



CAMPING, YOUTH, AND COLLEGE MINISTRY

MINISTRY ARCHITECTS ASSESSMENT REPORT

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BACKGROUND

The United Methodist Church of Greater New Jersey (GNJ) serves as the regional connection and central office for the more than 550 congregations in New Jersey and parts of New York and Pennsylvania. The conference has a very clear mission: “To call, equip, send, and support clergy and lay transformational leaders to make and mature disciples, grow vital congregations and transform the world.” The staff and core GNJ leadership are clear the primary focus for the conference is leadership development.

John Schol, Resident Bishop for Greater New Jersey expressed his passion for this project in no uncertain terms:

We are looking to integrate and go deeper, wider, and further in our student ministry...to explore possibilities and make decisions that put us on a 20-year path to courageous, innovative, life-changing student ministries that recruit and equip transformational leaders to make disciples and grow vital congregations to transform the world.

Recognizing that student ministry, camping ministry, and ministry to college students are all contributing factors to the ecology of establishing a “culture of call,” the Camp and Retreats Board invited Ministry Architects to complete a comprehensive strategic plan to integrate, renovate, and maximize these efforts.

Ministry Architects conducted a survey available to GNJ leaders through direct emails and the GNJ Digest. The survey had 110 responses that captured thoughts, hopes and reflections of those invested in these ministries. In addition Ministry Architects team members met with 112 individuals in 30 focus groups or one-on-one meetings. We made site visits to Aldersgate, Pinelands, and Ocean Grove, as well as conducted focus groups at churches or in or around college ministries. The findings of this report have been brought in conversation with our six consultants and Ministry Architects’ work with over 500 youth ministries around the country. This document represents an initial assessment of the assets,

challenges, and key recommendations for the conference in achieving its ambitious vision for the next generation.

The survey had 110 responses and included the following key insights:

- Gratitude for quality and holistic support from GNJ to help local congregations host and sustain meaningful youth (ages 0 - 18) ministry and mission work: *IGNITE Youth Leader Day was a great beginning that inspired many to see that we can "do" and "be" with God's help and working together.*
- A desire for seed money for "lab" work in engaging youth in multi-generational ministry and mission work: *For our denomination to survive and thrive in the 21st century, we must be intentional and insistent in connecting ALL generations to NOW (nurture, outreach, and witness) in God's love and grace.*
- The need for a section in GNJ Digest which highlights denominational resources for youth specific ministry and mission ideas & programs
- An expressed desire for "year-round" GNJ connectional approach to engage youth in growing spiritually that either kicks off from or culminates to IGNITE.
- The recognition that more churches are becoming too small to sustain a meaningful youth ministry program on their own and that creating processes for churches to work together and combine resources for next generation ministry will be "vital" for significant youth ministry and mission work to occur.

STUDENT MINISTRY OVERVIEW

When visiting the Mission and Resource Center, it is immediately evident how deeply GNJ values young people based on the photos of youth and children on the walls throughout the building.

It is estimated there are over 19,000 middle school and high school students in GNJ congregations and over 2,000,000 in the state. Reasonable estimates factor that there are approximately 40 full or half-time church staff members doing youth ministry in GNJ and another 100 part-time youth workers.

A study completed for the Camps and Retreats Board in 2014 indicates the steady and significant decline in the number of children and youth involved in local GNJ churches in the previous 40 years, declining from almost 50,000 youth and children to just under 20,000:

	Children	Youth	Total	<i>Decrease from Prior Period</i>
1973	35,586	14,294	49,880	
1983	26,942	10,225	37,167	-25%
1993	23,423	7,527	30,950	-17%
2003	20,234	8,347	28,581	-8%
2013	11,846	7,315	19,161	-33%

Over the past three years, youth ministry in GNJ has experienced a tremendous resurgence of energy and momentum surrounding IGNITE weekend, which essentially replaced the Ocean City Youth Weekend, a youth event with a 50-year history. IGNITE has been growing steadily in its short three-year history with over 1,300 students in 2016, showing great progress toward achieving the goal of attracting at least 5,000 youth annually. A youth-leader training day sponsored by IGNITE in February attracted 150 youth leaders.

GNJ dedicated \$82,000 to IGNITE in 2015 and \$65,000 in 2016. When this event grows to 2,500 students, it will be independently sustainable and no longer require financial support from the conference.

The last GNJ staff person to be solely dedicated to youth ministry was Erica Munoz who was appointed to a church in 2014 and continues to provide support for Safe Sanctuary processes. Though there is no GNJ staff specifically dedicated to youth ministry, several staff people have been active and enthusiastic members of the IGNITE team, led by Eric Drew, Director of Worship.

GNJ also has a Council on Youth and Young Adult Ministry made up of youth and leaders. Though many, if not all, members of the council are active in IGNITE leadership, they do not, at this time, have regularly scheduled meetings.

CAMPING MINISTRY OVERVIEW

The conference oversees the work of two camp properties:

- Aldersgate, located on 400 acres in Newton, NJ (Sussex County) near Swartswood Lake, a 90 minute drive from New York City
- Pinelands Center at Mt. Misery, located on nearly 200 acres in Browns Mills, NJ (Burlington County) in the heart of the NJ Pinelands, an hour drive from Philadelphia.

Pinelands and Aldersgate have served United Methodists in profound ways since being acquired in 1947 and 1964, respectively. Many focus groups included at least one person who described himself or herself as a “product of” Pinelands or Aldersgate. The Korean Church community contributed generously to the building of the beautiful Appenzeller Chapel at Aldersgate, named for the missionary who brought Methodism to Korea.

Pinelands has the capacity to sleep 140 guests in year-round cabins and 32 guests in rustic (non-heated) cabins for a total capacity of 172 people. The dining hall can support 160 people, and the auditorium has the capacity to seat 150. The property is currently open and providing a retreat venue for congregations and the community.

Aldersgate is limited to rustic (non-heated) cabins with a capacity for 92 guests. There is a dining hall, in need of renovation, that can accommodate 80 people and a ready-to-use chapel that can hold over 100 worshippers. The water is not currently on at the camp, making it unusable for groups. A property manager lives on the property and receives housing and a financial stipend.

The Northern and Southern New Jersey Conferences merged in 2000, and within the following ten years, both camps had moved into decline and disrepair. In 2004, a fire at Aldersgate destroyed the 70-bed lodge on the facility, and by 2014, the camp had been shut down all together. In February 2014, the Camping Board leadership raised the concern to alert the Conference that the camps have been operating at a deficit for several years and that the deficit has been managed by using a \$900,000 reserve. This reserve was created through a \$2.3 million insurance payment for the fire at the lodge ten years before.

In 2014, all copper plumbing was stolen from Aldersgate, and it was discovered that the pool house was sinking. Pinelands ceased to program their own summer camps after the 2013 camping season as well,

but has continued to operate as a retreat center, largely supported by a partnership with the Cherry Hill public school system.

In 2014, a full-time director was hired to oversee and run both camps, a recent seminary graduate with a degree in camp ministry. In the spring of 2015, Shore Point Architecture was contracted to conduct a survey of the camp properties and estimated that it would require over \$810,000 to rehabilitate Pinelands and over \$3,300,000 to rehabilitate Aldersgate fully, including over \$1,600,000 to build a new lodge.

In the meantime, the attempt to restart summer camps never quite got off the ground, and those advertised camps ended up being canceled in May 2015. The full-time director left her position in August 2015. Jay Kim, GNJ's Business Services Manager, was appointed to oversee GNJ's relationship with Pinelands in 2015.

In September 2015, the GNJ Camping Board hired Cassandra Ferrigno as a camp renovator, drawing on her extensive experience in home repair and her good work with A Future With Hope. She has overseen the successful renovation of two cabins at Pinelands, and in January 2016, she began serving as the acting director of both properties. It is anticipated that the number of retreat groups and users will increase by at least 50% in 2017.

GNJ has invested approximately \$90,000 per camp per year since at least 2009, when it invested \$94,600 per camp. Driven by this financial reality, the Camp and Retreats Board is highly motivated to determine a way forward that doesn't require an on-going annual expenditure of \$180,000.

In 2015, the two camps, when combined, were "in the black" by \$4,000, after depreciation, reducing GNJ's investment to \$176,000. The positive trend has continued into 2016 with GNJ contributing approximately \$160,000 or less.

Both camps come with built-in revenue streams before rental fees and camp fees. Pinelands typically receives \$20,000-\$30,000 a year in special offerings and donations, which include annual funds from the maintenance fund and the Hulitt Scholarship Funds. Aldersgate receives approximately \$20,000 a year in interest from the camps investment fund of approximately \$350,000. The camps are also supported by a maintenance fund of \$250,000. These funds are designated by the annual conference in support of the camps.

Aldersgate is currently made up of three properties—the main camp where the fire took place 13 years ago, 22 acres of lake front property (the Dietz Property), and Tannery Falls, a 131-acre tract of land with a long-vacant house and guest house. The camp needs major renovations to its dining hall, bathroom and pool, but it could generate revenue in the meantime as a day camp, church venue, or event venue. In 2005, the main camp property was encumbered (for a fee) by a Green Acres agreement that prevents sale of the main camp to developers, effectively reducing the value of this property on the open market. This agreement does not, however, prevent building and developing facilities and programs for GNJ's use on this property.

Despite multiple consultants, appraisals and renovation estimates, both properties and programs continued to decline to the point that one camp is no longer open and the other is not functioning anywhere near its capacity. Today, the future of these two camps is in question.

COLLEGE MINISTRY OVERVIEW

The state of New Jersey is home to almost 380,000 college students in 59 public or private colleges or universities. Perhaps more importantly, it is estimated that nearly 235,000 of those students are on one of the 29 campuses within 5 miles of a GNJ congregation. The numbers increase when the NY and PA congregations are included in this estimate.

Many in GNJ see this population as the church's most untapped mission field. Though there are a handful of GNJ churches, campus ministries and leaders doing good work with college students, it is generally agreed that attempts at college ministry have been isolated, inconsistent or undeveloped.

GNJ has a Council on Young Adult Ministry, currently in a "listening phase" with a new chair. The exact focus of this group is yet to be developed.

The GNJ Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry (BHECM) has functioned primarily as a grant-giving body, with responsibility for allocating funds to support ministry to and with college students. In addition to awarding scholarships to students who apply for financial help, in 2016, the board had \$65,000 to support specific campus ministries.

In 2016, \$25,000 was awarded to the Kingston Feed Truck Ministry, \$15,000 to the Wesley Foundation at Princeton, \$6,000 to Rockland County Community College, \$7,000 to Centenary College, and \$12,000 for twelve \$1,000 grants to churches who desire to kick-start a college-age or campus ministry.

It appears that, at this point, ministry to college students and their campuses has lacked coordination and focus. Over the last few years, however, there has been a renewed sense of urgency and energy surrounding campus ministry.

To date, each individual campus ministry has sought to develop, organize, and implement its own programming with and for students. Typically, these efforts have little to no connection with the congregations from which these students come.

NAMING NORMAL

Normal for Church-Based Youth Ministry

The following norms can serve as a helpful baseline for normal. These norms are largely descriptive, not prescriptive, so there is no doubt that churches will be able to identify quite a few exceptions.

1. **10% of the Worshiping Congregation**—In a typical church, the size of the youth ministry tends to settle at a number that is around 10% of the worshiping congregation. In other words, a church with an average worship attendance of 100 could expect an average weekly participation of around 10 youth per week.
2. **\$1,000-\$1,500 per Youth**—The typical church invests about \$1,000-\$1,500 per youth active on an average week (including program budget, staff salaries, and benefits dedicated to the youth ministry). So it would be normal for a church that sustains the involvement of 15 youth on an average week would have a budget between \$15,000 and \$22,500.
3. **1 Full-Time-Equivalent Staff Person for Every 50 Youth**—The trigger point for hiring a full-time staff person (or full-time-equivalent combination of staff people) dedicated to youth ministry seems to be the participation of 50 youth on an average week.

4. **1 Adult for Every 5 Youth**— Ministry Architects likes to think in terms of “spans of care,” recognizing that, realistically, most volunteers cannot effectively oversee the church’s Christian nurture of more than about five youth on an ongoing basis. According to this norm, a church with 10 youth would require a minimum of two adults volunteering in the youth ministry.

The key principle here is that effective youth ministry depends more on appropriate investment than on great ideas.

Normal for Next-Generation Ministry Through Mid-Level Judicatories

In short, there is no normal other than chronic ineffectiveness and shrinking investment from conferences, presbyteries, diocese, and synods. Thus, most mid-level judicatories are struggling to find traction in next generation ministry. A growing number have no staff at all related to next generation ministry, even though the clear majority of churches are struggling mightily with children, youth and young adult ministry.

Many full-time judicatory youth staff positions have become very part-time, and those who continue in full-time work find themselves with vastly expanded job descriptions (i.e., the once “Conference Youth Coordinator” assumes responsibility for children, young adults, college ministry and technology). What is clear is that few, if any judicatories, have identified a staffing model that moves the needle in next generation ministry.

Those bright spots across the country are often expanding their reach by creative, collaborative, innovative partnerships, rather than by the tried-and-true, grind-it-out Conference Youth Coordinator model.

Normal for Strategic Planning: The Parallel Priorities

As GNJ begins to develop and live into a long-term strategic plan for the next generation, it will face the challenge of working parallel priorities at the same time:

1. **Laying the Foundation:** Building a foundation and infrastructure that will ensure camping, youth and young adult ministries’ *future* effectiveness, and at the same time,
2. **Continuing to Do Ministry:** Maintaining the *current* ministries in a way that builds the enthusiasm of students, their families, the staff and the conference at large.

Sustainable Staffing for Next Generation Ministries

The most stable approach to leading a ministry involves building a team with three different capacities:

- **The Architect:** A person or organization that designs the building plan and ensures that building is done in compliance with the agreed-upon plan. In ministry, this person would be putting together the strategic design.
- **The General Contractor:** A person or team who manages the flow and sequencing of work, manages the building process according to the agreed-upon blueprint and ensures that the appropriate number of “laborers” is in place for each stage of the project. In ministry, this would be a business/office manager.
- **The Laborers:** That wide assortment of people with specific gifts, charged with responsibility for particular aspects of the work. For example, a typical laborer in youth ministry might be a

worship leader, an event planner, or a small group leader. In ministry, this would be the communication team, counselors, IGNITE squad, etc.

When a ministry leader attempts to play all three of these roles at the same time, as is the case in almost every judicatory program staff, instability, burnout, and mediocre results are the natural outcomes. One secret to the success of the IGNITE Team is that, though they all play a multitude of roles outside of IGNITE, they each play clearly defined roles on the team (Eric: The Architect, Jay: The General Contractor, Everyone Else: Specific Laborer Roles).

ASSETS

Willingness to Invest

Across the board, from pastors to conference staff to volunteer leaders to students we saw an eagerness to invest more deliberately in the next generation. One person affirmed, "I don't believe God is done with our church." And another said, "The younger generation will rise up. Even though we haven't seen it yet."

The reality of this assessment and strategic planning progress points, in no uncertain terms to "go deeper, wider, and further in our student ministry."

IGNITE Conference

IGNITE is a powerful and faithful experience designed to help students "learn about God's calling for their lives and go deeper in their faith journey." IGNITE has grown from 725 participants representing 52 congregations in 2013 to 1,300 participants representing 100 congregations in 2016. These numbers reflect mostly United Methodist youth, but there has been an increase of youth from the community who are not worshippers at a United Methodist church, as well. Over the past three years, IGNITE has gained a good reputation with 81% of those responding to the survey agreeing or strongly agreeing that it was a "strong ministry for youth in the conference." One person commented, "It's doing what we are hoping it will do—stimulating growth in youth ministry." Another person stated, "IGNITE is the best thing we've done in decades." A faithful group of volunteers generously give their time and talents to ensure IGNITE is living out its vision and purpose for the youth of GNJ.

IGNITE Youth Leader Day

Youth Leaders Day is a commitment to the continued education and growth for those ministering to youth in GNJ. With the success of 150 attendees at the first offering in February 2017, Leaders Day is poised to inspire and resource youth workers. From the survey, 88% of those who responded are seeking opportunities to train and equip volunteers in youth ministry. As one person said, "There are a lot of people gifted in children's or youth ministry who are not being accessed." IGNITE Youth Leaders Day could be the place where training is accessed. The possibilities of this event are great. It brings those in youth ministry together, it connects them to GNJ, offers quality education and support for the work they are doing and it's for anyone involved in youth ministry.

IGNITE Squad

The IGNITE Squad is a group of dedicated youth and youth leader volunteers who give of their time to be the hands and feet of an IGNITE event. They offer to both youth and adults the opportunities to share their faithful gifts in a way that may have never been available to them before. In response to the survey, 77% of people stated they would like to see youth involved in Christian leadership development. The IGNITE Squad is already offering some of those opportunities and has the potential to be a catalyst for leadership throughout GNJ. One student said, "I would enjoy being a part of a student leadership

program.” Another student stated, “We would love to have more training.” Like the other IGNITE offerings, this has great potential for growth and development.

Pockets of Collaboration

One exciting trend of youth ministry is the organic expressions of collaborative ministry that have taken place. For example,

- Bridgewater UMC sponsored a "youth group" and 20 churches come together twice a month with a different youth band leading worship each time. Very well attended.
- There are organic gatherings of support and networking among youth leaders.
- One district has offered a District-wide youth and children's program.
- One district had a rally in January. Nine churches participated, with about 50 young people.
- A church in Hackettstown gathers with different churches.
- One Korean church is busy planting a “Spanglish” church.
- PaCE Groups are helpful.

In more than one focus group, people who had never met began dreaming and scheming of ways to work together (e.g., “You need a van? We have a van you can borrow!” “You need props for VBS? We have a closet full!”).

Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry Grants

The bones are already in place to have a dynamic campus ministry experience both on campuses and in individual congregations. Through offering grants to local ministries that desire to engage with college students, the Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry encourages and supports creative and innovative ministries, seeking to connect the church with the campus. The board seeks innovative ministry leaders who will engage college students and campuses in worship, disciple-making, small groups, mission and stewardship. The Wesley Foundation at Princeton University is working to fulfill this call. Under the direction of a strong visionary and innovative leader, this ministry has moved forward. Through a dual appointment with Princeton United Methodist Church, the campus minister is working hard to connect college students to each other, to the community, and to the church. This gives hope to the possibilities of this model working in other locations. GNJ is rich with people and churches that are located in close proximity to each of the 59 colleges and universities in the region. One church leader made this observation “Our church is within a few miles of many, many college kids.” Another said, “This campus ministry is the great mission field.”

Location, Population and Potential

There is great potential for engagement of young people in these unique settings. GNJ is geographically located in a place that can be an amazing asset to the youth and college ministries. The unique combination of large cities, rural areas and the coast within a 3-hour drive for almost every church in the conference offers young people in a wide variety of possibilities to engage young people in the Five Markers of Vitality in new and diverse settings.

Ninety-one percent of those responding to the survey said they are looking for resources for local mission opportunities and there is no doubt a myriad of unique local mission opportunities exist in these diverse settings. With 19,365 students in the congregations and 2,011,089 students in local neighborhoods, opportunity abounds.

Commitment and Energy

There is strong commitment to student ministry in GNJ. Clearly there is a wealth of information and resources. Collecting this information and harnessing the energy already present will be key to growing and strengthening student ministry on at the congregational, region, and conference levels. This group is also looking for resources and training to better serve the students.

Eighty-eight percent of those responding to the survey expressed a desire for GNJ to hold regular training events for youth leaders. This is a group of people who are passionate and knowledgeable in their ministries and must be supported in the work they are doing.

Five Markers of Vital Congregations

The five markers (mission, stewardship, worship, new disciples and small groups) are a great road map for new and continued successful ministries on all levels of the church, and they illustrate a deep commitment to doing faithful and effective ministry with the next generation. There is no need to convince people of the importance of engaging and faithful experiences for youth and young people. It is already a part of GNJ's mission and can support great innovation, exploration, and discovery. The five markers also represent an area of the church that young people are drawn to and want to experience in their own faithful lives.

Desire for Missions

There is a strong desire for local, regional, and international missions. It was noted in several focus groups that great conduits to faith-deepening conversations are happening, and there is a healthy desire to do more. The following are just a handful of quotes some listening group participants shared:

- "We do a lot of regional missions."
- "We are talking about doing a meal program for a school for the summer time."
- "Kids who aren't connected to the church go on mission trips."
- "We have an awesome mission focus!"
- "My kids want mission projects...They don't want to sit around and talk about God all day."

Willingness to Serve

The focus group participants spoke with confidence about their ability and willingness to support the youth and the youth ministry, but the process for turning such a vision into a reality has not yet clearly been established. Most, it seems, are waiting for a clear vision they can get behind and a plan for its implementation.

Youth also echo this willingness to serve—in their church and wider community. It was noted that, "I would enjoy being a part of a student leadership program: Summer would be best." Another shared, "Kids are taking more of a leadership role. We like seeing them serving more." Youth leaders demonstrate their willingness to create connections and relationships: 150 leaders came to the IGNITE Leaders Event, but one commented, "We're not connecting the dots." Some student leaders reflected, "We would love to have more training."

Camps and Retreat Centers

Pinelands and Aldersgate are properties that have served the conference well for many years. They have offered many children, youth, and adults exciting, faithful experiences that have shaped a lifetime of ministry. "Camp ministries were the most fruitful place for my formation," one person shared. Another said, "I love camp ministries and the relationships that are developed there." One staff member even shared, "Aldersgate is where I received my call." The properties, if updated and taken care of, continue

to offer potential for a diverse and faithful experience for people of all ages. There is great potential for the sites to be where each of the Five Markers of Vitality are present and enriched in unique and faithful ways that bring people together and offer ministry that cannot happen in the traditional church setting. When speaking of Pinelands, one person offered, “It’s not a scout camp. It’s more like a church camp. I like how it was set up. A lot of deferred maintenance. It’s a property with a lot of potential.”

Unique Niches

There are several churches and events that have developed momentum (Korean Churches, Hispanic Churches, Chrysalis, etc.). Despite the decreased overall involvement in youth, camp, and campus ministries, a level of optimism exists in these wellsprings of nurture. The Korean Churches emphasis on mission is a draw for students and families. As one pastor said, “IGNITE was great, but we [Korean Churches] want to see more hands-on mission opportunities”

There was creative conversation around the possibility of Korean culture camp, Hispanic camp, the opportunity for young people to teach Spanish, and the opportunities for deepened involvement in camping for both these populations.

Sparks of Effective College Ministry

Trinity Hackettstown is one example of a healthy ministry to college students. However, in this setting, as in several others, the success of the ministry is due to the unique investment of the leader of this ministry, rather than any specific system or strategy.

The Wesley Foundation at Rutgers has “become a bit defunct,” but it’s being reinvigorated by the care and passion of the pastor (who is serving as Chaplain) and people from Piscataway UMC. The Feedtruck at Kingston UMC, and the Wesley Foundation at Princeton University work in creative collaboration to reach nearby college students. Other churches were highlighted for their solid work in campus ministry, including Kingston UMC, Calvary Korean UMC, Arcola, and Bergen County Korean Churches.

Clarity of Need

The high levels of lively participation in focus groups (many of which went well beyond their appointed time) reveal high levels of agreement that *something more* needs to be done to reach the next generation. Here is a sampling of ideas that were shared:

- I’m excited about the conference giving attention to young people’s ministry.
- Can we acknowledge that Millennials and Gen Z are not coming through our doors and agree that we’ll make this a priority?
- We need to be reaching out to young families.
- Half of the churches in the conference have this problem.
- There is a great desire for the church to connect better with youth
- It’s got to happen fast before the whole generation forgets.
- We are great at doing a one weekend a year event.
- We’ve got to do something better with our inner city young people.
- Doing what has been done is not working.
- I’m excited about this whole process.

CHALLENGES

Lack of Communication

The challenge, of course, in our high-velocity culture, is to get above the noise, knowing that most of the people we want to communicate with are buried under an avalanche of information. As one pastor said (rather dramatically), “There needs to be more information. But if I get one more newsletter, I’m going to climb the steeple with an M16!”

Almost every focus group had at least one lay person who expressed some version of “Really? We have a camp?! I’ve never heard about that before,” or “There was a youth leader training event?!” One participant said, “My church feels very left out of this process.”

Though the conference website is very comprehensive and attractive, finding information about opportunities for next generation ministry is far from intuitive. Once a website visitor finds the appropriate page, the information is almost always clear, including the appropriate person to contact for questions. But finding the page itself can be a real challenge.

Since the links in the conference website are presented chronologically rather than strategically, marketing efforts can be dramatically hampered (imagine if a USA Today loaded articles on the front page based on when those articles were submitted). As it relates to ministry to the next generation, the current website is simply a metaphor for the multi-layered challenge of providing a clear, culture-shaping narrative about the profound youth and young adult work that is happening throughout the conference.

Institutional Inertia

There is no lack of passion or commitment to youth and young adult ministry from pastors, youth leaders, youth, and conference staff. But, as one focus group participant stated, “We know it’s important, we just don’t know how.” Another said, “Nobody knows what to do with Millennials.” In the light of this uncertainty, it has been easy to become paralyzed.

There is tremendous hope and energy around the next generation, but structures are simply not yet in place to allow for sustained collaboration outside the current orbit. One passionate focus group participant expressed, “I think we need to focus on everything we do and make it top quality.” Of course, it doesn’t take long before focusing on everything becomes focusing on nothing. As one person put it, “GNJ has not been able to move from the way it was to the way it could be.”

Camp Limbo

The conference’s camping ministry has been on an expensive decline loop for at least the past decade. One focus group member said, “I remember having this same discussion almost 20 years ago, and we’ve been losing money ever since.” Another said, “Our attempts at doing master planning have been ‘building planning’ with the assumption that we would figure out the ministry later.”

One person described the state of the GNJ camping ministry as “holding pattern fatigue.” Because of this holding pattern, it feels to some as if “We just keep putting band aids and quick fixes to challenges that run deep”. The good news is that the conference is now able to face these adaptive challenges head on and design an integrated, comprehensive game plan moving forward.

Disconnected Connectionalism

Apart from a few exceptional bright spots, the decades-old model of District Youth Coordinators is failing to provide the connectional infrastructure and support that churches desire. One focus group said, “The district [youth coordinator] model is difficult to sustain, when the district youth coordinators

move to new positions.” Though everyone wants to be “connectional,” the systems are simply not in place for working collaboratively at the cluster, district, and regional level.

Low Numbers

There is a general feeling that, “We don't have the number of children and youth in the conference that we did 20 years ago.” Another person noted, “If I only have two to three kids that ends up not being that fun for kids.”

Many churches and youth leaders are looking for help in a) how to grow their small youth ministries or b) how to create a thriving ministry with just two or three youth. This feeling can have a defeating effect if it becomes the prevailing thought process from which decisions about youth ministry are made. It runs the risk of becoming the excuse to not try very hard. Instead of using it as an excuse, it must become a motivation to be innovative, dedicated, and faithful.

Missed Opportunities

GK Chesterton's observation about Christianity could equally be said about ministry to the next generation: “Christianity has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and not tried.” There is no question that moving beyond traditional mainline youth ministry approaches will, no doubt, be a difficult and complex process, one more akin to Lewis and Clark's pioneering than building from a blue print.

Opportunities abound for those who are willing to practice persistent resilience, the systematic capacity to fail forward again and again. Here are just a few of those untapped opportunities:

- There are over 12,000 camps in America, according to the American Camping Association (ACA), many of which are thriving, many of which are in New Jersey. The ACA reports average occupancy rates of over 90% and camper return rates over 65% nationally.
- The conference has a significant number of potential donors who had transforming experiences at one of the conference's camps.
- There are hundreds of thousands of college students in New Jersey, many of whom are searching, disconnected, and eager for an authentic experience with God and God's people.
- The Millennial generation is the largest in our nation's history with a deep desire to “change the world.”
- Many college students are home for the summer and would love to be in a gathering of other young adults if time is taken to build the networks.

As we think about cultivating a sense of call in the next generation, opportunities abound. There are young people in our churches (and staying away from our churches) who are eager to find places to serve and who are passionate about mission, but few clear processes are in place to cultivate their willingness to serve and lead. Here are a few comments we heard:

- I'm concerned that we are not doing anything significant to cultivate call.
- There's a real miss.
- Kids are doing camp counseling every summer and we are not using it as leadership development.
- My daughter was very sad never to be asked to be a counselor.

It is easy to understand why making a decision about whether to sell Aldersgate or Pinelands or both have been kicked down the road for several seasons. One person's comment, “I would cry deep tears if

we sold it,” captures the fear many feel of what the conference would be missing without these camp properties.

The time has come to make some tough choices about what the future of the camping ministry and what is going to look like programmatically, financially, and physically. In the next year, the future direction of these two properties will need to be clear.

Scarcity Mindset

There is a belief among some that there is a scarcity of financial and human resources within the conference. This thinking becomes a deterrent from fully exploring the possibilities of conference, district, and congregational ministry. One person observed, “We cannot scrimp our way to momentum and growth.” Another person stated, “Do what you can with what you've got.”–

Recent Financial Challenges within the Camping Ministry

In 2014, the Camping Board notified the Conference that it was going to exhaust its financial means. The reasons for these financial struggles are many and had been developing for many years prior to 2014. Although there is little consensus about how or why the financial troubles started in the first place, the Board and others in charge were slow to respond to the reality. It was stated, “The Board spent all of its time micromanaging property issues rather than looking for how to advance ministry.” The lack of resources has left the camps in disrepair and with facilities that are lacking compared to other camps in the area. As one person put it, “There is a difference between rustic and run down.” No matter the decision on the future of Aldersgate and Pinelands, it is clear that healing will need to happen to embrace a vision and future together.

Camping Recruitment and Deficit

Alongside the financial struggles, the lack of vision and direction for the camps and retreat centers has led to struggles in finding invested people to give their time to the camps. Without needed connections and mentorships, the ability to make disciples, engage in worship, and utilize the camps for mission and small group opportunities has been adversely affected.

Many expressed a desire for more (especially younger) people to be involved in volunteering, but there is no system for recruiting and developing volunteers that would invite them to come back year after year. It was noted that there were challenges in recent years with the conservative, evangelical churches being more drawn to Delanco Camp and Malaga Youth Camp for their retreat and camping experiences.

Terminal Uniqueness in Camping Ministry

“Terminal uniqueness,” focuses intensely on the “unique” challenging factors facing the camping ministry:

- Lower church membership
- Change in demographics for the conference
- Lack of leadership
- Competition from other camps
- Inadequate facilities
- Financial struggles

The truth is that none of these challenges are remotely unique to Pinelands and Aldersgate. There are many church camps around the country facing some or all of these same issues. The conference must

choose if these are going to be the issues that will defeat them or will they be the issues that spark a creative and fresh outlook for what camping can be.

Lack of a Common Vision

There does not seem to be a vision or committed mission for camping, youth or campus ministries, either individually or within the conference. It was noted that, "We're always reinventing ourselves." Feelings like this tend to hold us back from any thought of long term growth and discovery. One person observed, "We can easily get confused and think that discipleship is a single emotional event." Each ministry area seems to be on its own to chart its path without any great understanding of where they are supposed to go, including how they fit into and benefit from the Five Markers of Vitality.

Limitations of the Conference Board of Higher Education and College Ministry

Due to the CBHECM going through what some hope to be a "renaissance," there has yet to be determined a strong, unified vision for campus ministry throughout the conference. The board has extremely limited funding, which could be correlated to the lack of vision. So far, the Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry lacks accountability, control, and meaningful evaluation processes for ministries receiving grant funding.

Wait! We Do Campus Ministry?

Unless you are associated with one of the handful of churches who are actively trying to engage college students in a college town, many reported, "It's difficult to even know that campus ministry is a thing." When asked how youth pastors in the conference are being informed about which offerings their youth might take advantage of upon graduating, someone said, "I couldn't even tell you the first place to look...the website isn't very clear." Though there are many who are excited about campus ministry, there hasn't been a strategic way to market and create a buzz of excitement about how the GNJ will maintain connection with their students after launching them into college. "We aren't being very intentional about telling our college kids that we weren't just their church when they were little and that we still care about them," claimed one listening group participant. Another shared, "I think we need to do a better job of marketing what campus ministry is, who can participate, and how a church might begin doing campus ministry."

Limited Funds for Campus Ministry and How to Get Them

Though the overall budget for the CBHECM has been consistent, there doesn't appear to be a very clear process through which Wesley Foundations or churches doing campus ministry can apply for funds or request an amount different than the previous year's support level. For instance, if the Wesley Foundation at Princeton (a fledgling ministry due to a staffing transition and a re-visioning for the direction of the ministry), were to find its footing and start growing (a real possibility due to the current leadership), it very well might need additional funds to offset the cost of raw materials needed to sustain growth (e.g., curriculum, snacks, retreat space, etc). Some claimed, "The slice of the CBHECM pie is what it is, and that's all there is to it."

Another admitted, "Due to the CBHECM's grant process and its limited funding to begin with, there is an unhealthy sense of competition among campus ministers." Said one participant, "I'd really like to see us become a more collegial group, encouraging one another, sharing ideas and failures. Instead, we have to worry about 'protecting' what we've been given to justify our own [ministries]."

No Central Coordination of Campus Ministry

Because there is no point person for college ministry in the conference, most campus ministries are “just feeling their way through things.” Someone observed, “We are lucky to have such intuitive, passionate folks who care about college students’ faith.” She continued, “But we could be doing so much better if there was a way for us to be more equipped to do the work we’re doing. I think, to this point, we’ve just been getting lucky.”

When asked how many college students are actively engaged in campus ministry, nobody was able to provide even an educated guess. Unfortunately, a centrally-located database doesn’t exist, making it hard for any person or group to effectively reach out to college students. It stands to reason that if a well-connected youth graduates high school, goes to college, then doesn’t engage in campus ministry, the conference has no way of tracking, engaging, or inviting him or her to participate in a campus ministry, let alone welcome him or her back to church after years of disengagement.

Missing Links

Churches, districts, and the conference are having episodic success in a wide variety of programs geared toward youth and college ministry. Unfortunately, there are few links between these ministries to build on each other and tie them together (e.g., from IGNITE to back-home, district-based small groups, from retreats to opportunities for mission, from mission trips to opportunities for ministry internships, from youth group to a connectional college group).

Limited Youth Ministry Resources

At this point, the conference invests over \$250,000 a year in IGNITE and in its two camps. As a result, it can feel to some stakeholders that there is little margin to invest in additional next generation resources, staff, or initiatives. With strong and close management of the camps and IGNITE moving closer and closer toward sustainability, it is reasonable to expect that significantly more funds could be freed up for new next generation initiatives without having to do any fundraising.

For the 450 congregations that did not participate in IGNITE in 2016, there is the need for additional wrap-around services and systems. Here are a few focus group reflections:

- People love IGNITE, but it's got to be part of a much larger strategy and vision.
- Our church has not transitioned into IGNITE.
- We can easily get confused and think that discipleship is a single emotional event.
- We've got to go further than a vision for youth ministry that goes beyond the big events, leaving leadership resources to be very ad hoc.
- The conference had the vision that if there is a functioning youth group, it is well.
- We love IGNITE, but desire to build deeper relationships with other youth at the event.
- IGNITE is not reflective of 90% of the churches.
- Fifty-one weeks of the year we have to do ministry without all the high tech.

Missing Foundation

Much of the essential infrastructure necessary for thriving ministry to the next generation is still yet to be developed. Among the systems of sustainability are:

- Database: Though the conference has a robust software for data management, it has not yet been populated with the essential detail necessary for the effective connecting and marketing to the churches in the conference.
- Job Descriptions: A number of job descriptions for the many layers of volunteer and staff roles throughout the conference are either out of date or non-existent.

- Marketing: Though IGNITE has a magnetic brand among churches throughout the conference, other non-event next generation initiatives have yet to be developed, particularly when it comes to camping and college ministry.
- Integrated Calendars: In order to tap into the extensive next generation resources that the conference has to offer, several control-document calendars will be necessary, including a master event calendar, an integrated next generation calendar, and a preventative maintenance calendar.

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

OVERARCHING PRINCIPLES

1. Support the IGNITE Planning Team by staying in regular communication throughout this process and clarifying running lanes for collaborative and/or overlapping projects.
2. Disproportionately invest in the next generation.
3. Focus less on the structure of programs and more on the structure of connections.
4. Build the ship before hiring its captain.
5. Cultivate an innovative, apostolic ethos around student ministry, camping ministry, and college ministry in the conference, choosing to:
 - Prototype and iterate
 - Give up on THE answer or THE model.
 - Resist returning to comfortable categories that have failed to produce desired results (e.g., district youth coordinators, full-time youth ministry staff for the conference, etc.)
6. Provide latitude for the development of communication channels and innovative programs that may not naturally fit into the conference's current structure (The books, *Orbiting the Giant Hairball* and *Innovator's Dilemma* can serve as a reference point).
7. Combine the systems that ensure sustainability with a willingness to embrace disruptive innovation.

STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Set apart the next three years (through May 2020) as a time of deliberate focus on building a vital, sustainable, robust ministry to the next generation in and through GNJ.
2. Establish a prayer team to undergird the next generation strategic plan introduced in this document.
3. Create a clear leadership structure for all conference initiatives related to youth ministry, camping ministry, and campus ministry by reframing the current Camps and Retreats Board (already a separate 501c3) as Ignite Next Generation Board, which would have coordinating responsibility for five teams under its umbrella:
 - a. The Youth Council

- b. The Young Adult Council
 - c. The Board of Higher Education
 - d. A New Camps Committee (to be formed)
 - e. A Staff Action Team (to link these initiatives together operationally)
4. Provide for the on-going financial sustainability of next-generation ministry efforts through a multi-layered approach.
 5. Sequence the hiring of conference-level staff related to youth, camping, and campus ministry starting with seed money, then adding additional staff as funding becomes available.
 6. Enter into a 3-year discernment process relative to GNJ camp properties (Aldersgate and Pinelands), with the understanding that these properties becoming financially sustainable while staying “on mission” will be the key determining factor for determining whether to sell or retain these properties.
 7. Tend to the immediate pressure points facing youth ministry, camping ministry, and campus ministry in the conference.
 8. Establish a Next Generation Staff Action Team who will work together to monitor the implementation of the recommendations outlined in the strategic plan and coordination with the efforts surrounding IGNITE.
 9. Build Infrastructure essential to sustaining a culture of flourishing ministry to the next generation throughout the conference.
 10. Build a robust marketing process for Next Generation Ministries in the conference.
 11. Design and implement a long-term funding plan for Next Generation Ministry in the conference.
 12. Develop a user-friendly, easily accessible, on-line Next Generation Ministry Resource Portal.
 13. Define the vision for Next Generation Ministry in the conference, including long- and short-term objectives.
 14. Develop programs that are innovative, flexible and scalable.
 15. Design and implement a Young Leaders Academy that defines the ecology of leadership development and fosters a culture of call in the conference for youth, college students, and seminarians.
 16. Investigate and catalogue creative funding sources for next generation ministries.

RECOMMENDATIONS SPECIFIC TO COLLEGE MINISTRY

1. Focus the Board of Higher Education’s grant dollars into 3 college ministry initiatives to be tracked, coached, and monitored by Ministry Architects.

2. Merge the Feed Truck, Princeton UMC, Kingston UMC, and the Princeton University Wesley Foundation into a single, coordinated ministry effort to reach nearby college students.
3. Connect with all appropriate resources offered by the Collegiate Ministries of the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry with the United Methodist Church.
4. Develop collaborative connections and access resources through the United Methodist Student Movement and NEXTUMC.
5. Strengthen the role of the Conference Board of Higher Education and Campus Ministry through building accountability systems, communication, and support for the local campus ministry leadership.

RECOMMENDATIONS SPECIFIC TO CAMPING MINISTRY

1. Drop Mt. Misery from all branding and marketing of Pinelands Camp
2. Begin the process of appraisal to put Tannery Falls, the 90-Acre property at Aldersgate on the market, pending approval at Annual Conference.
3. Gain financial clarity and accountability around the two camp properties, working these steps:
 - a. Evaluate expenses against national or regional norms
 - b. Initiate the practice of creating annual budgets, monthly P&L reports shared with the acting camp director, the camping board, and Ministry Architects.
 - c. Identify, propose, and initiate cost-savings practices at both camps.
 - d. Identify, propose, and initiate revenue generating practices at both camps.
 - e. Complete a 5-year pro forma to model the financial viability of Aldersgate and Pinelands
 - f. Agree in concept that, if either of these properties is not able to move to financial sustainability, that/those property/properties will be sold.
 - g. Identify financial dashboard warning Lights that serve as triggers for immediate action, with Jay Kim having responsibility for the monthly review.
4. Experiment with up to five revenue-generating, on-mission initiatives or partnerships at Aldersgate or Pinelands, considering the following options
 - a. Partner with excellent program providers that fulfill the GNJAC mission.
 - b. Provide after-school programming for children and youth who are local to the camps.
 - c. Expand outdoor education partnerships with nearby schools.
 - d. Offer targeted programming (e.g., SAT Prep Course, Sailing, Writing, etc.).
 - e. Offer a summer multi-church mission week experience based at one of the camps, serving in neighboring communities.
 - f. Write a grant for a "Peace Retreat" for young people in the conference and refugee youth from within or even outside the conference.
 - g. A camp for LGBTQ youth
 - h. A camp for youth and/or children with disabilities
 - i. Develop a Spanish Immersion Camp for English speakers.
 - j. Develop a farming co-op or a partnership with the Farminary at Princeton Theological Seminary or a sustainable communal farm on the lake based on the Genesis Farm model.
 - k. Re-establish confirmation retreats for churches in the conference.

5. Contract Camp Staff through summer 2018 to include:
 - a. A marketing and program director at Pinelands with a focus on filling the weeks of summer with churches bringing their own groups to camp.
 - b. A day-camp director at Aldersgate for summer 2018.
 - c. Part-time, contract program staff as needed.

6. Explore the possibility of a new church plant meeting at the Aldersgate chapel, staffed by a clergy person who lives on the property and spends some of his ministry hours caring for the camp and its programs.

7. Until such time as Pinelands and Aldersgate have thriving programs of their own,
 - a. Market the retreat center to other churches and organizations for their summer camps.
 - b. Identify strategic church partners to run day camps at Pinelands and/or Aldersgate.
 - c. Pilot a GNJfamily camp sponsored by the Next Generation Ministries Board to reintroduce facilities.
 - d. Brand a spring break service week of camp designed to pair skilled contractors/laborers with students to assist with camp maintenance.

8. Develop a master plan for the renovation and upgrading of camp facilities.

**The *Ministry Architects* Team Serving
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Mark is the founder and president of Ministry Architects. For 28 years, he served as the Associate Pastor for Youth and Their Families at First Presbyterian Church in Nashville, Tennessee, where he continues to serve as the Associate Pastor for New Ministries in a volunteer capacity. Mark is the founder of Justice Industries and co-founder of Ministry Incubators and the Center for Youth Ministry Training. He serves on the Board of Trustees of Princeton Theological Seminary. Mark is the author of 10 books, including *Sustainable Youth Ministry*, *Family-Based Youth Ministry*, and soon-to-be-released *Reimagining Young Adult Ministry*. Mark and his wife Susan lives in Nashville, and they have three grown children and three grandchildren.

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Betsy brings years of experience to her role with Ministry Architects, having begun her youth ministry career in 2001 serving as the full-time youth minister at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Mobile, Alabama and has served in a wide variety of ministry roles since then, most related to next generation ministry. Betsy holds a Bachelor's degree from Sewanee (The University of the South) in Religious Studies and a Masters in Theological Studies from Spring Hill College. Betsy lives in Charlotte, North Carolina with her husband, Taylor, and their two daughters, Katie and Grace.

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Upon completing his undergraduate degrees at Belmont University in Biology and Chemistry, Tommy was accepted to Vanderbilt University's Ph.D. program in Biomedical Science. Although Tommy had never forgotten his calling to camp ministry, he felt that he would first have to attain significant status and wealth to launch the vision. However, during his third year of the program, Tommy shared with his wife, Lane, that God had revealed now was the time. After much prayer and due diligence, they discovered a stunning 70-acre farm on a 20,000-acre lake outside Scottsville, Ky. Tommy felt led to leave his Ph.D. program and sell his baseball card collection to secure the land and initiate Barefoot Republic Camp.

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Melissa has served in children's and youth ministries in a number of denominations since 1997 as a paid staff person and volunteer in small and large churches. Prior to moving to her current home in Connecticut, Melissa's experience has been working in churches in the Philadelphia suburbs and New

York City. While in NYC, she served as the Communications Assistant to the Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church. She is a certified DiSC Behavior Facilitator and enjoys working with ordained clergy and lay leaders to help them communicate more effectively with one another.

Melissa enjoys speaking at retreats for youth, parents, youth leaders, and church boards. She has authored curriculum and numerous articles for Simply Youth Ministry, Group Magazine, and is a guest blogger for a number of online blog sites. She's currently working on her first book project. Mike, Melissa's husband, is an Episcopal priest, and they live with their two daughters and a son: Talie, Kiersten, and Peyton. She loves to read, and she's particularly fond of giraffes and the color orange.