

Hiring a Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministry Leader

A guide for local congregations
and faith formation &/or youth ministry
leaders



Southern New England Conference
United Church of Christ
Living the Love & Justice of Jesus

Adapted with permission from
Called To Educational and Formational Ministries,
Association of United Church Educators (www.AUCE-UCC.org)

Table of Contents

- Definitions of Faith Formation and Youth Ministry Leaders 3

- Strengthening the Leadership of the Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministry Leader 5**
 - Marks of Faithful and Effective Christian Education and Formation Practitioners 6
 - The Church Educator's Code 8
 - Covenant for Church Youth Ministires 10
 - SNEUCC Faith Formation Leadership Certificate Program 12

- Extending a Call 13**
 - Establishing a Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministry Committee 14
 - Developing a Position Description 16
 - Calculating the Type of Leadership a Congregation Needs 16
 - Expectations and Questions to Consider 17
 - Faith Formation Leadership Expectations Checklist 18
 - Areas of Responsibility Worksheet 19
 - Skills and Special Interests Worksheet 20
 - Developing a Local Church Profile 21
 - Compensation Guidelines 24
 - Developing a Job Description: Job Description Worksheet 26
 - Sample Full-Time Job Description 29
 - Sample Part-Time Job Description 31
 - Sample Part-Time Job Description for a Youth Ministry Position 33
 - Where to Find Applicants 34
 - The Interview and Selection Process 36
 - Employee/Volunteer Screening Form 38
 - The Contract or Letter of Call 42

- Supporting the Relationship Between the Christian Educator/Youth Ministry Leader
and the Local Church 43**
 - Service of Covenanting 44
 - Ongoing Nurture and Support 46
 - Periodic Review 47
 - Recognizing Stress and Burnout 48
 - Resignation or Dismissal 50
 - Exit Interview 52

- A Post-Pandemic Addendum 53**
 - Post-Pandemic Faith Formation 54
 - Post-Pandemic Youth Ministry 55

Definitions of Faith Formation and Youth Ministry Leaders

Faith Formation Leader

For our purposes here, a faith formation leader is a person experienced in educational/formational ministry in the local church, having had some education, either formal or experiential, and whose gifts are recognized by a congregation through a formalized agreement. Thus, an ordained person, with a master's degree called to a local church as a minister of education is a faith formation leader, just as a lay person who recently accepted a part-time offer from her or his congregation to oversee the church school is a faith formation leader. Though possessing vastly different education and experience and serving in vastly different roles, both have in common the fact that a local church recognizes its need for a staff person responsible for faith formation ministries and selects or calls the appropriate person to serve in that role.

Youth Ministry Leader

A youth ministry leader is much the same as a faith formation leader except that their focus of ministry is in working with and ministering specifically to teenagers. Again, education and experience will vary. The exact definition of "youth" should be determined by each individual congregation.

In order to determine whether your congregation requires a volunteer or paid Christian educator or youth ministry leader, consider the descriptions that follow:

Volunteer

A volunteer faith formation or youth ministry leader should be considered a part of the church staff, even though he or she is not paid. The support, training, and communication with the pastor, other members of the church's staff and this volunteer are required for an effective working relationship resulting in an effective ministry. The absence of a salary should in no way diminish the value and quality of the expectations of the volunteer who takes on this important ministry. All expenses and supplies need to be reimbursed. If the congregation determines that it requires tasks of the faith formation or youth ministry leader that need more education and background such as training, specific skills, knowledge of educational and developmental theories, and biblical and theological training, it should consider making this a paid position.

Employed Layperson

Laypersons who serve as faith formation and/or youth ministry leaders may not view their work as a calling, yet they may find enough enjoyment and fulfillment in these positions to willingly dedicate their time and energy to the children, youth, and adults they serve in a paid staff position.

Employed Authorized Minister

In the United Church of Christ, many ministers of faith formation and/or youth ministry are ordained. An ordained minister is a minister of word and sacrament having taken a few, one, or no Christian education or youth ministry courses in seminary, as some seminaries do not require these courses for graduation.

Southern New England Conference Certified Faith Formation &/or Youth Ministry Leader

A paid professional who has completed the course work and other requirements for certification in the Southern New England Conference's Faith Formation Leadership Certificate Program (<https://www.sneucc.org/certification>).

Contractor or Consultant

A consultant is generally contracted for a specific project or role, such as the examples listed below under "How a Consultant May Be Utilized." As a contractor, they are self-employed and as such are responsible for providing their own resources, primary office, and benefits. The hourly or unit rate is thus higher than for a typical employee. This fee is negotiated between the consultant and the hiring body.

How a Consultant May Be Utilized

- Develop with and for the congregation a program for faith formation. This could include an overview of the church year, an outline for weekly programming, and long range plans for the program.
- Serve as a mentor to a Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministry Team, providing program evaluation, resources and leadership training, for instance.
- Serve as leader for a specific program, such as Confirmation, or to fulfill other faith formation and/or youth ministry needs determined by the hiring body.
- Serve as a mentor for a faith formation and/or youth ministry staff person, providing resources, support, and guidance for a specific period of time.

A Note About These Categories

Although the descriptions above seem to fit nicely into labeled boxes, the educational background of faith formation and/or youth ministry leaders can be as different and varied as each individual. Some discover their call to be a faith formation and/or youth ministry leader early on, and are able to follow a college (and sometimes graduate school) curriculum that gives them a good academic background in Bible, theology, and developmental and educational theory. Others arrive at a position in faith formation ministries much later, but are able to use their life experiences in the church, as well as their secular employment experience, to carry out their responsibilities effectively.

It should also be mentioned that the course of study that most ordained ministers undertake in seminary does not include training in faith formation and/or youth ministry. Be sure to talk with prospective ordained candidates to find out what their training and experience has been with children and teens, rather than assume that their process to ordination included such training. It will be up to the search committee to examine the education and training background of the candidates they interview for the congregation's faith formation and/or youth ministry position.

Embrace diversity.

Strengthening the Leadership of the Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministry Leader

Marks of Faithful and Effective Faith Formation Practitioners



<https://www.auce-ucc.org>

Able to think critically.

Engages the stories of the Christian faith and the stories of God's people throughout time and history.

Engages in sacramental living and recognizes the power of ritual and practice to form and transform the life of faith.

Engages in professional development as time and resources allow.

Knowledge and understanding of human, faith, generational, and spiritual developmental theories and research.

Able to translate theological and biblical concepts across age levels and life stages.

Able to utilize varied teaching and learning styles across age levels and life stages.

Has knowledge and understanding of multiple intelligence theories and cultural frameworks for learning.

Able to present and engage learners in processes of guided discovery that lead to the learners' insights and decisions.

Is self-aware and engaged in his/her own experience and story of faith.

Is committed to and participates in intentional continuing education that develops increased levels of expertise and experience.

Engages in ongoing development of (professional) relationships with peers/colleagues through informal and formal networks and organizations (i.e. Association of United Church Educators, Religious Education Association).

Actively engages in and is knowledgeable of the denomination's expressions of basic history, identity, and ethos, including justice, global, interfaith, and ecumenical perspectives, and is able to relate them across age levels, life stages, and individual faith history.

Advocates on behalf of each group within a congregation for intentional faith formation.

Advocates for appropriate faith formation and engagement which addresses the particular needs of all populations within the congregation.

Engages with and participates in all aspects of a congregation's ministry and mission and advocates for a faith formation perspective throughout all aspects of the congregation's ministry and mission.

Actively engages in a regular practice of goal setting and assessment of the work/ ministry in cooperation with the congregation he/she serves.

Able to teach others to teach—not as the sole faith former/educator of the congregation, but teaching with others and beside others.

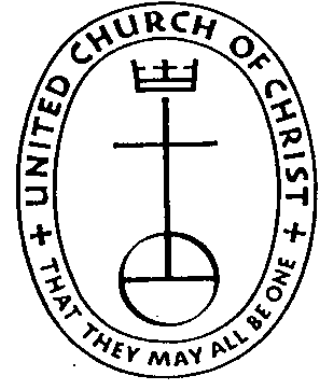
Able to lead and equip others to lead, develop programs, and fashion faith formation within the congregation.

Models and maintains healthy boundaries in all aspects of the faith community life and in all relationships within the community of faith he or she serves.

The Church Educator's Code

The Ministry of Church Education

I believe that God calls the whole church and every member to participate in and extend the ministry of Jesus Christ; that the privilege and responsibility of witnessing to the gospel in church and society belongs to every baptized Christian; that God empowers the ministry of the church and its members by the Holy Spirit; that the church nurtures faith, evokes gifts, and equips its members for service; and that God calls certain of the church's members to various forms of ministry in and on behalf of the Church.



**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**

I have been called by God to be a minister and servant of Jesus Christ in a ministry of education in the United Church of Christ, a church attentive to the Word, inclusive of all people, responsive to God's call, and supportive of one another.

I will seek to witness to the ministry of Jesus Christ.

I will faithfully and diligently perform the work of ministry to which I have been called.

Partnership in Ministry

I will nurture and offer my gifts for the teaching ministry of the church. I will seek to call forth and nurture the gifts of others for the sake of the mission of Jesus Christ.

I will seek to understand, support, and interpret the diverse ministries of the United Church of Christ and its members as carried out throughout the world.

I will work cooperatively and collegially with those with whom I serve in ministry.

I will stand in a supportive relationship with, and for the rights of, my staff colleagues, offering and receiving counsel and support in times of need.

I will be an advocate for fair and just employment standards for all employees of the church, particularly in the place where I serve.

I will be a responsible participant in the life and work of the local church, association, conference, and national settings of the United Church of Christ.

I will be a responsible representative of the Church Universal and participate in those activities which strengthen its unity, witness, and mission.

I will seek the counsel of the appropriate body and persons in local, conference, or association settings should divisive tensions threaten my relationship with those with whom I minister.

The Ethics of Ministry

I will regard and minister to all persons with equal respect and concern.

I will honor all confidences shared with me with the exception of times when I am legally bound to share information.

I will honor my legal and moral obligations where appropriate to disclose and report to civil and/or ecclesiastical authorities situations of actual or pending harm to myself or others.

I will not use my position, power, or authority to exploit or harass any person for sexual, financial, or other personal gain.

I will adhere to my setting's policy statements concerning appropriate and ethical behavior.

I will diligently care for the health and safety of those in my charge.

I will not misuse the finance of the institution which I serve.

I will deal honorably with the record of my predecessor.

I will not, upon my termination and departure from a ministry position, interfere with nor intrude upon the ministry of my successor.

Growth in Ministry

I will seek to grow in faith, knowledge, and the practice of educational ministry through intentional continuing education, study leave/sabbatical, membership in relevant professional organization(s), ongoing study, and worship and devotional life.

I will encourage and participate in the periodic evaluation of my ministry.

I will cooperate with the appropriate certifying and/or authorizing bodies in the periodic review of my ministry.

Commitments to Self and Family

I will honor my commitments to my family and to myself.

I will honor my need for time for physical and spiritual renewal, recreation, and vacation.

I will honor my family's need for privacy and time together as well as my own need for privacy.

I will be a responsible steward of my personal and family finances. I will honor and accept responsibility for all debts which I incur.

I will attend to my physical well-being and avoid abusive behaviors and abusive use of substances.

Relying on the grace of God, I will lead a life worthy of the calling to which I have been called.

*The Church Educator's Code Guide for Conversation and Planning
may be found, along with The Code, by visiting:
<https://www.auce-ucc.org/professional-support>*

A Covenant for Church Youth Ministries

This Covenant for Church Youth Ministries is inspired by and adapted from “The National Charter,” a similar set of promises promoted in the United Kingdom by two organizations — the Association of Christian Youth and Children’s Workers, and Youthwork — a collaboration of organizations working together to resource and inspire Christian youth work. The Eastern Ohio Association of the United Church of Christ obtained permission from these UK organizations to draw upon and modify the contents of “The National Charter” for use in this covenant. It was then shared with the Association of United Church Educators, and is used with its permission and blessings.

Background

The Covenant for Church Youth Ministries is a set of eight promises that churches adopt when considering the practices and principles they will use in nurturing and supporting people, both paid and volunteer, who work with youth. (Youth are defined using the United Church of Christ guidelines – ages 13-18.)

1. We will pray and support.

We believe that our youth workers need spiritual support in their work with young people.

We promise to pray for our youth workers and keep their needs a high priority in church prayer life.

2. We will acknowledge the importance of gifts and God’s call.

We believe that gifts and call are best discerned in the context of the faith community.

We promise to provide opportunities for prayerful discernment.

3. We will provide opportunities for retreat and reflection.

We believe that taking time to think and pray is just as essential for our youth workers as organizing events and meeting young people.

We promise to provide opportunities for our youth workers to use part of their schedules for retreat, reflection, worship and personal development.

4. We will provide ongoing training and development.

We believe that maintaining the gifts and skills of the youth workers is an ongoing process and that it is important to continually invest in professional development.

We promise to set aside time and money to provide this for our youth workers.

5. We will give a full day of rest each week.

We believe that taking regular time off helps maintain our youth workers’ passion and energy for their work with young people.

We promise to actively encourage our youth workers to take a day away from their role each week.

6. We will share responsibility as a priesthood of all believers.

We believe that having a youth worker does not release the rest of the church from our responsibilities toward young people.

We promise to encourage everyone to play a part in volunteering, praying for and supporting young people.

7. We will celebrate and appreciate.

We believe it is vital to acknowledge what our youth ministry leaders are doing and the commitment they have made to work with young people in our church.

We promise to make sure our youth ministry leaders know they are appreciated and we will celebrate their achievements.

8. We will strive to be a just employer.

We believe it is important to have clear structures and procedures for recruiting and employing youth ministry leaders, and to provide supportive management structures which are fair and just.

We promise to follow non-exploitive practices in the way we employ our youth ministry leaders.



Faith Formation Leadership Certificate Program

<https://www.sneucc.org/certification>

Classes may be taken as either part of the certificate program or as stand-alone workshops

Participants may choose to take classes either as stand-alone opportunities, or as part of a process for certification in faith formation leadership in the Southern New England Conference UCC.

Classes are for anyone with a passion for faith formation and/or youth ministries

While designed for the Southern New England Conference, anyone — both lay leaders and authorized ministers — within or beyond the United Church of Christ and southern New England, may participate, with the understanding that the focus will be on ministry within a United Church of Christ congregation.

Faith formation and youth ministry for the 21st Century

Our instructors are selected for their experience and expertise in their specific ministries, and who present best practices and teaching methods for forming faith and making disciples in today's congregations, particularly during this post-pandemic time.

Classes offered over the course of two years

Visit <https://www.sneucc.org/certification>

to view the list of class for the current program year and to register.

- * Engaging Our Sacred Scripture's Story
- * Serving Together — Mission For All Ages
- * Boundary Awareness for Faith Formation & Youth Ministry Leaders
- * Exploring Curriculum & Digital Resources
- * Developing Faith — Ages & Stages
- * Living Into the Mystery — Worship & Sacraments in the United Church of Christ
- * Making Disciples — Theories & Practices for the 21st Century
- * Faith Formation 101 — Practices for a Sustainable Ministry
- * Youth Ministry 101 — Practices for a Sustainable Ministry
- * Creating Safe Environments — Policies & Practices
- * Racial Justice

Extending a Call

Establishing a Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministry Committee

Adapted from The Youth Ministry Handbook, Rev. Kim Mislin, First Congregational Church, Bakersfield, CA. Used by permission.

Note: This article is intended for larger congregations with a good number of children and youth. The information provided is still important, but should be adapted by each individual congregation to meet its unique ministry needs.

No one person should be responsible for all aspects of faith formation and/or youth ministries. There must be shared leadership and a network of accountability, even if the church has only fifty members and four children/youth. Without this, the church leaves itself open to the potential for significant liability. The easiest way to establish this network of accountability is by establishing a Committee for Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministries that is accountable to the governing body of the church, and works closely and cooperatively with the hired faith formation and/or youth ministry leader(s).

The group that the Committee for Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministries reports to should have a member of the Committee as a voting member. This person serves as the link between both groups.

The establishment of a Committee for Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministries makes a clear statement about the desire to be involved, and intention in having a high quality program for its children and youth. This positive approach provides a good foundation for the ministry.

A Committee for Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministries should include representation from the governing body that the Committee reports to, parents, the youth themselves, other pertinent staff, and other interested persons.

If youth activities such as choirs, service clubs, and sporting groups are also considered to be youth ministry activities, then representatives of these groups should also be voting members of the Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministries Committee. The goal is to provide a voice for all aspects of the children and/or youth ministries, enriched by the viewpoints of those not directly involved in this ministry, thereby providing balance.

The Committee for Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministries should exercise leadership in the following ways:

1. Establish a Mission Statement of the vision, objectives, and theology of the youth ministry program.
2. Establish in writing clear guidelines and procedures for all youth ministry activities, regularly reviewed and modified as needed. Guidelines and procedures should include fiscal matters, so that those involved in youth ministry are aware of the financial resources available to the program, such as a fund-raising policy, for instance.
3. Review and approve youth ministry activities before they occur. It will be up to the committee to decide which activities require approval.
4. Act as an advocate for the youth and for the adult leaders with prayer, affirmation, and support. Find opportunities to publicly acknowledge the youth and their adult leaders.

5. Mediate difficulties and disputes that involve the youth and/or the youth ministry program modeling positive conflict management and communication skills so that problems are dealt with directly and in a respectful, timely manner.

After a committee is established, it should be publicly recognized in a worship service in whatever way is consistent with the particular faith tradition. In this way the entire church acknowledges and empowers this very important ministry.

One of the first tasks of this committee should be to discuss and draw up a covenant for working with the staff member(s) responsible for faith formation and/or youth ministries, outlining specific roles, relationships, and expectations of each party.

The Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministry Committee should meet monthly for the purpose of being consistently and faithfully involved in the children's and/or youth ministry program. Once a committee is established and becomes comfortable with a routine, an hour should be sufficient for conducting most business. A sample agenda for a routine meeting is as follows:

1. Prayer
2. Sharing of joys and concerns
3. Review of events requiring approval and any other business
4. Long-range planning
5. Other business
6. Affirmation of youth and leaders
7. Prayer

The Committee for Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministries should report monthly to the committee or governing body to which it is accountable. In this way, open communication will be maintained and the children's and/or youth ministry program stands a better chance of being integrated into the overall church ministry.

A planning retreat is often helpful when a committee first forms. A retreat can be a wonderful time for relationship-building and dreaming, as well as designing concrete guidelines and plans.

Developing a Position Description

Calculating the Type of Leadership Support Your Congregation Needs

The numbers and calculations used here may be found at <https://ministryarchitects.com/free-tools-and-resources/>, as well as in *Sustainable Children's Ministry* by Annette Safstrom and Mark DeVries and *Sustainable Youth Ministry* by Mark DeVries. You are encouraged to visit this website for other helpful faith formation and youth ministry resources.

1. Youth Ministry Budget

\$1,000 to \$1,500 per child/teen expected to participate in the faith formation and/or youth ministry program. ***This figure includes faith formation &/or youth and music staff salary and benefits, meeting and event supplies, trip costs, etc.*** (Calculated for 2021; visit <https://ministryarchitects.com/free-tools-and-resources/> for updated figures.)

2. Paid Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministry Staff

Full-time employee:

One full-time faith formation and/or youth ministry staff person for every 50 teens and 75 active children expected to participate.

Part-time employee:

One full-time faith formation and/or youth ministry staff person for every 25 active teens and 37 active children expected to participate.

3. Volunteers

One adult for every 5 teens/children expected to participate. (Your congregation's safety policy's required number of volunteers concern the *safety* of the children/youth; this figure is specifically for the number of volunteers needed to *sustain* a program.)

4. How many children/teens should you expect to participate in your faith formation and/or youth ministry program?

The average number of active children/teens that tend to participate in a typical congregation's faith formation and/or youth ministry program is 10% of the number of worshippers on a typical Sunday morning at that church.

5. How big will we be able to grow our children's/youth ministry program with these guidelines in place?

A typical congregation that puts these guidelines in place, along with a consistent structure and vision, can expect to grow its youth ministry program to 20% of the number of worshippers on a typical Sunday morning at that church. For children, the percentage is 15%. However, after this number has been reached, the potential for increased numbers is not as predictable.

Mark DeVries states that there are some exceptions to these norms:

- ✓ "Churches that have youth groups roughly the size of Jesus' youth group (12 or so) can typically do youth ministry much less expensively."
- ✓ "Youth groups in towns with one middle school and one high school may find it possible to attract larger numbers than the norms predict."

Developing a Position Description

Expectations and Questions to Consider

Does this congregation need a full-time or part-time faith formation and/or youth ministry leader? Refer to the next page, "Calculating What Type of Leadership Support Your Congregation Needs." Other determining factors are your congregation's financial health as well as its commitment to faith formation, children, youth, and families.

A congregation seeking a faith formation and/or youth ministry leader should examine carefully its needs and priorities for faith formation and youth ministries. This will help the prospective faith formation and/or youth ministry leader to better understand your congregation and the role that they will have. It will also help your congregation to clarify its own needs and expectations.

On the following pages are checklists to help you determine what tasks you will include in the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader's job description, along with an estimation of how many hours each task will take. In preparation for filling out these checklists, first address the following questions:

- ✓ Do we need a person who will lead us in envisioning what faith formation should look like in our particular congregation, in planning and developing programs that will make our vision a reality, and in overseeing the implementation of the program we plan?
OR
Do we need a person who will administrate our existing programs and supervise volunteers?
- ✓ Do we need a person who will have oversight of the total faith formation ministry for all ages?
OR
Do we need a person to oversee a special area such as children's, family, youth ministry, adult education, and/or intergenerational programing?
- ✓ What qualifications are we looking for in a staff person for faith formation and/or youth ministry?
- ✓ Which board or committee will the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader be responsible for?
- ✓ What support will be provided for the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader (e.g., administrative, work space, resources, committee and volunteer support)?
- ✓ What will be the relationship of the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader to the rest of the church staff (other ministers, employees, volunteers)?
- ✓ For each event or task, will the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader need to attend meetings and/or equip/train personnel? If so, how many meetings will be needed and how long will each one be?
- ✓ Will the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader need to find resources, create publicity, and/or recruit personnel? Most preparation of this type requires at least 1-2 hours for every hour of contact time, depending on the type of event/project.
- ✓ Will the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader need to provide set-up and clean-up?

Developing a Position Description

Faith Formation Leadership Expectations Checklist

Check the tasks you expect the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader to undertake, then write the number of hours estimated to complete the task. The first item (Staff Meeting) has been provided to get you started.

<u>Task</u>	<u># of hours</u>	<u>Circle one:</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Staff Meeting	1	(week) month
<input type="checkbox"/> Worship (actual worship time plus 1 hour beforehand, coffee hour, and any preparation time needed)	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministry Committee meetings (plus at least 1 hour preparation time)	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Other committee/board meetings as a staff/resource person (plus at least 1 hour preparation time)	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Local community agency/program/school liaison	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Research/purchase/develop curriculum materials and resources	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Recruit teachers, leaders, and sponsors (or provide guidance/oversight to recruitment of volunteers)	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Development/support/evaluation/appreciation of volunteers	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Mentor to children, youth, and families	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Plan programs	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Work directly with youth groups	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Visit in homes of the congregation	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Maintain regular e-mail/phone/social networking communication with children, youth, and families	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Keep regular specified office hours	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Be responsible for own administrative work	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Lead or participate in retreats, mission trips/projects, camps	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Regular reports, newsletter articles, web content, etc.	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Maintain/oversee/order/purchase educational supplies	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Recruit volunteers for and oversee childcare for faith formation programs (or all church functions?)	_____	week/month
<input type="checkbox"/> Other specific expectations of this congregation include:	_____	week/month
_____	_____	week/month
_____	_____	week/month
_____	_____	week/month
_____	_____	week/month
_____	_____	week/month
_____	_____	week/month
_____	_____	week/month

Developing a Position Description

Areas of Responsibility Worksheet

Place a 1 beside the activities on which the congregation places highest priority.

Place a 2 beside the activities that have intermediate priority.

Place a 3 beside the activities that have lowest priority.

Note that this list includes some areas of specialty above and beyond what traditional Sunday morning programming would cover.

- _____ Leadership development
- _____ Administration of the faith formation and/or youth ministry programs
- _____ Design new faith formation and/or youth ministry models/programs
- _____ Curriculum development
- _____ Education about worship and/or leadership in worship
- _____ Education in evangelism
- _____ Family ministries
- _____ Mentoring programs
- _____ Prayer groups, support groups, spiritual retreats
- _____ Seasonal programming (Advent, Lent, etc.)
- _____ Parish program development (in/for the local community)
- _____ Stewardship education
- _____ Youth ministry
- _____ Participation in regional/national/denominational programs/committees
- _____ Interdenominational educational programs
- _____ Counseling
- _____ Crisis visitation
- _____ Mission education/administration
- _____ Weekday children's programs
- _____ Music ministry
- _____ Confirmation education
- _____ Other program areas important to your congregation:

Developing a Position Description

Skills and Special Interests Worksheet

Check the items in which you hope the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader will have particular interest or skill.

Age Groups

- Infants
- Early Childhood
- Elementary
- Youth
- College
- Young Adults
- Singles
- Middle Adults
- Older Adults

Intergenerational Activities

- Camping
- Retreats
- Recreation
- Crafts
- Recreation for persons with disabilities
- Family
- Mission
- Other:

Arts

- Choral Music (Adults)
- Choral Music (Children/Youth)
- Organ/Piano/keyboard/instrumental
- Visual Arts (banners, graphics, etc.)
- Liturgical Dance
- Theatre Arts
- Media/Communications
- Other:

Languages

- Spanish
- European [_____]
- Japanese
- Korean
- Other Asian [_____]
- Mid-Eastern [_____]
- Other:

Developing a Local Church Profile

Church Profile Worksheet

A. Name of the Church _____
Address: _____
Phone number: _____
E-mail address: _____
Website: _____

B. About the Church

How might a member or visitor describe your church?

What are the long range goals of your church?

What joys, frustrations, key events or celebrations illustrate what it's like to be a part of this congregation?

C. About your neighborhood

Describe the area in which the church is located.

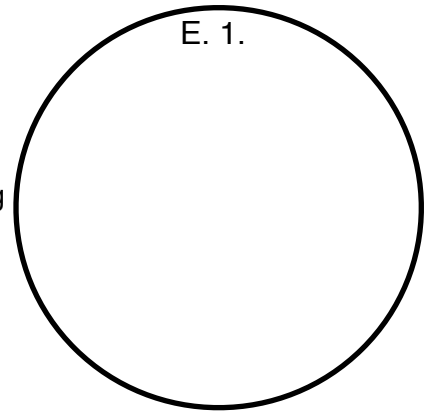
In what ways does the church interact with the community, especially educationally?

D. Membership/Attendance

Average attendance at worship: _____

Current church membership: _____

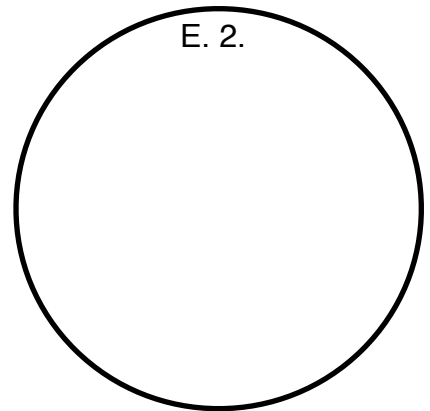
Describe your virtual, on-site, and/or hybrid worship & programming



E. Demographic Profile (fill in the corresponding pie charts with your estimated percentages)

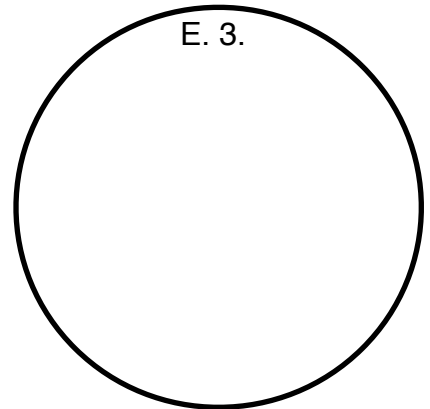
1. Age Category:

- Infants
- Preschool
- Elementary
- Middle/Senior High
- Young Adults
- Mid Adults
- Older Adults



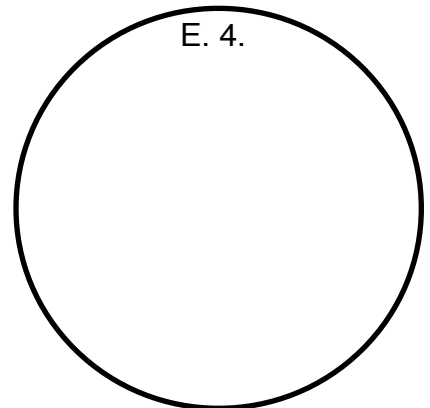
2. Education:

- High school
- Education beyond high school
- Advanced degree



3. Family Units

- % family units with children at home
- % family units without children at home
- % single
- % single parent/grandparent/caregiver with children at home



4. Occupation:

- Business
- Professional
- Farmer/Rancher
- Laborer/manufacturer
- Homemaker
- Service Industry
- Retired
- Other

5. Describe the diversity makeup of your congregation (racial, ethnic, gender, age, abilities, etc.).

F. Pastor and other professional staff

Name and position for each staff member:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Position</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

G. How does the church plan to fund this position over the next three years?

Compensation Guidelines

for Those Engaged in Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministries

Salary and Benefit Guidelines

Professional faith formation and/or youth ministry leaders deserve to be adequately compensated for their work in the church with salary and benefits. Consideration needs to be taken to include enough benefits for the faith formation and/or youth ministry leaders to accomplish their jobs effectively with a physically and spiritually healthy lifestyle. The following factors should be considered:

- Academic background (certification), ecclesiastical standing (ordained other authorized minister)
- Experience in teaching and the teaching ministry
- Median income of the congregation
- Salary levels of equivalent positions in your community (public school teachers, administrators)
- Years of experience
- Proportionality to other professional staff salaries

In addition to salary the following benefits should be considered:

- Social Security
- Continuing education funds and time
- Professional expenses (books, literature, supplies, professional memberships, such as the Association of United Church Educators — <https://www.auce-ucc.org>)
- Vacation (four weeks per year, paid)
- Mileage
- Sick leave

Strongly recommended:

Note: The United Church of Christ Pension Boards offer employee benefit programs for both clergy and lay employees: <https://www.pbucc.org>.

- Health and dental insurance
- Annuity - UCC Retirement Fund for Lay Workers
- UCC Health/Dental Insurance for Lay Workers
- Sick leave
- Other leaves of absence
- Sabbatical time and compensation

Job Related Expense Allowances to include:

- Books, magazines, and other resource materials
- Professional organizations' membership fees, such as the Association of United Church Educators — <https://www.auce-ucc.org>
- Conferences/workshops/webinars on faith formation and/or youth ministry
- State and national ecumenical events
- Continuing education costs
- Travel expenses - at the IRS allowable rate

Salaries for a part-time position need to be adjusted according to hours but should reflect professional standards of compensation.

Southern New England Conference, United Church of Christ offers compensation guidelines for authorized ministers. Do a search the website for its most recent guidelines: <https://www.sneucc.org>

Church Law & Tax offers resources for helping congregations to determine appropriate salary packages for their staff members: <https://www.churchsalary.com>

The former Connecticut Association of United Church Educators' 2014-2015 Christian Education and Formation Compensation Guidelines are available to help you visualize a just and fair package for your Christian educator/youth ministry leader. Be sure to calculate a 0.5% per year cost of living increase into the figures: <https://www.sneucc.org/files/websites/sne/Compensation-Guidelines-CT-2014.pdf>

And the Unitarian Universalist Association offers a comprehensive resource for their congregations to use: <https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/staff-salary>

Another calculation method is to use percentages related to secular salaries in your area, as follows:

The compensation for faith formation and/or youth ministry staff should be appropriate to the individual's education and experience. Persons with experience in complementary fields (such as art, music, and drama, for instance) should have this expertise considered in the discussion of the compensation package as well. The following are basic guidelines with which to start creating a compensation package. The number of years of church ministry experience and the number of faith formation and/or youth ministry continuing education courses and workshops taken also should be considered when determining the salary for a faith formation and/or youth ministry leader.

For a **full-time** faith formation and/or youth ministry position in the church:

- A person who is ordained should be compensated according to the conference's guidelines for clergy (authorized ministers).
- A person who holds a master's degree in religious or public school education may be compensated relative to the equivalent of a public school teacher in the church's district with the same education and same years of experience.
- A person who holds a bachelor's degree in religious or public school education may be compensated relative to the equivalent of a public school teacher in the church's district with the same education and same years of experience.
- A person who has completed the equivalent of a denominational noncredit program of training in church education may be compensated at least 80% of the salary of a first year public school teacher in the church's district.
- For those who have organizational skills and some educational background but little training or experience in faith formation and/or youth ministry, we recommend compensation at no less than 60% of what a public school teacher in the church's district receives. We also recommend that the church pay for this person to complete a program of training in faith formation and/or youth ministry, such as the Southern New England Conference Faith Formation Leadership Certificate Program (<https://www.sneucc.org/certification>).

As a person receives more training, the salary package should be adjusted annually with a pay raise that recognizes this achievement.

Salary for **part-time** positions would be the appropriate percentage of the full-time salary guidelines.

Churches that underfund their Christian formation ministry areas often have volunteers, parents, and staff who feel discouraged, undervalued, and disgruntled. In this way, churches can inadvertently undermine their potential for successful or sustainable ministry.

- Mark DeVries

Developing a Job Description

Job Description Worksheet

Name of Church: _____ Date: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ E-mail: _____

Website: _____

Title of the Position: _____

Purpose Statement of the Position:

A. Responsibilities - For what specific tasks, assignments and program areas will the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader have responsibility?

B. Working Relationships - Describe the line of accountability. List persons, boards and/or committees with whom the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader will work most closely. Describe any special relationships to the community. (The most effective oversight of a faith formation and/or youth ministry leader is accountability to the appropriate board or committee.)

C. Basic and Specific Qualifications - Personal and Professional

D. Evaluation and Review - Which board or committee is responsible for performance and salary review? How often are they held?

E. What office arrangements are made for the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader (office space, equipment, administrative assistance, etc.?) What allowances will be made for working from home?

F. Work Schedule:

How many hours are required? _____

How is the time to be distributed among task areas?

How many hours or percentage of time can the work be completed at home?

Is this position considered full-time or part-time?

If part-time, be aware of the amount of preparation time for each area of responsibility. For example, the time needed for mentoring and equipping leaders/teachers/volunteers will need to be included in many of the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader's task areas.

The faith formation and/or youth ministry leader will be granted the following time off:

_____ days per week

_____ weekends per year

_____ weeks per year vacation

In addition, the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader will receive _____ weeks per year for continuing education.

G. Salary and Benefits:

Salary range: _____

Social Security

Retirement Annuity

Health/Dental Insurance

Group Life Insurance

Family Protection Plan

Parental Leave

Sick Leave

Personal days

Reimbursable Expenses:

Moving Expenses

Auto/Travel Expenses

Telephone/Internet Expenses

Books, resources, professional memberships (such as the Association of United Church Educators — <https://www.auce-ucc.org>)

Continuing Education

Supplies for programs including food, etc.

Sample Full-Time Job Description

Title: Minister of Lifelong Faith Formation Ministries

Purpose of the Position: To provide overall leadership in faith formation ministries and fostering spiritual growth for all ages.

The Minister of Lifelong Faith Formation Ministries will provide nurture and guidance for all aspects of spiritual and faith formation in accordance with the mission and vision of the congregation, and the goals, objectives, and policies established by the Faith Formation Board-(or other responsible body).

The Minister of Lifelong Faith Formation Ministries will provide counsel and recommendations to the Faith Formation Board (or other responsible board or committee) for programs, resources, and volunteers.

The Minister of Lifelong Faith Formation Ministries will oversee the administration of all faith formation programs; work with the Faith Formation Board (or other responsible board or committee) in the enlistment and training of volunteers, and work with clergy and other staff in the planning and coordination of the church's program and mission.

The Minister of Lifelong Faith Formation Ministries will keep the entire congregation informed of children, youth, and family activities/events and enlist their participation and support as often as possible, fostering faith-forming relationships across the generations.

Responsibilities

CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

Focus of Time

- Establish regular office hours for availability to staff, volunteers, and parents.
- Participate regularly in corporate worship, and work with the senior minister to include children and youth.
- Attend meetings of the Faith Formation Board (or other appropriate board or committee) and coordinate the agenda with the Chair.
- Attend meetings of the Church Council as needed.
- Regularly attend staff meetings.
- Work with volunteers to administer all programming for children, youth, and families.
- Engage in the life of the congregation (such as pot luck suppers, fund raisers, etc.) for further connection with children, youth, and families and the promotion of their growth in faith.
- Focus on active retention of children, youth, and families by maintaining ongoing relationships and use the current communication tools of the congregation.
- Maintain relationships with service agencies in the community to partner with the congregation's faith formation and mission programming.

Administrative

- Oversee the recruitment of volunteers and substitutes.
- Provide support, training, and appreciation of volunteers.

- Provide leadership in the evaluation and selection of curriculum and resources.
- Keep up-to-date records of the children, youth, and families of the congregation; and share with the ministers.
- Maintain an inventory of Bibles, curriculum, and other resource materials.

PROGRAM

- Initiate, coordinate, participate in, and evaluate intentional, sustained, faith-forming experiences for children, youth, and adults, including intergenerational opportunities and corporate worship.
- Implement, coordinate, and supervise seasonal intergenerational opportunities and events/programming, highlighting church holidays and traditions of the Church and this congregation.
- Curate online resources to be shared with families, youth, and adults.
- Adapt to the changing landscape regarding in-person, virtual, and hybrid faith and spiritual formation opportunities, using best practices for this particular congregation.

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

- Engage in at least one educational opportunity (webinar, course, workshop, conference, and/or other form of continuing education) annually.

EVALUATION OF PERFORMANCE AND COMPETENCE

- Participate in an annual review process with the Staff Relations Committee and the senior minister.

Personal Qualifications

- Commitment to the Christian faith
- Enthusiastic and optimistic about faith formation ministries
- Able to work effectively with people and have concern for their nurture as persons and as disciples of Jesus Christ
- An effective communicator, is organized, self-directed, collaborative, and innovative
- Possesses adaptive leadership skills; is able to identify and act on signs of change

Professional Qualifications

- Academic training in religious education and theology, or equivalency through webinars, conferences, courses, and workshops. Such training should include work in theology, biblical studies, human & faith development, and educational theory

Experience

- Experience in the church in either volunteer or professional positions and/or experience in teaching, leading, administration and supervision
- Familiarity and proficiency with current digital, communication, and social media tools
- Bachelors degree or above
- Willingness to enroll in and attend the classes in the Southern New England Conference Faith Formation Leadership Program (<https://www.sneucc.org/certification>), as needed

Supervised by and directly responsible to: the Senior Minister

Sample Part-Time Job Description

Title: Director of Children and Family Ministries

Purpose of the Position: To provide overall leadership in faith formational ministries, including guidance and resourcing for all aspects of engagement in the life of the congregation.

Functions

Administration
Leadership Development
Nurture
Planning
Resource Development
Communication
Relationship-building

The Director of Children and Family Ministries will provide nurture and guidance for the faith formational and spiritual programming, birth through 8th grade, in accordance with the mission and vision of the congregation, and the goals, objectives and policies established by the Faith Formation Board (or other responsible body).

The Director of Children and Family Ministries will oversee all faith formational opportunities for children and families. They will work with clergy and other staff in the planning and involvement of children in the congregation's program and mission.

The Director of Children and Family Ministries will keep the entire congregation informed of children's and family activities/events and enlist their participation and support as often as possible, fostering faith-forming relationships across the generations.

Specific Responsibilities

- Recruit and support volunteers for children's and family programming, and plan and lead volunteer orientation and training sessions.
- Research, evaluate, and present curriculum materials and resources to the Faith Formation Board (or other responsible board or committee) for approval.
- Work with the pastor to incorporate children in worship and assist with intergenerational events during the year.
- Attend all Faith Formation Board (or other appropriate board or committee) meetings, working together in the formation, coordination, promotion, and evaluation of faith formational and spiritual programs and policies.
- Coordinate with the senior pastor the children's and teens' presence in corporate worship.
- Submit a yearly budget to the Faith Formation Board (or other responsible board or committee) for approval.
- Prepare and submit the annual faith formation report.
- Keep abreast of best practices for children's and family formational ministries, and bring them to the attention of the staff, Boards, volunteers, and parents.

- Adapt to the changing landscape regarding in-person, virtual, and hybrid faith and spiritual formation opportunities, using best practices for this particular congregation.
- Engage in the life of the congregation (such as pot luck suppers, fund raisers, etc.) for further connection with children, youth, and families and the promotion of their growth in faith.
- Focus on active retention of children, youth, and families by maintaining ongoing relationships and use the current communication tools of the congregation.
- Participate in an annual review process with the Staff Relations Committee and the senior pastor.

Qualifications

- Commitment to the Christian faith
- Enthusiastic and optimistic about faith formation ministries
- Able to work effectively with people and have concern for their nurture as persons and as disciples of Jesus Christ
- An effective communicator, is organized, self-directed, collaborative, and innovative
- Possesses adaptive leadership skills; is able to identify and act on signs of change
- Experience in the church in either volunteer or professional positions
- Familiarity and proficiency with current digital, communication, and social media tools
- College degree or above
- Willingness to enroll in and attend the classes in the Southern New England Conference Faith Formation Leadership Certificate Program (_____)

Time requirements: 20 hours per week or other hours per week, 48 weeks per year.

Supervised by and directly responsible to: Faith Formation Board

Sample Part-Time Job Description for a Youth Ministry Position

Title: Youth Ministry Coordinator

Purpose of the position: To provide overall leadership for youth ministries including guidance and resources for all aspects of the program in conjunction with the life of the entire congregation.

Functions:

Administration
Supervision
Leadership Development
Planning
Resource Development
Communication
Relationship-building

Responsibilities

Participation

Attend all youth group meetings, volunteer meetings, planning sessions, other church meetings, and events/activities necessary for effective program leadership.

Leadership

The Youth Ministry Coordinator will provide leadership, training, resource evaluation and/or development & selection, and support for youth ministry programming, and assist youth ministry volunteers with program planning — including in-person and virtual — and implementation.

Communication

- The Youth Ministry Coordinator will provide regular communication of youth ministry activities, issues, and programming to the Youth Ministry Committee/Board.
- The Youth Ministry Coordinator will provide communication of community, church, and wider UCC activities, issues, and youth ministry programming to the youth and their families.

Relationships

- The Youth Ministry Coordinator will maintain a relationship with the Youth Ministry Committee/Board and pastor so as to be provided with (semi-) annual evaluations of programming, leadership style, etc.
- The Youth Ministry Coordinator will work with the pastor and other boards/committees of the congregation to provide intergenerational faith formation opportunities to foster relationships across the generations toward growth in faith for all.
- The Youth Coordinator is directly responsible to the Youth Ministry Committee/Board.

Time required: 20 hours per week

Where To Find Applicants

Southern New England Conference Staff Support

The Faith Formation Team of the Southern New England Conference (<https://www.sneucc.org/faith-formation-team>) is available to assist you in your search for a faith formation and/or youth ministry leader.

Submit Your Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministry Leader Position to the SNEUCC Classifieds

Posting your ad on the Southern New England Conference website will help you to reach the kind of candidates you seek: <https://www.sneucc.org/classifieds>

United Church of Christ Classified Ads

If you are offering a full-time position, the United Church of Christ lists employment opportunities on its website that often include openings for Christian educators and youth ministers. Talk with your Area Conference Minister (<https://www.sneucc.org/area-conference-minister-team>) for assistance in posting your job listing on the UCC site.

Social Media

Facebook, Idealist, and other popular social media sites can broaden your search; however, be aware that you may receive more replies from those who do not have the skills and experience you are looking for from these sources.

Talk to People

As difficult as it is for most congregations to afford a full-time faith formation staff person, the reality is that part-time positions do not draw a variety of candidates from a wide geographic area. With that said, the best way to find a good applicant is through talking to people with contacts and connections in the field of faith formation and youth ministries. Other possible places to search would be local schools for teachers and local churches of other sister denominations to see if there are qualified and interested candidates within their congregations.

Local Christian Educator's Meetings

Talk with churches of other denominations in your community to see if there is a local gathering of faith formation and/or youth ministry leaders in your area. These people are in good position to link you with faith formation and youth ministry leaders who are searching for a new setting for their ministry. You may even find a faith formation and/or youth ministry leader there who is currently employed but may be intrigued by your position enough to consider a move! The New England Association of United Church Educators Annual Conference is held early in May each year. Visit <https://www.uce-ucc.org/new-england> to locate the contact information of the New England Regional Representative. They will be able to help you make your faith formation and/or youth ministry position known at this event.

Members In Discernment

Members in Discernment are often seminary students who are pursuing a degree toward seeking ministerial ordination. Many of these people do not have training in faith formation or youth ministries, yet some may have taken a class/workshop and/or have had some field experience. Ask your

association Committee On Ministry if any of their current Members In Discernment demonstrate the gifts/skills for ministry with children, youth, and families. Do note that a student seeking ordination may not consider staying with your congregation after they graduate.

Christian Camps and Outdoor Ministries Programs

Visit the United Church of Christ Outdoor Ministries Association (<https://www.omaucc.org>) to contact a camp director near you who may know of current and former camp staff members that may be interested and qualified to serve in a faith formation and/or youth ministry position at your church.

One of Your Own

One of the most common ways that Southern New England Conference congregations are filling their faith formation and/or youth ministry positions is by helping an individual from their own congregation, who possesses the gifts and skills for faith formation and/or youth ministry administration, to recognize a potential calling to this ministry. Then the congregation can sponsor this person financially to attend the SNEUCC Faith Formation Leadership Certificate Program (<https://www.sneucc.org/certification>). The congregation may also choose to reach out to the Southern New England Conference's Faith Formation Team (<https://www.sneucc.org/faith-formation-team>) to pair this person with a mentor from a UCC church nearby. While some may tell you that it is not a good idea to hire from within your own congregation due to potential boundary issues, someone who has served your program as a volunteer and demonstrates the gifts and talents needed for a faith formation and/or youth ministry position could actually turn out to be your best candidate. If you do choose to hire a member of your congregation, be sure to set up professional boundaries at the outset, and communicate these understandings to the entire congregation. The SNEUCC Faith Formation Leadership Certificate Program (<https://www.sneucc.org/certification>) offers a Boundary Awareness for Faith Formation and Youth Ministry Leaders class twice each year. This class is an excellent opportunity for the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader, their supervising committee/board, and the pastor to become familiar with the potential boundary issues that can occur while serving a congregation where you are a member, and to learn best practices for managing and avoiding them.

The Hard Truth

The days of people seeking out faith formation and/or youth ministry as a career seem to be drawing to a close as UCC-related seminaries and colleges are not offering those degree programs anymore. There is no longer a steady stream of trained faith formation and/or youth ministry leaders to choose from. If you are seeking the most highly qualified and gifted leader for your program, then you will need to offer a full-time position with a competitive salary and benefits with plenty of congregational support for the position. This will draw the best pool of candidates from across the country who will be willing to uproot and move to your community to accept your position. Yet with some creative resourcing, and adherence to the guidelines offered in this handbook, even the smallest congregation will be able to nurture and support a gifted person who is called to this ministry to serve your congregation faithfully and effectively.

The Interview and Selection Process

As a search committee, or group tasked with finding the appropriate faith formation and/or youth ministry candidate for your congregation, you want to strive to discern core competencies and affirm certain standards of excellence.

Seasoned candidates who are aware of and currently engaged in a call to the ministry of Christian formation should be able to articulate their knowledge of the field including a familiarity with best practices, with recently published scholarship or literature, and be able to articulate a clear understanding of the relevance of this ministry to the life of the faith community and to the individuals the community serves.

A candidate new to faith formation and/or youth ministry with the appropriate gifts and skills, and who is a person of faith, may be able to meet the criteria below, but may answer many of your questions differently than a seasoned faith formation and/or youth ministry leader.

To determine the candidate's suitability for this work, a process of crafting good (often open-ended) questions and careful reflective listening must be utilized. Be sure to use the qualifications and characteristics that you are seeking in a candidate to formulate effective questions that will allow the candidates to demonstrate their suitability for the position.

Practically speaking, your best candidate will be a person of faith who:

- Demonstrates an ability to articulate his/her own faith with clarity.
- Has knowledge of and is engaged in the best practices of faith formation and a personal foundation basic to the work (basic biblical knowledge, basic understanding of faith development, basic knowledge of United Church of Christ identity, history, etc.)
- Demonstrates an awareness of and a willingness to participate in the best practices of creating a safe and nurturing environment.
- Demonstrates social, emotional, and spiritual well-being with an understanding of healthy boundaries in all relationships within the church and outside of the church.
- A candidate who is a well-rounded individual with hobbies, relationships, and interests outside the church, as well as having experience and connections within a local church setting.
- Is a person of faith, regularly engaging in Christian practices such as prayer and worship.
- Takes advantage of professional development opportunities.

Some other helpful questions to ask could be:

- What would you describe as the greatest strength you bring to this work?
- What would you identify as a challenge for you in ministry?
- What would you describe as your most creative effort in previous employment?
- Describe in general terms a difficulty or conflict in your work that you are able to resolve.
- What would you like to ask of us?

What interests you about the role of [title of faith formation and/or youth ministry position] in this congregation?

What life experiences have been most helpful to you as a faith formation and/or youth ministry leader?

How have you supported families in your work?

What is your experience in intergenerational work or activities?
Describe how you manage to keep healthy boundaries between your personal and professional lives.

What would you describe as the greatest strength you bring to this work?

What would you identify as a challenge for you in ministry?

What would you describe as your most creative effort in previous employment?

Describe in general terms a difficulty or conflict in your work that you were able to resolve.

What would you like to ask us?

Employee/Volunteer Screening Form

*Adapted from a form developed by the United Church of Christ, Congregational, Norwell, MA.
Used by permission.*

Name _____
Last First Middle

Address _____
Street

_____ City State Zip

Telephone numbers _____
Best number to reach you Other

E-mail address _____

Other name(s), if any, by which I have been known _____

Position(s) for which you are applying _____

Current (or Previous) Employer name and address _____
Company

_____ Street

_____ City State Zip

Your immediate supervisor _____

Church affiliation _____
Church Town and State

Are you currently a member of this church?

- Yes
- No

How long were you affiliated with this church? _____

Have you ever been convicted of or pleaded guilty to a felony?

(If yes, please explain - attach a separate sheet if necessary.)

- Yes
- No

Do you have a valid driver's license?

Yes

No

If yes, please indicate: state _____ and driver's license # _____

Have you ever had your driver's license suspended because of alcohol or drug abuse?

(If yes, please explain - attach a separate sheet if necessary.)

Yes

No

Has a civil lawsuit alleging actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation or misconduct; physical abuse; child abuse; or financial misconduct ever resulted in a judgment being entered against you, been settled out of court, or been dismissed because the statute of limitations expired?

(If yes, please explain - attach a separate sheet if necessary.)

Yes

No

I have never terminated my employment or service in a volunteer position or had my employment or authorization to hold a volunteer position terminated for reasons relating to allegations of actual or attempted sexual discrimination, harassment, exploitation or misconduct; physical abuse or financial misconduct.

(If yes, please explain - attach a separate sheet if necessary.)

True

False

Is there any fact or circumstance involving you or your background that will call into question your being entrusted with the responsibilities of the position for which you are applying?

(If yes, please explain - attach a separate sheet if necessary.)

Yes

No

The information contained in this application is correct to the best of my knowledge. I authorize any references or churches listed in this application to give any information (including opinions) that they may have regarding my character and fitness for youth work.

Signature of Applicant

Date

Signature of Church Representative

Date

List three personal references who are not relatives:

(1) Name _____

Address _____

City, State, and Zip Code _____

Telephone number _____

E-mail address _____

Relationship to you _____

Years known _____

(2) Name _____

Address _____

City, State, and Zip Code _____

Telephone number _____

E-mail address _____

Relationship to you _____

Years known _____

(3) Name _____

Address _____

City, State, and Zip Code _____

Telephone number _____

E-mail address _____

Relationship to you _____

Years known _____

Please continue to the next page

The Contract or Letter of Call

A Sample Form for the Call of a Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministry Leader

The _____ Church of [town, state], having heard the recommendations of its Search Committee on [date], has voted to extend to [name of faith formation and/or youth ministry leader] a call to become its [title of position] effective [date].

Specifically, the congregation calls [name of faith formation and/or youth ministry leader] to: join the congregation in its life as stated in [covenant, declaration, or statement of faith], and assume the duties of leadership and to serve this congregation as [title of position].

The congregation agrees to support [name of faith formation and/or youth ministry leader] with prayers, periodic evaluation, and stewardship of time.

In addition:

The Church agrees to pay a beginning salary of \$_____ and to review the salary annually.

The Church agrees to provide the following benefits as specified:

Social Security

Annuity

Family protection plan

Health and dental insurance

Continuing education funds and time

Vacation weeks days/weeks

Mileage or compensation

Professional expenses

Parental leave days days

Sick leave days days

It is mutually agreed that this arrangement may be terminated by either the [name of] Church or the [title of faith formation and/or youth position] upon _____ months notice.

Signed

[church clerk, president, or moderator]
for the [name of church]

[Date]

Having prayerfully considered the call of the [name of church] of [town, state], I do accept that call and the conditions included in it. In accepting the call, I covenant to join with the Congregation in its faith and ministry, and to carry out the *faith formation/youth* ministry with love, faithfulness, and prayer.

Signed

[Christian educator/youth ministry leader]

[Date]

This sample form should be adapted according to your church's specific situation. It is suggested that two copies of the Contract/Call be printed on church stationery and signed by both the church moderator and the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader — one copy to be retained as part of the church records and one copy to be retained by the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader.

Supporting the Relationship
Between
the Faith Formation and/or
Youth Ministry Leader
and
the Local Church

Love God.

Service of Covenanting for the Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministry Leader

This service of worship and covenanting should be welcoming of children and youth by incorporating the arts and as many of the five senses as possible, as well as leadership by children at appropriate times. Adapt as needed for your particular congregation.

PRELUDE

OPENING STATEMENT

Dear Friends in Christ,

Our ministry to youth celebrates the love of God for all God's children, even as it celebrates our hope for the church of today and tomorrow.

HYMN: Called as Partners in Christ's Service TNCH #495

or

Jesus Loves Me TNCH #327

or a hymn/song of your choice

INVOCATION

WORDS OF INTRODUCTION

[Name of faith formation and/or youth ministry leader, and their title] stands before you as the person with whom we entrust this ministry on behalf of our church family.

[A member of the Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministry Committee/Board or other appropriate group shall interpret the purpose of this service of covenanting. They should tell the congregation something of the youth ministry leader's background and welcome them on behalf of the congregation.]

As [name of faith formation and/or youth ministry leader] builds trusted relationships with the youth in our congregation, we are reminded that this is an opportunity for all of us to learn, to grow in faith, and to serve together. As [name of faith formation and/or youth ministry leader] ministers in God's service, it is our responsibility to support them with our engagement, our cooperation, and our prayers.

HEBREW SCRIPTURE

Choose from Deuteronomy 6:4-9; Psalm 25:4-10, or a Hebrew scripture from your choice.

(YOUTH) CHOIR ANTHEM OR SPECIAL MUSIC OFFERING

CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURE

Choose from Ephesians 4:1-16; 1 Corinthians 12:4-31, or a Christian scripture from your choice.

COVENANT

Pastor: Dear friends, *[name of church]* has declared that, having gathered under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, it has called *[name of faith formation and/or youth ministry leader]* to minister in this place as *[title of position]* and that it now receives them as appointed by God for this ministry.

[Name of faith formation and/or youth ministry leader], are you willing to enter this covenant with *[name of church]*?

Faith Formation and/or Youth Ministry Leader: I am willing, and I promise to serve this church faithfully, teaching the word of God, according to the faith and order of the United Church of Christ.

Pastor: People of *[name of church]*, please rise in body or in spirit and affirm your covenant with your youth ministry leader.

Congregation: We, the people of *[name of church]*, receive *[name of faith formation and/or youth ministry leader]* as our *[title of position]*, promising to labor with them in the ministry of the gospel and to give them due honor and support.

CHARGE TO THE FAITH FORMATION AND/OR YOUTH MINISTRY LEADER

[Name of faith formation and/or youth ministry leader], may the Holy Spirit guide and strengthen you, that in this faith community, you may do God's will in the service of Christ.

On behalf of this congregation, we commend you to this work and promise you our prayers, encouragement, nurture, and support.

RESPONSE BY THE FAITH FORMATION AND/OR YOUTH MINISTRY LEADER (optional)

A statement of faith incorporating the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader's understanding of and hopes for the faith formation ministries of the church, utilizing visuals and symbols of education/formation and/or youth ministries.

At this time, simple gifts of symbols of faith formation and/or youth ministry may be presented to the faith formation and/or youth ministry Leader to exemplify these promises, this work, and the congregation's support.

PRAYER OF DEDICATION

Great and gracious God, be with *[name of faith formation and/or youth ministry leader]* who has now affirmed their commitment to follow Christ and to serve in his name. Give them openness, patience, and vision. Strengthen us all as we follow Christ's example and way of love and service to others. We pray this in your glory. Amen.

HYMN: You Are Called to Tell the Story TNCH #357
or hymn/song of your choice

BENEDICTION

Ongoing Nurture and Support

Adapted from Called To Educational and Formational Ministries: A Guide for Local Churches, Educators, and Youth Workers, Association of United Church Educators. Used by permission.

Support Group

The Southern New England Conference provides its faith formation and youth ministry leaders with Communities of Practice. These groups of local church faith formation and youth ministry leaders meet regularly with colleagues from the same geographic area to share best practices and networking opportunities. Contact a member of the Faith Formation Team for more information: <https://www.sneucc.org/faith-formation-team>.

Personnel Committee

If there is a separate personnel committee, be sure that new staff members are connected and have regular meetings with that group. The policies of your congregation will act as a guide to the frequency of the meeting. These meetings should always include time for meeting with a staff person without other staff members present. This will help to build an atmosphere of trust and ensure honest communication between individual staff members and the committee. The evaluation process should be clearly defined (see the Periodic Review page that follows) and a personnel file begun. Confidentiality must be respected.

Communication

Affirm and support the youth ministry of your congregation by intentionally keeping the youth ministry leader's role and work visible. Youth ministry events can be publicized in your newsletter, bulletin, on your church's website, Facebook page, and other social media. Announcements can be made during worship. Determine how frequently and in what role the youth ministry leader will participate in worship with the teens to help the congregation to view them as a part of the Body of Christ. Consider other ministries in the life of your congregation that can be opened up to the youth and made an intergenerational opportunity for all.

Personal and Professional Growth

Encourage and support the personal and professional growth of your youth ministry leader. Make available resources (time and money) for them to attend professional seminars and workshops, as well as personal retreat time for spiritual nurture. The Southern New England Conference offers a Faith Formation Leadership Certificate Program for faith formation and youth ministry leaders: <https://www.sneucc.org/certification>. Include the class' fees in your budgeting for your youth ministry leader's training and continuing education. Provide an allowance for books and other resources. Provide money to join professional associations such as the Association of United Church Educators (www.auce-ucc.org), which will also acquaint them with colleagues in youth ministry and solid professional development opportunities.

Resources from the Southern New England Conference

The SNEUCC Faith Formation Team curates resources and current information about faith formation and youth ministries on its "Make Disciples of Jesus" webpages: <https://www.sneucc.org/disciples>. Visit these pages often for access to best practices and UCC-friendly resources.

Periodic Review

Adapted from Called To Educational and Formational Ministries: A Guide for Local Churches, Educators, and Youth Workers, Association of United Church Educators. Used by permission.

Review is a process for assessing what is of value. The review or evaluation process is not a substitute for conflict resolution. Rather it is a means of identifying growth and growth goals and affirming the youth ministry leader. This review guide has been arranged in three sections so that the board or committee and the youth ministry leader can work separately, then together, to compare expectations and work out any discrepancies.

Questions and areas for the Board or Committee to address

- What are the strengths of our faith formation and/or youth ministry leader?
- Is support for your faith formation and/or youth ministry leader adequate? Not adequate? In what ways?
- List the goals the committee considers important to implement for the coming year.
- Which goals could our faith formation and/or youth ministry leader plan/coordinate/implement?
- For which goals might other staff take responsibility?
- For which goals might volunteers take responsibility?
- List possible ways to implement these plans.
- What are areas in which our faith formation and/or youth ministry leader might consider continuing education in the coming year?
- How will participation in continuing education be facilitated?

Questions and areas for the youth ministry leader to address

- What are some major personal accomplishments of the past year?
- List the goals you see as important to implement for the coming year.
- Which goals could I plan/coordinate/implement?
- For which goals might other staff take responsibility?
- For which goals might volunteers take responsibility?
- List possible ways to implement these plans.
- What are the areas in which I might engage in continuing education in the coming year?
- What will I need in the way of resources and time to do so?
- How has the Board or Committee been most helpful? Least helpful?

Questions and areas for both the Board or Committee and the youth ministry leader to address together

- List the strengths of the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader.
- What are the highlights of our church's faith formation and/or youth ministry in the last year?
- Which previously set goals were met? Which were not? Which goals were changed or modified?
- Are the position description expectations still realistic? What might be added? Deleted? Changed?
- How can the support for the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader be improved?

Recommendations for the coming year

- Compensation review
- Resources for ministry (volunteers, program and expense money, facilities, etc.)
- What goals for the coming year could strengthen the church's faith formation and/or youth ministry? Be specific and realistic!

Recognizing Stress and Burnout

Definitions

All people who work with human beings on a daily basis at one time or another may experience stress or burnout. Stress is the result of having to deal with too many crises that break the balance we have in our lives. Burnout can produce exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment. Burnout is the result of our inability to deal with stressful situations in our work, in our lives, or in our family life.

Crisis

Life brings with it certain levels of crisis. (For the purpose of this document, the word “crisis” refers to high-stress events, both positive and negative.) The two main classifications of crisis are developmental and accidental. A developmental crisis is one that is produced by our own maturation. Such events include marriage, birth, graduation, retirement, new jobs, and other changes that are part of the life cycle. Accidental crises, on the other hand, include sickness, accidents, surgery, moving, unemployment, and/or natural disasters. Both types of crises produce stress in our lives. If we are not able to deal with the levels of stress produced by various types of crises, burnout can result. Psychologists and psychiatrists agree that stress is cumulative. When you keep adding too many crises together, the level of stress increases and the ability of the person to cope is diminished.

Faith formation and youth ministry leaders are continuously dealing with different types of crises in their work environment. Just a message from a volunteer stating that they can not be present for a ministry commitment creates a certain level of stress if the ministry team is not functioning well. If parents are complaining, then stress is created. How much stress a person can handle at a particular time depends on how well equipped that person is and what support is available and utilized by them.

Let's look at the previous example. When the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader receives that message and knows that there are other people they can count on, the level of stress is reduced. On the other hand if there is nobody that they can contact at the last minute to fill in, it creates a stressful situation.

Potential Sources of Stress

- How many hours a week do you work?
- Do you see your work growing and your time shrinking?
- Who is in charge? To whom do you report?
- What kind of relationships do you have with your colleagues?
- What are the things you do not like to do, but are expected of you?
- Do you feel well compensated for the work you do?
- Who cares about your work?
- What are the sources of support for your work?
- How do you balance your work with your family life and your leisure time?
- What support do you receive from your Conference, Association or national offices?
- How do you renew your skills?
- How do you adapt to or resist change?

These and many other questions can help determine if the situation you work in creates levels of stress that can lead to burnout. Stress is dynamic and can change from one moment to the other. However, burnout is a sense of failure that is more difficult to deal with because it radically diminishes coping mechanisms.

Signs of Burnout

- Are you frustrated with your ministry situation?
- Do you think you are at the end of your rope?
- Do you feel emotionally drained?
- Have you lost the passion for your ministry?
- Do you care what happens to the participants?
- Are you having problems relating to other people?
- Do you feel everybody blames you for what is wrong and nobody recognizes what is right?
- When you wake up in the morning, do you dread going to work?
- Do you feel that you are pounding your head against the wall?
- Has your health been affected?

If you answered yes to two or more of these questions, you are a candidate for burnout. But this does not necessarily mean you are at the end of your rope. There is hope.

Steps for Dealing with Stress and Burnout

- Take a break. Create distance between yourself and the situation. Take time for spiritual renewal through prayer and biblical reflection.
- Explore and identify the situations creating stress. Try to boil down the problem to just the specifics. What is going on? What is the real problem or situation? Break down the problem into its parts.
- What resources do you have available to help you deal with the particular problem? Consider personal strengths, a problem solving process, and communication skills.
- Identify the problem or situation. Define all the possible alternatives, evaluate the alternatives and choose the best options, and act on them.
- Celebrate the value of personal relationships and the support network you have. Take time to seek support and other points of view. Contact your Association, Conference or national office for networking and support, particularly your Southern New England Conference Faith Formation Team: <https://www.sneucc.org/faith-formation-team>. Your Association of United Church Educators Regional Representative is also a good source of support (www.AUCE-UCC.org).
- One of the strengths of human beings is to learn from our mistakes or our challenges. Take time to articulate in writing what you have learned. These learnings can be helpful in a future situation.
- God will not abandon you. Pray. God will provide you with the peace, patience, and endurance to work through those situations that create stress and burnout in ministry.

Resignation or Dismissal

You love what you do. You love being a faith formation and/or youth ministry leader. However there are times when a person needs to move on, and there are times when a church needs to move in a different direction. Separation can take two different forms — one is resignation from the position; the other is termination by the employer. Each one requires a different approach.

Resignation

Resignation is considered a voluntary action. Changes in personal circumstances, the discovery of incompatibilities with the persons you work with, or marked theological differences that make you uncomfortable are possible issues leading to your resignation.

The issue of separation is a stressful one to deal with, even if you are resigning on good terms. You have developed special relationships with people in the congregation, staff, children, youth, and adults. What should you do?

Create opportunities to express your feelings to those who will be missed. Provide some kind of closing, perhaps during a service of worship, or the congregation may want to have a special reception for you. An Exit Interview (see the following pages) is a process that many churches find helpful for allowing each party to share thoughts and learnings, as well as joys at the close of your time together. Events like this help in the separation process with all concerned. Once you leave a position, ethics requires you to respect the church's new beginning without you.

If resignation is provoked by particular situations in the work environment, and you feel that the best way out is by resigning, you should be honest. Learn from your experience. It may be time to make an assessment of yourself and set new goals. (A self assessment process is included earlier in this handbook.)

Dismissal

The other type of separation is dismissal by your employer. This type of separation creates high levels of stress for all involved.

Questions to assess your situation:

- Were there any early signs that termination might happen? Did your evaluation show possible signs of dismissal?
- Was there an unusual amount of criticism about you and your work? If so, how did you respond?
- Were your relationships with other staff members deteriorating?
- Were there major theological or philosophical differences between you and the congregation and/or the staff?
- Was the church cutting staff because of reduced financial support or other budgetary losses?
- Do you feel the dismissal was unfair, or you have been mistreated?

Dealing With Reality

Responding to some of these questions may help you put reality in perspective. Do not jump immediately to conclusions before you have examined the total context of the situation. Try to get some responses from the pastor, your supervisor, the faith formation or youth ministry committee or the church board. An Exit Interview (see the following pages) with church representatives can be helpful to you and the church.

Face Your Feelings

Whenever dismissal occurs there are a lot of feelings on both sides. You may feel anger, bitterness, guilt, confusion, loss of identity and low self-esteem. Remember this type of news creates imbalance in your life and emotions need to be addressed in a healthy manner. Remember to be intentional in retaining your professional demeanor.

An unexpected dismissal can create financial setbacks, loss of health insurance, separation from loved ones, and can threaten your personal stability in many different ways. Refer to your contract. What does it say about termination? Does it guarantee any type of compensation in such cases or continuation of the health insurance for a reasonable time? Be sure to check if you are eligible for unemployment.

An Ethical and Professional Response

You will need to maintain a professional attitude when interacting with your peers, colleagues, and the people in your congregation after your departure. Realize that, like you, the congregation needs to move forward, and any disruptive conversations or actions that arise out of unresolved anger or stress will not be helpful for either party. The Southern New England Conference Faith Formation Team (<https://www.sneucc.org/faith-formation-team>) can help you work through any pain as well as offer guidance in working through issues that you or the congregation may need to address. (If you are ordained, your Committee On Ministry can help in this way.)

After your final day of employment, it is customary, and wise, to discontinue contact with the members of the congregation (this includes social media). This will help them to make a smooth transition to a new faith formation and/or youth ministry staff person. If you are a member of the congregation you served, you will need to have discussions with the pastor and church leadership as to how you will continue to function as member, particularly when a new faith formation and/or youth ministry staff person is hired. As difficult as this could be, it may be possible that both parties will determine that you seek membership in another church. In either case, speaking the truth in love will be the best course of action, followed by a decision or compromise that will best serve the congregation.

Planning Your Future

Your next step is to take responsibility over your life. Life must continue. This is not the end of the world, although it might seem like it to you now. These are some of the steps you can take:

- Pray
- Do something good for yourself.
- Make an assessment of yourself and your personal resources. (A self assessment process is included earlier in this handbook.)
- Set continuing education goals, if needed.
- Find support from people doing the same type of ministry.
- Do not let your bitterness sever relationships with people closest to you.
- Take steps to promote your spiritual growth.
- Prepare new goals for your ministry and your life.
- Update your resume or Ministerial Profile.
- Develop a network leading to your next position. (See “Networking for a Job Search” included earlier in this handbook.)
- Try to learn the most you can from this temporary setback.
- Trust God. Trust in the One that can lead you forward.

Exit Interview

This process may be revised or adapted to your individual circumstances and church context as necessary. Remember that an exit interview is a time for mutual reflection, not evaluation or a time to emphasize negative experiences. Yet it may be helpful to the church to hear the departing individual speak honestly and openly about challenges, both professional and personal in nature, without judgment.

It is recommended that two or three gather to listen and reflect with the faith formation and/or youth ministry leader. It would be important for the Chair or representatives of the faith formation or youth ministry committee or board and either Personnel or Pastoral Relations Board or Committee to be present, as well as an individual of the departing staff member's choosing — invited for support and to listen in.

Opening Prayer and Candle Lighting 5 minutes

Moments of Reflection 20 minutes (Choose 3-5)

1. Who or what has blessed your ministry here?
2. What were the greatest joys or high points in this work?
3. What were the greatest challenges or low points in this work?
4. How have you known God's presence in this work/ministry?
5. What do you celebrate about your work or what gave you great satisfaction?
6. Is there an accomplishment you'd place first on your resume or Ministerial Profile?

Moments of Review 20 minutes (Choose 4-6)

1. What enhanced your working relationships here?
(With staff, committee members, etc.)
2. What hindered your working relationships here?
(With staff, committee members, etc.)
3. Which job responsibility was most rewarding? (In what way or why?)
4. Which job responsibility was most difficult? (In what way or why?)
5. Do you have recommendations to make to the congregation regarding the scope of this work?
6. Would you add/delete any tasks or responsibilities?
7. Was the work adequately resourced and supported?
8. What, if any, changes or improvements would you recommend that might be particularly helpful to the person that will be hired as the next faith formation and/or youth ministry leader?

Closing Prayer 5 minutes

A Post-Pandemic Addendum

Post-Pandemic Faith Formation

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 created a major shift in the way that congregations provide faith formation programming for their children, youth, and adults. Some congregations found virtual ministry to be as effective as face-to-face, yet others struggled to maintain relationships with their congregants. Given that the culture of every congregation is different, imitating the success of one congregation's ministry can in no way guarantee that it will work with every congregation.

This realization drove church leaders to discover and utilize adaptive skills, envisioning and choosing the best methods and resources for the personality and needs of their particular congregations. The guiding question for that time, and continues to be, "At this point in the life of our congregation, what will be the most effective way to pass on the faith to our children, youth, and adults?" The answer to this question for each congregation will be based on giving itself permission to do ministry in a new way, acknowledging that the world, the church, and peoples' lives have changed. What will feed the souls of our people in this moment?

One of the things we learned during the pandemic is that a return to Sunday School programming is not the only response to that question. The pandemic challenges us to evaluate our programs. So how can we be faithful leaders and mentors as we fulfill our congregational and baptismal commitments to making disciples of Jesus for generations to come? What else did we learn from the pandemic?

We learned that family matters, perhaps more than we were previously aware.

As congregations, we can continue to support our families (which come in all shapes, sizes, colors, and configurations) through fostering *intentional* connections between these families and those who could benefit from having surrogate "families." We can support parents/grandparents/caregivers in their essential role of passing on the faith to their children and youth, in particular by offering resources that don't add "yet one more thing to do" to their already busy and complex lives (such as resourcing bedtime and mealtime routines, time spent traveling in the car together, and even via Zoom with extended family members). The family will always be the primary vehicle for passing on the faith, and we can offer them much-needed support.

We have learned the critical importance of self care.

As Christian congregations, we have access to a wide variety of self care experiences that have been around for centuries. We call them Christian practices. Perhaps a shift in focus from church attendance and committee meetings to intentional, soul-nurturing opportunities for praying together, small group support and learning, singing together, and worshipping together as an intergenerational community of faith can help our people to slow down their daily routines in order to practice better self care. How can your congregation support and resource a nurturing and conscientious slowing down in the life of your faith community?

We have learned about the faith-forming capacities of intergenerational ministries.

Worship that has been "Zoomed" and "Facebook Lived" into homes has opened up a new kind of intergenerational worship experience. People who live alone have benefitted from online congregational experiences to connect with others in their faith community. Intentional, life-giving (Christian) relationships can happen anywhere and at any time whether we can be together in person or not.

A congregation that puts these three focuses into practice, by virtue of being the Body of Christ together, will grow and strengthen the faith of each and every one of its people in effective and life-giving ways — more than through most of its programs that were in place before the pandemic. In the words of Maria Harris, an internationally acclaimed religious educator who taught at Andover Newton Theological School:

"The church does not *have* an educational program; the church *IS* an educational program."

Post-Pandemic Youth Ministries

The COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 created a major shift in the way that congregations provide youth ministry and faith formation programming for their teens. Some congregations found virtual ministry to be as effective as face-to-face, yet others struggled to maintain relationships with their teens. Given that the culture of every congregation is different, imitating the success of one congregation's youth ministry can in no way guarantee that it will work in every congregation.

A guiding question for this time can be, "At this point in the life of our congregation, what will be the most effective way to minister to our people?" And how can we be faithful leaders and mentors as we fulfill our congregational and baptismal commitments to making disciples of Jesus for the next generations? The answer to this question for each congregation will be based on giving itself permission to do ministry in a new way, acknowledging that the world, the church, and peoples' lives have changed. What will feed the souls of our people in this moment?

A few learnings from the pandemic may help to guide this discernment:

We have learned that we actually *are* able to shift from analog to digital ministries.

The COVID-19 pandemic pushed many congregations out of their comfortable "pews" and into the digital ministry world practically overnight. We went from face-to-face worship, fellowship, mission, and faith formation activities to Zoom-ing just about everything, diving into online communication modalities, and leaving many of our hands-on materials behind. We went from analog — utilizing physical space and materials — to digital — communicating, teaching, worshipping, and connecting online. Now we are shifting to planning for hybrid ministries — engaging in our traditional congregational activities and practices both physically and digitally in order to reach as many as possible, in order to make all abilities, ages, and individual preferences welcome, no longer leaving anyone out.

We have learned that gathering face-to-face is not necessarily needed for connecting.

Connecting with each other is key to fostering healthy relationships. And we found ways to connect and maintain our relationships during the pandemic without needing to be in the same room. The critical importance of relationships actually has research behind it. Search Institute (<https://www.search-institute.org/>) is a research organization whose most recent research projects have been focused on relationships. Their concluding statements based on this research are, "Nothing — nothing — has more impact in the life of a child [teen] than positive relationships," and "It's not programs that change people, it's relationships."

We have learned that family matters, perhaps more than we were previously aware.

As congregations, we can continue to support our families (which come in all shapes, sizes, colors, and configurations) through fostering *intentional* connections between our programming for teens and the support of their parents. Parents (as well as grandparents and other caregivers) will always be the primary vehicle for passing on the faith, and one way we can offer them much-needed resourcing is by including them on a regular basis in our offerings for the teens as we foster those relationships.

The adolescent years provide a challenge to the church, particularly when we try to use ministry models that were created for a different era and a different teen culture. Yet one thing remains the same — a focus on the interpersonal relationships in Christ that are fostered with the teens — with and among the teens themselves, with their youth ministry leaders, and especially with the other generations in the congregation. From Zoom games to prayer, from service projects to online resources — the goals for youth ministry are the same as always — to walk alongside our teens on their spiritual journeys.

BE THE CHURCH

Protect the environment.

Care for the poor.

Forgive often.

Reject racism.

Fight for the powerless.

Share earthly and spiritual resources.

Embrace diversity.

Love God.

Enjoy this life.

God is still speaking.
**UNITED CHURCH
OF CHRIST**

