

1 **Document: 620.01**
2 **Name: Discernment and Transition Planning for Camp and Retreat Ministry**
3 **Author(s): Bishop’s Camp and Retreat Ministry Taskforce, Annual Conference Shepherding Team**
4 **CCFA Action: The \$50,000 request can be absorbed into the 2027 Budget**

5 **ACTION:**

6 The Annual Conference authorizes the Camp & Retreat Ministry Task Force to continue its work of
7 discerning and recommending a sustainable, mission-aligned future for the Outdoor and Retreat Ministry
8 within the Northern Illinois Annual Conference.

9 The Annual Conference affirms the emerging strategic direction toward a renewed model of camp and
10 retreat ministry focused on direct disciple-making through program ministry, centered in a comprehensive
11 single-site model designed for year-round retreats, events, and camp ministry. Hospitality and space-
12 sharing may continue to support this ministry where appropriate but shall not define the primary purpose
13 of the future model.

14 The Task Force is authorized to conduct feasibility studies, as needed, not to exceed \$50,000, with the
15 funding source to be identified by the Council on Finance and Administration. This feasibility work shall
16 evaluate, but not be limited to:

- 17 • site requirements;
- 18 • viability of Reynoldswoods and Wesley Woods or other sites;
- 19 • capital needs;
- 20 • staffing and program requirements;
- 21 • accreditation and compliance requirements;
- 22 • governance and organizational models;
- 23 • financial sustainability;
- 24 • fundraising capacity; and
- 25 • the long-term relationship between ministry program, property stewardship, and Conference
26 oversight.

27 The Annual Conference Shepherding Team is authorized to provide oversight and alignment for this work
28 between sessions of the Annual Conference, serving as steward of Conference mission, assets, and
29 strategic direction as the Task Force conducts its work.

30 The year 2026 is designated as a year of discernment, feasibility, transition planning, and limited
31 operational wind-down of the current Outdoor and Retreat Ministry model. Existing reservations through
32 2026 may be honored, provided that all insurance, compliance, staffing, financial, and safety requirements
33 are met and verified.

34 The Task Force, in consultation with ACST, the Board of Trustees, CCFA, Cabinet, and ORM leadership,
35 shall develop recommendations regarding the future ministry model, governance structure, property use,
36 capital strategy, and implementation pathway. Recommendations requiring Annual Conference action
37 shall be brought to the 2027 session of the Northern Illinois Annual Conference, unless earlier action is
38 required.

39 **RATIONALE:**

40 Together, we give thanks for faithful ministry through Outdoor and Retreat Ministries across many
41 decades. Generations have encountered Christ, deepened faith, and discerned calls to leadership in these
42 sacred places. We honor that legacy.

43 Our camps again face a crisis requiring honest acknowledgment. For nearly a decade, Reynoldswoods and
44 Wesley Woods have operated primarily through space-sharing rather than as traditional conference camp

45 programs. UMC and external groups rent our facilities and run their own programming; we no longer
46 staff to design and implement direct disciple-making ministry. While this model has provided hospitality
47 and revenue, it is not the same as the ministry annual conferences are called to provide.

48 Currently, we carry \$1.6 million in debt tied to these operations, the result of rising costs, aging facilities,
49 deferred maintenance, and declining critical mass. Space-sharing generates revenue but cannot stabilize
50 the enterprise. Maintaining multiple aging sites during discernment is not financially neutral. Even when
51 usage declines, costs remain for staffing, insurance, utilities, maintenance, compliance, accreditation
52 readiness, and basic operations. Continuing without clear limits risks further erosion of financial
53 resources, organizational capacity, and ministry clarity.

54 Most critically, we must name a pattern: this is approximately the fourth or fifth time the Conference has
55 voted for difficult change regarding our camps and has not implemented those decisions. Attachment to
56 beloved spaces and reluctance to disappoint partners have led us to defer, compromise, or reverse course.
57 This pattern has deepened both the financial crisis and the ministry incoherence that now confounds our
58 witness.

59 The Task Force has discerned a familiar, emerging strategic direction: renewed camp and retreat ministry
60 focused on direct disciple-making through program ministry, centered in a comprehensive single-site
61 model. This is not a decision about which site survives, but a call to test whether such a ministry can be
62 faithfully and sustainably developed at this time.

63 Camp year 2026 cannot be business as usual. Continuing to operate multiple sites while discerning a new
64 model commits resources to structures we may not keep. Therefore, the Conference will honor existing
65 2026 reservations where safe and compliant, but will not accept reservations beyond 2026, and current
66 operations will conclude at year's end. No reservations for 2027 will be accepted. This creates space for
67 feasibility work without deepening the crisis we seek to resolve.

68 This decision is not death; it is resurrection faith. For over three generations, God has called the Northern
69 Illinois Conference toward something new in outdoor and retreat ministry through Task Force
70 discernment, financial realities, renewed ministries in other conferences, and younger leaders' longing for
71 transformative camp experiences.

72 We do not need perfect clarity to say yes to God's call. We need courage, trust, and willingness to let go
73 of what was precious, not because it was wrong, but because it served its purpose. Our task is not to
74 preserve a space. It is to attend to the new thing God has been working to birth in our midst.