

Dynamic Youth Ministry
Starr King School for the Ministry / Graduate Theological Union
EDFT-8462
3 Units
Spring 2020

Instructor: Betty Jeanne Rueters-Ward, MASC
Visiting Assistant Professor of Transformative Leadership
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Course Co-Developer: Megan Ruth Dowdell
Visiting Assistant Professor of Ethics and Society

Availability: I meet with students via video and phone. My office hours vary, as I try to be as flexible as possible to students' diverse schedules. Most of my meetings with students occur weekdays between 8am and 1pm Pacific (11am and 4pm Eastern). To request a meeting, send an email indicating available days/times including time zone.

Course Description

This lively and interactive on-line course grounds participants in social, emotional, theological and programmatic aspects of youth ministry. Geared particularly toward Unitarian Universalists, but open to all backgrounds, this course seeks to embody a vision of youth ministry that is a vibrant, robust, and flexible part of every congregation and community. Topics of instruction include leadership and spiritual development, professional support for adults who work with youth, adolescent development, and intergenerational community-building. Students will develop a critical analysis of different models of youth ministry and programming. Recommended for all leaders, new and old to youth ministry.

Inspired by the pedagogy of Starr King School for the Ministry, this course will:

- Invite students to bring their full, authentic selves to the learning community.
- Draw knowledge from both academic sources and lived personal experience.
- Embody an ongoing practice combining inquiry, study, action and reflection.
- Permeate the walls of the academy and build a global learning community.
- Center the unique learning goals and needs of each student.
- Further Starr King's commitment to countering oppressions, creating just and sustainable communities, and fostering multi-religious life and learning.

The course developers share a vision in which counter-oppression efforts are infused in every part of youth ministry. This course examines assumptions about age, leadership, and authority and employs a collaborative approach to shared ministry with youth. We will explore course topics using a critical analysis of multiple identities and oppressions, primarily race, class, ability, gender/gender expression, and sexual orientation. Students will be encouraged to examine their own social location as it affects their ministry with youth.

Learning Objectives

During this course, students will:

- Trace the history of other faith-based youth ministries and movements.
- Critically evaluate resources for youth and multigenerational ministry.
- Explore physical, psychosocial, emotional, sexual, spiritual adolescent development.
- Draw on diverse perspectives and case studies for insight and inspiration.
- Reflect on emotional, spiritual, and practical aspects of youth ministry.
- Provide and receive peer/collegial support for youth ministry.

Learning Outcomes

Through this course, students will:

- Understand core concepts of youth ministry.
- Identify their strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities re: youth ministry.
- Gain practical strategies and tools to address common challenges.
- Articulate their personal theology for and approach to youth ministry.
- Research, create, and present learning resources on topics of personal interest.
- Engage in ongoing, immersion learning via self-designed praxis (action/reflection).

Course Expectations

This course relies on the thoughtful and consistent engagement of each participant. All are expected to participate actively and promptly in discussions, activities, reading and written assignments. Students are co-creators of this graduate-level learning experience, generating learning materials for each other, facilitating discussions, and proactively building a culture of peer leadership and support.

- **Engaging Course Content:** Engage readings, recordings, and other learning resources as openly and fully as possible. Whether you identify with the particular experiences, identities, and values of the authors/speakers or those they reference, I expect you'll find something that relates to you and will inform your own spiritual leadership. If you've read, watched or listened to something before, I hope you will approach it with openness to new insights, including from your classmates' reflections: I've found that I learn something new or see something differently each time I return to a learning resource.
- **Attendance and Timeliness:** For the most part, this course happens asynchronously – students participate each week on their own time, when their schedules allow, but with specific deadlines by which to complete assignments and activities. In the case of late assignments or participation, it is your responsibility notify the instructor as right away (for example, sending a quick email notifying of the onset of an illness), and work out a plan for completing the missed or late coursework as soon as possible. You are encouraged to reach out to fellow students for support in catching up.
- **Technology:** Do not attempt to complete this course using a tablet or smartphone. Students are required to use a computer and consistent internet connection throughout the course. In addition to Moodle, this course incorporates web-based applications such as Zoom, YouTube, Google Drive and VoiceThread.

- **Counter-Oppressive Course Community:** In addition to providing a foundation in youth ministry for graduate students preparing for spiritual leadership, this course seeks to advance the values expressed in the statement on Educating to Counter Oppressions (ECO) that is central to Starr King School for the Ministry's educational design. Students should familiarize themselves with these priorities and reflect on them as they critically engage course content and the learning community.

Course Assignments

Each week,

- Review announcements and instructions for the week.
- Complete any activities or assignments for the week.
- Post (in writing or via video) in the online discussion.
- Comment on at least three postings by peers in the online discussion.
- Connect with discussion partner/s via phone or video chat.
- Engage in praxis (action/reflection component).

During the first month,

- Submit a brief description of your proposed presentation topic and praxis project.
- Meet with instructor to reflect on your unique learning interests and goals.

At the mid-semester point,

- Submit an update on your praxis project.
- Complete a self-evaluation of your participation, and an evaluation of the course itself.

During the final month,

- Summarize key lessons from your praxis experience.
- Lead presentation, and evaluate your planning and delivery.
- Engage classmates' presentations through discussion and/or other activities.
- Submit your personal statement paper on your theology of youth ministry.
- Complete a self-evaluation of your participation, and an evaluation of the course itself.

Once or twice during the course,

- Facilitate an engaging discussion forum.
- Participate in a live, instructor-facilitated gathering of the class community.

Supplementary documents detail the following course components:

Discussion: Connect and reflect online, via phone and/or video with your classmates.

Praxis Project: Develop and execute a customized praxis (action/reflection) project, engaging directly in youth ministry related activities, drawing insights from the experiences and integrating them with lessons from other course components.

Presentation: Create a multimedia presentation about course sub-topics of interest.

Paper: Write a personal statement describing one's philosophy/theology of youth ministry.

Grading and Evaluation

Regular, active class participation constitutes most of the grading rubric. Also required are three additional items of equal weight: the praxis project, presentation, and personal statement paper. Components are designed to enrich the online experience, and equip students with hands-on experiences, theological reflection, and collaborative ethos to build and sustain youth ministries.

Your final grade +/- or evaluation will be determined by the following components:

Class Participation - 40%

Praxis Project - 20%

Presentation - 20%

Paper - 20%

Required Text

“Youth Ministry Advising: A Complete Guide”

by Unitarian Universalist Association Office of Lifespan Faith Engagement

ISBN: 9781558966826, current cost at UUA Bookstore: \$15.00

Choosing to serve as a youth advisor is one of many ways that adults can demonstrate their commitment to youth. Serving in this capacity, however, is more than just making sure things run smoothly. Advisors contribute to faith- and spirit-centered, multigenerational, multicultural, congregationally rooted ministry to and with youth. Youth Ministry Advising: A Complete Guide covers broad-ranging topics including ways to recruit and support youth advisors, the nuts and bolts of youth group management, the role of youth in advisors creating a safe space, leadership training, and programming and project ideas.

In addition to this primary text, the course will incorporate other materials (readings, videos, online resources, etc.) generated or suggested by students and guest contributors, as well as by the instructor.

Optional Text

“Sustainable Youth Ministry”

by Mark DeVries

ISBN-10: 0830833617, **ISBN-13:** 978-0830833610, current cost on Amazon: \$10.22

You're looking for a youth pastor. Again. What goes wrong? Why do youth ministries crumble? And what is the cost to students, parents, volunteers and church staff? Is a sustainable youth ministry possible, even after a youth pastor leaves? Youth ministry expert Mark DeVries knows the answer is yes, because he helps build sustainable youth ministries through his coaching service called Youth Ministry Architects. So take heart: No matter what state the youth ministry at your church is in--in need of a leader and volunteers, full of battles and stress, large or small in number--it can be built to survive

and to last for the long haul. Based on his own experience and on his many conversations and interviews with churches in crisis, DeVries pinpoints problems that cause division and burnout and dispels strongly held myths. He then provides the practical tools and structures pastors and church leaders need to lay a strong foundation for your ministry so that it isn't built on a person or the latest, greatest student ministry trend.

About the Instructor

Betty Jeanne Rütters-Ward serves as the Visiting Assistant Professor for Transformative Leadership at Starr King School for the Ministry, where she has taught and mentored Graduate Theological Union students and spiritual leaders around the world since 2007. Her courses examine leadership, community organizing, education, social change theory and practice, multigenerational ministry, and more. Betty Jeanne's teaching approach is distinguished by:

- Linking theory, reflection and action – within and beyond the classroom
- Curricula that respond to students' unique passions, interests and goals
- Multi-faceted, interactive online courses that bring virtual learning to life
- Holistic academic advising, vocational counseling, and personal coaching

Betty Jeanne is a social change practitioner whose work has included ministry, community organizing, writing, public speaking, teaching and training, coaching, organizational and campaign management. She holds a Master of Arts in Social Change, combined with over ten years of leadership in the non-profit, educational, religious, philanthropic, and socially responsible business sectors. Betty Jeanne drives social change through capacity building and by developing effective, sustainable leaders of all ages, with the goal of activating people, organizations and communities in pursuit of the common good.

Betty Jeanne's passion for social change is fueled by her experiences in spiritual communities. She supports people – of any or no religious affiliations – to develop as leaders, make meaning of their lives, build community, reflect on and enact their values. Betty Jeanne has supported thousands of leaders in achieving success, maintaining balance and developing emotional resiliency amid the often fast-paced, high-stakes, stressful environments in which social change efforts happen. On a larger scale, Betty Jeanne has built religious-secular coalitions for civil and human rights, universal healthcare, youth empowerment, and racial justice.

Betty Jeanne has a multi-religious background and was raised and developed as a leader in a Unitarian Universalist congregation, which has fueled extensive professional work in the field of youth ministry from the local to the international level. More about her background can be found at www.linkedin.com/in/bruetersward or www.skism.edu/2015/04/17/i-am-starr-king-interview-with-betty-jeanne-rueters-ward/.