

SPECIAL ISSUE



Pastor feels called to camp, year after year

2A



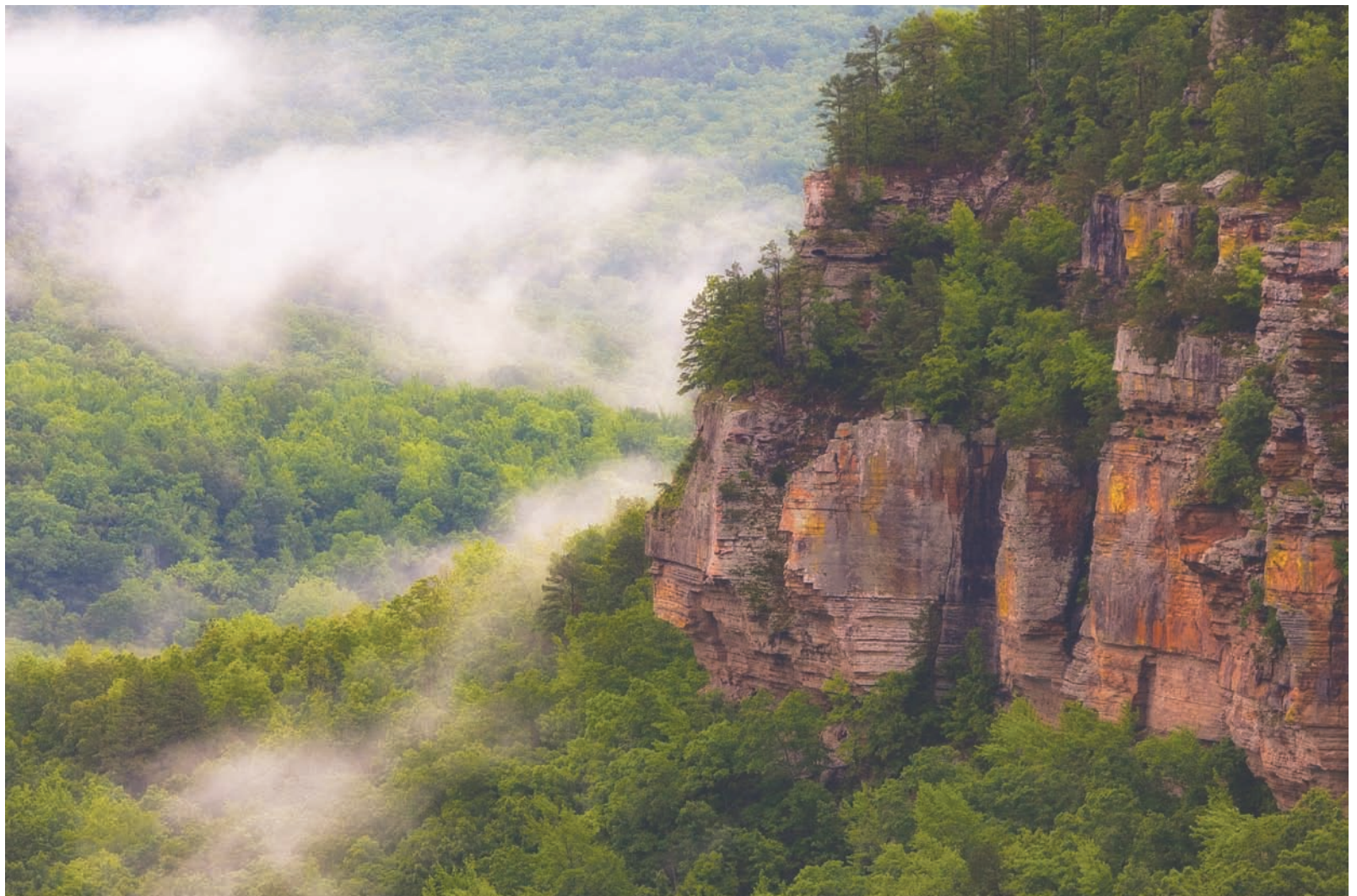
Summer schedules for Arkansas camps

4A



Camp can happen anywhere

7A



A springtime morning brings a blanket of fog to the valley below Mount Eagle Retreat Center near Clinton, Ark. Serene settings such as this one provide unique opportunities for people of faith to meditate upon the wonder of God's creation.

PHOTO BY RODNEY STEELE

Looking to the future of camps and retreat centers

Set-apart places seen as a key to fulfilling the church's mission

BY AMY FORBUS
Editor

Camps and retreat centers offer unique opportunities for connecting with God. Time spent in places of refuge and natural beauty reinvigorates the spirit. So how can United Methodists in Arkansas make the most of those opportunities?

The Arkansas Conference's core process planning team for camping and retreat ministries is seeking answers to that question. With the help of the Revs. Pam Harris and Garrie Stevens of Run River Enterprises, they've embarked on a path toward a comprehensive plan for the Conference's four camps and one retreat center.

Seeking common threads

Harris and Stevens, both United Methodist clergy who are members of the Upper New York Conference, have spent the past 15 years providing spiritually-based guidance for churches, camps and conference centers. Harris has a background in directing conference centers and camps, while her

husband, Stevens, has spent time as a district superintendent and in other conference-level leadership. Their experiences led to a shared calling of helping camps and retreat centers provide high-quality opportunities for spiritual development.

"We became convinced that [camp and retreat] ministries were going to be increasingly important, and increasingly challenged," Harris said.

Run River is guiding the core process planning team in developing a long-term, comprehensive and strategic plan for camping and retreat ministry in the Conference. Rather than viewing each of the Conference-related gathering places—Bear Creek, Mount Eagle Retreat Center, Shoal Creek, Tanako and Wayland Spring—as separate entities, the planning team seeks to understand them as different facets of a single ministry.

The Rev. David Fleming, convener of the Conference's core process planning team for camp and retreat ministries, shared his impression of the process.

"Our work is helping us to look at who we are and what we do in relation to others involved in camp and retreat ministries," he said. "It is also giving us a 'big picture' look at the way we as a whole are positioned to serve local

[See FUTURE, page 6A]

Why keep going to church camp?



The Rev. Bill Fish visits with some of the campers at one of the recent Older Elementary Camps he has directed. Fish has been involved with leadership at Camp Tanako for about three decades.

COURTESY PHOTO

BY BILL FISH
Special Contributor

I have loved going to church camp for as long as I can remember. It was always the highlight of my summer when we loaded up and headed out. There is just something about getting away, being with old friends and making new friends. It was fun.

But it was more than that. It was a chance to celebrate God's creation and experience Christian community away from the distractions of the world. Camp has always been a great way to get away from the world's "background noise" and listen for the voice of God.

Perhaps I never really grew up, because I still love going to camp! For the past 30 years or so, I have participated in the camping ministry at Camp Tanako. Most of those years I have worked with the Older Elementary Camp, for children who will be in the fifth and sixth grades the following school year. We have had from around 60 campers to more than 100.

That is a lot of fifth- and sixth-graders to keep up with—and I am not as young as I used to be. Those 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. days wear on me more than they used to. These days I try to rely on my experience to stay ahead of them, but that does not always work. Inevitably, at some time during the week I will ask myself, "Why do I keep doing this?"

The answer has always come through the campers. One year it was a young man walking alone across the campground. He came up to me and asked if I would play miniature golf with him. In the experience of that one game with that single camper, I found my answer that year.

I learn a lot from the campers. Not all of it is necessarily helpful—such as the lesson learned from the young man who always drank Sprite at canteen (the time and place when campers can purchase snacks and soft drinks.) He told me the reason he always drank Sprite was because it produced the loudest and longest belches. I cannot imagine why I would ever need that information,

but it seemed very important to this future leader of the church.

But you never know. There are those times when "out of the mouths of babes" comes something very powerful. Sometimes it is in the way they settle their disputes and move on. We really do learn a lot about Christian community at camp.

Children's honesty is also refreshing, sometimes painfully so. But you really don't have to wonder what is on their minds.

Perhaps what I like most is how they are so comfortable with mystery. In other words, they don't have to understand everything in order to believe. I think that is why Jesus said we need to be like little children to enter the kingdom of heaven.

At Camp Tanako we begin each day with worship down by the lake, and end the day with worship and Holy Communion in the open-air chapel. We often use campers as volunteer servers for Communion. I think the story that comes to mind took place on a Tuesday night. The young man serving the bread on the right side of the altar area was obviously taking the job very seriously, breaking the bread and giving it out. Campers and counselors were crowded around the altar, some kneeling, some not.

After everyone was served, I watched as the servers returned the bread and the cup to the table. Then this young man ambled around the end of the altar rail, stepped around to the front, and fell on his knees there at the end of the altar. His eyes were closed. His hands were clasped together. And he prayed.

The sight of this child kneeling before God in fervent prayer overwhelmed me. And then I knew: This is why I keep doing it!

The Rev. Fish serves as pastor of First UMC Prescott.



EDITOR'S CORNER

BY AMY FORBUS

As I planned this special issue with a focus on camp and retreat ministries, I began to look back on times I've spent at these places set apart for reflection and renewal. Here's a sampling of the memories that surfaced as I compiled the information in these pages.

Elementary years at Camp Tanako:

- Songs—the ones we sang while we waited in line for meals, as well as those we learned from guest clinicians who would return to direct us at the Little Rock Conference Children's Choir Festival.
- The year I finagled my way into attending three Tanako camps in one season.
- The first time I ever got up early to watch the sun rise.
- An unannounced evening visit from John Wesley (who, nearly a decade later, I came to recognize as Dr. John Farthing, one of my Hendrix College professors).
- Posing for that black-and-white group photo that includes a nine-year-old me on one row, a boy who would one day become my husband on another row, and my mom, who would pass away years before my first date with that boy, standing in the line of counselors along the back.

A middle-school-age stay at Wayland Spring Camp:

- The site of my first experience with Ozark Mission Project.
- Having my dad as a fellow OMP camper, and seeing how the skills he used in his daily work as a carpenter brought him

great opportunities for serving neighbors.

- Finding, and truly experiencing for the first time, a place of quiet in the morning before setting out on the day's work.

As a young adult, time at Mount Sequoyah:

- Traveling from my home in Texas for meetings of the South Central Jurisdiction's Mission Council during my time serving as part of that governing body.
- Being part of a team that planned a gathering of Generation X and Y United Methodists from across several states, and building relationships at that event that have continued for years.

In recent years, trips to Mount Eagle Retreat Center:

- Receiving lessons in caring for God's creation through simple acts, such as minimizing our water use and composting instead of throwing away food scraps.
- Walking out to the boat chapel and to Bear Cave.
- Soaking in the beautiful view of the valley as the fog lifted and the snowflakes subsided.
- Learning from retreat leaders, as well as from fellow retreat participants.

Just from this partial list, I can tell that my life and ministry wouldn't be the same without our camp and retreat centers. I hope you have similar memories. And if you don't, it's not too late to begin creating them.

To reach me, send an email to aforbus@arumc.org.



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Submission Deadlines

| Issue Date | Submission Deadline |
|------------|---------------------|
| April 5 | March 21 |
| May 3 | April 18 |
| June 7 | May 22 |

Recycle
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Replenish



Be sure to recycle your copy of the *Arkansas United Methodist* when you're finished reading it (or share it with a friend).

UM-affiliated organizations sponsor and host Arkansas' only grief camp



Participants in Camp Healing Hearts 2012 join in a fun team-building activity on the camp's opening day.

COURTESY PHOTO

Kaleidoscope Grief Center, a service of Methodist Family Health, has announced plans for this year's Camp Healing Hearts, set for May 17-18 at Camp Aldersgate in Little Rock.

Camp Healing Hearts brings together children ages 5 to 18 and their families who have lost a loved one. It provides a safe environment where children and families can develop coping

skills, both individually and within a community of others. The work of play encourages a new sense of normality and allows children to find a voice for their grief.

Participants will convene for Camp Healing Hearts at 5 p.m. Friday, May 17, and stay until 5 p.m. Saturday, May 18. Camp Aldersgate provides a beautiful oasis in the heart of Little Rock, with 120 acres of wooded hills, 22 buildings, a six-acre lake, cabins, a fully accessible tree house, a swimming pool and paved trails. Camp Healing Hearts unites families in the grief process by encouraging parents and guardians to attend the event alongside their children.

Throughout the weekend, campers participate in therapeutic and recreational activities. In "Heart to Heart" time, children, teens and parents will share in age-tailored peer support sessions designed to provide a safe environment for the expression of grief. Camp Healing Hearts also provides participants the opportunity to take part in traditional camp activities, such as a campfire with s'mores, fishing, swimming, arts and crafts and a ropes course.

"I cherish our role in the partnership with Methodist Family Health to provide Camp Healing Hearts," said Amy Frank, program director for Camp Aldersgate. "The opportunity to host a program which provides a stress-free weekend where families can honor their lost loved ones, fellowship with families facing similar challenges, and begin to build positive memories

within their new family dynamic is one that I feel blessed to have experienced. The families express leaving Camp Healing Hearts with a renewed sense of peace, hope and determination."

For more information and event details, visit www.methodistfamily.org or contact Jane Dennis at Methodist Family Health, 501-661-0720, ext. 7157.

Methodist Family Health is a nonprofit organization that provides comprehensive behavioral and mental health care services to children, adolescents and families in Arkansas. It currently serves more than 1,400 clients daily through an acute psychiatric hospital, residential treatment centers, therapeutic group homes, emergency shelter, counseling clinics, Kaleidoscope Grief Center and more. The mission of Methodist Family Health involves treating the whole person: behaviorally, emotionally and spiritually.



The power and purpose of camp and retreat ministries

BY KEVIN WITT
Special Contributor

It is no accident that the United Methodist Church has developed one of the most expansive networks of Camp and Retreat Centers among faith groups. The grass-root visions that launched the nearly 225 centers now operating in the United States (and a growing number in other nations) represent a natural extension of a unique faith heritage and gift from God.

Methodism's founder John Wesley and his colleagues made the bold choice to take faith formation into the outdoors through field preaching and teaching, based on their observation that Jesus had done the same. The results quickly proved quite effective.

Wesley found the response of the people and their changed lives a remarkable testimony to the undeniable movement of the Spirit. This movement reaches to the present through circuit riders venturing into the North American wilderness in the 1700s, to huge camp meetings and assemblies of the 1800s, to modern camp and retreat centers as we know them today.

Millions have been touched, renewed, and inspired over the last three centuries to trust God more deeply and to embrace lives of Christian love and leadership. Camps and retreats continue to be one very important way that the United

Methodist Church lives out its legacy of building bridges between the sanctuary and life beyond its doors.

As a true extension ministry of local congregations, camping and retreat ministries participate in the same collaborative mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. Within places of beauty, renewal and adventure, we live out this common mission today in seven key ways called the



Kevin Witt

Foundations of UM Camp and Retreat Ministry:

- 1. Provide sacred places apart to connect with God.** Our centers invite persons leave their busy routines and responsibilities for a while, in order to intentionally seek and grow closer to God. Entering a place apart and the opportunity to be attentive to God in special ways play a significant role in the faith journey of thousands upon thousands.
- 2. Extend genuine Christian hospitality and community.** The environment of a community and a people immersed in embodying Christian love through the spiritual practice of welcoming

the stranger and all persons impacts every guest and participant. All who come are invited to join in a unique opportunity to actually live together with others while at camp or on retreat in a way that inspires very different people to value and to care for each other.

- 3. Nurture growing Christian faith and discipleship.** A primary factor that distinguishes Christian camps and retreats from other types of camps is the priority given to learning about, embracing, and following Jesus. An ever expanding response to the grace of God is at the heart of discipleship.
- 4. Develop dedicated Christian spiritual leaders.** Many opportunities for learning and applying servant leadership occur through the programs. Teachable moments abound in the camp and retreat setting through an emphasis on experiential learning. Persons consider God's call in their lives then take new leadership abilities with them to be a blessing wherever they go.
- 5. Teach on-going creation care and appreciation.** Scriptures affirm the goodness of creation. The natural world enhances our awareness of and love for God. The beautiful, yet fragile, surroundings of our camp and retreat centers call immediate

attention to an essential aspect of Christian discipleship and Wesleyan teaching that is crucially important in the modern world. We are God's representatives meant to care for the whole community of creation. John Wesley, affirmed the salvation of the individual, but insisted that it cannot be separated from God's intention to save all of creation. This was a main point of his sermon on "The General Deliverance." It is no accident that most Christian camp and retreat centers are purposefully located within natural settings.

- 6. Partner closely with UM local churches and agencies.** Camp and Retreat Ministry reaches its full effectiveness when aligned with local communities of faith and other United Methodist organizations in a common mission. Camps and retreats offer concentrated, temporary experiences that invite people from their normal settings, activities and rhythms in ways that often open them for tremendous growth. Without strong connections to local faith communities and application in daily life, however, what is gained can quickly wane. Camp and retreat ministry provides an added avenue for helping each local congregation and UM

agencies fulfill specific goals and visions, too. Camps and retreats can focus on outreach, church vitality efforts, spiritual growth strategies, and much more.

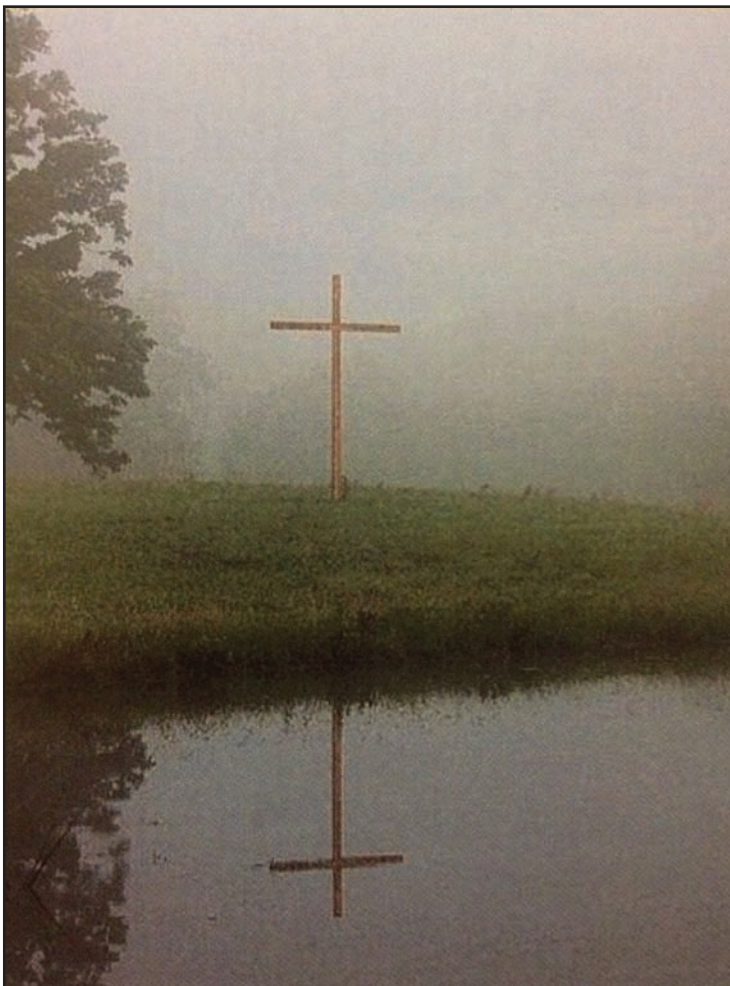
- 7. Inspire and equip all guests for lives of love and service.** The mission of the United Methodist Church is "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." We work to fulfill this mission through building relationships and living active lives of love and justice. In addition to serving our own members, camp and retreat centers provide encouragement and support to thousands of religiously affiliated and nonprofit groups whose focus is on doing good and avoiding harm in the world, too. They seek our centers out not just because we offer hospitality and place to meet, but more profoundly because we nurture, appreciate and inspire them for the good they are dedicated to doing. Through the welcoming doors of our camp and retreat centers, the UM church expands the fulfillment of God's desire by joining with others in creating transformed lives and a transformed world.

Witt serves as director of camp and retreat ministries for the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship.

Get away - Enjoy fun and fellowship - Rest and renew - Explore

A change of scenery may be just what you need to stir your spirit. Four Conference-related camps and one retreat center provide a host of options for individual, group and church-wide getaways.

Bear Creek Camp



Bear Creek Lake is small and calm, providing a beautiful setting for personal prayer and meditation.

COURTESY PHOTO

Bear Creek Camp is a year-round camp and retreat facility situated in the St. Francis National Forest, on Bear Creek Lake. Located six miles from Marianna off Highway 44, Bear Creek offers facilities and services for a variety of church, community, professional, civic and school groups. Bear Creek is a Camp and Retreat Center of the United Methodist Church and the Arkansas Conference, and part of the Southeast District.

Bear Creek offers 10 climate-controlled cabins, with bunks for up to 90 campers. Two cabins are wheelchair accessible, but all cabins will be so in the near future. New stand-alone bathroom facilities were built in 2007.

The grounds include a basketball court as well as other designated activity areas. The Assembly Hall accommodates 120 people for meals, and is equipped with a commercial style kitchen, range/ovens, deep fryer and deep freezer. The Assembly Hall is suitable for crafts, entertainment and worship, and as an inclement weather location for some activities planned for outdoors. An outdoor chapel is available for worship services, and special prayer points are located throughout the camp.

For information on scheduling an event at Bear Creek Camp, contact Dinah Apple at First UMC Marianna: 870-295-3681.



A winter sunrise at Mount Eagle Retreat Center, as seen from the road between Beal Lodge and Kaetzell Lodge.

PHOTO BY RODNEY STEELE

Mount Eagle Retreat Center

Situated in the Sally Flats area of southwest Stone County, the foothills of the Ozarks, Mount Eagle Retreat Center includes 1,002 acres of mostly hardwood forest with 3/4 mile of the Middle Fork of the Little Red River running along the northwest border. The buildings sit on top of the mountain, with a view of majestic bluffs and the river 650 feet below.

Mount Eagle offers program resources for family and personal renewal, and for spiritual growth. All facilities are available to churches, small groups, families and individuals for use when Conference events are not taking place. It is also open to other not-for-profit groups.

The Rev. Lu Harding, director of Mount Eagle, says that the focus on welcoming entire families is increasing. A transformation of the center's playground into a natural playscape for preschool children is in the works (and they would welcome a Sunday school class or other small group interested in helping with the labor). They also plan to offer more opportunities for tent camping with families that have older children.

"We understand the focus on vital congregations, and want to partner with local churches to offer additional and site-specific settings for faith formation," Harding said. "We believe that there are many ways we can work together to develop principled Christian leaders. We know that people of all ages come to our sites not knowing Christ, and leave having had a first-hand experience of his transforming grace. There are ways to connect what happens at camp or a retreat center with local faith communities so that people continue to grow in discipleship."

As a member of the transition team for National Camp and Retreat Ministries, in partnership with the United Methodist General Board of Discipleship, Harding sees change happening. The group is planning for the future, seeking ways direct their ministries toward strengthening congregations.

"It's a new day, and the passion and vision are growing," she says.

A sampling of events at Mount Eagle:

June 3-4, 2013, Care Cap Sewing Days
For individuals & local church teams who want to take part in a unique indoor, low stress, high energy mission opportunity.

June 24-28, 2013, Family Folklore Camp (details to come)

For details on these and other events, and to review options for booking your own group's stay at Mount Eagle, visit www.mounteagle.org.



Music Camp is a highlight of Shoal Creek's spring hand chimes.

Shoal Creek C

Located approximately 14 miles east of Paris and 20 miles west of Dardanelle off Arkansas Highway 22, Shoal Creek Camp offers a variety of opportunities to live out this year's camp theme, "Growing in Grace."

Shoal Creek has 10 wooden cabins, two separate bath houses, a large climate-controlled kitchen, a dining hall/meeting room, an outdoor covered pavilion, a large lighted recreational court and swimming pool on a 22-acre campground. The camp also offers horseshoe pits, a softball/baseball/kickball diamond, disc golf goals, children's play equipment, a fire pit and hiking trails.

To obtain information on cost and a registration form for any camp at Shoal Creek, contact Cindy Marsh at 479-783-0385 or cmarsh@arumc.org. The registration process differs for each camp, so be sure to follow instructions for the camp of your choosing. Shoal Creek is also available for small group and church retreats. Contact Marsh to check availability.

Grades K-2 / Day Camp

Date: June 6

Director: Sharon Balloun

Campers will explore the goodness of God's grace by using their senses. Without spending the night, campers will hike, eat, make crafts, swim, worship, and make friends! Bring swimsuit, sunscreen, and towel.

United Deaf ASL Camp

Dates: June 25-28

Cost: FREE

Directors: Angel McPeak and Kerry Scott
Counselors at this camp must have completed basic American Sign Language classes. Free classes are provided before camp.

Grades 3-6 / Music Camp

Dates: July 8-12

- Connect - Create and co-create - Worship - Experience grace



Summer schedule. Here, campers sing and

COURTESY PHOTO

camp

Directors: Judy Fraley and Mark Waynick
Campers will explore ways to express gratitude to God for his amazing grace. There will be Bible study, hiking, swimming, crafts, playing chimes, learning Festival music and making life-time friends. Bring a guitar if you would like to participate in guitar classes.

Grades 3-4 / Middle Elementary
Date: July 14-16

Directors: Carl and Denni Palmer
Campers will see how God's grace is ever-present in all creation. There will be eating, swimming, making crafts, playing games, singing and making friends.

Grades 5-6 / Upper Elementary
Date: July 14-16

Director: John Noggle
Campers will explore what it means to live in Christ's grace. There will be worship, swimming, music, Bible study, hiking and other group activities.

Grades K-2 / Day Camp
Date: July 18

Directors: Sally Ware and Kelley DeSoto
Without spending the night, campers will explore how to open their lives to God's grace. Bring a swimsuit, towel and sunscreen, and plan to eat, sing, hear a Bible story and make new friends.

Grades K-2 / Day Camp
Date: August 5

Directors: Amy Pennington and the Children's Council of Clarksville UMC
Campers will explore how experiences in community enrich their relationship with God. All in one day you will swim, eat, make crafts, hear Bible stories and play! Be sure to bring your swimsuit, sunscreen, towel and your best smile.

Family Camp

Dates: October 4-5

Director: Matt Daniels

The aim is for families to experience a closer feeling to each other while exploring God's grace.



Anna Herrin and Paul Ehenger serve Communion to fellow campers in Fawcett Chapel during the closing worship service of Tanako's Middle Elementary Camp I.

COURTESY PHOTO

Camp Tanako

Camp Tanako staff members have been busy planning new and exciting programs and activities for the many campers who will arrive at the Hot Springs camp this summer.

A new day camp opportunity will be available for first- through fifth-grade students who may not yet be ready for an overnight camping experience. Day campers may attend for a single week or register for multiple week participation. Each week will feature a biblical theme on stories such as Daniel, Jonah, Esther and King David.

With a low camper-to-adult ratio of 10:1 (standard for American Camping Association camps), every

camper will receive lots of attention and participate in small group activities and worship.

Other new offerings

Holy Healthy You camp focuses on nutrition, cooking and physical health as the campers learn how to serve and worship God.

Footprints is mission-based camp for seventh- through ninth-graders that will teach about the mission priorities of the Arkansas Conference, including poverty and hunger, Imagine No Malaria, clean water and wells in the Congo. Paired with the small group Bible study and

Wayland Spring Camp



Several third- and fourth-graders play in Wayland Spring, for which the camp is named, during last year's camp for their age level.

PHOTO BY PAM WILLARD

Wayland Spring is a United Methodist camp located in Northeast Arkansas, just south of Imboden. There are seven air-conditioned cabins nestled in 120 acres of the hills of North Arkansas.

Wayland Spring offers basketball and volleyball courts, swimming pool, nature trails and a natural spring. Wayland Spring is a perfect place to host youth and children events, church picnics, family reunions, men's campouts and women's retreats in a relaxing atmosphere. Just thirty minutes from the Spring and Eleven Point Rivers, tubing, canoeing and rafting are well within reach. To learn more about the camp facilities, visit www.waylandspring.org.

Summer 2013 will bring two Elementary Camps and one Jr. High Camp to Wayland Spring.

Elementary Camps:

June 2-4, open to rising 5th and 6th graders

June 5-7, open to rising 3rd and 4th graders

Contact Shannon May for more information: smay@fumcjonesboro.org.

Jr. High Camp is set for July 7-10, and is open to rising 7th, 8th or 9th graders.

Contact Billy Fly for more information: billyfly3@gmail.com.

education, campers will participate in mission activities that serve those missions with the goal of impressing upon the campers that we serve others out of a heartfelt love for Christ.

Regardless of which camp a student selects, each camper will participate in a mission activity. Stop Hunger Now, a feeding initiative, will allow campers to prepare food packets for others while others may assemble United Methodist Committee on Relief cleaning buckets, school kits and health kits.

For registration information, as well as descriptions of each camp, visit www.tanako.org.

Camp Tanako 2013 calendar:

- April 5-6, Family Camp
- April 14, Open House
- May 24-26, CIT Leadership Training
- June 7-9, Fishing Camp
- June 7-9, Holy Healthy You Camp
- June 17-20, Middle Elementary I
- June 24-28, Junior High
- July 1-3, Younger Elementary I
- July 8-12, Older Elementary I
- July 12-14, Middle Elementary II
- July 15-19, Senior High
- July 22-26, Older Elementary II
- July 29-31, Younger Elementary II
- August 5-9, Footprints Camp
- October 25-27, Wilderness Weekend

Future (continued from page 1A)

congregations and the Annual Conference in the fulfillment of their mission.

“I am encouraged by the fact that we are, for the first time in my memory at least, moving from talking about five individual sites or organizations to talking about one shared ministry.”

Harris and Stevens already have guided the planning team through the first two phases of a three-retreat process. The team, which includes members who have relationships with at least one of the five sites, spent the first retreat assessing each camp’s current situation and cooperative efforts. The second retreat, held in February, involved encouraging the planning team to think creatively and look at options for cooperation, collaboration and unity among the five sites. At the third retreat, scheduled for April 11-12, the team will decide what to recommend from strategic, missional and fiscal perspectives.

Fleming finds it reassuring that the process includes building a strong system of accountability to avoid erosion of assets or unnecessary risk exposure. Amid the data analysis, though, the team seeks to ensure that Arkansas camps offer consistent program quality, and ministries that serve the Conference. The big question: Where is God calling the ministry? Harris and Stevens encouraged the team to search the Scriptures to help define their experience and form a foundation for the future.

Distinctive stories

While Harris and Stevens encourage finding a common sense of purpose across all sites, they also look for each site’s unique identity.

“The five sites are all very

different from one another,” Harris said. “All have some uniqueness that they bring to the table.” She added that their placement provides a good geographic distribution throughout the state.

“When we went to Wayland Spring and had time there with some of the leaders, they took us down to the spring itself,” Stevens said. “It became clear to us that Wayland Spring is a place where it’s possible to see the influence of baptism in our lives.... When we’re baptized, we are identified as a child of God, and throughout our lives we discover what our baptism means. Wayland Spring is a great place to be reminded of our identity as God’s children.”

All of the sites hold stories of the transformation of individual lives, both children and adults; stories of how one person had a particular experience of God’s love or calling help us see how God works.

“As a people of faith, we are a people of story,” said Harris. “We know what is most true about our lives and our lives with God by the stories we tell.”

Harris recalled a similar story shared by several churches: a church-wide retreat at Mount Eagle changed the life of the entire congregation.

“That’s one of those real treasures, because we have lots of congregations in our denomination that are really struggling and are looking for new life,” she said.

While Mount Eagle carries many stories of renewal, Bear Creek’s stories tend to center around service to others.

“It’s at the doorway of the Delta area, and there is a significant amount of economic challenge,” says

Stevens. “Many groups have come to Bear Creek to serve in mission in that region.”

And Shoal Creek has its own advantages, too, Stevens said.

“They have a uniqueness in that they provide not a huge camp with all the expensive toys, but the more intimate setting,” he said. “There are a lot of kids that are not as comfortable in a theme-park kind of camp.” Shoal Creek’s size makes it easy for camp leaders to know campers by name, creating an almost family-like atmosphere. And, according to demographic data, it lies very near the state’s population center.

Camp Tanako’s convenient location near Hot Springs means it easily can serve as a year-round gathering place. Stevens also believes Tanako holds the potential to help the church retain the next generation of the faithful.

“We’ve been talking to congregations that have almost lost two generations,” he said, adding that those who remain find themselves graying and disappointed that their grandchildren don’t attend and get involved in a life of faith. “Tanako has a great opportunity to help turn that around.”

Shared mission

In light of the Imagine Ministry strategic framework adopted by the Conference, the planning team spent much of the second retreat answering the question, “How does this site or ministry serve the mission of the Annual Conference?” Camping and retreat ministries must focus on how they can work to help the Conference and congregations accomplish their mission: to make disciples of Jesus Christ equipped to transform the world with excellence and passion.

Fleming believes that just as in years past, the best opportunity for experiencing short-term Christian community lies within camps and retreats.

“They provide ample opportunity for leadership development, giving young people and those serving for the first time a safe environment to gain experience,” he said. “The question for our team is how to be proactive, approaching counterparts in other ministries and asking, ‘How may we serve you in helping you fulfill your mission?’”

“Sometimes we think of camp ministries in fairly superficial

‘One of the gifts that camping and retreat ministries bring to the church is the experience of God’s creation. You all in Arkansas are just blessed with an amazing piece of that creation.’

—The Rev. Dr. Pam Harris, Run River Enterprises

terms,” Harris said. “We think about games and activities, kids roasting marshmallows and that kind of thing. Sometimes we miss the deeper significance of what’s going on when people are discovering or rediscovering what it means that they’re a child of God, or what it means to live together in community. I think virtually everyone we work with has that sort of re-grounding [in] a deeper sense of the mission and ministry.”

Stevens cited instances of revitalized camp and retreat centers in other conferences, as well as those in other denominations where they’ve provided guidance. Often, new programs and possibilities will arise from the assessment process.

“For Arkansas camps, there’s just a whole array of possibilities for working together, cooperating, finding some areas where they might collaborate more fully,” he said. “We will explore what will be the best recommendations for these camps.”

“Sometimes making decisions for a ministry is slow and ponderous and difficult. But if there’s a ministry that has the ability to move quickly, it’s camping and retreat ministries,” he said. “The governance needs to reflect the kind of pace that will be appropriate. We know today that we have to make decisions faster than we used to, and that includes in the church.”

The nature of the as-yet-unformulated recommendations will determine the course of action. When the planning team submits its report, Bishop Mueller and the extended cabinet will review it to determine whether the proposed changes will need to be acted upon by the Annual Conference.

Gifts of getting away

Places of retreat and renewal will continue to have a valuable

impact upon the spiritual life of individuals and congregations. Some types of growth require a time and place for retreat. And Harris notes that Arkansas contains prime locations for fostering that growth.

“One of the gifts that camping and retreat ministries bring to the church is the experience of God’s creation,” she says. “You all in Arkansas are just blessed with an amazing piece of that creation. You just have gorgeous natural features.”

Camping and retreat ministries have the power to help us remember that the world is God’s creation. Harris believes that Arkansas’ incredible natural beauty makes a substantial difference in the quality of the Conference’s camp and retreat sites. They provide ideal places to teach the importance of being good stewards of the earth.

Stevens emphasized the spiritual need for a change of scenery and a closer connection to nature.

“One thing important to worship is a sense of awe,” he said. “Being in a little building that’s nicely clean and trimmed, and has a manicured lawn and low-maintenance shrubbery around it—it doesn’t create a sense of awe.”

He recommends a simple way to regain that perspective.

“Congregation members need to go out—especially if they live in an urban or suburban environment where the ambient light means that kids never go out in the yard—and look up and really see the stars. And sometimes for the first time they say, ‘Oh, wow.’”

“They acknowledge that we’re small, and that God as seen through the wonder of his creation is just so powerful and so great... [so that] when we pray, it’s with a sense of our place before the great God. That’s a treasure that camps and retreat centers offer to our congregations.”

‘Sometimes making decisions for a ministry is slow and ponderous and difficult. But if there’s a ministry that has the ability to move quickly, it’s camping and retreat ministries.’

—The Rev. Garrie Stevens, Run River Enterprises



COURTESY PHOTO

OMP camps continue Arkansas-based, God-centered mission

Ozark Mission Project (OMP) was born in the mid-1980s, when youth directors Allan Bruner and LaVerne Keahey, the Rev. Mark Lasater and laity Bill and Mary Beck began taking youth groups to Mountain TOP in Tennessee and Appalachia Service Project in Kentucky. Both camps provided outstanding mission opportunities, but distance became an obstacle, so the idea of an Arkansas-based mission experience was born.

Methodist laity and clergy met month after month to plan and organize what was to become known as Ozark Mission Project. In 1986, OMP's first camp gathered at Wayland Spring with thirty-five participants. Many of the design ideas tried out that year are still used today, like dividing the camp participants into work teams called family groups, hiring college staff to lead these family groups, providing daily scriptural themes for morning, lunch and evening devotions, and working for people—"Neighbors"—in the surrounding communities. Projects completed at the first camp included dusting, washing windows, cleaning ovens, raking leaves and scraping and painting a house.

By 1999, the ministry had grown so much that a part-time administrative assistant was hired. OMP continued to grow, and by 2004 required the attention of a full-time executive director.

In 2005, youth ministers began asking for a camp geared toward sixth- and seventh-grade youth. The first Jr. High Camp took place in 2007, with 72 campers. Every summer since has included at least two camps for that age group.

In 2008, United Methodist churches began asking to host OMP camps. Campers bring air mattresses and sleep in Sunday school rooms. In churches without shower facilities, church members would offer their homes for that purpose. Groups such as adult Sunday school classes, United Methodist Women and United Methodist Men provide evening meals. Church members volunteer to drive lumber and other supplies to work sites, and church youth groups often pack lunches and take frozen treats to work sites. Money saved from camp rentals and donated food allows OMP to purchase more supplies for their Neighbors' projects—a win-win situation and a great opportunity for a church-wide mission experience.

An OMP camp is about stepping out of one's comfort zone and trusting God. It's about getting to know Neighbors... learning about their lives, families and the struggles they have faced. It's hearing Neighbors share their faith stories and praying for the family group serving at their home. It's about the Neighbor who humbly shares a bag of home-grown tomatoes or a homemade peach cobbler as a thank-you for a freshly painted house or a life-changing wheelchair ramp. Campers—youth and adults—experience first-hand the joy of giving and the feeling that comes from helping someone and wanting nothing in return.

Summer 2013 finds OMP hosting two Middle School Camps and 10 Senior High Camps across June and July, with over 100 volunteers and 725 campers. This year's January College-Age mission trip took more than 55 missionaries to New Orleans to work on storm-damaged homes.

OMP continues to increase participation, and looks forward to thriving as the next executive director takes over leadership and the development of the organization. It's a bright future of service to God and Neighbors.

For a major announcement concerning Ozark Mission Project's leadership, see page 8A.

Camp on ASU campus benefits student leaders as well as campers



Participants in the 2012 Delta Pride camp at Arkansas State University express some of the joy they find in their time there. This year's camp is slated for July 10-13 and is open to middle school and high school students. For information, contact Muriel Aston at deltapride@astatewesley.org.

COURTESY PHOTO

Some camping experiences take people away. Others invite them to jump right in.

Delta Pride summer camp for youth falls into the latter category. Rather than go out into nature in search of retreat or adventure, Delta Pride carves out space for learning and renewal in one of the busiest atmospheres in the state: the Arkansas State University campus in Jonesboro.

"God is everywhere in our lives," says Delta Pride director Muriel Aston. "Delta Pride helps high school and junior high students to see how to make room for him in an academic setting."

Now in its second decade of ministry, Delta Pride is held each summer on the Arkansas State University campus. Students get a taste of college life by staying in the dorms, eating in the cafeteria and having activities in several buildings across campus.

Delta Pride began as a way to teach young people skills for leading in their local congregations. This year's camp will continue in that spirit with workshops on basic mission trip skills, cooking and creative expressions like art and music.

"We try to offer workshops that kids will enjoy," Aston says. "But we also want to teach something along the way—not just by what we say, but by the example our counselors set."

As with any Christian camp, worship and Bible study are also key components. Area pastors help plan and lead the studies, which this year will center on the theme "Shine Like Stars," taken from Daniel 12:3.

One unique feature of Delta Pride is its dual focus on youth and young adults. The camp is planned and staffed entirely by students from the A-State Wesley Foundation, overseen by the Wesley staff.

"We see a tremendous amount of growth in our college students from leading this camp," says ASU Wesley director the Rev. Eric Van Meter. "They have to solve problems on the fly, work together in close quarters, and show patience even to the most trying campers. Not only that, they have to model both a deep love for campers and a healthy respect for the boundaries that come with authority. It's not easy by any means."

Because of the difficulties of running any camp, Van Meter says, help from local congregations is essential to Delta Pride's success.

"Several churches pitch in to help cook, transport campers and offer their facilities for us to use during Delta Pride," he said. "I'm sometimes asked for a report on how our campus ministry works in partnership with local churches, and I think of things like Delta Pride. I can't imagine doing this camp without their help."

This year's Delta Pride camp is set for July 10-13. Cost is \$215 per camper with registration before June 26, and group rates are available. For more information, contact Aston at deltapride@astatewesley.org.

OMP names Faulkner new executive director, bids Mulhearn farewell

Ozark Mission Project has named Bailey Faulkner as its new executive director. A native of Little Rock, she graduated from Arkansas State University in Jonesboro and now lives in Maumelle with her husband, Will, and daughter, Sydney.

The Faulkners are active leaders at Pulaski Heights UMC Little Rock, where Bailey has served as the Mission Outreach Chair as well as president of her Sunday school class. She has worked in state government for the last six years, and has been actively involved with many non-profits, including serving as vice-president of UAMS



Bailey Faulkner

Cord Blood Bank of Arkansas. Before working for the state, she worked for a local domestic violence shelter.

“Bailey is passionate about OMP and serving others in response to Christ’s call of servanthood,” said the Rev. Carness Vaughan, who chaired the executive director search committee.

To learn more about OMP or to get involved, visit www.ozarkmissionproject.org or contact Faulkner at baileynfaulkner@gmail.com or 501-804-6686. She begins her work as executive director of OMP on March 15.

As OMP welcomes a new executive director, they say goodbye to their current one. After nine years at the helm, Nancy Mulhearn will step down effective March 15. Mulhearn has been actively involved

with OMP for more than 20 years, serving the organization initially as a volunteer and then later as its first executive director. Her love for Christ led her to this place of service, and she always took seriously Jesus’ call to servanthood: “When you did it to one of the least of these, you were doing it to me.”

“OMP is grateful beyond words for Nancy’s leadership,” said Mandy Stanton, chair of the organization’s board of directors. “We are glad that even though she is stepping away from her staff position, she will still be giving her time to the organization in the way it was when she first started—as a volunteer.”

Before working for OMP, Mulhearn served 12 years as youth minister to approximately 125 youth at First United Methodist Church Conway. As a youth minister, she

was a vital participant in Ozark Mission Project almost since its inception. In addition to OMP, Nancy coordinated and led youth participation in a variety of ministries and events, including monthly service projects, Conference activities and retreats.

A graduate of Mississippi State College for Women, Mulhearn attended the Perkins School of Youth Ministry at Southern Methodist University, and was the first youth minister in



Nancy Mulhearn

Arkansas to complete its certification program. Two years later, she also completed the Advanced Certification in Youth Ministry program at Perkins.

Mulhearn remains an active member of First United Methodist Church Conway, serving on the Good News Celebration worship committee, as vice-president of the executive board for the United Methodist Women, and founding the church’s Stephen Ministry. She also is a member of the North Central District mission committee for the Arkansas Conference. She has been married to Chuck Mulhearn for 38 years, and is the mother to three sons and grandmother to eight grandchildren.

Mount Sequoyah makes renewal-focused changes

“Renewal” is the new mantra on the Mountain! Just as the United Methodist Church is taking its rightful place in the worldwide awakening of the Body of Christ, so too is Mount Sequoyah Conference and Retreat Center, a property owned by the South Central Jurisdiction, which includes the Arkansas Conference.

Last year a transition began for the Fayetteville, Ark., facility. Rather than simply emphasizing Christian hospitality, Mount Sequoyah seeks to become a premier destination that provides relevant training and networking for United Methodist clergy and laity; 21st-century functionality and amenities in event and lodging facilities; and a captivating outdoor environment with walking trails and botanical gardens.

Maples Cottage, one of Mount Sequoyah’s 1930s-era brick structures, has been renovated with modern upgrades and amenities like motion-activated hallway lighting, coffee makers and flat-screen televisions in every room. The cottage has five large bedrooms, a gathering area and kitchenette, restored original hardwood floors and repurposed antique dressers and pews. Guests also can enjoy the new back deck and overlook, a place to connect with God and nature.



Rooms in Mount Sequoyah’s Maples Cottage recently have undergone complete renovation.

COURTESY PHOTO

Cokesbury Gallery, built in the 1960s as the Cokesbury Bookstore, has been repurposed as a multi-use meeting space and historical gallery, with large displays celebrating the decades of Mount Sequoyah’s ministry.

Families and young adults are again part of the scene at Mount Sequoyah. Two new programs, the Mount Sequoyah Marlin Swim Team and Kanakuk Kampout Day Kamp, have been supported and embraced by the community.

Every guest, without exception, is surrounded by the icons and spiritual disciplines of faith and with the hospitality we extend, they are introduced to United Methodist practices and principles, most notably John Wesley’s three simple rules: Do No Harm. Do Good. Stay in love with God.

With a \$300,000 matching grant from the United Methodist Foundation of Arkansas, fundraising efforts have begun to transform the Mountain into a premier United Methodist conference and resort center. To learn more, visit www.mountsequoyah.org.

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