

Trudi Downer, Chair of COM

Like every part of the Conference, COM has weathered some unprecedented hurdles in doing its job. I hope this finds everyone able to safely enjoy the last of summer and to look forward to what lies ahead in the fall. I want to take this opportunity to update our Conference on what the Committee for Outdoor Ministry (COM) has been doing and what is needed we move forward.

### **What was supposed to happen in 2020?**

2020 has indeed been a very unusual year- a year where we are learning to be flexible and learning to do the things we have always done in quite different ways. It has been at the same time difficult, different, and inventive and has come with some questionable and some rewarding outcomes. 2020 was to be a transition between our 89 years of Outdoor Ministry at Camp Mimanagish where we enjoyed a successful 2019 season, the last as stewards of the Camp, and 2021 where through partnership with others Camps we could create a new direction in Outdoor Ministry programming without the financial burden of managing and maintaining our own site and recognizing the transformative power of the camp experience.

The task assigned to COM in 2020 has been to work with Churches and folks throughout the Conference to define the Outdoor Ministry mission, to plan and implement outdoor ministry opportunities, to promote participation by campers of all ages throughout the Conference and to maintain a break-even budget. The task is not a small one even without the advent of a global pandemic. Very quickly, the task became a matter of offering what we could in 2020 and switching focus to 2021 and beyond.

### **What was accomplished in 2020?**

For the transition year, COM set a priority of making sure that our Conference youth had camp opportunities and to offer as many of our other adult and & Me camps as we could dependent upon venue availability and interest. Even with a late start in terms of seeking opportunities at busy and established sites, we were able to partner with three Camps. Christikon which is up the valley from Mimanagish offered to incorporate our youth in their youth camps on a first come-first served basis. In addition, UCC camps N-Sid-Sen in Idaho and Placerville in South Dakota offered to serve our youth as well as others interested in their full slate of offerings. We worked out registration protocols and promoted these camp opportunities. Late in the fall, we began work to recruit leaders and find sites to offer our other camps. Once the pandemic began, we made the difficult decision to discontinue working on those camps and concentrate on getting our youth to camp if they happened and move our focus to getting an early start on 2021. Very soon, N-Sid-Sen and Placerville announced that they would not be able to offer their scheduled camps. Christikon worked extremely hard to set up safety protocols for the camp, the staff and the campers and were able to offer a delayed season. The MNWCUCC was represented at Christikon by six young men at the Grades 9-12 Camp. Many campers expressed an interest but were concerned with the safety and the cost of sending campers in 2020. The six who attended enjoyed their experience and expressed interest in continuing this partnership.

### **What is COM considering for 2021 and beyond?**

COM spent much time brainstorming and working through the change in the committee focus following the move away from Camp Mimanagish. Below is a brief summary:

#### Mission of Outdoor Ministry

- Even though numbers are not as they have been in the past, the camp experience continues to be important to youth.
- Intergenerational and adult camp experiences are popular and have been growing.
- The unwired wilderness experience is important in our Conference.
- Outdoor Ministry must operate under a break-even budget.

#### Programming for Outdoor Ministry

- Ideally we would like to partner with a venue which would allow us to use the site and site staff for the venue while being able to offer our own programming with our own leaders and counselors.

- We realize that the venue and staff need for youth camps is different than the needs for adult and & Me Camps. We may be looking at offering camps at more than one venue until we have firm partnerships.
- While we are searching for venues, we must plan programming that can be offered anywhere and tailored later to a specific venue.
- We are hoping to be able to offer a good selection of experiences for all ages in 2021.
- We are also hoping to be able to develop opportunities outside the traditional summer camp season and eventually be able to have offerings in different parts of the Conference.

#### Realities

- Due to COVID-19, 2021 may have to be another transition year where we offer what we are able to.
- We will again be competing for venues as we try to maneuver through the pandemic.
- The economic outlook will bring about the need for more scholarships.
- Because focus on Outdoor Ministry has waned during the pandemic, we will need to rebuild our relationship with Churches and will need to rebuild interest in Outdoor Ministry.

#### **Where do we go from here?**

COM's last meeting is August 17, 2020. Through July and until that meeting the individual work teams worked to develop strategies and ideas for 2021. Final implementation will be dependent on Conference direction, budget and the selection of venues.

- Facilities team is working on a proposal letter to be sent to foster partnerships with existing camps to find venues for our camps.
- Added Programming team is working on a proposal to find venues for fall and winter experiences and are working on a memorial intergenerational retreat. They hope to be able to offer the first experience in winter 2021.
- Promotions is working on ways to update the website and Facebook and to cultivate future interest in Outdoor Ministry.
- Fundraising is working on ideas for raising additional funds for scholarships.
- Recruitment is strategizing ideas for recruiting program leaders and campers for camps we hope to offer.
- Programming will work with Faith Formation to develop curriculum which can be used throughout the year for camp, retreats, and by Churches for their education needs.
- COM is working to develop discussion opportunities to seek, ideas, manpower and support from folks throughout the Conference,

#### **What do we need from folks around the Conference (YOU)?**

- COM has two youth members, Axel Blodgett and Claire Hatch. Claire will be leaving COM to pursue studies abroad. We would like to find one or two youth to replace Claire. We would also like an additional young adult member on the team. Is there someone in your Church who would like to join the team?
- We will be working to reorganize and strengthen COM after the Conference Annual Meeting. Are there folks in your Church who would like to help COM move forward?
- COM meets one time each month by Zoom. COM is made up of the Chair who is elected at CAM and volunteers who lead the work teams. The Conference Minister, Moderator, Vice Moderator and Treasurer are ex-officio members. We would like to develop a list of folks who would like to help with the work team tasks. These folks would not be obligated to attend the monthly COM meeting but would provide manpower in carrying out the tasks of our work teams. Are there folks in your Church who would like to help COM move forward?
- This is the beginning of Outdoor Ministry for the future. COM is excited to hear ideas about all aspects of this ministry. Will you help us out?