

Eastern Pennsylvania Conference of The United Methodist Church Camp and Retreat Ministries - Policy Statement of LGBTQIA+ Inclusivity

Eastern Pennsylvania Conference Camp and Retreat Ministries serve as sacred common ground for a great diversity of people from many backgrounds. Regardless of the varying theological perspectives among us, we all have a deep commitment to do no harm. More than this, we are committed to doing good.

We come together in the wide embrace of God to love and be the community for each other as children of God. Love calls us to eliminate all harassment, devaluing, bullying, lack of acceptance, and other actions that harm or isolate any individual or group. We endeavor to interact in ways that honor each person as one created in God's image who is beloved beyond measure. Christian hospitality and deep welcoming are part of the enduring purpose of Camp and Retreat Ministries.

GUIDELINES RELATED TO HUMAN SEXUALITY AND INCLUSION

1. It is vital to understand that our Camp and Retreat Centers are shared sacred spaces for all regardless of differences among us – differences of theology, race/ethnicity, gender identity, economic status, sexual orientation, etc. Camp and retreat settings are intentionally safe places where we can come together. We cherish Christian core values of mutual hospitality and genuine community. We welcome all persons regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. All perspectives and experiences are important and contribute to the breadth and depth of the Christ-centered community.
2. Every staff/volunteer in our Camp and Retreat Ministries is an advocate for campers from the moment they come to camp to the moment they leave. The opportunity for all participants to have a safe and successful camp experience is paramount. It is vital to remember the fears/anxieties an LGBTQIA+ youth may have in coming to camp. It is vitally important, when possible, for parents/guardians of LGBTQIA+ youth to communicate with camps prior to arrival to ensure the best experience for all participants.
3. We are committed to the emotional and personal privacy of individuals, including their LGBTQIA+ identity. Procedures will be followed to keep any shared personal information private, just as we do with medical information. Anything that we believe impacts your child's safety will be communicated. In addition, we are committed to providing as much physical privacy as safety and our facilities allow. Individual camps and events will develop and train leaders in procedures specific to their location that ensure adequate privacy for bathroom use, showers, and dressing.
4. Human sexuality is not a focus of our summer camp curriculum or retreats sponsored by the Camp and Retreat Ministry. We realize that camper conversations surrounding human sexuality may happen "organically." Camp staff will strive to create an environment where no harm is done as we work to honor each person as one of God's children.
5. We acknowledge and respect that Christian leaders, parents, and campers have discernments related to human sexuality that are strongly held. Listening and being attentive to a camper who needs to talk while affirming God's deep love for them is essential as they explore their thoughts and feelings. Such conversations, when handled poorly, could cause significant harm to individuals, damage relationships with families, and congregations, and even one's relationship with God. Conversations must be handled with loving care and sensitivity. Christian community doesn't eliminate differences; instead, it builds unity, deep value and love for one another.