EVENT PLANNING FOR YOUTH:
RESPONDING TO RACISM, SEXISM, and OTHER INAPPROPRIATE BEHAVIORS

Planning a district, conference, or national-level youth event comes with challenges. Bringing multiple churches and youth ministries together means a wide variety of cultures, theology, and behavioral expectations coming together. Event planners have the responsibility to plan for a wide variety of activities and programming. Those responsibilities include the creation of safe space and having a plan of action when inappropriate behavior or conflicts come up during the course of the event.

This resource is meant to support event planners in their preparation for unforeseen conflicts and inappropriate behavior at events for youth. The resource is divided into four sections:

- **Preparation**: Considerations to take during the planning phases, before the on-site event.
- **Response**: Considerations for when a conflict or inappropriate action occurs on-site.
- **Conflict Resolution**: Considerations for dealing with multiple parties expressing anger or hurt while on-site.
- **Other Resources**: A list of resources to support event planners with items related to the first three sections.

### Preparation

- For any activity that involves open expression (envelopes, care cards, prayer walls, etc):
  - Educate and demonstrate both to youth and youth leaders what are appropriate messages to share.
  - Adults must model what it means to uphold the dignity of others.
  - Seed the activity with positive messages. Consider having some pre-written positive messages and available.
  - Create a plan to address or eliminate messages that are not appropriate including: a person or team monitoring collection, distribution, or sharing.
    - For example, if there is a publicly visible prayer wall, have someone responsible to regularly inspect the prayers and anything written for inappropriate messages. Equip that person to take care of the message in question.
  - Have a code of conduct available and agreed to by youth and adult participants before the event.

Make sure that shared understanding of behavior is available and obvious on site.

- Often this takes the shape of an event covenant, or other behavioral contract, that participants (and potentially parents) review, sign, and return with registration for the event.
- Important items can include, but not be limited to: speech, dress, interactions, sex, drugs, and firearms.
- Consider the recommendation to not wear “political” message gear.
• Events for youth in the UMC should always be inclusive. This is consistent with the UMC's understandings and stances found in the Book of Discipline and Book of Resolutions.

• If you believe (and advertise) that your event is inviting to all (multiple cultures) then make it so. Building a welcoming culture and space is much more than saying or writing it.
  • Work with the planning or design team to explore and understand cultural competency.
  • Include leaders and on-stage presence that represents multiple cultures.
  • Consider encouraging youth to speak in their first language.
  • Consider the musical choices and the manner in which worship is shaped and lived out in the community.

• Meet with design or core team members ahead of time to go over response plans for onsite situations and social media interaction.
  • Create contingency plans (if this happens, then we do this) for inappropriate behavior.
  • Spend time in the months and weeks ahead of the event paying attention to cultural phenomenon that youth and their leaders may carry into the event.

• Discuss what it means to create a “safe space” at your event with your planning team.
  • Safe spaces are places where participants feel secure; not made vulnerable by messages from the stage, leadership, or other participants. They are spaces where fear does not interfere with a youth’s ability to fully connect with an event’s intent.
  • What kinds of things need to be present for people to feel safe?
  • Absent in order for people to feel safe?
  • How will we create safe space for youth? For adult leaders?
  • What is our response plan if someone feels their safety is threatened?
  • How will we inform participants about their role in creating safe space?

• Discuss what it means to create “brave spaces” at your event
  • Brave spaces are places where that which needs to be said can be said without the fear of judgement or exclusion. They are spaces where event participants are willing to voice minority or unpopular opinions. They are spaces where everyone listens to try and understand without immediate judgement. It is a space where a person or group is risking something by their presence. These are different than safe spaces.
  • Discuss with your planning team how a situation may feel “safe” for one person or group and “brave” for another person or group. (like a first-time visitor at a church or your event)
  • How can your leadership support those bravely attending the event?

• Develop a process that pays attention to this Biblical witness.
Response

- Even the best plans don’t work sometimes. People will still do offensive or silly things, so be prepared to respond instead of react.
  - A response comes from you (and your teams) as a leader who has prepared and grounded the event in a specific set of values and theology. These values and theology should be communicated ahead of time with attendees, and also shared as reminders on-site.
  - A reaction is an attempt to address an inappropriate action outside of the shared values and theology of the event.
  - A response is always preferred to a reaction, so be proactive in training yourself and your leadership team in the values and theology of your event. The more familiar you are with those elements of the event, the more consistent and natural the responses feel.

- In the event of an inappropriate action or behavior (something that causes harm, takes advantage of vulnerability, or is outside the shared values and theology of the event), consider the following:
  - If expectations and values have been discussed as a part of the event, a response may be appropriate from the main stage.
  - How many people witnessed that inappropriate action?
    - For those unaware that something inappropriate has happened, how do you inform them as a part of your response?
    - Do you respond to the situation from the event’s main stage? If so, how?
      - How will your response include a call to action for all to monitor and not repeat the inappropriate behavior?
    - Do you (or an event leader) address the room?
    - Should the affected person be on stage? Speak? Will this increase their vulnerability?
      - When on stage:
        - Speak from notes, especially if/when upset.
        - When sharing a story of vulnerability or hurt, be prepared for others to respond by feeling vulnerable and hurt.
        - Be as specific as possible related to actions instead of people or groups.
        - Refrain from pointing the finger at a group or an individual. Instead, talk about how “we” can do better or different together.
        - Consider what types of inappropriate behavior deserve an immediate response and when a ‘cooling off’ or ‘reflecting’ period may be beneficial.
    - Determine if there needs to be a face-to-face meeting with the adult chaperones of either the offending party or the affected party.
      - Where will the meeting take place?
      - How many event leaders will be present for the meeting? (make it more than one!)
      - What specific outcomes will happen because of this meeting?
    - Consider if and how other youth participants should be made aware.
    - Consider if and how parents of participants should be made aware.
    - Consider providing information to adult leaders using event text or social media services.
      - Information should be reviewed by leadership before sending.
- A log of “official” communications should be kept.
- Anything that is shared in a written or shareable format will be received by readers as “official.”
- Consider having someone monitor social media feeds and interact directly with users on those platforms.
- No matter how or where the response is offered, respond in simple, clear, and authoritative terms using these suggestions as guide:
  - This is what happened.
  - This is why this is not safe or appropriate.
  - This affects our safety and ability to worship together.
  - This is what we need to do differently from here out.
  - This is how we act like Christ with each other.
- Help prepare official responses from your annual conference.
  - Official responses should honor the truth of what was experienced, show care for all involved, and do no further harm.
  - Offer contact information for continued conversations.
- Recognize that single incidents can get magnified via social media
  - Create “sharing guidelines” so that anyone who didn’t witness the situation directly can understand some context of the situation and response.
  - Encourage those affected in situations to reach out to each other first (with event staff mediation if appropriate) before social media sharing.
  - When possible, share not only the incident, but the incident and response at the same time.
Conflict Resolution

• Encourage healthy conversations about what is funny, what does harm, and empathy.

• Help all parties understand that a safe space does not mean “say what you want to say the way that you want to say it” at any time. It does mean that what we witness together needs to be honest and true.

• Matthew 18:15-20 offers some helpful practices for addressing conflict among members of the Body of Christ.
  • What do those involved in conflict share in common? Mutual hopes for resolution?
  • How will your leadership help those in conflict remain knit together in Christ’s love, while working through the conflict?
  • When an offense takes place, consider that direct conversation is often preferred to triangulation or speaking with others before the offending party.

• Provide information about what is consistent Biblical wisdom, as well as with United Methodist statements from the Book of Discipline, Social Principles, and the Book of Resolutions as an aid:

  SCRIPTURES
  • James 1:19
  • Proverbs 15:1
  • Philippians 2:4
  • Colossians 3:13
  • Philippians 4:17-5:2
  • Deuteronomy 1:17
  • Micah 6:8
  • Matthew 7:1-5
  • 1 Peter 3:8-11
  • Hebrews 12:15
  • Matthew 18:15-20

  BOOK OF DISCIPLINE
  • ¶4 (Inclusiveness of the Church)
  • ¶140 (Call to Inclusiveness)
  • ¶162a (Rights of Society and Racism)
  • ¶162d (Rights of Young People)
  • ¶162h (Rights of Immigrants)
  • ¶162p (Rural Life)
  • ¶162r (Urban/Suburban Life)
  • ¶162s (Media Violence and Christian Values)
• ¶163f (Foreign Workers)
• ¶164a (Basic Freedoms and Human Rights)
• ¶164c (Church and State Relations)
• ¶164f (Civil Obedience and Disobedience)
• ¶165a (Nations and Cultures)
• ¶165b (National Power and Responsibility)
• ¶166 (The Social Creed of the United Methodist Church)

BOOK OF RESOLUTIONS
• 2061 (Being the Church Amid Disagreement)
• 3124 (The Church's Response to Ethnic and Religious Conflict)
• 3126 (Prejudice Against Muslims and Arabs in the USA)
• 3141 (Dialogue: A Way to be Neighbors)
• 3281 (Welcoming the Migrant to the US)
• 3282 (Sons and Daughters of Our Fathers)
• 3283 (US Immigration and Family Unity)
• 3284 (Faithful Response to Critical Needs)
• 3323 (Healing Relationship with Indigenous Persons)
• 3371 (A Charter for Racial Justice Policies in an Interdependent Global Community)
• 3372 (Act of Repentance for Racism)
• 3373 (Affirmative Action)
• 3374 (Annual Conferences’, Districts’, and Local Congregations’ Responsibilities for Eradication of Racism)
• 3376 (White Privilege in the United States)
• 3392 (Rural Communities in Crisis)
• 3411 (Urban Issues: Pathways to Transformation)
• 3421 (Grieving and Repenting From Acts of Hate and Violence)
• 3422 (Resisting Hate, Fear, and Scapegoating; and Transforming the Context of Hate in the United States)
• 3425 (Prohibition of Bullying)
• 3443 (Eradication of Sexism in the Church)
• 5001 (Taking Liberties: On the Sitting of Dissent)
• 5013 (On Humility, Politics, and Christian Unity)
• 6024 (Global Racism and Xenophobia: Impact on Women, Children, and Youth)
• 6025 (Globalization and Its Impact on Human Dignity and Human Rights)
• 6028 (Global Migration and the Quest for Justice)
• 6044 (Understanding Globality in the United Methodist Tradition)
Other Resources

- Fearless Conversations Guidelines
  In use at St. Luke’s United Methodist Church in Highlands Ranch, CO - Simple and easy tips for engaging meaningfully in difficult conversations.
  http://bit.ly/2fkPwHS

- Courageous Conversations
  A collection of resources for leaders to begin meaningful conversations based on a variety of topics and age ranges.
  www.umcdiscipleship.org/topics/courageous-conversations

  2004 - Center for Ethical Leadership.
  www.ethicalleadership.org/gracious-space-a-practical-guide-for-working-better-together.html

- Courageous Collaboration with Gracious Space - From Small Openings to Profound Transformation by Patricia Hughes, Karma Ruder, and Dale Nienow
  2011 - Center for Ethical Leadership
  www.amazon.com/Courageous-Collaboration-Gracious-Space-Transformation-ebook/dp/B006PUJ0C8

- Ladder of Influence
  A tool to help groups understand that multiple viewpoints exist, and that jumping to conclusions is not healthy.
  www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_91.htm

Topic & Date Specific Resources

- Vital Conversations (General Commission On Religion and Race)
  A collection of questions and guidance to help groups think about race.
  www.gcorr.org/meaningful-conversations-on-race

- 25 Ways to Affirm Diversity (United Methodist Communications)
  www.umcom.org/learn/25-ways-to-affirm-diversity

- MARCHA Statement on Post-Election Hate Environment
  www.marchaumc.org/marcha-youth-statement-on-post-election-hate-environment

- Race Matters
  A toolkit to help frame and guide conversations about race.
  www.aecf.org/m/resourcedoc/aecf-whatsracegottodowithit-2006.pdf
• **Sacred Conversations About Race**
The UCC has a complete resource guide you may access to learn ways of engaging meaningful congregation and conference-based conversations. You may also consider partnering with a nearby UCC congregation to get things started and to broaden input and impact.


• **Do’s and Don’ts of Teaching Black History**
It cannot be relegated to a month of activities about 5 or 6 individuals.


• **Hate Map**
Know where “hate” activities are harbored within your area.

  [www.splicenter.org/hate-map](http://www.splicenter.org/hate-map)

• **BMCR Statement in the First Week after the 2016 Presidential Election**


• **Words That Hurt, Words That Heal (Commission on the Status and Role of Women)**
In addition to research about inclusive/expansive language, it contains a Bible study that can be undertaken by adult Sunday School classes, UMW circles, church leaders or other groups. It’s available through Cokesbury as a PDF download.


### Ethnic Caucus Groups of the UMC in the United States

• Native American International Caucus - [www.facebook.com/NAICUMC](http://www.facebook.com/NAICUMC)

• Pacific Islander National Caucus - [www.pincum.org](http://www.pincum.org)

• National Federation of Asian American United Methodists - [http://nfaaum.org](http://nfaaum.org)

• Black Methodists for Church Renewal - [www.bmcrumc.org](http://www.bmcrumc.org)

• Metodistas Representando la Causa de los Hispanos Americanos - [www.marchaumc.org](http://www.marchaumc.org)

### Other Connections

• Hispanic Youth Leadership Academy - [http://hylaumc.com](http://hylaumc.com)

• Commission on Status and Role of Women - [www.gcsrw.org](http://www.gcsrw.org)

• General Commission on Religion and Race - [www.gcorr.org](http://www.gcorr.org)

• Discipleship Ministries - [www.umcdiscipleship.org](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org)

• Young People’s Ministries - [http://umcyoungpeople.org](http://umcyoungpeople.org)