

A Statement of Commitment and Covenant from the Outdoor Ministries Team

WHEREAS, the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ claims a commitment to be driven by mission rather than maintenance; to spiritually enlivened strategic initiatives rather than to survival; to be focused on Christian formation and discipleship of children, youth, and adults; to be directed toward identifying and nurturing these gifts and leadership abilities in laity; and to be dedicated to prophetic witness;

AND WHEREAS, on November 4, 2006, the Board of Directors of the Minnesota Conference recognized that the ministry of Pilgrim Point Camp is a vital mission of the Minnesota Conference and allocated \$100,000 a year from the Ashley Fund to support a fulltime Managing Director of Pilgrim Point;

AND WHEREAS, on November 8, 2008, in a discussion on governance of Pilgrim Point Camp, the Board of Directors reiterated that the ministry of Pilgrim Point Camp is central to the Minnesota Conference;

AND WHEREAS, on May 2, 2009, the Board of Directors voted to suspend operations at Pilgrim Point Camp after the 2009 camping season;

AND WHEREAS, a fulltime Managing Director of Pilgrim Point Camp has served in that capacity for only one full camping season;

AND WHEREAS, the Initial Draft of a Business Plan authored by David Kettering does not contain enough data to conclude how many Minnesota congregations participate in activities or programs at Pilgrim Point Camp;

AND WHEREAS, the Initial Draft of a Business Plan authored by David Kettering does not include a proactive, **Conference-wide** plan to reinvigorate the ministry of Pilgrim Point Camp and assertively market the same to the member congregations of the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ;

AND WHEREAS, a decision to suspend the ministry of Pilgrim Point Camp appears to be primarily based on short-term financial concerns rather than creatively and energetically addressing the financial and programmatic challenges of sustaining and strengthening the ministry of Pilgrim Point Camp;

AND WHEREAS, the Outdoor Ministries Team offered a list of proposed ideas to initiate a proactive response to the financial concerns regarding the ministry of Pilgrim Point Camp;

AND WHEREAS, the covenantal relationships of the Minnesota Conference may suffer without a permanent locational presence outside of the Minneapolis-Saint Paul metropolitan area;

LET IT BE RESOLVED that the Outdoor Ministries Team of the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ calls upon all delegates to the 2009 Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Conference to oppose the proposed operating budget for the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ;

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that the Outdoor Ministries Team calls on the 2009 Annual Meeting of the Minnesota Conference to insist that full funding for Pilgrim Point Camp and its program ministry, managing director, and support staff be re-inserted into the operating budget for the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ;

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that the Outdoor Ministries Team welcomes all members of the Minnesota Conference to commit themselves to finding creative solutions to financial concerns for the ministry of the MN Conference of the United Church of Christ and for the ministry of Pilgrim Point Camp;

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that the Outdoor Ministries Team invites the member Congregations of the Minnesota Conference of the United Church of Christ to covenant to enthusiastically lifting up the ministry of Pilgrim Point Camp by actively promoting Pilgrim Point Camp programs in their home congregations and by actively partaking in the ministry of Pilgrim Point Camp at the camp;

LET IT BE FURTHER RESOLVED that the Outdoor Ministries Team invites the delegates gathered together at this 2009 Annual Meeting of the MN Conference of the United Church of Christ and the Conference Board of Directors to reaffirm their commitment to Pilgrim Point Camp's place as central to the ministry of the Minnesota Conference and to take proactive action to strengthen the ministry of Pilgrim Point Camp.

Approved by the Outdoor Ministries Team of the Minnesota Conference, United Church of Christ on May 30, 2009.

Important facts the Outdoor Ministry Team wants you to know:

- † Pilgrim Point Camp has been providing faith formation and ministry to children of all ages in the Minnesota Conference for 50 years.
- † In 2005, an external, expert on camp ministries in the United Church of Christ analyzed Pilgrim Point Camp and urged the Board of Directors to hire a full time director and strengthen the governance of Pilgrim Point Camp.
- † On November 4, 2006, the Board of Directors of the Minnesota Conference recognized that the ministry of Pilgrim Point Camp is a vital ministry of the Minnesota Conference. At this time the Board of Directors decided to use the Ashley Fund to support a fulltime Managing Director of Pilgrim Point allocating \$100,000 a year.
- † The mission of the Conference as established by the board of directors in January of 2007 is “to be focused on Christian formation and the discipleship of children, youth and adults,” and one of the strategic initiatives of the conference is to “address faith formation of children and youth.”
- † On November 1, 2007, Dee Dressler began her first day in the role of Managing Director of Pilgrim Point Camp.
- † On November 8, 2008, in a discussion on governance of Pilgrim Point Camp, the Board of Directors reiterated that the ministry of Pilgrim Point Camp is central to the Minnesota Conference.
- † Over 240 youth and over 150 adults participated in outdoor ministries programming at Pilgrim Point during the 2008 camping season. Outdoor ministry participation for 2009 is level at Wisconsin UCC camps and up at Christian Church (Disciples) Iowa camps.
- † On March 7, 2009, the Board of Directors proposed a bylaw change establishing a standing committee of the Board to govern Pilgrim Point Camp.
- † On May 2, 2009, the Board of Directors voted to suspend operations at Pilgrim Point Camp after the 2009 camping season. Furthermore, the proposed 2010 budget has \$0 for outdoor ministry programming at any location.
- † Suspending operations at Pilgrim Point is not good stewardship of the asset; there are significant security risks in leaving the camp vacant in 2010. Furthermore, costs of maintaining the property with active programming could potentially cost less than it would to get the camp in working order after a season of inaction.
- † There are financial options available to continue outdoor ministry programming in 2010 including, but not limited to, a reduction in other expenses in the budget, a loan from a bank with PP as collateral, an increase in spending from the Ashley Fund, or a withdrawal from the Ashley Fund to be repaid. While this is not the ideal scenario that the Outdoor Ministries Team would like, the finance committee presented an alternative which, for \$25,000 more per year the Minnesota conference could have provided 2010 Outdoor Ministry Programs at Pilgrim Point using a part-time director while the conference looks at other alternatives besides suspending operations at Pilgrim Point Camp.
- † If the Conference decides on different forms/locations of outdoor ministries, those programs should be in place before we shut down our current programs, to provide continuity, and not lose participants with a one or two year gap.
- † Pilgrim Point Camp is not a business venture expected at least to break even, but a mission and ministry of the Minnesota Conference.
- † **The Annual Meeting’s decision regarding Pilgrim Point comes as part of the budget vote.**

The Outdoor Ministry Team is requesting that the Conference Board of Directors, using the readily available Ashley funds, restore full funding of Pilgrim Point Camp as well as the fulltime position of Dee Dressler as our Managing Director in 2010, thereby maintaining the strength and continuity of ministry of Pilgrim Point Camp.

Some Responses to “Frequently Asked Questions”
(Board of Directors FAQ Sheet originally presented at Listening Sessions)

Rev. Christopher Ross, Chairperson of the Outdoor Ministries Team

1) In explaining the process the Board of Directors followed in deciding to suspend operations at the end of the 2009 camping season, it is stated that the environment last fall in which the Board took up the question of governance of Pilgrim Point was very different from that in which a fulltime managing director’s position was created. As recently as the Board’s meeting last November, the Board reiterated Pilgrim Point’s place as central to the ministry of the Minnesota Conference. *The only difference in environment is the financial worth of the Ashley Fund.*

It is also stated that the option of halftime director was argued against at the May 2 Board meeting due to concerns over justice issues. No mention is made of the justice issue surrounding hiring a fulltime director from a different state, welcoming that individual’s family to make their home in Minnesota, and then laying that person off after one camping season.

2) When explaining that the decision to “suspend operations” at Pilgrim Point does not mean there are plans to sell the camp, the Board acknowledges the need for broader input from churches and congregants in the Conference. *But such input was not at all sought before deciding to suspend operations, and not sought until the holding of Listening Sessions a mere week before the Conference’s Annual Meeting.*

The Board’s FAQ sheet goes on to state that “it made sense to stop digging while we took time to get more input.” *Suspending operations is not a “stationary” stance. In fact, we will continue to dig a deeper hole for Outdoor Ministries programs without continuity during a time of suspension of operations. In other words, re-opening Pilgrim Point becomes less and less likely during a time of hiatus.* Increased start-up costs would be involved in re-opening the camp, as well as the difficulty of re-attracting campers who have attended elsewhere during the hiatus.

3) In discussing the numbers reported in the Initial Draft of the Business Plan, the claim is made that “weekend use of the Camp is actually heavier among metro UCC churches, with Wayzata Community Church (107 campers in 2008) and New Brighton UCC (51 campers in 2008) likely to be greatly impacted by a suspension of operations.” *It appears that the argument here is that since metro churches are also affected by the closure of camp--and not just out-state churches--that makes this decision better.* This seems illogical.

The fact remains, however, that with the dissolution of Associations, the closure of Association/Area offices, and the likely loss of Pilgrim Point Camp if the Board’s decision stands, the Conference’s only “locational” presence will be the main office in Minneapolis.

4) In addressing the question of marketing, it is acknowledged that camp promotional materials are in most churches throughout the Conference, and yet the trends in camp attendance remain what they are. *This trend was in place before the commitment to hire a fulltime managing director, so its relevance now appears questionable.* With the Board’s recent commitment to programming and a fulltime director at Pilgrim Point, it seems unlikely that camp attendance plays a significant role in the decision to suspend operations, especially since usage has **not** decreased drastically in the last four years (see #1).

5) In discussing the monetary needs to continue full operations at Pilgrim Point Camp, please know that not all options are included on the FAQ sheet. Besides a whole list of proposals offered to the Board of Directors from the Outdoor Ministries Team, *the possibilities of making a maximum draw out of the Ashley Fund (over what is currently drawn), of borrowing money from the Ashley Fund, and of increased fundraising efforts for Pilgrim Point remain unexplored.*

The Ashley Fund was established to help provide ministry for children and youth, not to yield interest in the bank. Sure, we’d all like to insure maximum resources for the future, but the current economic downturn is most likely temporary. Moreover, *closing camp when we’ve finally moved to having a fulltime managing director is not keeping an eye out for the present OR the future.* We are called to God’s ministry in faithfulness and not fear.