A COVENANT FOR CHURCH YOUTH MINISTRIES
A Prudential Resolution

Submitted by the Eastern Association of the Ohio Conference

SUMMARY

This resolution calls upon local churches to adopt a set of promises to provide support to persons who work in youth ministries.

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 UCC 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 workers are doing and the commitment they have made to work with young people in our church.
We promise to make sure our youth workers 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 workers, 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 workers.

THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL RATIONALE

The more spiritually alive and refreshed a youth worker is, the better example they will be to young people.
Well-managed and supported youth workers do better youth work and often stay longer in their role in a church.
The Covenant is a way for churches to think about how they’re supporting a youth worker spiritually and practically. It is meant to be a helpful way for churches to think through the key issues in employing a youth worker.

When Paul writes to Timothy in the New Testament, he clearly places on him a responsibility to train himself, especially in ‘godliness’. But Paul’s advice and guidance in 1 Timothy isn’t just about character and spiritual life, it’s also about skills. Paul advises him on ways of managing members of the congregation, on pastoral warning signs he needs to monitor and about inter-generational conflicts.

Paul believes that Timothy needs to continue to grow not only in faith, but also in understanding, skills and experience. In effect Paul is behaving as an excellent employer. He is aware that Timothy is going to face challenges in his work, and so he wants to make sure he’s equipped for the task ahead.

The same challenge exists for churches today who employ a youth worker. Alongside their spiritual growth, churches need to think about ongoing training and development for their worker. Whatever qualifications they arrive with, the church has a responsibility to continue to invest in them and develop their skills, just like in any profession. After all, youth workers may face tough pastoral situations and often need to know how to counsel young people with complex needs, including dealing with child protection issues. They may need to learn new skills like speaking in public, leading small group programs or mentoring; and they almost certainly will need to know how to develop a strategic plan for their work. All of this requires ongoing professional training.

Add to that, the challenges of a fast-changing culture. Youth workers need to be able to understand the implications of developments in areas like technology and the internet, educational and youth policy, legislation on health and safety and so on.

RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Twenty-eighth General Synods believes that youth workers need spiritual support in their work with young people;

WHEREAS, gifts and call are best discerned in the context of the faith community;

WHEREAS, taking time to think and pray is just as essential for our youth workers as organizing events and meeting young people;

WHEREAS, maintaining the gifts and skills of the youth workers is an ongoing process and that it is important to continually invest in professional development;

WHEREAS, taking regular time off helps maintain our youth workers’ passion and energy for their work with young people;
WHEREAS, having a youth worker does not release the rest of the church from our responsibilities toward young people;

WHEREAS, it is vital to acknowledge what our youth workers are doing and the commitment they have made to work with young people in our church;

WHEREAS, it is important to have clear structures and procedures for recruiting and employing youth workers, and to provide supportive management structures which are fair and just;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that, the delegates to the Twenty-eighth General Synod of the United Church of Christ adopt this Covenant for Church Youth Ministries.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Twenty-eighth General Synod encourage local churches to adopt this covenant and implement it as policy and practice for employing, nurturing and supporting youth workers—both paid and volunteers they minister to and with youth.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that by adopting this Covenant for Church Youth Ministries the Twenty-eighth General Synod encourages local churches to make the following promises:

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

2. to provide our youth workers opportunities for prayerful discernment of gifts and call;

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

4. to set aside time and money to provide initial and ongoing training and professional development for our youth workers;

5. to actively encourage our youth workers to take TWO FULL DAYS away from their role each week;

6. to encourage the people of the local church to volunteer with, to pray for and to support youth;

7. to show appreciation for and celebrate the achievements of our youth workers;

8. to follow fair and just practices in the employment of our youth workers.

FUNDING

Funding for the implementation of this resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION

Local Church Ministries is requested to implement this resolution.

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¹This “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 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 General Synod resolution.