Great Lakes Episcopal Camping & Retreat Programs

Gender-Inclusive Housing at Camp

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Why offer gender-inclusive housing?

A: In the Episcopal tradition, our Baptismal covenant calls us to "strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being." In every aspect of camp life, we seek to create a Christian community that takes these promises seriously. Our inclusion statement, which you can read in full here, details some ways that our Great Lakes Episcopal camping and retreat programs leadership are committed to upholding this commitment to LGBTQ+ campers, including:

- Examining and changing practices and systems that operate on the assumption of binary gender and heterosexuality
- Supporting transgender and gender-expansive campers' right to use the lodging spaces and bathrooms that are appropriate for them.

Camps in the Episcopal Diocese of the Great Lakes fully affirm LGBTQ+ young people as people made whole and beloved in God's image. We are committed to offering gender-affirming practices because of this belief and, more broadly, because of our responsibility to support young people's mental health.

Some statistics from The Trevor Project's 2024 Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health[1]:

- 39% of LGBTQ+ young people seriously considered attempting suicide in the past year. More than 1 in 10 (12%) of LGBTQ+ young people attempted suicide in the past year.
- 46% of trans and non-binary youth have considered attempting suicide in the last year.

Significantly:

- LGBTQ youth who have access to spaces that affirm their identity are at a significantly lower risk of attempting suicide.

[1] The Trevor Project's 2024 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ+ Young People amplifies the experiences of more than 18,000 LGBTQ+ young people ages 13 to 24 across the United States.

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Gender-inclusive practices allow young people to enjoy all that camp has to offer – when young people know that they are seen and accepted for who they are, they can put their focus on growing their faith & spirituality, building new skills and friendships without having to focus on if they can safely exist in the camp space. Cabin time is an essential social element of camp, and we want every camper to experience the fun and joy of a cabin community.

Q: What does safe, non-gendered housing look like?
A: A gender-inclusive cabin will be assigned for sessions based on the number of campers signed up.

- **Supervision:** At least three counselors representing multiple genders will be assigned to the gender-inclusive cabin. Staff will be lodged in the same space as the campers. Great Lakes Episcopal camping programs require counselors to be physically present to supervise all unstructured time in cabins during the day.
    - Two of our primary norms at camp are the “Rule of Three” and “Double Coverage.” During a camp session, we stay in groups of three or more people, with at least one counselor. Two staff members should never be outside the campers' line of sight and earshot. These policies are in place at all times in all Great Lakes Episcopal camping program cabins and throughout the camp.
- **Changing and bathrooms:** All changing is private in our cabin spaces. Campers may use a bathroom or shower stall for privacy, or they can use a private stall in the cabins—these stalls are temporary, curtained spaces. All toilets and showers are private, with a separate changing area for each shower. We have some bathhouses with urinals, but campers can always choose to use a bathroom with urinals and stalls, or just stalls.

Q: How can I sign up for gender-inclusive housing? How can I make sure my child is signed up for single-sex housing?

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A: There will be a form within the registration process called “Lodging: Overnight Camp Housing Preference for Staff and Participants.” Within this form you will provide information about your child’s lodging preferences as well as specific information about their bunks.

The options will be as follows:

- My camper would prefer:
    - A gender-inclusive cabin
    - A primarily female-identifying cabin
    - A primarily male-identifying cabin
- My camper is most comfortable with:
    - A gender-inclusive cabin
    - A primarily female-identifying cabin
    - A primarily male-identifying cabin
    - Either a gender-inclusive cabin or a primarily female-identifying cabin
    - Either a gender-inclusive cabin or a primarily male-identifying cabin
- My camper is not comfortable with the option:
    - A primarily female-identifying cabin
    - A primarily male-identifying cabin

A **minimum of three campers** must choose the Gender-Inclusive housing option or select “equally comfortable" for a gender-inclusive cabin to be available for a specific week. However, sometimes, the number of campers for gender-inclusive cabins may be fewer than three.

If that occurs, we will consider two options:

1. We will accommodate campers based on their indicated single-gender choices on this form.
2. If you have not expressed comfort with a single-gender choice, we will reach out to you for further discussion to find a suitable solution!

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We will not assign or relocate campers to gender-inclusive housing without permission from their parent or guardian (completing the request form serves as permission). If a camper requests to move to gender-inclusive housing during the session, we will inform them that we must obtain permission from their parent or guardian and will contact them accordingly.

Q: My camper is transgender or nonbinary but feels most comfortable in single-sex housing. Is this okay?
A: Yes! The goal of gender-inclusive housing is to ensure that every camper has access to a sleeping space that's right for them. Regardless of your camper's cabin assignment, they can be assured that we will use the name and pronouns they wish to be called by.

Q: My camper is not transgender or nonbinary. Can they still register for gender-inclusive housing?
A: Yes! The gender-inclusive cabin is exactly that: inclusive of all genders. Our intention is not to create a separate space only for LGBTQ+ campers but also for all who wish to support inclusive housing. This is also why there is an option to self-opt in at registration.

Additional Questions and Information

Q: How will counselors be assigned to cabins?
A: Counselors are asked before the start of the camping season which cabins they are comfortable leading and sleeping in, just like campers. A single-gender cabin will be led by at least one counselor of that gender. A mixed-gender cabin will have at least three counselors of different genders. All our staff aged 18 and older undergo police record checks and multiple reference checks.

Q: How will counselors be trained in gender-inclusive practices?
A: Counselors receive training in supporting LGBTQ+ campers, both in a specific

training session aiming to educate them on gender/sexuality and the needs of LGBTQ+ youth, and through continuing conversation throughout training and the summer as particular situations arise. We take this approach with all diversity and inclusion matters, including race and socioeconomic status, and ability, as well as sexuality: counselors receive basic informational training. They are asked frequently throughout the summer: “How might this affect campers who are _____? How could we make this situation safer for campers who _____?”

Q: How will my camper’s privacy be maintained in the cabin?
A: Cabin spaces will have private changing stations, and private bathroom and shower stalls are available in our bathhouses, so that all campers can change privately. Changing privately is required in all cabins.

Q: Will campers be allowed to switch cabins once they arrive at camp?
A: No. Campers may not switch housing assignments without their parent/guardian's permission.

Q: Won’t gender-inclusive housing encourage romantic relationships?
A: It’s normal for young people to develop romantic feelings for each other, and of course, this can happen at camp. However, it is essential to remember that single-sex Housing does not deter the possibility of romantic interests, as not all campers are attracted to the opposite gender. Regardless of cabin assignments, three Great Lakes Episcopal camping norms are always in place to prevent inappropriate sexual contact and to encourage campers not to define their camp experience by romantic feelings or relationships:

- The “Rule of Three” and “Double Coverage:” It is built into our culture, among both campers and staff, that two people are never to be alone together at camp. Even for simple errands such as retrieving a forgotten item, everyone at camp goes by threes, and at least two counselors must be present. During group activities and unstructured time, such as cabin time, campers are to be accounted for and visible to staff at all times unless they are changing, bathing, or using a private

bathroom stall, in which case each individual is entitled to privacy. These rules are designed to protect the safety of campers and staff in many ways, including preventing inappropriate sexual behavior.

- With all campers, we also establish the norm that at camp, we are not here to pair off (or, in casual parlance, “no hanky-panky”). Beyond physical and emotional safety concerns, we encourage young people not to let a romantic relationship define their camp experience, as this can prevent them from developing other friendships and engaging with the larger community. We believe that age-appropriate conversations about healthy relationships are essential, along with logistical boundaries that prevent inappropriate contact — regardless of gender or attraction. With our older campers, we also remind them that camp is not a place for “sex of any kind with themselves or with other people.”

Q: Won’t creating gender-inclusive spaces encourage more kids to change their gender?
A: There are no medical or psychological studies that support this claim. Furthermore, most campers will be so focused on their own camp experience that they may not even notice changes aimed at creating gender-inclusive practices. We will continue to refer to our cabin spaces as “Matthew,” “Adam,” “Woodlands,” “Red-Pine, “Cabin 1,” Cabin 2,” etc. Many campers, regardless of gender, want a private place to change, and all campers deserve safety, privacy, respect for their body and belongings, and a place to sleep at night where they feel safe and respected.

Q: What if my camper has questions or concerns about these practices before or during camp?
A: A core tenet of camp is that young people should be encouraged to ask questions and that their curiosity should be taken seriously and in good faith. If your camper has a question about our gender-inclusive practices before camp, we are happy to speak to them or you in whichever way they feel most comfortable. If they have a question during camp, they can ask their counselor, the chaplain, or another member of the camp staff, who will happily answer their question to the best of their ability. We are happy to

answer questions about how we make these practices work, to clarify misunderstandings, and even to share why we chose to offer gender-inclusive housing. In all our conversations, we operate with the understanding that trans*, non-binary, and queer campers are loved and valuable, and we will do our best at our Great Lakes Episcopal camping programs to ensure that they know this to be true through our actions and not just our words.

Q: Allowing my child to be housed with someone of the opposite gender is against my religious or cultural beliefs. Will this be taken into account when making cabin assignments?

A: Yes. All of our regular cabin options will remain available, and our gender-inclusive housing is opt-in only. We will assign campers to whichever type of housing you and your family request.

Q: What resources do you have to learn more about gender-affirming practices at camp and in the Episcopal church?

A: Take a look at the list below:

- Why are gender-inclusive policies so critical? - a video by Chris Rehs-Dupin from Transplaining - please note that this video includes hard statistics and may be challenging for younger campers or campers who are trans*, non-binary, or queer to hear: Transplaining Introduction Find @Transplaining on Instagram for more information and resources!
- The Trevor Project Canada has great resources about what gender identity is, exploring your own gender identity, and how to be an ally to trans* and non-binary people, all designed for youth specifically: Gender Identity – The Trevor Project
- The Trevor Project also has counselors that youth can access if they want to talk to someone about their gender identity or sexual orientation.
- Learn about The Episcopal Church's stance on gender, sexuality, and sexual orientation here: LGBTQ – The Episcopal Church
- The Ausable Inclusion Center is a ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of the Great Lakes located in Mio, Michigan. It is a community resource center that provides

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holistic support to LGBTQ+ people and those affected by poverty through social/emotional, material, and spiritual support, as well as education and advocacy programs.

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