

The Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ is committed to being a transformational regional body with one of the four strategic mission priorities being a “focus on Christian formation and discipleship of children, youth and adults.” In the recent years there has been well deserved attention given to keeping children and youth safe in our churches. Keeping children, youth and adults safe must be the foundation of our faith formation ministries, both in the local congregation and in conference settings. It is critical that we have well thought through policies when having children or youth at camp or on off-site mission/service trips.

One of the ways we are trying to address having both safe and high quality experiences at camp and on mission trips will be through a training, “Packing the Bus,” at Pilgrim Point Camp April 30-May 1 for only \$10/person. The training is being sponsored by the Outdoor Ministries Team and is largely being underwritten by an Ashley Endowment approved by the Board of Directors. The weekend will be both pragmatic and spiritually focused. Our keynote speaker and trainer, Dr. Paul Hill of Vibrant Faith Ministries, will help us think through how we pay attention to our spiritual centers, build quality teams of leaders, deal with conflict, and help bring home these high-impact experiences. Our workshops will be focused primarily on making sure our experiences are safe for everyone.

Some of the measures we have taken to insure safer experiences for youth and children in the conference have been:

- Drafting and implementing safer conference policies for camp and conference activities;
- Working closely with local church ministers on leaders present at Conference Youth Events;
- Mandating background checks for all adults working with children and youth at camp, conference youth activities and the conference annual meeting;
- An on-line safety training for all counselors and staff at Pilgrim Point Camp and the adults attending the Regional Youth Event;
- Mandated boundaries training for clergy.

Some first steps local congregation might take include:

- Require background checks on all those who volunteer and work with children and youth;
- Check the sex offender registry (free at [www.nsopr.gov](http://www.nsopr.gov)) for all new members or for members that raise red flags with their boundaries;
- Make sure there are two adults present with children and youth on all off-site trips and at all possible in Christian education settings;
- Have windows in every room of your building and make sure they are not blocked out;
- Do intermittent room checks during times of child care or education;
- Mandate nursery care training for your child care volunteers or staff;
- Host a CPR training for ushers, teachers, clergy and anyone interested at your congregation (and strongly encourage it for all working with children and youth).

As a transformational regional body that puts faith formation for children, youth and adults as a core priority, it makes sense that we continue to lift up the idea of keeping all of our participants safe. While the topic of safe church might not be the most fun, it is one of the most important to insure we are able to keep doing ministry moving forward!

Blessings and Peace,

Wade Zick  
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