

Department of Christian Education

Leslie Desrosiers, Chair

The Department of Christian Education has been working on setting new priorities.

The Department of Christian Education shall encourage and support the ministry of Jesus Christ within the Vermont Conference of the United Church of Christ for its churches and their members in the following ways.

THE DEPARTMENT OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION'S PRIORITIES

1. Strengthening the Resource Center of the Vermont Conference

We believe that a strong, updated and vibrant Resource Center will be better able to provide the resources that our churches need to engage in vital ministry. To this end, we will be creating a Resource Center Subcommittee to work with appropriate staff and other departments / entities within the conference. We will create a process to empower all aspects of our Conference [staff, departments, committees, task forces and churches] to utilize this valuable resource within our midst.

The Department of Christian Education will work hard to maintain current and vital resources for our own particular areas of concern: various curriculums, Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, Junior and Senior High youth group activities, teacher training, outdoor ministry, adult education and any other aspect that rightly falls within our scope of operation.

2. Maintaining our Covenantal Partnerships

We believe that maintaining our covenantal relationships within our particular sphere of influence is within the best interests of the Vermont Conference. Our covenants expand the resources and scope of our many ministries and allow our members to both feed and be fed by our wider partners of Christ's ministries. We propose to continue our covenantal relationships with:

NEACE: New England Association of Christian Educators

VAUCE: Vermont Association of United Church Educators

UCC Resource Center: Our National UCC Resource Center

Outdoor Ministry Association

PIE: Partners in Education

Troy/New England Annual Conference of the UMC: Our Covenant Hills Partners

Episcopal Diocese of Vermont: Our Camp Agape Partners

3. Providing Quality and Pertinent Christian Education Programs and Activities

We believe that providing programmatic and educational opportunities for our member churches and their members will ensure that our churches have the resources they need to carry out the educational ministry of the Vermont Conference. As many of you know, the Department of Christian Education of the Vermont Conference has been in the midst of a painful time of transition for the last few years. We are just beginning to regroup and reestablish some of the priorities and programs needed to ensure that our vital ministries are

carried out. We hope to provide the following resources on a regular basis. They include but are not limited to:

- Resource Center Open House
- Communities of Practice Program
- Curriculum Workshops
- Teacher Training Gatherings
- Safe Church Educational Workshops
- Vacation Bible School Curriculum and Training
- VAST: Vermont Academy of Spiritual Training
- Biblical Literacy and Faith Formation
- Children, Youth and Adult Spiritual Formation and Bible Study

4. Providing Quality and Pertinent Youth Group Programs and Activities

We believe that providing programmatic and educational opportunities and activities for our member churches, their youth leaders and their youth will strengthen the Vermont Conference and yield a healthier and more vibrant church in the future. Again, after a temporary hiatus, we are again preparing to offer to Vermont Conference churches youth group resources and activities that will empower our folks and create a sense of belonging to the many youth that call one of the many Vermont Conference Churches home. We are working to provide the following programmatic and educational activities:

- Twice a year statewide gatherings of our youth [Spring/Fall- North/South]
- A youth presence at the Vermont Annual Meeting
- A Vermont youth presence at the New England Youth Event
- A Vermont youth presence at General Synod
- Youth Group Leader Workshops and Resourcing Events
- Vermont Youth Leadership Retreats

5. Strengthening Our Commitment to Outdoor Ministry & Our Ties with Covenant Hills

We believe that a vibrant outdoor ministry program within the Vermont Conference will only strengthen the church and lead our youth to commit to a life-time of Christian discipleship and for some a track to ordained ministry and service to the United Church of Christ. In addition, a strong outdoor ministry program instills Christian values and allows our youth to have confidence in a progressive theology of social justice and abundant welcome. Over the last few years, the percentage of UCC outdoor ministry participants at Covenant Hills has consistently declined, mainly due to a lack of education and promotion within the conference and among its churches. This needs to change.

We also strongly encourage the Vermont Conference and its Board of Directors to re-covenant with the New England Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church [the new overseers of Covenant Hills – no longer the Troy Conference] in our partnership with Covenant Hills.

At the Vermont Conference's Board of Director's direction and with the Vermont Conference's Department of Christian Education's agreement, we have seen the shift of funding for Covenant Hills to begin to be taken out of the general budget of the Vermont Conference instead of out of the Outdoor Ministries Fund. However, believing that outdoor ministry is a priority of the entire Vermont Conference, we believe that the slow change of funding from

the Outdoor Ministry Fund to the general budget should be shared by all and not just the Department of Christian Education. The funds should naturally come out of our budget, but this year we have been asked by the Vermont Conference's Board of Directors to use funds already slated for other Department of Christian Education priorities to compensate for the change. Knowing the financial difficulties of the Conference, we have readily agreed to shift funds to cover the added expenses associated with our covenant with Covenant Hills. However in the future, we would like to either have our budget increased to cover the increasing commitment to our Covenant Hills covenant or to see it shared by the entire conference.

Another priority of the Department of Christian Education concerning the strengthening of our Outdoor Ministry will be re-covenanting with the New England Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church, the new overseers / owners of Covenant Hills. The covenant should at the very least be with the Board of Directors and hopefully with the entire Vermont Conference at Annual Meeting.

We will continue to strengthen our commitment to Outdoor Ministry and our ties with Covenant Hills by:

- Creating an Outdoor Ministry Subcommittee [under Dept. of C.E.]
- Increasing our participation on the Covenant Hills Site Committee
- Encouraging increased participating in the Covenant Hills Open House
- Better publicizing Covenant Hills in the Vermont Conference
[Annual Meeting, Association Meetings, Workshops, Mailings, etc]