



## What's Next After Youth Ministry?

By Rev. Krystal Leedy, Associate Pastor for UKirk Campus Ministries in Austin, TX

Two caveats before we delve into our topic: First, the term “campus minister” is sometimes a misnomer, so please understand that by campus minister I mean any campus leader, practitioner, or pastor that runs a UKirk-affiliated campus ministry. Second, is every student going to follow this path exactly as laid out? No, probably not. This resource is simply giving some helpful guidelines, not hard and fast rules.

### A Campus Minister Perspective:

The transition from high school to college is a big one and students can easily feel lonely and lost in a large educational and social system. Students have access to many opportunities, particularly opportunities to engage with various and diverse faith communities. Campus ministers used to receive the names of incoming students from their denomination directly from the colleges/universities, but that practice has ceased in many places. Now, Presbyterian campus ministers must rely on receiving this information from Presbyterian contexts. For my own ministry, I created a spreadsheet of all the Presbyterian Churches in the state of Texas and I called youth ministers over the summer. In addition, I serve with Presbyterian camps and conferences in order to make sure that high school students associate my face with campus ministry. Even with all of this, it is still not enough to get our campus ministry “out there.” Students are still falling through the cracks. For UKirk to faithfully continue the work of Christian formation begun at students’ home churches and to prepare leaders in the PC(USA), we need to partner with youth workers. We need support from youth ministries and congregations across the country.

### A Youth Minister Perspective:

Rev. John Leedy, my spouse and colleague, works in the realm of youth ministry and often discusses with me that if campus ministry does not exist, then there is no point in doing youth ministry. If UKirk does not exist, we are inviting students to step off a cliff after they graduate and the message that we as a denomination are sending is that their faith journey does not matter in college. According to John, having students participate in youth ministry is only one plank in the long bridge of life-long Christian Formation. The truth is that both youth ministry and campus ministry do matter, and everyone needs a place to explore their faith at each stage of their faith development in an environment that encourages exploration and questions. That’s why John makes sure to send names, email addresses, and phone numbers of entering college freshmen to the campus ministers located on <https://ukirk.org/ministries/>.

### I’m a youth minister, how can I help students continue their life of faith after high school?

1. Promote UKirk with your students from a young age, starting in middle school or during Confirmation, even if you did not personally participate in campus ministry in college.
2. Introduce yourself to your local campus ministers (especially ones in your presbytery or synod) and learn about the ministry. Ask for promotional materials and stories from their UKirk-affiliated ministry, just to allow youth to see that campus ministries are made up of real people, just like them! If no campus ministry exists in proximity to you, please contact the UKirk Collegiate Ministries Association Executive Director, Rev. Gini Norris-Lane at [ukirknational@gmail.com](mailto:ukirknational@gmail.com).
3. When students go on college visits, encourage them to look at how their spiritual life may be nourished as well. Invite them to visit churches or discover a UKirk ministry as they visit the campus.
4. Invite a local campus minister to talk with your students or suggest campus ministers for large gatherings of Presbyterian youth as worship leaders or keynote speakers.

5. After your student chooses their college (or what they would like to do after high school) find out what resources are available for that student. Check out [www.ukirk.org](http://www.ukirk.org) for a listing of Presbyterian affiliated campus ministries or <https://www.pcusa.org/search/congregations/> to find a congregation in the area where they are moving.
6. Perhaps arrange a meeting with their future campus minister while they are on the campus visit, or take your youth and the campus minister to coffee or lunch before the semester begins to help foster the one-on-one relationship.
7. Even if you can't arrange a meeting, **give information about the student to that campus minister. Please give campus ministers the incoming student's name, email, phone number, and social media information.** And give them a little backstory for the student. It's incredibly helpful for campus ministers to get this information ahead of time, and to know if this student responds best to texts or Instagram posts rather than email. (If you need to get permission from the student or their parent, please do this before they graduate!)
8. Celebrate their graduation with them. Yay!
9. If your churches send care packages to students after they graduate, throw in some reminder info about UKirk.
10. When students come home for breaks, ask them how their spiritual life is. Ask them if they have been to campus ministry and their experience with it. Listen, like you always do, with empathy. Let the campus ministry know if there's anything they can do to help bring in students.

### How to Help a Student Experience Campus Ministry

1. Remind them that a first impression of a campus ministry means a lot, but it's not everything about a ministry. Talk about first impressions in terms of how people viewed Jesus. He's the Savior of the world and is amazing, yet many people thought he was crazy and mean. Remind them that they have also experienced what it is like to overcome someone's first impression of them. First impressions are important, but not everything.
2. It is really hard to visit a campus ministry or a church for the first time, so here is some quick advice, adapted from the television show *Gilmore Girls*:  
Look at visiting a new group like a soup tasting. One taste to acclimate your palette. One taste to establish the foundation. And the last taste to judge. On your first visit, like many of us, your mind may be consumed by where to go, how to act, where the bathrooms are and the answer to the standard question, "What's your major?" It's hard to make a decision about a group after only one interaction. The second time around, you're going to see some familiar faces and know the routine and that will help you feel a little more comfortable. The last time, you can make your decision about whether you want to stick with it. In short, shoot for three visits before you make up your mind.
3. Campus ministry is partially about what the ministry offers to students and partially about what students offer to the ministry. Tell students that they play a role in this. If they come in with a great attitude and participate and they feel like they are not getting anything out of it, then yeah, it might not be a good fit. But if they make little effort, have a bad attitude, and don't participate, it may be necessary for them to change their outlook. Urge your students to get involved and give it their best effort before they write off a group of people.
4. Encourage them to be honest with the campus minister about what they are experiencing and see if they will meet with them one-on-one, as well as in a group. It is very helpful for students to get to know their new leader and campus ministers exist to help students.
5. Remind them that everyone experiences anxiety, especially when doing something new. They are not alone! Tell them to take a deep breath and find a place where they feel spiritually nurtured.

Office of Christian Formation: <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/formation>

UKirk Collegiate Ministries: <https://ukirk.org/>



Office of Christian  
Formation



# WHAT'S NEXT AFTER YOUTH GROUP?

A UKIRK PLAYBOOK



Home church: a place of Christian formation



Youth workers build excitement with youth and parents about UKirk as next step



Youth worker informs the campus minister\* about graduates coming to their college



Student graduates high school and has a connection with a campus minister at their college



UKirk: a Christian community during the college years



During breaks from college, youth workers ask students about their campus ministry experience



Students graduate college looking forward to an ongoing life of faith

\*Don't know who a campus minister is at a particular college? Check out [ukirk.org](http://ukirk.org)