# Park River Bible Camp Statement on Inclusivity

In light of recent online chatter, we are issuing this statement to clarify who Park River Bible Camp is and what we stand for.

Park River Bible Camp is a camp and retreat ministry for all ages that encourages a faith relationship with Jesus Christ through Bible study, worship, music, and fellowship. We are affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA).

Park River celebrates and values diversity of race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, ability, socioeconomic status, and background in our campers, staff, donors, and volunteers. All are welcomed, celebrated, and loved at Park River Bible Camp.

This year, PRBC welcomed summer twenty-three staff members to camp. They have already led ten Vacation Bible Schools in area congregations, with ten more to come, and they’ve also held four camps on-site at PRBC, including Camp Maverick for kids who live with diabetes, and Camp Jubilee for adults with differing abilities. We have laughed and played and learned and grown, and through it all, we have seen and known scripture’s promise that in God’s presence, “there is fullness of joy”!

## Youth Fest Speakers at Park River Bible Camp

Park River Bible Camp is holding a camp program for 7th-12th graders called Youth Fest. This program is new this year and was created as an alternative event for the ELCA’s National Youth Gathering, which was canceled.

In choosing the speakers for Youth Fest, we consciously invited a diverse body of individuals who represented varying perspectives. We believe by opening our eyes to views that are the same as and different from our own, we are all made to love and appreciate one another in more profound ways. This is, after all, what Jesus calls us to do.

Each speaker has been assigned a theme. Each speaker will have 30 minutes to share and be present for activities throughout the day supporting their theme.

Themes include:

God’s Boundless Love – Goodness/Kindness

God’s Boundless Love – Love

God’s Boundless Love – Welcome

God’s Boundless Love – Forgiveness

God’s Boundless Love – Generosity

The speaker chosen for Monday, with the theme of Goodness/Kindness, is a pastor and a member of the LGBTQIA+ community.

There has been a lot of negative online commentary on this choice of speaker—specifically the gender of the individual. This speaker has backed out because their family no longer feels safe. The replacement speaker has not yet been chosen.

Our hope at Park River Bible Camp is that those who come to camp experience the love of Jesus and come to understand themselves as beloved children of God: created in the image of God, washed in the Spirit, and called to follow the Savior. We want everyone to experience those things.

At Park River Bible Camp, we are committed to working hard and faithfully to proclaim a message that **love always comes first**, a message for every camper, every family, every supporter knows and hears that God meets us, God sees us, God is for us, and God loves each and every one of us.

Park River Bible Camp is stepping boldly and courageously, not only to resist intolerance, prejudice, and hate, but to promote the gospel that values welcome, inclusion and love. We have made missteps in this work, and we will undoubtedly make more, but we are committed to learning, growing, and doing whatever is necessary to live into this hope.

We thank you for supporting the ministry of Park River Bible Camp. We are thankful for a summer of ministry that is happening as you read this letter. God is faithful, God is good and for 86 years God has walked with Park River Bible Camp through all the ups and downs and continues to do so even today.

We welcome questions or concerns and intentional conversations as we move together. Please reach out to Executive Director, Rebecca Kjelland at rebecca@parkriverbiblecamp.org

In grace,

Rebecca Kjelland

Executive Director

The Rev. Valerie R. V. Teppo

Board Chair

Park River Bible Camp Board of Directors

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### Frequently Asked Questions:

**How does your organization stand on whether identifying as part of the LGBTQIA+ community is a sin?**

We believe this is not a sin. However, if you believe this is a sin, we will need to agree to disagree.

**Do you uphold the Bible?**

Yes! As an affiliate of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, we would point you to elca.org to learn more about how we view the Bible.

**How can you assure the speakers at this event won’t teach outside their assigned theme?**

The speakers are a trusted part of our community. They are given a specific topic and asked to share a simple message to which the youth can relate.

**How did you choose the speakers for this event?**

Youth Fest was created to fill a gap left by the cancellation of the National Youth Gathering. The event organizers wanted it to include some of the diversity of speakers that the youth would have experienced at the gathering. The speakers were chosen because they represent diverse bodies of people, are known for their ability to lead in this way, and are affiliated with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

**How can I sign my kids up?**

We would love to have your child at camp. Go to [www.parkriverbiblecamp.org](http://www.parkriverbiblecamp.org/).