

The Presbyterian Church of Plum Creek has been a mission church throughout its two hundred year history. It was founded as a missionary effort of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America. For over 20 years Presbyterian missionaries provided supply preaching until the congregation called its first pastor, Francis Laird, in 1802. Although the congregation worshiped outdoors, without a sanctuary, it made donations for Presbyterian Church missionaries to preach the gospel to Native Americans in northwestern Ohio. Throughout the nineteenth century, inspired by the church's women who monthly met to advance the cause of Christian mission, the congregation contributed to the foreign mission effort of the Presbyterian Church, particularly in Asia. Prior to the First World War, the congregation sent Harrison Davidson as a Presbyterian missionary to Canadian Indians in Saskatchewan.

Plum Creek's mission commitment led to establishing Sunday evening services in the coal mining town of Trestle/Center, during the first decade of the twentieth century. Several families joined Plum Creek from this effort whose descendents continue to worship among the congregation. A second initiative, to the coal mining town of Renton in 1918, continued the congregation's commitment to Christian mission, particularly within Plum Township. This effort also resulted in families joining Plum Creek that remain part of the congregation today. While attempting to reach the local community with the message of salvation, the congregation continued to support national and international Presbyterian mission efforts through its annual donations. However, the commitment to local mission began to wane. No further local initiatives were attempted.

The present minister was called in 1983 to improve Plum Creek's Christian Education ministry. A children's sermon was added to the worship service. The old temporary sanctuary that had become a repository for discarded items was converted into additional classrooms. Improved support for the Christian Education budget allowed sufficient teaching resources to be purchased through congregation giving, instead of relying upon Sunday school teachers to provide supplies. Vacation Bible School was led by lay volunteers, achieving attendance totaling over 120 students three years in a row, expanding the congregation's need for staffing in youth ministry. A part-time Christian Education Director was hired after the session attempted to use a seminarian to staff the youth fellowship. Following the hiring of the Christian Education Director, Vacation Bible School attendance began to decline. However, Sunday school attendance increased. A part-time Youth Minister was hired to work with the part-time Christian Education Director in order to meet the needs of a large number of children who had now entered junior and senior high school. The church's youth ministry averaged 20-25 for several years, and then declined as the earlier falloff in elementary school enrollment and Vacation Bible School lowered the senior

high population. Overall Sunday school attendance totaled over 110-120 for several years, until 2000 with only 10-12 enrolled as adults each year.

With falling enrollment in Sunday school among the elementary school aged children, and Vacation Bible School enrollment totaling between 65-68 students, an initiative was launched in 2002 to consider the possibility of creating a Summer Day Camp model for summer children's ministry. The church's historic commitment to local, as well as national and international mission provided a basis for the initiative. The church-owned property's unique topography gave it an unusual possibility for development as an area for children and youth ministry. The congregation's culture endorsed camping, with many families owning hunting camps. Many youth were attending Christian summer camps as teens. But only the YMCA provided a summer-long day camp experience for the borough's elementary school children. It was/is not directed towards Christian discipleship, Bible study, and prayer. Subsequently, the Unity United Presbyterian Church began a two-week extended summer elementary school ministry with hours from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. called Summer Blast, which has attracted 325 elementary age students, despite charging families \$50 per child to enroll. Currently, over 2,143 elementary school children are available as the target mission audience in Plum Borough's school system. New housing developments around the church's location place Plum Creek in the center of neighborhoods that can potentially provide more children in future years.

The vision for The Day Camp at the Presbyterian Church of Plum Creek is based upon the Holy Spirit calling the congregation to improve the congregation's ministry to children and youth in a manner that takes into account changing realities about young families living in twenty-first century America. Several realities exist that pose challenges to the church to overcome in order to be effective in Christian mission.

The vast majority of elementary school parents are not attending church regularly, with little or no experience in reading or interpreting the Bible.

An increasing number of families have two incomes, with both spouses working, making neither spouse available to teach or organize Vacation Bible School.

The mobility of the American family with the availability of inexpensive transportation has allowed families to move away from their childhood residences and congregations. This has brought about a yearning for security and community among families that are new to the region.

The proliferation of youth athletic organizations has raised children's expectations of activity for youth ministry. Children at a younger age are looking to be athletically challenged, which is reflected in the preference for recreational programs over spiritual and personal development in the Precept Study. As a result, traditional youth ministry models that do not include activities that stimulate excitement do not meet children's needs, particularly in the fifth grade and beyond. Traditional youth ministry models that are based solely in bible study and prayer are too passive by themselves to stimulate youth interest. This is particularly true among young males.

Children are exposed to a greater degree of fantasy today, than at earlier eras of the Church's mission. The fantasy world of secular entertainment often misrepresents Christian themes, and distorts biblical truths.

Since children's secular role-models from entertainment's fantasy world are not representative of biblical discipleship, the Church's ministry provides a counter-cultural message that challenges their perceptions of the world they experience.

Despite the changing culture and sophistication of entertainment's fantasy world, youth and children are receptive to outdoor activities that engage their senses. Those who do make a commitment to Jesus Christ most often mention that a significant influence upon their lives has been Christian camping.

The disestablishment of Christianity from government oversight has led the Church into an environment of choice, and along with it, religious competition. Families exercise their free will to choose between secular and religious activities, as well as between those religious activities that are more interesting to them than others. Families no longer are limited by denominational loyalty, but will seek churches either according to convenience, or according to quality of service.

Jesus Christ is passionately concerned about the salvation of children and youth. His instruction to his disciples indicates that God looks with favor upon those attentive to the spiritual life of children. God's judgment also rests upon those who cause children to sin.

“Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me; but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. . . .

See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven. . . .

So it is not the will of my Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”

Matthew 18:5-6, 10, 14.

In October of 2004, Dr. Lolla presented to the Christian Education Committee the vision of replacing Vacation Bible School with a Summer Day Camp for elementary school children. A group had been formed consisting of Linda Bartley, Christian Education Director; Carrie Samarco; Chris Giles; Rebecca Merritt; Kathy Grabigel; and Dr. Lolla, who developed a mission statement after visiting the Ligonier Camp and Conference Center in Ligonier, Pennsylvania. The vision was refined, with a commitment made by the Ligonier Camp and Conference Center to assist the Church in the development of a day camp at Plum Creek. The staff was envisioned to be Church and local college students and trained youth ministry leaders.

A proposal was drafted and presented to the Christian Education Committee in November of 2004 that recommended to session the approval of the Summer Day Camp proposal. In December of 2004, Christian Education adopted the proposal for Session action. On December 21, 2004 Session adopted the proposal which authorized the formation of a Board of Directors to develop a Summer Day Camp.