



Hiring a Minister Responsible for Youth Ministry

A growing trend in Mennonite churches is the hiring of a minister with significant responsibility for youth ministry. The development of a plan to call additional staff, including a youth ministry staff person, needs to be carefully considered in light of the vision and goals of the congregation. By putting adequate effort into the initial process of discernment a congregation creates, from the beginning, a greater likelihood of a successful working relationship.

The addition of any additional staff person, such as a person charged with ministry to youth, represents the forming of or adding to a staff team; hence the term “associate” is used.

A. Questions about hiring (additional) staff

The impetus for hiring additional staff for congregational ministry may come from a variety of places. The lead pastor may be calling for additional staff. A lay leader might make the suggestion. Perhaps a consultant helps the congregation discern next steps for ministry, or there might be a grass roots push for new staff from within the congregation. The voice may even come from people with self-serving interests, who are not thinking about the entire congregation. Before any next steps are taken, it is important to discern the sources and motivations for adding a staff member.

The following questions need to be explored in the beginning stage of discernment.

1. Why does the church exist? What is it that God calls all churches to be and do?
2. What is our setting and call? That is, what is unique about the place of our church building, and the people who attend it, and the community?
3. What are our long-term goals?
4. What staff or lay positions would best help us achieve those goals?

B. Questions about hiring an associate pastor for youth ministry

If the answers to the above questions point toward additional staff focused on youth ministry in particular, then the congregation is ready to answer questions specific to filling a youth ministry position and to develop a youth ministry job description. (See your conference minister or conference youth minister for samples and help in writing this.)

C. Questions about the terms of reference

1. Will youth ministry be just one part of the job description or will time be exclusively devoted to youth ministry? If the position is solely youth ministry, will it be for senior high only, or are we including junior high and young adults? How many hours or units of time do we expect to be devoted to each area?
2. Will the call and length of term be similar to or different from current ministry staff?
3. Will we call someone from inside or outside of the congregation? Calling someone from inside often means helping them gain experience in youth ministry, assisting them with professional training, and paying attention to family dynamics. It is likely that the staff

person's immediate family, namely their parents, also attend the church. Calling someone from outside the congregation usually means someone is being called with some youth ministry experience and/or training. Factors such as their experience in team relationships, what youth ministry settings they enjoy most, and how they will embrace the congregational history should be considered.

D. Questions about supervision and ministry relationships*

1. What is the experience of the congregation and current ministry staff with multiple staff ministry? If the experience is minimal, it is important that some education and preparation takes place in advance for a satisfactory staff relationship to develop. Contact your area conference minister for help in finding resources on multiple staff ministry and include budget for initial and on-going training and support.
2. Depending on the answer to the previous question, how will supervision take place? Another way of asking the same question is, "to whom will the youth ministry staff person ultimately be accountable?" All associate pastors should be accountable to the senior/leading pastor. A youth pastor may also be accountable for programming issues to a congregational youth ministry council. However focused or diverse the job description, accountability ought to rest in a single place. All other groups who have an interest in ministry outcomes should be helped to understand their role as advisory, not supervisory.
3. What will the relationship be between youth minister and youth sponsors? This should be answered in light of the history within the congregation. Some churches use the youth minister to empower sponsors to do hands-on youth ministry with the congregation's young people. Other congregations have a history of sponsors being an assistant to the youth minister who is the main ministry contact with youth. The answer to this question, and the completeness of understanding for both youth minister and sponsors, is crucial to the early success or failure of a youth ministry position.

E. Questions about qualifications for youth ministry

1. How will the search committee and the congregation know that the youth minister is qualified both by character and by competence? It is strongly recommended that the congregation take advantage of the area conference and denominational resources for calling pastors. This includes requiring all candidates to complete the Ministerial Leadership Information form and have references processed by the denominational office. When the congregation intends to ask for licensing, commissioning or ordination for the youth minister, the packet of resources on Ministerial Credentialing must be consulted.
2. How will the youth minister promote the values and theology of the congregation and the Mennonite church? Youth ministers are primary mentors and role models for youth. They also influence youth in their educational choices. The congregation should ensure that the candidate will support the values and institutions that the church wants to uphold. Normally a youth minister should be a graduate of a Mennonite college or otherwise demonstrate strong advocacy for Mennonite schools and theology.
3. How will we ensure safety for our youth? Because the youth minister is entrusted with close relationships with youth the congregation should insist that the youth minister receive training in boundary maintenance, especially in relation to sexual matters. It would be appropriate to conduct a police security check of any candidate. (This also applies to any other pastoral or volunteer staff).

F. Questions about credentials for ministry

1. Is the congregation willing to grant ministerial credentials to the person called to youth ministry? Often this question is not addressed initially, but comes up later in the ministry experience. Since youth ministry is often a first ministry experience there may be hesitation about accepting the office of ministry. But if the assignment includes pastoral responsibilities (preaching, pastoral care, baptisms, weddings, funerals etc.) a ministerial

* See "Considerations for Multiple Staff Ministry"

credential is an important commitment to responsibility and accountability for ministry. It is recommended that the prospect of ministerial credentialing be raised during the hiring process. If not settled at that time it should be raised again in annual reviews.

2. Should the minister responsible for youth ministry be ordained? This is appropriate for a person who experiences an inner call, confirmed by the congregation, for long-term ministry. Another possibility is “commissioning/licensing for specific ministry,” which carries all the rights and responsibilities of ministry, but is restricted in time, location and/or role—i.e., it would be valid for the duration of the appointment at this particular church for this particular job. The possibilities for credentialing are described in *A Mennonite Polity for Ministerial Leadership* (Faith and Life Press, 1996).
3. What is the process for seeking/granting ministerial credentials? Ministerial credentials are granted by the area conference on the recommendation of the congregation after due processing. Information about the process and requirements can be found in the packet on “Ministerial Credentialing.”

G. Questions about resources for youth ministry

1. How do we adequately compensate the full or part-time position of an associate pastor of youth? The salary scale for associate pastors should apply to a credentialed youth minister. If the church does not intend to follow the denominational pastoral salary guidelines, it is better to employ a youth worker whose assignment is administrative as opposed to ministerial.
2. How will we resource the youth ministry staff persons as a youth ministry professional? At a minimum, congregations should provide youth ministers with subscriptions to a *youth resource*. Check with your area conference/area church youth minister for current recommendations and training opportunities. Congregations should also provide an annual professional training experience.

Adapted from an article by Mark and Lorie Vincent
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