



Mr. Joel Willis  
President/CEO

Rev. Wayne Racz  
Executive Vice President

April 20, 2021

Dear Friends,

As most of you know, Epworth By The Sea has been closed to the general public since September 22, 2020. We will continue to be closed through August 31, 2021 and perhaps longer. When the Golden Ray (a car carrier) capsized in the Saint Simons Sound in September 2019, no one knew that it would be a blessing in disguise for Epworth.

We began 2020 with two strong months of groups at Epworth and many bookings for the rest of the year. The Council of Bishops were scheduled to come in late October of that year. We felt very positive about the year with increased group business.

COVID-19 hit everyone hard in mid-March and all of our groups began to cancel. We basically had no group business for the rest of the year because of the unknown, fear and the governmental regulations put in place. All have suffered because of the pandemic, especially churches.

Because of the pandemic, we were approached by the team responsible for removing the Golden Ray wreck from the Saint Simons Sound. They needed a place where the workers would be safe and in a "bubble" to prevent them from contracting COVID-19. They determined that Epworth was the perfect place. We began providing two meals per day on September 8, 2020 at their quarantine hotel in Brunswick. They moved to Epworth two weeks later and have been here since.

We have been providing meals virtually 24 hours per day because of the different work shifts. Our housekeepers are deep cleaning once per week. Our maintenance personnel are handling any maintenance needs and maintaining the grounds. Our office staff are booking groups and individual guests for the time when we will reopen "normal operations". We just do not know when that will be.

We did not expect The Golden Ray to affect us in any way when it occurred. We expected the virus to last a few weeks and all would be well. I furloughed 43 of our staff at the end of March 2020 and told them we would try to bring them back in two weeks. That is when all groups cancelled or moved their date. Without the combination of The Golden Ray and COVID-19, Epworth would be struggling because of lack of operating income. But we were able to bring back most of our staff and have provided them the opportunity to work.

We like to think that God is smiling on Epworth but I am concerned about all church owned Conference/Retreat Centers across the country that are struggling to stay open, closed or even sold. Many will be very different when COVID-19 is finally over.



**Epworth**  
*by the Sea*

Find It. Love It. Epworth.

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Epworth continues to be a “Christian Place for Worship, Study and Fellowship”! We are still holding the Lovely Lane Chapel Service each Sunday. Weddings and funerals are being held. The salvage workers can log onto the chapel service each week and also request spiritual guidance. The Wright Prayer Tower plays hymns each day. The workers leave prayer requests and we pray over them. Our staff continues to provide service with a “servant attitude”. We are still doing what we always have. The only difference is that you have not been able to come to these Holy Grounds.

We continue to make improvements to the facilities. We recently replaced the flooring in The Arthur J. Moore Methodist Museum Library with vinyl wood flooring and we are replacing all carpet in the Booth and Pitts Memorial with the same. This will greatly reduce the mildew odor in the rooms. We have updated the Jones Auditorium with new lighting and a fresh coat of paint. The Turner Lodge and Robertson Inn have mini refrigerators and we plan to place them in the Booth and Pitts motels. Once the salvage workers leave we will replace the carpet in the Robertson Inn with the vinyl plank flooring.

We are looking forward to youth and adult groups on our grounds again. We miss all of you. We miss those accepting Jesus Christ at this place. We miss the great preaching and testimonials. We miss the fellowship that so many enjoy. I feel confident that these workers are experiencing all of this because these are indeed “Holy Grounds”!

We hope and pray to see you soon. Please continue to pray for Epworth By The Sea and our staff. Follow us on Social Media for updates and photos of your beautiful campus. For any questions specific to the removal of the ship, please visit [www.stsimonssoundincidentresponse.com](http://www.stsimonssoundincidentresponse.com).

In His Service!

Sincerely,



Joel Willis