

New England Yearly Meeting

Youth Ministries Committee 2025-26 Listening Project Report

Between March 2025 and March 2026, the New England Yearly Meeting Youth Ministries Committee sought to connect with meetings across New England that were either known or believed to have active family and youth ministries (see NOTE below). The purpose of these Listening conversations was to learn more about current needs and new possibilities related to youth ministries. Appointed members of the Youth Ministries Committee reached out to 34 meetings representing all 8 New England Yearly Meeting quarters. Friends from 20 meetings representing five NEYM quarters (Connecticut Valley, Northwest, Salem, Sandwich, and Southeast) responded to this outreach with their perspectives on the current state of youth ministry. This report highlights themes and insights from the Listening Project responses.

Reaching and Including Families

With very few exceptions, all of the meetings contacted by the Youth Ministries Committee reported families and children among their active attenders. There was clear and broad agreement across meetings that families and children add richness and joy to the meeting community. Many meetings are using creative ways to reach and involve families in the life of the meeting. Most meetings include children in Worship for at least part of the time. Meetings highlighted communication and outreach strategies such as a focus on children in monthly newsletters, a monthly parent conversation hour, group chats, and direct texting. One meeting is reinventing the idea of First Day School with “God in a Shoebox”, lessons and materials that families can take home and do at any time. Many meetings report that they have moved away from sequential curriculum in favor of flexible and adaptable activities and routines. Several meetings highlighted Faith and Play stories as a helpful approach.

Meetings are also focusing on intergenerational activities and involving teens and college students in meeting work. Many meetings are creating opportunities for families to gather outside of worship time, such as potlucks, game nights, Bread Day, D&D nights, summer hikes, service activities, and singing at a campsite. Some meetings hold intergenerational activities on 5th Sundays or on other Sundays during the month. These activities have included cooking for the meeting or for the community, intergenerational story time, a Festival of Giving, or Friendly Sharing during worship. Only two meetings report having an active teen group, while several meetings are involving teenage youth in their meeting as paid or volunteer childcare for younger children. Some meetings are intentionally supporting college students from their meeting with funds or care packages, and one meeting has created an essay/scholarship contest for teens.

Shared Challenges

Many meetings reported reduced attendance from children over the last 6 years from pandemic disruptions, older children moving on to college and beyond, and competing family commitments and priorities. Nearly every meeting reported fluctuating or unpredictable attendance from children and families. Some meetings have addressed this by reducing programming from weekly to monthly or semi-monthly, or by consulting with families on the best day to schedule activities. A number of meetings reported difficulty staffing either youth programming or their youth ministries committee.

There was wide variation across meetings in their policies and practices around child safety. In some cases these practices are not aligned with the best practices recommended by NEYM. Many meeting contacts were not aware of NEYM's child safety resources or its background screening service. These resources were shared with meetings as part of the Listening Project process.

NEYM Connections and Support

Most meetings were aware of NEYM opportunities for youth and families, and many reported that children and youth in their meetings were attending NEYM retreats or involved in Sessions. Some meetings reported that children and teens in their meeting attended or staffed Friends Camp, a ministry of NEYM in South China, Maine. The Local Youth Ministers Supporting Each Other (LYMSE) gatherings, which are hosted by NEYM's Children and Family Ministries Coordinator Kara Price on Zoom, were highlighted by several Friends as a helpful support for youth ministries. When asked about additional resources or support from NEYM that would be helpful, some meetings expressed a desire for book recommendations and book lists for a range of ages and topics, while others expressed interest in NEYM-vetted curricula or programs for children and youth.

Next Steps

The Youth Ministries Committee will use the information gathered through the Listening Project to identify, re-publish, co-create, and curate resources for local meetings to support inspiration and connection around youth ministries. These resources may include curricula or book lists and descriptions of youth ministry initiatives from local meetings. We anticipate working with NEYM staff to develop additional resources and training around child safety practices. We will also share back the themes from the Listening Project to the meetings that participated, as well as to the wider Yearly Meeting. The committee also hopes to build on the Listening Project with a Visiting Project to see youth ministry in action at local meetings. As we conclude this Listening Project cycle, we are heartened by the emergent and persistent life of youth ministries throughout our region.

NOTE: If your meeting is currently engaged in youth ministry but you did not hear from us during this Listening cycle, this may mean the contact information for your meeting is out of date.

Please contact nia@neym.org to share the best youth ministry contact person and email address with us. We look forward to including you in future communications and listening cycles.