

# YOUTH MINISTRY ASSESSMENT REPORT



## ***First United Methodist Church, Ocala, FL*** **Saturday, July 25, 2009**

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### ***BACKGROUND***

First United Methodist Church has a prominent place in the very active community of Ocala, FL. Officially established in 1890, the church's roots in this area go back as far as 1844. The church's 11:00 am worship service has been televised weekly since 1970, reaching out to persons who are homebound, traveling, or un-churched. In addition, this service was also carried on the radio from 1957 to the mid-1980's and again during the mid-1990's.

With the Rev. Sue Hauptert-Johnson and the Rev. Allen Johnson currently serving as co-pastors since July of 2008, church members describe their church with words like "vibrant," "building," and "caring." The church's forward-moving, Christ-centered emphasis is evident even on-line, where its mission statement is front and center:

*Welcome to First United Methodist Church of Ocala, Florida. Our goal is "to experience and share the love of God and make disciples of Jesus Christ." We are a gathering of people who have experienced the grace and goodness of Jesus, and we are trying to be faithful disciples of Jesus. We invite you to join us as we grow together in Christ.*

The membership of the church is 1972 and on an average week, 591 people attend one of the church's three worship services. The church has a 2009 budget of \$1,368,525. For the year 2009, the youth ministry has an operating budget of \$129,500, including program budget and funding for staff salaries and benefits.



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Currently, there are approximately 218 youth in 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades on the rolls of the church. During a typical week, about 100 youth participate in either Sunday school, Sunday worship, the Sunday night high school youth group or the Wednesday night middle school youth group. The youth ministry is described by students and parents as a “fun” and “caring” place, while others used the hopeful phrase “poised on the edge of success” to describe this ministry.

Following the 13-year tenure of a much-loved youth pastor which ended in 2007, the church has experienced significant turnover in staff leadership in the youth ministry.

- Art Robin served the youth ministry just over a year and a half, from November 2007 until June of 2009.
- The current Assistant Youth Director, Jenna Yongue, will be leaving as of August 1, 2009 to return to school.
- Emily Edwards, a student at the University of Florida, will be brought on board as the part-time interim director, on August 1 and will serve in that role until the completion of the search for a long-term youth director.

FUMC’s multi-building campus includes a dedicated youth facility and the Family Life Center. The church has done an excellent job in making the youth ministry feel welcome through its use of several parts of the facility during regular youth programming.

There is a Youth Council comprised of parents who have taken an active role in serving the youth by supplementing the leadership responsibilities for the youth programming and trips. They report to Pastor Allen and the Administrative Council. They have stepped up their participation during the search process which is in the early stages of gathering resumes. No interviews have been held yet to await the results of the YMA assessment.

Youth Ministry Architects was contacted by Rev. Allen Johnson from a recommendation by Theresa Reiter, the Director of Children’s Ministry at FUMC-Lakeland. Youth Ministry Architects was invited to do an initial assessment of the church’s youth ministry and to make recommendations on how it might move strategically forward. We met with 47 individuals in 9 focus groups or one-on-one meetings. What follows are the findings gleaned from those conversations along with recommendations and a proposed timeline for the future.

## ***YOUTH MINISTRY IN CONTEXT***

One lens we like to use for understanding youth ministry is the idea of the “three rents.” These three rents, in and of themselves, do not ensure an effective or faithful ministry, they are often the most immediate evaluation tools used by youth, parents, staff and the congregation at large.



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Youth ministries that “pay these rents” tend to have much greater freedom to be creative, take risks, and experiment with innovative ideas. Those ministries that fail to pay these rents often find themselves mired in distrust, second-guessing and discouragement.

**Rent #1: NUMBERS**—A significant percentage of youth need to be participating visibly in some aspect of the church’s ministry. FUMC is doing well at paying this rent in its youth ministry with almost 50% of the church youth participating weekly in some aspect of the church when compared to the number of youth on the church rolls. It will be important for a target number of participation level to be clearly agreed on by the Administrative Council, Youth Council and staff. Ironically, when target numbers are not established, youth ministries are typically *more likely* to be judged by numbers than if the target numbers are clearly established.

**Rent #2: PROGRAMS**—In order to “earn the right” to experiment with changes, youth leadership will need to provide the church with a few visible, effective programs that give youth, parents, leaders and staff “something to talk about.” Though there are a few special events, such as the Ignition event and the Lake Junaluska summer trip, it was generally agreed by the youth that there is a need for a new freshness in the programs of the youth ministry.

**Rent #3: ENTHUSIASM**—Due to recent events, the tide of enthusiasm for the ministry is at a low ebb. It will be necessary to re-establish a joyful, expectant culture among the active youth and parents for the benefit of the rest of the youth and congregation. A climate of enthusiasm will be essential to building trust with the leadership of the church and the parents. Though there is still a hopeful expectation on the part of the young people of the church, lingering frustrations remain and were expressed by youth, parents, volunteers and staff serving in the youth ministry.

As the leadership of this ministry develops its long-range vision, it will simultaneously need to be attentive to these “three rents.” In this sense, the FUMC Youth Ministry faces parallel challenges:



1. Laying the Foundation: Building a foundation and infrastructure that will ensure the ministries’ *future* effectiveness, and at the same time,
2. Continuing to Worship on Stilts: Maintaining the *current* ministry in a way that builds the enthusiasm of youth, families, staff and the church at large.



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As the youth ministry leadership steps into this parallel process, four rules of thumb – or what we call “ministry norms” – will be helpful to keep in mind:

- 1) **\$1000-\$1,500 a Kid**—With \$129,500 in the church’s budget currently dedicated to the youth ministry and a weekly participation level of 100 students, FUMC is right in the range of normal and is appropriately funded for its current level of ministry.
- 2) **1 Full-Time Staff Person for Every 50 Youth**—With two full-time staff people in its staffing design, FUMC will be performing at capacity when its new staff is hired. At one level, the hiring of the desired staff will get the youth ministry to the starting line but not likely move the ministry strategically forward. This is of particular concern when measured against the overwhelmingly expressed desire to grow the youth ministry spiritually deeper, vocalized by all listening groups.
- 3) **1 Adult for Every 5 Youth** — YMA likes to think in terms of “spans of care,” recognizing that most volunteers cannot effectively oversee the church’s Christian nurture of more than about five students on an ongoing basis. FUMC currently has 10 volunteer adults who have made a weekly commitment to interacting with youth at its major weekly youth programs on Sundays, Wednesdays and additional trips. This number of adults gives the church the capacity to minister in a sustainable way to approximately 50 youth, making the adult volunteer base significantly “over-capacity.”
- 4) **10% of the Worshiping Congregation**—In a typical church, the size of the youth ministry tends to settle at a number roughly around 10% of the worshiping congregation. Thus a fair gauge for the target number of youth attending should settle at 60 students. An average weekly youth attendance of 100 students in some aspect of the life of the church speaks to FUMC’s fundamental dedication and commitment to its ministry to youth.
- 5) **The 20% Ceiling**—We have observed an invisible ceiling in some churches when the number of youth active weekly exceeds 20% of the worshiping congregation. It is likely that, as the youth ministry becomes healthier and more stable, it will settle at a weekly participation level in the neighborhood of 120 students.

## ***BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE YOUTH STAFF***

When a ministry is based solely on the giftedness of a single staff person, instability is a predictable result. We have found that the most stable approach to staffing a ministry, particularly in the early stages of a rebuild, is to build a staff of three different kinds of people:



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- **The Architect:** A person or organization that designs the building plan and ensures that building is done in compliance with the agreed-upon plan.
- **The Construction Foreman:** A person who manages the flow and sequencing of work, manages the building process according to the agreed-upon blueprint, and ensures that the appropriate number of “laborers” is in place for each stage of the project.
- **The Laborers:** Those people charged with specific gifts and responsibilities for particular aspects of the work. In youth ministry, a laborer might have particular skills in relating to students, or particular skilling in planning and managing events, or particular skills in teaching.

Many churches hire, as their lead youth pastor, someone who may have gifts in a single area--for example, working with students, managing a facility--but who simply don't have the experience base or the skill set to oversee the complex components of a ministry of 100 or more youth. The result in these situations can be a pattern of unrealistic expectations for the staff which can lead "scapegoating," particularly in settings in which a sustainable infrastructure for ministry has not been established.

At this point, Jenna is serving in the role of the Construction Foreman for the youth ministry. With her exit coming up quickly, Emily is coming in on a part-time basis to tide the group over. The church has a team of willing laborers, but without a plan (the architect) or a person who coordinates the flow of work (the construction foreman), this building project is destined to require much more time, effort, and frustration than is necessary.

One parent summed it up, “I think we need a focus, we need an agreement on how things are going to work. How do we function? What is our curriculum? What are the rules for the kids? So there’s not so much bickering and struggle for control. Putting out the fires is exhausting after awhile.”



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## ASSETS

### *Strengths to protect in the current youth ministry*

**High Priority of Youth Ministry:** Nearly 50 youth and adults participated in focus groups, taking time to share their input about the youth ministry. This gives undeniable evidence of a broad-based eagerness about building a thriving youth ministry at FUMC. The church's willingness to invest in its youth is clear:

- There is an attractive facility for youth activities in addition to a Family Life Center.
- The church staff expressed a desire to broaden their scope by working with youth.
- The youth ministry budget is supportive and church members spoke of the wealth of resources available to support the youth ministry.

All these factors contribute to a climate that says to youth and their families: "You are highly valued and your growth in faith is a high priority for this church family."

**Spiritually Driven, Excited Kids:** We met with 16 students during our listening groups. They spoke with clarity and maturity as they expressed a desire to grow numerically and spiritually. They are excited about having a new youth leader and are ready to warmly welcome him or her. With some coaching, they are looking for an opportunity to serve and lead. The youth want to grow deeper and build a more inviting environment to reach new students. One of the youth's most beloved volunteers said, "I've seen so many positive things happen here and the horseplay but they settle down. It changes their lives. This is a way I can steer someone. Horseplay into life changing."

**Great Pastors:** Members of the listening groups expressed love and respect for the new co-pastoral team of Sue and Allen Johnson. One team member said, "We are poised for greatness because of Sue and Allen." The new pastoral team is very supportive of the youth ministry; FUMC has received a gift in Sue and Allen serving among its midst.

**Fabulous Facilities:** FUMC has a facility available for its youth other youth directors would drool over! Between the Family Life Center, the Renfroe Building, the Chapel and other open space, there are no barriers on FUMC's campus to impede a creative, engaging youth ministry event.

**Inspiring Worship:** CHU (Christ Has You) Youth have a love of worship! Both the middle and high school students expressed their appreciation of the worship time on CHU nights. They love the band, prayer times, videos and well-prepared messages. Several students commented on a recent talk given by Mr. Sanders: "It was awesome and I got a lot out of it!" Their time in the Chapel seems especially meaningful to all involved.

**Desire for Missions:** The youth of FUMC have a heart for mission outreach to the local and global community. Several older youth shared their memories from the days of international mission trips and how much they would love to re-instate those endeavors. Several commented on how much fun they had on the "Sailing and Serving" trip earlier this summer. There were also



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adults who said they would make a commitment to help chaperone youth mission trips. One dad voiced this thought, “The one thing that keeps coming back to my mind about the program is simplicity. I think that we need to make it simple so they want to be here and that they get that strong foundation when they leave HS. Keep it to the basic. Jesus and the Gospel. Missions. Community relationships. We have to move our kids along.”

**Youth in Leadership:** It was very exciting to meet such a dedicated, refreshing team of student leaders. They have an amazing heart for the other students at FUMC-Ocala. They serve in all capacities of implementing the program from setup and planning to cleanup and lockup. They dedicate a significant amount of weekly time towards their leadership responsibilities. Their love for God and His Church is evident.

**Helpful Parents:** We spoke with many parents who said things like, “Just ask me; I’ll help!” Many parents expressed their willingness to serve in numerous areas of the youth program whether directly with the students or behind the scenes. Although a few parents said they were nervous to work directly with their own child’s age-level, they also recognized the possibility of serving in other parts of the ministry. They want to help provide the youth with the best possible ministry advantages.

Parents also articulated a strong desire to see their kids grow in Christ while developing practical Jesus-led life skills. Many parents see FUMC-Ocala as a life-long involvement church and hope their children will continue in being a valued and valuable part of the church’s outreach.

**Ready for a New Leader:** The teenagers interviewed have a strong desire to make things work with the next youth leader. Not only were they well-spoken, interesting students who love God, they also had a clear, balanced picture of recent youth transitions with a proper handle on making future transitions smoother. Each student made intentional commitments to welcoming the new youth staff. One student said, “Next time, I won’t be so judgmental. I’ll try to give the new person more than one chance.”

## **CHALLENGES**

### ***Obstacles to Moving the Youth Ministry Strategically Forward***

**Spread out Campus:** First UMC has worked tirelessly to provide a campus that provides many options for youth ministry programming. However, FUMC’s facility is spread out over nearly three city blocks. Moving from building to building creates undesirable transition time between program elements and a supervision challenge. The youth ministry is in need of a deliberate design for the wise and safe use of these facilities.

**Who’s In Charge:** The Youth Ministry of First UMC is still in a leadership transition after the departure of its long-term, well-loved youth leader in 2007. A strong leadership structure was not in place upon his departure and the ministry is once again looking for a leader. After a less than positive experience with the most recent youth director, all those interviewed expressed a



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hunger for a strong leader. One person said, "Tons of instability and drama and never really a clear staff person. Very personality driven. Needs a strong leader." This leadership void can lead to poor decision-making. It can result in adults stepping up to lead from a position of panicked anxiousness and in a search that is pressured to move more quickly than might be prudent.

**Everybody's Got A Vision...**they just aren't all the same. In the groups we met with, there was no shortage of ideas related to the youth ministry. Many of those ideas came from people who believe their idea holds the key to the future success of the youth ministry. For the sake of illustration (and entertainment), we have included some of the various agendas we noted in focus groups:

*Don't let parents be leaders.*

*Use more parents as leaders.*

*Have more service activities.*

*Change the Sunday morning worship schedule.*

*Get a youth music program in place, like hand bells or youth choir.*

*Kids don't want a choir.*

*Have the kids do the landscaping for the church's projects.*

*Do Confirmation every year.*

*Hire a young youth director.*

*Hire a youth director with experience.*

*We need more fun activities.*

*We need to be more spiritual.*

Since there are so many in the church with a high investment in the youth ministry, there are quite a few different ideas about what the vision of the ministry ought to be. Not surprisingly, most people evaluate the youth ministry and its director based on their own vision of where the youth ministry needs to go. When a ministry lacks a clearly stated vision, anxiousness is often a predictable result. In anxious settings, there is typically a good bit of triangulation, in which people don't talk directly to each other but instead talk to a third party about their concerns.

Until this picture is developed, agreed on, and pursued, the future leadership of the youth ministry will remain mired in petty programmatic debates which will result in little more than "rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic." Without a clear target, parents and students will become confused and frustrated about what actually is expected of them and leaders will likely resort to the non-productive practice of motivation of guilt.

**Confirmation Confusion:** Parents and staff expressed a desire for clarity regarding the Confirmation experience at First UMC. Questions that arose include: What age should we target for Confirmation? How often should it be offered?

**There's Nothing Going On:** To many stakeholders in the youth ministry, its annual calendar feels bare. Students could only identify 3 annual events that they look forward to each year. In the absence of a calendar filled with exciting events that build anticipation, the ministry has the potential to remain stuck in the perception that "nothing's going on."



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**Under-utilized Parent Volunteers:** The parents of youth have a desire to be involved in appropriate areas of the youth ministry. They have felt unneeded and unwanted. One parent said, “I have volunteered to work on the back end but I’m not getting any calls. Not getting the chance. I think it’s because of some of those involved.” Another parent expressed that, “The parents in leadership feel like another clique.” While understanding their need to give their youth some spiritual development space, they also recognize the need for committed volunteers in all areas of the youth ministry. This is a group of parents who are willing to step up and use their gifts.

**Lack of Distance Calendar Planning:** Students are accustomed to receiving a calendar of events for the upcoming month. The student website contains the dates for Ignition and the Lake Junaluska retreat but nothing else. At the beginning of each school year parents should be given a calendar of major events for the next 12 to 15 months. Today’s youth have many, many opportunities with school, sports, dance, etc. Such events will take precedence on the family calendar if parents aren’t aware of key youth ministry dates well in advance.

**Missing Organization and Infrastructure:** There was general agreement among parents, staff and volunteers that organization and infrastructure has not been one of the hallmarks of the current youth ministry. The vision and goals are not clear, non-major events feel a little haphazard, and no one seems to be in charge of team-building or infrastructure.

**Hand Wringing and Helplessness:** There is a general sense of dissatisfaction regarding the current state of the youth ministry. Parents and students feel disappointed and disillusioned. Leadership must work to turn the tide of negativity. A campaign of positive marketing and PR will give students and parents hope. This sense of encouragement will provide emotional support for new staff leadership and current volunteers. One student painfully summed it up, “We’re not a family anymore.”

**Spiderman Not Superman:** Students, volunteers, staff and parents spoke of the incredible ministry led by Tim Ingram (The image of Jesus with Superman’s cape comes to mind). Tim’s ministry here was vital but First UMC does not need another Superman. Your new youth ministry staff will need to develop a network/web of parents and other leaders in order to effectively disciple the youth of First UMC. Each youth coming through the doors at First UMC needs and deserves a well-trained, equipped team of volunteer youth ministers.

**Selective Memory:** It is normal for a church to compare the best days of a previous, beloved youth pastor to the worst days of the current youth pastor. If Tim’s experience was normal, it is very likely that his first few years were filled with frustration and beginner’s mistakes. As the church moves toward welcoming its new youth pastor, it will be helpful to agree to avoid the unhealthy tendency of comparison by selective memory. Here are the adjectives given from the middle school and senior high listening groups: “enthralled, ecstatic, happy, little worried, nervous, anxious, hopeful, expecting, necessary, excited. Can’t wait!”



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**Transition Overload:** The past 14 months have been characterized by an unusually high turnover rate in youth staff. This turnover has brought a weariness and higher-than-normal frustration level to many of the youth ministry stakeholders. One adult said, “I think this assessment process is a wonderful thing. I don’t know what it going to take to make people open their eyes and listen.”

**Lack of Curriculum Plan and Discipleship Pathway:** Parents and staff expressed a concern about what is being taught. Students were heard saying, “We rotate through only 3 or 4 topics.” There is also a need for age-appropriate teaching that meets students where they’re at on their personal spiritual journeys. First UMC needs to enter into a process to ensure a well-rounded, comprehensive plan for what curriculum is being taught. One of the youth shared this desire, “We need more small groups...we don’t know each other anymore. We haven’t done small groups in 2 years and now there’s just questions and 10 people. They went pretty well. I want to talk with kids one on one and heart to heart.”

**Volunteer Deficit:** It was generally agreed that the church is filled with dedicated leaders who need direction, training, support, and encouragement. It seems like the church has settled into a pattern of having only two kinds of leaders: overworked superstars and helpless helpers, instead of partners who take real and reasonable responsibility for their portion of the ministry. Until this adult team is developed, the youth ministry will not be able to faithfully steward its current load of students, much less be prepared for the any future growth.

**Where’s The Welcome Mat?** Nearly all of the members of our listening groups described a culture of both student and parent cliques within the youth ministry. Some youth report feeling left out if they don’t attend the “right” school or worship in the right way. One participant said, “If you’re not on the front row during worship then you’re an outsider.” Youth have expressed a hesitance to invite their friends because they’re afraid of the reception those friends might receive.



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## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Reframe the next 17 months (through December 2010) as a time of direction-setting and infrastructure building for the youth ministry. Target January 2011 as the date for a sustainable structure for this ministry.
- 2) Present this report to the Administrative Council, requesting they approve the 17-month strategic renovation process outlined in this document.
- 3) Establish a Youth Ministry Renovation Team under the oversight of Pastor Allen Johnson. This team would be made up of the newly hired interim staff person and four volunteer stakeholders in the church, appointed by the Pastor.
- 4) Engage the services of Youth Ministry Architects or some other team with proven experience in building sustainable youth ministries to partner with the church's leadership in overseeing the implementation of the recommendations found in this assessment.
- 5) Charge the Youth Ministry Renovation Team with responsibility to report at least quarterly to the Administrative Council and are charged with two overarching responsibilities:
  - I. Immediate Pressure Points: Work with the youth ministry leadership to address the immediate pressure points facing this ministry as they transition toward sustainability.
  - II. Long-Term Infrastructure: Establish a consensus and vision for the direction of the youth ministry and oversee the development of a long-term infrastructure.

### **RENOVATION TEAM TASK #1: IMMEDIATE PRESSURE POINTS** *(to be accomplished before any major changes in weekly programming)*

**Pressure Point 1: Youth Ministry Staffing**--Immediately hire a 15-hour-a-week Youth Program Coordinator to supplement the work of the interim youth director. This person would partner with the interim youth director by initiating the oversight of the organizational details of the youth ministry.

**Pressure Point 2: Calendar a Youth Ministry Visioning Retreat** with Youth Ministry Architects to develop clear direction and measurable goals for the FUMC youth ministry.

**Pressure Point 3: Identify Additional Volunteer Adult Roles Needed for the Youth Ministry**, ensuring that accurate job descriptions are in place for each of these roles.

**Pressure Point 4: Recruit 10 Additional Adults** to serve on a weekly basis in the FUMC youth ministry.

- Recruit at least 2 additional adults for Sunday nights who are willing to make a consistent commitment to regular attendance and interacting with youth.

- Recruit at least 8 additional adults for Wednesday nights who are willing to make a consistent commitment to regular attendance and interacting with youth.

**Pressure Point 5: Calendar Youth Ministry Leadership Training and Orientation Meetings,** one in September and one in January

**Pressure Point 6: Establish a Prayer Team** who will undergird the strategic renovation process with prayer over the next 17 months.

**Pressure Point 7: Ensure That All New Staff People Are Provided with Ministry Mentors** (one of the pastors or one of the YMA consultants, for example) to provide those new staff persons with a safe place to debrief, grow in ministry and receive guidance and accountability.

**Pressure Point 8: Locate and Obtain “Good Enough” Curriculum Resources** for the coming year for each of the weekly youth ministry settings.

**Pressure Point 9: Make a Decision About the Schedule and Curriculum for Confirmation** for the coming year, recognizing that a full, intentional strategic plan for confirmation will take place as a part of the overall renovation process.

**Pressure Point 10: Establish Target Participation Numbers** for the coming year for each program of the youth ministry, as well as a target number for total weekly participation.

**Pressure Point 11: Determine Clear Roles for the Student Leaders** currently serving in the youth ministry, and calendar and orientation gathering for those students.

## TASK #2: LONG-TERM INFRASTRUCTURE

### SUSTAINABILITY AND STABILITY

- **Visioning:** Complete a three-day visioning retreat with YMA, resulting in a youth ministry mission statement, a statement of values, three-year revolving goals, and an organizational chart for the youth ministry.
- **Control Document Development:**
  - Develop and print an up-to-date youth directory, containing all the information necessary to maintain contact with FUMC youth and their families.



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- Create a calendar of major FUMC youth ministry events through August 2010 and make that information available on the churches website.
- Develop and print an up-to-date volunteer youth leader directory that contains names and contact information of all volunteers serving in the youth ministry.
- **Attendance:** Develop a process for tracking attendance at all weekly youth programs.
- **7-Year Intentional Discipleship Plan:** Create an integrated template for youth ministry curriculum that deliberately maps the key topics to be covered in the various programs of the youth ministry over the next seven years. Locate appropriate curriculum resources to be used for the 2010-2011 school year.
- **Compliance Documents:** Ensure that copyright licensing for music and videos has been obtained, that screening processes and background check processes are in place for every weekly volunteer and every trip volunteer. Ensure, as well, that a written sexual abuse/child protection policy is adopted and affirmed in writing by all adults working in a hands-on way with the youth of the church.
- **Marketing:**
  - Establish clear internal marketing processes that allow parents, youth, leaders and the broader church to be exposed to the successes and good news surrounding the youth ministry.
  - Develop processes for communicating about upcoming events and weekly programs that allows participation targets to be regularly reached in the youth ministry.
  - Select normative processes for effective and timely communication with parents, youth and volunteers, considering as many forms of communication as possible including updating church's website, church newsletter, bulletin, Facebook, Twitter, mass texting, phone tree, etc.
- **Youth Ministry Manual:** Develop a FUMC Youth Ministry Manual, including the most recent directory, an 18-Month Calendar, volunteer and staff job descriptions, compliance documents, budgets, game plans, a preventative maintenance calendar and notes for every major ministry event.

## NURTURING OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

- **Strategic Staffing:** In partnership with SPR, propose a clear, appropriate long-term staffing plan for the youth ministry which will provide the church with significant capacity to sustain a thriving ministry to its targeted number of youth.
- **Strategic Searching:** In partnership with SPR, develop and maintain a deliberate process for effectively searching for the church's next youth pastor (using YMA's manuscript *Before You Hire a Youth Pastor* as a guide).



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- **Staff Development:** Provide mechanisms for on-going education and coaching for the youth ministry paid staff.
- **Role Clarity:** Complete results-based, written job descriptions for all paid and volunteer position in the youth ministry.
- **Volunteer Development:** Establish the norm or ongoing, quarterly training of all volunteers, equipping them with necessary tools for success (e.g., copies of Group magazine and an up-to-date youth ministry library).
- **Leadership Recruitment:** Build a fortified volunteer leadership team for 2010-2011, some of whom will do relational ministry while others work behind the scenes. Create a “fishing pond” list of at least 75 potential volunteers.
- **Leadership Launch:** Schedule and implement an inspiring leadership-training event for all volunteer youth workers at the beginning of the school year in 2010.
- **Student Leadership:** Develop a clear game plan for empowering students to serve in more significant ways in the youth ministry, a game plan to be launched by the fall of 2010.

## STRATEGIES AND NEW INITIATIVES

- **First-Timer Process:** Develop a process for welcoming new youth and friend visitors to the church, so that they feel warmly welcomed at FUMC. Develop a timely follow up plan to maximize the chances of their return to the youth programs.
- **Friendship Epidemic:** Leveraging the willingness of the Student Leadership Team to become a more open and welcoming group, equip the current student leaders to develop a “friendship epidemic.” Train and support them as they create a climate of hospitality and friendship for new people coming into the youth ministry, a climate that is effectively focused beyond comfortable friendship clusters and reaches outside the FUMC youth community (*Thriving Youth Groups: Secrets for Growing Your Ministry* by Jeanne Mayo is a good resource for this process)
- **Missions:** Establish a focused calendar for involvement in local, national, and international missions. Evaluate the youth ministry’s current mission projects and trips, and create a plan for promoting and exposing the congregation to youth missions throughout the year.
- **Parent Engagement:** Create a written process for engaging the majority of parents of all the youth in some way in the ministry in the 2010-2011 school year.
- **Measurable Markers of Effectiveness:** Determine reasonable participation goals for all major student ministry events and weekly programs for the 2010-2011 school year and take responsibility for achieving those targets.



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- **Increasing the Church's Reach:** Develop a clear game plan for deliberately increasing the number of youth and families participating in the life of the church, with a particular focus on reaching out to families who are not currently involved in the church.

## PROPOSED TIMELINE

### (AND OPTIONAL CONSULTING PROPOSAL)

*The following provides First United Methodist Church of Ocala with a timeline that can serve as a blueprint for the strategic launch of a sustainable, long-term youth ministry.*

#### August 2009

#### Focus: Preparing for the Process/Leadership Recruitment

#### Outcomes:

- The Youth Ministry Renovation Team has been recruited.
- The Administrative Council has approved or revised this report as the start of a strategic timetable for “renovating” the First UMC Youth Ministry.
- The dates of all major youth ministry events and trips have been determined through August 2010.
- A Fall Kick-Off Team is in place for a post-Labor Day kickoff event designed to inspire parents and youth, even during this season of transition.
- Any changes in programming have been communicated to youth, their parents and the rest of the church, using all communication vehicles available including flyers, bulletin, letters, newsletter and web site.
- Enthusiasm-building, clarity-giving volunteer training event has been calendared for September and January.
- A Communication Coordinator (volunteer) has been recruited.
- The Staff-Parish Relations Committee has reviewed the YMA Assessment and has made recommendations for their own search process for the future youth ministry staff.
- The team responsible for managing the search for the church’s next youth pastor has completed a clear orientation to their responsibilities based on the timetable found in *Before You Hire a Youth Minister*.
- Volunteer needs for the 2009-2010 year have been identified and recruiting of additional leaders for the fall has been aggressively begun.
- A master list of 75 potential adult leaders has been developed, including people from a variety of age groups.
- A results based job-description has been written for a part-time Youth Program Coordinator and it has been approved by SPR.
- Curriculum resources have been collected and distributed to the appropriate leaders for all program settings through November, 2009.

*Proposed YMA Time: 3 Days (1 onsite, 2 offsite)*



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## September 2009

### Focus: Quick Launch and Vision Retreat

#### Outcomes:

- An updated Youth Ministry Directory has been created and distributed to families in the church.
- The Youth Ministry Renovation Team has been oriented to their unique roles and responsibilities over the coming year and a half.
- The 2010 youth ministry budget request has been submitted.
- Visioning documents for the Youth Ministry (Mission Statement, Values, Goals, and Structure) have been completed at a visioning retreat.
- A Fall Kick-Off/Parent Orientation event leaves youth and parents excited and enthusiastic about the year ahead.
- The 2009-2010 Youth Ministry Calendar (through August) has been printed and is distributed using best practices of communication. Registration forms are available for any youth ministry retreat or trip.
- The Youth Director position opening has been posted in at least 20 different places, likely to be viewed by those searching for a youth pastor position.
- Sourcing work has been completed by the Search Team and members of the YMA team, resulting in at least 10 names of potential candidates for the Youth Director position have been collected.
- All key youth ministry volunteers (weekly volunteers and major event coordinators) for the 2009-2010 school year are in place.

*Proposed YMA Time: 6 Days (3 onsite, 3 offsite)*

## October 2009

### Focus: Pressure Points/Volunteer Training

#### Outcomes:

- A part-time Youth Program Coordinator has been hired.
- The Youth Program Coordinator completes a ½ day Quick-Start orientation to his or her responsibilities.
- Regular meetings have begun with the Youth Ministry Renovation Team.
- An enthusiasm-building volunteer training event has taken place, leaving volunteers with the sense that they have clarity about their roles, their importance, and the plans for the upcoming year.



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- Results-based, written job descriptions for all volunteer positions in the youth ministry have been developed.
- A curriculum plan is in place for Wednesday night and Sunday night, through May of 2010, with published resources collected to fulfill almost the entire year's plan.
- A parent-equipping event has been scheduled for the spring of 2010.
- The chair of the Youth Ministry Renovation Team and youth staff have received specific coaching, troubleshooting, and support from the YMA staff.
- Extensive sourcing by members of the Search Team and YMA has continued, resulting in resumes for 30 qualified candidates being collected.
- The top 5-10 Youth Director candidates have been selected and preliminary phone interviews have been conducted by YMA and the search team.
- A student input event has been completed, resulting in the completion of a special event program calendar through December, 2010.
- All major event coordinators through August, 2010 have been given an overview of their responsibilities, including how to create a notebook for the event to pass along to future coordinators.
- Normative processes have been established for celebrating the youth ministry's successes using all available channels of communication.

*Proposed YMA Time: 4 Days (2 Day onsite, 2 Days offsite)*

## November/December 2009

### Focus: Hospitality and Top 5 candidates

#### Outcomes:

- A game plan has been written for creating a welcoming environment.
- A list of potential youth to serve in leadership roles has been created.
- 6-8 student leaders have been recruited to create a welcoming environment in the youth ministry.
- A game plan for incorporating parents into the youth ministry has been created.
- There is a written agenda for the typical flow of the Wednesday night and Sunday night youth meetings, that recognizes their unique purposes.
- Sourcing for quality candidates continues.
- Top 3 candidates have been selected and reference checks have been completed for each of them
- Ongoing communication mechanisms are in place to communicate youth events and activities to parents and the church at large.
- The chair of the Youth Ministry Renovation Team and youth staff have received specific coaching, troubleshooting, and support from the YMA staff.
- All youth ministry events, classes, and groups have been brought into compliance with the Child and Youth Protection Act.

*Proposed YMA Time: 3 Days offsite*

## January 2010

### Focus: Curriculum and YD Interviews



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## Outcomes:

- A curriculum design event has been completed with key youth ministry stakeholders and a curriculum template has been completed, integrating Sunday School, youth group and Confirmation.
- A deliberate discipleship plan has been developed that allows youth and parents to understand where students are in their spiritual lives and determine what programs will meet their individual needs.
- A written game plan for confirmation has been completed and presented to all stakeholders in the confirmation ministry for their input.
- Curriculum resources for the 2010-2011 school year have been selected and ordered.
- A second youth ministry volunteer training event has taken place and the Child and Youth Protection policies of the United Methodist Church are understood by all weekly youth ministry volunteers.
- On-site interviews with final candidates have been conducted for the YD position.
- Processes are in place for the timely and personal follow up for any first-time visitors to the youth ministry.
- A focused calendar for youth involvement in local, national, and international missions has been distributed using all established channels of communication
- The appropriate number of volunteers for summer trips has been recruited.

*Proposed YMA Time: 5 Days (3 onsite, 2 offsite)*

## February 2010

### Focus: Infrastructure and Candidate Selection

## Outcomes:

- A written, relational volunteer recruitment process has been developed, outlining when and how volunteers in the youth ministry will be recruited, with the goal of having all key positions in the youth ministry filled at least 2 months before those leaders are to begin serving.
- A list of all volunteer needs for 2010-2011 has been created.
- Recruiting of key volunteers (weekly volunteers and major event coordinators) to serve in the 2010-2011 year has begun.
- The Youth Ministry Renovation Team has completed a 6-month mid-course evaluation of the renovation process and has taken corrective action to address those components of the strategic plan that may have gotten off course. Unexpected challenges (which are to be expected!) in the youth ministry have been addressed with playfulness and proactive creativity.
- In-person interviews are complete and (God willing) an offer is made to the top candidate.
- The chair of the Youth Ministry Renovation Team and youth staff have received specific coaching, troubleshooting, and support from the YMA staff.
- All curriculum resources for the 2010-2011 school year have been chosen and purchased.



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- A clear and effective process of managing the youth ministry database, including managing its attendance is in place.

*Proposed YMA Time: 2 Days (1 Day onsite, 1 Day offsite)*

## March 2010

### Focus: Nailing Down Plans

#### Outcomes:

- A permanent youth pastor has been hired.
- Reasonable participation goals for youth ministry events and weekly programs have been set, and there are promotion strategies for meeting these goals.
- A strategy for sharing youth ministry stories with the congregation has been created.
- The Youth Director and staff receive ongoing coaching and training through the YMA program.
- A plan for infusing the Youth Ministry with a contagious friendship culture is in place.
- A plan for Fundraising and the use of these funds has been drafted and approved by the Finance Committee.

*Proposed YMA Time: 1 Day offsite*

## April 2010

### Focus: Parent Equipping, Youth Ministry Manual, and Senior Consultant Visit

#### Outcomes:

- The new Youth Director has completed a ½ Quick Start orientation to the Youth Ministry Renovation Process that has been underway for the previous 9 months.
- A Preventative Maintenance Calendar has been created for the youth ministry which will help it regularly deal with on-going “behind the scene” ministry maintenance.
- A manual for the youth ministry has been completed, including
  - Visioning Documents
  - Youth Directory
  - Volunteer Directory
  - Annual Calendar
  - Job Descriptions
  - Game Plans
  - Curriculum Template and Record of Curriculum Resources Used for the Current Year
  - Budget
  - Recruiting Template, with a Record of All the Volunteer Needs for the Year
  - Compliance Documents
- The YMA senior consultant has met with key stakeholders in the youth ministry for a 9-month Renovation assessment and recommendations are made for next-level staff and



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maximizing the alignment of all the components of the youth ministry in preparation for the fall launch,

- A parent-equipping event that builds community and confidence within the parent community has been held.
- A planning team for a Fall 2010 kick-off event for parents and youth is in place and has begun their initial planning, with the goal of engaging over 75% of the youth families in the church.
- All youth ministry and volunteer job descriptions have been reviewed and revised to reflect the reality of the youth ministry.
- The chair of the Youth Ministry Renovation Team and youth staff have received specific coaching, troubleshooting, and support from the YMA staff.
- Attendance is being tracked at all youth ministry events.

*Proposed YMA Time: 4 Days (2 onsite, 2 offsite)*

## May 2010

### Focus: Evaluation and Calendar Planning

#### Outcomes:

- The Youth Ministry Renovation Team has approved the 2010-2011 Youth Ministry calendar.
- Structures are in place to provide on-going support for the staff and volunteers of the youth ministry to ensure sustainable, intentional, effective ministry.
- The newly launched student leadership team has been oriented to their mission of creating a welcoming environment at all youth ministry settings.
- A year-end volunteer training/celebration event has occurred, providing time for feedback from the Spring semester and giving leaders the chance to give input on their upcoming year and giving the Renovation team the chance to inspire the leaders about the vision for the fall.
- The church's high school graduates are launched from the youth ministry, confident that they are surrounded by a supporting church family and committed to live out their faith as adults.
- A library of Major Event notebooks is being built as Major Event Coordinators complete their first year of service.
- The Youth Director has met with the YMA consultant to establish a Rhythmic Week.
- Recruiting of key volunteers for the 2010-2011 school year is complete.

*Proposed YMA Time: 1 Day offsite*

## June/July 2010

### Focus: Kick-off Planning and Compliance

#### Outcomes:



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- The 2010-2011 Youth Ministry calendar has been prepared for print and is posted on the web site and the youth bulletin board.
- Final details are in place for a fall kick off event designed to welcome youth into a program they can get excited about, to introduce parents to a format and structure they can feel confident about, and to provide a forum for receiving information from youth families (sign up forms, surveys, etc.).
- A non-overwhelming fall kick-off parent survey has been developed which provides parents an opportunity to plug into “helping” roles within the youth ministry for the upcoming year. (All lead volunteer roles will have already been filled by this time).
- Compliance documents are in place (background checks, child protection documents, music and video copyright licensing, etc.).
- The dates and costs of all major youth ministry events and trips have been determined through August 2011.

*Proposed YMA Time: 1 Day offsite*

## August 2010

### Focus: Defrag and Fall Launch

#### Outcomes:

- All volunteers have experienced a ½ day “leadership launch” event that clarifies their roles, inspires them to grow in their own faith, and equips them to serve the youth of the church and community.
- Leaders have been recruited for the new classes and programming that are being offered during the school year.
- A Fall Kick-Off/Parent Orientation event leaves youth and parents excited and enthusiastic about the year ahead.
- The structure of teams within the Youth Ministry who have served during the transition year has been evaluated and a game plan is in place for transitioning to a more permanent, streamlined team structure.

*Proposed YMA Time: 3 Days (2 onsite, 1 offsite)*

## September 2010

### Focus: Family Ministry

#### Outcomes:

- A plan has been created to develop stronger ties between families and to support parents in the church. Determine what combination of staff, volunteers, and organizational structure will have primary responsibility for implementing and nurturing the plan. Focus on friendship first; firm commitments will come later.
- A strategic plan for helping youth become an integral part of the whole church has been developed. The strategies to weave the youth ministry into the fabric of the entire church could include:



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- **Special events** – designed to help youth discover other aspects of the church.
- **Invitation** – Intentionally create opportunities for youth to be invited to fully participate in ministries outside of the youth programs.
- Registration forms are available for any youth ministry retreat or trip calendared for the coming year.
- There are at least 60 adults who have served in some way in the youth ministry in the previous year.
- A potential volunteer survey, distributed to parents at the Fall Kick Off, has been returned by at least 50 parents.
- Based on the results of a parent interest survey, those who indicated interest in serving have been placed in specific helping roles.
- A clear youth ministry staffing plan for budget year 2011 has been agreed on by SPR and the pastors, with the expectation of providing one full-time staff person for every 50 weekly active youth (e.g., if the target is 125, the staff would be made up of 2.5 full-time staff).

*Proposed YMA Time: 1 Day Offsite*

## October 2010

### Focus: Strategic Development

#### Outcomes:

- The 3-year revolving goals and 1-year benchmarks have been evaluated and re crafted for the upcoming 3-year and 1-year windows.
- The organizational chart for the youth ministry has been revised to reflect changes that have taken place since the visioning retreat.
- Written game plans (including implementation timetables) have been collected for:
  - an intentionally welcoming culture at all programs of the youth ministry.
  - building bridges for students into the life of the whole congregation
  - a long-term staffing plan for the youth ministry.
  - a communications best practices
  - maximizing the retention of new 6<sup>th</sup> graders as they step into the youth group
  - key rites of passage for the youth ministry
- Processes are in place for the timely and personal follow up for any first-time visitors to the youth ministry.
- Search for any additional staff for the youth ministry has begun.

*Proposed YMA Time: 3 Days offsite*

## November/December 2010

### Focus: Transitioning to the Permanent Structure

#### Outcomes:



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- The Youth Ministry Renovation Team and the other teams of the Youth Ministry are celebrated, having discharged their infrastructure-building duties. Many members of these teams continue to be involved in the youth ministry in some role.
- The role and scope of the members of the Youth Ministry Renovation Team have been redefined and the team has morphed into a more permanent team with oversight of the youth ministry (from Youth Ministry Renovation Team to Youth Ministry Team, for example).
- Additional staff for the youth ministry have been hired and have completed a ½ day Quick Start Orientation to their position(s).
- Curriculum resources for the 2011-2012 school year have been selected and ordered, based on the template created through the renovation process.
- The Youth Ministry Renovation Team has recommended how, if at all, they are suggesting YMA be involved in providing on-going support for the FUMC youth ministry, including monthly coaching/troubleshooting and an annual late-fall visit for evaluating and re-upping goals, adjusting the organizational chart, and ensuring that all control documents and visioning documents are up to date.
- Written game plans (including implementation timetables) have been developed for:
  - Reaching out strategically to youth who are not currently a part of the youth ministry
  - Intentionally engaging youth in local missions and setting a youth ministry mission calendar for the coming year (includes recruiting a local mission coordinator).
  - Engaging the majority of parents of youth in some way in the youth ministry in the 2010-2011 school year
  - Expanding and clarifying the opportunities for youth in leadership through a more focused youth leadership program
  - Training and placing youth in ministry roles in the youth ministry and the church at large.

*Proposed YMA Time: 4 Days (2 onsite, 2 offsite)*



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