

Board of Camp and Retreat Ministries Journal Report

The year 2024 was one of growth for TWK Camp and Retreat Ministries! Our sites had over 10,000 guests, campers, and visitors who experienced the beauty of creation and the gift of loving hospitality to empower change while on our sites and as they returned to their home context. Beersheba Springs Assembly and Cedar Crest Camp met benchmarks set forth by Kaleidoscope consulting in Winter 2024; those benchmarks will continue to be goals to maintain viability and reach long term sustainability for our camp and retreat centers. Lakeshore Camp, a TWK covenant entity, is a separate 501(c)3 and is governed by its own board of directors.

Beersheba Springs Assembly is located in Grundy County on the Cumberland Plateau with a beautiful overlook into a valley, a pre-Civil War era hotel, modern and vintage hotel rooms, and many other amenities. The Assembly is part of the historic town of Beersheba Springs and offers retreats and other events year-round. Sarah Ratz has served as the Director since 2017, leading Beersheba to expanded offerings of hospitality, programming, and sabbath. Last year witnessed the creation and return of many UMC church retreats! People from over 75 United Methodist churches found a home on the mountain through programming, weekend events, planning retreats, and clergy sabbath opportunities. Beersheba has continued to develop new relationships as well, including essential area and community partnerships. Trails and Trilliums, a fundraiser for the South Cumberland State Park networks, has been held at Beersheba for the past two years, with 2025 predicted to have over 200 guests. Annual programs, including a Women's Retreat, Men's Retreat, and a summer youth retreat called *Meet on the Mountain*, continue to offer a chance for TWK congregations and individuals to find renewal, worship, and creative opportunities. Beersheba is excited to obtain accreditation through the American Camp Association in 2025. For more information, contact BSA Director Sarah Ratz at sarah.ratz@twkumc.org.

Cedar Crest Camp is located on 500 acres of field and forest in Hickman County, less than an hour's drive southwest of Nashville and from most of Middle Tennessee. It is accredited by the American Camping Association and offers summer camp, programs, and amenities throughout the year. Last year marked a successful ACA camping accreditation visit as programs, policies, and procedures were audited to ensure best practices were being met in all operating areas. Summer camp, programmed retreats, and guest group attendance all grew, including participants from over 100 TWK churches. In addition, Cedar Crest continues to offer an Environmental Education program for schools, colleges, and the greater Middle Tennessee community. In 2024, over two dozen schools, campuses, and universities took part in Environmental Education offerings. Winter and Spring 2025 have already exceeded 2024's EE partnerships. The BE Retreat (in partnership with the TWK Children's Team) in 2024 saw 75 students and adults join together to experience a children's spiritual life retreat. That growth continued in 2025 with 130 children and leaders coming together to celebrate the call to "BE Bright." In addition, Cedar Crest partnered with the TWK Young People's Ministry team to create United, a TWK Youth Winter Retreat. Over 150 students and leaders took part in the retreat at Cedar Crest, joining in worship and to ponder what it means to reflect the Acts community and be *United and Unique*. For future retreats and programming please visit www.cedarcrestcamp.org or contact Director Russell Casteel at russell.casteel@twkumc.org.

Our Conference Camp and Retreat Ministry remains a vital partner in the work of our Conference Children, Youth, Campus Ministry, Older Adults, Creation Care, and Discernment groups. If your church, family, community, covenant entity or group is interested in connecting or learning more, please contact TWK Executive Director of Camp and Retreat Ministry at russell.casteel@twkumc.org.

Rev. John Hill, Chair of TWK Board of Camp and Retreat Ministries
Russell Casteel, TWK Executive Director of Camp and Retreat Ministry