

Briarwood's History and Working Philosophy: A Summary

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after conversation with staff, board members, and other pastors
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Pre-1995

Briarwood was owned by the Presbyterian judicatory. They used it primarily for adult retreats as they had other youth-focused camps. They made Briarwood available to other organizations. LORMS used Briarwood and other north Texas locations for camping programming: summer camp, youth worker training, Church Council retreats, etc.

In 1993 LORMS did a feasibility study which yielded a recommendation against conducting a capital campaign or purchasing property at that time.

1995

The Presbyterians put Briarwood on the market. LORMS investigated, and eventually purchased Briarwood on Easter Monday 1995. Opinions varied as to whether or not that was a sound decision.

Rev. Bill Irons, then Program Director for Youth Ministries with LORMS was offered the Site Director position, which he declined. After a search yielded no qualified candidates he was approached again and accepted the position in the spring of 1995.

Kathy Naish had been the Office Administrator for the Presbyterians and was hired by LORMS to handle all of the registrations for LORMS. Chuck Swartwood was hired as Facilities Manager. Briarwood employed and supervised a food service staff.

Opening the camp for summer programming in the summer of 1995 required some major capital outlays for building repair, water treatment plant, mattresses, etc. These costs were wrapped into the mortgage debt Briarwood Lutheran Ministries would later assume.

1997

Briarwood contracted with Signature Foods to provide the food service because of the unsatisfactory results from staffing for it themselves.

Late 1997 through early 1998

LORMS conducted the Pass It On Campaign. It was not widely supported. This lack of support was a factor in the subsequent decline of LORMS and division of ownership of camping ministry between the three synods.

October 1998

Briarwood Lutheran Ministries was formed as a separate entity for camping ministries in north Texas. The NTNL Synod appointed the Board of Directors. Rev. Bill Irons was called by the Synod Council as its Executive Director.

BLM assumed an \$800,000 mortgage note as its portion of the LORMS accrued debt. LORMS evolved into CMS to handle camping registrations, Kathy Naish was employed by CMS, later by Briarwood.

1999

Briarwood Lutheran Ministries struggled financially from the outset. It subsidized the fees for youth campers heavily and adult campers to a lesser extent. Part of the time Lutheran organizations were charged lower fees than non-Lutheran organizations. Briarwood depended on individual and congregational contributions to make up the difference.

The budgets from year to year reflected the anticipated receipt of approximately \$150,000/year in contributions from congregations and individuals. Donations never met that expectation and subsequent budgets were not adjusted accordingly.

Some of this shortfall was masked by the arrival of funds from the Pass It On campaign. Pass It On funds went into the general fund and were used to pay operating expenses. Often Signature Foods extended time to pay their bill thereby acting as an additional line of credit.

In September of 1999 Erik Miller was hired as the full-time Program Director and given responsibility for running the in-house programming and developing new adult retreat business through Elderhostel and other organizations.

2000

Briarwood board contracted with a company to conduct the Jubilee campaign. When the first payment came due, they paid only half (\$40K) because the consultant wasn't accomplishing anything. Later it becomes evident that the company wasn't doing the campaign at all. Legal proceedings are initiated to recoup the \$40K. (Which is still pending)

The financial situation became critical during the summer of 2000. Rev. Irons approached newly-elected Bishop Kanouse. Briarwood owed: \$725,000 in mortgage principle, \$60,000 to Mission Endowment Fund, \$39,000 for the Jubilee campaign, \$29,000 to the line of credit and \$30,000 in accounts payable.

At his September installation service Bishop Kanouse announced the Bishop's Call to Action to eliminate Briarwood's mortgage debt. The goal was to raise \$1,000,000 by selling 1000 Briarwood shares at \$1000 each. Altogether pledges were made for 928 shares (this includes 60 from MEF in the form of forgiveness of BLM's \$60,000 note).

2001

To date, \$793,300 has been raised in the Call to Action and \$60,000 of MEF debt was forgiven. In 2000 and in 2001 incoming Call to Action funds were used to pay the ongoing mortgage payments and to reduce the principle. An \$85,000 mortgage note remained. Starting in 2002 all Call to Action funds have been used exclusively for principle reduction. During 2001, contributions to the general fund declined. Additional business through Elderhostel or other adult organizations had not been developed.

2002

After the 2002 summer camping program it was clear that late 2003 would be problematic without additional development of contributions from individuals and congregations. Additional business still had not been developed; even existing business had declined. In December 2002, AIM Sandra Templeton was employed to do this development work. It was not a good match of skills, gifts, and need.

2003

Briarwood board struggles with question of fees and raised fees starting in September 2003.

In March Rev. Bill Irons approached Bishop Kanouse about Briarwood's anticipated fiscal situation by the end of the summer camping program. After consultation with synodical leaders and the Synod Council, Bishop Kanouse proposed measures at the June Briarwood board meeting to address the ministry and status of Briarwood. The Interim Administrative team was formed.

As of this writing, Briarwood owes: \$78,632 mortgage debt, \$86,668 to line of credit, and \$28,000 in accounts payable.

Major (one-time) Capital Outlays since October 1998

House moved onto camp for Program Director - \$35,000, plus some for minor repairs

Resurfacing, re-decking, and repairing the pool - \$11,000

Re-roofing the dining hall - \$6-7000

Arts and crafts building - \$2-3000

Copy machine - \$2500

Phone system replacements (due to lightening strikes) - twice, @ \$2500

Bus - \$3000 (after high operating costs, sold for \$1500)

Van and truck (financed,, still paying on van, \$250/month)

Briarwood is also the beneficiary of various Eagle Scout projects and contributions of materials and labor from congregations. All of the decks around the camp were contributions from Resurrection-Plano or Living Word-Grapevine.

Philosophy / MO

Purpose for Being: To provide setting and/or programming for faith development
A more detailed Mission Statement exists, it is not memorized by anyone we met with.

Camp Usage: Majority of usage falls into one of two categories.

Retreats: Outside organizations who bring in their own leadership and programming. Briarwood provides space, facilities, meals, and hospitality. Quail Run is booked about a year and a half out for this type of usage. There is some flexibility of pricing, especially if one group is reserving both cabins and Quail Run. At this point this type of usage is intended to be breaking even. In the past, even this usage was subsidized, Lutheran groups to a greater degree than non-Lutheran groups.

Internal events: Briarwood provides leadership and programming as well as space and facilities. Events include: Church Council retreats, Advent and Lenten retreats, Summer Camp, Confirmation Camp (also held during the summer, but with less programming than other weeks.) and (new this year) a Mother-Daughter retreat. Fees for these events are heavily subsidized, up to 50%. It is not clear whether or not the Board was aware of just how high the subsidization was. Note: The programming done for Advent and Lenten retreats was not developed each year. We have been doing the same three retreats in rotation for the last 13 years. The summer camp programs are also not developed by the program director. They are purchased from Augsburg-Fortress.

The cabins are more suited for youth, who attend the internal events. Quail Run is not usable for youth (due to lack of adult supervision). Similarly, Quail Run is more suited for adults who attend retreats. The cabins are usable for adults but much less desirable; this is limiting the functional capacity for adult groups.

Rationale for Fee Structure

1) Accessibility – In order to enable all kids who would like to go to camp to be able to afford it, fees were kept low to be within reach. Some scholarships were given.

2) Compensation for lack of “flash” – In order to compete with camps that have more attractive features (a lake, a bluff, horses, more recreation facilities, etc.) Briarwood needed to keep the price lower than those other camps.

Board: Leadership / Process

The Briarwood Board was supposed to meet quarterly but often had to meet monthly to deal with financial issues. The Executive Committee often consisted of just Rev. Irons and the president. Usually Rev. Irons would simply consult with the president as needed between meetings. Some Board members were invited to be on the Board because they were raising concerns about how Briarwood was operating. It is not clear what other strategy was used to recruit Board members.

The process for preparing the budget was a) a budget proposal was prepared by Rev. Irons and brought to the Executive Committee, b) the Executive Committee would review c) Rev. Irons would make the revisions before bringing the proposal to the whole Board d) the Board would then approve the budget proposal.

The budgets that were proposed were balanced. However, the expectations of grants, donations from individuals, organizations and congregations and matching funds fluctuated widely from year to year, sometimes far surpassing the trends of previous years. (2003 appears to be better in that regard.)

Unanswered Questions

What does it actually cost for an overnight and 3 meals at Briarwood?

How can Briarwood Lutheran Ministries be more cost-effective? How much staff is needed? Is there a more cost-effective means of food service?

What ever happened to Elderhostel or other recruited business?

Kathy is not a signer on the checks and has no access to credit card accounts. How will she pay bills, make purchases, etc. after July 31?

There are only 2 regular volunteers from congregations that help with facilities. Why only 2? How can we increase that?

If fall events, like LYO Jr. High, are not going to Briarwood, can we open those dates to fill with other business?

Quail Run is booked a year and a half out. What can be done in the short-term (if anything) to increase the usability of the cabins for that user group?

Is the lack of “flash” a real factor? Is it outweighed by proximity to a major population center?

Is Briarwood a youth camp that adults use in the off-season or an adult retreat center that youth use on occasion? Or something in between?

Is Briarwood an island of unspoiled nature that provides (somewhat rustic) haven for spiritual renewal or is it a collection of rundown buildings on 72 acres of snake and scorpion infested scrub? Or something in between?