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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

As we gather on April 11th for an historic conference, I want to express my deepest gratitude for the cooperation and gentle spirit that has guided actions thus far. That there has not been large scale “campground campaigning” to “keep my campground” indicates tremendous spiritual growth since we became one mission center in 2011. I also express deep gratitude to the Campground Study Team for their hard work over the past two years and the integrity they modeled during the process.

Approaching April 11, I would ask you to keep these words of counsel in Doctrine and Covenants in the forefront as we continue prayerful discernment and preparation for the decision delegates will make regarding the future of our campgrounds:

1a. Listen, O people of the Restoration—.... Listen to the Voice that speaks from beyond the farthest hills, from the infinite heavens above, and the vast seas below.

b. Listen to the Voice that echoes across the eons of time and yet speaks anew in this moment. Listen to the Voice, for it cannot be stilled, and it calls you once again to the great and marvelous work of building the peaceable kingdom, even Zion, on behalf of the One whose name you claim.

2a. Listen carefully to your own journey as a people, for it is a sacred journey and it has taught you many things you must know for the journey yet to come.

b. Listen to its teachings and discover anew its principles. Do not yearn for times that are past, but recognize that you have been given a foundation of faithful service, even as you build a foundation for what is yet to be.

Our collective deliberations will build a foundation for what is yet to be for our children and grandchildren and those who are waiting to hear the message of joy, hope, peace, and love this community has to share as we invite them to grow through camping ministries in the future.

Take time to examine the information you are receiving carefully. If you have questions, contact a Campground Study team member and ask. Rumors or assumptions are unreliable sources of information. Understanding that youth camping, reunions, retreats, and other experiences held at campgrounds will not go away, but may change location, ask what is the best stewardship of the resources God has entrusted to us? The numbers and information will provide a basis for deliberations.

While we so desire to proclaim that “God will provide”, we recognize that God depends on our generosity to fulfill God’s plans and purposes. We recognize too that many, many people who have gone before worked very hard to make each of the campgrounds viable. Sadly, the economic climate, the changing culture, and many other factors bring us to the point we are at on April 11th. Delegates at the November 2012 conference recognized it is simply not feasible, no matter how hard we wish it to be so, to support five campgrounds. The studies conducted confirmed this acknowledgement

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As we gather in deliberation in April, I ask each of you to be mindful and respectful of one another. Let us be prepared to share one another's pain and disappointment in loss of a place where experiences with God are rich. Likewise, those whose sacred space may remain, be sensitive and avoid prideful exclamation or exultation, this is not a case of "winners or losers" even though it may feel that way. In our joy, we must be cognizant and sensitive to the other's pain.

Brothers and sisters, this challenge will speak loudly of the character of our discipleship. Do we care for one another more than we care for a campground? Do we yearn to follow God's will even though it might cause us to sacrifice property we dearly love and embrace a campground that is foreign to us or distant from us? Do we desire to be people of the peaceable Kingdom, even Zion, more than we desire to hold on to the past?

How will we live out the enduring principles during our time together on April 11th? Will we listen respectfully, keep our emotions in check, be willing to embrace one whose opinion is so radically diverse from our own? Can we carry this burden of decision making together in love, knowing that how we behave and how we honor God during our time together will speak so much louder than the actual decision made? Can we acknowledge that what is most important to God is our relationship with each other and that everything else pales in significance to our love for God and one another?

I believe we can be the people God has called us to be in this moment in time. Let us remember to lift our eyes from our own personal agendas and desires and look beyond ourselves to the places where God is calling us to go; to the youth who will find their sacred space within the geographic areas we ultimately support.

I have shared a bit of my own journey as MCP with some of you. But, seven years ago when asked to take on the role of MCP of Southern Great Lakes MC as a volunteer Field Specialist, I prayed about it and pretty much told God, "I'll do it as long as I don't have to deal with campgrounds!" I can only testify that God definitely has a sense of humor! The call to serve was not about "me" but about saying "yes" to God's call even though the way forward was murky at best. We must move forward in trust to a future yet to be defined.

Brothers and sisters, I believe in "us". I believe in our deep desire to not just speak the enduring principles, but live them. I believe in our deep desire to not simply dream and speak of Zion, but to be engaged in building Zion every single day by what we say, how we act, and how begin to see as Jesus sees.

We can do this. We must do this. And we can do this together in love as we call upon and are open to receive the blessings of the Holy Spirit who will be present in abundance.

As I near retirement, I want to thank you for the opportunity to serve you. Your patience and forgiveness, and wisdom and courage, your willingness to stretch and grow, your never ending support has enriched my life tremendously.

I sense exciting things are on the horizon for Michigan. As we grow deeper and deeper in living out the mission of Jesus Christ, the world around us will be transformed. Let us fix our eyes on the horizon to the places God is calling us to go. What adventures are in store! There is "so much yet to see, so much yet to do!"

We are one.

Peace*Blessings

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