

YOUTH MINISTRY STAFF POSITION RECOMMENDATIONS

Adolescence is a critical period in a young person's life, involving a search for identity. It is a critical time for exploring spirituality. Research reflects that the substantial majority of people who become a Christian do so before reaching their 18th birthday.¹ Those who participated in faith formation activities as youth have been shown to be more likely to have an active life of discipleship as adults² and have been shown to have a higher chance avoiding high risk behaviors.³ The call for churches to be in significant ministry with young people is clear and vital. As the life-stage of adolescence continues to grow in duration, the church must take youth ministry seriously and serve diligently in this mission field.⁴

The average duration of a youth ministry staff person's service in a local church (United States) is now around four years.⁵ This time-frame has increased in recent years. Longevity of a youth staff person increases the effectiveness of that ministry and the quality of the relationships within the youth ministry of a church.

While several factors contribute to longevity, youth ministry staff persons need adequate salary/benefits, realistic job expectations, adequate time off, self-care encouragement, positive pastor-staff relations, recognition, training, and support. This document is designed to be helpful for local churches in the process of hiring a youth staff person or evaluating their current youth ministry staffing situation.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR 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 checking

references, a psychological assessment, a criminal background check, and a social media survey of the person to be hired.⁶

Compensation

Youth ministry staff persons should be compensated a living wage.⁷ A starting point in determining a youth ministry salary for a full-time position might 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. Churches should pay equitably, recognizing the value of youth ministry and taking into account the local economy and the resources of the local church.

Other factors to consider:

- A person's level of education
- Experience in youth ministry
- Differences in the local cost of living

Other church staff salary surveys are available from a variety of sources to assist a church in making this important decision in an equitable way.

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 2012* (paragraphs 342.1). This salary amount can be found in the conference Journal or Book of Reports for the current year.

For a part-time staff position, divide the full-time amount by the number of hours you intend to incorporate into the job. The church may need to allow additional amounts if your part time position does not include benefits such as healthcare.

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 2012*, para. 258.2.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

The church and the youth staff person should have a clear understanding of the number of hours that the youth ministry staff person is expected to work. While the youth ministry staff person may voluntarily work more hours than the stated expectation, the church should not expect more hours.

Because of the nature of youth ministry, there will be some days and weeks of the year that require more than the agreed-upon hours. Consideration should be given to allow the youth ministry staff person compensatory time at other points in the year, or they should receive additional compensation.

Flexibility in keeping hours is important in youth ministry. Good youth ministry meets youth where they are (e.g., presence at a soccer game), 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 deciding whether and how many “office hours” will be maintained by the youth ministry staff person. The youth ministry staff person should be accountable 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 2012*, para. 259.2.g (7). Like all job descriptions, it should be regularly reviewed and updated.

Wesleyan Theology

Youth ministry staff should be familiar with Wesleyan theology and basic United Methodist doctrine. If training is needed, it could be provided under the supervision of the pastor and/or using available denominational and conference resources. Conference youth staff are available to discuss training options specifically related to youth ministry. Online training in United Methodism is also available through umc.org.

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. An understanding of the youth ministry staff person as a member of a team and the expectation that they will develop a team to provide leadership for youth ministry is vital to the retention and success of that staff person.

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.

At a minimum, an annual evaluation of the youth ministry staff person should be conducted by the Staff Parish Relations Committee. The pastor and/or direct supervisor should also have input into this process. *Book of Discipline 2012*, para. 258.2.g (4) and (5). Every church should have a Safe Sanctuaries policy in place (*Safe Sanctuaries for Youth: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in Youth Ministries*, Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 2008) with the expectation that youth ministry staff persons are expected to adhere to the guidelines for the protection of both youth and adult leaders.

Youth ministry staff persons should have access to the Staff Parish Relations Committee. *Book of Discipline 2012*, para. 258.2.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 for this should be encouraged.

Churches should provide time and financial assistance for spiritual renewal events for the purpose of the staff person’s spiritual growth. See *Book of Discipline 2012*, para. 258.2.g (8).

Family Health

Youth ministry staff should be expected and encouraged to nurture their families. Churches should provide flexible scheduling allowing the staff person to take time off to be with the family. (vacation, personal, sick, etc.) See Book of Discipline 2014, para. 258.2.g (16).

Training

- Youth ministry staff should be expected to participate in continuing education and training. Many annual conferences have structured opportunities for this.
- 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 2012, para. 258.2.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.
- The 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.”

Communication

- There should be an expectation of regular communication between the youth staff person and their supervisor, other staff, parents, and volunteers.
- Clear guidelines for communications with youth in person, by telephone, and online should be well defined from the outset.

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.

and adults in the church as they experience a healthy ending of the working relationship. Churches can model God’s grace in closing this professional relationship.

For persons not subject to Episcopal appointment, see Book of Discipline 2012, para. 258.2.g (12).

¹ The Barna Group, “Evangelism Is Most Effective Among Kids” (Ventura, CA, 11 October 2004) [article on-line]; available from https://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/196-evangelism-is-most-effective-among-kids#.UyhaE_dVlo Internet; accessed 18 March 2014 Internet; accessed 18 March 201.

² The Barna Group, “New Research Explores the Long-Term Effect of Spiritual Activity among Children and Teens” (Ventura, CA) 16 November 2009 [article on-line]; available from <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/family-kids/321-new-research-explores-the-long-term-effect-of-spiritual-activity-among-children-and-teens#.UyhZxvldVlo> Internet Accessed 18 March 2014.

³ Karen Choi, “The Relationship Between Youth Ministry Participation and Faith Maturity of Adolescents: Testing for Faith-Nurturing Characteristics in Youth Ministry As a Mediator Using Multiple Regression” *Christian Education Journal*, Ser. 3, Vol. 9, No.2 (September 2012), pp. 294.

⁴ Kim Parker, “The Boomerang Generation: Feeling OK about Living with Mom and Dad” (Pew Research Center: Washington, D.C.) 15 March 2012 [article on-line]; available from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/03/15/the-boomerang-generation/> Internet Accessed 31 March 2014. Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids) 2011, pp. 49-68.

⁵ See, e.g., Josh Griffin, “The Truth, and Nothing But the Truth,” 20 March 2012 [article on-line]; available from <http://blog.simplyyouthministry.com/general-ministry/guest-post-the-truth-and-nothing-but-the-truth/>, Internet; Accessed 18 March 2014. Gary A. Goreham, “Denominational Comparison of Rural Youth Ministry Programs,” *Review of Religious Research*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (June 2004), pp. 336-348.

⁶ See Joy Thornburg Melton *Safe Sanctuaries for Youth: Reducing the Risk of Abuse in Youth Ministries* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources) 2008, pp. 11, 21-22, 142-144, 145.

⁷ A helpful calculator for the living wage in each U.S. municipality can be found at <http://livingwage.mit.edu/>.

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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. This can be a teaching time for youth