May 19, 2020

Beloved New England United Methodists,

I bring you news from our Camping and Retreat Ministries in the New England Conference. With heavy hearts, but grounded in our faith and missional responsibility, we have suspended summer camping programs across all our Conference camps for 2020. Rolling Ridge continues its retreat ministry online until it is safe to reopen.

We know that summer camping provides a vital ministry of spiritual, emotional, and physical nurture for thousands of children. It offers enriching employment and leadership development opportunities for hundreds of young adults, and it fills a need for childcare for many working families.

The decision to suspend summer camp programs was made in collaboration with our partners in ministry across the New England Conference of the United Methodist Church and with the support of the Bishop and Conference leadership. The Camp and Retreat Ministry Executive Board, comprised of equal members from all CRM sites, has worked diligently and collaboratively to resource and support each other as we considered changing guidelines in our unique contexts. While the decision to suspend summer programming was made by each site, the CRM Board and Conference leadership support this very difficult decision, made to ensure the safety of campers, staff, volunteers, and communities across the Conference.

We do not make this decision lightly. Our summer camps have the certification of the American Camping Association (ACA), which means that our camper families entrust us to have the highest standards of safety and quality. We have carefully reviewed all the CDC guidelines, state guidelines, and ACA standards, and have deemed that we will not be able to offer the level of service that our families expect and deserve. We will do everything we can to reopen our facilities when we are able to do that safely and responsibly.

I am particularly mindful that this decision will severely impact children who rely on camp as a place of refuge and support as they navigate childhood and adolescence, as well as families who need to go back to work and do not have alternatives for childcare. Let us hold these members of our community in prayer and do what whatever we can to offer our gifts of support.

While there is no exact replacement for outdoor summer camp, our camp staff and volunteers will continue to work on the following priorities:

- Deferred maintenance and facility improvements
- Cleaning
- Creating alternative programming opportunities for campers at home
- Developing high-quality curriculum for next summer
- Serving as distribution centers for our conference churches for cleaning supplies/PPE
- Providing community services where possible (e.g. feeding programs for school children)

Please see our Conference [website](#) to find out what alternative programming is available now, how you can support these ministries for a strong come-back (including volunteering on site with clean up and maintenance), and continue to hold the entire New England Camping and Retreat Ministry in prayer.

Connected in Christ,
Rev Erica Robinson-Johnson
Director of Connectional Ministries