

Jenness Park Christian Camp – Frequently Asked Questions

Since 1953 Jenness Park has been an integral part of California Southern Baptist Convention. The camp has helped facilitate and undergird many Convention ministries such as those for children and youth, ministers' wives, pastoral care, and leadership training for adults.

What led to the CSBC Executive Board's decision to sell Jenness Park Christian Camp?

The decision to close and sell Jenness Park Christian Camp was not easy, nor was it impulsive. There was a series of events that led the Board to its ultimate decision. There is a lot of history and emotion regarding JP, but the reality is that the camp is financially unsustainable.

Over the last three years, there has been an effort for both CSBC and Jenness Park to balance their budgets and live within their means. CSBC has made significant strides in balancing its budget by trimming more than \$1 million from annual operating expenses. With all CSBC reserves depleted, the organization can no longer cover losses incurred by Jenness Park. At the 2019 CSBC Annual Meeting, messengers were asked and approved a plan to reduce world missions giving to provide capital to help Jenness Park balance its budget and become a self-sustaining CSBC entity by the beginning of 2021. The revenue afforded by that action will not cover all the losses at JP through 2020 as anticipated. With no changes to the Jenness Park plan, we expect the amount to more than double.

In the first two months of 2020, financial losses were minimal and it appeared the camp had a chance to reach its goal of sustainability. Convention leadership was excited by the progress made by camp leaders. By March, however, the coronavirus pandemic swept across the U.S. and Californians were ordered to shelter in place causing all immediate camps to be canceled. In March and April JP incurred significant losses due to the lack of campers. The outlook for campers for the remainder of 2020 is bleak at best. A significant revenue stream for the camp is CentriKid and Centrifuge, both sponsored by LifeWay Christian Resources. LifeWay has canceled all CentriKid and Centrifuge camps nationwide for summer 2020. Even if other camps were held this summer, camper attendance would be minimal at best, providing insufficient fees to cover the cost of conducting camps.

Over the last seven years while fully operational, Jenness Park has recorded deficit spending of about \$2 million, or almost \$24,000 monthly. In the two months since Californians have sheltered in place, the camp has not been operational and recorded deficit spending of about \$140,000, or almost \$70,000 monthly. Those amounts would continue with no campers while maintaining the status quo which would lead to insurmountable losses of hundreds of thousands of dollars. All losses incurred by Jenness Park have been underwritten by CSBC. CSBC has no reserves to cover those losses.

That left two options:

- close Jenness Park and keep the losses somewhat manageable, or
- incur unknown losses that neither organization (CSBC or JP) could sustain.

The latter would mean the loss of the camp and possibly the state Convention.

Additionally, JP has a \$1.4 million loan. While the loan has been a significant factor in the ongoing annual deficits, the impact of COVID-19 in 2020 would certainly increase those deficits exponentially. Even without the loan, the deficits of keeping the camp would be substantial enough to jeopardize CSBC operations. With no reserves, there is no way to cover JP deficits.

Every effort was made to help the camp survive. The Executive Board believes CSBC's purpose must be to empower the vision of and serve its member churches. It appears Jenness Park would require more financial assistance than CSBC can provide. In these days of financial uncertainty, we believe closing and selling the camp is the best avenue of stewardship.

What about JP summer camp programming for 2020?

It is mid-May and Californians still are sheltering in place with no date set for beginning the phase of allowing large gatherings to take place by State of California officials. On May 14 LifeWay Christian Resources made the decision to cancel all CentriKid Centrifuge camps nationwide for the summer of 2020.

Also, informal surveys of CSBC youth leaders reveal they would not send students to a large gathering – camp or event – until at least 2021. Because of these factors JP could not host summer camp programming for 2020. These reasons have led CSBC leaders to begin planning a virtual 2020 Ignition Student Conference.

What about summer camp programming for CSBC churches in the future?

CSBC is committed to empowering churches to fulfill their vision. If that vision contains summer camps CSBC will do all it can to help the church make that a reality. The possibility of churches being able to camp at Jenness Park in the future will depend on the buyer of the camp. It is not yet known how LifeWay will support Centrifuge and CentriKid camps in the future, let alone in California. If these camps are supported by LifeWay in the future, CSBC will assist in facilitating the availability of these ministries to its churches.

How has coronavirus (COVID-19) factored into the Executive Board's decision to close and sell Jenness Park?

COVID-19 was the deciding factor which led the Executive Board to its decision. COVID -19 made the future unachievable financially. The camp needed to see an almost perfect year to be sustainable. Because of the coronavirus, no camping will take place. Even if camps were allowed, they would be limited. In either case, it would be too late to save the camp financially.

What organization (SBC-related or otherwise) might buy Jenness Park?

CSBC does not have a buyer for Jenness Park. Ideally, we would like for JP to stay in the Southern Baptist family if at all possible. The Executive Board voted May 14 to allow SBC churches/entities through June 30, 2020 to have priority in purchasing the camp. A possible option would be for another Christian organization to purchase the camp for their ministries and offer CSBC congregations access. Our goal would be for the camp to be used to perpetuate the Kingdom impact it has had for 67 years. However, all avenues will be explored to find interest in purchasing the camp.

What will happen to Jenness Park until a buyer is found and a sale is complete?

Jenness Park staff will continue to work until June 30 in assisting to prepare the camp for closure. The camp will be closed and its facilities secured until the 160-acre facility in the Sierra Nevada Mountains near Sonora is sold. A caretaker will be employed and be on site to provide security; to oversee the grounds and to perform other duties required, such as maintenance; and to preserve the camp.

How can I say “thank you” to Jenness Park for the ministry and memories provided in my life?

Jenness Park has been a place for us throughout the years of fond memories and life change. Many have met Jesus in the time they spent at camp and heard the whole crowd cheer as they rang the bell signifying that someone accepted Christ as their Savior while at Jenness Park. Since the year 2000, 8,081 people have made the decision to follow Jesus.

Without a doubt, Jenness Park has been a special place in the heart of California Southern Baptists. As a way to honor the many people and ministries that have served at Jenness Park, we would like to invite you to post a picture and a quick story on social media using #thankyoujennesspark.