



April 6, 2020

Dear Camp Keola Supporters,

We hope and pray that all of you are safe and healthy during this unexpected season of social isolation. The long-term impact of COVID-19 has become more and more apparent as time has gone on, and we have been keeping a close eye on its potential impact on Camp Keola Jr/Jr High and High School camps.

While July might seem like a long way away, the process of organizing these two weeks of camp and hiring the staff necessary to make camp a reality begins already in January and February. Our commitment to keeping Camp Keola a place that is both safe and spiritually nurturing is dependent on securing commitments from counselors and staff that meet our high standards for these roles. The uncertainty that Covid-19 brings makes it difficult for counselors to make a commitment to serve this year. Also, over the years as our church conference has gotten smaller, the pool of qualified individuals who have availability to staff or counsel has shrunk. The time and energy needed to ensure we are adequately staffed is significant, and **with the unanticipated disruption and uncertainty of COVID-19, it has become clear that it is both prudent and responsible to cancel our Jr/Jr High and High School camps for the 2020 season.**

This is a decision made with much deliberation and much sadness. Camp Keola is a highly anticipated and spiritually formative part of our young people's lives. However, we feel strongly that in order to have camp, we must also ensure the safety and wellbeing of our young people, and given our current situation, the faithful thing to do is to cancel camp for this year. It is our hope that this year off can be a time of reflection and reenergizing as we discern the future of our beloved camp and the ways in which we can support this essential ministry moving into the future.

We know that so many of our campers have meaningful friendships both with counselors and campers that they only get to see at Keola. We are working to create a "digital reunion" in which those relationships can continue to be nurtured. We will send out an email with more information on this when those details have been established.

Continue to hold Camp Keola in your thoughts and prayers as well as the young people that make it such a special place. May the God who is forever our Creator and Sustainer guide us through these difficult times and bless us with many more special Keola memories in the future.

Sincerely,

Duane Ruth-Heffelbower, Pacific Southwest Mennonite Retreat Ministries Executive Director  
Clare Ann Ruth-Heffelbower, Pacific Southwest Mennonite Conference Executive Conference Minister  
Caley Ortman and Whitney Wenger, Mennonite Camps Co-Program Directors

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