



## Step Up 2021: Youth delegates at #MennoCon21



We're excited to once again invite youth ages 16-21 to join the delegate sessions, this year as delegates!

- Congregations may each nominate one youth delegate.
- Conferences may each nominate two youth delegates.
- Constituency groups may each nominate two youth delegates.

Step Up is the program designed for youth delegates to connect with each other and to prepare first time youth delegates for their role. Youth delegates are not required to participate in Step Up programming but are invited to do so. Brook Musselman is the Step Up coordinator. He can be reached at [brookm@atlanticcoastconference.net](mailto:brookm@atlanticcoastconference.net).

### Step Up schedule

Youth delegates will be full participants in the delegate sessions connected to MennoCon21. In delegate sessions on the afternoon of July 10, all delegates will participate in the online business session facilitated by the moderators of Mennonite Church USA. Step Up programming will include an orientation to the delegate role along with various ways to connect with other youth delegates and to reflect on the experience. Delegates need not attend any part of the in-person convention taking place in Cincinnati July 6-9. To see the convention schedule, go to [convention.mennoniteusa.org](http://convention.mennoniteusa.org), click on "Schedule" in the drop-down under "Information."

### Here's what youth had to say about Step Up in the past

"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 2021: Answers to common questions

Does the youth delegate take the place of one of our adult delegates?

No, the youth delegate is in addition to your regular delegation.

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

Yes. Step Up is intended to orient youth delegates to the delegate assembly, to network them with each other and to give them opportunities to reflect on their experience. If youth delegates 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 possibly sit in on the delegate sessions (if possible with online sessions), but s/he would not be able to vote as a delegate.

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

The online delegate session on July 10, 2021 will be around three hours long.

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

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 a typical 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 2017-2019) 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.