

Flathead Lake United Methodist Camp seeks to create a space that campers can experience community, God, and fellowship—for all of our participants, regardless of race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or gender identity and expression. FLUMC welcomes children all across the gender spectrum and assigns bunks based on a variety of factors. Our goal is to ensure that every child who attends Camp is welcomed, included and celebrated. For the majority of our history our cabins and bunkhouses were “boys” and “girls.” While this strictly binary housing arrangement was generally been satisfactory, it is no longer an adequate model, nor does it reflect or conform to the diversity of the camper population we now serve. While binary options may be sufficient for the majority of participants, a non-trivial percentage of campers now identify as non-binary or gender fluid, and creating a space in which all campers and staff can feel affirmed, accepted, supported, and safe should be as fundamental a part of our mission as providing opportunities for connection, growth, and fun.

In 2022 the camper application explicitly included a place to provide pronouns and our Senior High Camp offered non-binary housing options. The success of that pilot program and response from those campers and staff for whom this made camp a more welcoming space led us to implement that practice at all our camps in 2023. The majority of campers will continue to reside in same-gender bunkhouses, but beginning in 2022 we also offer gender-inclusive housing. During registration campers can choose **same-gender housing** or **gender-inclusive housing** or if they have **no preference**. During check-in, campers will choose which cabin they would like to stay in. We offer housing separated by gender as well as gender-inclusive housing. Those who identify as girls and who request same-gender housing will be assigned to our Girls’ Cabin, whereas those who identify as boys and who request same-gender housing will be assigned to our boys’ cabin. Gender Inclusive cabins are good options for campers who prefer to bunk with friends of other genders, for campers who identify as non-binary, who want to bunk with a friend who is non-binary or for campers who feel this is the best fit for any reason.

Our decision to offer a gender-inclusive housing option is the product of extensive research on best practices in the summer camp industry and careful deliberation by the FLUMC board of trustees and Program Team. It is also motivated in part by some alarming statistics that underscore the difficulties that many LGBTQ+ youth (including those who identify as non-binary) face.

- More than 40% of LGBTQ+ youth have seriously *considered* attempting suicide in the last year
- One in five trans\* youth *attempts* suicide each year (but when a transgender youth is empowered to share pronouns, use their chosen name, and is affirmed for who they are, that risk is cut in *half*)
- Substantial majorities of LGBTQ+ youth report feeling unsafe at school because of bullying and harassment
- An overwhelming majority of trans\* youth never play a team sport

For more information about why gender-inclusive spaces are so important for trans\* and non-binary youth, please watch this video by Chris Reys-Dupin of Transplaining, or visit the website of NextGen, the inclusiveness ministry of the Mountain Sky UM Conference at <https://www.mtnskyumc.org/nextgen>

You can also view our full inclusion policy at <https://flatheadcamp.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/FLUMC-Inclusion-Policy-2022.pdf>

## Acknowledgment

We view this expansion of housing options as a critically important step intended to create an environment in which all campers to feel safe, affirmed, and validated at camp. We also recognize that this new policy may make some parents, guardians, and campers uncomfortable and that you may have many questions about why we are doing this and just how this policy will be implemented. We welcome such questions, and while we have tried to answer many of them here, we also invite you to share any lingering or additional questions or concerns to Directors Brandon and Carole Scheer at [carole@flatheadcamp.org](mailto:carole@flatheadcamp.org) or 406-844-3483.

Learning more about LGBTQ+ identities and the particular challenges that non-binary and trans\* youth encounter as they seek acceptance and affirmation can be a hard, awkward, and vulnerable process, and as a camp community, we acknowledge that we still have much more to learn. We invite you to participate in that journey with us and to help us create an even more inclusive and more transformative camp experience for all of our participants—without judgment or barriers but with dignity and grace.