

Policy Statement of Full Inclusivity for Camp and Retreat Ministries of the Desert Southwest Conference

In following the example of Christ and the declarations of *The United Methodist Book of Discipline*, the Desert Southwest Conference sees all persons as individuals of sacred worth, created in the image of God. All persons, regardless of age, gender or gender-identity, ethnicity, race, ability, marital status, or sexual orientation are entitled to participate in our ministries, as well as be protected against intimidation or abuse.

The Camp and Retreat Ministries of the Desert Southwest Conference fully accept into the life and activities of our ministry and our camp sites any person identifying as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual or Ally, gender non-binary, and/or other emerging senses of personal identity (hereafter referenced as LGBTQIA+). We acknowledge that our ministry's efforts toward full inclusion are a constant work in progress as we seek to put into practice policies, procedures, and programs that are more accepting toward LGBTQIA+ youth and adults.

Procedures toward Full Inclusivity for Camp and Retreat Ministries of the Desert Southwest Conference (draft procedures; *in progress*)

The policy statement above, and subsequent procedures below, are meant to be a guide to make camp a more open, inviting, and welcome place for everyone. The following event procedures are meant to be general guidelines and procedures for a camp site or CRM event with LGBTQIA+ Campers, Participants, Staff, Volunteers, or Visitors.

Commitment to our Core Values: Acceptance and Love

Our ministry has committed to core values that “we are *accepting*... [and] *loving*.” We accept all people for who they are, and love all as best we can, without discrimination.

We hold it to be imperative and non-negotiable that all individuals are treated with dignity and respect, as we recognize the intrinsic value of every person. We do not allow our leaders or participants to denigrate a person's identity, regardless of any individual personal theological beliefs about sexuality, gender, and/or orientation. This commitment means we do not allow criticism of a person's self-identification as LGBTQIA+.

Communicating with Acceptance and Love

Campers will often follow the lead of the staff. This includes their behavior and attitudes, as well as how they communicate. We must be mindful that our words and communications are in concert with our commitment to acceptance.

Regardless of an individual's intent, phrases such as the following communicate the opposite of acceptance and love, and should be avoided:

- “Who am I to judge?”
- “I can love the sinner, but hate the sin”
- “That's so gay”

- “What are you?” (or any questions asking if someone is LGBTQIA+)
- “What is your real name?”
- Anything with the words “biblical marriage, or biblical standard,” etc.
- “That’s a sin/that’s sinful behavior”

Keeping an open mind and being creative is key in helping to achieve a more open, inviting, and welcome place for everyone. If there is any doubt or question about how best to proceed remember that it is okay to say, “I don’t know what to do or say, can you help me?” (Or, with their permission, find someone to help you both.)

As a staff/volunteer, be extra aware of any anti-gay, homophobic, transphobic, or heterosexist remarks, jokes, or comments, from other leaders or campers. It is your responsibility to speak against such comments immediately.

A Commitment to Privacy

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.

In addition, as expressed in the 2019 update to our *Safe Sanctuaries Policy*, 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.

LGBTQIA Camper/Participant

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 coming to camp.

Therefore, it is important we do the following:

1. Prior to camp, communications will make clear that parents are invited to connect with our leaders and/or staff to discuss any needs their camper(s) may have. Our goal is to ensure every child will have a safe and successful experience at camp, and parents are encouraged to contact us if there is any information we should know in advance of camp.
2. In the event that a parent reaches out to us to discuss an LGBTQIA+ camper, we will strive to have a positive conversation with that parent about ensuring a positive experience for their child:
 - a. This conversation will need to be respectful, accepting, open and child-centered in nature.
 - b. During conversation, leaders should establish what pronouns the camper(s) will go by (i.e. she/her/hers or ze/zie/xe).
 - c. Camp leaders will never ask invasive questions (i.e. “have you had surgery?”), especially with transgender campers.

- d. Leaders will ask the camper and parents where they would prefer sleeping, going to the bathroom, and showering.
3. At camp, be creative in how you address problems and/or issues that may arise.

What to do if a camper comes out as LGBTQIA during camp.

1. As a staff/volunteer, and regardless of your personal views, it is important to stay calm if a camper comes out to you. Remember that our ministry core value “we are accepting” does not change based upon a person’s identity.
2. Coming out as a camper does not mean they are causing harm to themselves or others and thus does not fall under the mandate to report.
3. If someone is abusing them because of their identification as LGBTQIA+, then staff/volunteers are mandated to report.
4. Never “out” a camper to anyone, including parents. It is okay to ask the camper if you can share it with one other adult at the event who may be designated to help with the emotional state of someone who is expressing their identity for the first time (e.g. a dean, pastor, nurse, professional counselor, Site Director, or other individual whose training/vocation would make them a suitable support for such a time).
5. It is not necessary to share a camper’s sexual orientation with others, nor do we allow such sharing. A person’s orientation is private, and to be protected, just as their personal health or medical information.
6. Before the camp or event begins, leaders will designate an individual staff/volunteer (if there is not already a Safety Advocate) that can be a go-to person if a camper comes out. This person may be contacted if the individual the participant comes out to is not comfortable handling the situation, or to provide additional emotional support as needed.
7. If a camper comes out to another camper and as a staff/volunteer you hear about it, talk to the camper who came out directly to better understand how they would like to proceed.¹
8. If a parent/guardian calls after camp is over and complains that there was an LGBTQIA+ camper at camp, the staff/volunteer talking to this parent/guardian can respond, “This camper was safe and successful during their time at camp and we were glad they came.” If there is subsequent conflict or push back from the parent, inform them that they may contact the Executive Director, or the Board Chair, of the Camp and Retreat Ministries to better understand our policy of inclusivity.

LGBTQIA Staff/Volunteer or Visitor

1. Most of the same policies/procedures shared above, including those about privacy and what to do if a camper comes “out,” apply to staff, volunteers, and visitors just as they do for campers.
2. Unless the individual wants to, you are not mandated to report the sexual orientation of your staff to parents/guardians.
3. Our *Safe Sanctuaries Policy* already addresses any potential safety issues that may arise in relation to campers and staff of different orientations. LGBTQIA staff will follow all the same guidelines as non-LGBTQIA staff.

Other Considerations

¹ Question raised of me for Board Discussion: Do we need to include reference to responding to the person to whom a camper came out?

1. Having adequate training for staff/volunteers in being hospitable to all, including specific reference to LGBTQIA campers, is essential.
2. We will never isolate LGBTQIA campers/staff or make them feel like they are alone or different.
3. Staff/volunteers should familiarize themselves with correct pronouns and terminology usage, and be honest when they are struggling.

The preceding policy statement and procedures have been developed and approved by the Board of Camp and Retreat Ministries of the Desert Southwest Conference. We owe much to prior work done and shared by the Camp and Retreat Ministries of the Pacific Northwest Conference and Brave Trails Camp of California.