

The Seven Foundations of United Methodist Camp & Retreat Ministries

PROVIDING INTENTIONAL PLACES APART: SABBATH, SILENCE, SOLITUDE, AND PRAYER

Providing Opportunities for People to Quench Their Thirst for God

Spiritual retreats tap into a universal human desire. Sometimes it is hard for people to articulate, but we all long to connect more deeply with God. Retreats tap into a widespread search in modern society that some cannot fully articulate, but which has sparked their interest in spirituality. Retreats serve as an oasis for the soul where people can drink of the “living water”. Retreats are about removing the barriers that keep people from noticing and relating with the ever-present Love, Who is with us and for us. The unabashed aim of faith-based retreats is helping persons seek God with their whole heart.

Sabbath Rest

Faith-based leadership relies on truly trusting the Spirit of God to be present and to transform. It seems important to recognize that the patterns within vibrant camp and retreat practices will likely seem a bit unusual, at first, for many participants, guests and even we who are accustomed to the harried life of over producing and over consuming. If we fail to cherish the unique gifts of our ministry and spiritual heritage, we can easily lapse into becoming activity directors thinking our job is to keep people busy and entertained as consumers rather than “being” with God and “being” God’s people on retreat and in the wider world.

Silence and Solitude

The importance of silence and its power to help persons develop a greater sensitivity to God’s presence are echoed in the teachings of some of the great mentors of the Christian tradition who are resonating with creative and passionate Christian mentors of our own time.

14th-century Christian mystic Meister Eckhart said, “Nothing in all creation is so like God as silence.”

Silence of the heart is necessary so you can hear God everywhere – in the closing of the door, in the person who needs you, in the birds that sing...¹

---Mother Teresa

Prayer

Following the example of Jesus, we can be teachers of prayer. We ought not to assume that those we host are fully practiced in prayer, and we can enrich those who are practitioners of

¹ *No Greater Love* by Mother Teresa (New World Library: Novato, California , 2001), p 10 ISBN: 1577310063

prayer by teaching new ways to pray. There are seasons to prayer and having a wider exposure to many forms of prayer enables persons to select those modes that resonate best and that enhance the vibrancy of their relationship and connection with God.

Scriptural Foundations: Psalm 42:1-2, Jeremiah 29:12-13, Exodus 20:8-11, Matthew 11:28-29, 1 Kings 19:11-13, Psalm 46:10, Mark 1:35, Mark 6:30

NURTURING CHRISTIAN FAITH AND DISCIPLESHIP

One unique gift of Christian camps and retreat centers that other types of camp and retreat settings rarely highlight is the opportunity to learn and practice the Christian path. The word disciple means someone who seeks and incorporates the guidance of a teacher – in our case Jesus Christ. Christian discipleship, then, is a growing trust in God that integrates Christian faith and teachings as a way of life. Grace refers to the love that God extends without exception to everyone. This priority is crucial to our central purpose.

Provide Environments and Experiences Of Genuine Grace

Nurturing Christian discipleship begins by a very intentional way of relating with each and every guest and camper that reflects God's love for them and God's active participation in their welfare. It begins in the recognition that no one is outside the embrace of God, despite whatever challenges, regrets or failures. We are called to honor the divine with and within every guest and participants. This love in action which is given even when people don't recognize the source to be God is called prevenient grace by John Wesley. Without a doubt, such a level of respect and genuine concern for the good of all is healing and helps persons to recognize God's companionship in ways that call forth responses of love, faith and a desire to walk with God. Jesus embodied this wideness of grace and taught it to his disciples.

Encourage A Growing Trust in God

The Holy Spirit continues to reveal more of God's love until there is a realization of God's presence by a person. This recognition invites a response - decisions of all kinds to move toward the Giver of Life and to make choices to trust in the presence, forgiveness and guidance of God. Oneness with God develops in the fertile soil of an expanding faith or confidence in the Divine. As camp and retreat leaders, we work with the Holy Spirit to gently give persons hope and affirm God's love for them. Confidence or trust in the depth of this love demonstrated in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus John Wesley calls justifying grace.

Inspire Persons to Open Themselves to Transformation

Christian discipleship continues through the dedication to live a life of love as a follower of the way of love. This is no easy undertaking and spiritual teachers remind us that we cannot generate this love on our own power. God will, however, work in us to transform the aspects of our personalities and lifestyles that cause harm to ourselves and others so that we can be an expression of love more and more consistently. This help – this blessing – this energy to change is called sanctifying grace by Wesley. As we open ourselves more and more to God's guidance and to be avenues for and embodiments of love and justice, we receive this gift of transformation that shapes us toward our fuller selves as children of God – made in the image of God. Wesley encouraged the practices of doing good and avoiding harm as ways the Holy Spirit often uses to transform our hearts and lives, if we are genuine in our intention to grow in love and are not doing

it for other motives.

Scriptural Foundations: Galatians 5:22-25, John 1:14-16, 1 John 4:19-21, Matthew 9:10-11, Matthew 4:18-20, Matthew 9:20-22, Romans 10:12-14, Galatians 3:11, Ephesians 3:16-19, Luke 19:5-9, Luke 6:36-38, Mark 7:17-23, Luke 4:16-21, Romans 12:1-5, Luke 6:45-49, Ephesians 2:10, 1 Peter 4:8-11, 3 John 1:11, Jeremiah 29:11-13, Matthew 14:22-23, Acts 12:2-4, 1 Thessalonians 5:15-24

EXTENDING GENUINE CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY AND COMMUNITY

The Core of Christian Hospitality

Welcoming people and doing all we can to engender a true experience of community touches people profoundly. We live in a time when people long for connections, but often hesitate to reach out to form new relationships. Families move from place to place more often today than in previous generations, thus displacing them from tight knit family and friends. Individuals frequently do not even know their own neighbors. Even members of the same congregation may know each other only on superficial levels. Moving from discomfort and at times general suspicion of strangers to friendship is a precious blessing prioritized within Christian camp or retreat settings. Genuine love expands the meaning of community by drawing people together despite their differences. The movement from mere politeness and tolerance to a greater level of care and recognition emerges when a group opens themselves to the Spirit of God. Christ models a wide embrace, including those shunned by others.

In his book, **The Road Less Traveled**, M. Scott Peck gives the following definition of love that births true community.

I define love thus: The will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth. ²

Sensitivity to People's Needs

Another important dimension of Christian hospitality is a keen sensitivity to people's true needs. Remarkable hosts and hostesses learn not only to be observant and to listen with attention to their guests, they can actually predict needs even before someone asks. Providing for an expectation or going beyond it before the request is made honors the guest, and this type of hospitality delights not just satisfies. We make all kinds of preparations and predict the wants of those we invite to our own homes, and in the same way this is true of camp and retreat centers dedicated to be a place of God. Loosely based on Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of need, levels of human need might be described as: 1. Sustenance, 2. Safety and Shelter, 3. Sense of Belonging, 4. Sharing Their Contribution, 5. Spiritual Expression and Fulfillment

Welcome the Stranger – Extending Sacred Hospitality

Your own welcome of strangers and inspiring them to welcome each other are faith filled acts, because they embody God's love of the stranger. The Judeo-Christian heritage holds this as a

² *The Road Less Traveled* by Scott M. Peck M.D. (Touchstone Book published by Simon and Schuster, New York, 1978), p 81

premier value. Providing hospitality includes an inherent humility, too, which acknowledges that we are often in the position of being a stranger ourselves and it is part of the story of the people of God. Not only does hosting express God's love, but the stranger or guest often turns out to be the giver from God and, we, the recipient. Check out just a few of the encounters, when an act of hospitality leads to a revelation from God. (Genesis 18:1-14, Luke 24:28-32, Luke 19:1-10)

Covenant to Love One Another and Share the Fruit of the Spirit

A proactive step is planting the realization that participants help create the experience they seek. Help them discuss what they need and hope for from one another and the retreat. Introducing the Scriptural texts and principles of love and Christian community serves as one aspect of launching the covenant to care for one another among staff, volunteers and guests.

Scriptural Foundations: Deuteronomy 10:17-19, Matthew 25:34-40, Hebrews 13:1-2, Leviticus 19:33-34, Mark 12:29-31, 1 John 4:18-21, Galatians 5:22-25, Romans 12:9-17, 1 Peter 4:8-11, Colossians 3:12-15, 1 Corinthians 12:4-7

DEVELOPING CHRISTIAN SPIRITUAL LEADERS

Leaders play a critical part in shaping the present and the future for good or for ill. Leadership assumes that others will be involved. Leadership training has aspects of personal development for the leader. If, however, the leader fails to engage, inspire, and prepare others to act, all that personal development never translates into actual leadership. Leadership, then, serves as a catalyst to rally others. Trustworthiness requires both "integrity and skill". Integrity refers to the congruency between what a leader says and what that leader prioritizes and does. Skill implies a recognized level of ability and experience in effectively guiding groups to launch out on a particular new endeavor together.

Christian Spiritual Leadership

Most faith-based camp and retreat centers provide staff, board members, volunteers and participants with ample opportunities to develop generalized leadership abilities, but if this is all we do then we fall short of our full mission. We seek to nurture a special type of leadership - Christian Spiritual Leadership. Spiritual refers to "God", which indicates that the leader continually seeks the Holy Spirit's guidance and engages the individual or group being led to discern God's purpose when choosing attitudes, direction and action. Christian, of course, refers directly to Jesus Christ. Jesus epitomizes Spiritual leadership, so we focus on his life, ministry and teachings as a guide for faithful living and leadership.

Servant Leadership

Jesus had some radical ideas about leadership. From his perspective, the one who leads is not the one who is served, but the one who serves. This represents a marked departure from many concepts of leadership where greatness is equated with getting others to do what you want them to, often for one's own benefit, or to be seen as successful. Not so with Christian Spiritual Leadership. We are called to be among those who use their influence for the common good.

Teachable Moments

Jesus frequently used the unplanned experiences he encountered to draw out spiritual

wisdom and reflection. This ability to observe life and then to get people to consider the deeper meanings of situations is a powerful way to teach and guide. Shared activities at camp or while on retreat become an avenue for reflection and seeking wisdom. Planned programs are certainly beneficial; however, some of the most powerful learning will happen in those moments that are not part of a curriculum. This aspect of Christian Spiritual leadership requires a true grasp of Christian teachings and sensitivity to where people are and what might move them further in their Spiritual journey.

Grow Leaders by Engaging Them in Leadership

Modeling is not enough, however, because leaders become leaders by actually leading. It is vital to help prepare and move people into actual leadership, if they are to grow and have the ability to guide others now and in the future. It, also, helps tremendously to become aware of the particular gifts of a person, so their leadership roles can be matched to their interests, abilities and personalities. The same can be said of matching leadership opportunities to an individual's age level and developmental abilities.

Scriptural Foundations: Matthew 20:25-28, 1 Peter 4:10-11, Mark 9:33-35, 1 Peter 3:8, Philippians 2:1-11, Proverbs 11:2, John 13:12-15, Matthew 26:26-28, Matthew 13:31-34, Mark 12:41-44, John 4:5-15, John 8:5-11, Luke 10:25-37, Mark 6:30-31, Luke 4:18-21, Matthew 27:55b-56, Mark 1:16-20, Exodus 18:17-23, Matthew 28:18-20, 1 Timothy 4:12, Romans 12:4-10, 1 Corinthians 12:4-20 and 26-27, Ephesians 4:11-13

TEACHING CREATION CARE AND APPRECIATION

The waters nourishing modern camp and retreat ministry run deep within United Methodist heritage. Early on in the 1730's, John Wesley made a fundamental decision that would launch the Methodist movement into the mainstream of an historic "spiritual awakening" flowing from Europe into North America. With colleagues, he boldly chose to move preaching and faith formation into the "open air" where the people would have new access and new opportunities to hear and respond to the Good News. Though varying in its many forms modern day Christian camp and retreat ministry are an expression of that same vital intention.

It is crucial for camp and retreat leaders to perceive and value the unparalleled Spiritual benefits of having persons spend time outdoors as part of the process of seeking God and being found by God. The creation often sparks joy and thanksgiving. Faith communities have discovered time and time again that the natural world is a powerful avenue of God's self-revelation. Nature renews, stirs a sense of awe, and reveals insights into the meaning of life. The creation speaks of the Creator and can draw us closer to the Giver of Life.

Encourage People to Listen in New Ways, because the Creation Speaks of God

The Psalmist highlights an abiding feature of nature, if we have the ears to hear it. The creation is constantly telling the glory of God. The author of gospel of John makes an inseparable link between Christ and all of creation. All things come into being through the Word – the life-giving, creative dimension of God. The Word, which was with God and was God, sparks the creation and it is all a communication and expression of love from our Creator. The Gospel writer shares the good news that this same Word lived and lives among us in Jesus Christ. The Word that brings forth life is linked to Christ, and therefore is a dimension of Christian faith and discipleship.

What God brings into being, therefore, deserves our utmost respect and effort to preserve. Every species has messages from God and much to say about God, because they are expressions of the Source of All. Great Christian hymns such as, "This is Our Father's World",

echo some of these long-standing teachings, in lyrics like “All nature sings” and “God speaks to me everywhere”.³ “God of the Sparrow, God of the Whale” is a modern hymn we, also, sing.

Help Persons Learn about the Natural World as a Source of Wisdom from God

In addition to telling the glory of God, scriptures point to the diversity of creatures and ecosystems as sources of Divine wisdom and instruction. Other forms of life can be our mentors offering essential lessons on life, if we humans are humble enough to be receptive. Solomon, for example, was given the gift of wisdom so he could lead the people well. Much of this wisdom was passed on in lessons he gained from time spent reflecting on the natural world. He developed thousands of proverbs and songs - many drawn from knowledge and observation of life outdoors.

The Goodness of Creation and the Call to Love

Scripture and Christian tradition depict creation as a process that births a community, not human beings in isolation. In Genesis one, each part of creation is deemed good by God in their own right, even before human beings come on the scene. In the first creation account, we actually share our “day” of creation with other land animals. In Genesis Chapter two, our connection with the earth and the rest of creation gets expressed in the fact that we are “made from the dust of the earth”. The word for earth or ground is “Adamah” in Hebrew, thus “Adam” – which represents humanity – “of the earth or ground”. All life, as we know it, is tied together. We are a part of each other both theologically, and as it turns out biologically. God loves the entire creation and thus rests our call to teach and do the same.

Scriptural Foundations: Psalm 19:1-4; John 1:1-5 and 14, Psalm 148, Romans 1:20-23 and 25, 1 Kings 4:29-33, Genesis chapters 1&2, Psalm 8, Psalm 24:1, Genesis 9:11-16, Romans 8:19-21, Colossians 1:15-20, Leviticus 25:1-5, Job 12:7-10

COLLABORATING WITH UM CHURCHES AND AGENCIES

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. 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.

Move Beyond the Boundaries of Our CR Centers

In very practical terms, UM camp and retreat ministry leaders and committees must be genuinely engaged 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 certainly remain attentive to the current Christian hospitality, programs, and operations of the

³ *The United Methodist Hymnal* (The United Methodist Publishing House: Nashville, TN, 1999), Hymn 144

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.

Paragraph 130 of the Book of Discipline of the UMC: 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 such as 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...*⁴

Become Informed and Collaborate

We cannot reach our full potential as a ministry avenue without finding out what our partners are doing and what visions God has given them as a community of faith or agency of the local or global church. This requires reading information disseminated by local churches and conference, national and international UM ministries. Even more, collaborations grow out of direct conversations and relationships with leaders within these groups. In this way, the programs and experiences we offer are more likely to resonate with true needs be addressed by our congregations and agencies. It is a blending of the vision of our center and the unique gifts and graces of camp and retreat ministry with the discernment of where God is leading UM congregations and leaders from the wider connection.

This is not to say, in any way, that we don't offer experiences that we feel led to offer by God, but it does mean that God will add to those through genuine listening and collaborations with other dedicated leaders and groups moving proactively to follow God's lead as well. Do we take the time to get informed, to learn, to dialogue, and to listen? Part of our mission is to bring the unique power of camp and retreat ministries as an aid in vital ministry goals within the connection. Let us be interested beyond ourselves and attentive to the movement of the Spirit.

Scriptural Foundations: Ephesians 2: 19, Matthew 28:18-20, Hebrews 10:23-25, Romans 16:1-9, Ephesians 4:1-13, Romans 12:1-11, Titus 1:7-9, Mark 6:30-32, Isaiah 40:28-31, 1 Timothy 4:12-16, Hebrews 13:7, 1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 1 Corinthians 3:8-9, Isaiah 42:6-7, James 1:22-25, 2 Corinthians 5:17-20

EQUIPPING GUESTS TO DO LOVE AND JUSTICE

From its inception, our denomination has emphasized the inextricable link between Christian community and doing love and justice in the wider world. The intent of Christian camp and retreat ministry is not to isolate people from real life. Within the Christian community setting of a camp and retreat center, persons find renewal, insights, practices, and new visions for the possibilities of life that find expression in their return from "the mountain-top".

Make the Link Between the Mountaintop and the Road to the Cross

Jesus often took time apart for renewal and communication with God. These spiritual retreats fueled the advance of his ministry. The story of the transfiguration illustrates that Jesus linked

⁴ *The 2004 Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (The United Methodist Publishing House: Nashville, TN, January 2005) ISBN: 0687350646

these times apart with his call to bring abundant life and to suffer if need be for love. The disciples wanted to make him a dwelling so he could stay and live in the holy place where he had such a profound and joyful spiritual experience, but he would not permit that.

Camps and retreats are transformative experiences that inspire us to lives of service. Furthermore, when the inevitable valleys of sacrificial living are encountered, the memories of the mountaintop (and new mountain-top experiences) become a source of strength. Jesus' life exemplified the values and actions of God's reign – a world in which God's desire and love becomes real in the present. To pray the Lord's Prayer – "thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven" - is to commit oneself to participate in bringing that into reality.

Covenant to Do Love and Justice

Micah 6:8 He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

"To do justice" is rooted in God's very nature, a chief attribute of which is concern for the poor and the oppressed. Micah 6:8 makes clear that justice making is an activity of the faithful and not merely a theoretical principle. The Hebrew word for "kindness" in Micah 6:8 is *hesed*, which means covenant faithfulness and/or steadfast love. Therefore, just as God has been faithful to the covenant community, we are to be faithful to God through extending steadfast love. Finally, to "walk humbly" is best translated to walk carefully or circumspectly. Of course, the operative word is "walk," which implies again that what the Lord requires is action, not just belief. This covenant can be lived out within the camp and retreat setting and by educating and motivating people to take it beyond the place of their retreat or camp experience.

Embrace and Support People Beyond Our Faith Tradition Doing the Work of God

A lesson that Jesus lifts up prominently in the story of Good Samaritan is that people who love and do the work of God cannot be seen as limited to our own church groups. Jesus, for instance, chooses a Samaritan as the example of one who has true compassion in loving one's neighbor rather than a Jew from his own faith tradition. A major point of the parable is that those who love their neighbor, those who are compassionate as God is compassionate, those who are sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and those who are faithful can be found in many groups. All non-profit groups have to be doing something to better life and the society or they cannot be a 501C3. Let's serve them, inspire them, thank them, and celebrate the good they do. One of the great untold dimensions of the UM Churches impact is our hosting of not-for-profit groups and their leaders who find renewal, plan their service to the world and even carry out their programs at our camp and retreat centers. This then flows forth to touch hundreds of thousands of lives each and every year.

Scriptural Foundations: Mark 9:2-8, Mark 9:34-35, Luke 10:25-37, Luke 7:1-10, Matthew 6:9-10, Micah 6:8, Exodus 3:7, Romans 8:22-23, Hebrews 10:23-25,

It is important to note that this document is a much abbreviated form of 7 very rich documents. Everyone who receives this abbreviated summary is encouraged to request and read the original documents. To request copies, please contact Diane Coppock and request the 7 Foundations of UM Camp and Retreat Ministry documents:

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Thank you! We give thanks for all you do as camp and retreat leaders to touch so many with the love of God.