

2025 UWM Great Lakes Youth and Family Ministry

Annual Report

YFM Coordinator (Cassidy Meeks)

YFM State of the State

- 2025 has been another strong year for Youth & Family Ministry around the Region! We moved the vision forward of continuing to offer training opportunities, increasing connections with YFM contacts around the Region, increasing teen leadership and developing the regional officer pipeline, inviting and supporting more ministries to attend teen events and overall growing youth event attendance, as well as holding space for the spiritual upliftment of youth and families around our region. There is more to be done to support ministries both in launching YFM programs as well as maintaining strong programs in 2026 and beyond.

YFM Support

- Monthly Ministering with Families calls continued this year on Zoom. This is a space for those working in YFM to connect with each other, share what's happening in their ministries and gain support/troubleshoot challenges. Topics range from celebrating wins like newly launched programs and volunteer recruiting, to sharing fundraising ideas and ways to ensure sacred safety. Monthly attendance averages 7, on par with last year's average.
- The YFM Coordinator regularly provides resources and consults to YFM leaders throughout the Region, from new hires, to volunteers, to seasoned YFMers, by Zoom, calls, texts and email. Common questions are: when is it time to launch YFM if no program currently exists, where to begin, how to recruit and retain volunteers, where to source curriculum, etc.
- Daryn Wells, LUT at Unity of Columbus, covered this part of the coordinator role from Mid-May through Mid-August while Cassidy was on maternity leave and did a wonderful job!

Youth Retreats/Teen Leadership

- A huge bright spot is the ongoing attendance growth at Regional YFM retreats, as well as the establishment of a teen leadership pipeline.
- We are on track to hold three retreats in 2025, an increase from two in 2024. The Fall 2024 Retreat (combined Uniteen and Y.O.U.) and Spring Unitreat (Uniteens)

were held at Lutherdale Retreat Center in Elkhorn, WI. June Rally (YOU) took place at a new (to us) Retreat Center called Towerhill Camp in Sawyer, MI. We return to Lutherdale for Fall Retreat 2025. What's more, the first sub-regional event since 2019, hosted by Unity of Columbus, was held in March.

Fall Youth Retreat Nov 8-10, 2024

- 3rd joint event with Uniteens and YOU - the model seems to be working well to boost critical mass. Though YOUers have expressed a desire for their own event (aka Rally).
- 54 folks attended: 13 Uniteens (6th-8th), 19 YOU (9th-12th) and 22 adults.
- Seven states represented: MN, WI, IL, MI, KY, OH and WA.
- Regies, supported by Cassidy, led material creation around the theme "It's All Perspective."
- Activities ranged from tie-dying retreat t-shirts to a blindfold scavenger hunt, meaningful discussions in small "Spirit" groups, touching truth talks by the Regies, joy songs, and the Halloween-themed dance.
- The online registration process is much more streamlined and we continue to improve it with each retreat.
- Pricing ranged from \$225-\$250/person (early bird vs. regular rate) to help ensure the events break even.

Sub-Regional Mini-Rally March 1-2

- Daryn Wells and Unity of Columbus organized a wonderful event for the Great Lakes Eastern Sub-region! Cindi and Cassidy organized the event registration form and kept in contact with Daryn. Regies -Maddie and Joey helped plan and participated.
- 24 folks attended: 14 youth, 8 registered adults, and 2 additional adult volunteers from Unity of Columbus. Chapters represented: Unity of Louisville, KY (3 adults, 4 Uniteens, and 7 YOUers); Unity Spiritual Community of Grand Rapids, MI (1 adult, 1 YOUer); Unity of East Louisville, KY (1 adult, 1 Uniteen); and Unity of Columbus, (5 adults, 1 YOUer).
- Activities included three Spirit Group sessions, Free Time, Secret Prayer Pals, a Saturday evening Truth Talk and "Playshop," with Daryn as keynote speaker and presenter / facilitator; a Sunday Morning Meditation and God Walk; Joy Songs, and more.
- Continued Regional collaboration for the future will include spacing the dates with the other Regional events and inviting other Unity centers to consider hosting a sub-regional event similar to this one.

Spring Unitreat April 4-6, 2025

- 45 attendees (26 Uniteens, 16 adults and 3 YOU leaders) from 8 chapters: Renaissance Unity, OH (6 - first time attending post-pandemic), Fox Valley, IL (9), Unity of Louisville, (10) and East Louisville (2), Detroit Unity Temple (7), Westlake, OH (4), Oak Park, IL (2), Des Plaines, IL (4)
- The theme was “Let It Go”, and Regies- Alex and Joey did a phenomenal job leading the group - including sharing meaningful heart talks about their experiences letting things go. They were supported by YOU Staff -Kellan Conner (YOUer) from Louisville
- I wrote some of the materials to help Regies focus on June Rally content, and incorporated elements of Nonviolent Communication.

June Rally June 13-16, 2025

- 43 attendees (24 YOUers, 19 adults) from 8 chapters: Columbus (3), Des Plaines (5), Detroit (6), Grand Rapids (2), Livonia (2), Louisville (10), Minneapolis (6), North (1), Spiritual Living of Greater Milwaukee (3), Westlake (5)
- Cassidy worked with Regies for the bulk of the planning, and handed things off to Chelsea Short and Kimberly Bencker (both of Louisville) mid-May when she went on maternity leave.
- We worked with a new retreat center Towerhill Camp in Sawyer, MI, and they included swimming in Lake MI as an option, supervised by lifeguards. Other notable activities included a God walk, talent show, service projects and small group activities. The theme was “Tell Me More” – all about bringing curiosity to our communication.
- YOUers appreciated the opportunity to participate in their own event for the first time since 2023, when 11 youth participated.

IYOU 2025 July 20-24, 2025

- 79 youth from around the country gathered at Unity Village for the International YOU retreat, including 15 participants from the Great Lakes Region.
- The theme was Transformation. Participants stayed onsite at the hotel, and over 5 days experienced small group connection, plenty of joy songs, time for reflection, service projects, a dance and more. This event is a wonderful opportunity for both youth and adult leaders from across the US to connect with each other.

Great Lakes Regional Officers (aka Regies)

- Maddie Chapman (Grand Rapids, MI), Joey Short (Louisville, KY) and Alex Bornstein (Des Plaines, IL) completed their term installed as Regies for 2024-25. They did a fantastic job! Maddie and Alex have started college and Joey, a senior, is representing the Great Lakes Region as an International YOU Officer (Indie) to plan the 2026 International YOU retreat at Unity Village.
- In February, they partnered with Regies from the Eastern Region to deliver compelling online training for teens and sponsors titled, 'Diving Into Leadership'.
- Three new Regies were installed at June Rally for the 2025-26 year. We welcome Kellan Conner (Louisville), Sam Shaheen (Louisville) and Kyra Hanneman (Des Plaines)! They are jumping right in planning for the Fall 2025 retreat. Also, three additional teens interested in leadership are creating 'funshops' for the Fall Retreat and will likely become Regies the following year.
- A highlight is a return of the leadership pipeline previously interrupted by Covid.

Chapter X

- This online, youth-led chapter for YOU continued for a second year! See their website youthofunity.org for ready-made lessons that can also be used in person, a meditation series, and online lessons on video. For ministries just starting with teen programming, or for those with teens but no YOU program, consider plugging into the powerful Chapter X material and community!

Coordinator Routine Activities and Communications

- Keep Constant Contact YFM email lists and points of contact for ministries updated
- Market YFM support calls, training and retreats via monthly newsletters, social media and with ministry reach-outs
- Phone calls, meetings and emails with Great Lakes Board YFM Liaison, and admin as well as Regional YFM Team Leaders (YFM Consultants) and Teen Regies
- Monthly finance and activity reports to Board
- Input to regional newsletter and website

Vision/Upcoming

- Offer more formal trainings for YFM leaders and volunteers across the Region to build their skills in working with youth as well as program management
- Support ministries to launch and/or expand their YFM program

- Continue building teen leadership skills by offering more teens the chance to lead at youth events and through another training in partnership with the Eastern Region
- Continue to find ways to increase participation at youth events, such as by fundraising to offer registration at lower rates and expanding marketing efforts.
- Upcoming Youth Retreats: Fall 2025 Youth Retreat (Oct 24-26), Spring Unitreat 2026, June Rally 2026, Winter Subregional Event