



Pilgrim Lodge

Annual Report, September 2025

Greetings from Pilgrim Lodge, the Outdoor Ministries Program of the Maine Conference United Church of Christ. We are wrapping up another vibrant and spirit-filled season, hosting summer camp, retreats, and visitors to our site in West Gardiner on Lake Cobbosseeconte, the ancestral homeland of indigenous tribes of the Wabanaki Confederacy.

This season, we welcomed approximately 590 participants (children, adults and families) to Pilgrim Lodge camp programs and over 650 individuals through retreat groups to our site. This robust in-gathering of people for a variety of purposes; from summer camp to meditation retreats, trainings and conferences, brings vitality and purpose to our ministry and diverse revenue to sustain our operations.

Pilgrim Lodge Leadership Team:

Rev. TJ Mack, Chair

Andrew Hunter

Kayte Ellsworth

Beth Haynes

Henry Hilton

Stacy George

Emily Southard

Doug Rhoda

Elena Barrantes

Programming: The Programming of Pilgrim Lodge is the responsibility of the Outdoor Ministries Team (Louise Smith-Erb, Carla Boyle-Wight, Rev. Emelia Attridge, Rev. Kiah Baxter, Erin Shultz, Nicci Pilotte, Ashley Martinage, Skyler Keiter, Kelsea Bickford, Antonio Pulsoni, and Leslie Smith-Green with Lydia Hoffman and myself attending as staff).

- This season, we utilized the ecumenical InsideOut Curriculum called “Another Way.” The curriculum encouraged campers of all ages to reflect on how God invites us to reimagine who we are and how we do things as we consider personal change and transformation in manifesting the change we seek in the world.
- For our annual summer Mission Project, we grounded our programming in scripture as we lifted up the work of two organizations that serve immigrants in Maine: The Maine Immigrants’ Rights Coalition and the Maine Mobile Health Program. Throughout the season, we collected \$5,000 to share between the organizations that serve our neighbors across the state while exploring the gifts and talents we bring to doing justice work in the world beyond camp.
- For the first time, we partnered with Catawba College, a UCC-operated college in North Carolina, to join with 3 other UCC Outdoor Ministry Programs on the Eastern seaboard in hosting summer interns to focus on faith formation in camp programming. Ollie Mohammed was our first-ever intern through this project that we hope to continue building and sustaining over time.
- We hosted a new camp program called Justice Together: Climate, Identity, Community. This was a partnership with The BTS Center and included a pilot project to engage Youth Advisors during the winter months in planning this camp session. The pilot project and guest presenters were funded through a grant from the national UCC Genesis: Make a Difference Fund.



Confirmation Retreat 2025

Contact us!

To schedule a visit to your church or to learn more, reach out at info@pilgrimlodge.org or 207-724-3200.

www.pilgrimlodge.org



*"No where else is full acceptance
and honor for all so
encompassing."*

-Adult Camper



*"Having a faith centered Pride space
for my teen to be surrounded by love,
nature, and deeply explore and af-
firm who they are was so important
to find -- we found this perfect slice
of heaven in Pilgrim Lodge. Thank
you for great counselors, program-
ming and knowing just what is
needed."*

-Camper Parent



*"Home isn't a place. It's a people.
My home is Pilgrim Lodge"*

-Camper

- The Outdoor Ministries Team hosted Spencer Traylor of Samara Strategies for training for volunteers and staff on "Navigating Identity-Based Social Conflict" to equip our camp leaders in skills to work with campers across lines of difference in constructive ways.

Priorities and Innovation: The Pilgrim Lodge Leadership Team leads the strategic direction of Pilgrim Lodge. We are finding purpose as a ministry in living our values: Love of Children, Love of Neighbor, Love of Creation and the all-inclusive welcome of Open and Affirming. Through centering our priorities around our values, we are creating energy that fuels our program.

- Funds from the Haney-Leighton Fund have supported Pilgrim Lodge in our goal to "Be The Church." These funds have supported outreach efforts to build relationship with new external partners and design a model for collaborative programming.
- We worked with partner organizations including the Level Ground Initiative of Maine Summer Camps, the Quality Housing Coalition, and a variety of our UCC churches to welcome New Mainers to camp for their first experience as Pilgrim Lodge campers, expanding our invitation to camp and the diversity of our youth on the Boardwalk.
- A Pilgrim Lodge Subcommittee comprised of Rev. Ben Bigney, Rev. TJ Mack, Karen Choate, Andrew Hunter and myself is dedicated to guiding a learning journey to explore the history of the land where our camp is located, once home to indigenous peoples of Maine, and our relationship to our present-day native neighbors. This summer, we mounted three discussion panels comprising a Reflection Walk to invite participants to consider their relationship to the history and land that we now call Pilgrim Lodge. As members of the Wabanaki Alliance Coalition, Pilgrim Lodge communicated ways of supporting Wabanaki-led efforts for tribal sovereignty to the camp community.
- Over a series of years, we have sought to use Restorative Practices to build community and address conflict at camp. This year, I had the opportunity to participate in a 40-hour course through the UMaine Continuing Education program and Restorative Justice Project Maine to grow our tools for utilizing these practices at camp.
- We have made progress in our goal to convert Pilgrim Lodge's primary energy source to solar with an installation of 101 panels on our dining hall utilizing funds from the pre-pandemic capital campaign.
- In May, the Department of Health and Human Services Health Inspection Program updated the rules that govern licensing for Maine summer camps. We were able to adhere to the updates and had a successful inspection in July.

Financials and Utilization: Pilgrim Lodge ended the 2024 fiscal year with a balanced budget, giving us the ability to fund our "Pilgrim Lodge Improvement Fund" for the first time since re-opening in 2022. This fund sets aside



"The adults at camp supported me and the Manitou community [on the island] by instilling trust and giving us courage to express ourselves."

- Island Camper



"I went there as a kid, and 30 years later, I am still close with the friends I met there. I love that PL is a safe, inclusive place where my kids can be themselves and share bonding experiences of teamwork, empathy, compassion, and love with their fellow campers."

- Camper Parent

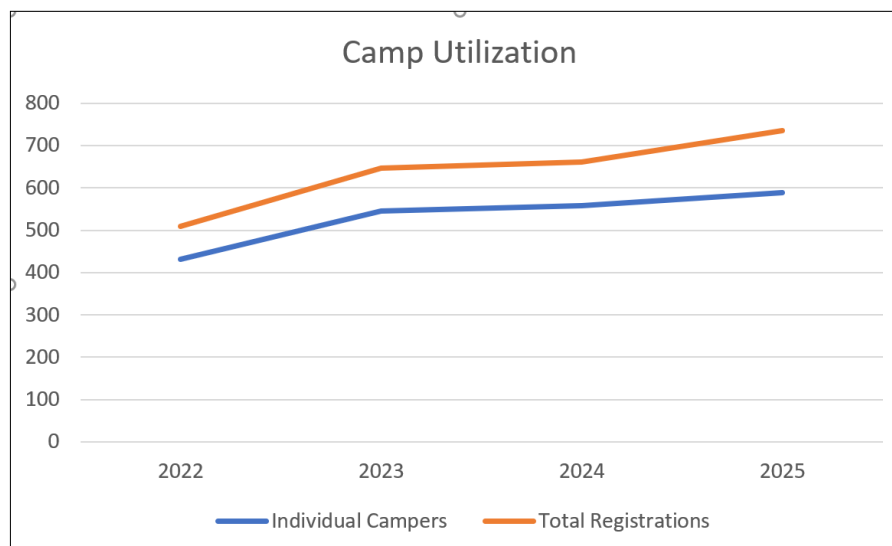


"I have loved PL ever since I heard about it at my church. I have never felt more close and connected to a group of people, let alone strangers, in my life."

-Camper

resources for future facility upgrades and was a priority highlighted in the pre-pandemic sustainability study for Pilgrim Lodge. We believe that important elements to the sustainability of Pilgrim Lodge include maintaining high quality, relevant programming for our camper population, creating relationships with mission-aligned partners who may work with us as collaborators, and providing hospitality to outside organizations who offer retreats at Pilgrim Lodge.

- Pilgrim Lodge maintained and grew camp registrations by roughly 15% over the 2024 camp season. This was the first season that we returned to pre-pandemic levels of camp utilization. We measure both individual campers and registration totals as markers for engagement as retaining campers for multiple sessions during one season is a way of increasing use of our site. As our camper utilization increased, our registration income rose by approximately 20% as we have done the work to align camp pricing with actual expenses. We have been blessed to maintain a robust scholarship fund through donations and invested monies. Between providing tiered pricing for campers to register at a level fitting for their budget along with our additional scholarship support, we are able to keep camp financially accessible while maintaining a sustainable level of income.



- We increased the number of retreats facilitated at Pilgrim Lodge, providing a home for 17 different organizations to host their program for a combined total of over 650 additional people using our facility. Welcoming Maine Conference UCC churches, Associations and programs as well as nonprofit organizations diversifies our income for Pilgrim Lodge and aligns with our ministry of hospitality.
- Over the past four summers, we have been able to increase our income. This has been essential to keep up with inflation as well as investing in some significant updates and preventive maintenance for the site. Between adding solar to updating our water pump, well pump, and some water heaters, we're ensuring the facility runs safely and efficiently.



"Camp Pride helps people shine their brightest!"

-Camp Pride Camper



"I am endlessly hopeful after seeing so much authenticity and inclusion. I saw many, many campers cheering on their peers...or supporting genuinely New Mainer campers or neurodivergent campers"

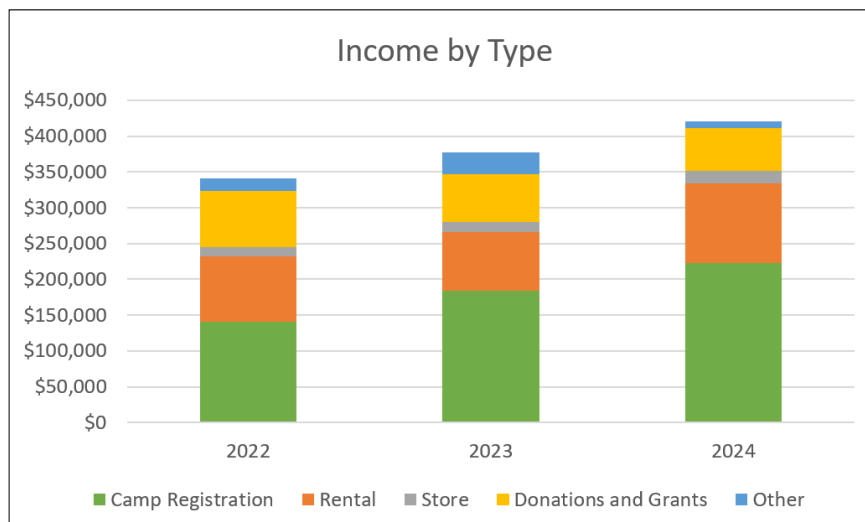
-Volunteer Counselor



Volunteers Deans and Counselors



Summer Staff 2025



Gratitude: Our ministry is abundant due to the time, talents and gifts shared with Pilgrim Lodge.

- We have been grateful to engage in the exploratory process that will result in the Conference Office moving to the Farmhouse at Pilgrim Lodge in 2026. We look to the future of sharing space, united as a conference at one site, with joy and anticipation.
- Individual donors and churches who financially support "Friends of Pilgrim Lodge" offer vital resources to support our ministry. In 2024, donations represented 11% of our budget. These donations ensure our ability to offer a subsidized pricing model while keeping our operations sustainable. Friends of Pilgrim Lodge donors are instrumental to our ministry and ability to be accessible and inclusive. Thank you!
- Local churches play a vital role in supporting access to camp through spreading the news about our programs and providing scholarships for attendance. Thank you for your relationship to our camp program!
- Volunteers are the lifeforce of Pilgrim Lodge. During the 2025 summer season, approximately 100 volunteer Deans, Counselors, Chaplains and Nurses were joined by additional volunteers who supported work on our facility, in our kitchen and supplementing our program. Thank you to all who offer love and energy in service to our ministry and campers.
- A small, mighty staff is the backbone to our core program and operations. They rise early to cook breakfast and stay up late to play music for evening vespers (and everything in between)! Thank you for your ministry to Pilgrim Lodge, Summer Staff 2025!

We are honored to be a space of rest, renewal, faith-exploration and community building to equip our participants to spread God's love in the world.

Respectfully submitted,

Elizabeth Charles McGough, Pilgrim Lodge Director