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To supporters of the Iowa United Methodist Camping Ministry:

The Iowa United Methodist Camping Ministry has adopted core values which guide our values, principles and decision making. Our first core value is to “ensure guests feel safe, secure and loved”. As a result, today we are announcing that due to ongoing concerns regarding the safety and health of our campers, families and staff due to COVID-19 we will be cancelling all summer programs at Okoboji and Wesley Woods United Methodist Camps for 2020.

This has been an incredibly difficult decision. Camp leadership have been monitoring the situation closely for months. As ACA Accredited Campsites, we have consulted with some of the brightest minds and leaders within the camping industry on how best to prepare for the upcoming summer. As Camp Staff, we prayerfully considered multiple scenarios such as starting on time, starting late, offering on-site programs late in the Summer and the ramifications of each situation. Camp staff have attended each webinar, listening session and press conference with a singular mindset “how can we provide space this summer where our children and youth can grow in Christ?”

*Ultimately, the safety and security of our campers and guests is our first core value. While we did not choose a global pandemic, we can choose how we respond to it.*

Though this decision comes as a great disappointment we believe that conducting large group gatherings this summer puts our children, youth and adults at unnecessary risk.

In the next few weeks a number of things will happen. If you have already registered for a camp experience this year you will be contacted by a member of our Iowa Camps team to make arrangements with payments. Each camper family will be invited to:

- Transfer deposit to a future Iowa United Methodist Camp Event
- Receive a refund (full or partial) for funds already paid towards an event
- Offer your payment to either Okoboji or Wesley Woods as a gift to sustain camping ministry in Iowa

While the loss of opportunity to share Christ with youth at camp is our deepest regret, this decision also creates an enormous financial challenge for Iowa Camps. Iowa Camps will be asking supporters to consider a gift to Okoboji or Wesley Woods this upcoming Giving Tuesday (May 5<sup>th</sup>) to sustain camping ministry during this time.

Iowa United Methodist Camp staff remain committed to continuing to share about Christ this summer season. We are working hard to spend time with campers in whichever way we can safely do that. There is a tremendous need for children and youth to share and learn about Christ to reaffirm that we are not alone and that our God is big. Camp staff have been hard at work preparing ways to be in community together.

- The first option is a virtual experience to remain connected to camp and the faith formation that comes with being part of a community. For churches who have had to alter or postpone their VBS programs, this would also be a viable program for summer ministry and partnership.
- Secondly, camp staff continue to monitor the COVID-19 situation and as conditions continue to change will explore offering “pop-up” experiences and day camps this summer in regional settings where we can safely be together in community.

Information about future program offerings in the coming months will be available shortly. In the meantime, please be in prayer for our campers and parents, families and churches, and those who are working diligently to defeat COVID-19.

While these times may be tough, our God is tougher. We lament the opportunity to offer residential camp this summer at Okoboji and Wesley Woods but we can't wait to be together with you again. Our mission is to *“provide growth experiences to develop Christian leaders for the transformation of the world” and with your support, we will fulfill it.*

You are in our prayers, and we ask that you keep Iowa Camps in your prayers as well.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bryan Johnson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Bryan Johnson  
Director of Camps and Retreats