



Pilgrim Lodge

Annual Report, September 2024

Greetings from Pilgrim Lodge, the Outdoor Ministries Program of the Maine Conference United Church of Christ! We are wrapping up another vibrant and spirit-filled season, hosting summer camp, retreats, and visitors to our site in West Gardiner on Lake Cobbosseeconte, the ancestral homeland of indigenous tribes of the Wabanaki Confederacy. This season, we welcomed over 500 campers (children, adults and families) to Pilgrim Lodge, and we saw an increase in retreat groups as various organizations utilized Pilgrim Lodge for programming in the shoulder season of Spring and Fall.



Pilgrim Lodge Leadership Team:

Rev. Marraine Kettell, Chair

Laura Barrantes

Stephenie Michaud

Andrew Hunter

Rev. TJ Mack

Kayte Ellsworth

Beth Haynes

Programming: The Programming of Pilgrim Lodge is the responsibility of the Outdoor Ministries Team (Carla Boyle-Wight, Rev. Emelia Attridge, Rev. Kiah Baxter, Erin Shultz, Nicci Pilote, and Stef Michaud).

- This season, we utilized the ecumenical InsideOut Curriculum called “Linked by Love” focusing the ways that God’s love is manifest in relationships of all kinds that weave in and out of our lives, teaching us about commitment, intimacy, grace, and faith.
- For our annual summer Mission Project, we supported Maine Seacoast Mission, collecting \$3,450 and in-kind donations for this organization that provides vital programming to residents of DownEast Maine and its islands.
- The Outdoor Ministries Team hosted NAMI Maine (National Alliance on Mental Illness) for a Youth Mental Health First Aid Training for Pilgrim Lodge volunteers, staff and folks from around the Maine Conference to learn how to support youth with mental health concerns.



Climate Justice Camp 2024

Priorities: The Pilgrim Lodge Leadership Team leads the strategic direction of Pilgrim Lodge. We are finding relevancy living our camp’s values: Love of Children, Love of Neighbor, Love of Creation and the all-inclusive welcome of Open and Affirming. Through seeking to be true to our values, we are finding engagement with both our own programming and with external partners.

- Funds from the Haney-Leighton Fund supported Pilgrim Lodge in our goal to “Be The Church” as we seek to utilize the strengths of our camp to provide purposeful programming for campers. These funds have supported outreach efforts to build relationship with new external partners and design a model for collaborative programming.
- This season, we partnered with The BTS Center and Maine People’s Alliance to provide the first ever Climate Justice Camp at Pilgrim Lodge. The generosity of The BTS Center provided scholarship funds to make this program financially accessible. This multifaith program for high school teens provides us with a template for justice-oriented programming of

“My little one warmed up, made new friends, was in a skit for the first time and prayed aloud for the first time.”

-Camper at a family camp session



“There was an amazing moment at chapel. We were singing ‘Here I am, Lord’ when this golden dragonfly lands on my hand and stays there for the entire song.”

-Camper



“Thank you for allowing us to be ourselves as well as getting space to enjoy nature!”

-Tree Street Youth Camper



“I think PL is a shining star of the UCC. Perhaps their best program/outreach/ technique for connecting people to progressive Christianity.”

-Camper parent

relevance to the youth we serve at Pilgrim Lodge and beyond.

- We hosted two summer fellows through the National UCC Global H.O.P.E. Partners in Service program. Lee Deater-Deckard and Hayden Osgood focused on areas of accessibility and climate change in our camp environment as part of their roles on the summer staff.
- A Pilgrim Lodge Subcommittee comprised of Rev. Ben Bigney, Rev. TJ Mack, Karen Choate, Andrew Hunter and myself is dedicated to guiding a learning journey to explore the history of the land where our camp is located, once home to indigenous peoples, and our relationship to our Wabanaki neighbors. Throughout the past year, the Subcommittee made education from Wabanaki REACH accessible for volunteers by partnering with the Anti-Racism Resource Team. During the summer season, Land Acknowledgements were offered at the beginning of each session and a Reflection Walk was piloted to explore campers’ relationship to the land and the goals of our present-day Wabanaki neighbors. Pilgrim Lodge joined the Wabanaki Alliance Coalition as a means of seeking to offer support while bringing education and opportunities for action to the Pilgrim Lodge community.
- This season, we hosted an accreditation visit from the American Camping Association and passed with flying colors to maintain our accreditation; an important marker of our safe practices for a healthy and engaging camp program.

Financials and Utilization: Pilgrim Lodge ended the 2023 fiscal year with a balanced budget and forecasts stability for the 2024 season as well. We believe that important elements to the sustainability of Pilgrim Lodge include maintaining high quality, relevant programming for our camper population, creating relationships with mission-aligned partners who may work with us as collaborators, and providing hospitality to outside organizations who offer retreats at Pilgrim Lodge.

- Pilgrim Lodge maintained and grew camper numbers by 10% over the 2023 season by welcoming just over 500 campers to Pilgrim Lodge for one or more sessions during the 2024 season. For the 2024 season, we adjusted registration costs to align with the actual cost of providing sessions while maintaining a robust offering of scholarship funds meant that revenue increased while all requests for financial support were met, maintaining accessibility of camp programming.
- We increased the number of rental groups from 11 (2023) to 17 in the 2024 season, bringing an additional 550 people to our facility. Welcoming Maine Conference UCC churches, Associations and programs as well as nonprofit organizations is a vital source of income for Pilgrim Lodge and part of our ministry of hospitality. We have worked to make opportunities at Pilgrim Lodge accessible for new immigrant populations through funds from the Genesis Grant of the National UCC.



‘It...mattered A LOT for my cis-gender kid that this is a trans-inclusive camp...it mattered to know that this was a place where all friends are welcome. And I think it's a great example of putting our faith in action.’

-Parent of a Camper



Lydia Hoffman and
Karen Steelhammer

Call to Action

We are looking for our next Maintenance and Facility Manager at Pilgrim Lodge. If you know someone who would like to support us with the care and tending of our facility in West Gardiner, Maine, we want to meet them! Full and Part time options available for this April—October position.

info@pilgrimldoge.org

207-724-3200

Gratitude: Our ministry is abundant due to the time, talent and gifts shared with Pilgrim Lodge.

- This summer, we gratefully released Karen Steelhammer from her role as Office Administrator to joyful retirement. Karen lovingly and skillfully served Pilgrim Lodge for 19 years. As she departed, we were blessed to hire Lydia Hoffman as the Assistant Camp Director to assume Karen’s work while also supporting hosting campers and rental groups. A life-long Pilgrim Lodge camper, Lydia has served on the summer staff since 2016 and is a recent graduate of Yale Divinity School. Lydia and I are both available to visit your churches. We would love to be in relationship with you! Reach out to us at info@pilgrimldoge.org.
- We offer special thanks to Rev. Mairaine Kettell (Chair), Laura Barrantes, and Stef Michaud as they complete their terms of service on the Pilgrim Lodge Leadership Team. They have provided strong leadership during a time of challenges and transition in the life of our ministry.
- Individual donors and churches who financially support “Friends of Pilgrim Lodge” offer vital resources to support our ministry. In 2023, donations represented 12% of our budget. Our ministry would not be possible without these gifts. Thank you, Friends of Pilgrim Lodge!
- Local churches play a vital role in supporting access to camp through spreading the news about our programs and providing scholarships for attendance. Thank you for your relationship to our camp program!
- In 2024, the Hampden Congregational Church UCC made a financial gift of just over \$53,000 to Pilgrim Lodge from the sale of their property as they closed their church. This gift of faithfulness will carry on the legacy of their church at Pilgrim Lodge as we seek to use this generosity in service to the long-term sustainability of our beloved camp.
- Pilgrim Lodge is successful due to the dedication, skill, and commitment of our volunteers. In 2024, approximately 90 volunteer Deans, Counselors, Nurses and Chaplains were joined by additional volunteers who supported work on our facility, in our kitchen and supplementing our program. Thank you to all who offer your love and talent to our ministry and campers.
- A small, but mighty summer staff is the backbone to our core programming at Pilgrim Lodge. They wake up early to lifeguard for campers and stay up late to provide campfires and play music for evening vespers (and everything in between)! Thank you, Summer Staff 2024!

The momentum of a rich and full summer season launches us to a hopeful future as we serve a new generation of campers and welcome guests to share time together in purposeful programming at our beloved camp of the Maine Conference United Church of Christ.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Charles McGough, Pilgrim Lodge Director