

2018 NE MN Synod Journey: EXPECTATIONS and COVENANT Explanations

One of the more challenging elements of The Synod Journey is coming to a common understanding of expectations for participants, and the enforcement of those expectations. The goal of The Synod Journey Planning Team was to develop a covenant that would build community, give structure for participants to be fully engaged in the Journey, and provide and maintain safety and respect for participants.

This is difficult because we are a large and diverse group. Leaders fall on a continuum of expectations and leadership styles that give different perspectives to what expectations should be.

Fun trip ←.....→ Deep Faith Experience
Tight Control ←.....→ No Boundaries
Cell Phones ←.....→ No Cell Phones
Conservative Dress Code ←.....→ No Dress Code
Dictatorship ←.....→ Democracy

There is no black and white when it comes to expectations and leadership styles. In our own settings, we develop systems that work well for us. However, when our individual group joins with many other groups, we cannot operate under the same procedures. For the good of the group, we develop new understandings. As adults, we understand this – we work with it every day. Catherine Anderson may prefer to only take showers on Sundays. It worked for her when she was a canoe guide in college. But for the good of her officemates and colleagues, she bathes and puts on clean socks every day (and she promises to do the same for you next summer... 😊).

The same is true on The Synod Journey. The expectations of the youth participants and your leadership style may not completely align with the expectations the Planning Team lists in the covenant. Most will, especially for adult leaders. But for the good of the group, we develop new understandings.

This document seeks to clarify some of those new understandings as listed in the Participant and Adult Leader Expectations and Covenant Forms. Thank you for your partnership in making this Journey a safe and transforming experience!

ACCOUNTABILITY

In many ways, The Synod Journey is two trips in one. There is the synod portion of the Journey, which includes travel on the bus, and the servant events in Galveston. And there is the ELCA Youth Gathering portion of the Journey, which is the time in Houston. While the synod will support you throughout the entire Journey, you will experience the ELCA Youth Gathering primarily as a congregation group. Therefore, congregations and participants on The Synod Journey are accountable to the synod Expectations and Covenant Forms only during the synod portion of the Journey as listed above.

If the Covenant is broken, adult leaders are asked to follow the procedures listed in the Covenant:

1. The adult leader will discuss the offense with the participant and give the participant a warning.
2. If the offense re-occurs or an additional offense occurs, the adult leader will talk with other appropriate adult leaders (other group leaders, bus captains, etc) to determine an appropriate consequence. The participant will meet with the adult leaders to discuss the offense and the consequence. If appropriate, the discussion will also include the congregational group.
3. If the offense re-occurs a third time and/or an additional offense occurs, the adult leader(s) will meet with synod staff and appointed synod leaders to discuss appropriate consequences. The participant will meet with synod staff and the adult leader(s) to discuss the consequence.
4. Although not our first choice, adult leaders reserve the right to skip steps 1 and 2 above, and send a participant home at the participant's expense if the need arises. (For example, if the participant is a danger to him/herself or to others, or other offense of a serious nature.)

CELL PHONES AND DIGITAL DEVICES

We understand that cell phones and digital devices are a part of youth culture, and that these devices (cell phones, tablets, mp3 players, etc.) serve many functions – camera, music, social media, phone, etc. At the same time they can be isolating and detract from the group experience. Calls/texts/posts from parents and friends can keep one's heart and head at home, rather than fully engaged in the Journey. For this reason we ask all participants to follow these expectations for cell phone and digital device use:

1. Cell phones and digital devices can be used **EXCEPT** during Community Time. Community Time includes, but is not limited to:
 - a. Worship, work sites, family time, meals, group activities
 - b. Any time we can be building relationships with each other.
 - c. Any time an adult leader announces it is community time.
2. If phones/digital devices are also used as cameras and music during Community Time, they must be in airplane mode to not receive phone calls, texts, tweets or other types of messages.

3. The synod highly encourages participants to leave their phone on airplane mode at all times, so they can be fully present to the experience. We will fully support congregations who mandate no cell phone/digital device use during the Journey.
4. We request that parents be asked to NOT call their youth, but allow youth to initiate phone calls home at appropriate and designated times set by the congregation adult leader.
 - a. The Synod Journey planning team will provide a letter for congregation to give to parents with this request.
 - b. The Synod Journey planning team will help parents and congregations stay connected through regular social media postings during the Journey (Twitter, Facebook page, blog).
 - c. In an emergency, parents should contact the adult leader from the congregation first, so the youth can be properly supported when he/she receives emergency news from home.
5. Adult leaders should keep their phones on vibrate, and refrain from using except in emergencies or to be in contact with Synod Journey leaders. We also want adult leaders to be fully engaged in the Journey!

DRESS CODE

Clothing is a difficult issue. We affirm the self-expression that clothing allows, yet want to maintain a community in which our young people are safe and respectful in their clothing choices. We will be working in neighborhoods where suggestive clothing or sagging pants says something different than it does on Main Street northern Minnesota. We will be interacting with young people who may have experienced inappropriate boundaries or sexual abuse. We will be representing our synod in another culture through worship and meals.

We also have young people on our Journey who have self-esteem and body image challenges. Our dress code is one way in which we can equal the playing field and live as a Christian community that cares for each other in every way.

The dress code states that participants (youth and adults) are expected to:

- Wear appropriate clothing at all times. Logos, captions, and appearance should reflect the spirit of The Synod Journey. As a sign of respect for others and for your safety, we ask that clothing cover all underwear (including bra straps, sport bras and boxer shorts) and no belly buttons show. Swimsuits should be modest. T-Shirts will be provided for certain program days during The Synod Journey. At other times, t-shirts will be given for participants to wear if clothing is deemed inappropriate.

We ask that adult leaders:

- Present the reasons for our dress code and have a conversation with your young people so they understand why it is important to follow.
- Discuss with your group what “appropriate” clothing is. It is impossible to list all forms of inappropriate clothing as styles change quickly. Current examples include revealing clothing such as short-shorts, low cut tops or sagging pants. Keep in mind the spirit of the dress code: safety, and caring support of all young people as they navigate body image challenges and hormonal attractions.
- Check the clothing of your participants before they leave their hotel room, and ask them to add a t-shirt or change clothes if necessary.
- Support your bus captain and other adult leaders if your participant is asked to put on a t-shirt or pull up his pants.

COVENANT

All participants will be asked to sign a Covenant with these expectations and policies to send in with your registration. Please take the time to discuss these covenants with your group BEFORE you register to make sure everyone understands what is expected. If these policies do not align with your group expectations, we encourage you to consider attending with Luther Crest Bible Camp or on your own.

