

A Bit About CONs

What on earth is PCD YRUU?

The Pacific Central District Young Religious Unitarian Universalists (PCD YRUU), is a long-standing, youth-run organization designed to provide fun, safe, spiritual programs for youth in Northern California, Nevada, and Hawai'i. Members of our group are 14- 20 years old, plus the adults who support and advise us. We are governed by a council of youth and adults, who work closely with youth groups, congregations, and other PCD organizations to create engaging and powerful youth programming geared towards community building, spiritual development, social action, and youth empowerment.

What is a Conference?

Conferences come in two types: working conferences, and non-working conferences. A working conference can be one of four different types of weekend long trainings lead by representatives from the continental youth office or youth leaders from PCD. There are Leadership Development Conferences (LDC), Spirituality Development Conferences (SDC), Anti-Racism/ Anti-Oppression Trainings (AR/AO), and Chaplain Trainings.

Non-working conferences are weekend long events in which youth from all around PCD can gather together to bond, discuss issues, and share our faith. Although these conferences are “nonworking” that does not mean that no work is done, it simply means that the sole purpose of the weekend is not focused on one particular element of PCD YRUU, such leadership or spirituality. Instead, these conferences are more open ended and allow a broader range of activities.

PCD YRUU hosts four conferences per year. The first conference is Elections Con, at which the upcoming year's Council is elected. The second is Spirituality Con, in which the conference community has a chance to explore and discuss different spiritual paths . The third is Summer Con, which is set aside for focused discussion and action on social justice issues. The fourth is Fall Con, where the youth leaders decide on a silly theme, like pirates or vikings.

How does a conference, or 'con' work?

Cons are a collaborative effort put together by many youth leaders, adult advisers, and district officials, all of whom work incredibly hard to make conferences an amazing experience.

PCD YRUU's Council works primarily behind the scenes. The Conference Co-Coordinators communicate with the host congregation about site use and logistics, and follow up with the host congregation after the conference to make sure everything went well. Our Registrar keeps track of registration for conferences. This involves collecting registration forms, keeping track of how many conferees will be in attendance, and communicating specific concerns a conference attendee may have to the appropriate youth leaders. The Adult Coordinator communicates with our adult advisers and makes sure we uphold an appropriate youth-adult ratio. These are only a few of the Council positions instrumental to running a conference.

During conferences, Youth Empowered Lay Leaders (YELLers) run various aspects of the event. New YELLers are chosen by the Conference Coordinators for each conference, ensuring that leadership opportunities are available to a wide array of youth. The primary

leaders of a conference are the Deans. They are responsible for managing the entire event, from making sure things stay on schedule to dealing with minor problems that arise. The Worship Coordinator plans and runs two to four worships at a conference. Two or three Cooks plan, prepare, and serve meals. Chaplains act as peer counselors and mediators, and are responsible for gauging the needs of the community. Touchgroup Leaders plan and run several small-group ministry sessions throughout the weekend. Again, these are only a few of the positions instrumental to running a conference.

If you need to contact a Council member or YELLer (such as informing the cooks of your dietary needs or registering for a conference with our Registrar) please ask a Conference Coordinator for their information. A list of current Council members can be found at our website, www.pcdyruu.org .

Why are all these leadership positions held by youth?

In YRUU we understand youth leadership to be one of the most empowering and growth stimulating parts of our organization. Understanding this makes comprehending a conference much easier. We believe that by offering youth the chance to be leaders in their community and providing them with the resources and support they need to do it, we are offering them a chance to gain important experiences and life-skills that they will carry with them long after the conference is over.

This doesn't mean we don't value the input and guidance of adults! On the contrary, although adults are not the organization and leadership force behind any conference, PCD YRUU would not be successful without them. We require a 10:1 ratio of youth to adults at every conference, and we ask that our advisors participate fully in conference activities so that their advice and guidance is widely available. Adults are an integral part of our learning process and we appreciate their wisdom, but in order to fully empower our youth they cannot be disciplinarians and active teachers. Rather, we ask that they be resources, providing insight and advice, and allies whom our youth can rely on when a problem does not have an obvious solution.

Give me an idea of what goes on at a con?

Lots of wonderful, amazing things! Here is a generic schedule with short descriptions of common activities. Not every conference will look exactly like this, but most will follow the same basic outline. (Elections Con is held over a three day weekend and therefore has a longer, modified schedule. To be simple, what happens on Saturday can usually be applied to Sunday for an Elections Con.)

FRIDAY

5:30 p.m. YELLers and Council arrive to set up

7:00 Start of Con: Conferee's Arrive

-Depending on the conference the number of attendees can be anywhere from 70-120 people.

-During this long period attendees mingle, play games, and meet new friends!

8:00 Orientation for all Conferee's (adults included!)

9:00 Nuubie Meeting and Adult Meeting

-For youth who have never been to a con before, and to orient the adults to positions as interactive but not disciplinarian advisors.

9:30 Touch Group Meeting

-Touch Group is the name we give to small groups that meet throughout the weekend to provide a more structured, personal space to connect.

10:30 Dessert/Snack

11:30 Worship

-These are not your usual Sunday morning services! In the style of what is commonly referred to as a circle-worship, our worships are interactive and engaging, incorporating song, meditation, sharing, and many other elements. We pull from many different faiths and traditions to create a powerful spiritual experience tailored to the PCD YRUU community.

Eventually: Bed Time!

SATURDAY

9:00 a.m. Wake-up

9:15 Morning Meeting

-Morning Meeting is when the Deans explain the schedule, share announcements, and go over anything else that may be relevant.

9:30 Breakfast

10:30 Touch Groups

11:30 Workshops Part I

-Workshops are small, youth lead sessions geared towards just about anything. Workshops could involve choreographing a dance, playing games, learning how to knit, discussing the political situation in Syria, or even doing homework!

1:00 p.m. Lunch

2:00 Touch Groups

3:00 Workshops Part II

-Another workshop slot! New workshops are held, some continue from the first workshop slot. The Deans may choose to schedule only one workshop slot, in which case this is freetime!

4:30 All-Con Activity

-This time is used for things like piñata's, water fights, dance parties, or other activities including the whole con. The Deans may decide to make this freetime as well!

6:00 Dinner

7:00 Touch groups

8:30 Coffee House

-Coffee House is our no-talent talent show! Con attendees share poetry, songs, bedtime stories, the dance they choreographed during their workshop, a silly skit, or anything else they think the rest of the community may enjoy! We seldom get around to actually serving real coffee.

11:00 Worship

Eventually: Bed Time!

SUNDAY

6:00 a.m. Wake up (Yeah, that is for reals.)

6:15 Morning Meeting and Clean Up

-Clean Up is something we take very seriously. This is the one activity we require participation for, because we have to clean the whole church well before its service starts. It is also one of the few ways we can give a big "Thank You" to the host site. We do everything from replacing displaced items to vacuuming and mopping.

9:30 Service A

-Lots of churches have two morning services. If they do not, we simply wake up later. The Deans may decide that PCD YRUU will attend both services, or only one.

11:00 Service B

12:30 p.m. Touch Group Closing
1:00 All-Con Closing
2:00 Grab food, Leave!

Are conferences a time in which youth can do whatever they feel like?

No. While we don't require youth to participate in activities (except cleaning), we strongly, *strongly* encourage it. A lack of participation in scheduled events during a conference indicates a certain level of disrespect towards the PCD YRUU community, and thus is highly discouraged.

Just like any other event, cons have rules! The rules listed below are included in *every* con flyer, and are explained during *every* conference orientation. Youth are also required to sign a covenant as part of their registration.

To keep our community safe and healthy, the following are not allowed within a conference:

- Malicious violence
- Drug use, or arriving at a conference intoxicated
- Leaving the site (unless prior arrangements have been made with the registrar and the deans of the conference)
- Youth under the age of 18 will be turned away if they do not have a registration slip with the signature of their parent or legal guardian.
- While sexuality is a healthy and important part of the lives of youth, exclusive relationships and disrespecting the boundaries of others are not allowed as they detract from the community. Thus it goes without saying that any type of sexual harassment or any clearly sexual activity (the appropriateness being determined by the conference staff) is strictly not permitted.
- As a Unitarian Universalist organization, we are a community that celebrates diversity and promotes the inherent worth and dignity of all human beings. Therefore discrimination based on gender, sexuality, physical capability, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, politics, religion and even diet are also not permitted.
- The Pacific Central District Young Religious Unitarian Universalist (PCD YRUU) Council and the conference staff reserve the right to deem any behavior inappropriate.

Parents/Guardians are invited to discuss this policy with youth. Breaking any of these rules may result in being asked to leave the conference and/or not return to future conferences.

What happens if these rules are broken or the covenant is breached?

During conferences if a conferee breaks one of the aforementioned rules it is his or her peers (under the advice of adult advisers) who address the issue and decide on any action that is taken. When dealing with rule violations and breaches of covenant, PCD YRUU strongly emphasizes restorative justice. This means that instead of immediately deciding to punish a rule violation or breach of covenant, the conferee in question may be offered an opportunity to amend any damage they caused with their actions, thus empowering the conferee to make amends and restore trust with the community.

However, some rule violations and breaches of covenant require punitive action. As an example let's say that Lucy Buuth is discovered using an illegal substance during a conference. As soon as possible the leadership of the conference will form a Conference Affairs Committee (CAC). This committee is made up of the Deans, the Conference Coordinators, a member of Council (either the Energy Chair or the Facilitator Chair), an adult, two uninvolved youth (one male, one

female), any involved parties (perhaps the youth who discovered the rule violation), and Luucy. This group discusses the situation, the youth involved, and the consequences. They will ask Luucy to explain herself, and in turn will explain to her the repercussions of her actions on our community and why such behaviour is not acceptable, before deciding what action should be taken.

In this specific scenario the punishment would most likely be the immediate removal of Luucy from the conference and a year-long suspension from conferences. The terms of her re-admittance to conferences may vary depending on the situation. In some cases, a conferee may be banned from PCD YRUU events permanently. A conferee may also be offered the opportunity to seek restorative justice by finding a way they repair the damage they caused to the community.

I still have more questions!

Here is a list of what you can do to learn more!

1. Explore our website! www.pcdyruu.org.
2. While there, send an email to a Council member (there's an email list) or to all of Council at info@pcdyruu.org.
3. Ask someone who already goes to cons! Heck, that's how you probably found out about them in the first place.

Hope to see you there!

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