



Parent Handbook

2025-2026

What is FISH?

FISH stands for "Fellowship In Senior High." It is an outreach ministry of the State College Presbyterian Church to area high school youth. In FISH, the whole person is ministered to through a variety of activities, discussions, retreats, and service/mission projects.

FISH is designed to enable youth, with compassionate leadership, to develop strong moral and spiritual values. Leaders and youth together confront and discuss pertinent issues.

FISH is adults and youth in partnership. Its goal is to create a sharing and caring community open to any high school youth wishing to participate. Everyone involved in FISH is treated as a child of God. Without imposing religion, FISH leaders are called upon to share their experience of Christ's unconditional love.

The FISH Format

FISH is made up of youth *and* leaders. Each week all gather at 6:00 pm on Wednesday nights at the Church for a common meal. Following dinner there is a time for large group singing, fellowship and announcements. Small group conversations create an opportunity for fellowship, fun and spiritual growth. The evening concludes at 8:00 pm.

F.I.S.H. IS A CIRCLE

A circle of friends, who stand together as an intentional community, committed to supporting and caring for one another. Joined by hands and hearts we recognize that collectively we are more than we are alone. The circle offers us a safe place to discover who we are and to be that together. It's a place where we are invited to come alive!

A circle in motion rolling back, remembering those who came before, and rolling ahead, eager to support those yet to stand within it. Our tradition contains sacred rituals, rhythms and repetitions, songs, prayers and celebrations.

A circle that grows, always maintaining room for one more. In the circle our differences are celebrated and our similarities affirmed. We remain open to growing in quality and quantity. We remain willing to take risks together, to try something new.

A circle that expands, reaching beyond to spread life and love to the world around. As members of the circle we seek to serve even as we are served ourselves. We practice compassion as our circle stretches to enfold others.

A circle with a center recognizing that wherever two or more of us stand together, the presence of God is there. It is a presence that takes on different names for different people, but in the circle we meet face to face and see the divine good shining in each other. From this center we learn love and forgiveness. From this center we are invited to shine on the world.

FISH Leader Covenant

God calls us together, within this Church community, to serve youth and one another in the circle of FISH. Our task is to help create an environment of love and acceptance that nurtures spiritual growth among the youth and ourselves. Therefore, we will extend ourselves as mentors, models, teachers, and organizers.

As FISH Leaders we commit to prayerfully deepening our presence with God so that we might:

- *be present to the youth entrusted to our care;*
- *point to God's presence among and around us;*
- *help others explore the big questions of their lives and faith;*
- *create circumstances and an environment where we all feel comfortable and challenged;*
- *see and hear others with compassion;*
- *do little kindnesses;*
- *and embrace and accept our imperfections.*

FISH Leadership

Leadership for FISH is provided by a team of adults who work together to create programs, develop projects, plan retreats, organize fundraisers, and decide on rules of conduct and policy. The most important work of the leaders is direct involvement with the youth to provide nurture and support.

Reed Dressler serves as Director of Youth Ministry. He is responsible for the overall program direction, leadership and training, and is the main contact person for parents and youth in FISH. Reed can be reached at youthministrysepc@gmail.com, or at the church at 814-238-2422.

Amy and Mike Gordon serve as Kitchen Coordinators for the FISH and LOGOS programs. They coordinate and organize the volunteer cooking crews, menus and food purchases. If you have a special concern about your youth's diet or food allergies, you may contact them directly at scamygordon@aol.com or 814-404-8346.

FISH is a program of the Education Ministry Unit of State College Presbyterian Church relying on that committee for guidance and support.

Program Content

The FISH program is based on a holistic approach to building faithful relationships. FISH tries to provide a variety of settings for youth - in partnership with the leaders - to have opportunities to find new relationships and strengthen old ones. The evening schedule includes dinner together, music, conversation, and circle prayer. Dinner is provided and is always a casual fun way for us to begin our night together.

The weekly programs at FISH are thematic giving small groups a chance to discuss specific topics throughout the year. Small group time comprises the majority of a typical FISH evening. The program/discussion allows for open dialogue on a variety of issues. Topics such as sexuality, family relationships, global concerns, and dating have been explored through the eyes of faith. The leaders are equipped to facilitate discussion as they share their faith in Christ with the youth.

Retreats

Fall and winter (if available) retreats are generally held at Krislund Camp and Conference Center in Madisonburg, PA. The fall retreat focuses on building a community and a time for reflecting on the past, and dealing with the uncertainty of the future. The winter retreat is spent looking at deeper issues of faith and life. It is also a time for refocusing for the second half of the year.

A summer retreat may be planned — several days to a week long experience of community at a location to be determined.

There are retreat fees—**Scholarships are available.**

Mission Opportunities

FISH usually offers a Mission Trip opportunity during the year. In the past we have gone to Farmington, Maine, Wheeling, West Virginia, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, PA to work on local building and renovation projects as well as work with an after school youth program and soup kitchen. In the past several years the youth have gone to Pittsburgh, Broad Street Youth Initiative in Philadelphia, and Highland Park, NJ and Jonestown, VA. Other opportunities are provided throughout the year for local mission and service projects. Examples include working with Habitat for Humanity and the Women's Resource Center. Youth and leaders decide together what projects to pursue.

Behavioral Guidelines

The following behavioral guidelines are established to maintain the integrity of the FISH program and ensure the safety and well-being of all who participate. These guidelines apply to all FISH activities.

Responsible Behavior at FISH is characterized by the following:

- Abiding by the FISH Covenant
- Maintaining regular attendance
- Arriving on time to FISH activities
- Participating in the FISH activities (weekly meetings, retreats, fundraisers, etc.)
- Honoring small group confidentiality
- Respecting one's self, others, and the surroundings

Irresponsible Behavior includes, but is *not* limited to, the following:

- name calling
- disrupting group singing and/or announcements
- disrupting small group discussions
- using abusive language
- leaving the building during program without permission
- not assisting in clean-up after meals
- arriving late without permission
- leaving early without permission
- misusing church property
- smoking or any other tobacco use within sight of church property

Consequences of Irresponsible Behavior

Irresponsible behavior will be addressed through a stair-step course of action resulting in one or more of the following consequences (listed from least to most severe):

- Discussion with FISH leadership
- Parent(s)/guardian(s) notified of the situation and the individual **sent home** from FISH event. (FISH member may return to next function)
- Immediate **suspension** from all FISH activities until meeting is conducted between the individual, the parent(s)/guardian(s), the Associate Pastor, and at least one other FISH leader. This meeting will address the behavior and appropriate follow-up
- **FISH membership discontinued**

Non-Negotiable Behavior

Non-negotiable behavior is behavior deemed unacceptable under any circumstance and will result in the immediate notification of parent(s)/guardian(s) and the individual being sent home (step 2 above). This behavior includes:

- Arriving under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- Possessing drugs or alcohol
- Fighting
- Stealing
- Sexual misconduct - verbal or physical
- Leaving the Church property without permission
- Vandalizing Church property
- Other behavior that may threaten the welfare of oneself, others, or the surroundings