

## **Report to the Synod of 2022**

### **From: Laurel Ridge Camp, Conference and Retreat Center**

#### **Mission, Purpose and Values**

The mission statement for Laurel Ridge is *'Laurel Ridge is a mountain place set apart for forming disciples of Jesus Christ who live and learn in community to serve the world.'* As we are nestled in the heart of the Blue Ridge Mountains, Laurel Ridge is uniquely situated to offer summer camps, mission camps, year-round programming and rental facilities to communities of faith, non-profit organizations, businesses and individuals since its establishment in 1960. We live out our Mission Statement through two key focus areas:

**Restoring faith through service:** We are dedicated to you during your visit. We strive to meet every request with exacting attention to detail by providing you or your group with high quality environmentally friendly facilities, healthy meals, effortless set up and support of your event.

**Working in harmony with God's creation so you can connect with Him:** Situated on 688 acres of beautiful mountain top wilderness, your spirits will soar as you sit in front of a crackling fire enjoying the aroma of a cup of fresh coffee. You'll feel God's presence as a gentle breeze and the sun softly caress your cheek. Laurel Ridge Facilities are unmatched in allowing you to explore your inner self, connect with God, reconnect with others and leave with a feeling of purpose.

#### **Responsibilities**

The only specific assignment to Laurel Ridge during the 2018 Synod was Resolution #8 (Proposal 20) Laurel Ridge 60th Anniversary Capital Campaign, giving Laurel Ridge the authority to conduct up to a \$1.5 million. A separate written report detailing challenges, successes and progress is available.

This capital campaign highlights the critical role Laurel Ridge has in the spiritual development of the church and the needed updates to continue meeting the needs of the Province as we transition from a financial liability to a financial asset. Laurel Ridge continues to adapt its organizational structure, board and staff roles and the responsibilities afforded each. These changes allow Laurel Ridge to continue to meet the needs of the church, stewardship of its natural and financial resources while also remaining relevant in its servant role.

#### **Summary of Activities**

Through the hard work and support of volunteers, donors and staff, Laurel Ridge not only survived, but thrived during the inter-synodal period while battling the repercussions of the pandemic. We found ways to continue core activities, make physical improvements and sustain financial growth. They include:

- Transition from the ‘Friends Forever Appeal’ meeting the needs for specific items, to a more encompassing “Annual Fund”, which addresses operational needs, endowment funding, and growth in maintenance reserves for long term financial viability.
- Growth in stakeholder confidence to include over \$175,000 in perpetual gifts.
- Continued improvements and upgrades to Summer Camp with the help of churches and volunteers through the ‘Adopt-a-Cabin’ program providing new windows to several cabins.
- Continued staff and organizational restructuring to meet the demand for new growth.
- Refinement of the structure of the Laurel Ridge Board and its responsibilities.
- Continued membership in the American Camp Association and the Presbyterian Church Camp and Conference Association.
- Modified programming during and facilities during the Covid-19 pandemic to continue our ministry to those in need of a safe place to gather.
- Worked with the regional health department to provide housing, as needed for local individuals dealing with Covid exposure.
- Modified camp programming during the Covid-19 pandemic, including a one completely virtual summer and the following summer used cohorts to minimize potential transmission of the virus.
- Provided more than 10,150 experiences at Laurel Ridge.
- Began monthly payments to reduce the more than \$700,000 in accumulated debt borrowed from the Province since 2004 including a \$100,000 initial installment in 2021.
- Fully funded the Operating Reserves, transitioning Laurel Ridge to a financial asset.
- Began the solicitation phase of the capital campaign in the fall of 2020, reaching more than one third of our goal by the end of 2021.
- Postponed by a year, but still successful 60th Anniversary Celebration on the Mountain with more than 350 in attendance celebrating 6 decades of impact.

### **Future Direction and Opportunities**

It is the goal of the Laurel Ridge Staff and Board to provide the best stewardship possible of this ministry that has been entrusted to us. We will focus on our future direction in many ways including:

- Continue nurturing and developing our strong volunteer support.
- Regular review for relevancy of existing programs and events.
- Ongoing consideration of needs for our constituents and guests.
- Continue striving for operational efficiency to be a viable financial asset to the Province..
- Expand our programs while keeping environmental stewardship and environmental education a priority.
- Grow our youth camps to maximum capacity for maximum impact!
- Continue our goals of financial self-sufficiency and debt retirement.
- Responsibly maintain our existing buildings and equipment while actively seeking improvements that will help us maintain and grow our mission.
- Continue educating and building relationships within our churches that will clarify our abilities to be an expansion of their ministries.

Our future opportunities and challenges ahead include:

- Reverting the decline in Moravian membership while remaining a viable ministry to Moravians and other denominations.
- Maintaining a focus on Moravian heritage and identity while reaching out to other groups and denominations visiting Laurel Ridge.
- Remaining a financial asset and financial independence as annual provincial support declines.

### **Summary**

The theme of the 2018 Synod, “Living the Essentials with Courage for the Future,” is the core of how we operate at Laurel Ridge. Jeremiah 29:11 assures us that there is a plan for the future. Based on the expressed heritage and beliefs of the Moravian Church, our belief at Laurel Ridge is that we never stray from the essential reality that **God creates; God redeems; God blesses. And we will respond in faith, in love and in hope.**<sup>1</sup> If we truly believe God’s grace is available to everyone and He is the only source of sanctification, our responsibility is to reach out in love and welcome all who visit Laurel Ridge, no matter their denomination. Laurel Ridge will maintain a hope for a brighter future for the world and will remain steadfast in playing our part in remaining a mountain place set apart for making disciples of Jesus Christ.

The Mission of Laurel Ridge will not change, however, our methods to reach the youth and adults of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must change. Although, when the methodology to engage visitors changes, we do not automatically lose the essence of what Laurel Ridge has always been and will continue to be...a mountain place set apart for forming disciplines of Jesus Christ. God has truly blessed the ministry of Laurel Ridge for nearly 60 years and through God’s divine plan and the many volunteers and groups who support Laurel Ridge, we will continue to impact the lives of those who visit for generations to come.

Submitted by Tres Fordham, Director, Laurel Ridge

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<sup>1</sup> “In Essentials, Unity: Understanding the essential things,” *Moravian Church in North America*, accessed January 11, 2018, <http://www.moravian.org/uncategorized/in-essentials-unity-understanding-the-essential-things/>.