



Camp Hiawatha • Camp Vermilion 1105 E. Superior St. Lower Suite, Duluth, MN 55802 800-331-5148 218-666-5465 vlm@VLMcamps.org

Voyageurs Lutheran Ministry provides opportunities for Christ-centered spiritual growth, leadership development, and outreach in God's great northwoods!

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. - Hebrews 13:8

Dear member congregations, pastors, volunteers and camp supporters,

Holy Week. The week in our church year that moves us from praising, through darkness, and into hope and resurrection. It is a week full of changing and differing emotions. This time in our world is also full of change and emotion. We are concerned for ourselves, our neighbor, and our world. Just as Jesus walked with the disciples on the road to Emmaus, so too Jesus walks with us during these uncertain times.

Voyageurs Lutheran Ministry is also in a time of differing emotions as we seek to navigate the Covid-19 pandemic and to understand what social distancing and sheltering in place means for camp. This time of the year is generally filled with summer preparations – hiring staff, registering campers, writing curriculum, and looking forward to the sounds of ministry at both our sites. But this year, we are preparing to do ministry in new ways.

The VLM Board of Directors, at their April 3rd meeting, voted that, **“For the safety of our campers, volunteers, staff, and their families and to position the organization to be a resource for our church and communities during these uncertain times, Camp Hiawatha and Camp Vermilion and their associated programs, will be temporarily closed until further notice.”**

The decision is based on the current and expected restrictions and recommendations from the Center for Disease Control (CDC) and the State of Minnesota, and has the following ramifications:

- Cancellation of all summer on-site, Canoe Country, and Day Camp programming for 2020.
- Cancellation of all Retreats and community events through June 30th. July and August groups will be contacted no later than May 31st to review the current situation.
- Temporary furloughs of year-round ministry staff.

Our vision driving this decision is the safety of our campers, our organizational strength, and our ability to share the amazing love and grace of God through Jesus Christ to people in new ways.

For more than 60 years, Camp Hiawatha and Camp Vermilion have been providing life-changing ministry. We had recently launched a very aggressive plan to increase our summer and year-round ministry with a vision of **“Surrounding VLM with the leadership and resources to be the premier outdoor ministry partner in Minnesota”**. This year, the external impacts to VLM and the corresponding action within the organization are unprecedented. Though our vision has not changed, the current pandemic has had a direct impact on our program and retreat income that were a key part of that plan. The decision to cancel our camping season is not an easy one, but we feel that **this response allows us to both be proactive and to assure that VLM has a strong base from which to move forward.**

Though we are in a time of crisis, we are also in a time of opportunity and innovation. Filled with hope, we are excited to still connect with the youth and adults from your congregation in new and different ways. Just as you have been offering worship and community experiences outside of your buildings, so Camp Hiawatha and Camp Vermilion seek to offer new ways to support and mentor your youth and families. We are preparing a plan of response that includes program options and alternatives to traditional ministry. This will allow us to respond to changes quickly.

We will continue to be guided by the Minnesota State Health Department, the Center for Disease Control and our ELCA and NEMN Synod Leadership as we move forward. As our position changes and as the restrictions and community safety allow, we will re-open the camps. **In the coming weeks, we will be contacting churches, parents and group leaders with more details.** We will also share updates to ministry opportunities, camper deposits, and other resources available to your members, as well as directly posting on https://www.vlmcamps.org/covid_19.

Sometime soon, we will be able to safely gather the people of God at camp; and oh, what a joyful day that will be!

Until then, we are relying on the strong leadership of our staff and board, the generosity of many, and your prayers.

We appreciate and value your partnership in ministry and the creative leadership you have given to your congregations. Know that we walk with you in this endeavor, and while the road is yet to be fully defined, we feel positive that it will lead to children, youth, and families engaging their faith in God.

Be Bold, Be Strong!
For the Lord thy God is with thee.


Joel Abenth
Executive Director


Andy Mork
Board President

Please contact Joel directly at joel@VLMcamps.org or 218-780-2069.

Over the next few weeks:

Registered Campers and Day Camp Congregations will be receiving information regarding current deposit status, timing, and any alternative distance camp programs we may offer.

Canoe Trip Group Leaders will be receiving information on current deposit status, timing, and how to book a trip for 2021.

Retreat and Rental Groups will be receiving information on current deposit status, timing for our late summer decisions, and opportunities to reschedule.

Thank you for your patience.