



Step Up 2019:

Youth representatives at #MennoCon19



We're excited to once again invite youth ages 16-21 to join the delegate sessions in Kansas City!

- Congregations may each nominate one youth representative.
- Conferences and constituency groups may each nominate two youth representatives.
- Delegates will vote to approve an amendment to the bylaws that would add youth delegates, making these youth representatives delegates. (See next page for more details about who may be delegates.)

Step Up schedule

Youth reps will be in the delegate sessions Wednesday, Thursday and Friday from 8:30-10am and every afternoon from 1:30-3:45pm. In delegate sessions, all participants are seated at round tables in groups of seven. The sessions are facilitated by the moderators of Mennonite Church USA. To see the convention schedule, go to convention.mennoniteusa.org, click on "Schedule" in the drop-down under "Information."

Step Up is the program designed for youth reps to connect with each other and to prepare for their delegate role. Brook Musselman is the Step Up coordinator. He can be reached at brookm@atlanticcoastconference.net.

Registering as Step Up participants

When youth sponsors register their group online, they will be able to designate one of the youth as a Step Up participant. If youth are chosen as representatives *after* their online registration is complete, their sponsors should email sarahc@mennoniteusa.org with the name of the youth rep and the name of the congregation, conference or constituency group s/he will represent.

Here's what youth had to say about Step Up 2017

"I would say that 100 percent Step Up has been amazing. I just had an awesome table. Everyone was so welcoming and nice, and they really valued my opinion. I would really recommend this program to anyone, especially those who are interested in what the delegates do. I hope I can take part in it in the future."

"I am really so honored and so excited to be part of Step Up. I thought my opinions were valued, and I really enjoyed how the table wanted me to speak. I felt like we were all valued, and I was really happy about that. It's important that we be involved in the church at a young age because we are the future and we will make the decisions in the future."

"It was just a great learning experience. I felt like I was really able to connect with the other people at the table. I felt like they valued my opinions, which was gratifying—I was worried that as a youth I might be discounted somewhat but I think that they were very receptive towards my thoughts."

"I greatly enjoyed getting the perspective of the adults. I was able to get a better understanding of where other congregations and other conferences are coming from. Previously, I didn't really know as many people from other parts of the church as I do now."



Step Up 2019: Answers to common questions



Does the Step Up rep take the place of one of our delegates?

No, the Step Up rep is *in addition* to your regular delegation.

Could one be a youth rep without being in Step Up?

Yes. Step Up is intended to orient youth reps to the delegate assembly, to network them with each other and to give them opportunities to reflect on their experience. If youth reps do not want to participate in Step Up, they do not have to.

We have a youth who would love to do this and we want to send her/him, but s/he is not a member of the church, and the bylaws stipulate that delegates must be members.

S/He is welcome to participate in Step Up and join a delegate table, but s/he would not be able to vote.

What kind of time commitment does this mean for the youth reps?

The youth reps will spend quite a lot of time in the delegate sessions and will miss certain youth activities, like Squads and most seminars. One seminar a day is held outside delegate sessions. The schedule would be something like this: delegate session, worship, lunch, delegate session, seminar, dinner, worship.

How should a congregation, conference or constituency group choose their youth rep?

Invite youth who show interest in ministry, leadership, or the broader church.

Will youth really be interested in the business of the church?

For the past 20 years, Central Plains conference has had a similar program for voting youth delegates. Over 20 years of accompanying youth delegates at a two-day delegate meeting, they have found that most of the youth are glad they came and many return year after year. They will often comment that while there *are* boring parts, being taken seriously as delegates and learning about the church far outweigh the boring parts. (See comments on reverse.)

What if every congregation sends a youth and the youth take over the delegate assembly?

If our youth showed that kind of interest and commitment, we would praise God for being at work among our youth! Still, it is pretty unlikely. In Central Plains, out of 50 congregations, there have consistently been 12-20 youth participants, and in that setting there are not concurrent activities designed for youth like we have at convention.

Then why is this a good idea? How does it benefit the youth and how does it benefit the church?

Past experiences in both Mennonite Church USA (Speak Up 2005-2009 and Step Up 2017) and Central Plains demonstrate that many youth have the interest and maturity to participate in delegate business. When they are given orientation and mentoring, they usually have a very positive experience. The presence of youth in the delegate assembly brings out the best in adult delegates, makes younger adults feel more like they belong in the assembly too, and bring energy and hope to the adult delegates. The participation of youth at tables in Central Plains has impacted the average age of delegates there, resulting in an overall younger delegate body. Research shows that when youth are given real responsibility in church, they are more likely to stay in church over the long term. Finally, the testimonials of youth who have participated in Speak Up and Step Up demonstrate a renewed sense of hope and belonging in the church as a result of their participation.