



# HEARTLAND CONFERENCE

UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST  
N. KY • OH • WV

November 29, 2023

Dear Members and Friends of the Heartland Conference,

It is with heavy hearts that we must share with you the recent decision of the Heartland Conference Board of Directors to sell our beloved Temples Hills Camp and Retreat Center by the end of 2024. **Summer Camp will still be held at Temples Hills for the summer of 2024.**

We want you to know that this decision was not made lightly nor quickly. Many of you are aware that the financial challenge of owning a camp property (and in our case two properties over the years) has long been a strain on the overall finances of the conference. The significant nature of this challenge has been shared in many ways over the years, and in the past year has been regularly conveyed through conference communications with the proposal of the “Survive and Thrive” initiative. A funding sub-committee of this initiative composed of decades-long supporters of our camps has been significantly involved in helping to clarify this decision which the Board now shares with you.

As was shared at the Conference Annual Gathering in September, the financial pressures of camp ownership and its overall effect on the finances of the entire conference have reached a point where the sustainability of our entire shared ministry was quickly becoming a matter of major concern. While we have seen an increase in campers and camp use since the extraordinary realities of COVID’s impact over the past several years, it has not been nearly enough to offset what the camp requires for long-term viability.

Truthfully, the camp has never been completely self-sustaining. It has always required additional financial support in the form of endowment draws, Our Church’s Wider Mission (OCWM) support, and other special gifts in order to make ends meet. Those endowments have now reached a point where they can no longer offer the support necessary for long-term viability. Additionally, the other sources of income have been decreasing over time. Many of you already know of this reality as it has been communicated over decades of consideration regarding how to make this part of our shared life sustainable over the long term.

**Please know the Board of Directors is committed to the program of Outdoor Ministries in our life together.** Already conversations are underway with ecumenical partners that will enable our camps to migrate to other locations. Jill Frey, our Executive for Outdoor Ministries will guide this migration process, in addition to helping local churches find settings for retreats and working with a team in the development of creative new outdoor ministry initiatives that are not site-specific.



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With much sadness, when Templed Hills is sold, there will be staff who lose their jobs. While this is inevitable, it is not taken lightly, and every effort will be made to be of support to them in this time of transition. We have been blessed by Andy and Miranda Lacefield's years of service and are very grateful for their service during this time of transition.

**Certainly, there are more questions than one letter can address, so we encourage you to read the "Frequently Asked Questions" document that accompanies this letter.** Please know that we both have very personal connections to Templed Hills. This decision is felt at a very deep level by us, and by many members of the Board who also have had significant life-changing experiences at this holy ground we know as Templed Hills. Further, we welcome your questions and concerns, as does Jill Frey, our Executive for Outdoor Ministries ([jill@heartlanducc.org](mailto:jill@heartlanducc.org)). Two Zoom listening sessions have been scheduled for January 21st and 22nd at 7:00 pm., should you wish to have conversation with us. Zoom links will be shared through Conference communications in the new year.

May the blessings of God, the love of Christ, and the power of the Spirit be on us, as we engage these transitions so that the ministry of outdoor ministries may long continue in our life together.

With blessings and thanks,

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## Templed Hills Sale Frequently Asked Questions

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### Why was the decision to sell Templed Hills made at this point in time?

This decision came as a result of several intersecting factors. For a number of years, camp use fees and other additional gifts have not been adequate to cover the general operating expenses required to run camp. In addition, the camp infrastructure which is 66 years old requires ever-increasing costly capital repair improvements including recently discovered failing septic lift stations (there are two) that require immediate attention. Other structures need new roofs and other repairs including floor and deck and supports on Memorial Lodge, Skipper Lodge, the Managers House, and the Staff House

Over the decades there have been a number of “Blue Ribbon Committees” and action teams, including an effort over the past year called, “Survive and Thrive”, to develop strategies to meet these needs, all of which have failed to garner the necessary resources of people and finances for sustainability.

### What happened to the money from the sale of Pilgrim Hills and why was it not enough to support Templed Hills over the long term?

The Conference received a little over 2 million dollars for the sale of Pilgrim Hills in 2017. Of that, 1 million was used to restore Templed Hills in 2017-18 for use after a 5-year sabbatical of very limited use. A little over 1 million dollars was put into an Endowment for Faith Formation, including Outdoor Ministries but not exclusively for Outdoor Ministries. This endowment still supports both Outdoor Ministry and Faith Formation and will continue to support it.

Templed Hills would have required at least twice what was allocated from that sale for all of the deferred maintenance to be addressed. Additional funds are also needed to address the capital improvements to meet the needs and expectations of future users. While attendance and commitment to the property have been growing slowly since 2018, the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated expenses and reduced income did accelerate the timing of this decision. During this time, fewer than 20% of Heartland Conference congregations have been using the property. Additionally the property usage is at approximately 30% of full capacity for weekend retreats outside of summer camp.

### Will there be summer camp in 2024?

**Yes, there will be summer camp in 2024 and it will be held at Templed Hills. Registration will open on January 1, 2024.** Make plans to register as soon as possible to ensure your spot. There will be opportunities for children, youth, and adults [Click here](#) for a preview. It will be a year of celebrating the amazing gift of Templed Hills and all that we have experienced there over the decades.

### Will there be summer camp in 2025?

**Yes! The Heartland Conference UCC is committed to continuing Outdoor Ministries!** It is our hope to offer more diverse opportunities as well as continue our established traditional summer camp session. We expect to hold MMADD Camp/Camp Out, and Sportscamp on the traditional week at a new location. We also expect to hold Grands and Family sessions at new locations. In addition, we expect to collaborate with other denominations of similar theological approaches to offer more general camp sessions.

### Where will 2025 summer camp be held?

We are still finalizing these plans, but significant conversations with ecumenical partners are already underway.

### **I have a reservation for later in 2024 or in 2025 or beyond. What happens now?**

We will refund any payment for reservations we are unable to honor. We will also help you find a new location for your event if you'd like. We believe congregational retreats are a vital Outdoor Ministry faith formation experience and will gladly support you in continuing them. There are many exceptional camp and retreat centers across the Conference's geographical setting. We'd like to help you find a good fit for you. Jill Frey, Executive Director of Outdoor Ministries will have some recommendations for you.

### **How and where can we still have congregational retreats?**

There are many amazing camps across the Conference's geographical setting that will welcome your congregational retreat. Jill Frey, Executive Director of Outdoor Ministries ([jill@heartlanducc.org](mailto:jill@heartlanducc.org)), is available to help you find a new location. There may actually be one closer to your home or better meet your needs. It is our hope that you will continue these at a new site. These are important Outdoor Ministry opportunities. Jill will continue to be available to you to aid in the development of new retreat experiences.

### **When will camp "close"?**

After 66 years in operation, 2024 will be a year for us to celebrate the amazing gift of Templed Hills and the ministry we have shared there. We are still determining the final date for closure but it will certainly be after August of 2024.

### **What will happen to our outdoor ministry staff?**

The Executive Director of Outdoor Ministries position will remain and will facilitate the development of a new vision of Outdoor Ministries programs at a variety of locations. The Templed Hills Site Staff will be needed through the 2024 Celebration year and limited staff will be needed until the property is sold helping to manage logistics related to the items the Conference will retain. The Conference Human Resources Committee will be working with respective staff to offer appropriate compensation and separation packages.

### **Will there be any special events to honor this site and all it has meant for us?**

Yes! We encourage all groups to host a "last hurrah" at camp, celebrating what this camp has meant and sharing memories with each other. The Heartland Conference will also be holding some Conference-wide gatherings. Please stay tuned for more information. If you'd like to be involved in the planning of these events, please contact Jill Frey, Executive Director of Outdoor Ministries.

### **Should I still donate in 2023-2024 and how will my donation be used?**

YES, your donation is vitally important as Outdoor Ministry in the Conference transitions into ever-new forms in new locations. Our ongoing ministry still has many expenses and there will be expenses with Templed Hills during this Celebration year and until it is sold. Some of the deferred maintenance at Templed Hills will need to be repaired before selling the property. For example, part of our septic system has failed and needs repair or replacement as of the fall of 2023. We will be looking strategically regarding the best stewardship regarding what will be necessary to repair/replace for our celebration year and for optimal sale and also clarify what can be left as is for the sale.

### **How can I connect with my friends from past camp experiences?**

Join our Alumni Association by [clicking here](#). We are planning to have alumni gatherings, virtually and in person. We invite and encourage you to help us plan them, help host one, or join with others as a participant.

### **Who can I talk to about this?**

Many of us who have had our lives formed by experiences at Templed Hills feel the grief that naturally accompanies such a decision. If you need more information or just need to process this news, please know that the following staff and Board members are glad to listen and offer clarifying responses to your questions. They include:

Jill Frey, Heartland Conference Executive for Outdoor Ministries – [jill@heartlanducc.org](mailto:jill@heartlanducc.org)

Rev. Dr. Dave Long-Higgins, Heartland Conference Minister – [dave@heartlanducc.org](mailto:dave@heartlanducc.org)

Rev. Daniel Doty, Moderator of the Heartland Conference – [ddoty66@gmail.com](mailto:ddoty66@gmail.com)