

ROCKY MOUNTAIN CONFERENCE
Reflections
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

www.rmucc.org

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What A Summer!

By Rev. David K. Popham

This summer's camping season was certainly one for the books:

- Due to the persistent presence of the norovirus (stomach flu), MADD camp concluded 24 hours early.
- Due the same virus and concerns for exposing a younger and older population, Grandparent and Me Camp was cancelled.
- Due to our shrinking camp numbers (in turn due to our shrinking number of youth and children in our churches), Pioneer Camp was cancelled and Pioneer age children folded into the Explorer Music Camp.
- While both Voyager Music and Explorer Music had fantastic campers and great programs, the reality is that both music venues have experienced a severe drop-off in attendance and so the decision was made not to continue them for the summer of 2011.

This news of a decline in camp registration may be surprising to some people, but it should not be. Let's start with a wide lens. You are floating above the world and below you is the United States of America (with Hawaii and Alaska to the west and north). As you hover you notice that all the states appear orange except for Utah, which is green. The orange indicates those states with a majority of their population at age 40 or above. Utah – the one green state – has a population where the majority are 39 or younger.

Now we focus in a little closer and see the United Church of Christ. The average age of our church members is 68. Now we come in even closer and focus on the Rocky Mountain Conference. In 1995 the churches of this Conference confirmed 335 youth into full church membership. In 2009 the churches of this Conference confirmed only 85 youth into full church membership.



“The times,” as the song states, “are a changing.” So also do we need to change and adapt for the new reality of youth presence (some may say absence) in the Rocky Mountain Conference. Your Faith Nurturing Ministry Team is on the ball. Just last month we hosted the second annual EYE on Youth (Exemplary Youth Emphasis) gathering at Keystone. This event brings the latest and best youth ministry research and practices together with those churches seeking to improve their youth programs.

Next month on November 13, your Faith Nurturing Ministry Team will host a visioning summit for camps titled “La Foret for the Next Generation!” Each congregation is invited to send someone to the summit not only for the purpose of hearing all voices, but for the purpose of building on the collective wisdom of this Conference.

Yes, the times are changing, and with the co-creative God walking with us, we too can change and become the centers of meaning-making that contemporary youth are longing for both at camp and in your congregation.

Rev. David Popham is Associate Conference Minister for RMCUCC, a role that includes oversight of camp offerings.

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