



NEWCOMER'S BOOK

WELCOME NEWCOMERS!

We are very happy you are here, experiencing the Northfield Conference for the first time! You are embarking on a week of living in community, meeting new people, listening to speakers, being part of a “family,” attending workshops, sitting in Sacred Circle, enjoying music, laughter, dance, and so much more! We hope you feel welcomed by the community and that you will ask for help from any of us at any time.

The Conference can be a bit overwhelming at first and so this Booklet is designed to help you plan your week and learn about our history, etc.

The first thing many newcomers notice is that there is an inordinate amount of hugging going on. People return to this Conference year after year and many have long-standing friendships with people that they only see this week. They reconnect with dear friends, let go of the stress of their regular lives, and find a space to be vulnerable and “real.” This is what we hope you will discover as a Newcomer.

Perhaps the most important thing for you to remember, as you watch folks reconnecting with big hugs, is that we were all Newcomers at one point, we all remember that initial feeling of discovery. We each discovered a part of the conference that caused us to return. We hope you will enjoy your week, that you learn things about yourself you may not have been aware of, that you make wonderful connections, that you discover the joy of being a part of this special community. Welcome!

“Northfield makes me feel like I’m with my own family. The family and friends I can count on.” ~ Eleanor

“It means, new friends, new people, and new adventures. I like the food. I like that there’s a lot of play space.” ~ Cooper

History of the Northfield Conference

The Conference was founded in 1893 as a Christian Conference for young women by May Whittle Moody, daughter-in-law of evangelist Dwight Moody. For a week each year they met on the campus of the Northfield School (situated on the grounds of the Moody Farm). High school and college age women were the conference participants, with a staff of young Protestant ministers under the leadership of older women who were conference alumni. Due to rationing during World War II, the Conference separated into three geographical areas: the Northern Area Conference on the Northfield-Mount Hermon campus; the Erie Area Conference, held at Westminster College in New Wilmington, PA; and the Middle Atlantic Conference, held on Cape Cod. Each Conference developed differently as they chose whether to incorporate men and children into their community and whether to broaden the participants from high school and college youth.

By the 1970s, the Northern Area Conference (our “Northfield”) evolved into a multi-generational community for individuals and families with a strong youth program, with program planning emanating from the participants instead of hired religious leaders. In 2005, the Conference adjusted to a new home when the original Northfield campus was closed and consolidated with the Mount Herman campus where we meet today. In 2007, the Middle Atlantic Conference and in 2013, the Erie Area Conference, ceased operations and transferred their endowments to the Northern Conference after long-term challenges with sufficient conference attendance and leadership and lack of affordable conference locations. Several current members of our conference attended the Middle Atlantic Conference.

“Northfield is the summer camp I so desperately needed as a child. I grow, I learn, I make new friendships. Most of all I learn to navigate life. It is the safest place on earth.” ~ Dafna

Northfield Leadership

Since the 1970s, the Conference has been led using the Troika model, in which three Conference Coordinators are in charge of planning and running the Conference, each for a three--year term. Having three key leaders ensures regular injection of new ideas and a balance of backgrounds, skills, and interests across the wide range of activities that go into a successful conference. It also provides continuity from year to year and a welcome respite at the end of the three year commitment.

In 2013, the Conference completed the dissolution of the previous three conferences and the League structure that had previously tied the conferences as a single corporation for tax and legal matters. As a corporation, the Conference has a President, Treasurer, and Secretary whose duties are focused on the legal and tax obligations of the conference and the investment of endowment funds. Along with the Troika, the Registrar and the Youth Program Coordinator, they form the Board of Directors of the Conference. One member of the Troika and one officer are elected by the membership each year, usually at the Annual Meeting held on Thursday. Similar to most nonprofits, a Nominations committee identifies strong candidates with relevant experience for these key positions.

The Troika appoints leaders for various parts of the conference, with planning and recruiting for next year's conference beginning on Thursday. Some of the most visible and important positions the Troika appoints are the two program chairs for the next year's conference, who also recruit and appoint leaders for various aspects of the conference program. Normally four times during the year, Conference leadership meets over a weekend to integrate key decisions for the next year's conference such as theme, budget, speakers, and workshops.

“Northfield, a place where any kind of individuality of any individual is embraced, and home of my 130 extended family members.” ~ Sam

FAQS

Welcome to Your Northfield Family! ... What is it?

A Northfield “Family” is an intergenerational small group of Conference participants that meet daily after the Conference Hour. They use this time to reflect on the speaker and their personal journeys. It is a great opportunity to get to know a small group of people throughout the week and share your reactions to the Conference or just to have a confidential space where you have a chance to talk about personal growth and challenges. There are specific guidelines to the composition of the families and expectations of strict confidentiality for the discussions which will be explained at the first meeting. Each small group has two “Family Facilitators” whose goal is to help everyone feel welcome and included.

Do I have to do everything on the schedule?

We know we pack a lot into our week together and it can feel overwhelming, even to folks who have been coming for years! We encourage Newcomers to participate in as much as possible, to really immerse yourselves in the Northfield experience. Though be warned, almost no one does every single activity in a day from morning movement to closing down Club Northfield.

The core of the Conference is the Conference Hour and the Family group meeting from 9:30am to 12noon each day. Most attendees also participate in Sacred Circle after dinner. Beyond that, whether your highest calling for a given hour is a workshop or a workout is up to you.

“I first stepped into the Northfield community in 1988 with my 4 year old daughter. It was awkward those first few days but then I saw what was happening for her – joy, laughter, freedom – and I saw the magic, felt the magic and embraced it for myself. I’ve been coming ever since, to live in community, to drop into myself, to ‘come home.’” ~ Caroline

Where do I sit at meals?

The simple answer is “Anywhere you like!” But that is not so easy when you are new and everyone seems to know everyone else and it can feel difficult to sit at a table, especially if you are naturally reserved or shy. Here we encourage “Be Brave!” and join a table with others already there. You will be welcomed, we promise!

What’s this about the bathrooms?

Northfield Mount Hermon is a boarding school where students are housed primarily by their gender identity. During the school year, most dorms house students who either “identify as male” or “identify as female.” (All-gender housing is also offered for students desiring more freedom in their gender expression.) As a result, the majority of dorms used by us feature just one single-gender bathroom per hallway – usually with 2-4 stalls, 2-3 curtained showers, and 3 sinks.

A key element of Saturday night’s dorm meeting is to decide as a group if all bathrooms in the building will be gender-neutral 24/7, or if there are specific hours when a bathroom will be designated as single-gender. It’s part of our culture to discuss and set guidelines as a community, so if you have strong feelings on the topic, we encourage you to speak up at that meeting! Considerations typically include accessibility for the mobility challenged and parents caring for small children. As part of this process, we also recognize that gender is neither fixed nor binary, and we affirm the right of all Northfielders to use the designated bathroom that is consistent with their gender identity.

“I’ve been coming to Northfield since I was born. To me, Northfield means happiness and family.” Kara

Sacred Circle – I'm not particularly religious or spiritual...

That's fine. Sacred Circle is a time every evening for us to gather as a community and sit in peace together. There are readings and songs – coming from every tradition. As a community, we are Christians, Jews, Buddhists, Earth-Based, agnostics ... we welcome every faith or none and use this time to feel the Spirit as it moves us. Every day at 1:00pm, that evening's Sacred Circle is created by anyone who wishes to have input or just listen to the process. Do you have a favorite reading or song? We encourage you to bring it to a meeting and offer it.

"The Northfield community is a large and beautiful basket that holds space for me to grow, connect to others, deepen my spirituality, learn new things, laugh and cry, and, most of all, practice the ongoing art of loving. YES." Dorothy

"Northfield is my dream of a nonviolent culture materialized. It is a safe place where people are welcome at all levels of their being. It is the flowering of loving intention, where everyone participates in the bouquet." Veronica



GENERAL DAILY SCHEDULE

Please refer to the Grid. See Daily Schedule posted in the far end of the Dining Hall for changes or additions or listen for announcements before Conference Hour.

Time	Activity
6:30am	Coffee available in Dining Hall
7:00 - 7:30am	Yoga: Solarium
7:00 - 7:30am	Sound Meditation: Chapel
7:00 - 7:30am	Meditation: Blake, small lounge
7:30 - 8:15am	Breakfast: Dining Hall
8:30 - 8:55am	In-gathering/Announcements: Blake Lounge
9:00 - 12:00pm	Children's Program: Leave from Blake Lounge
9:00 - 10:15am	Conference Hour: Blake Lounge
10:30 - 11:55am	Northfield Families
12:00 - 1:00pm	Lunch, Dining Hall
1:00 - 2:00pm	Sacred Circle Planning: Small Dining Room
2:15 - 4:15pm	Workshops (<i>Check the "Grid" or the Booklet</i>)
4:45 - 5:30pm	Tree Sessions – Locations to be announced
5:30 - 6:30pm	Dinner: Dining Hall
6:45 - 7:30pm	Sacred Circle: Chapel
8:00pm	Each evening will have a Special Activity! Check the Booklet and the Grid.
Evening Activity	"Club Northfield" (Blake, 2nd Floor) Refreshments, Games and more!!

While this is the "general" schedule of each day, there are variations and additions throughout the week. For explanation of the special activities, please refer to "Afternoon and Other Activities" in the Handbook.