

## **Dynamic Youth Ministry**

Instructors: *Megan Dowdell and Betty Jeanne Rueters-Ward*  
*Starr King School for the Ministry*

### **Course Description:**

This lively and interactive on-line course grounds participants in philosophical, psychological, programmatic, ethical and theological aspects of youth ministry. Geared particularly toward Unitarian Universalists, but open to all, this course seeks to embody a vision of youth ministry that is a vibrant, robust, and flexible part of every congregation. Topics of instruction include leadership and spiritual development, professional support for youth advisors, denominational polity, adolescent life issues, building intergenerational community, and a critical analysis of different models of youth ministry and programming. Recommended for all religious leaders, both new and old to youth ministry.

### **Course Instructors:**

**Megan Dowdell** is a Unitarian Universalist graduate of Starr King School for the Ministry, former Ph.D. student at the Graduate Theological Union, and current doctoral student in sociology at the University of California, San Francisco. She served as the first Youth Trustee-at-Large on the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) Board of Trustees, and co-convened the Association's Consultation on Youth Ministry with the Rev. Dr. Bill Sinkford, then the UUA President. Previously, she served as a mentor for the YMCA Y-Scholars program, helping first-generation college-bound students achieve their goals. Currently, she works as a graduate research assistant for Dr. Randall Miller, ethics professor at Pacific School of Religion, and also at Project Homeless Connect, an organization providing an inter-agency, collaborative approach to serving homeless families in San Francisco.

**Betty Jeanne Rueters-Ward** is a lifelong Unitarian Universalist and full-time Youth and Young Adult Program Coordinator at the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock. She is one of the first graduates of the Master of Arts in Religious Leadership for Social Change at Starr King. As a Youth Programs Specialist for the Unitarian Universalist Association, Betty Jeanne coordinated international conferences, trainings and social justice initiatives. She has also served as a youth advisor at the First Unitarian Church of Oakland, as a youth mentor for OutLoud Radio, and with youth clients at Carroll Center for the Blind. Beyond her leadership in youth ministry/programming, Betty Jeanne works as a community organizer and national movement builder with networks including Catalyst Project, Standing on the Side of Love, and U.S. for All of Us. Following her graduation from Starr King's MASC program, she served as the interfaith organizer for the No On Prop 8 (Equality for All) campaign, and the statewide manager for UU Voices for Health Care.

Megan and Betty Jeanne bring over two decades of experience in youth ministry. Individually and as a team, they have consulted with Unitarian Universalist congregations, districts, camps and conferences on multigenerational community building, youth ministry, and other issues.

### **Course Commitments and Expectations:**

This course relies on the thoughtful participation of each participant; all will be expected to engage actively in on-line discussions and activities, in addition to completing all reading and written assignments. Over the span of the semester, participants will generate a culture of peer support as well as their own personal philosophy of youth ministry for use in professional and academic contexts. We hope that these philosophies might become an edited compilation, a resource for future students as well as the broader community through podcast, paper distribution, etc.

### **Educating to Counter Oppressions:**

Starr King's mission, theological vision and educational philosophy support us in educating to counter oppressions. In our work, we strive to embody what we hope to see in the world -- a just, loving humanity and community in which people are free to be themselves fully and without fear. A community where no one is exiled, silenced or exploited because of gender, gender expression, race, color, ethnic or national origin, religion, sexual/affectional orientation, age, class, physical character or disability. For more information about Starr King's educational philosophy, including its counter-oppressive commitment, we encourage you to visit [http://sksm.edu/about/educational\\_philosophy.php](http://sksm.edu/about/educational_philosophy.php).

The course instructors share a vision in which counter-oppression efforts are infused in every part of youth ministry. This course will examine assumptions about age, leadership, and authority and employ a collaborative approach to shared ministry with youth. We will explore course topics using a critical analysis of many other identities and oppressions, primarily race, ability, gender, and sexual orientation. In reading and discussing the first-hand accounts of youth, we will draw from a diverse pool of voices and experiences. Students will examine their own social position (internalized privilege and oppression, etc.) as it affects their own life experience, and their ministry with youth.

### **Course Requirements:**

#### Class Participation

- Online discussion postings and responses to peers
- Voice-to-voice conference calls
- Reading assignments
- Written reflections
- Engage guest presenters
- Two in-depth consultations with instructors

#### Praxis Requirement

Starr King is committed to community-based, immersion learning to complement classroom/online engagement. Further, the instructors believe that learning – particularly about youth ministry – thrives in a praxis engagement model, which cycles between action and reflection and enables us to continuously draw from our firsthand experiences in ministry with youth. As such, all students are expected to develop and engage in an individualized youth ministry praxis over the course of the semester.

### **Course Schedule:**

- Week One:** Introduction to the Course
- Week Two:** Foundations of Youth Ministry / Youth Programs
- Week Three:** Theology and Philosophy of Youth Ministry
- Week Four:** Unitarian Universalism and Youth
- Week Five:** Adolescent Development
- Week Six:** Leadership Development and Youth
- Week Seven:** Mid-term Dialogue, Peer Support, and Evaluation
- Week Eight:** Spiritual Development and Youth
- Week Nine:** Group Dynamics
- Week Ten:** Faith in Action
- Week Eleven:** Identity, Privilege and Oppression

**Week Twelve:** Collegiality, Policy and Professional Concerns

**Week Thirteen:** Bridging the Lifespan

**Week Fourteen:** Celebration, Final Evaluation and Closing

### Sources for Learning:

#### *Guest Speakers*

Guest speakers are an integral part of this course. Almost every week, students will have access to experienced leaders in youth ministry – both adults and youth – who will provide content and dialogue. Assignments will be tailored to build upon guest contributors each week.

#### *Readings*

Course readings will draw from the following:

#### *Required texts* (to be read in their entirety)

- Arnason, Wayne and Scott, Rebecca. *We Would Be One: A History of Unitarian Universalist Youth Movements* (Skinner House, 2005) \$15.00 at UUA Bookstore, ISBN 9781558964884
- Smith, Christian and Melinda Lundquist Denton. *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford University Press, 2005) \$17.95 publisher price, ISBN 0195384776
- Mark DeVries. *Sustainable Youth Ministry* (IVP Books, 2008) \$16.00 publisher price, ISBN 0830833617
- Michael Sadowski, ed. *Adolescents at School: Perspectives on Youth, Identity, and Education (Second Edition)* (Harvard Education Press, 2008) \$29.95, ISBN-13 978-1-891792-94-6

Additional required readings will be provided on Moodle.