Affording the Ministry
We Cannot Afford To Lose

A professional strategic document written for Camp and Retreat Leaders and Conference Leadership responsible for decisions related to the long-term sustainability and financial health of Camp and Retreat Centers and Ministries.
God has given The United Methodist Church a very special gift. We are blessed to be a blessing through one of the most expansive and vital camp and retreat ministry networks of any Christian denomination. The impact of the experiences provided by this ministry pours forth in partnership with our own congregations, agencies and leaders. It, also, opens doors to serve, inspire and strengthen an astounding array of other faith based groups and nonprofits who share our missional passion for transforming individual lives and the wider world through love and justice. Currently, there are more than 220 United Methodist Camp and Retreat Centers in the US and dozens of Methodist related centers present and emerging in other countries.

Because these ministries are locally or regionally operated, it has been difficult until recent times to grasp the combined influence and the number of lives touched. The first national survey of UM Camp and Retreat Ministries, collated in 2003, revealed that close to 1 million people were being served annually by our centers, which was a surprise even to long term camp and retreat ministry professionals. Those who come into our midst through this dimension of the Church are shaped by their experience with us. They then return to faith communities, families and the society at large to influence living realities far beyond the boundaries of our centers. It is crucial, therefore, for leaders of the denomination to consider carefully how to be good stewards of our camp and retreat ministry which has great strategic importance within the mission and future direction of the United Methodist Church.

It is truly a ministry we cannot afford to lose, but many are trying to determine how to afford to operate the ministry well within the changing financial milieu of the denomination and the wider society.

When we, as a Church, consider our current strengths in fulfilling and expanding our mission of "making disciples for the transformation of the world", it seems crucial to recognize that we have an avenue already in place and poised to play a very significant role in the emerging visions and goals of the church as we move forward. We must be proactive not reactive. We are wise to build upon our strengths.
Today, a serious threat to our camp and retreat ministries looms that we can definitely do something about. The issue focuses on how to finance our camp and retreat ministries in ways that are sustainable over the long run. We must forge a dynamic future that continues to produce the great benefits and blessings that these experiences and sacred places provide as a vibrant aspect of how our denomination carries out its Christian mission in partnership with local churches.

There is a convergence of economic stresses from a downpour of factors that has the capacity to sweep viable ministries away unless we build stable foundations to withstand these new pressures. Pressures like skyrocketing health care and insurance, the cost of proper risk management training and systems, the need for funding of other important endeavors like new church development, declining apportioned giving, rising public expectations of our ministries and facilities, constrained conference budgets, along with other high impact dynamics at play within the US and world economic recession. Some experts are predicting the closure of 10% of all camp and retreat centers in the US over the next several years, unless faithful, visionary leaders take action.

Today’s landscape requires that all ministries operate at higher levels in terms of leadership, mission focus and financial sustainability. The financial resources that were once available in conference and district budgets to simply bailout ministries that previously operated at a chronic deficit are much less available today – and in some settings nonexistent. That truth must be genuinely accepted. Most of our ministries receive some level of generous support from our conference and/or district budgets, which is very important to continue where it is possible. Receiving support is quite different from becoming an untenable burden due to poor operating practices, however.

It is crucial to realize that camp and retreat ministry is part of a larger faith community. Many local churches and conferences face the same financial stressors now impacting extension ministries like camp and retreat ministry. This is an opportunity to become stronger on behalf of the whole. Those who recognize the need to adapt and change earlier and then act will have a greater variety of options available in making transitions. Those options narrow in direct proportion to the length of time that we delay in taking serious steps to address what needs to be implemented. This paper attempts to give an overview of key factors that work together for effective, sustainable camp and retreat ministries that are much more likely to remain viable long into the future.

We might look as the situation as we would our own family. If our family faced a period of financial struggle, everyone in the family would be asked to pitch in and take on greater responsibility to see the family through. We are in such a time as a church family, as are most denominations right now and for the foreseeable future. Camp and Retreat Leaders must step up, too.
You are not alone:

Those of us in positions of responsibility within U.M. Camp and Retreat Ministry and the broader circles of Conference leadership are very fortunate that expertise and support is much more widely available today than it has been in previous decades. This is due, in large part, to a more highly trained network of camp and retreat professionals within the UM Church and ecumenically who share best practices and strategies. In our case, the Camp and Retreat Leader Network is a potent source of information and insight. There are, also, professional camp and retreat consultants that can be tapped who have extensive experience through their work with thousands of camp and retreat centers of all types (religiously affiliated, not for profit, and private independent camps).

This paper is written as a tool to assist leadership teams doing their very best to be discerning, prayerful and wise in decision making that impacts camp and retreat ministries of the UMC. These leadership teams include Bishops and Cabinets, Connectional Ministry Staff and Committees, Treasurers and Councils on Finance and Administration, Camp and Retreat Ministry Directors and Boards. There is enormous benefit to seeking out knowledge and then leading the way to effectiveness, because camp and retreat ministry has a significant role to play in our current and emerging priorities as a denomination.

A group of experienced camp and retreat leaders and consultants has prepared this Paper to provide an overview of the areas for action associated with financing this ministry based on practices known to lead to health and vitality. It is our hope that these recommendations will provide a foundation for decisions that move all of our UM camps and retreats toward stronger missional and financial health.

HOW TO AFFORD THE MINISTRY WE CANNOT AFFORD TO LOSE

5 AREAS OF ACTION

♦ Put First Things First
♦ Be Strategic - Respond to Significant Changes in External Realities
♦ Require Prudent Operational Procedures and Practices
♦ Diversify and Expand Resource Streams
♦ Tap Sources of Support, Expertise and Inspiration
The mission of The United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Joining God in that shared mission is what distinguishes Christian camp and retreat ministries from other types of camps and conference centers. It is our heart – our unique gift to the wider society that God has given us to share. Otherwise, we become redundant in providing what others already provide. Camp and Retreat Ministry developed so extensively in our denomination because it so consistently draws persons into a deeper connection with God and offers prime faith forming experiences for people. When we drift from this purpose, we begin to lose the passion and power that is so essential to making a significant difference and to being viable as a ministry of the United Methodist Church.

In the camp and retreat setting, the fulfillment of this mission takes shape through **Seven Foundations of UM Camp and Retreat Ministries** which are the highest priorities shared by UM Camp and Retreat Ministries across the denomination. It is what we must do and must do extremely well. More in-depth papers on each foundation can be found at: www.gbod.org/camping

- **Provide Intentional Places Apart** from the rhythms and responsibilities of daily life where people can come to encounter God, renew, and explore the deeper meaning of their lives
- **Extend Genuine Christian Hospitality and Community** as an open door through which all guests are welcomed into an intentional experience of the loving embrace of Christ.
- **Nurture Christian Faith and Discipleship** - Christian discipleship is a growing trust in God that integrates faith and Christ's teachings as a way of life. Many individuals point to camps and retreats as milestone experiences in their deepening Christian identity and journey.
- **Develop Christian Spiritual Leaders** - This is a prime focus of the denomination and a major strength of camp and retreat ministries. Camps and retreats have long been a key place where laity and clergy have recognized their calls to ministry and hone their leadership skills.
- **Teach Creation Care and Appreciation** - The church has intentionally placed all of our camp and retreat centers within the natural world because creation speaks of God in deep ways. UM Camp and Retreat Centers teach creation care and model it. This commitment to earth care implements the Bishop's vital call to participate in “God's Renewed Creation.”
- **Collaborate with UM Churches & Agencies** - Assisting congregations fulfill their primary aims and collaborating together with UM agencies on their vital goals is core to effective CR ministry, including new church starts and other special emphases.
- **Inspire and Equip All Guests to Do Love and Service** - It is crucial to understand that we almost exclusively serve religiously affiliated and nonprofit groups. We encourage and partner with these groups in the great good they are doing in the world. They too are involved in the “transformation of the world” through love and justice. They, also, need our centers.
Continued conference, district, local church, foundation, and individual support hinges to a larger degree on whether a ministry is clear about the specific outcomes it is endeavoring to achieve. Secondly, actually measured outcomes must be consistently and widely shared along with highlight stories showing what those reports mean in terms of real life impact. People support what they know about and what truly makes a difference.

We need to implement ways to better measure whether we are indeed reaching the positive outcomes we endeavor to. For example in the area of “Developing Spiritual Leaders”, we can become much clearer about the Christian practices, abilities, skills and character traits that are core to Christian Spiritual Leadership and then gear our experiences, services, and sites to help persons to develop and embrace these specific attributes as leaders. We can, then, more reliably determine if children, youth and adults grow in Spiritual leadership as a result of their time with us. Establishing measurable outcomes for each of the 7 Foundation areas will help us sharpen our ministry effectiveness.

Deploy a Skilled Spiritual Leadership Team

Modern camp and retreat ministry is multifaceted and complex. People with a passion for God and a deep commitment to the long-term mission are essential. Key leaders must, also, possess a diversity of abilities needed related to faith formation, operational and staff management, visioning and strategic planning, and much more. We are asking some of our leaders to quickly take on expanded responsibility or excel at a much greater level, as we expect centers to become more self-sufficient financially. There are a wide diversity of factors that go into strengthening a camp and retreat ministry leading to financial health. It does not happen overnight. We might best view these elements of a quality ministry as spokes in a wheel, when one spoke is missing or weak then the whole wheel is weakened and it grows harder to move forward.

The more spokes missing the more unstable the ministry. If staff or volunteers are being asked to take on new responsibilities necessary for the financial turn around and higher standards of quality, be sure they receive adequate training and support. Staff and volunteers with overarching responsibilities for camp and retreat ministry would benefit greatly from participation in UM Camp and Retreat Ministry Certification and other forms of continuing education. Persons not interested, able or committed to grow and to take on pivotal tasks to address the current situation cannot move the ministry forward effectively.

Clearly Articulate the Outcomes and Impact
Passion in leaders becomes a virtue when it is combined with STRATEGIC thinking, planning and execution. Adjectives for “strategic” include opportune, critical, key, principal, and crucial. To be strategic means that decision makers are both AWARE of the needs at the moment and ABLE to make the kinds of choices and changes necessary to respond to current issues. Let’s look at just a few of the changes that we must see as camps and retreats are planned for the future:

**Heavy impact of a “consumer culture and mindset”**
There is a blurring of Not-For-Profit (NPF) and For Profit expectations as increasing competition is at play that is not necessarily mission driven. Certainly churches have a unique spiritual role. This does not eliminate, however, the fact that parents and campers respond based on perceived value in every area. We cannot ignore issues of quality in our deep commitment to transform lives.

**Increasingly diverse demographics**
As the demographics of our churches and communities change, we are compelled to create new and different program models that fit the ethnic and social expectations of our constituency. Some church camps are only doing marginally well in this regard.

**End of unquestioned loyalty to institutional identities**
Camps and retreat centers, along with the local church and other denominational institutions used to be able to expect members to support their organization as part of what it means to be united. No more! Even members judge every part of the organization based on how it meets their individual needs, and if it doesn’t, many are quick to respond to another opportunity that does.

**Changes in financing of ministry**
In the midst of higher operating costs, there is diminishing support from traditional sources. We must broaden our revenue sources to replace what is no longer available.

**Aging buildings and infrastructure with large capital needs**
Many camps are facing inadequate facilities, constructed thirty or more years ago, that no longer meet needs for comfort and more complex expectations. The cost of capital construction requires consistent fund raising which many camp and retreat center leaders are not yet equipped to do.

**Increasing government regulations**
Camps can’t escape the imposition of ever increasing regulations that affect health, safety, construction, infrastructure, environment, personnel management, etc.
Viability is too often seen simply as a financial issue in the arena of treasurers and accountants alone. In truth, the viability of the organization, and its success in generating revenue to cover true costs, has more to do with the ability of leaders to apply strategic thinking to all ministry responsibilities. Strategic thinking is MORE THAN business planning because the goal of business planning is to make money. The goal of camp/center ministry is to transform persons through specific experiences in a way that is financially sustainable. Christian Camp and Retreat Centers are not hotels or motels. There is much more to the ministry than providing lodging rooms, meeting spaces and equipment at a competitive rate. In some ways we look like hotels, but our mission and ministry has very significant distinctions as does the environment we create. For example, many hotels don't care about bringing people together to know and care for one another, but we always do for all our guests and participants. This shapes our facilities, spiritual practices and ways of serving that look similar to the undiscerning eye, but which are not equivalent in the end.

Certainly there are many business techniques and tactics that are very appropriate tools for ministry leaders, and we definitely should learn and glean from that field of expertise. But the application of those tools is based on very different values. For example, business offers opportunities to customers in relation to their ability to pay. That is not the criteria for sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ and moving persons into lives of love and justice that characterize Christian discipleship. What does it mean to think intentionally about setting fees that generate the most revenue and at the same time provide access by every person to a transforming Christian experience or experiences that live out our calling to love and justice as a faith based ministry? Almost all camp and retreat ministries operated by religiously affiliated and non-profits rely on more than fees for service for financial viability. As we discuss and make financial decisions, how do we become proficient in all dimensions of the financial picture while we stay focused on our primary purpose of transforming lives. How do we maintain our identity and not be drawn in by our fears to simply trying to “make money” without mission?

There are United Methodist camps and centers that achieve both missional vitality and financial viability. This paper outlines some of the key characteristics that enable those organizations to keep their ministries thriving in the midst of change. At the forefront, is the presence of strategic leaders—persons with the gifts, graces and training to lead the ministry in shared directions it has never gone before for the good of the ministry and good of those we serve. Being strategic is being an agent of meaningful change that addresses true need. A significant number of leaders are good at management—doing what we already do with excellence, consistency and quality. Those leaders are absolutely necessary, but may not be capable or passionate to move a ministry team into the future when change is required. It is vital to have strategic leaders on staff, on Camp and Retreat Ministry Boards and Committees, and within the wider Conference leadership. This must be intentional. It is wise, also, to deploy the very best conference leaders available to serve on CR boards right now.
Recruit Staff and Volunteers Capable of Guiding Strategic Change Processes
If the director of the camp and retreat center does not have that skill set, then someone who does needs to be recruited to work with the director or the director needs specific training if they have the graces for this type of leadership. The person leading the strategic planning and implementation process must have high integrity, relational skills as well as ability in leading organizational change. He or she will need to have the cooperation and respect necessary to bring others on board.

Innovate and Adapt to Change
Healthy organizations understand that they must always be changing, always be trying new things, always be responding to new needs. Innovation and change that is not detrimental to the ministry in the long run must become a part of the culture in order for a ministry to thrive. This sometimes means that individuals or program groups who cannot change must be helped to become cheerleaders from the sidelines so that they do not block the growth of the ministry, and do not drain resources on ineffective efforts.

Give Responsibility and Authority to an Effective Governing Body
The governing body (may be a committee, commission or board of Camp and Retreat Ministry) that has defined responsibility, that is trained, and that is given authority to provide comprehensive leadership to the program, operation and facilities. These are essential relationships and responsibilities generally observed in an effective governing body:

The membership is drawn from highly capable persons with the specific skills needed to make strategic decisions for the ministry (not necessarily “representative” of a region within a church judicatory) -- program, personnel, board development, ministry expansion, financial management, facility management, strategic planning, and fund raising.

The relationship to other annual conference agencies and to the staff is clear with specific points of mutual accountability and collaboration.

The governing body engages in its own educational process to TRAIN its members how to make strategic decisions and to be very knowledgeable in Camp and Retreat Ministries. Authors like Peter Brinckerhoff (Mission-Based Management) and organizations like www.boardsource.org provide invaluable educational resources to help all non-profit groups be more effective. The UM Camp and Retreat Ministry Support Team also does board training and development based on the best principles of Board Development.

Note—If camp and retreat ministries are being asked to be more financially self-sustaining, they need permission, support and authority to match the responsibility.
Allocate Assets to Fulfill the Mission and Long-Term Vision

It is essential to allocate assets so that key aspects of the ministry are covered – program development, operational subsidies, facility depreciation, etc. On the other hand, it is critical to have resources that can be applied to emerging needs. This primarily takes DISCIPLINE – to budget to cover true costs and not to spend every penny that is available at the time it is received.

Asset allocation also involves shifting assets and resources to move the overall ministry into the strongest future possible. This evaluation includes looking at staffing, property and other major assets to determine and discern how to best serve the population of your region in the long run, while living out your ministry core values. When chronic deficits and inability to meet budget are a pattern for a particular facility, which threatens the viability of the overall ministry then a more detailed examination of the broad spectrum elements needed for a more self-sustaining, quality ministry needs to be done.

In a few cases, the selling of property and reinvestment in other aspects of the ministry may be warranted. Careful study needs to be done before making such a determination. It is not easy to find properties appropriate for camp and retreat settings as less and less land is available and affordable in natural environments. Not only are our own churches depending upon the facilities we own and operate, so are the ecumenical and nonprofit groups who share our passion for love and justice in the wider society.

With that being said, it is clear that leaders at facilities prone to major deficits and frequent unplanned subsidies must turn around that situation. This is crucial and to be taken very seriously. We can’t be naive.

Recognize Financial Challenges Early and Be Mutually Responsible

The current situation of shrinking subsidies has been predictable for some time. In a period of declining membership and increasing expenses, the church ends up with less funding availability. Camp/center leaders should not expect that their proportion will increase while others bear the brunt of the decreases. It is completely unrealistic, however, to think that a camp and retreat ministry can absorb large reductions of funding within a short time frame of less than 3-4 years, if that funding covers current fixed costs. There is a mutual responsibility between conference boards and agencies and camp/retreat boards and staff to anticipate and discuss together the implications of funding reductions from the conference when that is necessary, so that leaders have adequate time to gear up to establish other funding streams. The long-term impact of such cuts should be analyzed. Cutting funding alone is typically inadequate. It may be required in some cases, but often it only addresses symptoms not overall solutions.

Seek Wider Expertise to Maintain Your Edge

There are many reasons to secure the assistance of professional Camp and Retreat consultants or other expertise – to provide insight into specific operational issues; to offer an unbiased perspective on the status of the ministry and its likely future potential; to provide in-depth know how for specific projects (site planning, fund raising, marketing); to assist with the resolution of a difficult situation. Contracting with an experienced consultant will shorten the learning curve and aid the strategic decision-making process.
Recognize the Different Financial Context - The financial system of a camp or retreat/conference center is radically different from the financial system of the annual conference, district or local congregation. The conference, or district or congregation usually has a donation based structure; that is, the predominant source of revenue comes from donations or voluntary contributions. [Even in the apportionment system, the revenue is technically a contribution from a congregation.] There is little to no direct “purchase of services” in the financial system which supports a church, district or conference. Conversely, a camp/retreat center depends on a variety of revenue streams - “earned revenue” from fees (primary), fundraising, grants, etc.

The viability of a camp and retreat center depends on varied income sources, which in turn requires a different set of practices, know how, and follow through for each. Frequently, camp and retreat ministries have staff (sometimes a large staff) making it quite distinct from most other connectional ministries which operate more like committees than non-profit businesses. The financial system of a camp or retreat/conference system more closely resembles a nonprofit than a local church or judicatory. From this perspective, the development, management, and appraisal of the financial system should be according to standards of the best nonprofit fiscal practices, including adherence to GAAP (generally accepted accounting principles). Even if the financial system of the camp or conference/retreat center is embedded within a larger parent body system, it should be administered as much as possible as an autonomous nonprofit financial system.

Eliminate Operating Deficits - If you incur an operating deficit, it should be addressed immediately and concretely. Most deficits occur because revenue falls short of need or expectation. Determine exactly where the shortfall occurred and develop specific tactics to remedy the situation. Do not assume it was a “fluke” and will correct itself. Or, do not assume that with some cost containment, the situation will right itself. Cost containment measures must be implemented but are generally a short-term remedy. Chronic budget deficits are nearly always a case of insufficient revenue and must be addressed accordingly. Revenue shortfall is the result of too few persons (guests or campers), too low a rate, failure to do adequate fundraising, or a combination of these and other factors.

Generate an Operating Reserve - Your budget should allow you to build an operating reserve. While there are numerous theories on the level of cash reserve that is appropriate for a nonprofit, most organizations aim for 3 – 6 months of regular expenses. If you are at the point of just covering your expenses with revenue, then consider adopting a five year strategy which will support the establishment of a reserve.
Have a Reliable Cost Accounting System - In a fee based, or earned revenue, system, one of the most fundamental factors is the accurate analysis of the cost of the services offered. A cost accounting system is an essential element of a fee-based system. A cost accounting system must include all costs associated with the ministry, regardless of the budget in which those costs might be lodged. For example, the salary of a camp director may be included in the budget of a parent organization, such as a conference program ministries budget. The liability insurance may be included in the Trustees budget. Regardless, they should be gathered up and included in a cost accounting system. If significant costs of running the ministry are assumed by volunteers (summer counselors, kitchen or maintenance workers, administrative support), these costs should also be included. Costs should be compiled and then allocated proportionally across the units which produce the revenue. There are budget models based on studies by organizations like the American Camp Association, The Christian Camp and Conference Association, etc. Also, other camps and centers are usually willing to share their budgets and systems; however, formulas are somewhat site specific and must be tailored to reflect your site.

Establish a Balanced and Stable Budget - A viable budget for a camp or conference/retreat center must be balanced, with realistic and accurate projections for revenue. As a general rule of thumb, your budget should approach at least 70-80% earned revenue and 20-30% donations and subsidy. The 20-30% portion would not include gifts designated as camperships or for capital projects (which must be raised through a separate capital fund campaign, as is true for nearly all camp and retreat centers owned by religiously affiliated or nonprofit sponsors), but would include funds received as an annual subsidy from a parent body and unrestricted annual donations.

All fees for services should be fully funded. For example, do not award camperships or scholarships without backing them with real dollars. Your campership funds should reside in a fund balance account apart from your normal operating funds. Do not use campership gifts as a general operating subsidy.

Have an active annual fund through which persons are invited to support your ministry directly. This is an absolutely crucial step in a proactive development plan. Treat any operating subsidy from a parent organization as you would a grant. Most nonprofits strive to have no more than 10% of their budget from any one grantor source. Understand that funds from a parent organization are not a “birthright” and, as with other grants, serve to further the missional goals of the granting organization.

When any revenue figure in a budget is adopted by a governing group, they have set a marketing goal for that budget term. Your revenue should always be expressed in terms of the number of units times the rate: for example $400,000 might translate into 5,000 guest days @ $80 per guest day. When a budget is presented, there must be an accompanying marketing and fundraising plan.
Produce and Share Useful Information

Because the financial system of a camp or center is different from your church or conference, the reports and information that are needed for effective management are different. Availability of real-time information is essential. While month-end and year-end reports are generally useful in a donation based system, they do not allow for timely action in an earned revenue system. A camp or center should have access to real-time information which supports sound management decisions.

Establish An accurate method of projecting revenue

This is essential. A camp or center should know, with reasonable certainty, what revenue it expects in the next 6-12 months. Projection of income is not the same thing as speculation or wishful thinking! Projection means a system which calculates the revenue that will be available based on solid guest and participation reservation data. If the projected revenue from guest and participant fees in the next six months is not sufficient, then steps can be taken to remedy the situation. You won’t know that unless you track reservations and use that to project income. Usually group sizes shrink so you need to determine over time what average decrease in numbers is from what groups say their numbers will be and what they actually end up being.

With some experience, a camp or center should be able to project fiscal year-end figures for a budget with at least 6-8 months lead time, which permits corrective action. The outcome of a fee based budget cannot be effectively redirected 2-3 months from year end, because by then it is too late to seek additional guests and participants (who typically book 6 months to a year out) or adjust spending adequately.

A contribution or donation system can often be affected in that time, generally by urgent appeal to the contributors. If a camp or center budget is headed for a shortfall in 8-12 weeks, there is little time to successfully impact that situation. While emergency appeals can be utilized, that should be an extremely rare course of action. It both signals an intrinsic weakness in your financial system, and is the poorest kind of donor development.

Reports to governing groups should enable a group to ascertain where they are against established benchmarks and to see into the future. Information provided should look both forward and backward. A benchmark may be that at the end of March, 30% of summer camp revenue is received. If the end of March report indicates that $72,000 has been received in summer camp fees, then a board may gauge that they are “on track” with summer camp revenue of $240,000. If however, only $50,000 has been received, then the board and staff should quickly address the situation.
Exercise Positive Cost Containment - Too often, cost containment means cutting back on spending which, in the long run, jeopardizes the ministry. Not having sufficient staff, not completing routine and preventative maintenance, or not adequately funding marketing may address a budget shortfall in the short term, but are not viable means to a stable financial system.

When it comes to cost containment, look for ways your operation can be more efficient. You may be able to “work smarter” by investing in training which enables a staff person to perform some tasks in house instead of contracting them. You may be able to join a purchasing cooperative. You may be able to share equipment with a nearby camp or center, or church.

Always be Cash Positive - Ideally, your camp or conference/retreat center should be cash positive through the year. While this can be challenging with large amounts of seasonal revenue, it is a financial discipline worth pursuing. You can avoid many pitfalls through this practice. If your operation requires short term cash at some point in the year to meet monthly expenditures, then cash should be available through the operating reserve.

Avoid Debt - Debt can be one of the biggest factors that places a camp and retreat ministry in jeopardy of survival. There are only infrequent cases where incurring debt is a sound decision: for example, a construction loan which is backed by campaign pledges in hand and already committed by the donors. Debt on “speculation” is never wise (“we think people will give to the project if we just go ahead…” or “if we build it they will come…”). The second factor that creates debt is cost overruns on capital projects, when estimates are far lower than the actual cost turns out to be. Nearly always capital projects end up being more expensive than anticipated, so that should be factored into the target goal of raised funds. We know of no religiously affiliated or nonprofit camp and retreat operation that funds major capital improvements and new construction purely on guest and participant fees. Capital fund giving is vital and fundraising is a stewardship skill that continues to grow in importance. General maintenance should be covered through fees, however.

Hold One Another Accountable - All persons must be held accountable for the financial targets that are set and the financial decisions that are made. Both board and staff members (even volunteers) are responsible for attaining the financial goals that a budget represents, and for subscribing to practices that create a sound fiscal system. If your organization continually struggles with achieving its budget, persons may be excusing one another from critical responsibilities or overlooking negligence or failure to follow through. However, your commitment to the mission of your camp, retreat or conference center mandates that you hold one another accountable.
Set Fees Appropriately in Relationship to Known Costs

Many camps and retreat centers sense a built in tension between financial viability and ministry focus. On the one hand, there is the understanding that generating adequate income is crucial to a healthy ministry. On the other hand, there is the desire to make camp & retreat experiences affordable. This is often compounded by the feeling among local church constituents that camps and retreats are “expensive.” This, however, is often not the case when actual comparisons are made to what is being offered by other denominations and non-profits who provide experiences and settings of similar quality. If there are rates that are much lower being offered by centers in the same region, look for subsidies they may be receiving or unfunded costs that they are ignoring that will catch up with them eventually.

Unfortunately, trying to set rates purely on what is affordable for families at the lowest income level can ease the conscience, while undermining the long-term viability of the ministry. A ministry that fails and no longer exists will not be accessible to the poor or anyone else. Artificially low fees have some natural outcomes. Because prices are not sufficient to cover the actual costs of operation, under pricing essentially creates a subsidy that gets paid for in several unplanned places. The most obvious, is the ministry will run deficits, which are funded by the annual conference or district. Unfortunately, this subsidy when not planned and agreed to creates feelings of dissatisfaction and lack of trust in the capability of the CR leaders and the financial operation of the ministry, even as its campers and guests receive the benefit of subsidized fees.

Other often unaccounted for costs include seriously deferred maintenance, insufficient reserves, and inadequate staffing. This creates a downward spiral because it becomes increasingly difficult to charge prices that cover costs as facilities fall into greater disrepair and the quality of the experience lessens. The least obvious way that camps & retreats subsidize prices is through underpaid, overworked staff and volunteers who often don’t receive adequate training. It is not wise in the long run to do this.

We know that in terms of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world and in terms of developing persons for Spiritual leadership, Christian camps and retreats are among the most valuable experiences people have. While it may be noble to keep prices low in the name of ministry, it is poor stewardship and an untenable ministry model, especially when conference or district subsidies are less and less available. People will pay for what they value. Therefore, it is better stewardship to provide quality programs, set fees that will actually cover costs, and generate a significant scholarship fund for those who truly cannot afford it.

First, one must determine whether costs are fixed or variable. Fixed prices will be incurred even if the camp/retreat serves no one and INCLUDES facilities maintenance, salaried staff, etc. Variable costs are related to actual usage. Prices are then set so that an attainable operating income will not only cover program costs, but will generate additional resources used to cover fixed costs, depreciation, and investment in ministry expansion and improvements. This allows for constantly repaired facilities, new programs, scholarships, and increased marketing efforts.
Develop a Strategic Marketing Plan to Meet Mission and Revenue Goals

The old adage is that “those who fail to plan, plan to fail.” A strategic marketing plan provides focus to efforts so that resources used to reach potential constituents are maximized. A mission-based, strategic marketing plan ensures that efforts are not solely to increase income, but are consistent with the ministry’s purpose. It is helpful to examine mission focus first as outlined in the 7 Foundations of UM Camp and Retreat ministry outlined earlier in this paper, then to address strategic marketing second.

A camp & retreat’s mission focus can be understood by asking the question, “Whom has God called us to reach and to serve?” One way to structure the answer to this question is by thinking in terms of in three areas, Our Home, Our Community and Our Outreach.

- **Home** - These are the groups and persons with whom we have a natural affinity, for example, our local UM churches and nearby mainline protestant churches.
- **Community** - Groups and persons with whom we have commonality, but may take more effort to reach, e.g. other churches, not for profit groups and schools.
- **Outreach** - Groups and persons which would likely require considerable effort to reach and serve, e.g. underserved ethnic and cultural groups, special needs populations, etc.

What matters is that each camp & retreat ministry prayerfully and intentionally seeks God’s leading in this regard, then a strategic marketing plan will reflect new missional directions.

It is not within the scope of this paper to elaborate on the process of developing a marketing plan. There are numerous effective methodologies. What is important is for the camp & retreat ministry to find a good fit, as well as to find assistance, if necessary, from a skilled volunteer or a paid consultant. Any effective marketing plan will have specific and measurable objectives, as well as a means for follow-through and evaluation. It should be noted that marketing expenditures should be 6-8% of income. This is likely to be significantly higher than most UM Camp & Retreat budgets. And, while this presents somewhat of a chicken and egg conundrum in terms of how to go about increasing marketing efforts, it emphasizes the importance of generating operating surpluses that can be reinvested in the future of the ministry.

The ministry expansion plan should have different emphases, respectively, as follows:

- **Home** - the greatest emphasis and amount of resources should be focused on this area. Constituents with deeper mission affinity often come repeatedly and refer others which also benefits steady income.
- **Community** - a moderate, but sustained, emphasis is placed on these groups. Over time, many become part of the Home group as they make deeper connections to the camp & retreat ministry.
- **Outreach** - a concerted effort on outreach recognizes the “return on investment” may be a long time in coming. However, a commitment to outreach results in lives touched that might never have been reached through camp & retreat ministry. It, also, recognizes the changing demographics. This is not just numbers but new communities and people among us.
Even as churches struggle and apportionment giving declines, individuals continue to give but desire a more direct connection in their giving. Therefore, it is imperative that camp & retreat ministries learn and implement effective fundraising and development practices. Furthermore, it is worth considering the hiring of a development professional to focus specifically on camp and retreat ministries, at least on a part-time basis, to ensure effectiveness in this area. It is typical that the results will pay for the position in three years, with results increasing exponentially in subsequent years. As one will see below, a development professional will greatly improve the effectiveness in each of the recommended areas. This is an investment well worth considering.

**Get Agreement on Policies that Permit Fundraising**

It is important that the camp & retreat ministry and the Conference Council on Finance & Administration (CCFA) agree on acceptable practices. The rule of thumb should be that the ministry may solicit individual donors and churches without review or approval. Capital campaigns and other conference-wide appeals should be approved by CCFA. Furthermore, consolidated campaigns are to be avoided, as they tend be viewed as bureaucratic, inefficient and lacking accountability; even when such campaigns allow donations to specific entities within the campaign.

**Broader the Donor Base and Annual Giving**

A solid and growing donor base is essential to effective fundraising. The process of acquiring, cultivating and motivating donors is at the heart of the development effort. The annual appeal is the means by which this takes place. One donor, who is developed as a passionate supporter of the ministry, will provide a significant amount of financial support over her/his lifetime. Therefore, a growing donor base has the potential to significantly reduce the need for apportionment funding or emergency deficit reduction. Donors give where their heart and passion come into play, so it is not true in any way that a gift to camp and retreat ministry somehow undermines giving to a local church. Most donors give to multiple institutions they value. This gives persons the opportunity to give to United Methodist camp and retreat ministries, in addition to their local church. Otherwise, their funds will go to other causes, if they are not given information and the opportunity to give.

It is important to emphasize the need to give local church members the opportunity to become individual donors. While benevolence giving and plate offerings can generate financial support, they do not provide the camp & retreat ministry the ability to add individuals to their donor base. This negates the opportunity to develop a long-term relationship with the donor. Development is, in the end, about relationships. Camps & retreats need to learn to communicate regularly with individual donors, to cultivate relationships in personal ways and identify prospects for giving opportunities. These are practices that are well developed in other not for profit organizations and can be instituted by UM camps & retreats with proper planning and focus.
Establish Endowments and Planned Giving Opportunities
As the donor base grows, it is critical in the cultivation and motivation process to identify donors who will consider a planned gift to the camp & retreat ministry. These are typically the most passionate and most connected persons. The establishment of endowments for general income, scholarships and capital expenditures provide options to which the donor can direct their gift. This is an area where there is great potential to partner with the area foundation and local churches. When persons of faith consider a planned gift, they will identify their church first, and then as many as five other causes. One of the other five cause could be UM camp & retreat ministries, if individuals are given the opportunity to hear about the centers and their ministries. This is critical for church pastors and conference leaders to embrace. People typically give to multiple organizations anyway. Give them a chance to support two UM ministries that matter to them. Other causes are contacting them already. We should too. Planned gifts in particular can be much larger than a typical donation as givers leave a legacy for what resonates most with them.

Prepare for Cyclical Capital Campaigns Beyond the Operational Budget
As mentioned, operational budgets should fund routine maintenance, as well as generate capital for smaller projects. Capital campaigns should be used to develop new facilities that enable the ministry to meet changing needs and to expand services to existing populations. In addition, successful campaigns create positive energy for the ministry AND the annual conference, as well as expand the donor base. A campaign every five to ten years would not be too frequent.

Seek Grants and Collaborations
Grant-writing can be time-consuming and too often yields little in the way of results when not done well. There are two reasons for this. First, grant writing is a specific skill and, therefore, needs to be accomplished by one who is competent in this area. Second, even the most well written grant request will likely get little attention without a personal introduction. Effective networking with foundation board members significantly increases the chances of grant approval. Nonetheless, grant funding can be a good resource to fund scholarships, capital expenditures and program development. Furthermore, camp & retreat ministries that are incorporated as a separate 501 c 3 may qualify for some non sectarian grants.

Program partnerships, in which a camp and retreat ministry partners with a local church, religiously affiliated or non-profit group to provide a program or experience together, are collaborations that will become increasingly important to UM camp & retreat ministries. There are four benefits. First, they allow camps/retreats to share the effort and the risk associated with developing new programs. Second, they result in higher quality programs because the program partner will typically have a greater understanding of the needs of the target population. Third, successful partnerships may provide the potential for new donors. Fourth, the partner may qualify for grants that the camp and retreat center may not. For example, when we partner with the cancer society to host a week of camp for children living with cancer survivors, both the cancer society and our camp bring expertise to the table. These experiences will be associated with the camp or retreat center. Persons will want to support both organizations.
Utilize Volunteers Effectively

Volunteers are a great resource. At the same time, they can be challenging to manage. However, done properly, an effective volunteer program increases connection and commitment to the ministry, as well as provides much needed labor hours. In some ways, volunteers need to be managed like paid staff because they are doing work that would be otherwise done by staff. Job descriptions, background checks for program volunteers and scheduled work hours provide mutually agreed upon expectations and increase the likelihood of successful efforts. Camps & retreats with effective programs often have a Volunteer Coordinator who addresses these concerns.

Develop non-traditional sources of income

Some very creative options deserve mention as additional streams of income. All these examples have occurred in conjunction with camp and retreat centers. These are just a few possibilities that seem compatible with a faith based camp and retreat setting.

Conservancy agreements – Land is forever set aside as natural land with specific limits on development. Conservancy organizations provide funding associated with this preservation.

Eco-Eternity Forests – Some centers have joined organizations that connect families who want to reserve a tree in the forest as the resting place for ashes of their loved ones so they can visit there. Families pay a fee to preserve a tree in their loved one’s memory. It preserves the natural environment long into the future as the funds pay for the preservation of the forest. This is a tradition that is particularly meaningful to Korean communities along with others.

Outdoor Schools – Partnering with public schools to offer outdoor education and environmental care programs for students where they can come to a natural setting for their study and learning.

At Risk Youth Programs – At least one center has entered an agreement with a social service agency to house one of their programs at a set aside portion of the camp during the summer.

Utility Leases – Some centers are in locations desired by utilities such as cell phone companies looking for tower locations, etc. They pay a monthly lease to have the tower located on the site in an out of the way location.

Many Other Compatible Opportunities are out there for camp and retreat ministries who keep their eyes and ears open.
A Message from the Chairperson of the National UM Camp and Retreat Committee (NCRC).

On behalf of the NCRC, I would like to thank the contributors to this strategic document who have shared their expertise and advice as a gift for all of us serving on leadership teams working hard to enhance the future of this ministry. This paper is one step in learning how to afford the ministry we cannot afford to lose.

The good news is that leadership teams who act to implement the suggestions outlined here do achieve much stronger financial and missional footing. There may be aspects of what was introduced in this paper that you will want to delve more deeply into or you may want to seek out further expertise. Below is contact information for persons and organizations that can provide guidance, resources and services in support of your efforts. May God bless you as you move forward to inspire and encourage your teams for effective spiritual leadership in these challenging times. It is very, very important.

We are deeply grateful for your willingness to read this paper and for responding to act in the face of the challenges and opportunities of these changing times in which we are called to lead.

Your Brother and Colleague in Christ:
Mike Huber
Pam J. Harris and Garrie Stevens co-founders and principal consultants with Run River Enterprises - a professional camp and retreat consulting organization established in 1997. Run River provides consultant services to organizations which are pursuing strategic initiatives for renewal, planning, and funding. They also provide training for groups in spiritual discernment and consensus decision making, as well as lead programs of personal spiritual renewal. The mission of Run River Enterprises is to provide churches, camps, conference centers, and other organizations with spiritually based services in areas of strategic endeavor, including Master Plans, Capital Campaigns, Spiritual Discernment, and Organizational Development. Pam has served in a variety of capacities as a camp and retreat ministry professional. Pam has also taught on the International Association of Conference Center Administrators (IACCA) faculty for the certification of conference center professionals. Phone: 315-559-0526 Email: pam@runriver.net or Garrie@runriver.net

Kathleen M. Trotter, Principal Consultant Kaleidoscope inc. - Kathy is a nationally recognized specialist in camp, conference center and retreat center programming and management. Kathy consulted for three years as an associate for an architectural firm in Portland, Oregon, then formed KALEIDOSCOPE inc. in 1986 to offer a broader range of services from assessment to master planning. Kathy adds to her consulting skills 15 years experience as a successful site director and executive staff person in both camp and conference center settings. With camp and center management as a background, she has honed her consulting skills to include in-depth analysis, effective communication in all forms, facilitation to achieve consensus, creative solutions to address critical issues faced by CR leadership teams. Phone: 614.448.0268 Email: kalkathy@aol.com

Jack Shitama, Conference Director of Camp and Retreat Ministries, Peninsula Delaware Conference and former President of the International Association of Conference Center Administrators. Jack has extensive experience as a Camp and Retreat Ministry professional. He, also, currently serves on the National UM Camp and Retreat Committee which provides denominational training and resourcing for leaders of camp and retreat ministry. He is a member of the Camp and Retreat Ministry Support Team of the UMC. He, also, served on the team that developed and edited the 7 Foundations of UM Camp and Retreat Ministry. Phone: (410) 556-6900 Email: jack@pecometh.org

Kevin Witt, CCD and UMCC, National Staff for Camp and Retreat Ministries with the General Board of Discipleship (GBOD). A 25 year veteran of camp and retreat ministries, Kevin gained significant experience in many supervisory positions, including Center Director and Conference level Executive Director. He, also, for serves on the National Camp and Retreat Committee of the UMC. Kevin worked with the collaborative team that helped launch the UM Camp and Retreat Ministry certification courses for leaders and other national initiatives in CR Ministry. He has co-written two books – Twists of Faith and The Retreat Leader’s Manual. Phone: 541-317-1615 Email: kwitt@gbod.org
National Camp and Retreat Committee of The UMC, Chairperson Mike Huber
The committee is organized to (a) support the camp and retreat ministries of the annual conferences of The United Methodist Church by providing opportunities for training and fellowship; (b) develop resources to enhance the quality and expertise of the Church’s leaders and programs; (c) more effectively carry out, through camp and retreat experiences, the Ministry of Jesus Christ at all levels of the Church; and (d) to work within UM and ecumenical circles to launch initiatives that address important issues and developments that have broad impact on the ministry and those we serve.
Phone: (315) 364-8756 Email: mikehuber@campsandretreats.org

Camp and Retreat Leader Network (CRLN)
The Camp and Retreat Leader Network involves nearly 900 camp and retreat leaders who support one another and share vital information on many aspects of this specialized ministry. The email network allows leaders to pose questions for feedback from other professionals and experienced volunteers. A great deal of information is also shared on continuing education opportunities, resources and emerging trends in the field. This service is provided by the Camp and Retreat Ministry Office of the GBOD in collaboration with the Religiously Affiliated Council of the American Camp Association. For more info and to participate contact Kevin Witt Phone 541-317-1615 Email: kwitt@gbod.org

UM CR Ministry Support Team
This group is coordinated by the national staff person for Camp and Retreat Ministry, GBOD. The CR Support Team consists of very experienced professional staff within UM Camp and Retreat ministries who have agreed to be available for basic training, visioning and planning facilitation, and reflection/dialogue with you on specific issues faced by your camp and retreat center or conference. This support is provided without charge as a resource to staff, boards and committees of the UMC. The only expenses incurred by those requesting support team help are the travel, meals and lodging costs for the leader coming to work with your leadership team. These services are in no way intended replace the more in-depth study and expertise provided by professional consultants. Phone: 541-317-1615 Email: kwitt@gbod.org

UM Camp and Retreat Ministry Certification
This is one of the newest official professional certifications recognized by the UMC. The courses and program were established and are now offered through a joint effort among the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry, The General Board of Discipleship, Drew Theological School and the National UM Camp and Retreat Committee. The goal of the courses is to better prepare staff and key long-term volunteers for effective leadership within camp and retreat ministry. Three websites for more information:
http://www.drew.edu/theo-content.aspx?id=13009
http://www.gbhem.org/site/c.IsKSL3POLvF/b.3584809/k.7FFF/Professional_Certification.htm
American Camp Association (ACA)
Web: [www.ACAcamps.org](http://www.ACAcamps.org)
The American Camping Association is a community of camp professionals who, for more than 100 years, have joined together to share our knowledge and experience and to ensure the quality of camp programs. Providing accreditation standards for Camp Programs and Services, Religiously Affiliated Council for faith-based Camp and Retreat Centers, Campline for the latest on risk management-legislation affecting camping, a bookstore for Camp and Retreat leaders, etc. Enhancing the physical, emotional, social and spiritual growth of campers. UM Linking Persons with ACA Religiously Affiliated Council:
Kelly Newell - kellyn@calnevumc.org
Jen Burch - jen_kenny99@hotmail.com

Christian Camp and Conference Association (CCCA)
Phone: (719) 260-9400
[www.ccca.org](http://www.ccca.org)
Christian Camping International is a not for profit association that provides extensive programs, products and services for the leaders of autonomous Christian camps and conferences nation-wide. CCI/USA also maintains the Internet’s most extensive database of summer and year-round Christian faith-based Camps, Conference and Retreat Centers. UM Linking Person:
Bill McCuaig - director@sacramentoassembly.org

International Association of Conference Center Administrators
[www.iacca.org](http://www.iacca.org)
IACCA is an educational and support organization of individuals involved in the administration and leadership of not-for-profit conference centers. International Association of Conference Center Administrators was formed over 25 years ago to provide personal and practical support to conference center leaders. IACCA continues to be an organization of people with a wide range of experience and knowledge who are eager and committed to sharing. We offer training and networking opportunities.
UM Linking Persons:
Anne Horton - ahorton@susumc.org
Jack Shitama - jack@pecometh.org

Professional Consultants
If you are looking for a professional consultant, the camp and retreat ministries office of the GBOD can provide a list of professional consultants that have been contracted by UM boards and centers in the past. This listing does not constitute a recommendation, but gives you leads about where to find the right consultant for your situation which you then can evaluate before selection. Contact Kevin Witt for more information – kwitt@gbod.org or 541-317-1615