

## **FAQs for Strategic Discernment Process and Pilgrim Point Camp**

### **The Strategic Discernment Process was announced at our Annual Meeting in June 2018. What has happened since then?**

DeYoung Consultants was retained to lead a Conference-wide process of information gathering throughout the summer. An electronic survey was sent to everyone in the Conference for whom we had email addresses; focus groups and individual interviews were also held. All of that data was collated and then presented to the Board at a day-long retreat in November; themes, concerns, and key questions were identified.

A Pilgrim Point Camp Working Group was convened. This group did intensive work to consider the future of outdoor ministries for the MN Conference from every angle. They benefited from the expertise and facilitation of Bill Bourdon, Executive Director of the UCC's Outdoor Ministries Association. They produced a report for the Board which raised 7 potential scenarios for outdoor ministries in the Conference. Ultimately, they narrowed their recommendation to the Board down to two scenarios: 1) invest approximately \$3 million into the Pilgrim Point property to convert it to an adult retreat center on a smaller footprint of land; or 2) sell the Pilgrim Point property & invest in a new model of outdoor ministries that would not require owning our own property. The Board and Pilgrim Point Camp Committee (PPCC) met together for a full day in January to weigh both scenarios and consider all implications in a conversation facilitated by Bill Bourdon.

The Board simultaneously retained an engineering firm to help us conceptualize how we might sell a portion of the PPC property in order to create revenue to fund investment in the remaining property. An appraisal of the PPC property was also conducted. A wide financial assessment of the Conference was also performed by a consultant and a report received in January.

At a special meeting in February, the Board focused exclusively on the question of outdoor ministries in the Conference and reviewed a vision paper outlining what a new model of outdoor ministries might look like if we didn't own a camp. At its March meeting, the Board voted unanimously to sell the PPC property and utilize the proceeds to support a new model of outdoor ministries and other ministries and core values of the Conference.

Throughout the process, documents and information were transparently shared with the Conference via COMMAntary. Three “Conference Conversations” were hosted prior to March; several more will be convened between March and early June.

A full detailing of the Strategic Discernment Process can be viewed [HERE](#).

### **What were some key learnings from all the feedback gathered?**

- Relationships between the Board, staff, congregations, and pastors are generally healthy. Individual and congregational regard for the Conference staff is generally high.
- The Conference’s work around our 2020 Vision was affirmed and celebrated.
- Members long for and need deeper connections and relationships of support across the Conference. Clergy in particular desire a stronger web of support.
- The need for stronger communications throughout the Conference was emphasized.
- Conference members are generally proud of and grateful for the Conference’s commitment to a lifting a prophetic and progressive Christian witness on matters of society and justice, although that witness is also an occasional place of tension. There is a desire for the Conference to make the link between such prophetic witness and the texts and traditions of our faith more explicit.
- There is a deep hunger for leadership development evident across the Conference. This must entail equipping and supporting clergy and providing formats for leadership development of laity.
- Faith formation across the generations is of high value.
- Interest in developing a broader approach to outdoor ministry was clear.
- There remains concern about the “divide” between our metro and greater Minnesota membership. Greater understanding of the needs of our rural churches, and deeper intentionality about connecting congregations, is desired.

**In addition to decisions being made about Pilgrim Point Camp, what other decisions are currently being informed by the strategic discernment process?**

The future of outdoor ministries in the Conference necessarily required an enormous portion of the discernment process thus far. Other decisions that still lie ahead in this process will include: 1) determining the key missional priorities of the Conference that will inform subsequent planning & ministry; 2) financial planning for a the long-term sustainable future of the Conference; 3) determining the appropriate staff structure that is both financially sustainable and reflective of our chosen missional priorities; 4) determining the appropriate governance structure that will best support our work; 5) setting a basic understanding of what the essential role of the Conference is in the collective life of our Church.

A chart outlining decision-making and work still to be accomplished in the remainder of this process can be accessed [HERE](#). Decision-making is likely to continue through the remainder of 2019, and implementation of decisions will be phased over the next several years.

**How much are finances driving the strategic discernment conversations?**

The Conference entered into this discernment process from a position of good health and strong relationships; we did not enter into this process as a reaction to crisis, financial or otherwise. We did want to be mindful, however, of longer term considerations and gain a clear-eyed view of our financial position as part of this process.

An outside consultant was identified to do an objective [assessment of our financial health](#). This assessment was performed at the end of 2018 and that report was presented to the Board of Directors and members of the PPCC in early January. While it affirmed that the overall financial position of the Conference was healthy at present, it also noted trends that were troubling when projecting out to 2025. Those trends included ongoing decline in giving to OCWM, our single largest source of revenue. It also studied our current utilization of temporarily restricted and Board-restricted funds to support specific ministries of the

Conference, and projected a concerning depletion of those funds if a current level of expenses is largely maintained and no replenishment of those funds occur. The same assessment offered a glimpse of financial scenarios and implications related to either selling PPC or retaining it and investing new capital into the property.

## **Pilgrim Point Camp & Outdoor Ministries**

### **What decision has the Board made about the future of Pilgrim Point Camp?**

The Board voted unanimously at its March meeting to sell Pilgrim Point Camp and to utilize the proceeds of that sale to support a new model of outdoor ministries and other missional priorities and core values of the Minnesota Conference.

### **Will outdoor ministry (broadly speaking) be a long-term missional priority of the Conference?**

Yes. The Board affirmed that outdoor ministries provide an essential way for our churches and members to grow in relationship with each other and with God's abundant Creation. We will build into our future planning an infrastructure of staff and financial resources that will allow us to develop a new model of outdoor ministries in the Conference that will be widely accessible to churches in all parts of the Conference and provide diverse and exciting opportunities for experiencing God's Creation and building deep relationships. Outdoor ministry in the Minnesota Conference will not look the same as it has, but it will be a valuable and prioritized ministry.

### **What were the key factors that led to the Board's decision about PPC?**

The last 10 years of experimentation, concerted effort, and fairly significant investment of resources at Pilgrim Point Camp did not yield sustained, increased use of the camp by Conference members. Over the last 10 years the Pilgrim Point Camp Committee, staff, and Board of Directors has tried a number of things to strengthen our ministry at PPC and increase its usage. You can find a 10-year timeline [HERE](#). We took the programmatic recommendations from the Kaleidoscope report and changed the model of our outdoor ministry to one more

congregationally-oriented. We addressed a significant amount of deferred maintenance. We sought other partners within our Conference (Wayzata Community Church) and outside our Conference (national UCC, Deaf Family & Friends Camp) who had interest in utilizing our camp for their own programming in order to expand our revenue and ensure more consistent use of the camp. When Kaleidoscope Consulting recommended an investment of millions of dollars in the camp facility, we performed a professional 'feasibility study' to determine whether a successful campaign of that nature was feasible, and learned that it was not. We considered a more formalized, long-term partnership with Wayzata Community Church and commissioned a joint task group to explore that option. We partnered with Luther Crest to provide site management, thereby strengthening those efforts while allowing our Conference staff to concentrate on good programming. And while we experienced occasional increases in camp usage and registrations, the general trend was one of declining use among our Conference churches. At present, only 43 of our Conference's 125 congregations consistently send campers to Pilgrim Point.

Other factors included:

- The recognition that PPC was simply farther than many of our churches desired to travel for camp experiences, especially in a state where so many camps and retreat centers are available.
- Investing approximately \$3 million into the PPC facility would necessarily mean putting aside a number of other ministries in our Conference in order to focus resources (dollars, staff time, and energy) on PPC alone.
- The information gleaned from our campaign feasibility study in 2014 that we do not have the capacity to raise millions of dollars in the Conference.
- The wisdom we received from outdoor ministry experts that in order for a church camp to be financially sustainable today, 50-80% of the camp's "business" must come from non-church users. (This is demonstrably the case at several Conference-owned camps in the UCC.)
- The demographics of our state and of our congregations do not suggest that a youth-oriented camp model makes good sense.

- Input gathered from interviews, focus groups, and surveys throughout the discernment process indicated interest in a more broadly conceived model of outdoor ministries that would not be geographically bound to one site.

### **What kind of research or information-gathering did the Board do to arrive at this decision?**

Over the past year, the Conference Board of Directors has worked in partnership with the Pilgrim Point Camp Committee to complete a thorough exploration of potential options for sustainable ministry at Pilgrim Point and other outdoor ministry models. Following is a summary of the work completed:

#### January-June 2018

- A joint task force made up of members from the Board and the Pilgrim Point Camp Committee was formed to develop long-range financial needs for PPC, including 5-year budget projection and deferred maintenance and capital replacement needs. In addition, the working group explored potential options for stabilizing camp operations through outsourcing and possibilities for increasing revenue through limited land or shoreline conservancy partnerships.
- Contracted with Kaleidoscope to prepare a [market analysis](#) for Pilgrim Point that included a limited assessment of external rental potential and possible long-term partner relationships.
- Worked with a civil engineering firm to explore options for a partial sale of an undeveloped and unused portion of Pilgrim Point property to fund ongoing facilities and operational needs at camp.
- Engaged an appraiser to provide a real estate appraisal for the “partial sale” plan and to provide a full appraisal of the Pilgrim Point Property.

#### July-December 2018

- The Board authorized Pilgrim Point Camp Committee to engage external consulting services to explore options for long-term sustainability of outdoor ministries at Pilgrim Point. The camp committee contracted with

Bill Bourdon, Executive Director of the Outdoor Ministries Association United Church of Christ, and formed a working group made up of camp committee members, staff, two members of the Board of Directors and two additional representatives from the Conference at large. The working group thoroughly examined seven scenarios for outdoor ministries in the Conference ranging from maintaining the status quo to making significant capital investment to full divestment of Pilgrim Point. The working group presented their preliminary report to the board of directors at a meeting in early November 2018 and presented the final report to the Board in mid-November. The full report was made immediately available to the entire Conference and may be accessed [HERE](#).

- December 2018-January 2019 – Conference Staff and the Board hosted three information and listening sessions for Conference members to learn about the working group recommendations, the broader strategic discernment process, and to ask questions and comment on the recommendations.

**How many congregations in our Conference currently utilize Pilgrim Point Camp on a regular basis? How many individuals in our Conference have been campers at PPC in recent years?**

Following is a look at the utilization numbers for Pilgrim Point Camp for Minnesota Conference congregations for the last two full seasons, 2016 and 2017:

- During the 2017 season a total of 731 participants from 43 congregations participated in a retreat or camp program. 15 of the 43 participating congregations had two or fewer registrants for the entire season. These numbers represent 2.8% of Conference membership and approximately 34% of conference congregations.
- During the 2016 season a total of 712 participants from 43 individual congregations participated in a retreat or camp program. 17 of the 43 participating congregations had two or fewer registrants for the entire season. These numbers represent 2.6% of Conference membership and approximately 34% of Conference congregations.

## **Will there be any outdoor ministries at all in the Conference if Pilgrim Point Camp is sold?**

Yes. The Board of Directors has reaffirmed the Conference's commitment to Outdoor Ministries as a missional priority and we have begun the work to develop a new vision and model for Outdoor Ministries. You can learn more about this emerging vision [HERE](#).

We are excited about the vibrant and robust camp and retreat options for all ages during the upcoming 2019 season that will be hosted in different locations around the state. During the coming months we will be exploring potential partnerships and collaborative relationships with camps and retreat centers around the state. We will also be reaching out to our local congregations to begin the conversation about your hopes and ideas for maintaining existing programs and developing new, relevant, and vital outdoor ministry opportunities for the 2020 season and beyond.

## **How will the Conference continue to support retreats of individual congregations?**

Individual congregational retreats have become a central part of Pilgrim Point's ministry over the past seven years. While the Conference will no longer have the capacity to host and staff these retreats for our congregations, the Conference will continue to support these important retreat programs in two ways:

- As we develop partnerships with camps, retreat centers, and other program venues around the state we will include access for weekend congregational retreats and family camp experiences as part of our negotiations. We will be able to help connect congregations with multiple host sites around the state to schedule their individual retreat or family camp programs.
- The Conference staff will continue to serve as a resource for congregations who wish to develop intergenerational faith formation programming or opportunities for spiritual exploration for all ages within their retreat programs. Conference staff will not be able to provide on-site program

facilitation but will support congregational programming as resource curators and consultants.

**Will the same camps and programs we've enjoyed at Pilgrim Point Camp be offered in other places in the future?**

Many of the current camp and retreat programs will continue to be offered at other places in the future, but some will not. We will be evaluating all of the current camp and retreat programs and exploring a variety of new Outdoor Ministry opportunities. During the coming months, the Associate Conference Minister of Faith Formation for Children & Youth, the Pilgrim Point Program Director, and other leaders from around the Conference will be connecting with our local congregation to learn about the specific needs, hopes, and ideas for maintaining current programs and developing new opportunities to strengthen the ministries and connections within and among our congregations.

**Will the costs of renting various other facilities for outdoor ministry programs be the same as what PPC costs have been to churches and campers?**

The lodging and meal costs at Pilgrim Point were significantly lower than many other camps and retreat centers in Minnesota. The rates were artificially low and were insufficient to covering operating and program expenses.

There will be a moderate increase for lodging and meal costs for programs we host at other facilities. Based on our experience scheduling programs for the 2019 season, rates have increased 5-20% depending on the program venue.

As a result, we will be offering increased scholarship assistance for Conference-sponsored programs during 2019 and considering ways to continue expanding scholarship availability in subsequent years to maintain the affordability and accessibility for our Outdoor Ministry programs for all ages.

### **What is the Pilgrim Point Camp property worth (monetarily)?**

The assessed value of the property (43.84 acres) is \$9.5 million (land and buildings).

An appraisal will be conducted soon.

### **How is selling Pilgrim Point Camp consistent with our commitment to faithfully steward God's Holy Ground?**

The Board of Directors and Pilgrim Point Camp Committee take seriously our responsibility to be good stewards of the sacred gift we have inherited from previous generations. Much conversation during this process of discernment has been focused on this issue.

We celebrate this season in our Conference when we had the deep privilege of stewarding the precious gift of the Pilgrim Point property. We understand the impulse to want to keep it and protect it forever. We also confess that the daunting reality of consistently maintaining a property and facility often overwhelmed our capacity to be the best stewards and caretakers possible. We acknowledge that there are others who can equally treasure the beauty of Pilgrim Point and may be in a better position to care for this beautiful, sacred space.

### **What types of buyers will the Conference entertain?**

The Board has not placed strict parameters on this question. It has, however, expressed a commitment to avoid buyers that would utilize the property in ways inconsistent with our values. And the Board has specifically asked our Conference Minister to reach out to potential buyers that would utilize the property for their own faith-based outdoor ministry or as public green space. We do not know as of yet whether such potential buyers have any feasible interest.

### **How will the money we get from selling PPC be used?**

A vote of the Board taken at its March 2019 meeting stated that “the Conference use the proceeds of the sale of Pilgrim Point Camp to support a new model of outdoor ministries and other missional priorities and core values of the Conference.” More specificity about this will unfold as we determine more fully what the new outdoor ministry model we imagine will require to support it, and as other missional priorities of the discernment process become clear.

### **What would this decision mean for our current staff?**

For 2019, our current staff will remain focused on providing high quality Outdoor Ministry experiences for all ages. You will find information about this season’s programs [HERE](#).

Moving forward, this decision will shift the focus of our staff from managing and filling a facility to exploring, developing, coordinating and facilitating dynamic and relevant Outdoor Ministry opportunities for all ages. There will likely be changes to the current staffing model. We anticipate a reduction in the amount of time allocated to Outdoor Ministries by the Associate Conference Minister of Faith Formation for Children & Youth (currently at 40%). We will create a new position dedicated to developing and implementing our new model of outdoor ministries in the Conference. That position will be included in our budget for Fiscal Year 2020.

**This document with all of its links is available at <http://uccmn.org/faqs-for-strategic-discernment-process-and-pilgrim-point-camp/>**