For the First Time, The Site Is Closed

By Jennifer Kronholm Clark

The entrance hill is awash in wildflowers, pink and yellow and white. Orange traffic cones bar the driveway, and signs direct visitors to call ahead.

At this time of year, the camp is usually bustling with pre-summer staff working to get the grounds ready for campers and administrative staff busily preparing for Staff Development Week.

But this year, all is quiet. The normal hustle of the season has moved online.

On May 1, Executive Director the Rev. Ryan Gackenheimer and the three Bridge Conference Ministers of the Southern New England Conference announced that Silver Lake was cancelling its 2020 in-person summer camp program due to the coronavirus pandemic.

“Silver Lake’s first priority has always been, and continues to be, the health and safety of our campers, staff, and volunteers,” they wrote.

“With prayerful discernment, it became clear that providing an authentic Silver Lake overnight summer program was not possible this year.”

In the wake of this announcement, Silver Lake has been overwhelmed with the positive support of our community. Alumni, parents, and volunteers voiced their appreciation for Silver Lake’s commitment to safety and the well-being of the global community in emails, social media comments, and phone calls.

“Making the decision about

Site Is Closed, Continued on Page 2

Conferees from Silver Lake Sings in 2019 performed at their closing worship service. This year, all Silver Lake programs will happen at home.

Silver Lake At Home

While we can’t gather together at camp this summer, we can all participate in Silver Lake At Home.

The staff of Silver Lake is committed to providing an opportunity to encounter God’s love in creation, a chance to be seen and loved for exactly who you are. Focusing on the Silver Lake Loves — Love God, Love Your Neighbor, Love Yourself, and Love Creation — a new kind of Silver Lake experience is available to all who want to participate.

“I really don’t like the phrase ‘virtual camp,’” said Jennifer Kronholm Clark, Program Director. “And that’s not what Silver Lake At Home is. We can’t recreate a week of Silver Lake online. Instead, we are bringing the core of the ministry to our families.”

The new program offers an “a la carte” menu of program options, allowing each family to customize their experience and engage in a way that works best for them.

“It was really important to me to ensure that those who don’t want to sit in front of a computer all summer have a way to experience Silver Lake this year,” said Jenn.

The program will run over four weeks in July. The Silver Lake At Home Box ($30), available to purchase online, will equip conferees to explore the weekly themes through journaling, activities, graces, and recipes. An older camper can enjoy the box independently; younger, non-traditionally aged Silver Lakers can get a lot out of the box with the help of some older family members. Churches can use the materials in the box to supplement or replace a Vacation Bible School program. They can host their own video calls with their church members to enrich the activities they are doing on their own.

Silver Lake At Home, Continued on Page 3

Wildflowers have claimed the Grove between the Pines and the Cedars in this quiet time at Silver Lake.
A Ministry Needed Now More Than Ever

If I have ever visited your church on a Sunday morning, or you have heard me speak at an Annual Meeting, I am sure you have heard me say, “Silver Lake changes lives.”

I believe in the deepest core of my being that Outdoor Ministry has the capacity to change lives — even save lives. I have seen it myself. I grew up with dozens of people whose lives were changed, and several even saved, by their experience at a UCC church camp.

One of the most profoundly sad things I can think of is a summer without that experience. As hard as it is to miss a summer of camp for most of us, young people and adults alike, I worry most about those campers who truly believe they are only loved at camp, those young people who don’t hear anything affirming, welcoming, inclusive, loving, or even friendly the rest of the year.

But at Silver Lake, they know that they are always welcome, that they are loved just as they are, that they will encounter Christ in themselves, in creation, and in one another at camp.

I am so sad to think of them this season without the opportunity to experience God’s unconditional love, to have a summer without hearing, seeing, feeling, and knowing they are loved just as they are, immersed in creation, surround by a welcoming Christian community.

And for those campers who were coming to Silver Lake for the first time this summer, now they don’t get the opportunity to know that this is a place where you can find the hope to keep going, where you can be received for who you are — all of who you are. Those who would have been first-time campers don’t yet know the joy that camp brings and don’t yet have that hope to carry them to summer 2021.

I know this is depressing. I am sorry. I am also aware of how blessed I am to be a part of this ministry, to be a part of the Silver Lake community, with you, that changes lives.

At the end of each week of camp, I invite the campers to take Silver Lake home with them. I ask them to think about the places that they can make a little more like Silver Lake.

One of the saddest things I hear at camp is, “Camp is the only place I can be myself.” I love to hear how safe they feel at Silver Lake, but I feel really sad for the other 51 weeks of their year. This year it is especially hard, since instead of 51, it will be 103 weeks.

I pray you join me in this grand adventure as Silver Lake changes lives in new and exciting ways.

Blessings,
Rev. Ryan Gackenheimer
Executive Director

Site Is Closed, Ministry Continues

Continued From Page 1

the summer was both incredibly difficult and very obvious,” said Ryan. “I am filled with hope knowing the best way we can share God’s love this summer is to keep our campers, families, volunteers, and staff safe by not gathering physically for camp.”

Those who had already registered for 2020 were given the option to receive a full refund, to roll over their deposit to 2021, or to convert their payments into a donation. More than 100 of those initial registrations were converted to at least partial donations, resulting in gifts of $13,500.

Other Silver Lakers showed their support through donations as well. Since the announcement on May 1, Silver Lake has received more than $26,000 in independent donations, totaling nearly $40,000 in donations in a month.

“Silver Lake is not going anywhere!” said Ryan. “I can say that with confidence because of the love and support our community has shown for this life-changing ministry. Thank you to so many of you who have given. It is by widening the pool of givers that Silver Lake will continue to thrive.”

Silver Lake has every intention of running in-person summer camp in 2021, with updated policies and procedures to ensure all participants stay healthy.

I pray that you will help make sure Silver Lake is around for another 60-plus years to change lives. Silver Lake has always been evolving, and this is another step in that journey. It is a profoundly powerful time to consider how we equip our young people and adults to take Silver Lake out in the world, to explore the ways we can make the rest of the world more like Silver Lake.

My hope is that as we move into the next evolution, we will hear campers say, “At Silver Lake I can be my whole self, and because of that I have created space for those around me and for myself to be my true and beloved self, all the time.”

I pray you join me in this grand adventure as Silver Lake changes lives in new and exciting ways.

Blessings,
Rev. Ryan Gackenheimer
Executive Director

Tee Time

Come join a day of fun and competition while benefiting Silver Lake! Reconnect with old friends, alums, and staff! Introduce friends to Silver Lake by creating your own 4-some! The annual Golf Tournament will kick off with a shotgun start at 9 a.m. on Sept. 22 at The Country Club of Waterbury, with lunch and reception following. Awards include a new set of golf clubs for the 1st hole-in-one!

Golfers and sponsors register online for this year’s event at www.silverlakect.org/golf. Entry fee is $200 per person. Sponsorships range from contest sponsor to tee markers to hosting.
Remembering the Vietnam Era at Silver Lake

By Rev. Karl Duetzmann, Alumni Chaplain/Historian/Archivist

Throughout the history of Silver Lake, there have been times that reflected the history of our nation and the issues that confronted us all. From the mid-1960s into the ‘70s, the issues swirling around the Vietnam war came into the life of camp along with other issues of the day. It affected people in different ways.

Several staffers like Josh Weber, Tom Kelleher, and Bill Thomsen enlisted in the Navy in 1969. Josh and Tom had run out of draft deferments, and Bill didn’t want them to go without him. They had basic training together before being deployed, Tom and Josh on ships off the coast of Vietnam and Bill on antisub aircraft over the North Atlantic.

There were others on staff who became conscientious objectors to the war. John Bach was on the engineers. He took his CO claim to the draft board and was denied. He stood his ground and was sentenced to jail time in Danbury Federal Prison, where he met the Berrigan brothers and joined them in the antwar movement. Other staffers like Nick Gilbert, Jeff Scott, and David Walker did their alternate service by working at Silver Lake. Peter Jessup did his alternate service at Ryder Memorial Children’s Hospital, established by the United Church of Christ in Humacao, Puerto Rico. All of the above staffers were moved by what resonated in their hearts.

Vietnam became real to me for the first time when I was a counselor at Mayflower conference in 1972. I was two years out of high school, and Vietnam was something I watched on the evening news. It wasn’t something that related to me! But it was. Another counselor had returned from Vietnam after serving in the 101st Airborne Division. Glenn Nordin had been wounded by a hand grenade that destroyed his left knee. He called it his Vietnam leg. After a shower, he sat on the bench in the boy’s room pulling threads from his uniform that were coming to the surface in his still healing knee. He matter-of-factly talked about what had happened ... and with a grin he pointed to a bit of shrapnel still embedded in the tip of his nose. It was in that encounter and subsequent conversations with Glenn that the news became a flesh and blood reality. I began writing this article because my thoughts turned to Glenn, who lost his battle with pancreatic cancer in early March.

Silver Lake embraced him and other returning veterans with the same unconditional love and respect as was given to the COs like John Bach, Jeff Scott, Peter Jessup, David Walker, and Nick Gilbert. There are others to be listed among those who became COs or served in our armed forces. The Lake has always been a place of welcome and unconditional love, embracing all who have traveled “the road we came in on.” It has also sent us out as seed sowers of that same love.

Experience Silver Lake At Home

Continued From Page 1

“There are so many ways to engage with the activities in the box,” said Jenn. “This would be a great thing for a grandparent to give to campers.”

For those who would like to participate in a virtual community, Cabin Groups will meet twice a week for four weeks. The cost to participate is $10.

There will be additional “add-on” options offered each week, with no fee attached, that anyone can join. During Week 2, Love Your Neighbor week, our mission partners, Church World Service and Simply Smiles, will offer virtual programs as well.

Each week will culminate in an “all-camp” virtual campfire worship service on Friday at 7 p.m. All are invited. At the end of the summer, on Aug. 1, will be the final event: the Super Mega Jumbo Praise Saturday End of Summer Celebration.

The Silver Lake Board of Directors is creating a parallel Silver Lake At Home experience for alumni, which will be organized by decade.

More details and how to register for events can be found at silverlakect.org/silver-lake-at-home.
Valerie Tutson Recognized with 4th Annual Silver Lake Award

By Brian Lapis

The Silver Lake community has spoken! Valerie Tutson is the 2020 Silver Lake Award honoree. The Silver Lake Award recognizes someone whose life has been visibly shaped by the core values of Silver Lake Conference Center and who, in turn, lives their life and faith in a way that reflects the formative experiences they have had at Silver Lake. This person truly takes Silver Lake home with them beyond Low Road.

“I am beyond honored to receive this award. Silver Lake has been a part of my life since I was 11 years old,” Val said. “Without a doubt, Silver Lake has helped to shape the person I am in the world. It has always been a place where my life, my creative work, and my faith get explored and braided together. I tell people all over the world that all the good stuff I learned about life and caring for God’s people I learned and keep learning at camp!”

Valerie was first a Silver Lake camper in 1977, on Camp Family in 1982, and has been a summer dean at Silver Lake since 1985.

Val was lifted up by Silver Lakers in an open nomination process earlier this year. The nominators praised her decades of work as the dean of the iconic Sing Praise conference, where campers adapt a Bible story to a musical worship.

“Val has helped to bring God closer to hundreds of conferees through the amazing work she and her colleagues do through the Sing Praise family of conferences. Val has created a great legacy of deans, with her former counselors and conferees becoming counselors and deans.”

“I still remember how Sing Praise coming to my church to perform inspired me to take a chance on Silver Lake. Val finds the special gift in every person and encourages them to share it in whatever way they can. Her kindness, deep love of God and Mother Earth (Pachamama), and her personal strength show conferees exactly what Silver Lake is about: an extravagant welcome, the sharing of our unique gifts, and taking a risk to be your true self.”

“Val has helped widen the reach of Silver Lake, welcoming people from Rhode Island and beyond, actively inviting talented people, particularly people of color, to become part of our Silver Lake family.”

“I am so delighted to celebrate Val Tutson as the SLCC Award Recipient,” said SLCC Executive Director the Rev. Ryan Gackenheimer. “It is difficult to be in the presence of Val and not know that God is alive and loves you to the deepest core of who you truly are.”

Silver Lake 2019 Fundraising Events

Thank you to all who attended the 2019 Golf Tournament or the 2019 Silver Lake Award fundraising events. We would especially like to thank our sponsors and underwriters.

Silver Lake Award

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Golf Sponsors

| Congregational Church of Green’s Farms |
| Congregational Church of Salisbury UCC |
| Kazurs Foundation                    |
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| (Herb Knight)                        |
| Hazelwood Excavating Inc.            |
| Trudy Kelley                         |
| Consolidated Trust Fund              |
| (Charlie Kuchenbrod)                 |

The 2020 SLCC Award Celebration is set for Sunday, Nov. 8. Details will be announced later this summer.
Your Silver Lake Board Is Working Toward a Vibrant Future

As we move into the summer of 2020, I am full of prayer and gratitude. In my conversations about canceling Silver Lake’s on-site program with Executive Director the Rev. Ryan Gackenheimer, I felt sad for the young people who NEED the Silver Lake experience of safety, inclusion, faith, fun, and friendship. There is no question that Silver Lake changes lives. I invite you to join me in praying for those known and unknown to us who will not experience this transformational community this summer.

The Silver Lake Board is exceptionally grateful for your exceptional generosity! Since we announced that cancellation on May 1, the Silver Lake community has donated (as of late May) more than $32,400. Amazing! Awesome! This figure includes summer registration fees that were converted into donations and gifts from churches and individuals. There is still time to be generous! Making a financial donation is the most effective way to help Silver Lake’s ministry right now. It’s easy to contribute: Go to silverlakect.org/donate-now and find the box that says, “Silver Lake Conference Center (general support).” Thank you!

While we are on the topic of money, thank you to Southern New England Conference Bridge Conference Ministers, the Revs. Marilyn Kendrix, Don Remick, and Kent Siladi, and Executive Associate Conference Minister Charlie Kuchenbrod for designating Silver Lake as a key recipient of this year’s Strengthen the Church offering. The Silver Lake Board is hard at work on many projects:

• Strategic Planning: We want to assess how well Silver Lake serves its summer campers, retreat guests, alumni, churches, and other users. Watch for an email survey later this summer.
• Golf: This year’s Silver Lake Golf Tournament is Sept. 22 at The Country Club of Waterbury. This is a very fun day at a beautiful golf course! Please consider golfing and/or sponsoring this event. Register at silverlakect.org/golf.
• Silver Lake Award Celebration and Fundraiser: The incomparable Valerie Tutson is our 2020 Silver Lake Award honoree! The celebration will be in early November — venue and registration information coming soon to silverlakect.org/silverlakeaward2020. If you’d like to donate an item or service to the silent auction, contact us at slcc@silverlakect.org.

The Silver Lake Board lifts up gratitude for our exceptional Silver Lake Staff. They have done a masterful job of keeping our campers engaged online this spring. They have also adapted our summer programs for fun at home! The Silver Lake At Home Box will maximize creative and outside time and minimize screen time. Remember, “grownup” campers are also invited to participate in “Camp in a Box”!

Finally, stay connected on Instagram and Facebook, including the Silver Lake Conference Center Alumni Group. It’s almost like being at camp!

For the Silver Lake Board of Directors,
Brian Lapis
Board Chair

I want to help!

Please accept the enclosed gift to help with Silver Lake’s projects and programs.

Donor Name

Donor Address

Please apply my gift of $__________________________ to:

☐ Share the Adventure: A New Ropes Course

☐ Scholarships

☐ The Fund for Silver Lake

☐ Other: ________________________________

Cut on the line and mail this slip, with your donation, to Silver Lake Conference Center, 223 Low Road, Sharon, CT 06069 or give online at www.silverlakect.org/donate-now.
The Fund for Silver Lake 2019 Donors

The following individuals and organizations contributed to The Fund for Silver Lake, our annual fund, in 2019.

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2019 Campership Sponsors

The following churches and associations supported conferees in 2019.

- Asylum Hill, Hartford
- Beneficent Congregational Church
- Berlin Congregational
- Bolton Congregational Church
- Center Congregational Church, Manchester
- Center Congregational, Torrington
- Christ Congregational Church, Brockton, MA
- Church of Christ Congregational, Goshen
- Church of Christ Newington
- Congregational Church of New Fairfield
- Dixwell Avenue Congregational
- Ellington Congregational Church
- Fairfield East Association
- First Church Middletown
- First Church New Britain
- First Church of Bethlehem UCC
- First Church of Christ Congregational West Hartford
- First Church of Christ in Northampton
- First Congregational Church Bethel
- First Congregational Church of Bristol
- First Congregational Church of East Longmeadow
- First Congregational Church of Haddam
- First Congregational Church of Kent
- First Congregational Church of Westfield
- First Congregational Church South Hadley
- First Congregational Church Wallingford
- First Congregational UCC of Stratford
- First Congregational UCC Watertown
- First Congregational, Vernon
- First United Church of Christ in Milford
- Fishers Island Union Chapel
- Flagg Road United Church of Christ
- Grace Community Church
- Greenfield Hill Congregational Church
- Lordship Community Church
- Middlebury Congregational Church
- Naugatuck Congregational Church
- New London Association
- Newtown Congregational Church
- North Branford Congregational Church UCC
- North Guilford Congregational Church UCC
- Plantsville Congregational Church UCC
- Prospect Congregational Church, UCC
- Salisbury Congregational Church
- Salisbury Family Services
- Second Congregational Church Greenfield
- Seymour Congregational Church
- South Church Granby
- Southbury UCC
- St. Louis de Montfort Parish
- Townsend Congregational Church UCC in Cornwall
- Union Memorial Church, Stamford
- United Church of Christ in Devon
- United Church on the Green
- United Congregational Church of Bridgeport
- United Congregational Church, Torrington
- Unity Hill United Church of Christ
- Windham Hill UCC
- Wolcott Congregational Church

Looking for Silver Lake swag? Check out our new online store! Fleeces, t-shirts, hats, the 2020 stuffed animal, and more!

www.silverlakect.org
2019 Unrestricted Gifts

Churches and Organizations

Beta Circle, First Congregational Church of Norwalk
Broadview Community Church
Congregational Church of Salisbury UCC
East Woodstock Congregational Church
Fairfield East Association
First Church of Christ Congregational in West Hartford
First Church of Christ, Congregational, Glastonbury
First Church of Christ, Simsbury
First Congregational Church, Fairfield
First Congregational Church of Greenwich
First Congregational Church of Washington
Middlesex Association
New Haven Association
New Haven East Congregation
Oxford United Church of Christ Congregational
Plantsville Congregational UCC
Roxbury Congregational Church
South Congregational Church of Granby
South Congregational/First Baptist Church
Storrs Congregational Church UCC
The Flagg Road United Church of Christ
Tolland Association
United Church of Christ, Southbury
United Church of Rowayton

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Timothy Bertaccini
Robert Borruso
John & Suzanne Bourdeaux
Craig Breismeister
& Jennifer McCalley
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Asylum Hill Congregational Church
Greg Davis & Susan Townsley
Jim & Julie Gackenheimer
David Knapp & Stanley Wright
Niantic Community Church
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Katrina Weckenbrock
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Upcoming Events at Silver Lake

You’re Invited!

We would love you to join in our events and activites! Call (860) 364-5526 or email slcc@silverlakect.org for more information. To register online or for details, go to www.silverlakect.org/events.

July 6  Silver Lake At Home Week 1: Love God. Online program.
July 13 Silver Lake At Home Week 2: Love Your Neighbor. Online program.
July 20 Silver Lake At Home Week 3: Love Yourself. Online program.
July 27 Silver Lake At Home Week 4: Love God. Online program.
Aug. 1 Super Mega Jumb Praise Saturday End of Summer Celebration Campfire. Open to all, please register online.
Sept. 22 Silver Lake Golf Tournament. The Country Club of Waterbury; register online.
Nov. 6-8 Pride Retreat. For LGBTQIA+ campers and allies. Register online.
Nov. 8 Silver Lake Award. Tickets available online.
Nov. 20-22 Fall Action. Register online; adults, RSVP by email to slcc@silverlakect.org.
Dec. 4-6 Christmas at the Lake. 4th, 5th & 6th grade; 7th & 8th grade. Register online.

Our Mission

Silver Lake Conference Center, a year-round outdoor ministry of the Southern New England Conference of the United Church of Christ, is called to covenant with God and with the churches and people of the Conference in the work of forming life-sustaining leaders for the church and the world, by offering to all:

- Experiences of inclusive and nurturing Christian community
- Opportunities to grow and participate as Christ’s disciples
- A model of sustainable environmental stewardship of God’s world.

We worship, learn, play, serve, and work together, respecting the right of private judgement. We seek to provide a safe environment of acceptance regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, reflecting our unity in Christ and respecting the faith journeys of all of God’s children.

“Welcome one another, therefore, as Christ has welcomed you, for the Glory of God.” Romans 15:7