

The Epworth Document -- Youth Ministry Staff Position Recommendations

From the Association of Conference Youth Staff
of the Southeastern Jurisdiction of The United Methodist Church
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We hope and pray for excellence in youth ministry in the churches of the conferences that we serve. We desire that youth come to be committed disciples of Jesus Christ through the youth ministries of the churches. We celebrate that our churches are engaged in youth ministry, being faithful to God's call. We thank you for what you do to love and shepherd the youth that God places in our lives.

We understand that adolescence is a critical period in a young person's life, involving a search for identity. It is a critical time for exploring spirituality. The substantial majority of people who accept Jesus Christ as their savior do so before reaching their 18th birthday.¹ The call of churches to be in significant ministry with young people is clear and vital. The church must take youth ministry seriously and serve diligently in this mission field.

Good youth ministry is built on the foundation of meaningful relationships. Youth ministry is best lived out in a relational model, where youth ministry staff persons and other mentors build relationships with youth that point to Jesus Christ. Youth need caring adults who will journey with them and guide them in following Jesus. For relational ministry to be most effective, longevity in relationship is critical. Thus, a youth ministry staff person's length of tenure is critical to effective youth ministry.

We lament the too-frequent turnover of youth ministry staff in the churches. The national average for a youth ministry staff person's length of service in a local church is very short, with estimates ranging from 9 months to a couple of years. 18 months is a common citation.² While youth are resilient, they are also quite susceptible to the harm done by the short-term relationships with youth ministry staff.

While several factors contribute to the average low period of tenure, youth ministry staff persons often cite as factors inadequate salary/benefits, unrealistic job expectations, being overworked, high stress, poor pastor-staff relations, low status, burn-out, a lack of training, and a lack of support.

¹ The Barna Group, "Evangelism Is Most Effective Among Kids" (Ventura, CA, 11 October 2004) [article on-line]; available from <http://www.barna.org/FlexPage.aspx?Page=BarnaUpdate&BarnaUpdateID=172>; Internet; accessed 19 October 2007.

² See, e.g., Jim Still-Pepper, "Burnout Road" (The United Methodist Publishing House, 1996) [article on-line], available from http://www.ileadyouth.com/article_reader.asp?ID=30; Internet; accessed 19 October 2007. Jenni Smith, "Annual Youth Ministry Program Provides Leadership Training," SMU News (18 Nov. 2002) [article on-line], available from <http://www.smu.edu/newsinfo/releases/02090.html>; Internet; accessed 19 October 2007. Gary A. Goreham, "Denominational Comparison of Rural Youth Ministry Programs," *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (June 2004), pp. 336-348.

One of our collective observations is that youth ministry staff are not commonly offered compensation that provides a living wage. We encourage churches to offer compensation that adequately supports a person in the position.

We encourage churches to provide means for supporting and training youth ministry staff and volunteers.

From our collective experiences, we offer the following recommendations for a church staffing a youth ministry position.

HIRING A YOUTH MINISTRY STAFF PERSON.

Screening Process

Each church should have a screening process for potential youth ministry staff persons. The screening process should include, among other things, a criminal background check for the person to be hired. See Joy Thornburg Melton's *Safe Sanctuaries for Youth: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in Youth Ministries* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2003).

Compensation

Youth ministry staff persons should be compensated a living wage.

A starting point in determining a youth ministry salary for a full-time position is to consider the public school teachers' pay scale in your area. Please note that the public school teacher pay usually covers a 10 month period. Thus, salary for the youth ministry position should be adjusted to cover the full year. We believe this is a minimum level and encourage our churches to pay more, recognizing the value of youth ministry and taking into account the local economy and the resources of the local church.

Other factors to consider are the person's level of education and experience. Experience in youth ministry is a valuable factor.

Please note that standards of living can vary throughout the conference.

If the individual hired is ordained, the salary will need to be in line with the equitable compensation that is required for ordained persons by *The Book of Discipline 2004* (paragraphs 331.14.b and 342.1). This salary amount can be found in the conference Journal or Book of Reports for the current year.

For hiring part-time, divide the full-time amount by the number of hours you intend to incorporate into the job.

Benefits

Benefits for lay staff employees should include, but are not limited to expenses of doing youth ministry (e.g., mileage reimbursement), continuing education training, "adequate health and life insurance, and severance pay," as well as retirement benefits. See *Book of Discipline 2004*, para. 259.2.g (8), (12), and (16).

Clergy

When an ordained clergy person is selected, the appointment process should be followed as set forth in the appropriate sections of *The Book of Discipline*.

Hours

A church's expectation of the number of hours that the youth ministry staff person will work should be clearly stated.

While the youth ministry staff person may voluntarily work more hours than the stated expectation, the church should not expect more hours.

While there will be some days and weeks of the year that require more than the "normal hours," consideration should be given to allow the youth ministry staff person to comp that time with time off at other points or receive additional compensation.

Flexibility in keeping hours is important in youth ministry. Good youth ministry goes to the youth where they are (e.g., presence at a soccer game is youth ministry), rather than expecting them to always come to the church building. Because the nature of youth ministry does not lend itself to "normal business hours," consideration of this factor should be taken into account when considering whether and how many "office hours" will be maintained by the youth ministry staff person. With flexible hours, the youth ministry staff person should be willing to account for the way her/his time is spent.

Job Description

A detailed written job description should be provided by the Staff-Parish Relations Committee. *Book of Discipline 2004*, para. 259.2.g (7).

Wesleyan Theology

Youth ministry staff should be familiar with Wesleyan theology and basic United Methodist doctrine, or be willing to learn it. If training is needed, it could be provided under the supervision of the pastor and/or using available denominational and conference youth ministry resources. Conference youth coordinators are available to discuss training options.

Youth ministry staff should apply Wesleyan theology and basic United Methodist doctrine in their teaching with youth.

SUPERVISION AND RETENTION.

Supervision

Youth ministry staff should have supervision that provides mutual trust, caring encouragement, loyalty and partnership.

Persons providing accountability for youth ministry staff should be clearly defined.

Supervising pastors are encouraged to treat the youth ministry staff as a ministry partner.

Yearly evaluations of the youth ministry staff person should be conducted by the Staff Parish Relations Committee with input by the pastor and/or direct supervisor. *Book of Discipline 2004*, para. 259.2.g (4) and (5).

Youth ministry staff persons should have access to the Staff Parish Relations Committee. *Book of Discipline 2004*, para. 259.2.e.

Critique of a youth ministry staff person's job performance should be constructive and offered in a manner that will "build up" (Ephesians 4:12) rather than tear down the person. Speak "truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Bear one another in love (Ephesians 4:1). Restore one who has transgressed in a "spirit of gentleness" (Galatians 6:1).

In matters of supervision, live by the Spirit, demonstrating the fruits of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Galatians 5:22-23).

Soul Tending

Youth ministry staff should be expected and encouraged to nurture and maintain their own spiritual vitality and to honor and keep the Sabbath. Appropriate time off should be encouraged.

Churches should provide time and financial assistance for spiritual renewal events as may serve the staffer's spiritual growth.

See *Book of Discipline 2004*, para. 259.2.g (8).

Family Health

Youth ministry staff should be expected and encouraged to nurture their families.

Churches should be considerate of providing flexible scheduling to provide some family time, and allowing the staff person to take time off to be with the family.

See *Book of Discipline 2004*, para. 259.2.g (16).

Training

Youth ministry staff should be expected to participate in continuing education and training.

Churches should provide financial resources for youth ministry staff to receive continuing education and training in youth ministry.

Participation in such training should be considered part of the job and "on the clock."

See *Book of Discipline 2004*, para. 259.2.g (8).

Networking

Youth ministry staff should be expected to be involved in networking groups with youth ministry peers, especially district, conference and other United Methodist networking groups.

A church should provide financial resources for youth ministry staff to participate in such networking opportunities.

Participation in such networking opportunities should be considered part of the job and "on the clock."

Compensation

Merit increases in salary should be provided.

Cost of living adjustments should be made to salaries. These COL adjustments should be in addition to increases based on merit.

TERMINATION OF PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP.

When the staffing relationship ends between the church and the youth ministry staff person, we encourage all persons involved to show grace in the process. The youth and adults of the church will observe and/or learn how the ending of the relationship is handled. Model God's grace in closing this professional relationship.

For persons not subject to Episcopal appointment, see *Book of Discipline 2004*, para. 259.2.g (12).