

Parent Handbook for Outdoor Ministries

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Theology & Philosophy

The Outdoor Ministry program of the Rocky Mountain Conference offers a sanctuary – a place where it is safe to explore new ideas, develop the language of faith, dream, and take risks as persons harmonize their lives in Christian community with the vision of the Gospel. .

What does this mean? It means that our brand of Christianity emphasizes Jesus' radical welcome, Biblical stories of truth, God's enduring love for creation, humanity's spiritual longing for connection, and the power of Spirit to transform lives and communities. At camp, we encourage participants of all ages to consider important questions about God, faith, community, justice, and the sacred. We invite questions over answers, process over product, and personal stories over normative statements. The result is a people-centered, faith-enriching, holistic (serving mind, body, and spirit) experience. Through friendships, laughter, story, prayer, campfires, hikes, games, crafts, morning watch, worship, discussion, and God's ubiquitous presence at La Foret, our campers discover, rediscover, and deepen their faith.

Outdoor Ministry radically connects faith and justice communities across the West. It is an integral part of the Rocky Mountain Conference's educational mission to local UCC parishes. It is also an open program welcoming campers from all walks on the spiritual journey. No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here.

Covenant

In the United Church of Christ, COVENANT is a critical value. It is the method by which we, as autonomous bodies of Christian community and autonomous believers, commit and connect to one another in the wider church. In like manner, we teach about Covenant at camp. We do not have rules; we have covenants. We do not judge and reject; we covenant to engage friendship and connection. We do not all agree, but we covenant to respect each other in our disagreements. We are not all the same and we covenant to value and celebrate our differences. Having said all that, as a camp community we embrace covenantal guidelines to ensure camper safety and inclusion. A more thorough engagement of this topic may be found in the individual camp covenants on the Camps and Events page of our website. This sample of some of the more serious “Dos and Don’ts” offers a window into how covenant guides the building of our camp community:

While at camp, we ask that campers DO:

- Participate
- Accept and welcome everyone
- Approach conversations with an open mind
- Attend programming on time
- Make new friends, seek out first-time campers
- Listen to their counselors and directors
- Express their authentic selves
- “Unplug” from social media and technology (leave your cell phone at home if you cannot resist constantly checking it.)
- Respect the natural and human environment

While at camp, we ask that campers DO NOT:

- Engage in sexual activities
- Bring weapons of any kind
- Drink alcohol or use tobacco products of any kind (including vapor pens)
- Bring marijuana in any form to camp (edibles, joints, pipes, pens, etc.)
- Take drugs of any kind (other than prescriptions cleared by the camp nurse)
- Break covenantal agreements formed by the camp community

Violation of these important covenantal rules will usually result in being sent home from camp. Community is one of the most important components of our ministry, so when campers create divisions in that community by breaking camp rules, we take it very seriously. More importantly, these rules keep campers safe, which is our #1 priority.

Benefits, or "Why Go to Camp?"

The following list offers an overview of just some of the benefits of sending our children to RMC camps:

- **Moral enrichment:** RMC camps facilitate intentional discussions around what it means to be a moral agent with free will. Moreover, children may (within safe spaces) become involved with moral conflict. We believe camp is an excellent venue for these types of conflict resolutions.

- **Self-empowerment:** Many children come to our camps unsure of who they are, and even more unsure of what's expected of them. As staff, it's our job to help them navigate tricky social situations, their self-identity, and ultimately reach a place where they know that they are loved and celebrated by God and by their communities.
- **Spirituality:** One of the largest questions at our camps is, "How does God/Jesus/the Bible fit into all of this?" We try not to guide youth to any "right" theological answers, but instead, we do our best to help them to ask the right questions to reach the answers on their own.
- **Leadership:** Our camps are staffed by trained directors and counselors. The developmental needs of the campers dictate the structural design of the program. In all our programs, we intentionally grow faithful leaders: campers, counselors, directors.
- **Conflict resolution:** Conflict doesn't happen often at camp, but when it does, we have tested procedures in place to make sure that resolution is reached and everyone feels fully heard and understood.
- **Communication:** In times of declining person-to-person interactions and even more rare complete sentence communications (IMHO), camp teaches critical skills in non-verbal communication, thought framing, eye contact, introductions, authentic self-expression, and articulating one's experience aloud.
- **Radical acceptance:** We are radically and authentically inclusive; we accept everyone, no matter how their story/journey differs from ours; and we strongly encourage ALL campers and staffers alike to embrace their authentic selves.
- **A wider worldview:** At camps, youth have had some pretty amazing "a-ha!" moments. Camp cultivates "real" conversations in which it is safe to hear and speak an alternate perspective. Rural and urban, Male/Female/Bi/Trans/Queer, affluent and poor will gather to hear and learn from one another.
- **Something bigger than yourself:** While beliefs at camp run the gamut, the youth recognize that there are just as many opinions as people. Campers learn that despite our differences, we can become a part of something--faith, friendships, and community--bigger than ourselves.
- **A sense of calling:** RMC outdoor ministry has been (and will continue to be) a huge factor in so many children's lives. We want each child to leave camp with a sense of duty, empowerment, and ideas on how they can reenter the outside world with their La Foret spirit in mind.

Disciplinary Policies

In some instances, campers need to be redirected toward better and more positive outcomes. When such a case arises, our staff is trained to use discipline that is constructive, educational, and non-violent. Intervention is guided by the principle that all campers have the right to participate fully in camp activities, as long as they are not interfering with another's right to participate. Communication, trust, and understanding guide our disciplinary procedures. Staff are trained to redirect, refocus, and listen. Campers learn to articulate frustrations (rather than

act out), to express themselves before they lose perspective, and to become active participants in the solution.

About La Foret

Our main outdoor-ministry venue, La Foret, is nestled in the heart of Black Forest, CO, and surrounded by 400+ acres of majestic Ponderosa Pines. Located just North of Colorado Springs and minutes from I-25, La Foret boasts an oasis of inspiring scenery in a peaceful, private setting. Imagine waking up to a stunning view of Pikes Peak and the rugged Rocky Mountains!

All of the buildings are located around the perimeter of a huge, open meadow, and are perfect for games, concerts, and other outdoor group activities. Recreational facilities include a heated outdoor swimming pool (open Memorial Day through Labor Day), softball field, tennis and basket ball courts, a horseshoe pit, archery, and an 18-hole Frisbee Disc Golf Course.

The grounds also boast three fire circles, a walking labyrinth, wireless internet available in certain areas, a small camp store open by appointment, picnic grounds, state of the art audio/visual equipment, and a variety of sports equipment. La Foret is the proud home of a challenging ropes course and orienteering course, both designed with elements to encourage team building.

You can [learn more about La Foret at their website](#), or by calling 719.495.2743. You can [view the La Foret property map here](#).

Registration Deadlines and Payment Details

All registration takes place online. Families create an account and enter camper information through the our registration website. Our online system collects household information, emergency contacts, medical and allergy data, all permission waivers, and payment.

Prior to the start of camp, parents must also upload their child's [Colorado Immunization Schedule](#) (form is available through registration if needed) and the [Camper Medical Form](#) (**must be signed by the camper's doctor**).

After completing your online registration, you will receive a confirmation email. Please keep this email for your records. At any time you may log back into your account to make additional payments, review your current or past registrations, print household account statements and more, so please remember your login email address and password.

Registration is not complete until all fees have been received by the Rocky Mountain Conference. We ask that all fees are paid no later than TWO WEEKS prior to the start of the event. You may choose to send a check or make an online payment.

Summer Camp Registration DEADLINES:

- **May 15:** Early Bird Registration Deadline. After this date, we reserve the right to increase camp fees by \$50
- **June 1:** Registration is closed unless we still have room.
- The **Last Chance Registration Deadline** is always TWO WEEKS prior to the start of the event.

Fees and Cancellations:

The deposit is due at the time of your registration. If you select, "Pay by check," it is imperative that you send a check to the Conference Office (1140 W. 5th Ave., Denver, CO 80204) immediately to hold your spot. Unless otherwise noted, the balance is due two weeks prior to the start of the event.

If you need to cancel your registration for all RMC summer events except National Youth Event/Western Regional Youth Event,

... you may do so with no penalty 60 days before the event.

... Between 60 and 30 days before the event, the cancellation fee is the deposit plus \$25.

... Between 30 and 14 days before the event, the cancellation fee is the deposit plus \$100.

... ***Within the final two weeks leading up to the event, we are unable to refund fees and will bill unpaid accounts accordingly.***

Thank you for your understanding and good stewardship of Conference funds.

Scholarships

We carefully set prices for camps and retreats such that camp event expenses are covered by camper fees. This includes La Foret staff wages, the camp nurse, camper meals, facilities, planning meetings, supplies, programming and much more. The RMCUCC-chosen camp counselors and directors are volunteers and are not monetarily compensated for their time.

While it is important for us to ensure that our camp program is financially stable, we are also adamant that any child who wants to come should be able to attend camp. We are happy to work with parents who need financial assistance.

Some ways in which campers are able to pay for camp are

1. a small scholarship available through the RMC, which can be self-selected during the online registration process.
2. home-church scholarships that match or exceed the RMC scholarship
3. donations from family members and friends
4. pick up extra jobs to help cover the costs (shoveling snow, mowing lawns, cleaning cars, yard work, etc.)
5. personal fundraisers (bake sales, yard sales, crafts)
6. set up a payment plan

If your child would like to attend camp and you are struggling with payment, please [contact Rev. Chris Gilmore](#).

Payment Options when a Church is offering Scholarship Funds

As noted above, in some cases local UCC churches encourage campers to attend camp by offering matching scholarships (to match the RMC registration scholarship) or additional funds. If your church is doing this for you, we recommend you choose one of the following options when selecting your payment method.

1. Pay in full on your own credit card and have the church reimburse you for the scholarship amount they have authorized.
2. Select the "Pay Deposit Now, Balance Later" button and have your church send a well-labeled check to the Conference Office before May 15.
3. Select the "Pay by Check" button, send a personal check for a portion of the fee and follow up with your church to ensure timely payment is made.

Regardless of which payment method you choose, please check your account periodically to ensure payments are up to date. Even if your church is helping you pay for camp, YOU are still responsible for ensuring payments are made on time.

Communicating with your Camper

Emergencies

If a parent needs to reach a child at La Foret in a bona fide emergency, they may call the La Foret office at 719-495-2743. This number is answered 24 hours a day and La Foret staff have access to Rocky Mountain Conference leaders. Alternatively, parents may call their child's Camp Director directly and leave a message. The Camp Director will return the phone call when there is an appropriate break in programming.

Cell Phones

Many campers have their own cell phones. We encourage campers to "unplug" while at La Foret and some camps collect cell phones to prevent campers from missing the chance to be "present" at La Foret. We request that families support this opportunity for their campers by resisting the urge to "check-in," say "goodnight," or otherwise regularly communicate with campers via text, social media, or phone calls.

Homesickness

Homesickness is a common occurrence. Staff members work hard to help campers process through homesickness, encouraging campers to form friendships with other campers and to participate in activities and programs.

You can help your camper by talking positively to them before camp begins. It is much better to say, "I'm looking forward to hearing your camp stories" than to say, "I'll miss you so much." It is more helpful to say, "I'll see you and your new friends on Saturday" than to say, "Don't worry, I'll text you every evening to say goodnight."

Texting and calling home is strongly discouraged. Such communication rarely relieves homesickness and more often exacerbates the issue, preventing the child from experiencing the fullness of camp.

If a parent is concerned during the week, feel free to contact the Camp Director. Your call will be returned at an appropriate time so as not to trigger homesickness for your child.

Letter writing, talking to counselors, and making new friends are the best antidote to homesickness. Consistently positive growth outcomes occur when an involved staff member and camp friends love the homesick camper into community.

Sending Mail

- There are often multiple groups onsite at La Foret at the same time. Please identify your child's **specific camp name** on the outside of the envelope below the camper's name. This will increase the likelihood that the envelope gets into the hands of your child's Camp Director more efficiently.
- Send mail early in the week. Mail sent later than Tuesday will often arrive after the campers have gone home. **Camp mail and packages do not get forwarded from La Foret.**

- Please limit your mail to one or two letters / cards. Flooding campers with daily messages from home can increase camper stress and homesickness and adversely affect the growth and community we are trying to foster.
- Camp Directors reserve the right to hold onto mail and distribute later during the week to reduce jealousy or embarrassment.
- Care packages with food, snacks, and candy can complicate camp. Camper allergies, wildlife, and scheduled meal / sleep times can all be adversely affected by a well-meaning care package. It is better to have these items in the car when you pick up your camper!
- The best scenario is for a camper to receive a letter or card on Wednesday or Thursday. This simple gesture reassures campers that he or she is on your mind.

Medications at Camp

- For the purposes of camp, “medications” refers to prescription meds, over the counter meds, herbal and homeopathic supplements or treatments, allergy medications, and every “as needed” items such as Tylenol or sunscreen.
- Please do NOT bring medications in a unit dose box or planner, plastic bag, or unmarked container. State regulations prohibit us from accepting medications which are in unmarked containers. If needed, a pharmacy can prepare a marked bottle with just enough medication for the week.
- All medication is turned into the camp nurse at registration, logged and stored per state licensing guidelines, and dispensed as needed at mealtimes and bedtimes. Campers are not permitted to have any medications in their cabins unless expressly requested on the health form by a medical professional.
- Any camper requiring an Epi-Pen must know how to use it and must carry it with them at all time, as there are situations (such as a hike) when the nurse may not be readily available.

With the information on the medical form, and all medication dispensed by the nurse, a quicker and more helpful assessment can be made in the event of an emergency.

Special Needs at Camp

- The theology and philosophy of our camps are grounded in the statement that “All are welcome.” Having said that, we know that all camps are not appropriate for all children.
- La Foret is a wilderness setting and participation decisions may need to be made on an activity-by-activity basis.
- Our camps are staffed by volunteers. Their commitment to camper safety coupled with potential limits in their knowledge and ability to address special emotional or physical needs may adversely affect your child’s experience.
- La Foret has an Accessible cabin (Tannenbaum) and an Accessible yurt complete with accessible bathrooms and reasonably flat access. Many reasonable accommodations can be made to ensure your special needs camper can attend and participate.
- Communicate early! If the camper is unlikely to be able to participate fully in the program, please inform us as early as possible so that we can understand and plan how to better integrate him or her into the camp routine.
- Inform us of your camper’s special needs: bathroom, dietary, managing clothing changes so we can assess our volunteer staff’s ability to support your camper effectively.
- Think through your camper’s participation. What challenges do you anticipate: keeping up with a full day schedule, transportation around the grounds, mealtime realities, etc.

- Make arrangements ahead of time. Very little can be adjusted at the beginning of camp.
- Sometimes it is helpful for special needs campers to bring a “companion” along who is able to provide the special attention and service that the camper needs to participate fully. Companions are suggested when it would be unreasonable to ask standard camp counseling staff to assume this role. Companions are required to complete all volunteer staff paperwork and training, partner with camp staff and directors, and be the primary caregiver to the camper with special needs. Companion camp fees are covered by the Rocky Mountain Conference.
- We reserve the right to deny registration if we feel we cannot reasonably accommodate your child’s needs and the needs of the entire camp at the same time.

By communicating early and offering yourself as a resource for the staff and director, we are more likely to meet our goal of a good experience for the special needs camper.

Parent Expectations:

- Our camp staffs work in covenant with you, the parents and guardians of those children and youth attending camp.
- Conference camping protocol and policies are developed to ensure compliance with all state and other pertinent guidelines.
- Send your love to your campers by a route other than snack foods. Snacks are provided and the La Foret dining hall serves three complete meals. Snack sharing can prove problematic within the cabins and yurts.
- Trust us that one or two letters / cards are sufficient to reassure your camper.
- Encourage your child to make new friends. Camp is a time of exploration and discovery. Moving out of comfort zones and challenging one’s self are curtailed by cliques and exclusive friendships. Cabin assignment placement policies differ from camp to camp. If your registration permits your camper to request a cabinmate, please request just one. If it does not, reassure your camper that they will make new friends and have plenty of time with current ones.
- In most cases, cabin / rooming assignments are made by individual Camp Directors. Please contact the Camp Director directly by phone or email with requests. Camp Directors reserve the right to use their discretion when it comes to cabin assignments.
- State regulations grant parents access to their children upon request. While you are certainly welcome at La Foret, please consider the disruptive nature of your presence for the camp community. Campers find it disconcerting when a parent keeps stopping by, “What’s wrong with your parent? What’s wrong with you?” Also, your child gets a mixed message: “Have a good week away from home” followed by “You can’t have a good week without home coming to you.”
- La Foret has a stranger-on-site policy which includes parents and guardians who have not arranged to be present during the week. This could lead to an embarrassing situation involving emergency protocols and local law enforcement.
- If you would like to check on your child, call the La Foret office phone (719-495-2743). La Foret staff will pass on your number and concerns to the ACM or Camp Director who will return your call at an appropriate time.
- When discussing camp with your camper and planning how to interact with your child, please remember that camp is an opportunity for your child to explore their independence in a safe, loving environment. Use common sense and consider how your parenting needs could overshadow your child’s growth needs and affect the entire camp.
- First time campers may want to look at www.aca-camps.org to find tips and strategies to help campers and parents prepare for their first camp experience.

Camper Rights and Responsibilities

The RMC-UCC camps are a mixing and sharing of lives in Christian community. Our camps are more than just a week together at La Foret to have fun. They are human encounters where children, youth, and adults learn to live in community with each other, seeking the Spirit of God. In order to allow this experience to be as positive as possible, we ask that campers come with and understanding of their rights and responsibilities for camp. Please cover this information with your camper as this is the baseline from which the staffs build.

RIGHTS:

- To receive appropriate and reasonable adult guidance, support and supervision
- To wear your own clothing, keep and use your own personal possessions, and keep and spend a reasonable sum of your own money
- To enjoy freedom of thought, inquiry, perspective, conscience, and beliefs, which are not harmful to others and respect UCC values.
- To receive adequate and appropriate medical care
- Access to all camp amenities regardless of race, creed, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political affiliation
- To be free from physical and verbal harm from either adults or co-campers
- To be protected from sexual exploitation (*You may reference a copy of the **RMC Safer Camp Guidelines** on the Camps and Events page of www.rmccucc.org. Our directors and camp staffs undergo orientation and training for proper boundaries and behavior. Follow up on issues that arise at camp will come from the Conference Office. Should a counselor be in contact with your child after camp, please let us know. This behavior crosses boundaries set in training.*)

RESPONSIBILITIES

- To know and comply with camp rules
- To respect the possessions of other campers and staff
- To follow the camp schedule including lights out
- To tell staff where you will be at all times
- To respect restrictions of where campers may and may not go
- To assist camp staff in upholding Child Care Licensing laws and standards
- To cooperate with staff request that do not violate camper rights
- To keep your personal possessions in reasonable order
- To wear appropriate clothing at all times
- To make efforts to get along with others
- To make camp “home” for the week
- To make a good effort to be with other campers in activities and the spirit of the camp
- To follow safety instructions and avoid endangering self or others
- To attend and participate in camp activities as able
- To report any harmful behavior of other campers, staff members, or other persons on site
- To avoid any violent actions or words that may harm another camper or staff
- To abstain from using or possessing ANY alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, or non-medically prescribed drugs at camp
- To leave ALL weapons – guns, bullets, knives, etc., at home

F.A.Q. for First-Time Campers

I'm nervous; is that normal?

Yes; it is perfectly normal and very common for campers to get anxious or excited about camp! Even returning campers will experience butterflies in their stomach. However, as with most new experiences, your nerves will likely fade right away.

What if I'm not very good at sports/art/etc?

Youth of all different backgrounds attend camp, and we don't judge others for who they are. We don't ask that anyone excel in any area; we only ask that campers participate, if they are able.

Will I make friends?

Yes! All campers participate in activities and discussions specifically designed to help the campers get to know one another. We also place the utmost importance on creating a judgment-free, inclusive, and safe experience.

What should I bring/leave at home?

Please note: this list is not exhaustive. Please refer to your Camp Director's letter before you and your child finalize packing for camp. However, this will give you a general idea of our expectations surrounding what campers need to bring to camp and what items have no place at camp.

Campers SHOULD bring:

- weather-appropriate clothes, lots of layers
- close-toed shoes
- bathing suit
- toiletries
- bedding
- sunscreen
- towel
- refillable water bottle
- small musical instruments
- Bible
- Flashlight / headlamp
- any prescription medication (always labeled and in its ORIGINAL containers)

Campers SHOULD NOT bring:

- drugs of any kind
- alcohol
- tobacco or marijuana
- weapons
- cell phones

Still not sure whether to bring something or not? Contact your Camp Director, give us a call at 303.984.9118, or email camps@rmcucc.org

Who to Contact

If, after reading this Handbook, you still have questions about our camps, please call the Conference Office at 303.984.9118 or email camps@rmcucc.org

If you have specific questions about the camp for which you have registered, please contact the Camp Director.

If there is an emergency and you must reach your child during camp, please call La Foret at 719.495.2743, call the Associate Conference Minister (303-984-9118 and leave a message) or call your child's Camp Director.

Credentials & Licenses

La Foret is accredited through the American Camping Association. La Foret is also a licensed childcare program with the Colorado Department of Human Services. The license indicates that the program has met the required standards for the operation of a resident children's camp. You may ask to see a copy of the license at the La Foret office.

In the event you believe your child has suffered physical or sexual abuse at camp, please call Social Services at 1-800-CO-4-KIDS, the 24/7 Colorado reporting hotline for child abuse and neglect. If you have concerns about the La Foret facilities please call the Division of Child Care of the Colorado Department of Human Services: 303-866-5958. If you have concerns about camp staff, please contact our Outdoor Ministry Pastor, Rev. Chris Gilmore, at 720.384.7028.

Forms

With the exception of the [Camper Medical Form](#) and the [Camper Immunization Record](#), all of the safety, contact, household, medical, special forms, and liability information we need about campers is captured through our online registration system.

The Camper Health Form needs to be filled out and SIGNED by a medical professional, so call your child's doctor now and set a date for their camp physical. Campers are not permitted to stay at camp with having a completed Camper Health Form. Once completed, you may log back into your camper registration account and UPLOAD it in the Document section. You can also email it to us at camps@rmcucc.org or fax it to us at 303-980-6695.

Any additional required forms will be posted to the website under "Camper Forms," linked on the registration program, and emailed directly to parents / guardians of registered campers.

COME TO CAMP!

We know this document contains a lot of information and hope it has been helpful to you in answering some of your camp questions. If you have more questions, please contact the RMC office or the specific Camp Director.

We hope to see you at Camp this summer!