

An emerging vision for Outdoor Ministries in the Minnesota Conference UCC

Why Outdoor Ministry?

Outdoor ministry, as a subset of the broader work of faith formation, provides a unique and essential context for faith development, spiritual exploration, and personal growth. Outdoor ministry programs provide varied opportunities for people of all ages to encounter the sacred by connecting with both the natural world and a community of people. By creating spaces that interrupt the routines of daily life and invite people to experience a balance of rest, play, learning, reflection, connection, and solitude, outdoor ministry programs can be transformative and life-giving experiences for individuals, families, and communities. These programs have the potential to strengthen the ministry of the Church by developing, nurturing, and sustaining leaders and creating a strong web of relationships throughout the wider Church.

Purpose:

To enliven the ministry of the Church by providing opportunities to encounter the sacred in the wonder of creation and the welcome of community; to create spaces for transformative and life-giving experiences for individuals, families and communities.

Goals of Outdoor Ministry:

- Foster spiritual and personal growth
- Nurture faith for all ages
- Strengthen connections to the wider Church
- Support the values and justice commitments of the Minnesota Conference UCC
- Identify, equip and support leaders

Strategies for meeting goals:

- Interrupting the regular rhythms and patterns of daily life
- Experiencing radical hospitality and welcome
- Exploring the wonder of the natural world
- Living in temporary intentional community
- Engaging a variety of spiritual and ritual practices, both individually and in community
- Encouraging balance of rest, play, learning, reflection, connection, and solitude

Strategic and practical considerations:

- Consider adding an Outdoor Ministries program director role to Conference staff to develop, coordinate, promote, and facilitate outdoor ministries programs for all ages.
- Identify collaborative partnerships to develop and lead new and ongoing outdoor ministries opportunities (e.g., Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light, The Theater of Public Policy, Penumbra Theater, Convergence Music Project, Earth Guardians, MN Conference Prophetic Witness teams, etc.)
- Need to clarify distinction between outdoor ministry programs and broader faith formation programs within the Minnesota Conference. Outdoor Ministries is a subset of these programs, but with a very distinct focus and purpose. This conversation will have implications for any future staffing model.

- Redefine Pilgrim Point Camp Committee as Outdoor Ministry Team. This group could collaborate with conference staff and leaders from around the Conference to promote, support, and evaluate programs

Programmatic opportunities:

Youth

- Wilderness experience (e.g., Boundary Waters, Fire & Ice, rafting trip, etc.)
- Spiritual pilgrimage (e.g., Ghost Ranch, Iona, Taize, Holden Village, etc.)
- Regional youth gatherings/events in various locations around Minnesota
- Environmental justice/sustainable agriculture immersion experiences

Families

- Family retreat and camp experiences
- Learning-focused family retreats (e.g., Human Sexuality Education, spiritual practices at home, how to have conversation with children/teens, mindful parenting, parent support, etc.)
- Camp or retreat experiences for grandparents and grandchildren
- Retreat or camp programs for support families of LGBTQ+ children/youth
- Retreat or camp opportunities for families of special needs children
- Rites of passage retreats for grandparent or parent/child

Intergenerational

- Traditional camp/retreat experiences focused on community connection and relationship building
- Spiritual Pilgrimage (e.g., Camino de Santiago,)
- Youth and young-adult led programs/retreats/camps for local congregations; could be focused on justice or service engagement, spirituality, community building, worship or other focus area.
- Creation justice focused retreat or camp

Adults

- Spiritual-practice based retreats
- Specific retreat experiences for women, men, couples, etc.
- Clergy retreats for renewal and ongoing support
- Retreats or camps specifically for older adults
- Environmental justice or food justice retreat or work trip
- Retreats or camps for LGBTQ+ adults
- Retreat opportunities for other church staff (e.g., faith formation leaders, musicians, etc.) for renewal and support