



# let it shine

## Outdoor Ministry at Silver Lake Conference Center

Imagine sitting around a campfire at the end of a full and tiring day. It began at 7:30 with a quick dip in the cool lake. You spent the rest of the day shepherding 24 fifth and sixth graders through craft projects, field games and nature walks. They learned how recycling water and composting food would help next year's garden grow, cheered as the smallest child in the group climbed higher than he ever thought possible on the high ropes challenge course, and planned a worship service based on what they had learned about the parable of the Good Samaritan. Their grasp of Jesus' teaching astounded you. Now, as the campfire blazes, one of the girls looks right into your eyes and says, "This was the best day of my life."

Such are the stories told each summer at Silver Lake Conference Center, the outdoor ministry setting of the Connecticut Conference. Nestled among the beautiful Litchfield foothills in Sharon, Connecticut, Silver Lake is the place where members and friends of Connecticut UCC churches have gathered to learn, relax and grow since 1957. Each summer, up to 1,400 conferees, from fourth grade through high school, participate in summer conferences. But Silver Lake is not just a summer camp. More than 3,000 people come to Silver Lake during the fall, winter and spring – the retreat season.

Silver Lake's mission is to be "a year-round outdoor ministry of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ, called to covenant in partnership with God and with the churches of the Conference in the work of forming life-sustaining leaders for the Church and world..." Silver Lake is a place where God transforms children, youth and adults into those "life-sustaining leaders." Many who have answered God's call to ordained ministry trace its beginning to their experience at Silver Lake. Countless lay leaders have discovered gifts for leadership in the church and in the world at Silver Lake. Both our Conference Minister, Rev. Davida Foy Crabtree, and the Executive Minister and President of the UCC, Rev. John Thomas, credit their experience at Silver Lake as a key factor that prepared them to be leaders in the church. The ministry that happens

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*Our Mission and Ministry*

at Silver Lake changes lives and equips leaders. It is one of the Connecticut Conference's most valuable resources.

While Silver Lake has served the Conference well over the last 50 years, the Connecticut Conference has not always served its conference center well. Some buildings and other facilities have suffered from deferred maintenance. The conference center is in need of an expanded dining facility that can be used year-round and adult-friendly accommodations for the retreat season. In *Now, For the Future: The Campaign for Silver Lake*, churches and individuals of the Connecticut Conference have the opportunity to address those needs and help continue the ministry that has been so valuable for 50 years.

When the clergy gather at Silver Lake each September for General Association, someone always tells the story of how the Connecticut Conference came to purchase Silver Lake in 1957. For many years, the Reverend Jim Yee was the storyteller. "It was a great leap of faith," he would say, "buying this property. But we knew it was what God wanted us to, so we did it." Jim's voice echoes in my mind as we now plan for the future of Silver Lake. This is a ministry of visionary faith with the goal of teaching the children and adults about our God who loves them and who calls them to live faithfully in relationship with Jesus Christ.

Reflections:

- How have you been aware of God's creating presence through the wonder of nature?
- Have you, or members of your family or your church, experienced Silver Lake Conference Center in summer conferences, confirmation retreats, adult retreats, or other visits?
- How do you think SLCC can best be used to equip leaders for the church, both present and future?

Resources:

- Silver Lake Web Site: [silverlake.ctucc.org](http://silverlake.ctucc.org)
- *Now, for the Future* Web Site: [silverlake.ctucc.org/nowforthefuture](http://silverlake.ctucc.org/nowforthefuture)

*"Outdoor Ministry at Silver Lake Conference Center" was written by the Rev. Dr. Ronald Brown, Associate Conference Minister for Clergy Concerns, and former chair of the Board of Directors of SLCC.*

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