



Living Water Ministries

Faith Formation, Service, Leadership, and Community

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Bringing together all of God's children to experience Christian community, grow in faith, develop leadership skills, and serve others.

—Living Water Ministries Mission Statement

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I write this letter with a spirit on fire for the mission we share, and also with a heavy heart as I assemble these words for your review.

Many of you have been aware of the challenges facing Living Water Ministries (LWM), as we have been wrestling with a trend of declining camper registrations for over a decade. Since 2005, summer camp enrollment has declined by 40%. We are not alone. This is a trend which has impacted camping organizations across the country. Unfortunately, this trend seems likely to continue. In recent years we've been speaking of this difficulty publicly in newsletter articles, at synod assemblies, in donor letters, and to our adult leaders visiting camp.

As we've shared with you about our struggles we have also lifted up the powerful work we are doing in the name of Christ, as guided by our mission. We're emboldened by the notion that we are called by this mission to bring together *all* of God's children. During the 2014 summer season alone, we partnered with outside organizations to welcome 115 campers who otherwise would have been unable to attend our programs. Children in foster care, families suffering from homelessness, children from inner city Detroit, and children from downtown Jackson all came to know Christ more intimately through a Living Water Ministries experience as we put this mission first. Of course we also have continued to bring together our Lutheran, Episcopal and other youth, and adult leaders in powerful experiences of Christian community and faith formation.

In response to challenges we have faced, we have been engaged for over a decade in rigorous strategic planning (on multiple occasions), including working with consultants from the ELCA and third party organizations, holding focus groups on various aspects of our ministry, and through deep prayer & discernment about how we faithfully respond to current realities. Despite all these efforts, it became apparent to all leaders that our ability to maintain two separate physical locations was no longer sustainable in the face of the trend of ever declining summer enrollments. To enable us to continue to fulfill our mission boldly, competitively, and with excellence, the Board has determined that the best course forward was to sell one of our properties, in order to focus our talents and treasures more effectively in one location.

After months of consultation with outside experts, carefully considering demographic trends, geographic considerations, including proximity to growing population centers and tourist destinations ("location, location, location"), physical plant needs and opportunities, and numerous other factors, and after much prayer and careful discernment, the Board (composed of both Bishops, several pastors from around the state, and lay leaders from ELCA and Episcopal congregations), passed the following resolution on September 22nd, 2014:

(OVER)

With gratitude to God for all the ways that Michi-Lu-Ca has transformed lives and shaped the faith of campers and staff, but recognizing also that our mission is not tied to a place and in confident hope that the mission of Living Water Ministries may continue to flourish, with deep regret and after prayerful deliberation the Board moves to authorize the sale of Michi-Lu-Ca. Going forward, we commit to enhancing the facilities at Stony Lake and exploring other means and places where Living Water Ministries may continue to create communities centered in Christ to transform the world.

Some Board members expressed their thoughts following the very emotional meeting:

Bishop Kreiss: “My wife Kristin and I met at Michi-Lu-Ca. Our kids have been to camp every summer. My daughter was hoping to work there next summer. The decision to let go of this camp, in many ways, breaks my heart. Because I believe so firmly that camp changes lives, I’ve been part of this decision to keep our synods in camping ministry by bringing the best of Michi-Lu-Ca to a new place so that camping can continue to change lives.”

Bishop Satterlee: “I have been really impressed with the Living Water Ministries Board’s commitment to camping in Michigan. It’s been a long, hard, painful decision to let go of Michi-Lu-Ca to preserve camping ministry on behalf of the church. We really believe this is a necessary, yet painful step as we seek to grow the ministry of LWM.”

Board President Dan Rustmann: “This was the most difficult decision I have ever faced on any board. Michi-Lu-Ca is very dear to me and will forever hold a treasured place in my heart. But as I examined the data and considered the situation, I realized that I had to discharge my duties as a diligent steward in favor of this decision. This is not an end but a new beginning. I am extremely excited about our future!

In the spring of 2015 there will be an opportunity to celebrate the ministries, share stories of faith, and to say goodbye. This celebration of ministry will take place May 2nd, 2015 from 1:00 pm – 5:00 pm at Michi-Lu-Ca. You may have questions about this decision. Please see the enclosed document for answers to some your questions.

On behalf of thousands of campers, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to all who have changed the world in Christ’s name through their leadership, service, and support of the communities formed at Michi-Lu-Ca. As Paul reminds us in Romans, “For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.” May you find peace in the power of both Christ’s death and resurrection.

In Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "C.J. Clark". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "C.J." and the last name "Clark" clearly distinguishable.

C.J. Clark

Executive Director, Living Water Ministries

Thank you again for your support of Michi-Lu-Ca and Living Water Ministries. Please direct your questions that may not have been addressed above to board@elcalivingwater.com. Anonymous correspondence will be discarded.