

## SNEUCC Board Votes to Wind Down Programming at Silver Lake

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11/6/2025-by:[Tiffany Vail](#)

The Southern New England Conference Board of Directors has made the prayerful decision to wind down programming at Silver Lake Camp & Retreat Center - which has been forming faith and friendship under the pines for nearly seven decades - following one final summer of ministry in 2026.

This decision, made with both grief and gratitude, reflects the Board's commitment to faithful stewardship and to nurturing new expressions of youth and young adult ministry across the Conference. It comes as the number of campers and overall use of the site has dropped precipitously, even as the costs have been increasing dramatically. The camp saw an operational deficit of \$355,000 in 2024.

The Board of Directors earlier this year [hired a consultant](#) to look for a path to viability for the outdoor ministry program, and spent many hours across multiple meetings discussing the findings and possible next steps. But in the end, the Board members were clear that the Conference is no longer able to continue running the summer camp and retreat operations.

They elected to commit the funding needed to keep the camp open through the summer of 2026 in order to allow the program a "good goodbye."

"The Board prayerfully faced this difficult decision with full recognition of how painful this transition will be for many people within our community," said Board Chair Persephone Hall. "We are fully aware of the gravity of this decision and agreed that the additional funding and effort required for a good goodbye would provide the time and space needed for a tender transition."

### ***A Message from Rev. Darrell Goodwin, Executive Conference Minister:***

Beloved in Christ,

*"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven."*

~ Ecclesiastes 3:1

Silver Lake has been a sacred place of formation, friendship, and faith for nearly seven decades. We give thanks to God for every life changed under the pines.

This next season brings both gratitude and grief. With prayerful discernment, we recognize that the time has come to bring Silver Lake's programming to a faithful close after one final summer in 2026. Endings are hard — and they are also holy.

We will honor this ministry with celebration, storytelling, and a good goodbye. And we trust that the same Spirit who has sustained Silver Lake is already guiding us into new and transformative ministry with youth and young adults across our Conference.

May God hold us tenderly in this transition and lead us with hope into what comes next.

[Silver Lake](#)— a ministry of the historic Connecticut Conference and later the Southern New England Conference — has been operating for 68 years. But in recent times, as church attendance has declined, so has the number of families sending their children to overnight Christian camps. Ten years ago, there were 950 summer campers; in 2024, there were 250. Simultaneously, costs — in particular insurance for such a sprawling, waterfront site — have skyrocketed.

## Consultant Findings

[In their report](#), the consultant, Kaleidoscope Inc., found the camp to be in “financial crisis,” and found that total usage of the site has dropped nearly 50 percent in the last 10 years. The summer camp program — considered the main transformative ministry of the site — accounts for just 24% of the usage.

Given those realities, Kaleidoscope indicated the most likely path to viability would be a shift in focus, with an intentional marketing plan aimed at bringing in more outside groups for retreats and programs. That idea would improve the financial picture — but would not guarantee solvency — and would take several more years of deficit spending to achieve.

In their conversations on the topic, Board members felt that shift in focus would not be in keeping with the Conference’s mission to spread the love and justice of Jesus.

“One guiding question we carefully deliberated is whether running a retreat center is within our mission,” Hall said. “This difficult decision allows us to faithfully move forward as good stewards of the ongoing ministry of the Conference.”

Both the Silver Lake Engagement Team and the Board were clear that the missional movement forward is for **the engagement of Youth and Young Adults in transformative and relevant ministry**, with initiatives such as campus ministry, civil rights tours and other mission and outdoor ministry trips. They felt that shifting programming would have a greater impact than what has been achieved in recent years with the Silver Lake camp program.

The Conference is currently [searching for a new Minister for Youth and Young Adults](#), a position already funded in the Conference budget. As the operations of the camp wind down, some of that funding will be redirected to these other programs.

“Silver Lake’s legacy of spiritual journey, camaraderie and joy continue to live in the lives of past campers and staff,” said Rev. Donnie Anderson, a board member who led the Silver Lake Engagement Team process. “As we look to the guidance of the Holy Spirit dreaming of

youth ministry moving forward, these virtues will certainly be part of the core of that emerging vision.”

While the Board felt that it is time for the Conference to conclude operations at Silver Lake, they also wanted to give volunteers, alum and campers a good final summer of celebration and farewell, as well as a chance for a large reunion gathering on site for campers, families and alumni. This is despite the significant financial investment that will be required to continue operation well into 2026.

“My hope for our community is that we can both celebrate and grieve Silver Lake well this year and upcoming summer,” said Rev. Dr. Chris Davies, Executive Minister for Programs and Initiatives. “We have built legacies of leadership, and care, and it’s up to each one of us to act, together, and individually to build what comes next,”

In order to accomplish a good, final year, the Conference is making some immediate shifts in staffing.

### **Staffing Changes**

Former Camp Director Tim Hughes, who has a long history with Silver Lake, is being brought back on staff temporarily to serve as Team Lead at Silver Lake Camp and Retreat Center, to guide the community through the final year of programming.

The Camp Director position is being phased out, with Rev. David Camphouse departing in December. The Conference does not anticipate any further job reductions through the summer of 2026, though there may be some slight shifts in responsibilities.

“When thinking of our community, I could think of none better than Tim Hughes to help us steward this transition for Silver Lake,” Davies said. “His creativity, leadership, familiarity with Silver Lake, and recent work through other UCC Camps will help us faithfully celebrate, and grieve. At the end of the program summer, we want to invite the Silver Lake alum and community to come together on site. Tim will put out details after he is re-oriented to Silver Lake.”

Hughes will begin in the role Nov. 17.

“This year’s summer camp program **is** the SNEUCC Board continuing to support the outdoor ministry at Silver Lake, and where it goes from here, even as it’s closing. I appreciate that.” Hughes said. “It’s not going to be easy, and I know so many people didn’t want camp to end – including me. I have loved Silver Lake over the past 50 years of my involvement there. And, I hope to be able to gently and with so much love shepherd this final year.”

Tim continues:

“My personal goal here is to have an amazing last summer at Silver Lake with as many people as we can get to camp to have the magical, miraculous church camp experience. Call me if you can think of a way to come help!

We’ll be looking for staff and volunteers, and welcoming families.”

### **Future for the Site**

The future of the Silver Lake Camp facilities and grounds is as yet to be determined.

A Property Team will work on assessing the property and land, and will seek out opportunities for partners who might be interested in purchasing the site.

The Conference will entertain all reasonable offers, and would welcome conversation with alum and donors who are interested in purchasing the property and taking it over programmatically. In a potential sale, preference would be given to a reasonable internal offer.



*Tim Hughes*

- Went to Silver Lake as a teen with youth group on retreats for many years.
- Served as a Counselor & Dean in the early 1980s.
- Served on Summer Staff in 1987-90 on Resource and as Resource Coordinator.
- Served as Dean through the 1990s including *Sing Praise* and *God Show* conferences.
- Served on Silver Lake Board from mid 1990s until 2003 when stepped down to apply for the Director position.
- Served as Co-Director with spouse, Anne Hughes, for 12 years ending in 2015.
- Served as Director at Horton Center from 2018 - 2023.
- Currently serves on the Board of the National UCC Outdoor Ministry Association.
- Has received continuing education throughout the UCC OMA, PCCCA, and Methodist Camp Association.

Tim says: “I love camping, playing music with friends, fixing things, working with young people, giving campers a life changing, positive, growth experience as they begin life-long faith journeys.”

“We don’t yet know what the future will hold, but we are committed to exploring faithful possibilities aligned with our missional impact and theological commitments,” Davies said.

[Find Frequently Asked Questions about Silver Lake's future here.](#)