

Virtual youth groups



These five pilot sessions can be used sequentially. Congregations can also pick and choose from these based on time constraints or content needs.

Youth groups are encouraged to reserve enough time to debrief after each session. There are optional activities related to the theme that can be done in youth group after the call ends. These activities can be shared at the next virtual youth group meeting.

Session 1 – Culture and Heritage

a. Introductions

Adult facilitators, both American and Transylvanian, are introduced. (Teens are interested in why adults choose to facilitate teen groups, and why adults are so interested in teens—and in ministry—in countries other than their own.)

b. Check-In

- *Youth introduce themselves and offer a little information about who they are and what they care about.*
- *Initially, teens check in about what's best in their lives in that moment. As they build intimacy in the group, they can address challenges they are facing as well.*

c. Reading from the Bible: Isaiah 11:1-9 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

The Peaceful Kingdom

- 1 A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
- 2 The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
- 3 His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear;
- 4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.
- 5 Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.
- 6 The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.
- 7 The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
- 8 The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.
- 9 They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

d. Exploration and Discovery

QUESTIONS: These questions are jumping-off points for sharing from the youth. As facilitators choose their questions and follow up questions, they keep in mind the key connections and concepts that they hope the youth will come away with.

1. How would you describe your culture? This can be a national culture, regional culture, or the culture of your town or city.
2. What do you love about your culture?
3. What is the culture like at your church? How do people act with each other? Is the culture of your church different than the culture at large?
4. What are common misconceptions about your culture?
5. What are your favorite holidays? Do these holidays connect with your faith? How?
6. What social pressures do you feel in your community? Does your family expect you to live in a certain way? Teachers? Friends?
7. What dreams do you have for your future?

e. Closing Check Out

Ask for any final reflections from the youth.

f. Closing Reading

*Empower me
To be a bold participant,
Rather than a timid saint in waiting,
In the difficult ordinariness of now;
To exercise the authority of honesty;
Rather than to defer to power,
Or deceive to get it;
To influence someone for justice,
Rather than impress anyone for gain;
And, by grace, to find treasures
Of joy, of friendship, of peace
Hidden in the fields of the daily
You give me to plow.*

—Ted Loder

g. Optional Activity

Make travel posters for your town or city.

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Session 2 – Living Our Faith in the World

a. Introductions and Check-In

Joys and concerns

b. Reading from the Bible: Jeremiah 1:5 New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

5 Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

The Story of Exodus

c. Exploration and Discovery

QUESTIONS:

1. What social justice issues are you passionate about, personally? Why?
2. What social justice issues are important in your church community? Are there specific forms of ministry your church community focuses on?
3. Do you ever do service projects or volunteer as a youth group? What do you do?
4. What are the most pressing concerns for the environment and for justice in your community?
5. What positive changes do you imagine for your community?
6. How are you called to live your Unitarian or Unitarian Universalist faith in the world?

d. Closing Check Out

Ask for any final reflections from the youth.

e. Closing Reading

People say, what is the use of our small effort.

They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time.

A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions.

Each one of our thoughts, words and deeds is like that.

No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless.

There's too much work to do.

—Dorothy Day

f. Optional Activity

Design a service project around the topics discussed today. How can you create the positive changes you desire in your own community?

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Session 3 – Spiritual Practices

a. Introductions and Check-In

Joys and concerns

b. Readings from the Bible: Exodus 15:20 (NRSV)

The Song of Miriam

20 Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines and with dancing.

Matthew 26: 36-43 (NRSV)

Jesus Prays in Gethsemane

36 Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."

37 He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated.

38 Then he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me."

39 And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; yet not what I want but what you want."

40 Then he came to the disciples and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "So, could you not stay awake with me one hour?"

41 Stay awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial;^[a] the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."

42 Again he went away for the second time and prayed, "My Father, if this cannot pass unless I drink it, your will be done."

43 Again he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy

c. Exploration and Discovery

QUESTIONS:

1. What do adult worship services look like at your church?
2. Do you have a youth worship service? What does that look like? What kinds of subjects do you explore?
3. Do you personally engage in any spiritual practices? Spiritual practices include things like prayer, reading scripture, meditation, and yoga. What do you practice? What does this practice look like? Why did you begin?
4. Do you talk about spiritual practices in youth group? Are spiritual practices ever part of youth group?
5. Do you think there is a difference between spirituality and religion?
6. What feeds your spirit at church?
7. Do you carry anything with you from your life at church into your life at school, work, or home?

d. Closing Check Out

Ask for any final reflections from the youth.

e. Closing Reading

*May the light around us guide our footsteps,
And hold us fast to the best and
most righteous that we seek.*

*May the darkness around us nurture our dreams,
And give us rest so that we may
give ourselves to the work of our world.*

*Let us seek to remember the wholeness of our lives,
the weaving of light and shadow
in this great and astonishing dance in which we move.*

—Kathleen McTigue

f. Optional Activity

Youth are invited to try spiritual practices they haven't tried before. For example: prayer, meditation, making prayer beads, lectio divina (Latin for "Divine Reading") with scripture passages or readings from the UU hymnal.

This hands-on UU prayer bead art activity and practice is particularly accessible to teens:

www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/practice/workshop2/workshopplan/handouts/59197.shtml

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Session 4 – Big Questions

a. Introductions and Check-In

Joys and concerns

b. Readings from the Bible: Matthew 7:12 (NRSV)

The Golden Rule

12 “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.

The Story of Jonah as the central document of the Jewish forgiveness ritual at Yom Kippur.

c. Exploration and Discovery

QUESTIONS:

1. What do you think are the most important ethical and religious teachings from your faith?
2. What is your view of forgiveness?
3. What is the meaning of loving one’s neighbor as oneself in your faith community? In your life?
4. What does the love of God look like to you?
5. What fills you with love and compassion?

d. Closing Check Out

Ask for any final reflections from the youth.

e. Closing Reading

Fully Alive

*I will not die an unlived life.
I will not live in fear
of falling or catching fire.
I choose to inhabit my days,
to allow my living to open me,
to make me less afraid,
more accessible,
to loosen my heart
until it becomes a wing,
a torch, a promise.
I choose to risk my significance;
to live so that which came to me as seed
goes to the next as blossom
and that which came to me as blossom,
goes on as fruit.*

—Dawna Markova

f. Optional Activities

- *Create a collage mandala of things the youth find sacred or important.*
- *Instruct the youth to write a credo or journal about their beliefs.*
- *Create advertisements (print, or as a skit) for Unitarianism or Unitarian Universalism. What are the most essential components of your faith? What does U/UU have to offer people who are struggling? People with questions? People who want to give back to the world?*

Facilitators can encourage youth to give their advertisement to the church board or membership committee.

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Session 5 – Technology

a. Introductions and Check-In

Joys and concerns

b. Reading from the Bible: Mark 2:21-22 (NRSV)

21 “No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old cloak; otherwise, the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made.

22 And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and so are the skins; but one puts new wine into fresh wineskins.”[\[a\]](#)

c. Exploration and Discovery

QUESTIONS:

1. Is there a strong link between youth culture and technology for you? What does this look like?
2. How is technology changing your community? At home? At school?
3. What are some of the best things technology has to offer?
4. What are problems that have come with technology? What can be done to minimize negative effects of technology?
5. Is technology changing your faith? How?

d. Closing Check Out

Ask for any final reflections from the youth.

e. **Closing Reading**

“The Buddha, the Godhead, resides quite as comfortably in the circuits of a digital computer or the gears of a cycle transmission as he does at the top of the mountain, or in the petals of a flower. To think otherwise is to demean the Buddha - which is to demean oneself.”

— Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*

*Take courage friends.
The way is often hard, the path is
never clear,
And the stakes are very high.
Take courage.
For deep down, there is another
truth:
you are not alone.*

—Wayne B. Arnason

f. **Optional Activities**

- *How could technology be used to solve a problem you see in your church community? Is there a dream website, app, or other technological tool that could improve U/UU communities?*
- *Use recycled materials to create “old technology” art pieces—carts, plows, a printing press, etc.*
- *Create an app for your youth group or religion. What would your app do? What purpose would it serve? Why would someone want this app? (Note, focus on the content of the app rather than how it would actually be created).*