

# **PARTNER WITH UM CHURCHES AND AGENCIES**

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One of the most fruitful and vital dimensions of United Methodist Camp and Retreat Ministries is our participation in a tremendous covenant connection. United Methodists deliberately choose to link together and join forces in a common mission together. Our congregations and joint ministries sponsored by all the churches of a wider region, called a Conference, are viewed as a collective not as islands standing alone. We share leadership in many ways, and our clergy are even seen as members of the broader Conference rather than individual congregations. This covenant connection is a special, valued part of the United Methodist Church, its heritage, and its character.

Some camp and retreat centers are private, independent operations, but United Methodist camp and retreat ministries are not. Even when our camp, retreat and conference centers are separately incorporated for legal, operational purposes, this in no way diminishes our promise to partner with United Methodist local churches, conferences and agencies of the larger Church in a combined effort to nurture faith in God and to reach out to meet true needs in the world together.

We earnestly believe that we can accomplish more together than we can individually – both as church members and as ministry organizations within the whole. The entire denomination is structured to highlight this “vital web of interactive relationships” that unite us and strengthen us as the Body of Christ. Within this understanding, our effectiveness hinges on our ability to build relationships and to establish meaningful ministry collaborations with United Methodist members, local churches, conferences and agencies. This approach grows out of scriptural reflection on the nature of the Church itself. In some cases, covenant connection may even call us to apply the gifts and graces of camp and retreat ministry in the communities where our partners are located rather than always assuming that the partnership will occur on the grounds of the camp and retreat center.

In very practical terms, UM camp and retreat ministry leaders and committees must be genuinely interested in what is happening beyond the boundaries of our camp and retreat center sites. If we ignore this, we will inevitably suffer isolation, because new partnerships and relationships are unlikely to emerge. We must certainly be very attentive to the current Christian hospitality, programs, and operations of the centers where we are stewards. However, being too myopic hinders our ability to forge strong ties with fresh visions, dreams and possibilities that our wider partners are passionate about.

In our desire to explain the needs we have at our centers (which is important), it is all too easy to give little regard to listening deeply and to understanding our covenant partners and their current callings. It is not partnership when we begin to view members, local churches, conferences, and UM agencies simply as resource streams supplying money, volunteers, participants, etc. for operations and programs we develop in relative isolation from them. What are the major ministry goals and priorities of our local

churches, conferences and UM agencies, and how can these visions from God be addressed through the gifts and graces of camp and retreat ministries? How can we be very proactive in establishing the partnership, rather than simply waiting for others to come to us?

Anyone leading a United Methodist Camp and Retreat Center, even if they are from another denomination, must sincerely appreciate and engage in the sacred synergy that covenant connection avails. It will be very difficult to effectively implement a UM Camp and Retreat ministry for the long run without realizing how cherished and important this is within our denomination. The “united” perspective, also explains in part, why the United Methodist Church tends to be so ecumenical. These principles not only apply within our own denomination but also through our participation in the larger family of God. UM Camp and Retreat Centers host and support training, planning and programs of a host of other religiously affiliated and non profit groups who share a common passion for making a positive difference in the world.

The following excerpts from the *2004 Book of Discipline* give a glimpse into the importance of “the connection” within our heritage and self-understanding.

Paragraph 101: Our Doctrinal Heritage

**Nurture and Mission of the Church**--*Finally, we emphasize the nurturing and serving function of Christian fellowship in the Church. The personal experience of faith is nourished by the worshiping community. For Wesley there is no religion but social religion, no holiness but social holiness. The communal forms of faith in the Wesleyan tradition not only promote personal growth; they also equip and mobilize us for mission and service to the world. The outreach of the church springs from the working of the Spirit. As United Methodists, we respond to that working through a connectional polity based upon mutual responsiveness and accountability. Connectional ties bind us together in faith and service in our global witness, enabling faith to become active in love and intensifying our desire for peace and justice in the world.* <sup>i</sup>

Paragraph 129: The Unity of Ministry in Christ

*There is but one ministry in Christ, but there are diverse gifts and evidences of God’s grace in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4-16). The ministry of all Christians is complementary. No ministry is subservient to another. All United Methodists are summoned and sent by Christ to live and work together in mutual interdependence and to be guided by the Spirit into the truth that frees and the love that reconciles.* <sup>ii</sup>

Paragraph 130: The Journey of a Connectional People

*Connectionalism in the United Methodist tradition is multi-leveled, global in scope, and local in thrust. Our connectionalism is not merely a linking of one local charge (and/or extension ministry, which is the case with Camp and Retreat Ministries) to another. It is rather a vital web of interactive relationships. We are connected by sharing a common tradition of faith...and by sharing a common*

*mission, which we seek to carry out by working together in and through conferences, which reflect the inclusive and missional character of our fellowship...* <sup>iii</sup>

**Ephesians 2: 19** So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, **20** built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. **21** In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; **22** in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

## **Scriptural and Theological Exploration** **For Camp and Retreat Leaders**

### **A. Help Congregations Fulfill Their Primary Task.**

Local congregations have many goals that coincide with their primary task of engaging people in a growing Christian discipleship. Ezra Earl Jones, in his book – *Quest for Quality in the Church*, provides an excellent framework for us to consider, which identifies four main areas in the on-going congregational process where camp and retreat ministries might partner. He identifies the following as key areas in a local church's endeavor to nurture people in faith and Christian living.

#### 1. Reaching out and Inviting Persons

Camp and Retreat Ministries is one way that the United Methodist Church reaches out to invite and welcome people into the community of faith. This connection is short-lived, however, unless we find ways to enable guests and participants without congregations to link with one once they return to their home communities. Camps, retreats and conferences are by their nature – temporary. Ongoing faith formation and service is greatly enhanced by involvement in a continuing faith community.

There are many ways that we might partner with local congregations in this arena. Hospitality and welcome, for example, are core to what we do, so there might be ways that we can help congregational leaders think creatively about how to strengthen this aspect of their ministry within the local church setting. We can partner with local church leaders in projects like day camps in their community that help neighbors get to know the people of the local church in an experience that is positive and that builds relationships. We can sponsor retreats that focus on training leaders for local community assessment, so leaders can learn who the people are living in their region and plan ways to listen to the needs of these populations and how to develop strong ties with leaders of the various groups where the local church is.

Our camp and retreat centers can make a concerted effort to be sure that we are responsive to the various ethnic communities in our regions, and build strong ties so the leaders and people of these communities feel welcomed and engaged in shaping the direction of our camp and retreat ministries. In this way, we walk hand in hand with local churches serving these communities. These are just a few of possibilities that might emerge as we listen to the needs of our local churches and their communities.

2. Helping Persons Grow in Their Relationship With God

It is vital that we be sure to incorporate, within our camp and retreat ministries, the type of experiences that will nurture children, youth and adults in their relationship with God and Christian faith. Local churches, parents and others count on us not to overlook this vital dimension of what we do. How might we, also, support specific goals and objectives that leaders are trying to implement in their local setting? What role might we play in helping congregational leaders learn from each other about effective avenues that help persons connect more deeply with God?

3. Nurturing Persons in Christian Living and Practice:

How can camp and retreat ministries reinforce Christian living and practice through the camps, retreats and conferences we offer, which many local church members and leaders attend? We can also teach local church leaders how to plan and lead their own camps and retreats for their congregants, so that camps and retreats become a more available, regular spiritual practice for communities of faith.

4. Sending People Out in Christian Love to Meet True Need in the World:

It seems important not just to talk about service and servant leadership. There are ways for our Camp and Retreat Ministries to engage people in actual service within and beyond our sites so people can live out the call and desire to serve. Some of these opportunities will likely arise out of joint efforts with UM local churches and agencies who work with public organizations, like habitat for humanity for example or denominational groups like Volunteers in Mission. The possibilities are incredible, when we leave our sites to sit down with our covenant partners and dream together with God.

It is important to note here, that camp and retreat centers are not local churches nor are they meant to replace an ongoing faith community. We can and do, however, bring the unique focus and characteristics of camp and retreat ministries as an asset in support of what local communities of faith are trying to do. Some local churches actually build in camps and retreats as part of their intentional discipling plans and strategy. Another way that we affirm that camp and retreat centers do not replace the ministry of local churches is our own

participation in a local church as camp and retreat leaders. This requires that we find ways to rotate staff and volunteers so that our leaders have a chance to be involved, since we are hosting groups at our centers nearly every weekend. This can be a challenge.

Some local church leaders do not have a background of participating in camps and retreats as part of their life experience, there we need to be very good at interpreting the benefits of camps and retreats for helping local congregations reach their goals and visions. It is our role to make people aware of the good our ministry accomplishes and not expect others to know somehow without effectively telling our story and repeatedly keeping folks up to date on what is happening.

Finally, we need to learn how to listen. Do we seek to know and understand the goals, visions and priorities of our local congregations and UM agencies, so that we know what is important to them currently? Too often, we want people to understand what our goals and needs are, and forget that collaboration means that we must also care deeply about the vision, goals and priorities God has given to those we partner with, such as our conferences, local churches, UM agencies, etc. When we proactively seek to understand, it will be much easier to see opportunities for partnerships and collaborations. We should endeavor to partner in the areas that are true to our strengths and purpose rather than trying to replace the ministry of local congregations for folks or dilute our core reason for being by trying to be all things to all people.

**Matthew 28: 18** And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. **19** Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, **20** and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

**Hebrews 10: 23** Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who has promised is faithful. **24** And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, **25** not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

**Romans 16:1** I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchraeae, **2** so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well. **3** Greet Prisca and Aquila, who work with me in Christ Jesus, **4** and who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. **5** Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaenetus, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. **6** Greet Mary, who has worked very hard among you. **7** Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was. **8** Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. **9** Greet Urbanus, our co-worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys.

## **B. Support Annual Conference Leaders in their Primary Task of Preparing Persons for Specialized Leadership Roles**

Earlier we highlighted Camp and Retreat Ministries' role in the general development of Christian Spiritual leaders. A main concern of congregations,

Bishops and cabinets, conference staff, connectional ministry committees, and Boards of Ordained Ministry takes this a step further. They have the momentous responsibility to identify, select, prepare and deploy spiritual leaders for specialized roles with the church and society at large. This requires a more systematic approach, not simply a crossing of fingers that spiritual leaders will somehow come forth without a well coordinated process to help draw them forth.

Camp and Retreat leaders can proactively support these endeavors, which are vital to the well being of the denomination and the wider world. Simply put, the number of volunteers, staff and participants engaged in growing spiritual leadership through their camp and retreat experiences is extensive and most are members of United Methodist congregations. In some regions, the number of volunteers involved in this faith formation effort every year is remarkable. Recent surveys completed by our centers indicate that United Methodist camp and retreat ministries currently recruit and train nearly 25,000 staff and volunteers annually. These leaders help serve approximately one million guests and participants. The substantial number of people participating in and growing as leaders within camp/retreat experiences across the denomination speaks to the vitality and meaning inherent in both participation and leadership. We have to tools, the spaces and the experience help conferences and cabinets develop Spiritual leaders, and it is important to claim our part in that responsibility and to get better and better at it.

A large portion of these leaders are inspired to utilize their gifts and graces in expanded ways by responding to God call to others forms of Christian Spiritual leadership beyond the camp and retreat setting. Many become clergy or lay persons serving in key positions within their local church, annual conference and beyond. This is true for persons of all ages, while youth and young adults are in a stage of life when they are especially open to exploring the meaning of their lives and where they might find a fulfilling way to contribute to the world. If we do not provide the chances to explore Christian vocations, then where else will it happen? School activities, sports and other organizations they are involved with do not offer this.

The pathway to additional faith based leadership roles will not be nearly so clear or productive, if we do not partner with others responsible four primary dimensions of leadership formation. Those areas are identifying, assessing, preparing and deploying spiritual leaders for specialized roles within the church and society at large. There are numerous ways that we can support the efforts of our friends and colleagues to help in this process.

First, encourage leaders in our midst to recognize their gifts and graces and other opportunities where they might be applied to great benefit for the good of all. Second, we can regularly expose persons to information and mentors who can describe the variety of ordained and lay leadership possibilities. We can, also, teach them how to enter ministry exploration processes that are in place already, which are designed to help persons to prayerfully explore their vocational calling. Third, we can get permission from persons with a passion and giftedness for leadership, so we can share their names and contact information with local church leaders, Bishops, cabinets and others responsible for recruiting

and deploying leaders who can encourage and nurture them further. Fourth, we can work hand in hand with Bishops, cabinets and Boards of Ordained Ministry to co-sponsor ministry exploration camps and retreats or training events for those already in leadership.

Another powerful contribution, which camp and retreat ministry is well suited for, is the renewal of leaders. All leaders reach the point from time to time when they become exhausted and sometimes disillusioned. The opportunity to get away from the rigorous pace to enter a time of rest from responsibilities can be realized in the beauty, silence and solitude available at camp and retreat centers. It is a place of hospitality and encouragement, where people can pray, renew and talk with God about the direction of their lives. We should not underestimate the importance of this aspect of our ministry.

**Ephesians 4:1 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all. 7 But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift...11 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.**

**Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect. 3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, 5 so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. 6 We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; 7 ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; 8 the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. 9 Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; 10 love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord.**

**Titus 1: 7 For a bishop, as God's steward, must be blameless; he must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or addicted to wine or violent or greedy for gain; 8 but he must be hospitable, a lover of goodness, prudent, upright, devout, and self-controlled. 9 He must have a firm grasp of the word that is trustworthy in accordance with the teaching, so that he may be able both to preach with sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict it.**

**Mark 6: 30 The apostles gathered around Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. 31 He said to them, "Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. 32 And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves.**

**Isaiah 40: 28** Have you not known? Have you not heard? The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable. **29** He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. **30** Even youths will faint and be weary, and the young will fall exhausted; **31** but those who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.

**1 Timothy 4: 12** Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. **13** Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching. **14** Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. **15** Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. **16** Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things...

**Hebrews 13: 7** Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.

### **C. Become Informed and Collaborate with the Exciting Outreach Work Being Done By Local Churches, Districts, Conferences, National and International United Methodist Groups and Agencies**

These types of cooperative partnerships have generated very powerful experiences that have touched people deeply both within and beyond the church. A few examples are: day camps with migrant workers, trips to work with indigenous leaders to build camps and retreat centers in other nations, retreats for persons living with HIV/AIDS, missionary visits to children and youth camps, creation vacation camps for low income families, mission trips, earth care ministries, disaster relief, and on and on. These are experiences that require a relationship with others, in order to bring visions to reality. We can also be a witness and a voice with the larger denomination around issues that are part of our strong points and focus, such as environmental justice, abuse prevention, welcoming the stranger, etc.

**1 Corinthians 12: 4** Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; **5** and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; **6** and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. **7** To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

**1 Corinthians 3: 8** The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. **9** For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

**Isaiah 42: 6** I am the LORD, I have called you in righteousness, I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, **7** to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.

**James 1:22** But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. **23** For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; **24** for they look at themselves and, on going away, immediately

forget what they were like. 25 But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act--they will be blessed in their doing.

2 Corinthians 5: 17 So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; 19 that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. 20 So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

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<sup>i</sup> *The 2004 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (The United Methodist Publishing House: Nashville, TN, January 2005) ISBN: 0687350646

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