

The First-Time Attendee Packet

A Guide to Your First OMD YRUU Conference

(For anyone who has ever thought “Gee, I’d like to go to a YRUU Conference, but I want to know a little about what it will be like before I go.” And even for those of you who haven’t thought that.)

What the heck is all this stuff about “OMD YRUU”, anyway?

Well, that can be a difficult question to answer. First, let’s spell out those pesky acronyms. OMD stands for Ohio-Meadville District. The continent is divided up into districts. OMD contains Western PA, Eastern OH and WV. YRUU stands for Young Religious Unitarian Universalists. The YRUU Purposes state that “Young Religious Unitarian Universalists shall serve its members for the purposes of fostering spiritual depth, creating a peaceful community on earth and peace within us, and clarifying both individual and universal religious values as part of our growth process. Our purposes are to provide and manifest a greater understanding of Unitarian Universalism, and to encourage the flow of communication between youth and adults. In so doing, we shall nurture the freedom and integrity of the questioning mind, and embrace all persons of diverse backgrounds. We shall encourage the development of a spirit of independence and responsibility. We shall strive to support our members and member groups with educational resources, a communication network, and with love. These purposes shall assist us in developing an effective system for social actions, and serve to raise our levels of mutual respect, communication, and community consciousness.”

All Unitarian Universalist youth between the ages of 7th grade and 19 years old are “members” of OMD YRUU. Junior High Conferences are for youth in grades 7th-9th. Senior High Conferences are for youth in grade 9th- 19 years old. All age range conferences are for everyone. OMD YRUU has four conferences every year: a Jr. High Fall Con, a Sr. High Fall Con, a Sr. High Social Action Con in the winter, and a All Age Range Spring Con. Every youth must have an adult sponsor at the conference (an adult can sponsor 6 youth at a Jr. High Con and 8 at a Sr. High Con.) Adult sponsors are 25+ years old. Youth Conferences in the OMD are planned by the OMD Youth Adult Committee, otherwise known as YAC. This committee is made up of (as of right now) 2 youth co-chairs, 4 adult co-chairs, a Social Action Coordinator, and a Youth Council Representative. (Youth Council is the Continental legislative branch of YRUU.) And of course, there are many YAC members without titles, which isn’t to say they are any less wonderful. The primary responsibility for YRUU leadership rests with youth.

What’s a conference?

A conference is many things. Let’s take a look at the basics first, and save the metaphysical and fun stuff for later. A typical OMD YRUU conference is a three day retreat (Friday night - Sunday morning) for UU youth. There are workshops, food, great people, hugs, worship, a dance, a talent show, and lots of other cool things. Conferences take place in a church or at a camp, and are planned by YAC. Conferences draw youth and adult advisors from all over the district. Now that you’ve gotten that little bit of a look into what a Con is, if you’re still interested, I’ll take you on an imaginary walk through a conference. (I’d ask you to close your eyes and pretend you’re at a Con, but that tends to make reading this packet a little difficult.)

The Con

By this time somebody has either told you, “Hey, there’s a Con going on this weekend, everyone’s gonna be there. Wanna come?” At this point you either say, “Sorry, too much homework,” or “Sure, but what’s a Con?” Your friend replies with a really quick speech about games and workshops, friends, songs, worship, hugs, and everything that s/he can possibly tell you, hands you a registration flyer, and runs off. You’re left with a bewildered look and a flyer with all types of stuff written on it. That flyer has all the info about the Con in 200 words or less. In it are rules and such. OMD YRUU Con rules go something like this:

Rules

NO SEX (overt or covert)

Sexual intercourse at Cons is prohibited for many reasons. The exclusivity of sexual relationships damages the conference community. Although YRUU recognizes that our sexuality is an integral part of each of us as human beings, sexuality is not always expressed in ways that are beneficial to individuals and the conference community. Inappropriate sexual behavior, defined as sexual intercourse, exploitation, harassment, or abuse, is prohibited.

We here in OMD respect the “No means No” rule. This goes for massages, “No thanks, I don’t want one right now.” Hugging, kissing, singing bad songs that go on forever, all can be stopped with a simple “no.” No means just that-- no. Don’t be afraid to use it.

NO DRUGS/ALCOHOL/SMOKING

Drug and alcohol use detracts from the community. It makes people uncomfortable. It isolates the users from the community. And besides, drugs are illegal. Drug use at conferences threatens the existence of future conferences. Smoking is prohibited at ALL Conferences. That includes adult sponsors.

NO VIOLENCE/WEAPONS

Conferences are a safe environment, and violence has no part in a safe environment. Weapons and violence don’t impress people, and they tend to be very harmful to people and objects. Overall, they are not nice things. Cons are really nice things. Bad things and nice things don’t mix very well. Enough said

NO VANDALISM

Many churches in our district are kind enough to let us use their church for a weekend, and it would be really horrible for to pay back that kindness by desecrating the church. We have enough trouble finding host churches for our cons as it is. If someone vandalizes a church or something in the church, we may not ever find a church that will host our conferences. Then what would we do?

NO LEAVING THE GROUNDS

This one’s pretty self-explanatory. It’s hard to make sure everyone is safe and happy if they are gone.

C.U.Y.O.D.S. (Clean Up Your Own Darn Stuff)

You make a mess, you clean it up. End of story.

What if someone breaks a rule?

That really depends on the severity of the rule. If someone is caught breaking a rule, YAC will meet to discuss the situation. If it wasn’t a severe rule infraction, the person may get a reprimand. If it is more severe, the person may be banned from the next con, or maybe for the next cons, or maybe from all cons. If YAC finds out about the rule infraction during the conference, the person will be sent home from the conference at their own expense. ☆Remember, a basic premise at conferences is the respect of each person. This helps to create a community in which people are free to express their emotions, thoughts, and whether or not they like peanut butter with white or rye bread. Conference goers show respect for themselves, the conference site, each other, the environment, YRUU, etc.☆

The Very Important Thing:

Have fun. Even though it seems like there are a lot of rules and stuff, that's just to keep things nice, relaxed, and to create an environment where people can have fun. So remember, no matter what you're doing at the moment, have fun. It may take a little effort, but I've found that having fun tends to make my day a lot better.

THE CON

DAY 1

You've filled out your registration form and sent it in with your registration fee to the registrar. You've packed your suitcase with the suggested "Things to Bring" from the registration form, such as:

- Some Clothes (enough so you don't smell bad when you come back home)
- A sleeping bag, pillow, and stuffed animal
- A favorite book/poem/story/song/for the talent show (explanation to come)
- Personal Hygiene Items
- Anything else that you deem necessary to bring to the con

Now that you're all packed and ready to go and have figured out a means of transportation to and from the con, get in the vehicle of your choosing and go to the con!

Registration: The registrar that you sent your registration will be meeting you at the door to check you off. You will also get a Touch Group number written on your hand. (Explanation coming up)

Opening Circle: During the opening circle, the co-chairs and other YAC members will tell you what's going on, talk about the rules, explain workshops, and maybe even sing a fun song or two. They will then introduce everyone to the touch group leaders, and you will look at the number on your hand, and look at the number of fingers the leaders are holding up, and match up the two.

Touch Groups: You are now in a Touch Group. There may be one or two people you know, but the rest are complete strangers. The main reason you are in a touch group is so that you can meet some other people (it's hard to meet everyone at the con, but you can get to know everyone in your touch group), have fun, and help people with the conference experience. Your touch group leader will probably have beads for you to make a bracelet or necklace with. Your leader might teach you a cool song or a goofy game. You and your touch group may just want to sit around and talk. Whatever you do, it will be great.

Worship: The first worship is done by the host church's youth group. They may be experts at worship, or it may be the first they've ever done. Worship gives people time to reflect on the conference's meaning, life in general, and worship offers an opportunity to grow spiritually. Sometimes there are readings, poetry, stories, songs, meditations, or sharing. It's a very special time at night when you can sit back and feel connected to the people around you.

Sleep: Now worship has ended. You've been hanging out with people, talking up a storm, and having lots of fun. (See, I told you that one was easy to follow.) Now you're tired and you want to sleep. A sleeping area is provided that is quiet, peaceful, and not a bad place in general to fall asleep. So unroll the sleeping bag, and sweet dreams...

DAY 2

Morning Gathering: An overly energetic YAC member will be in charge of waking everyone up on

Saturday morning. You will drag yourself out of bed and go get some breakfast. After breakfast, YAC will get everyone together to discuss what's happening before lunch. There's going to be some awesome workshops and touch groups will probably meet again.

Workshops: Choosing a workshop is a cool part of cons. Usually there are many to choose from. Try to find a workshop which meets your interests and you want to participate in. Workshops give you an opportunity to learn something new and possibly discuss a topic that you've been wondering about for quite a long time. You find a nice workshop which meets your interests. When it is over you've made some friends, gained a bit of knowledge, etc. There will be another workshop session in the afternoon with all new workshops.

Theme Related Activity: After lunch, everyone will gather together for the theme activity. As the name implies, the activity will be related to the theme. It may be a guest speaker, a Social Action project or presentation, or a just a fun activity, depending on what YAC has planned for that theme. After it's over, that crazy name of the con will finally make some sense to you.

Talent Show: Most likely, you have been hearing announcements about who to sign up with for the talent show. Yes, that's right, on Saturday night, there is a conference talent show. Now is when your poem or song or story would come in handy. Maybe you want to sing a song by yourself. Or get a group of friends together to perform a skit. Or show off your clapping and hooting skills from the audience.

Worship: One of the workshops was probably a worship workshop. That workshop planned the Saturday night worship. It will be as wonderful as the first worship.

Dance: On OMD tradition, the Saturday night dance is quite an experience. Now is the time to "get your groove on". Lots of people get dressed up, and others just wear their regular clothes. Hopefully the DJ will have some taste in music, if not you and your friends can stage a revolt. If you are not interested in dancing, there are fun games to play in other parts of the church.

DAY 3

Clean up: Make the church look exactly like it was when you got there. Yeah fun!

Closing Circle: Now's your chance to hug everyone at the conference (and I really do mean everyone.) Say goodbye to all your new friends (until the next con, at least.) Run around the church looking for your stuff, pack it into the car, and head home.

A conference is a learning place. You can experience a diversity of cultures and beliefs. You have the chance to meet new people, and make new friends. Now that you've read this packet, hopefully you have a better understanding of what a conference is. Any other questions can be directed at your other YRUU friends, or a YAC member.

See you at the next con!!

Revised by Julz Charvat, YAC Co-Chair '02-'04