discipleship system names how a ministry can become structured in a purposeful and meaningful way. Once an intentional discipleship system is visioned and organized, planning and programming naturally evolve out of that structure.

Ideally, any program, curriculum, experience, or resource (whether written yourself or adapted from an existing material) is an outcome from the system you create. It might look something like this:

WHY → SYSTEM/MODEL → PROGRAM/EXPERIENCE/  
CURRICULUM/RESOURCE

Or, to further simplify:

WHY → HOW → WHAT

(Find more details about *why*, *how*, and *what* in the Getting Started sections.)

Too often, the programming (the *what* we offer) becomes the starting point for our plans. Time and energy become wasted in determining how we get people to come to this thing we created that we thought was necessary. Instead, remember to start with *why* your ministry exists in the first place, then you will build a system that is intentional in *how* it offers opportunities for discipleship. Once you know your *why* and your *how*, then you and your ministry partners can determine *what* programming, curriculum, or experiences are most appropriate for the young people in your ministry.

A model of ministry doesn't have to be complicated or cumbersome. See the Resources section at the end of this Guideline for ideas about how others have modeled ministry. Additionally, you can visit [SeeAllThePeople.org](http://SeeAllThePeople.org) for models of discipleship currently in use throughout The United Methodist Church.



# Called to Ministry with Young People

**Y**ou have been called to ministry with young people: those journeying from childhood through adolescence, emerging from their teenage years to find themselves navigating the unpredictable and full-of-firsts years of their 20s and 30s. This sacred and exciting leadership role comes with many challenges to be addressed, countless opportunities to touch lives, and infinite blessings that you may never anticipate!

Your ministry may be well-established or newly formed, flourishing or struggling, transforming lives or in ordinary time. Wherever you find yourself, your position calls you to work with others to offer vital and life-changing ministry. Your work may begin with young people already in your church and will certainly expand beyond the walls to their friends, the community, and an unlimited realm of possibility. Your work may also include starting from zero youth or young adults – or starting over, in a ministry setting where the presence of young people is not obvious.

We develop new leaders, encourage the growth of disciples of all ages, and form beloved communities through the core process for carrying out our mission as stated in ¶ 122 of *The Book of Discipline*:

- Proclaim the gospel, seek, welcome, and gather persons into the body of Christ;
- Lead persons to commit their lives to God through baptism by water and the spirit and profession of faith in Jesus Christ;
- Nurture persons in Christian living through worship, the sacraments, spiritual disciplines, and other means of grace, such as Wesley’s Christian conferencing;
- Send persons into the world to live lovingly and justly as servants of Christ by healing the sick, feeding the hungry, caring for the stranger, freeing the oppressed, being and becoming a compassionate, caring presence, and working to develop social structures that are consistent with the gospel; and
- Continue the mission of seeking, welcoming and gathering persons into the community of the body of Christ.

Why we offer opportunities in discipleship should be reasonably consistent across The United Methodist Church (¶ 120, *The Discipline*), even as each church community refines its own answer to the basic question of “Why do we disciple young people?” How we do each of those actions from the BOD will vary from congregation to congregation, based upon context. Remember, while each of our church’s methods, models, and systems can be different, we all create discipleship pathways as United Methodists living into our shared call to

participate in the kingdom of God. There is no magic way to create ministry with young people, and certainly no curriculum or approach can be a “one-size-fits-all” pathway for discipleship. Whether your church is smaller or larger, those five central tenets of disciple-making, taken from ¶122 can help shape a church’s approach to ministry with young people.

Your own experience, whether positive or negative, of growing up in a church has likely influenced your call to be involved in this ministry. Perhaps you were nourished in a church home and mentored by adults who helped shape you, and that stirs you to feel the importance of providing a similar environment for today’s young people. Or, if you count yourself among those whose early religious experiences were infrequent, unpleasant, or nonexistent, you feel called to facilitate a journey for others that is different from your own.

People of every age experience the love of Christ through relationships—with God and with others. This concept is the beating heart of our Christian identity, and the two Great Commandments serve as an appropriate starting point for your own call to lead ministry: Love God. Love neighbor. Your call as a leader is shaped by your own experience and understanding of God and will manifest itself in your ministry. Thank you for saying yes to deepening relationships with God and one another through Jesus Christ! (For deeper reflection, see “Biblical and Theological Foundation for Ministry with Young People” at [www.UMofficialresources.com/Guidelines](http://www.UMofficialresources.com/Guidelines).)

This Guideline covers an introduction to the ministry of a youth or young adult coordinator. Your church may describe this position differently, and each church will require duties according to the number of young people in the congregation, the size of the church, or other unique factors. How you live out your call to ministry will be shaped by your local congregation and its needs as well as the unique set of skills you bring to this position.

## Young People’s Ministry

Your role and the age range of people you will serve should be defined by your local church and its leadership, with guidance from *The Book of Discipline*. If you have paid youth/young adult staff, the church’s Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee will also be involved. The church’s dedication to ministry with young people is outlined in ¶256.3 of the *Discipline*:

The term *young people* is inclusive of all persons from approximately twelve through thirty years of age in the United States and thirty-five in the central conferences. The term encompasses both youth and young adult ministries and allows for age flexibility . . . in various cultures around the world. The term *youth ministry* is an inclusive title, encompassing all the concerns of the Church and all activities by, with, and for youth . . . [and] shall include all persons from approximately twelve through eighteen years of age . . . who are currently or potentially associated with the church or any of its activities. . . . The term *young-adult ministry* is an inclusive title, encompassing all the concerns of the Church and all activities by, with, and for young adults . . . [and] shall include all persons from approximately eighteen through thirty in the United States and twenty-four through thirty-five in the central conferences who are currently or potentially associated with the church or any of its activities.

While those definitions do provide specific age-ranges, especially on the upper-end of what it means to be a *youth* or *young adult*, those terms may also have different meanings in different cultures. Generally, in this Guideline, when we refer to *youth ministry*, we mean ministry that typically involves people from ages 12–18 years, depending on the configuration in the local school system or the local church’s Christian education structure. *Young adult* ministry, then, covers an even broader spectrum, generally from ages 18 to 30 or 35 years. These age ranges contain a wide variety of life stages. Young people can be students, working their first jobs, young professionals, single or married, with or without children, financially independent, or seeking direction.

The youth age ranges generally encompass the younger portion of Generation Z and the oldest members of Gen Alpha. The young adult age range includes older Gen Z and the youngest Millennials.

Your ministry ideally will support families as well, recognizing that most young people are connected with family members who care for them through adolescence and beyond. Many churches also use terms like “family ministry” to include ministry with young people in addition to other age ranges. Youth ministry requires effective communication with parents and guardians to help youth navigate relationships with parents, siblings, other family members, and caretakers. Consider guardians and parents your partners in ministry, as opposed to adversaries or competitors. Their support will make a difference in the discipleship system you create or manage and enhance a young person’s spiritual journey. Consider ways to meet family needs, such as parent classes, support groups and seminars, and connect with your church’s children’s ministry to provide care for younger siblings during events and to plan transitional activities. A growing area of ministry includes the preparation and equipping of parents and guardians for faith formation leadership within the family.

In young adult ministry, your umbrella of care may extend to the spouses of those in your group who are married; children of those who are parents; and perhaps the parents of young adults recently who are continuing their studies, working, or participating in service. Get to know the people who love the young adults you are called to serve.

## **Connectional System: You Are Not Alone**

Coordination of youth and young adult ministry at a higher level than the local church is prescribed in *The Book of Discipline*. Seek information and connections from the district, conference, jurisdictional, and general levels of The United Methodist Church to provide additional resources and opportunities for your ministry. Youth and young adults should be offered the opportunity to represent the local church at annual conference and General Conference and to apply for the design and planning teams for regional, national, and international events. These annual conference and jurisdictional organizations and leaders may provide help for you:

- The annual conference council on youth ministry (*Discipline*, ¶649.1) or conference council on young adult ministry (¶650.1)
- The district coordinators for young adult ministry (¶665)
- The district council on youth ministry (¶672)

- The jurisdictional young adult organization (§534)
- The jurisdictional youth ministry organization, guided by a young people's ministries coordinator (§533)
- Regional organizations dedicated to young people's ministries or local young people's ministries organizations

NOTE: At the time of writing this Guideline, the regionalization of The United Methodist Church may affect jurisdictional language related to organization. Refer to online articles and supplements for up-to-date information.

The Young People's Connectional Network (YPCN), administrated within Discipleship Ministries of The United Methodist Church, serves youth and young adults at a denominational (or general church) level (§1201). YPCN was created to connect young people and those in ministry with young people, to one another, to the church, and to God. This group advocates for the full participation of young people in the denomination. This group also provides a central resource for ministry with young people and strives to build global partnerships to empower young people as world-changing disciples of Jesus Christ. The YPCN is the successor organization to the Division on Ministries with Young People (DMYP), as well as older organizations like the United Methodist Youth Organization (UMYO) and others.

**Purpose of YPCN.** The Young People's Connectional Network will advocate for the full participation of young people in all levels of The United Methodist Church, build global partnerships, and empower young people to make world-changing disciples of Jesus Christ (§1202).

*Tasks: "Administrative Order" (§1203)*

1. To advocate for the varied concerns of all young people;
2. To assist in planning and carrying out a quadrennial global young people's gathering;
3. To provide administrative oversight of grants for ministries with young people distributed in consultation with the General Board of Church and Society, General Board of Discipleship, General Board of Global Ministries, and General Board of Higher Education and Ministry;
4. To promote grants for ministries with young people and the Youth Service Fund;
5. To recommend young people to nomination committees of general boards and agencies;
6. To collaborate with boards and agencies to provide young people with opportunities to listen, discern, and respond to their vocational call whether laity or clergy;
7. To encourage the participation of young people in denominational, ecumenical, and interreligious relationships and deliberations.

# Getting Started: Youth Ministry

## First Things First: Start with *Why*

Organizations that begin with *why* tend to be more successful than those that begin with a product or service. The same is true of youth ministry. You must know *why* you do the things you do in ministry. Knowing the *why* of your youth ministry will allow you to be intentional about each opportunity, program, or activity that you offer. After all, each of us is working with limited time, energy, and budgets. Before you commit to spend your time, skills, resources, or strength on any aspect of youth ministry, know the value and goal you are working toward. This will help your success in the long run.

As noted, the official *why* (mission statement) of The United Methodist Church is “to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.” That said, each congregation and ministry area should spend some time exploring its own *why* in its culture and context. Some questions to ask yourself as you begin to explore your *why*:

- In what ways can our youth ministry make a unique impact on our community?
- What are two or three things we want our students to know/experience before they complete schooling?
- For more detail, what do we want our young people to know/experience at age 12? Age 15? 18? 21? 24? 27? 30?
- Why do we want them to have that knowledge or experience?
- How will that knowledge or experience be useful for them as they mature as disciples of Jesus Christ?
- How will that knowledge or experience help them to transform the world?
- What is one thing that we want to be “known for” in our community?

Youth ministry in The United Methodist Church provides a framework for youth to grow spiritually and relationally while they are developing physically, mentally, and socially.

Once you begin to explore the purpose of your ministry, any structure or programming naturally grows from that purpose. When you do things on purpose, that is called *intentionality*. When you create opportunities to imitate Christ, that is called *discipleship*. When you plan a coordinated series of experiences, that is called a *system*. Understand and start with the *why* of your youth ministry. Then, on purpose, you can create experiences and opportunities for youth to become more Christlike. You can create an *intentional discipleship system*. That system will shape your planning and be the compass to guide your direction in ministry for youth and their families.

## Know Where You Come From

“You have to know the past to understand the present.” (Carl Sagan, *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*, Adrian Malone, producer [Arlington, VA: Public Broadcasting Service, 1980], episode 2: “One Voice in the Cosmic Fugue”)

Once you know the *why* of the ministry you lead, work to understand the history of ministry in your church context. This knowledge can help you create and implement your intentional discipleship system, it may also help you know why the current youth ministry looks or feels the way it does. Begin by gathering as much information as possible about the history, expectations, and plans (past, present, and future) of your church’s ministry with youth and young adults. Schedule some time each week to build relationships with current and former adult volunteers with youth, parents of youth, the youth themselves, and pastor/church staff. Learn about their past experiences and current hopes. Maximize these interactions by gathering a group of two or three to have a shared conversation. Once you know the history, the time you dedicate to these relationships can shift to discussions about future opportunities and the effectiveness of your discipleship system. This will also positively affect your outreach and evangelism efforts, because you will better know the culture you are inviting unfamiliar and newly connected young people, and their families, to be a part of.

If in a setting where there seem to be no youth or young adults in membership or active discipleship, this research may also help you uncover the history of your church’s efforts in ministry with young people. It may reveal underlying or inaccurate assumptions that your church may have about young people or what your church believes ministry with young people should look like.

Consider finding people who are not active in ministry with young people for feedback and opinions as well. Seek out people who align themselves with your church but who are not currently actively involved. Seek out people who have no affiliation with your church and ask them what they know about your church and its ministries. Connect with your community to discover the needs and find out where and how community members interact with young people. Where do the young people of your community spend their time when they are not at your church?

Not everyone with whom you speak will become a ministry partner. As you seek the insights of others—parents, adults working with youth, pastors, staff, lay leaders, the whole congregation, the young people themselves—you will identify potential partners in ministry. Everyone with whom you speak with provide lessons and opportunities to build relationships.

Some questions to ask others as you explore the past:

- What has been your personal experience of ministry with young people?
- What role has the youth minister, or youth coordinator, (or other equivalent staff title for any age range) played in the lives of youth historically in our church? For young adults?

- What are some things that are missing from the ministry with young people at our church?
- Has there been any loss or trauma within or related to the ministry with young people in our church?
- What are some things that have been successful in the past?
- What are some things that were not successful?
- How has our church measured and defined success in the past? Does that same measure of success still make sense?

Ask questions and seek answers. Listen to the experiences, successes, failures, hopes, and dreams of those with whom you talk. Listening and eventually understanding the makeup of their shared lives together is the cornerstone of relationships that will affect how successful your discipleship system can be. You as a leader are part of that shared life.

## **Move from *Why* to *How***

### **Your Setting**

When youth and young adults come through the doors of a church, what and whom they encounter determines whether or not they will want to return. For some, the bravest thing they may have done in life so far, is to cross the threshold of a church building. It can be intimidating. A warm welcome, a personal connection, a setting that feels comfortable and inviting, and a reason to make a second visit are critical to making a good first impression. Elevate your culture and space from “welcoming” to a place of “intentional hospitality and authenticity” so that people might have an experience where they feel the love of God and want to return. The set-up and furniture in the space speak into the culture of the youth ministry. For example, if a Ping-Pong table is the first thing students see when they walk into the space, will they assume that recreation is the most important component of your life together? What if they see a TV or a stage with instruments first? If students walk into a small-group room and every seat is taken, will they feel welcome? What if there is no dedicated space for young people? Are there inviting elements and usable spaces, or does it seem like everywhere is off-limits for gathering and socializing? Likewise, how might a ministry gathering look in public, without a dedicated space? How will young people know that they are invited to belong?

Take a critical look at your setting and ask these questions:

- Do our church’s atmosphere, architecture, worship styles, and culture beckon anyone under 40 to take a second glance?
- What is a student’s first impression when they walk into any room?
- What are some easy and inexpensive things to do to the space to make it more welcoming and representative of the culture of the group?
- If we regularly meet in a public space, how do we encourage belonging and focus? For instance, if meeting in a park, how will someone know that they have arrived?



For those who are unchurched, entering a church may feel like an alien and intimidating experience. Scripture repeatedly calls us to be hospitable (Lev 19:34; Titus 1:8; Heb 13:2). Consider ways that you and your ministry partners can connect with others outside your physical church building. You have youth and adults who serve as connectors between your ministry and the community. How can you prepare those connectors to carry their spirit of intentional hospitality with them, so that an unconnected youth, young adult, or family might have a chance to understand your *why* simply through interactions in community?

Consider organizing a *walk-through* with young people, trustees, and even unchurched connections or friends you have, moving through the spaces young people will experience ministry. Talk through the *feel* of the space, as well as practical solutions that communicate intentional welcome through the design and use of space. This can be done whether you have a church building, or not.

### **Parents and Youth Ministry**

We use *parents* and *guardians* interchangeably in this resource, as young people may live in a variety of situations that include extended families, adoptive parents, other guardianships, and so on. Research indicates that the most meaningful people in the spiritual development of adolescents are parents or guardians, not the youth minister, nor the church itself. You must partner with parents and guardians. Beyond being a “youth delivery person,” who makes sure that kids show up, guardians are crucial to the success of the youth ministry. Remember those adults who have these young people living at their home can be your biggest allies in spiritual development. Not all parents are going to volunteer, but all parents can support and nurture young people in their faith journey, especially when you offer clear and intentional support, as well as tools for faith development in the home. Consider guardians as you organize your intentional discipleship system; discover their *why* for the participation of their young people, and themselves, in any ministry of the church.

Consider having a parent meeting early in your process, and then regularly schedule parent meetings. Introduce yourself, talk about your goals and the *why* behind the culture and discipleship system you are working alongside God to create. Help guardians understand what, when, and why you are doing what you are doing in your ministry. Help them understand your planning and programs. Tell stories from meaningful experiences and share funny moments. This may equip parents to be your best advocates, sharing information in the community, and welcoming others on your behalf. Ask what they want or desire for their young people, how they will pay attention to the growth of their children, and help report it back with you and other church leaders.

Parents are your partners, not drones who don’t interact with the youth in your ministry. Recognize the potential of relationships with guardians, and it will transform your ministry with youth. Resource parents for faith conversations at home. Offer parent-specific programs. Equip parents to continue conversations at home that started in your ministry. Invite them to be co-creators in your discipleship system.



These dynamics for young adults can also apply to your connections with their guardians. Though the developmental needs are different, more and more young adults continue to live with guardians or roommates, with fewer ever living alone. Providing resourcing and story-sharing opportunities for home life can be powerful connectors between in-person gatherings. This dynamic also applies to young adults attending college, universities, trade schools, or the military, helping them to feel still connected to the faith community who launched them into their academic and skill-building lives.

Some questions to consider:

- How might we resource parents and guardians for faith conversations at home between in-person gatherings?
- What do parents need from the church?
- Does our current discipleship system unintentionally assume anything about living situations, economics, or family relationships that hinder a young person, and their guardians' ability to connect in a meaningful way with our ministry?
- How can we help strengthen parents' and students' relationships?
- What if a youth becomes part of our ministry, but their parents are not? How can we build relationships with them?
- How do we continue to connect and support young adults and their parents after the high school years?

## **Ministry Ideas and Strategies: The *What* of Your Ministry**

Age-level Ministry in each church, shaped by answers to the *why* question, will look and feel unique. As you begin to think about how you will organize gatherings and activities to create an intentional discipleship system, remind yourself of your *why*. Then consider these building blocks and *how* each might play a role in ministry with young people:

### **Worship**

For thousands of years, worship has served as a central experience for Christian connection. Consider how youth are included in the planning and leadership of churchwide worship services. Some questions to consider:

- How are young people involved in the worship service?
- How might youth ministry supplement and support the worship life of the church?
- How might worship become an important part of life together for families? How is worship intergenerational for us?
- Is there an opportunity or need for a youth-focused worship service at a different time? If so, how might that worship still connect with the whole worshipping body?
- How might we use the gifts of youth in a worship experience (music, drama, liturgy, ushering, preaching, and so on)?
- Does the schedule of worship and other opportunities for young people or their families cause schedule conflicts or forced choices? How do we communicate the value of the worship experience in those times that choices must be made?
- Are there preferences for online worship as compared to in-person? How do we

regularly monitor and ask about these preferences and adjust how young people can meaningfully engage?

## **Learning**

Traditional methods like Sunday school, youth group, or small groups continue to be meaningful learning in some contexts. In other contexts, innovative service-learning opportunities serve this function. Learning works together with worship to increase our understanding of the work of God in the world. Learning is more than study and lecture, it is the application of knowledge gained. Some questions to consider:

- How might we structure intentional times of learning into our discipleship system?
- If we use curriculum, is it age appropriate, engaging, and meaningful?
- Are the curriculum and resources we select consistent with the theology and vision of our church?
- What do youth want to learn about regarding faith? What do parents want youth to learn about regarding faith?
- What does the church want young people to learn about at various ages and stages during adolescent development and spiritual formation?
- How might we offer learning opportunities that meet different learning styles?

Many resources exist to aid in the educational enrichment of students. Your own learning as a leader is important so that you can select and adapt resources and curriculum that is consistent with Wesleyan theology and a United Methodist worldview. The United Methodist Publishing House (Cokesbury, Abingdon Press, etc.) offers resources written from that perspective, helping to ensure consistent theology throughout the church. You can be creative and adapt resources to fit your needs. If you find yourself liking the message of a particular resource, but are unsure about the theology of that resource, consider discussing that resource with a pastor, a parent, or other ministry partner. Christian education settings for young people should employ a variety of presentation styles and media, when appropriate. Consider the use of video clips or movie series, book studies, or topic-based discussions in addition to traditional models of Christian education. Use the gifts of your congregation for leadership, including students.

## **Community Building**

Fostering intentional connections with one another provides further opportunities for bonding and spiritual depth. As young people walk a discipleship pathway to spiritual maturity, they are also becoming physically and socially mature. Connected effectively with a community of faith, they can be transformed to live faithfully and cultivate Christian values. In your discipleship system, find an intentional balance of fun, fellowship activities, and learning experiences. Build in opportunities for reflection and testimony. Some questions to consider:

- How can our students continue to grow closer to one another through community-building activities?

- How might a balance of fun and learning work together to foster community?
- What about the culture of discipleship in our church should easily translate to building community among young people?

Consider regular, ongoing small-group meetings. These could be age- or gender-specific; they could be intergenerational as well. Remember, if you know your *why*, it will inform *how* these groups take shape and make the most sense. This small-group opportunity might be your whole group; the intentionality and regularity are important, not the total number of participants. Small groups function best when the group meets in a regularly established pattern. Community is built quickly with more frequent meetings, perhaps weekly instead of monthly. Consistency of leadership, time, and space are more important than any particular day or time frame. Leaders should be open to considering meeting times other than Sunday, if another day is a better fit for the group. If you are breaking down a larger group of youth, groups consisting of eight to twelve people are ideal for discussion and sharing. Such groups should include at least two identified leaders.

As technology and communication platforms continue to improve consider how informal ongoing conversations can also build community. In contexts where many have access to data and devices, groups can grow community through regular sharing and interaction. In contexts where great distances must be covered or meeting in-person regularly is impractical for any reason, the ability to regularly interact virtually can maintain and develop community. For some young people, this has even become the preferred method of interaction and developing friendships, with in-person meetings becoming an option after a connection has been established online.

An opportunity to check in with one another and share joys and concerns is vital. This echoes John Wesley's tradition within the Holy Club of asking, "How is it with your soul?" A group that listens to one another and prays together will develop deeper connections. Consider the introduction of Scripture in each setting as well. These are the elements that make the church different from other organizations in which our youth and young adults may be involved. We are not called to duplicate the calendar or culture of the neighborhood recreation center, schools, sports, or other social clubs. Instead, we offer Christian fellowship, education, and formation.

## Service

Service to others is a core tenet of our faith. Serving others allows young people to live out their faith and build community. Local one-time service engagements, fundraisers, ongoing opportunities, and out-of-town mission trips are valuable tools for helping youth invest in their faith and put their beliefs into action. Some questions to ask:

- Why does our ministry (and discipleship system) do missions or service projects?
- How do we understand the similarities and differences in the terms *mission* and *service*?
- How might mission engagement serve to teach youth about the work of God in the world?

- How might you engage in service projects that focus on relationships rather than service?
- How might mission opportunities serve to tell others about the work of Christ in the lives of students?
- How might mission engagements provide opportunities for students to invite others to the youth ministry program?
- Do our current missions or service projects cause any harm? Do we unintentionally create dependencies? Do we displace others from serving because of our size or approach?
- How do we prepare young people to serve others in diverse settings? Serving those who may not look like, sound like, or have the same economic opportunities as they do?

Local missions are a great way to educate students about the needs that surround them in their communities through partnerships. Partnering with another organization that works to meet a community need can ease the burden of planning and preparation. To engage in acts of service and build relationships with people in your community is to demonstrate that serving others is central to the life of a Christian. Take a courageous step and begin building relationships with an organization that addresses needs in your community and needs more people or resources to accomplish its goals. Ask youth, parents, and other partners what needs they see around them and how your ministry could organize to meet those needs.

Short-term mission trips can be an effective way to see the work of God in the world and provide paradigm-shifting opportunities. Incorporate educational components about the purpose and goals of your service. If you feel unequipped to talk about poverty, homelessness, education, lack of affordable housing, human trafficking, or other items on the long list of needs in this hurting world, bring in a partner or speaker with a history of meaningful relationships and effectiveness on the issue in preparation and for reflection before and after you serve. These experiences will help students understand why they travel from their homes to serve others. These trips can also be opportunities for different churches to partner together to create a larger group of participants and multiply the impact of their efforts.

Finally, it is crucial that mission experiences (especially those that expose young people to other cultures) be grounded in an understanding of hospitality. Understanding and appreciating the culture of the people served in mission promotes rewarding relationships and limits the dangers of patronizing, marginalizing, or colonizing those being served.

Consider this mantra: “Service WITH, not service TO.”

Your church can create its own mission experiences once you and other leaders feel comfortable doing so. Both Discipleship Ministries and the General Board of Global Ministries of The United Methodist Church have developed websites that feature many mission opportunities and planning resources, including youth-friendly organizations related to United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM). See the Resources section for contact information.

## Christian Practices and Disciplines

The mission (the why) of the church is, with God's help, to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. It follows, then, that the ultimate goal of our ministries together is to help young people develop a deep, sustainable relationship with God, to nurture the spiritual and human relationships in their lives, and to help them mature in their faith and character. That is part of developing a beloved community. Asking young people to engage in spiritual practices without any training is the equivalent of asking them to swim in the ocean with no swim lessons. It is your responsibility to understand why we participate in personal spiritual practices and to teach how to engage in spiritual practices.

Consider these questions:

- How can we incorporate spiritual practices, which can be replicated at home, in our intentional discipleship system?
- How can we teach spiritual practices and allow students to try them regularly?
- How can we maintain accountability without being judgmental?
- What spiritual practices come from our Methodist and Wesleyan heritage?
- What spiritual practices is our church naturally gifted and already great at? Are there spiritual practices our church seems to avoid? How does this affect our culture of discipleship?

Some ideas for spiritual practices that can be incorporated in our ministry life together include:

- read the Bible to hear, study, and meditate on the Scriptures;
- pray (explore different ways to pray)
- engage in personal devotion time (there are many resources available for teens)
- tithe, move toward donating at least 10 percent of resources
- Study the membership vows of the UMC (<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/our-membership-vows-in-the-united-methodist-church>). How could the membership vows link to daily practices? How are these actions incorporated or answered through confirmation?
- Explore the concept of Covenant Discipleship with young people (<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/growing-everyday-disciples-covenant-discipleship-with-youth-downloads> is a great place to start). The spiritual practices identified in this model of discipleship are specific and can be both personal and communal.

This is not an exhaustive list. Consider how you might develop additional spiritual practices to empower and equip students for a life of spiritual growth.

# Vital Leadership for Your Ministry

## Building a Team

Jesus modeled how ministry is most successful when it is shared. Do not do ministry alone! Jesus' ministry involved calling and equipping others. To create a thriving and successful ministry, spend time cultivating leaders of all ages throughout your ministry. Each team and its function within your discipleship system can look different based on your ministry context. Create a team that works for your context. Equipping and empowering others for ministry will foster a greater sense of connection, allow others to use their gifts, and build a broad base of leadership.

## Coordinator/Staff of Ministry with Young People

The process that led to your selection for this position and your early conversations with others in the church should help you understand what is expected in your role. It is important for you to be flexible, to practice the art of listening, and to establish personal boundaries based on the amount of time dedicated to the position, whether you are a volunteer or paid staff. As the appointed leader of this ministry area, it is vital to gain clarity in responsibilities and expectations from those to whom you report.

Regardless of the size of the church and your program, youth ministry demands will vary by season and depth of engagement. An updated and comprehensive job description will help in clarifying your role. Some of your responsibilities might include:

- make personal care a priority so that you are spiritually, physically, and emotionally equipped for ministry;
- recommend to the Church Council activities, program emphases, and systems that will create an environment to generate opportunities for young people to grow as disciples; support your church's intentional discipleship system;
- use available resources and means to inform young people about the Youth Service Fund (see details below) and cultivate its support;
- challenge young people to live into the membership vows of the UMC, including but not limited to how they give their prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness.

Within your church context, you and your team will:

- learn about, raise congregational awareness of, and work to address issues that young people in your community face.

- help others find their gifts in ministry and train them to be effective in their roles as Sunday school teachers, youth group leaders, parents, mentors, and so on.
- help church leaders understand the primary task of youth ministry.
- encourage inclusion of youth in congregational goals and decision making. Help youth be seen and heard beyond any designated “youth space.”
- support, guide the work of, and convene regularly a young people’s leadership team.
- help plan and carry out a varied and wide-ranging ministry with young people, appropriate for your context, which may include worship, study, fellowship, and service opportunities.
- make use of leader and spiritual development resources and participate in frequent and effective training experiences.
- act as a liaison with organizations, people, and resources within the church, denomination, and the community that relate to young people.
- organize parents and other congregants in age-level ministry to support activities such as meals, transportation, and fundraising.
- mentor young people and facilitate their development as they emerge to become leaders in the church, community, and world.
- coordinate faith education and curriculum; recruit and train teachers and leaders for Sunday school, Covenant Discipleship groups, and so on.
- keep accurate records of participation.
- manage any age-level ministry budget. If this is not a separate fund or account, advocate to establish designated accounts for young people within the larger church budget.
- lead or coordinate Safer Sanctuaries® efforts to ensure the safety of all participants in ministry experiences.
- serve on other appropriate church committees as needed and encourage the addition of a young member on the church council, local church leadership groups, annual conference, or elsewhere. Local churches need to keep young people’s school schedules in mind to enable their participation in meetings.

This list might seem overwhelming. Please remember that your specific duties and responsibilities will be shaped by your Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee and the senior pastor. Responsibilities should also be available to you and church leadership in a job description and other documents on file. A job or position description should match expectations for responsibility with reasonable estimates of the time required to meet those expectations. In short, if a position is listed as “20 hours per week,” include time to plan, organize, and follow up for each item, not simply the time to be present for each item. Beware of creating unrealistic expectations related to time commitments.

## **The Leadership Team**

We are called to identify, equip, train, and deploy the next generation of Christian leaders. The exact role for the Young People’s Leadership Team at your church will depend on

your students and their gifts, but most leadership teams should incorporate elements of both creating and implementing plans. Reach beyond allowing young people to create the calendar of youth events. Encourage them to be load-bearing members of your church; and equip them to plan and reflect on their ability to work as team members. Leadership skills are like a muscle; they get stronger only when they are used. Some ideas for youth and young adult leadership include: worship leadership, mission trip devotionals, smaller group facilitation, lesson leading, and Youth Service Fund fundraising. Regardless of your leadership team structure, include time for creative planning and effective evaluation.

## Youth Service Fund

The Youth Service Fund (YSF) is part of Young People's Ministries (*Discipline*, ¶¶ 649.3.i, 1207), and it gives youth the opportunity to give money and time to projects that they design, lead, and implement. Funding for YSF is collected and raised at the local church level and sent to the annual conference treasurer, with 70 percent remaining in local communities through the annual conferences. The remainder is distributed by the Young People's Connectional Network (YPCN) to fund youth-designed and youth-led projects around the world, selected by a project review committee. The YPCN also provides resource promotion and interpretation. An ongoing goal is to increase involvement in contributing to YSF to include annual conferences from around the world in addition to those from the United States.

Any youth organization may apply for YSF funding through the online application portal each year for project selection for the next calendar year. Project categories, designed to serve those in need, include "Community Outreach and Development," "Leadership Development," "Justice Work Related to Young People," "Evangelism," "Intentional Discipleship Systems or Disciple-Making," "Engaging Those Currently Outside the Church," "Contextual Resourcing," and "Anti-Racism Efforts or Anti-Racist Discipleship," <https://www.umcyoungpeople.org/global-youth-service-fund>.

## Advisory Council

Using your partners in ministry, consider forming an advisory team of people who can help you navigate the first year or two in your position. They can offer advice and guidance, help review resources, and screen volunteers. No matter the size of your church, a team-based youth ministry will better serve your ministry. Membership on the advisory council should include both young people and adults.

The advisory council can be responsible for:

- evaluation of ministry programming, considering growth, depth, and vitality;
- coordination and scheduling of all events;
- finding and evaluating curriculum;
- publicity and dissemination of information for ministry activities;
- representation on the larger Church Council;
- implementation of special youth-led events and projects for the congregation;
- supervision of designated ongoing activities;



- cooperation with the Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development to designate young people's representation for various church boards and committees.

Consider the following possibilities based on the number of participants: You may regularly call together all young people and their leaders. A smaller church can function as a single unit to plan for, implement, and evaluate all aspects of ministry when properly equipped. A larger church may function better with a Ministry Advisory Council for Young People interacting with other councils from different ministry areas of the church. You, as the coordinator, get to determine how you invite others into a team-based model of leadership. You can create opportunities to lead for the course of a year, or longer. You can also rotate or share responsibilities among members of the council. As you more fully establish your ministry, consider having a team of a predetermined size and establish procedures for nominating, appointing, or electing team members, and designating leadership within the team.

## **Pastor/Church Staff Support**

Church staff can support you and your ministry. Ask for their guidance and suggestions and keep them informed of your plans and events. They can communicate the importance of young people's ministry to the congregation, be advocates on behalf of your ministry, support emerging youth and young adult leaders, and participate, as available, in various classes or events. Youth and young adults will likely respond well to the opportunity for increased access to a pastor or other church leader whether in person or online.

Across the congregation, the pastor, staff, and other leaders may support and assist in your ministry to young people in other ways:

- Pastoral care by trained, experienced church staff can be very helpful in counseling youth and young adults and helping them develop their own skills as peer counselors.
- Worship leaders can encourage participation by youth and young adults as musicians, lay readers, liturgists, ushers, sound technicians, etc.
- Short-term studies with staff and lay Christian education leaders can offer youth and young adults new topics of exploration on their faith journey and build a culture of call within a congregation.
- Appointment to various committees can be encouraged for youth and young adults by the pastor as chairperson of the Committee on Nominations and Leadership Development.

## **Confirmation**

Confirmation is an intentional time of transition from a childhood faith toward a faith that young people can claim as their own. There are many resources available that will help shape and guide confirmation at your church. In some congregations, the youth minister/coordinator is responsible for confirmation. In some congregations, this responsibility remains with a pastor. Confirmation should include opportunities to explore Scripture, the

history of the Christian faith, the history of The United Methodist Church, the story of your congregation, as well as discipleship and spiritual practices.

In addition to these components, confirmation can be an excellent opportunity for leadership development with youth. Regardless of the format and length of the confirmation experience in your congregation, integration of leadership ideas and opportunities should be considered. Research the best confirmation materials for your context and invest time to add items that are important for the culture of discipleship at your church. The United Methodist Publishing House as well as several other publishers have materials consistent with United Methodist theology.

At the completion of confirmation, young people are given the opportunity to become professing members of The United Methodist Church. Depending on what the process to join your church looks like, this could be a time rich with opportunity to discuss what it means to be a member of your church. Encourage adults to take their next steps in commitment and help young people become fully engaged members of your church body. Confirmation is a young person's chance to respond to the baptismal vows that were given on his or her behalf or to take those vows, essentially graduating into the full life of the church. This also means you have the opportunity to prepare the rest of the church to recognize confirmands as full members of the church and to provide opportunities for them to grow in leadership and have their voices heard in the councils and leadership teams that plan for the life of the church.

In churches that have not done confirmation for a period of time, who have alternative pathways to become a professing member, or other membership classes, the lessons that can be found in confirmation materials can still be meaningful. Research shows that many adult members of the church maintain around a 7th-8th-grade level of theological understanding. Confirmation materials can be used for any age to explore God's story and build relationships. Perhaps there are intergenerational learning opportunities to be had by offering nontraditional approaches to confirmation.

## **Online & Virtual Engagement**

Access to data services, portable devices, and applications that allow for communication, media sharing, and interaction continues to expand at a rapid pace. Worldwide in 2022, people spent on average 6 hours and 58 minutes per day on internet-connected screens (<https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-global-overview-report>). Young people often beat those averages, with today's teenagers averaging upwards of 9 hours per day (<https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2020/07/28/childrens-engagement-with-digital-devices-screen-time>), and children now grow up in more settings with digital devices and artificial intelligence woven into their daily lives. Ministry leaders, whether it comes naturally to them or not, have the responsibility to be aware of and engage in the opportunities that online communication allows.

Community can be built and decisions made using online platforms. Consider setting policies and procedures for leadership teams to set agendas, schedule meetings, and hold votes online. If your church has struggled with multigenerational leadership, the

opportunity to host meetings online using video conferencing services can increase the possibility of creating meeting times that allow young professionals, parents of younger children, college students, and youth to more easily attend and engage. Shared drives and files allow secure access to agendas and other items for decision-making. Voting mechanisms using tools like Google Forms or even email replies can allow for debate and equitable access to finalizing plans.

There are economic and cultural limitations in terms of data and device access, so be aware of those factors in your ministry context. If device or high-speed data access are issues facing your community, consider how your church might help to meet those needs in the community and provide greater access to the ministries that you organize. Perhaps your facility could even be set up as an *internet café*. If your building has reliable and fast internet access, create a guest network, and consider setting open hours and creating hospitality hours for students who need access to complete their schoolwork or even receive tutoring or mentoring as a method of community outreach and relationship building.

If your church is only using social media to push out announcements, your leadership is not harnessing the full capabilities of online community building. In fact, there are faith communities that are purely online. Larger and larger percentages of young people prefer making connections and having conversations online that then translate into in-person connections and relationships. Conversations and relationships begin online and are integrated into the real life of individuals and churches alike. In many ways, the dynamics of a beloved community can be replicated online as easily as they are in person. That said, it does still take intentionality by leadership to ensure that the culture of discipleship so important to the vitality of a church stays consistent whether interactions are online or in person. Small groups can flourish because of the ease of communication between in-person sit downs. Worship and other church events can be livestreamed and engage live with commentary. Church records can be digitized and organized and more easily shared than ever before. AI and translation software allow your church to connect to an ever more diverse community, and this is a good thing.

Online and virtual connection opportunities will continue to increase, as will the diversity of applications, platforms, and devices used to engage. As a leader, build up your skills and willingness to engage online. Ministry, with young people especially, will require intentionality virtually and in person. If you do not feel naturally gifted or skilled in virtual arenas, invite other leaders who enjoy those settings to bear responsibilities for how your beloved community interacts together online. Attend trainings and use services from Discipleship Ministries or United Methodist Communications to improve your church's online capabilities.

As online and virtual access and platforms evolve quickly, it is difficult to create guidelines that will last for the span of four years. Therefore, we encourage ministry leaders to use a combination of the following questions so that approaches to online communication and engagement can evolve along with technology and popular apps:

- How do these technologies align with our church's mission and values?
- How do these tools help us to build genuine community through engagement, in

addition to growth and outreach? Likewise, how do these tools reinforce connections and relationships so that virtual interactions complement rather than replace in-person community?

- How can we ensure that the online technologies we use are accessible for all members of our congregation, including those with limited technical skills or access? Do we provide any training or support?
- How do we account for privacy and security needs in the tools we use? How do we include guidelines for transparency that are consistent with abuse prevention policies?
- How do we maintain standards related to our culture of discipleship and theological integrity between in-person and virtual platforms?
- How do we determine what is appropriate in terms of decision-making, vote-taking, etc., when leadership teams meet online?
- How will we measure engagement and define success in virtual spaces?
- How do we envision the role of technology in our long-term strategy? How do we prepare to adapt as our congregation's needs and digital tools and environments evolve?
- How do different age-ranges in our church use technology differently? What expectations do they have? How and where are those connected with our church engaging online in addition to through what we offer?

For deeper reading, see <https://store.umcdiscipleship.org/product/online-discipleship/>.

# Getting Started: Young Adult Ministry

A leader of young adult ministry often faces an initial task of discovery. Who are the young adults in the congregation? Are they in college, post-college, employed, seeking work, married, single, divorced, parents, or childless? Do they work on Sundays, so that time for church activities is not on a traditional schedule? Are there young adults living in our community, either with their parents or independently? This fluid population will require ministry to be flexible and responsive to the world of “firsts” this age group is facing: first job, first marriage, first child, first home. Young adult ministry can be an anchor in a sea of movement during life transitions.

## The Importance (*Why*) of Young Adult Ministry

Ministry with young adults is a critical area of engagement. An ever-increasing percentage of young adults do not have church homes or active faith lives that relate to a church. Those who have grown up in a youth ministry sense that they have *graduated out* instead of *graduated into* church life. Young adults may be single, married, divorced, partnered, working, studying, parenting, or some combination. Their stage in life doesn’t fit in a prescribed set of criteria, making the establishment of effective ministry particularly challenging.

In a vital congregation, ministry, mission, and worship opportunities that nurture, involve, and maintain a healthy young adult population will be priorities. This area of ministry may also call you and other leaders out into the community. For some young adults who have left church behind, or who have never been involved with a church, it is imperative to meet them where they are rather than demand that they enter your church to engage in discipleship. The value you initially create with young adults will be based in relationships, not in institution or tradition.

## Partners and Sources of Critical Information (*How*)

Just as in ministry with youth, engaging in young adult ministry with intentionality and purpose is essential. If you are beginning a new ministry, you are not alone. As you begin, consider these sources of critical information and consult with others committed to, or experienced with, young adult ministry.

- Define the parameters of what young adult ministry means in your context. Engagement with people younger than your average church member? Those up to the disciplinary ages of 30 or 35 years of age?

- As previously noted near the front matter of this Guideline, determine the *why* of your young adult ministry. Create language and opportunities that are consistent with that *why* and the theological expression of your church. Make no assumptions about the life stages or maturity of young adults. Often, traditional markers of adulthood are now obtained nonsequentially. Also, culture may have significant say in when a person is considered an adult, versus a youth or young adult, particularly in cultures where extended family and elders occupy significant roles.
- Seek the insights of others. Your contacts should include the pastor, staff, and laity leaders in your congregation to help you locate and get to know young adults who may already be engaged in ministry in some way. How are they being spiritually fed? How are they feeding others? Are some currently involved in the music ministry, Bible studies, church sports teams, service or outreach opportunities, or in teaching children?
- Develop relationships with young adults. Meet individuals and small groups for refreshments or meals, figure out low pressure social connections, find recreation. Discover where young adults in your community spend their time. Find out what they are looking for in a church home, where their interests lie, and how they spend their free time. This will help you build a ministry that meets their needs and taps their gifts. Are they commuting to work? Are they living with parents? Busyness and loneliness are significant factors in this age group, as they find themselves for the first time outside of required educational settings, not necessarily surrounded by peers. Listen to their needs and create meaningful space for them to express and share their gifts and further their own discipleship.
- Learn about the diverse and technological aspects that shape the lived experience of today's young adults. Odds are that they are experiencing a wider variety of people, living situations, economics, challenges, and technology than you did at their age. Research is also showing a greater tendency for polarization of beliefs, opinions, and attitudes among young adults. For example, research shows that Gen Z men are trending to be more politically conservative, while Gen Z women are trending to be more politically liberal. Gen Z are also more likely to match their economic behavior with companies and institutions who match their personal belief systems.
- Prepare yourself for honest conversations and difficult questions. While many ministries require safe spaces, young adult ministry benefits from the creation of brave spaces—groups where honesty is valued, questions can be asked, actions can be taken, and issues can be addressed so that individuals can discover their identity in Christ. Also prepare yourself to not be the first stop for young adults seeking advice. The odds are they have researched and asked questions online or of other trusted mentors before bringing up a topic with you.
- Converse with leaders of other young adult ministries. Check out community resources such as recreation centers, libraries, coffeehouses, etc., to see what is being offered and who is attending. You may uncover potential partnership situations for meeting space as well as leadership and ministry ideas. Virtual spaces can

also be a benefit in young adult ministry, as plenty of screen time and online conversation are the norm.

- Do generational research. Today's young adults are younger Millennials and Generation Z, born between 1980 and the early 2000s. Significant research has identified *microgenerations* within this broad age range, often defined by moments of cultural significance and technological leaps forward, which tend to occur with greater regularity than in previous generations. Together, these two generations make up nearly half the global population. Your local government may have a census on the percentage of your local population made up of young adults. They are generally savvy in the use of technology, comfortable with multitasking, and less religiously affiliated than the two preceding generations, Gen X and Baby Boomers. Research Groups like the Pew Research Center, Barna Group, YPulse, the Lilly Foundation, and Fuller Seminary have established ongoing research within this age range. Explore their online findings and ask young adults in your area if they seem to match those research findings, or if they would challenge it.
- Create opportunities for engagement and expression. Young adults are generally thoughtful about their own spirituality and may be experiencing a call to action for the first time, they may have the adult agency to act on their calling. Expose them to meaningful opportunities, clearly share your *why*, and be an example of Christian life. Remember, some may never set foot in your church building, so how can you engage and connect them with your whole church?

Millennials and Generation Z entered young adulthood during the emergence and spread of terrorism, both foreign and domestic, the proliferation of mass violence, the age of social networking and rapid technological evolution including Artificial Intelligence, and the rise of divisive rhetoric, relative truth/alternative facts, and extremism. Some view faith as unnecessary in an uncertain world. Information can seem overwhelming; a fear of missing out is always present, and filters to help determine what is “real” or “true” seem difficult to find or use. In constant technological connectedness, some report feeling an increased sense of isolation and loneliness. Time, money, and energy are limited resources for many young adults, so they will give those over only to things that they value or that create value for others. There is a significant mix of optimism and pessimism among young adults, and there are activists seeking to leverage their influence for social change.

### **Coordinator/Staff of Young Adult Ministry**

Your church may have established the goal of nurturing and growing an existing young adult program, or you may be starting from scratch. Your job will be to determine the scope of your young adult population; to learn about their life situations, plans, and dreams; and to develop activities and create experiences that fit their ever-changing needs. Your own experiences with school, employment, and family will provide valuable insights as you become a guide and mentor to maturing young adults.

## Responsibilities

*The Book of Discipline* sets the upward age of young adults as thirty in the United States and thirty-five regionally, but your responsibilities may encompass a broader age range, depending on the membership of the congregation and the needs of your church and community. *The Discipline* focuses on the younger end of the age range in its recommended ministries, particularly in its attention to college-age young adults, by recommending ministries that relate them to on-campus ministries (see ¶256.3d). It further suggests connection with United Methodist Women (doing business as United Women in Faith) (¶256.5) and United Methodist Men (¶256.6) and other *program* ministries (¶256.1a–d).

These other ministry areas to which you may guide young adults or with whom you may partner include but are not limited to:

- the church school and education, including classes and small groups that meet during the week and/or away from the church;
- accountable discipleship groups (including Covenant Discipleship groups), either as participants or leaders, that focus on the personal faith journey that extends into acts of compassion, justice, worship, and devotion under the guidance of the Holy Spirit;
- mission and ministry groups, both domestic and foreign; community outreach opportunities;
- support groups, such as care and prayer groups; divorce recovery; parenting groups; and support for people who are suffering from chronic illness (including mental illness) and their families.
- Music ministries, including worship or other opportunities to engage in performing arts, including community performances

## The Young Adult Leadership Team

A Young Adult Leadership Team could include the coordinator/staff of the ministry; a pastor or staff member; lay or volunteer leaders; and young adult representatives for all the demographics and ministry areas served by your young adult ministry, such as recreation, study, fellowship, singles, married, or parents. Remember, this team should be based on your *why* of ministry.

From your contacts, develop a team or task force that can help you establish goals for your ministry. By including young adults from the wide variety of demographics listed above, you can determine an initial path for spiritual, social, and recreational goals for those in their twenties and thirties. Consider a broad range of offerings, from introductory, low-risk dinners, game nights, or trivia contests to in-depth gatherings such as theme-based Bible, book, or video studies based on specific topics or areas of interest. Additional leadership for events and groups can come from within your expanding list of young adult contacts. One of the challenges noted by many leaders in the US, is the lack of young adults to begin with. Giving the energy to meet young adults where they are is an important starting place. So is the ability to actively listen to the kinds of experiences that would be meaningful



for them and what kind of church they are interested in being a part of. Perhaps in this listening, you will notice patterns that may be best met through partnering with other churches in a shared ministry model.

#### *Determine the Need for a Young Adult Leadership Team*

*The Book of Discipline* does not mandate a young adult leadership team in the local church. The coordinator/staff of this ministry should evaluate, along with staff members and lay leaders, the need and configuration. Depending on the demographics and size of the population you are serving, young adult ministry could operate separately or as an arm of adult or family ministries. Consider the following possibilities as you evaluate your unique situation.

- Evaluate the scope of current and future plans and assessed needs. Which ministry area in your church structure is the best fit for young adult ministry? How and where are young adults considered as maturing disciples and can receive attention? How does the youth ministry help graduate maturing disciples into this age range?
- Recruit people in whom you have seen gifts in this area; allow them to sign up if they are passionate about this ministry. How can you be intentional about invitations to leaders who will make things happen?
- Discern with a group of young adults and other stakeholders the work to be done and pray for God's guidance in the process.

If you do not need a formal young adult leadership team, it is still wise to have a ministry team of at least three or four others with whom you can plan, share dreams and ideas, prepare for leadership, and divide responsibilities.

NOTE: For additional approaches to the *What* of young adult ministry, adapt the Ministry Ideas and Strategies from page 16–21.

# Leaders in Age-Level Ministry

**W**hether your ministry is with youth or young adults, choosing, developing, and training leaders will be a top priority on your list of responsibilities.

Leaders model a Christian lifestyle, can offer advice and guidance without judgment, and genuinely enjoy the company of the youth and young adults. They need not fit any age profile (except as described in Safer Sanctuaries® for reasons of safety and prudence). A variety of leaders in age, marital status, family structure, career, and background offers a broad spectrum of experiences to be shared.

Good leaders possess recognizable qualities. Ask the youth or young adults in your ministry whom they know who fits the leadership profile you develop together. Parents and guardians will naturally be suggested. Consider connecting parents/guardians as leaders in a parallel setting rather than with their own teens, or consider asking the youth or young adult if it is all right with them to have their parents serve in the ministry activities they attend. Leading youth often involves the need for more adult leadership and presence, though young adult ministries also benefit from the mentoring and organization that other adults can provide. See “Toolbox for Leaders” at [www.UMofficialresources.com/Guidelines](http://www.UMofficialresources.com/Guidelines) for an in-depth look at the skills and tools useful to leaders in every ministry area.

## Realistic Job Descriptions

An effective tool in identifying and recruiting volunteers is a detailed and specific job description for each of the areas of ministry that needs a volunteer. Rather than a general “come and be with young people,” recruiting volunteers into specific roles and functions in the ministry area will benefit you and the volunteer. Clear guidance regarding expectations is essential. At the very least, any teacher or other person working with your youth and young adults should have a clear conversation about expectations. Consider these points:

- The leader’s role should be clearly explained with time required for preparation, the time span of the commitment (beginning and ending), and defined expectations.
- Teams of leaders should be assigned based on compatibility, availability, and experience. Pairing a veteran with a newcomer may be the way to bring up less confident volunteers.
- Human and material resources should be readily available, training opportunities outlined, and completion of regular training expected and required.
- Peripheral, or related, expectations should be clearly outlined, such as attendance at committee meetings or other outside events.
- Financial or other potential ramifications, such as the need to purchase supplies, should be made clear.

- While it might be assumed, you can also present the personal and spiritual characteristics you desire in any volunteer. If part of the role is helping others in faith formation, you want your leaders to be mature in their faith as well.
- Create opportunities for feedback and relationship building with volunteers. When providing feedback, try to note at least two positive aspects of their leadership for every negative or “growth opportunity” type feedback.

## Well-Trained Leaders

After the recruitment phase of connecting with leaders and volunteers has been completed, begin training and equipping them for ministry with young people. Encourage leaders to remain open to new ideas and to listen to the thoughts of the young people they serve. This will encourage their growth, in addition to the regularly planned training that you can create. When you are planning a training event for volunteers, keep these tips in mind:

- Talk often about your *why*. Give volunteers the chance to “see under the hood” or “look behind the curtain,” so they can understand your larger goals in ministry. This can help them understand how their piece of ministry responsibility fits into the whole puzzle.
- Define the structure of your ministry, including a leadership team, and how volunteers relate to this structure. Keep this structure obvious and transparent, so that others can easily identify your team.
- Offer broad ideas of training and specifics for the ministry area in which volunteers are involved. Share these trainings across all age-level ministries to lighten the burden of planning, increase the efficiency of resources, and cross-train a larger portion of all leaders.
- Provide resource materials for training and for ministry well in advance, allowing leaders to become comfortable with curriculum and lesson plans. Acquaint new leaders and teachers with different learning styles in your training methods. Create an accessible bank of training resources for folks to refer back to any time they need.
- Include regular Safer Sanctuaries® reminders to ensure that the students and leaders act in ways consistent with safety and limiting the risk of abuse.
- Demonstrate what a leader looks like in the different roles of your team. Invite them to a session where you will be acting as the leader in the role that you hope to recruit them for. Offer chances to substitute, or do a short-term trial run for a role. Meet afterward to help process the experience of leading.
- Partner a veteran leader with new volunteers to introduce them to participants in the ministry and to help the new volunteers become familiar with the format used for any gathering.
- Provide time for new leaders to ask questions and to interact with one another.
- Give leaders a support network on which to rely as they become comfortable in their new roles. Help them build relationships with one another as well as with you.

Consider these possibilities to provide insight for and guidance of your ministry’s adult leaders that are available outside your local congregation:

- Training events led by district and conference coordinators or staff. These folks may have a schedule of upcoming training events, be able to plan an event to meet your special needs, provide training at your church, or recommend other qualified professionals to do so. Often, these trainings can be virtual as well, increasing the ease of attending.
- Discipleship Ministries offers onsite and online training opportunities. Contact your conference youth coordinator or Young People's Ministries at Discipleship Ministries (see Resources).
- Community opportunities for education and training may be offered by hospitals, school systems, mental health networks, law enforcement agencies, social service offices, and other government units. Such workshops and seminars often pertain to youth and young adult ministry and may be free or low-cost.
- Collaboration with other churches may allow you to bring in professional speakers or other guests that you might not otherwise be able to afford.
- An interdenominational network can help make you aware of community events about teen suicide, addiction, family conflict, or other pertinent topics.

## Safety in Ministry

Every annual conference has established the requirement for churches to have Safer Sanctuaries® policies in place for the protection of the vulnerable, including but not limited to children, youth, and vulnerable adults. *Safer Sanctuaries: Nurturing Trust within Faith Communities* (The Upper Room, 2023) was built upon the foundation of the original Safe Sanctuaries® to assist churches in safety issues related to physical, emotional, or sexual abuse and the protection of leaders who work with the vulnerable. Safer Sanctuaries® as a resource is designed to set the minimum standard of risk reduction and help a local church develop its own protection policy that will complement the policy in place at the conference level. This resource is written by multiple authors and contains a wealth of real-world scenarios and practical information. There are online platforms and providers that help local churches reach beyond a basic understanding of abuse prevention. Safe Gatherings, Ministry Safe, and others offer various degrees of online training and background-check capabilities to ease the burden of offering training and processing paperwork related to volunteers and staff.

### Safer Sanctuaries®

Safer Sanctuaries® is important for churches as a whole and for youth and children's ministries in particular. This resource helps protect youth and children from abuse. It also helps adult leaders and volunteers from being placed in situations where they could be accused of abuse that did not occur. Safeguard your ministry by instituting Safer Sanctuaries® guidelines. The following suggestions should be considered minimum expectations. You are encouraged to help your church reach beyond these minimums. Paragraph 256.1 of the *Discipline* says that local churches and charges "are strongly encouraged to develop policies and procedures to provide for the safety of the infants, children, youth, and vulnerable

adults entrusted to their care.” Work with clergy and Trustees if changes need to be made to your church’s existing policy. The provisions here are addressed to youth ministry, but common sense and prudence should prevail for every age group.

- Adults applying to work with youth must complete a volunteer information packet and a background check, which is submitted annually through the state bureau of investigation. (Some churches have modified this to do a background check every one to three years, with 24 months being an expectation.)
- Two unrelated adults must be present with any group of youth; never just one adult present and never one adult alone with a youth. This can be a challenge in smaller churches, so creative solutions may need to be employed.
- Adults must be at least 18 years old and at least five years older than the oldest youth present. This does mean that older youth can serve an adult function with children who are at least five years younger than they are, although they should always be paired with another adult. Likewise, young adults should be at least five years older than any youth they are responsible for.
- Youth and adults never sleep in the same bed and preferably not in the same room on overnight events. If youth and adults must be in the same room (camp or dormitory style), they must have separate beds and have more than one adult in the room overnight.
- One-on-one meetings should occur only in rooms with uncovered windows and open blinds and open doors, or in highly public places. If one-on-ones occur in the church, inform another staff or volunteers of the session, including the anticipated start and ending times.
- All meeting room doors must contain windows.
- Leaders are required to attend annual training about abuse and Safer Sanctuaries®; leaders are to sign a form stating that they have been trained and that they understand the issues involved. Volunteers are to be informed about local laws on the mandatory reporting of abuse. This training may take place online, in partnership with other churches, or specifically within your ministry.
- Physical safety should be a priority. Provide adequate adult supervision of all activities, professional safety training, and a well-stocked first-aid kit available at all times for bumps and bruises. Do not provide medication, even over-the-counter items, unless you have medical release forms signed by parents or other responsible parties granting that permission. Even then, consult with your conference or other counsel about relevant local laws on providing medication.
- Draft a medical permission form to be used for all events; include contact information, medical history, medications, and allergies. Include insurance information if it is available and research your state’s requirements; some prefer this form to be notarized. Consider a different color form for youth and adults; check with your church’s legal counsel about the possibility of a notarized form being kept on file to avoid the paperwork of a new form for each event.

- Mandate motor vehicle background checks for any adult driving youth. Require the use of one seatbelt per person in any vehicle being driven for a church activity. Advocate for well-maintained, safe church buses and vehicles. Consider creating a policy for when your responsibility begins and ends for a youth attending a gathering. If a young person is using a ride-sharing service or other transportation to and from your gathering, have a process for informing parents of their arrival and departure.
- Consult the Board of Trustees or executive director of church administration to become familiar with your church's insurance, making sure it is adequate for the scope of youth and young adult activities.
- Explore needed expectations for online interactions and communication when not in person. Cyber-bullying, linking to inappropriate media, or inappropriate media sharing can also be covered within expectations and policy.

### **Seek Additional Help**

Safer Sanctuaries® policies cover issues of abuse prevention, but other situations arise related to the safety and well-being of young people. Be cautious when confronted with issues beyond the scope of your skill and experience. Many problems facing young people require professional help, and you are not expected to fix or offer professional level counseling for anyone. Establish a network of recommended experts in the mental health field, including counselors who work with youth and young adults; clergy and other church staff; school counselors; and help centers for issues such as suicide, teen pregnancy, and family planning for young adults.

# Evaluate Your Efforts

**O**ne important way to measure your progress in ministry is to develop ways to evaluate the effectiveness of resource components, leaders, the number of people being served, and how Christian disciples are being developed. Disciple Dashboard is a congregational data dashboard that provides an opportunity to set goals, collect essential data and reflect on ministry: <http://umcdiscipleship.org/disciple-dashboard>.

## An Evaluation Process

- Keep attendance for each gathering, tracking the numbers over a year and for the same time periods from one year to the next. Numbers can determine trends and are one measure of the vitality of a ministry. Remember to go beyond and beneath the numbers for stories of Christian transformation. Tracking means online and in-person, of course.
- Analyze ministry progress regularly at leadership team meetings by reviewing what is happening in each area of age-level ministry and making notes about what is working and what needs improvement.
- Lead an annual leadership team retreat and planning session to implement changes to be made, develop activities and experiences to be added, and analyze overall effectiveness.
- Survey youth, their parents, young adults, and the congregation, casually or formally, to obtain feedback on your ministry, its methods, leaders, and programs. Surveys can be conducted in-house or by an outside professional, written, or online. Simple survey instruments, such as Survey Monkey, allow surveys of up to ten questions for free. Google Forms also make survey collection simple.
- Display a suggestion box or board for young people. Encourage participants' feedback on what they want to see, do, add, or eliminate.
- Consider the type and scope of planning as well as the number of people involved. Evaluate the number of leaders engaged; the ease or difficulty of obtaining commitment from caring, consistent adults; and the number of outreach opportunities extending beyond the church walls into the community.
- Invite outsiders into your evaluation process. These could be church members unfamiliar with youth or young adult ministry, Church Council members, and so on. By soliciting feedback from these groups, you may discover ways to align your efforts with your church's overall mission and vision (the *why*) and potentially recruit new leaders if they discover something they are interested in.

## Go Beyond the Numbers

How do you measure whether your efforts are influencing your target ministry population? Do you have tools to determine how your young people are progressing toward becoming committed, world-changing disciples of Christ? What is a disciple anyway? What exactly constitutes “changing the world”?

Paid and volunteer leadership should work with youth or young adult leadership teams to establish numeric and financial goals, specific time periods for evaluation, and a flow of ministry involvement through an introductory level to deeper spiritual commitment and into emerging leadership. Persistent follow-up can help your team determine why some may leave from your ministry while others are there, growing and deepening their relationship with God.

Consider creating a grid or graph for your ministry that includes the following categories. The easiest assessments are quantitative; that is, you can count or calculate them.

### For Quantitative Evaluation

- a list of activities, starting with low-risk, outreach types that welcome people in the door (including those that are offered offsite or online) and concluding with those that require the greatest commitment level;
- the purpose (the *why*) of each event, class, or activity and the minimum number of attendees required to make it work;
- the amount of paid/volunteer staff time needed to plan and execute the event, class, or activity;
- the need and cost, in time and resources, to provide leader training to improve effectiveness;
- an ultimate goal for each entry in terms of the percentage of participants that moves to the next level of involvement;
- the total overall cost and the cost per participant;
- timeline for evaluation, as soon as possible after completion, to keep important details fresh in mind.

Set reasonable and attainable ratio- or percentage-based goals that make sense in your context. For example, a goal of 20 percent greater participation of your existing population of young adults may be a more reasonable goal than 20 new young people.

What percentage of the youth or young adults on your membership roll are actively involved in some kind of ministry? Of those involved, what percentage are regular in worship, opportunities for personal growth and study, and in outreach ministries beyond the walls of your church? How many disappear in the first month or year after their initial involvement? Whenever possible, conduct back-door interviews to ask why someone has stopped attending and what would help him or her consider returning. You may obtain vital information that can help you do an even better job of serving those who remain.

Remain cautious of energy spent in “ministry vampires”—those plans and activities that no longer get the results you desire, and even though “we’ve always done it that way,”



suck the life and energy out of you, your young people, or your community. Use your evaluation and measurement efforts to know when a ministry effort has completed its effective life cycle. Be bold, name the need to end that effort, and create space for something new and more effective to be born in its place.

### **For Qualitative Evaluation**

Be sure to include goals and measures for the qualitative things you want to evaluate, particularly the results regarding the transformation of your young people as people of faith. “How many?” is a good question, but “How are we being formed as disciples?” is the point of ministry. These measures may not fit the chart, but they are the kinds of standards or indicators that tell you if young people are being formed more deeply in the image of Christ:

- the character traits you want your young people to cultivate, exhibit, and deepen;
- the effect of their Christian practices, which will probably be borne out by the stories they tell and/or the witness of the community;
- the new practices (spiritual or behavioral) that they take on;
- the changes in leadership; how you see that people are gaining confidence to accept responsibilities and take on new roles;
- shifts in worship attendance and/or giving;
- anecdotes and observed evidence that young people are more loving, generous, hospitable, and service-oriented.

If these standards are not being achieved, the “program” efforts may not be the issue so much as the quality of relationships. More people will grow in faith by being with and emulating the mature Christians with whom they relate. So, the *what* of your ministry efforts may not need to change as much as the *who* and *why* of what you do. Again, notice your *why* and work with others in your church to generate an intentional discipleship system that makes patterns of growth clear. That system will influence the opportunities that you create for others to grow.

### **Other Measures**

Remember to evaluate and measure your communications efforts as well. Consider which methods will best reach your intended audience.

Periodic evaluation of paid and/or volunteer staff is critical. (The Staff/Pastor-Parish Relations Committee will have the primary responsibility for professional staff.) Make every effort to match a person’s gifts and graces with the specific role and design a two-way evaluation process that gives both parties the opportunity for feedback and positive suggestions for change. If possible, discuss the evaluations face-to-face, honor the contributions of every participant, and attempt to make changes when the situation is not a good fit.

# Resources

\*\* = Highly recommended resource

+ = Young adult focused

## Theological

\*\**Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church*, Kenda Creasy Dean (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), ISBN: 9780195314847.

\*\**Cultivating Teen Faith: Insights from the Confirmation Project*, Richard R. Osmer and Katherine M. Douglass (Eerdmans, 2018), ISBN: 9780802876607.

+*Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness*, Andrew Root [Ministry in a Secular Age] (Baker Academic, 2017), ISBN: 9780801098468.

\*\**Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation*, the Barna Group (Barna Group, 2018), ISBN: 9781945269134.

\*\**The Godbearing Life, Revised Edition: The Art of Soul Tending for Youth Ministry*, Megan DeWald, Kenda Creasy Dean, Ron Foster (Upper Room Books, 2023), ISBN: 9780835819978.

+\*\**If the Church Were Christian: Rediscovering the Values of Jesus*, Philip Gulley (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2011), ISBN: 9780061698774.

*The Jesus Gap: What Teens Actually Believe About Jesus*, Jen Bradbury (Youth Cartel 2019), 9781942145028.

\*\**One Body: Integrating Teenagers into the Life of Your Church*, Sam Halverson (Youth Cartel 2019), ISBN: 9780991005086.

*Speaking Christian: Why Christian Words Have Lost Their Meaning and Power and How They Can Be Restored*, Marcus Borg (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2011), ISBN: 9780061976551.

*To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey*, Parker J. Palmer (HarperOne, 1993), ISBN: 9780060664510.

*A Theological Journey Through Youth Ministry* - 4 books, Andrew Root (Zondervan, 2012), ISBN: 9780310670766.

*What's Right About Youth Ministry: Six Values Great Youth Ministries Embrace*, Mark Oestricher and Kurt Johnston (Youth Cartel, 2018), ASIN: B07K5ZSY84.

## Practical

*The Adolescent Journey*, Amy E. Jacober (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), ISBN: 980830834181.

*Family-Based Youth Ministry*, Mark DeVries (IVP Books 2004), ISBN: 9780830832439.

**\*\****Changing the Game for Generation Alpha: Teaching and Raising Young Children in the 21st Century*, Valora Washington (Redleaf Press, 2021), ISBN: 9781605547268.

**\*\****Crash Courses in Youth Ministry*, Chris Wilterdink and Jeremy Steele (2021) <https://www.umcyoungpeople.org/lead/crash-courses-in-youth-ministry>.

*Faith Beyond Youth Group: Five Ways to Form Character and Cultivate Lifelong Discipleship*, Kara Powell, Jen Bradbury, Brad Griffin (Baker Books, 2023), ISBN: 978-1540903518.

**++***Growing Young: Six Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church*, Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin (Baker Books, 2016), ISBN: 9780801019258.

*Helping the Struggling Adolescent: A Guide to Thirty-Six Common Problems for Counselors, Pastors, and Youth Workers*, Les Parrott (Zondervan, 2014), ISBN: 9780310340874.

*How Youth Ministry Can Change Theological Education—If We Let It*, Kenda Creasy Dean and Christy Hearlson (Eerdmans 2016), ISBN: 9780802871930.

**\*\****Innovating for Love: Joining God's Expedition Through Christian Social Innovation (The Greatest Expedition)* Kenda Creasy Dean (Market Square Publishing, 2022), ISBN: 9781950899555.

**+***Lead Small: Five Big Ideas Every Small Group Leader Needs to Know*, Reggie Joiner (Orange Books, 2012), ISBN: 9780985411626.

**\*\****Now That You're a Youth Leader: How to Handle the Challenging Yet Rewarding First Years of Youth Ministry*, Jeremy Steele (Abingdon, 2018), ISBN: 9781501856662.

**\*\****Safer Sanctuaries: Nurturing Trust within Faith Communities*, Multiple Authors. Discipleship Resources, 2023), ISBN: 978-0-88177-962-2.

*The Secrets of Happy Families: Improve Your Mornings, Tell Your Family History, Fight Smarter, Go Out and Play, and Much More*, Bruce Fieler (William Morrow Paperbacks, 2013), ISBN: 9780061778742.

**\*\****Smaller Church Youth Ministry: No Staff, No Money, No Problem!* Brad Fiscus and Stephanie Caro (Abingdon, 2016), ISBN: 9781501825811.

*Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action*, Simon Sinek (Portfolio, 2011), ISBN: 9781591846444.

*Sticky Faith, Youth Worker Edition: Practical Ideas to Nurture Long-Term Faith in Teenagers*, Cheryl Crawford, Brad Griffin, and Kara Powell (Zondervan, 2011), ISBN: 9780310889243.

**\*\****Sustainable Youth Ministry: Why Most Youth Ministry Doesn't Last and What Your Church*

*Can Do About It*, Mark DeVries (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008), ISBN: 9780830833610.

*Toward a Prophetic Youth Ministry: Theory and Praxis in Urban Context*, Fernando Arzola, Jr. (IVP Academic, 2009), ISBN: 9780830828029.

*Welcoming and Affirming: A Guide to Supporting and Working with LGBTQ+ Christian Youth* (Queerfully and Wonderfully Made Guides, 2), Leigh Finke (Broadleaf Books, 2020), ISBN: 9781506464985.

*Wrestling With Rest: Inviting Youth to Discover the Gift of Sabbath*, Nathan T. Stucky (Eerdmans Publishing, 2019), ISBN: 9780802876263.

## Leadership

+\*\**Blank Slate: Write Your Own Rules for a 22nd Century Church Movement*, Lia McIntosh, Jasmine Smothers, and Rodney Smothers (Abingdon, 2019), ISBN: 9781501876264.

*Canoeing the Mountains: Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory*, Tod Bolsinger (IVP, 2015), ISBN: 978-0830841264.

*The Emotionally Healthy Leader: How Transforming Your Inner Life Will Deeply Transform Your Church, Team, and the World*, Peter Scazzero (Zondervan, 2015), ISBN: 9780310494577.

+*How to Lead When You're Not in Charge: Leveraging Influence When You Lack Authority*, Clay Scroggins (Zondervan, 2017), ISBN: 9780310531579.

*Inside the Mind of Youth Pastors: A Church Leader's Guide to Staffing and Leading Youth Pastors*, Mark Riddle (Zondervan 2008), ISBN: 9780310283652.

*Jesus-Centered Youth Ministry*, Rick Lawrence, et al. (Simply Youth Ministry; Revised edition, 2014), ISBN: 9781470714192.

*Leader Slips: Learning and Leading from Failure*, Tony Sutherland (CreateSpace, 2019), ISBN: 9781717041364.

*The Starfish and the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations*, Ori Brafman and Rod Beckstrom (Portfolio, 2008), ISBN: 9781591841838.

\*\**Smaller Church Youth Ministry: No Staff, No Money, No Problem!* Brad Fiscus (Abingdon Press, 2016), ISBN: 9781501825811.

*What Is the Role of Teens in Your Church?* Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu (Sauk Village: African American Images, 2011), ISBN: 9781934155493.

*A Woman in Youth Ministry: Honest Insight and Leadership Wisdom for Real People*, Gina Abbas (Youth Cartel, 2014), ISBN: 9780991005048.

## Adolescent Development

*Belonging: Reconnecting America's Loneliest Generation*, Springtide Research (Springtide Research Institute, 2020), ISBN: 9781641210898.

**\*\****Growing With: Every Parent's Guide to Helping Teenagers and Young Adults Thrive in Their Faith, Family, and Future*, Steven Argue and Kara Powell (Baker Books, 2019), ISBN: 9780801019265.

*Raising an Emotionally Intelligent Child* (The Heart of Parenting), John Gottman PhD and Joan Declaire (Simon & Schuster, 1998), ISBN: 9780684838656.

*Saying Is Believing: The Necessity of Testimony in Adolescent Spiritual Development*, Amanda Hontz Drury (IVP Academic, 2015), ISBN: 9780830840656.

+*Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults*, Christian Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), ISBN: 9780195371796.

+*They Like Jesus But Not the Church: Insights from Emerging Generations*, Dan Kimball (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), ISBN: 9780310245902.

*The New Adolescence: Raising Happy and Successful Teens in an Age of Anxiety and Distraction*, Christine Carter (Benbella Books, 2020), ISBN: 9781948836548.

*The Whole-Brain Child: 12 Revolutionary Strategies to Nurture Your Child's Developing Mind*, Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson (Bantam, 2012), ISBN: 9780553386691.

+*You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church . . . and Rethinking Faith*, David Kinnaman and Aly Hawkins (Baker Books, 2016), ISBN: 9780801015892.

## Curriculum

**\*\****The Awakened Life: An 8-Week Guide to Student Well-Being*, Sarah Bollinger and Angela R. Olsen (General Board of Higher Education and Ministry/Upper Room, 2019), ISBN: 9781945935497.

*Bible Lessons for Youth* (UMPH) <https://www.cokesbury.com/curriculum-youth-bible-lessons-for-youth>.

**\*\****Change the World: Rediscovering the Message and Mission of Jesus*, Michael Slaughter (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), ISBN: 9781426702976; four-session DVD with leader guide, ISBN: 9781426710124.

**\*\****Discovery Weekend* <https://www.n2discovery.org/>. Subscription plan for curriculum.

*Everyday Disciples: Covenant Discipleship with Youth*, Chris Wilterdink (Discipleship Resources, 2016), ISBN: 9780881777932.

*Fathom Bible Studies* (UMPH) <https://www.cokesbury.com/Curriculum-Youth-Fathom>.

*Let Me Ask You a Question: Conversations with Jesus*, Matt Croasmun (Upper Room, 2018), ISBN: 9780835817998.

*YPM Worship Series* <https://www.umcyoungpeople.org/lead/worship-series>, 60-minute scripts following lectionary texts. These follow the series published by Discipleship Ministries <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship-planning>.

## Connectional Resources: The United Methodist Church

*The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 2024* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2024).

Division on Ministry with Young People (Young People's Connectional Network), Discipleship Ministries. <https://www.umcyoungpeople.org>. Denominational body representing young people across The UMC connectional structure. Resourcing, grants, and more. Also includes the Crash Courses in Youth Ministry. <https://www.umcyoungpeople.org/lead/crash-courses-in-youth-ministry>.

*Guidelines for Leading Your Congregation 2025–2028*; see especially Adult Ministries, as well as Small-Group Ministries and Family Ministries (Nashville: Cokesbury, 2024).

The Methodist Youth Ministry Association ([methodistYMA.com](http://methodistYMA.com)). Membership-based association providing resources and development opportunities for those serving youth and young adults in the Methodist family of faith.

United Methodist Curriculum Resources: The United Methodist Publishing House ([ministrymatters.com](http://ministrymatters.com)).

## UMC Agencies & Helpful Links

The United Methodist Church, [www.umc.org](http://www.umc.org)

General Commission on Archives and History, [www.gcuh.org](http://www.gcuh.org), Madison, NJ, 973-408-3189

General Board of Church and Society, [www.umcjustice.org](http://www.umcjustice.org), Washington, DC, 202-488-5600

United Methodist Communications, [www.resourceumc.org/communications](http://www.resourceumc.org/communications), [www.umns.org](http://www.umns.org), Nashville, TN, 615-742-5400; InfoServ 1-800-251-8140

General Board of Discipleship, [www.umcdiscipleship.org](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org), Nashville, TN, 877-899-2780; Discipleship Resources, <http://bookstore.upperroom.org>; The Upper Room, <http://www.upperroom.org>

General Board of Finance and Administration, [www.gcfa.org](http://www.gcfa.org), Nashville, TN

General Board of Global Ministries, [www.umcmmission.org](http://www.umcmmission.org), Atlanta, GA, 800-862-4246

General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, [www.gbhem.org](http://www.gbhem.org), Nashville, TN, 615-340-7413

General Commission on Religion and Race, [www.gcorr.org](http://www.gcorr.org), Washington, DC, 202-495-2949

General Commission on the Status and Role of Women, [www.gcsrw.org](http://www.gcsrw.org), Chicago, IL, 1-800-523-8390

General Commission on United Methodist Men, [www.gcumm.org](http://www.gcumm.org), Nashville, TN, 615-340-7145

The United Methodist Publishing House, [www.umph.org](http://www.umph.org), [www.abingdonpress.com](http://www.abingdonpress.com),  
[www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com), [www.ministrymatters](http://www.ministrymatters), Nashville, TN, 615-749-6000

United Women in Faith, [www.uwfaith.org](http://www.uwfaith.org), New York, NY, 212-682-3633

Wespath (retirement/benefits), [www.wespath.org](http://www.wespath.org), Glenview, IL, 800-851-2201

**For additional resources, contact your annual conference office.**