

Sustainable Kids Min Video Script

Hi Friends! I am Rev. Kathy Pittenger, and this video shares updates about our sustainable children's ministry model, protection policy, and cohorts over the past year.

How did we get here? In 2023, the Michigan Conference underwent a significant staff restructure, eliminating six program staff positions and shifting current staff from "experts" to "generalists." This eliminated the position dedicated to children's ministry, which was my former position.

In the summer of 2023, I had the opportunity to begin the Practical Church Leadership Graduate Certificate program through Dakota Wesleyan University. Part of the program was an applied project. This was the perfect opportunity to weave the new tools I was learning with the need to build a sustainable children's ministry model. We started with an Advisory Board that offered oversight, collaboration, accountability, and feedback through the process. After listening sessions and feedback forms, we decided to focus on four areas: Kids Min Zooms, Curation/Resourcing, Regional Networking, and Communication. The Advisory Board spent time listening, building relationships, and making sure we were creating a model that would be effective, relevant, and sustainable.

In February 2024, we started to gain momentum. The advisory board and team leads met in person for a two-day planning meeting. The goals for that time were to build relationships and trust, clarify team responsibilities, brainstorm possible team members, and begin a timeline for 2024. We included time to look back - "How did we get here?" - look at strategy, including vision, mission, and core values that would guide our time and our teams moving forward. Through this planning meeting, we found a communication team lead and discerned clarity for that role, created a working timeline, and built energy and excitement for the work. We named and moved through

the grief because of the changes to children's ministry in the Michigan Conference. And, we celebrated the opportunities that have opened up because of this shift.

Here are a few of the accomplishments and changes made over the last year:

- In the fall of 2023, we launched the lifelongfaith.org website, which houses all children's ministry resources. We will expand this website to include youth, adult, and intergenerational faith formation ministry as well.
- We have team leads who are overseeing the four areas and have built teams to work with them.
- The Kids Min Zoom team, led by Susan Adam-Rita from Chelsea First UMC, has planned topics, lined up guest speakers for the year, and successfully run the meetings since March.
- The Regional Networking team, led by Rachel McCollum from Ann Arbor First UMC, is planning two in-person events for the fall, one on the east side and one on the west side of the state.
- The Curation team, led by Deaconess Anne Hillman from Detroit Central UMC, is updating resources posted on the lifelongfaith.org website and will regularly add new, relevant content.
- Maddy Martinson is the Communication Lead. She sends out monthly e-newsletters, monitors and posts on the Michigan Conference Children's Ministry Facebook group, and updates the children's ministry portion of the website.
- Protection Policy resources and training information on the conference website have been updated. They can be found at michiganumc.org/harm. Click on local church resources.
- While not part of the Sustainable Children's Ministry Model, we have offered four faith formation-related cohorts so far in 2024, with 30 participants. In the Fall, we will offer a Mini Faith Formation cohort led by Sherry Stone. This is open to all Faith Formation Leaders. You can find more information at

lifelongfaith.org/cohorts. We are also reviewing our cohort model and will offer new options in 2025!

All of these leaders and the team members work in churches and have stepped forward to lead and assist with the work to equip, empower, and encourage children's ministry leaders in the Michigan Conference and beyond. Thank you!

In July 2024, I presented my final project to my peers and completed the PCL certificate. I learned and grew tremendously through the program, and I pray we will continue to see the seeds grow and bear fruit in our conference.

Children's Ministry Leadership remains strong in the Michigan Conference because we have seen its impact on leaders, churches, families, and children. We will continue with an Advisory Board to ensure we stay on track with our vision, mission, core values, and goals. We will continue to learn and pivot as needed to ensure we are providing resources and leadership development that is relevant, timely, and flexible.

What's next?

I will be on vacation, renewal leave, and tending to my board of ordained ministry responsibilities from July 27 through November 10, returning to the office the week of November 11th. While I am on leave, the team leads can respond to many of your questions, including protection policy questions. You can find their contact information at lifelongfaith.org/about and click on "Sustainable Children's Ministry Team." The conference connectional ministry staff team can also answer questions. I am grateful for the opportunity to rest, play, learn, and build. When I return, I am excited to hear updates from you and continue listening to leaders about how we can equip, empower, and encourage all faith formation leaders and how to do this in connectional and sustainable ways. Thank you for your ongoing support!