



**Christian Discipleship
for Emerging Generations:
*Children, Youth, and Young Adults Ministry***
Case for Support

Children, Youth, and Young Adults: *A Ministry That Shapes the Future*

Since the formation of the West Ohio Conference in the 1960s, camping and outdoor experiences have been an integral part of our Children, Youth, and Young Adults Ministry. The WOC currently owns three camp locations, each of them full of the memories and gratitude of every camper who has passed through them. Resources for our ministry have largely been allocated to the operation and maintenance of the camp properties owned by the WOC.

For the past two years, West Ohio lay and clergy leaders have been conducting research to create a sustainable go-forward plan for our ministry that includes outdoor residential camps and retreats, while simultaneously evolving to meet the needs of young people today. At the Annual Conference of 2023, those leaders presented legislation for their recommendation: that the WOC sell two camps and retain one. This legislation was removed from consideration for further study and reflection.

We believe that together we can ensure that emerging generations encounter Jesus in their lives in meaningful, lasting ways. To that end, we are seeking your insight: **how should we allocate our resources to best serve young people today and our church tomorrow?**



A Camp Experience Based in Christian Values

For many of today's church members, their primary experience with the Children, Youth, and Young Adults Ministry has been as participants in the residential camps we offer through the **West Ohio Camping and Retreat Ministry**. The WOC currently owns **Camp Widewater** in Liberty Center, **Camp Wesley** in Bellefontaine, and **Camp Otterbein** in Logan.

Generations of campers have experienced firsthand the joy of stepping outside of their everyday routines, exploring God's creation, and nurturing their faith in a supportive environment. Camp allows them to engage with the beauty and adventure of nature, in an authentic and safe community set apart from the stresses of everyday life.

About the West Ohio Camping and Retreat Ministry

Our Mission:

The mission of the West Ohio Camping and Retreat Ministry is to equip local churches to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world. A world of justice, love, and peace filled with people growing in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

Our Vision:

Our vision is to positively transform people, partners, and spaces through sustainable stewardship, fun experiences, and relationships with God, others, and creation.

Our Values:



Safety – Ensuring all who engage in our ministries feel safe—emotionally, physically, socially, spiritually, and mentally.



Inclusion – Respecting and valuing all God's people.



Transformation – Providing immersive space, time, and opportunities for personal, relational, and spiritual growth.



Sustainability – Being committed to wisely investing in our people, partners, facilities, and the environment.



Fun – Creating enjoyable and engaging experiences in a natural environment that brings smiles to faces and invites others to be included.

Our Camp Locations:



Camp Widewater (*Liberty Center*)

Our ADA accessible retreat center, located at the widest spot on the Maumee River.



Camp Wesley (*Bellefontaine*)

Our central location, best known for aquatic activities on its giant lake.



Camp Otterbein (*Logan*)

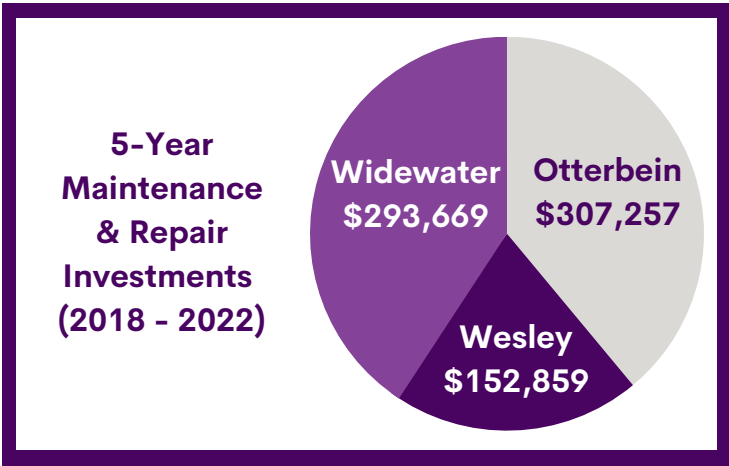
Our southernmost location, equipped with a high ropes course and zip lines.

The State of Our Camps

For decades, young people have nurtured their faith at our camps. But as the demands on our limited resources increase and the needs of young people change, we must consider how we can wisely invest in the church of the future.

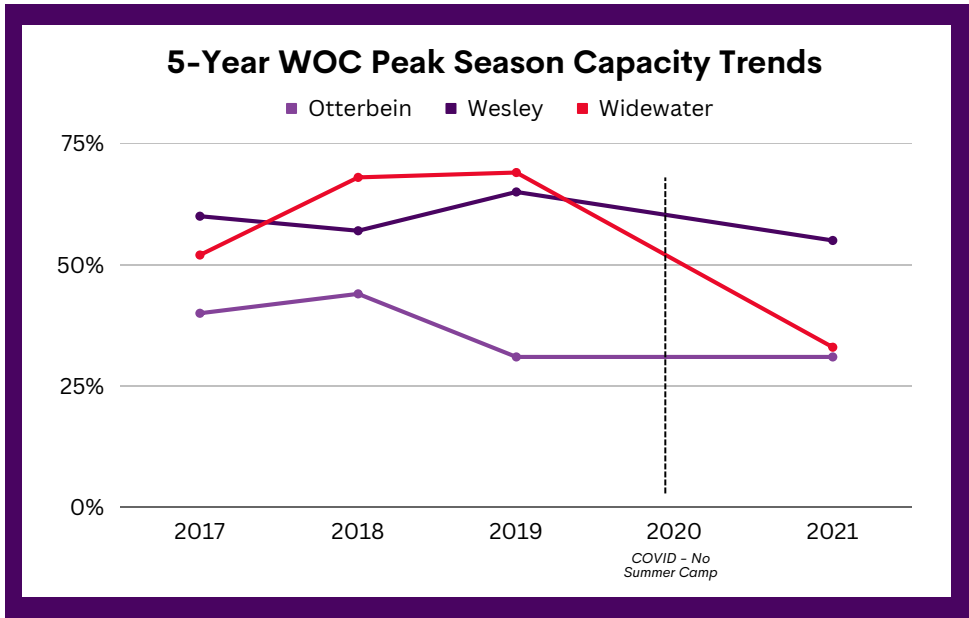
Studies of our camps have determined that **high maintenance costs, declining participation in camp, and a declining pool of apportioned funds** have made owning and operating three camp properties unsustainable.

Over the past five years, we have invested over \$750,000 in repairs across all three camps. But it would take **more than \$21 million** to bring all three camps up to 1990s camping and retreat standards for health and safety—not even considering 2020s standards for programming and facilities.



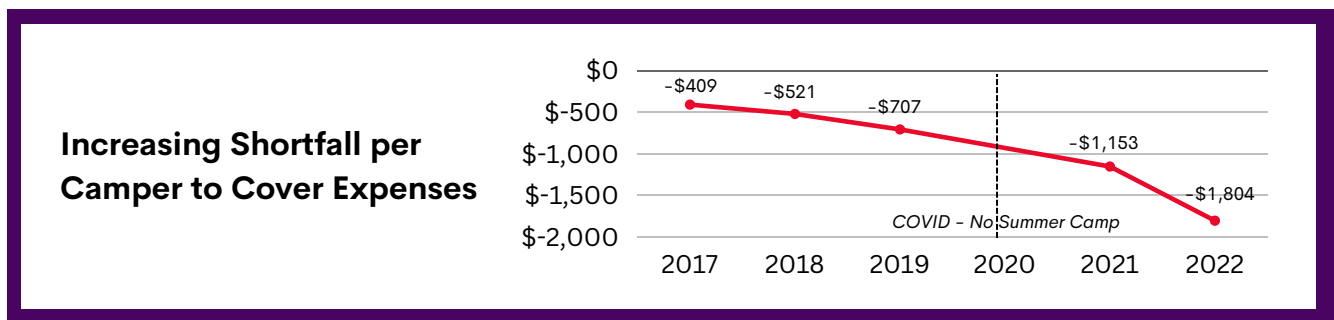
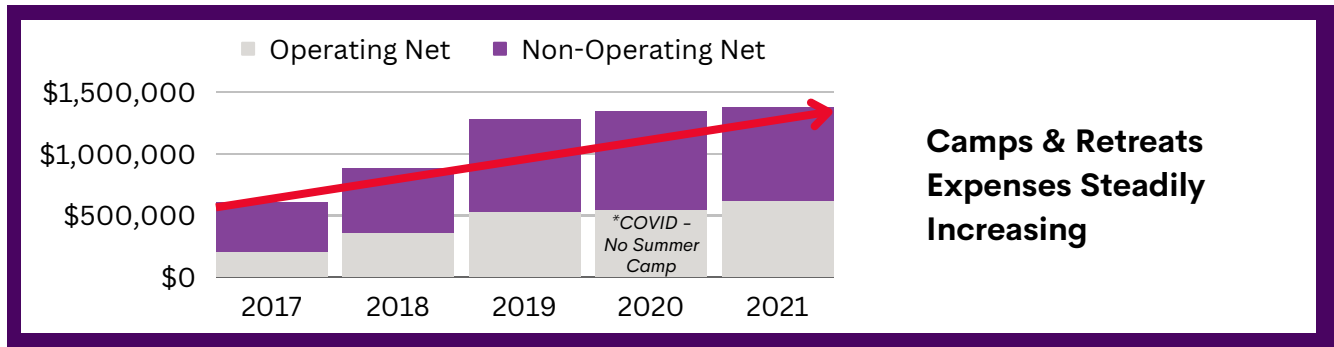
2022 Study of Capital Needs at Camp Sites by Kaleidoscope Inc. Camp Consultants

Otterbein	Wesley	Widewater	Total
\$4,208,325	\$7,334,299	\$9,747,265	\$21,289,889



In 1972, the average number of campers in West Ohio was over 35,000 per year across 10 camping facilities. Currently, we average fewer than **350 campers annually across our three camps**. In the last three years prior to the pandemic, our camps were nowhere near capacity, and the challenges of COVID-19 exacerbated our already critically low enrollment.

The West Ohio Conference is not alone in its struggles to sustain its camps. From 2021 to 2022, **about 90% of American Camp Association accredited camps reported slight or significant increases in expenses, and our camps are among them.** WOC camps rely on camper fees and apportionments from the churchwide budget to cover operating expenses and maintenance. But decreased enrollment and declining apportionments means our camps are consistently experiencing an increasing shortfall.



In addition to these issues, trends among Generation Z (those born between 1999 and 2005) call us to tailor our ministry to their primary concerns and life experiences. **Thirteen percent of Gen Z identifies as atheist**—significantly more than Millennials (7%), Gen X (6%), and Baby Boomers (5%). When asked about barriers to faith, non-Christians in this generation say they have a hard time believing that a good and loving God would allow so much suffering in the world. In their personal lives, they report troubling feelings of pressure, pessimism, and anxiety. **But investments in ministries geared specifically towards their questions and struggles have the potential to kindle their faith, build their resiliency, and set them up for a lifetime of discipleship.**

Our ability to engage with Emerging Generations is vital to the WOC's sustainability as a vibrant expression of the body of Christ. By broadening our focus and reallocating our resources, we can open a new world of possibilities for the church of tomorrow.





A Plan to Innovate

The local church is in a season of adapting to new realities, and both our Children, Youth, and Young Adult Ministry and Camping and Retreat Ministry are no different. Failure to adapt in our outreach to today's young people will increase our generational disconnect and threaten the future of West Ohio. That's why Conference and Ministry leaders have worked hard to meet the challenges we are facing.

The Isaiah 11:6-9 Discernment Team, made up of lay and clergy members with insight into these issues, was formed to create a sustainable go-forward plan for the WOC. The plan they proposed at the Annual Conference of 2023 would **allow for continued outdoor residential camp and retreat experiences, while simultaneously creating innovative expansion opportunities for the Children, Youth, and Young Adult Ministry.**

This plan entails two equally important parts:

The first is investing in renovation of Camp Wesley through the sale of Camps Otterbein and Widewater. We know this decision is painful for many West Ohio camp alumni and current camp families.

Camp Wesley was selected for its many advantages:



It has been our **most-attended camp location** for the past five years.



It is **conveniently located** for many church members near Columbus and Dayton.



Its large lake is a **valuable resource**, and its trails and surrounding environments have been well maintained.



It has **plenty of acreage** for additional building and expansion.



The sale of two camps could yield an estimated \$3.9 million, which would be used to offset much-needed capital projects at Camp Wesley.

The second part of the plan includes investing in current programs for young disciples, and creating new programming to engage Emerging Generations.

Additional investments from churches and individuals would strengthen programming for Emerging Generations across the Conference. Programming that...

- ...**encourages young people** to be empowered by Jesus' redemptive grace.
- ...empowers and equips local churches to **engage with young people and their families in authentic and meaningful ways**.
- ...**builds partnerships between vibrant ministries for children, youth, young adults, and families** across our Conference.
- ...**actively listens** to Emerging Generations and **amplifies their voices**.
- ...**embraces all the beautiful diversity** of the body of Christ and owns our past shortcomings.
- ...**provides safe space** for young people to try new things, ask questions, and engage with adults who care.

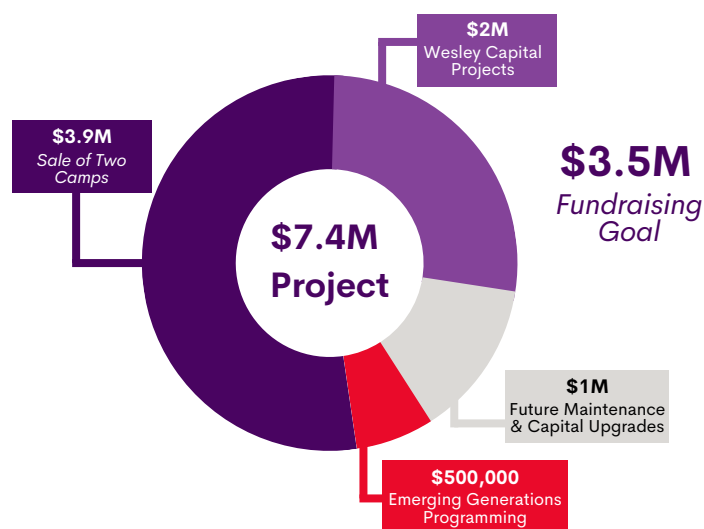


This programming will nurture Emerging Generations so they can confidently lead our church through challenges and changes—**because they are not only the future of the church, but an active part of the church today.**

The Goal

In addition to the estimated revenue from the sale of the two camps, **this plan would require the WOC to raise an additional \$3.5 million:**

- \$2 million to complete key capital projects at Camp Wesley.
- \$1 million to create a fund for future maintenance and capital upgrades at Camp Wesley.
- \$500,000 to support programming for Emerging Generations.



It is important to note that no matter what final decisions are made, summer residential camping and its benefits will remain an integral part of our strategy for ministering to Emerging Generations. This can happen at our own camp or at facilities owned by others.

Forming Tomorrow's Faith Leaders

We are facing a defining moment—an opportunity to embrace a season of change and invest in the spiritual formation of future generations, just as those who came before invested in us. **Now, we are asking for your feedback as we refine our plans.**

As we fulfill our obligations as stewards of the resources entrusted to us, it is imperative that we find a sustainable solution that will secure the future of our faith...



For Generation Now, young people who are on the cusp of choosing what they want to do with their lives and how they will live out their faith.



For Generation Next, middle and high school students who are learning what being a follower of Jesus is about.



For Generation New, our youngest children who are just getting to know Jesus.

We are called to make investments that will contribute to the growth of God's kingdom.

This is not the end of our Children, Youth, and Young Adults Ministry, nor is it the end of summer residential camping in West Ohio—it is the beginning of a new chapter. **Together we can nurture God's kingdom and prepare Emerging Generations to do the same.**

An Investment in Future Impact

By shifting our focus and our resources away from the time- and resource-consuming demands of owning and operating multiple residential camps, we can create other significant opportunities for the church.

It is only a matter of deciding how many of our resources we want to invest in our children, youth, and young adults.



Imagine initiatives which allow us to work alongside local congregations, equipping them to engage future generations. **The WOC could be a Conference where young people are not only present, but heard and uplifted as well.**

The current proposal would allow us to begin modernizing our most centralized camp to be more inclusive, while also allowing for bold changes that **could multiply our impact to thousands of diverse future leaders in the next few years alone**. Every one of those future leaders has a story just waiting to be written. Let's seize this opportunity to allow God to shape and illuminate their stories—and the story of our future church. We hope you'll join us by supporting this critical opportunity.



*It only takes a spark to get a fire going,
And soon all those around can warm up in its glowing.
That's how it is with God's Love,
Once you've experienced it,
You spread the love to everyone.
You want to pass it on.
—"Pass it On" by Kurt Kaiser*



Leadership

West Ohio Conference leaders referenced or involved in the creation of this Case for Support include:

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