

The Executive Council recommends this resolution be sent directly to a plenary session of the General Synod

A Resolution In Support of Outdoor Ministries of the United Church of Christ

**Submitted By the Connecticut Conference, the Pacific Northwest Conference,
the Ohio Conference and the Litchfield North Association of the Connecticut
Conference of the United Church of Christ**

A Prudential Resolution

SUMMARY

This resolution aims at raising awareness, momentum and support for our crucial United Church of Christ (UCC) Outdoor Ministries and specifically for the Outdoor Ministry Association (OMA) of the UCC. Both play critical roles in the growth, call and discipleship of countless young people and provide an irreplaceable resource to the churches, families and the wider church. Outdoor Ministries nurture community in invaluable ways. This resolution is a witness and encourages the strategic support of the Outdoor Ministry Association and its member constituencies in leading the sustainability of youth ministry and the stewardship and cultivation of these sacred places apart.

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND ETHICAL RATIONALE

‘See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wilderness.’ – Isaiah 43:19.

‘When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying...’ - Matthew 5:1-2 (The Beatitudes).

In the Gospels, Jesus taught, gathered, healed and prayed outside, Jesus modeled experiential outdoor ministry, calling his disciples and equipping them by the lakeshore, in the boat, on the water, on the mountainside, in the desert, in the garden, walking, hiking, fishing, eating, resting.

‘[My Shepherd] leads me beside quiet waters, and restores my soul’ (Psalm 23:2b-3).

Outdoor Ministry is those places apart, within God’s creation, stewarded by your servants, where we invite the Spirit to restore our soul. Outdoor Ministry Association is the gathered vessel that invites the Holy Spirit to connect us as individuals, churches and, especially youth, with God in the context of Creation.

BACKGROUND

The UCC’s Outdoor Ministry camp programs are a vital complement and extension of the Christian Education mission of the local and wider church, a chance to embrace diversity and deepen understanding, and an opportunity for youth and all ages to fall in love with God’s creation. From the shores of the Atlantic Ocean in New Hampshire, Maine and Massachusetts to the Pacific shores of Hawai’i to the majestic mountains of

47 California -- and at more than (now 35) sites in between, thousands of guests of all ages
48 and backgrounds discover and deepen their faith through encounters with God in creation
49 and Christian community. Outdoor Ministry Association, the gathered body of the
50 Outdoor Ministry Program of the UCC, has elected a Board of Directors by its peers and
51 has been hosting 'Consults' every 2 years since 1974 to resource, equip, train and
52 encourage leaders in providing authentic Christian hospitality and community, promoting
53 best practices, holding professional development events related to accreditation and
54 strategic planning, nurturing strong colleague support, sharing stories, experiencing each
55 others' sites and providing sacred retreat for all serving in Outdoor Ministries,
56 worshiping together, and strengthening the community of Outdoor Ministry sites and
57 programs.

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59 Our tradition of Outdoor Ministry, 'church camps', long predates the formation of the
60 United Church of Christ denomination. Some of our sites are continuous, active church
61 camps and retreat sites for over 100 years. Outdoor Ministry Association has a
62 constitution, a Board of Directors and by-laws, which support and encourage its member
63 staff, volunteers, boards and Conferences and promotes outdoor ministries in all areas of
64 the church. The Outdoor Ministry Association celebrates the many wonders of God's
65 creation, and provides resources to steward these sacred places. Founded as NACOM
66 (National Association of Camping and Outdoor Ministry) in 1974, OMA has contributed
67 a presence at General Synod, National and Regional Youth Events, and Christian
68 Education related ministries of the National Setting. OMA provides writers and yearly
69 distribution of the National Council of Churches' Outdoor Ministry curriculum, has
70 hosted National Staff Goes to Camp, and administers Deering Grant awards for new
71 initiatives. OMA models and teaches sustainability and green practices to the wider
72 community. OMA has organized leadership development, Safe Camp guidelines, cross-
73 training pilots, and networking opportunities. Through its member sites, it has
74 coordinated more barn-raising work, volunteer placement and mission opportunities than
75 can be cited here. OMA is an enthusiastic partner in promoting and implementing UCC
76 Mission 4/1 Earth Campaign 2013, and has been a leader in promoting earth care
77 education and practices for generations.

78 79 **TEXT OF THE MOTION**

80
81 Whereas, we affirm the crucial support in the past from our national UCC and from many
82 Conferences in both proclaiming and celebrating the vital and visible outdoor ministry to
83 our youth, our churches and the wider church, and

84
85 Whereas, we recognize the power of Outdoor Ministry sites in promoting wider
86 church/conference financial appeals, including capital campaigns and Our Church's
87 Wider Mission; and further we affirm the crucial support in the past from the national
88 UCC setting and from many conferences, and

89
90 Whereas, we honor the foresight of founding mothers and fathers of the faith to purchase,
91 develop and invest in Outdoor Ministry camp and retreat sites for the UCC's faith
92 journeys and to grow and raise up leadership in every generation, and

93 Whereas, we celebrate further investments in the infrastructure and improvements to our
94 Outdoor Ministry sites, and
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96 Whereas, the UCC, in recognition of the significant number of ordained ministers who
97 claim their Outdoor Ministry experience as foundational to their hearing and heeding of
98 the Call (for example, over 200 clergy credit their experience at Silver Lake Conference
99 Center with hearing the Call), and
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101 Whereas for over 50 years, our outdoor ministries have been developing leaders who live
102 their faith in every walk of life and consider their experiences there as major touchstones
103 in their lives as they make ethical and professional decisions, and
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105 Whereas, we further name and recognize the correlation between the alarming closing of
106 Outdoor Ministry sites (from over 65 in 1995 to 35 current member sites) and the lost
107 opportunity for raising up young seminarians, and faith leaders of the Church and
108 Conferences, and for future generations of youth to experience this unique ministry of
109 Jesus, and
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111 Whereas since OMA's inception, we've lost Blakes Grove (IA), Atkinson Center, VT;
112 Deer Hill Conference Center NY; Camp Laurent, NY; Camp Fernbrook PA; Pilgrim
113 Haven, MI; Pleasant Valley Outdoor Center IL; Lake, Camp Western Hills MO; Dillon,
114 RMC; Pilgrim Park, ND; Deering Conference Center NH (BHM); Pilgrim Haven, MI;
115 Warner Farm, MA; Ingraham House, CT; Rockcraft Lodge, ME; Dillon Hi Country,
116 Rocky Mountain Central Conference and Pilgrim's Playground, AZ, and more recently,
117 Lake Byrd, Florida; Camp Fernbrook PA SE, Lani Kamaha'o, Oahu Association, HI;
118 Bows Lake Camp and Conference Center, MI Conference, and many others,
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120 In recognition that Camps have closed and been sold by our UCC Conferences and
121 Associations across the country; and in recognition of current sites in distress even now,
122 (Mensch Mill Conference and Retreat Center, PSE) and in light of the disturbing trend of
123 closings of faith-based camps across the country,
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125 And whereas, it would not be inappropriate to describe the state of Outdoor Ministry in
126 the UCC as the 'Canary in the Coalmine' for our denominational lifecycle,
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128 Now therefore be it resolved, that the Twenty-Ninth General Synod of the UCC gathered
129 in Long Beach, CA declares its advocacy and support of the Outdoor Ministries
130 Association (OMA), and
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132 Be it further resolved that the Twenty-Ninth General Synod requests that the conferences,
133 associations and other settings of the wider church, prayerfully discerning the long term
134 consequences to the youth and future leaders of the church when considering the
135 ramifications of closing a camp or center, seek the counsel of the OMA, and
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137 Be it finally resolved that the Twenty-Ninth General Synod, requests that the
138 conferences, associations and other settings of the wider church provide timely

notification to OMA in the event of impending Outdoor Ministry site or program closing so OMA may have the opportunity to provide resources, support and consultation to the distressed body and to programs at risk.

FUNDING

Funding for the implementation of the resolution will be made in accordance with the overall mandates of the affected agencies and the funds available.

IMPLEMENTATION

The Collegium of Officers, in consultation with appropriate ministries or other entities within the United Church of Christ, will determine the implementing body.