

Camp and Conference Task Force  
Presentation for Diocesan Convention  
October 3, 2008

Last evening Bishop O'Neill spoke of the hunger for spiritual connection in our hectic world, which helps us to see why there's something so special about a place and time "set apart" for renewal.

More than ever before, we see that hunger in young people, as well as adults. Their schedules are as packed as anyone's, with so-called "free time" dominated by competitive activities and homework. They need opportunities to play freely outdoors, to join in authentic community, to give the seeds of faith a chance to blossom in their lives.

We all need a place for spiritual refreshment, a sanctuary in which we can be nourished before being sent out in service. This is not a dream or a luxury—it's absolutely essential in order to participate in God's mission to bring redemption to a broken world.

Sixteen months ago, Bishop O'Neill charged the CCTF with establishing "high-quality camping and conferencing facilities that will serve and strengthen the mission of the church in the Diocese of Colorado." He saw three particular ways in which this will influence our common life:

1. Leadership—Participation in summer camp develops the youth leaders of today and tomorrow's adult leaders, both clergy and lay. Renewed leadership is a critical element of our mission capabilities.
2. Unity—Having "a place of our own," dedicated to spiritual renewal, will unite the diocese across theological, geographic, and cultural lines, building meaningful and fruitful relationships.
3. Community—Sharing the love of Jesus in a beautiful place, set apart from our daily lives, knits Christians together in long-lasting ways. We need each other in order to respond faithfully to God's call.

Serving on the Task Force has been an experience of building that kind of community. We're a diverse group: lay and ordained, church professionals and business people, from different geographic locations, with a variety of theological perspectives. But it wasn't hard to find common ground: at one of our first meetings we shared stories of our camp and retreat experiences—every one of us had been formed and shaped by them.

In a prayerful and discerning atmosphere we've listened to and challenged each other, in order to move forward together. I know we're all grateful for

the generosity and dedication of the Task Force members and of Faith Formation Canon Neil Riley and his staff.

We're also thankful for the ways in which you've contributed to this process, especially through the survey we distributed. The response was terrific, and we've spent a great deal of time considering your comments and perspectives. This information, along with what we've learned about successful camp and conference programs, has been at the heart of our investigations.

I'd like to briefly summarize three of our conclusions:

1. It is clear to us that the members of our diocese will utilize a camp and conference center that is accessible, affordable, and hospitable.
2. We agree that having our own camp and conference center will transform the life of our diocese, taking Christian formation and spiritual renewal programs to new levels, touching the lives of all the generations, reaching beyond our present membership to draw in people who do not yet know the love of Jesus.
3. We've worked hard to bring you a realistic and fiscally responsible proposal. Studying successful business models from around the country showed us that, after an initial investment, a well-run camp and conference center in the right location will be financially self-sustaining. A fundraising campaign will be needed to get started, but this facility will not make demands on the operating budget of our diocese

We see this presentation, not as the completion of our process, but as the beginning of a new conversation in the diocese. Along with opportunities for discussion at breakout sessions during the convention, there will also be more chances for conversation in the future, as we move toward making concrete plans to turn this vision into a reality.

You don't have to look far into this week's news to realize that we're living in a fearful time, characterized by a general sense of scarcity. We all need to be prudent to live in this world, but as Christians we affirm a deeper foundation, a secure place to stand in the abundance of God's kingdom. We do not lack resources when we encounter bumps in the road, but are able to draw on the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit. As Paul said in his Letter to the Romans, "If God is for us, who is against us?" (*Romans 8::31*)

So imagine an Episcopal sanctuary in the mountains of Colorado...

- with forests and meadows and views of the surrounding hills
- hiking trails through the woods and peaceful spots to sit
- long, sunny days filled with play and recreation
- quiet, starlit nights when God's presence comes near

Imagine the people who will come to this place...

- The joyful sounds of children's voices as they make new friends and learn about Jesus
- The relaxed conversation of vestry or altar guild members enjoying being together away from home
- Teenagers sitting in a circle in the woods, praying and listening for God's voice in their lives
- Our Bishop on retreat with church leaders, away from their busy schedules for a time of contemplation
- People who might never walk through the door of a church, but who can accept an invitation to come to a weekend retreat or a summer camp or a wilderness adventure

These are not idle dreams—they're opportunities that have been placed before us. With God's help, we will make them a reality.

We pray that this investment in the lives of our members and the mission of the church may be a sacred offering, renewing us all to follow Jesus Christ more faithfully.

The Rev. Michael Carney