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# A Theological Playground: Christian Summer Camp in Theological Perspective

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A THEOLOGICAL PLAYGROUND:  
CHRISTIAN SUMMER CAMP IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

by

JACOB SORENSON

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of

Luther Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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## ABSTRACT

*A Theological Playground: Christian Summer Camp in Theological Perspective*

by

Jacob Sorenson

Christian camping ministry is a vibrant and well-established form of ministry in the church, but it has received shockingly little scholarly attention. Supporters and detractors alike rely on anecdotal evidence to support their claims. Many in the academic community have dismissed camp as theologically shallow or mere fun and games, while others have praised it as a form of ministry proven to facilitate *life-changing* experiences. Much of the confusion comes from conflating very different models of camping ministry, though most is the result of a simple dearth of scholarly research.

This project takes a close look at the rich history of Christian camping ministry in America and its treatment in the scholarly literature. This examination reveals some of the sources of the stereotypes and guides the project toward a deep empirical approach that goes beyond anecdotes. Voices from philosophy, psychology, interpersonal neurobiology, and theology guide the discussion and focus attention on the human subjects who are united in community at camp. Participants come to the camp environment from different contextual realities, and their bodily wisdom (*habitus*) must be taken into account as they make meaning from their encounters at camp. Through the project, the reality of God's ongoing activity in the world is taken seriously and explored, specifically through person-to-person interaction and the praxis of ministry.

This project includes the most extensive study to date of Christian camping ministry, and it focuses specifically on Mainline Protestant camping with strong ties to

congregational ministries. The camp experience does not function on its own but rather as part of a complex web of meaning making in the life of each individual participant. The ambitious empirical approach takes a broad look at Christian camping ministry with a survey of more than three hundred camps. These data are used to consider the pedagogical and theological priorities of camping ministry alongside those of other educational ministries in the church, specifically confirmation ministry. Four site visits at camps in different denominations add depth to the rich quantitative data and help provide a working model to understand the camp experience. The camp participants themselves are given the opportunity to characterize their experiences.

The project defines Christian camp as a set apart space that facilitates relational encounter between the self, the other, and God. Camps are considered places of ministry and deep theological reflection. They are characterized as theological playgrounds, where participants are free to explore their beliefs in the safety of a nurturing Christian community and are awakened to a hyperawareness of God's activity in the world. The experience itself does not function in a single way but rather differently for each unique individual. There is strong evidence, however, that the encounters common at camp often precipitate measurable and lasting change in the lives of participants. The greatest overall impact is in facilitating ongoing connection to Christian community, including congregational ministries. A model for understanding transformation through the camp experience is proposed, along with pragmatic steps for future research and for improving camping ministries.

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There are many people without whom this project would not be possible. I want to offer special thanks to my thesis advisor, Andrew Root, for his consistent support throughout my degree program, keen insights that helped us both consider camping ministry more deeply, and for teaching me the importance of getting things done. Thank you to my readers, Alvin Luedke and Roland Martinson, for making me a better researcher and helping to keep my project grounded in the life and ministry of the church. Many other faculty members at Luther Seminary have supported me along the way. I want to especially thank Terri Elton, who believed in the value of this project from the beginning and accompanied me at every stage of the journey.

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and their voices speak through this project. I want to especially acknowledge Bryan and Aric, the Sugar Creek Bible Camp counselors who mentored me in my childhood camping experiences and started me on this path. I also owe special thanks to Joel Abenth and Dick Iverson, two of the church's most faithful ministers, who hired me as a summer staff member, instilled in me the values of camping ministry, and have continued supporting me throughout my work on this project. They are among the many camping ministers whose words could express better than mine the value of this ministry, if only their schedules allowed them to sit still long enough.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACA	American Camp Association
AME	African Methodist Episcopal Church
CCCA	Christian Camp and Conference Association
CY: LLF	Congregational Youth: Learning and Living the Faith Project (The Confirmation Project)
ECCC	Episcopal Camps and Conference Centers
ELCA	Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
IPNB	Interpersonal Neurobiology
LOM	Lutheran Outdoor Ministries
PCCCA	Presbyterian Church Camp and Conference Association
PC (USA)	Presbyterian Church in the United States of America
UMC	United Methodist Church
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YWCA	Young Women's Christian Association

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CHAPTER 1  
AN INVITATION TO PLAY

**The Tower and the Island**

From the tower window, a wizened gentleman gazed through the telescope at the distant island. It looked as dreary and dirty as always, with the inhabitants engaged in some new form of hootenanny. “At what are you looking?” asked an inquiring young voice. The gentleman peered down at his daughter through the round spectacles perched precariously on the end of his long nose. “Nothing of import,” he scoffed, turning his instrument elsewhere. The curious young girl pondered this response briefly. Her mind made up, she lifted the hem of her long academic robe and began the winding descent of the spiral staircase.

From the top of a hill on that distant island, a young woman caught a glimpse of shining white in the distance. There it was: the ugly round tower, protruding rudely into the clear blue sky and spoiling the view. “Whatcha lookin at?” asked an energetic young voice. She smiled down at her son. “Nothing to get excited about,” she said with a dismissive laugh. He followed her gaze to the ivory monolith and cocked his head to one side. Starting down the hill at a run, he threw off his shirt and dove into the water separating the island from the mainland.

They stopped short when they encountered one another. One was dripping wet, shirtless, and disheveled. The other was clean, well-groomed, and erudite. They looked into the face of the other and spoke in unison: “Do you want to play together?”



### **Orientation: The Playground**

Our journey begins with an invitation, one that is long overdue. The worlds of academia and camp seem so distant to some people that the prospect of meaningful interaction is laughable. Many of my camping colleagues were dumbfounded by my decision to pursue a Ph.D. degree. I was on the front lines of an incredibly vibrant ministry, interacting with hundreds of young people and adults throughout the year and having a direct impact on individuals, families, and congregations. Why was I exchanging people for books, ministry for theology? There have been similar reactions from my colleagues in academia. They are genuinely interested in my field of study, and when I say, “Camp,” they respond with a derisive chuckle and a rejoinder, “No really, what are you studying?” My hunch is that the general disdain for camping ministry in theological circles is a product of two forces: a general suspicion of religious experience and a sort of allergic reaction to natural theology that can be traced back to Karl Barth and the neo-Orthodox movement. These two concerns will be addressed in the pages to come. The invitation, therefore, is mutual, and I extend it from both locations, as I try to keep one foot in each. Camp friends, join me in a hike through the halls of learning and academic rigor. Wipe your feet at the door, but please come as you are. Colleagues in academia, join me in a literal field, one of study and of play. You may get your feet dirty, but you are sure to learn something along the way. Like children who have briefly evaded the watchful eyes of our parents, let us play together.

My youngest son has an uncanny ability to spot a playground. He can be dozing off in the backseat of the car as we drive sixty miles per hour down the highway, and he will suddenly blurt out, “Look, a playground!” It might be a giant jungle gym near the

side of the road or a single rusty slide in an overgrown field on the horizon. If it is there, he will find it, and he will want to stop and play. He knows that it is a place set aside for him. It is not one of those boring places to which mom and dad drag him along. We do not stop at every playground we pass, but when we do, it is always fun to watch him play. He will find some stranger who happens to be there and ask that beautiful question of invitation, “Do you want to play together?” If there is no stranger present, he will settle for his older brother or for me, but he has a clear understanding of what to do at a playground. It is a place to play with others.

People never lose this longing for a playground. The apparatus simply changes. Consider the way that some adult eyes light up at the sight of a golf course or a concert stage or an unfurled sail on the open water. Some of my colleagues and I may even get excited at the sight of the stacks in the Princeton library. Playgrounds look different, but we never outgrow them. Our invitation today is not to climb onto a particular apparatus but rather to find a space where we can play together. At the heart of our longing for a playground is the deep-seated human desire to be in relationship. This is part of what fundamentally makes us human, and it is an outpouring of the divine relationship.

### What is Camp?

Camp is not defined by apparatus. The word is used colloquially to mean many things. Some people immediately picture A-frame tents and insects crawling across their arms. Others use the word to characterize every youth program that lasts at least an hour. My kids go to the local YMCA every Thursday afternoon for a month, and the organizers call it *Basketball Camp*. Still others conjure images from popular movies like *Meatballs*, *Wet Hot American Summer*, or even *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>*. If the oversexed teenagers and

masked serial killers did not scare them off, they may have seen the 2006 Oscar-nominated documentary *Jesus Camp*, which portrays a Christian summer camp that is manipulative and theologically problematic, at best.<sup>1</sup> Those who only view camp from afar, as through a telescope, run the risk of conflating the multitude of meanings of the word. Conversely, those who only view camp from deep embeddedness in a specific location run the risk of making their understanding normative. They tend to see camp in terms of the apparatus. The reality is that not all camps have tents or high ropes courses. Not all camps have campfires and s'mores. Not all camps end with a cry-fest on the last night or an altar call where kids are pressured to give their lives to Jesus. This project seeks to leave behind the assumptions and stereotypes.

We need to move past anecdotes in order to accomplish this. Isolated stories are not enough, especially when the word *camp* is so often misunderstood and misused. The American Camp Association (ACA) sets the national standards for camps in the United States, and they have become the leading body for research on camping in recent years. They divide their camping membership into three major streams: private camps (these are both for-profit and non-profit), agency camps, and religiously affiliated camps. Chapter 2 will trace the development of these three streams, as well as the emergence of ACA. ACA publications offer a helpful starting place for a definition of camp, something called “the essential trinity of organized camp: 1) community living; 2) away from home; 3) in an outdoor, recreational setting.”<sup>2</sup> These three aspects provide a helpful starting point for

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<sup>1</sup> *Jesus Camp*, directed by Rachel Grady and Heidi Ewing, DVD (Magnolia Pictures, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Christopher A. Thurber, Marge M. Scanlin, Leslie Scheuler, and Karla A. Henderson, “Youth Development Outcomes of the Camp Experience: Evidence for Multidimensional Growth,” *Journal of Youth Adolescence* 36 (2007), 242.

our exploration of camp, but we will find that there is not much substantive scholarly work to build on when it comes to religiously affiliated camps, much less specifically Christian camps. We will gather the pieces that we can in the next couple chapters, but we will ultimately have to turn to a deep empirical approach to gain a better understanding of camp. We will go to specific places and talk with specific people. We do not seek a positivist or deterministic approach that will tell us the one thing that camp is. Neither do we seek to prove that camp is effective or de facto better than other forms of ministry. Our study will help us come to a working definition of camp and an understanding of some of the forces at work in the camp model. We will arrive at the following working definition:

***Camp is a set apart space that facilitates relational encounter between the self, the other, and God.***

We say that camp is a *space* because it has physical boundaries. It is not a concept or an idea but rather a unique physical location. These boundaries mean that it is *set apart* from the places that are recognizably not camp. The set apartness facilitates an awareness of similarities and contrasts with what is left behind. *Relational encounter* is essential to the camp experience. We say *encounter* because these relationships are not mediated by technology, and they do not involve passing interaction like two people waving from a distance or brushing past one another on the sidewalk. They involve physical presence and running up against or being brought up short by the other. We use the word *facilitates* because the encounters are not forced. Rather, the set apart space intentionally provides opportunities for relational encounter. The space is not the cause but rather the occasion. These relational encounters are three-fold. They necessarily include the *other*.

Camps are places where real people interact and run up against the reality of other unique human beings. This relational encounter with the other facilitates a deeper encounter with the *self*. As we will see in the coming pages, the self only exists in relationship to others. The set apart space of camp also facilitates relational encounter with *God* through the concrete presence of the living Christ and the creative movement of the Holy Spirit. This happens in multiple ways but most clearly through person-to-person encounter. God in Christ is present in the midst of these encounters. The use of Christian practices also facilitates an awareness of God's presence in the set apart space of camp, and the increased awareness is often experienced as encounter.

Notice that we are not defining camp by its program or specific setting. There is a spirited debate among camping professionals as to what qualifies as camp. Most of the controversy centers on how much a camp uses the outdoors. Even Richard Louv's bestselling *Last Child in the Woods*, which desperately seeks to get children outdoors, mostly critiques camps as not focused enough on nature.<sup>3</sup> Most camps are excellent spaces for people to interact with the natural world, but reducing our understanding of camp to this aspect will get us lost in the weeds.<sup>4</sup> There are some purists who essentially believe that any permanent structure marks the difference between a camp and a resort. They may allow these approximations to be called camps, but they want to include an asterisk. Others are willing to embrace cabins as long as they are rustic enough. They might allow electricity and even indoor plumbing but draw the line at air conditioning.

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2008), 228.

<sup>4</sup> The American Camp Association (ACA) responded to Louv's critique with a survey of member camps, which found, "83% of the camps had programs primarily staged in the outdoors." Penny A. James and Karla A. Henderson, "Camps and Nature Report" (June 2007) [http://camps.qc.ca/files/2914/2671/0036/camps\\_nature\\_report.pdf](http://camps.qc.ca/files/2914/2671/0036/camps_nature_report.pdf) (accessed March 2016), 3.

These folks have evidently never been to Texas in July. Two camps might be situated on beautiful lakefronts, but one will claim the superior experience because that lake only allows canoes and sailboats, while the other has powerboat traffic. We need to get past these rivalries. There is a consensus that the outdoors are important to camp, but there is wide variability in the duration and quality of the outdoor experiences. The above definition is expansive enough to include inner-city camps and mountain wilderness excursions under the same proverbial canopy. There is an assumption that the set apart space includes interaction with God's creation. We can say that this interaction involves somewhat more than a potted plant but is not the unspoiled wilderness of Shangri-La.

Programmatic differences are more germane to our discussion. The set apart spaces that we are calling camps offer remarkably different experiences. Day camps do not include overnight experiences, while residential (or *sleep away*) camps do. Some camps offer family camp programs, when young people experience the set apart space with parents or grandparents. Some camps offer retreat experiences, which can be generally defined as including one or two overnights. Three or more consecutive overnights can then be called residential camp experiences. Our definition of camp does not seek to exclude day camp, family camp, and retreats, but our primary focus will center on the residential summer camp experiences. There are historical reasons for this focus that we will explore in the next chapter, but by way of introduction we can say that residential summer camp is the core experience behind the above definition of camp. There are an estimated 12,000 camps in the United States alone, and 62% of these are residential.<sup>5</sup> The other programs are understood as analogous experiences or historical

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<sup>5</sup> Joel F. Meier and Karla A. Henderson, *Camp Counseling: Leadership and Programming for the Organized Camp* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2012), 12.

offshoots of residential summer camp. Family camps, day camps, and retreats deserve separate and intentional consideration, though that is beyond the scope of this project. Future projects that consider them individually should note their connection to residential summer camp. One final programmatic consideration is that some camps also operate as conference centers. They share historical roots with residential summer camp, but conferences are here understood as qualitatively different from camps and retreats because they tend to focus more on business meetings and presentations than on relational encounter.

Our camp orientation is almost complete, but we must acknowledge that our definition of camp reveals a theological starting point. We have a clear preference for camps that are intentional about engagement in Christian practices. This project, therefore, focuses on Christian summer camps and their analogous ministries. We will discover in our journey through the coming pages that even Christian summer camps differ a great deal in their programs, priorities, and fundamental definitions of the camp experience. The various expressions of Christian summer camp must not be conflated because experiences like *Jesus Camp* are here considered unfaithful representations of the camping model. This project does not exclude camping experiences in the tradition of American Evangelicalism, even though our focus will be on Mainline Protestant camping. This focus is based on the theological starting point of the project. I hope that the working definition and theological priorities are inclusive enough that my Evangelical friends and colleagues feel welcome to play. We learn more together, and Christ is present where we gather in his name. May this playground be one of those spaces.

### Relationship as a Theological Starting Point

The invitation to play is an invitation to relationship. We can consider this our theological starting point because God is the being revealed to us in relationship. Karl Barth has helped theologians since the early twentieth century reclaim the primacy of the doctrine of the Trinity, especially as the Cappadocian Fathers articulated it: *perichoresis*, or mutual indwelling. Relationship is the starting point for our understanding of God because this is how God acts in the world. Barth writes, “God seeks and creates fellowship between Himself and us, and therefore He loves us. But He is this loving God without us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, in the freedom of the Lord, who has His life from Himself.”<sup>6</sup> We can affirm that God exists as an eternal relationship and has no ontological need of creation or humankind. This is a profound and mind-boggling insight, but Barth sees no purpose in trying to describe God in relational isolation. The simple fact is that God has acted. We have no knowledge of a cloistered, cut-off God but rather a relational God who has reached out in love to creation. We can say that God is relationship, God seeks relationship, and God creates relationship.

Jürgen Moltmann is one of the giants of twentieth century theology who is indebted to Barth and his insights, though he helps us move beyond Barth in many ways. He provides a helpful metaphor to understand the Triune God reaching out in relationship to creation. He writes, “The creation is God’s play.”<sup>7</sup> There is no need for the created world to exist. The created world is an outpouring of God’s divine love and exists as an

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<sup>6</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker, W. B. Johnston, Harold Knight, and J. L. M. Haire, II/1 (London: T & T Clark, 1957), 257.

<sup>7</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, trans. Reinhard Ulrich (New York: Harper and Row, 1972), 17.



expression of God's joy. Creation is God's playground. This is not to say that creation exists for pleasure or that God is toying with creation. Creation exists as a place of relational encounter. God is moving and working in this temporal space as the one who seeks relationship with the creation and inspires creation itself to relationship. Humanity is drawn to God as the source of relationship. Moltmann, therefore, considers theology itself to be a form of play. Limiting theology to a theory of a practice is insufficient. He writes, "Christian theology is also an abundant rejoicing in God and the *free play* of thoughts, words, images, and songs with the grace of God."<sup>8</sup> Humanity is invited to be in relationship with God. Our God is not distant and cut off but rather personal and inviting: "Do you want to play together?"

Our theological starting point suggests a dynamic connection between relationships and play. Play is both the outpouring of relationship and the means by which we nurture relationship. This leads us to two understandings of playground. Our relationships with each other and with God are expressed in terms of play, so the place where we interact in relationship can be considered a playground. There are also specific places where we go in order to play and interact with others. It is to this second understanding of playground that we can categorize camp. Camps are set apart as places of encounter, as places of play. Camps are theological playgrounds.

### **Camp Rules: A Note on Interdisciplinarity**

Every camp that I have visited establishes some form of rules or group covenant to guide the participants' time together. Any safe playground does the same. They usually include guidelines about showing respect for others and their things. Practical theology

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 27.

establishes its rules of interaction as interdisciplinary perspectives. It is not enough to say that we will place very different disciplines in conversation with one another. We have to establish some guidelines for how this conversation and interaction will take place. We do not want to rifle through someone's intellectual property when they are not looking and leave it a filthy mess. We do not want to be like the kid at camp who leaves his dirty underwear on his cabin mate's pillow. Respect for the other and a desire for relational encounter should guide our interaction. We want to both hear and be heard because we believe that Christ is present and active in this relational interplay.

This again betrays our theological starting point. We do not enter this project pretending that we can suspend our belief in God's active presence in the world. That would be disingenuous. However, we also do not claim that theology is a superior field of study just because it is intentionally about God. The claim we make is one of revelation. God has broken into the world in the person of Jesus Christ, and this revelation has reordered our entire understanding of existence, as Christ has transformed humanity's state of being in relationship to God.

James Loder has articulated a helpful interdisciplinary model as a "Christomorphic approach."<sup>9</sup> He understands the human sciences to go through a process of transformation in dialogue with theology. This is not to do damage to the perspectives or to use them for selfish purposes but rather to deny the assumption that any field can speak of anything that is not related to God. Loder puts this more poetically, "The Creator Spirit...will negate any presuppositional negation of theological reality."<sup>10</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> James Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 40-41.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 41.

relationship between fields is essential because this dynamic interplay is a living out of the relational wholeness of Jesus Christ, who is inseparably God and human. Loder uses the Chalcedonian understanding of Christology as a framework for understanding his methodology. Loder's insights demand intentional listening to the perspectives of the human sciences because without them we have an incomplete understanding of the human spirit. Denying their perspectives would be, for Loder, denial of the humanity of Jesus Christ. Our faith leads us into deep relationship with a variety of disciplinary fields in order that we might better understand God's activity in the world. Where we must part with Loder is in the amount of credit he gives to theologians. He says that the discipline of theology has priority over the other disciplines, as Christ's divine nature has ontological priority over his humanity.

The theological argument, which follows Barth, is elegant but unnecessary and potentially misleading. Dwight Hopkins offers a critical voice that brings us up short. He points out that the dominant voices of theology "have had the resources to promote their voice, their experiences, and their thinkers as normative or as *the* tradition."<sup>11</sup> He lifts up valuable theological voices that are often silenced or marginalized, notably black, womanist, feminist, mujerista, Latino, Asian American, and Native American voices. We cannot say that theology as a field has de facto priority over the human sciences because our understanding of the human sciences are needed to critique the field of theology itself. Our theological categories are called into question when we come face to face with the reality that many are embedded in a mindset mired in white male elitism. It is enough to say that God has the ontological priority. Put another way, we are making a distinction

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<sup>11</sup> Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2005), 15.

between theology as a discipline and Christ as a person who encounters us. The field of theology is always embedded in the practical, so it only exists at the union of human and divine. Theology and the human sciences are united in relational unity that together point to God who has come in the flesh. This is why we can still understand our approach as Christomorphic. The human sciences are transformed by Christ's active presence in the world, through whom we are able to understand how God is at work. That is to say, the human sciences help us develop a more informed theology. We enter with various disciplinary fields into this playground seeking a shared understanding, but this understanding is always oriented toward the Triune God who has reached out in loving relationship to the world in the person of Jesus Christ and has made our interaction itself possible.

### **A Rough Schedule for our Journey**

Participants come to camp with a mixture of excitement and anxiety. They often want to know right from the beginning what they are getting into so they have time to prepare themselves. The child who has a deathly fear of heights wants to know when the group is scheduled for the high ropes so she has time to consider whether or not this will be the year she climbs to the top. The one who absolutely loves animals wants to know when he will get the chance to ride a horse or visit the farm animals. You, the reader, likely want to know what activities we are in for in our journey together through the coming pages. You may decide to opt out of certain pages, knowing that all camp activities are, after all, *challenge by choice*. Others have already skipped this section, like the camper who tunes out the schedule review, because they either like being surprised or are in a hurry to get going. There will certainly be some surprises and unexpected

encounters in the pages to come, but it is still helpful to have a rough idea of where we are going.

Our journey will follow a schedule that is reminiscent of the camp experience itself. We have begun here in chapter 1 with brief introductions and an orientation to the rules for our time together. Chapters 2 and 3 will take us on a tour of the camp landscape. Like any good tour, we will hear some camp history and some fascinating stories of what people say about camp. Chapter 2 is a broad overview of the history and heritage of Christian camping ministry. It is not only fascinating to hear about where camp comes from, but this survey also gives us insight into the present realities of camping ministry. We will pay special attention to the dominant models of Christian camping ministry that have been present from the very beginning: the crisis conversion model and the Christian nurture model that facilitates intentional connection with congregational ministries. The history provides us great insight into why camp is often dismissed in the scholarly literature. Chapter 3 will examine camp's treatment in the literature and make a case for camp as a locus of practical theology. Our review of the literature will also make clear that we must take a deep empirical approach in this project, since there has been so little scholarship on camping ministry. We are like first-time campers who have only heard about the wonders and dangers of the camp experience. We will have to delve deeply into the experience.

Chapter 4 is about building community. Camp experiences involve relational encounter between people that might not otherwise meet. We will enter into intentional dialogue with theoretical and theological voices that will join us for our journey. Some of us will get along splendidly right from the beginning, and others might have to work at

getting to know the new people. Some of our cabin mates will be Pierre Bourdieu, John Bowlby, Daniel Siegel, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Don Juel, and Jürgen Moltmann. We ultimately cannot settle for an all-white, boys-only cabin group. To do so would be to succumb to the problematic assumptions that plague the history of the academy and camping ministry. Our dialogue partners will, in fact, convince us that we must seek other perspectives and genuine encounter with a diversity of voices. A few of the friends that will help guide our way include Mary McClintock Fulkerson, Bonnie Miller-McLemore, and Dwight Hopkins. Their critical perspectives will ultimately help guide us to the unorthodox research methodology of *portraiture*, with Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot as our guide in chapter 5.

Chapters 5-7 immerse us in the camp experience. Like camp itself, we will use multiple methods. You may find some of them exciting and fascinating, while others may make you uncomfortable. Chapter 5 lays out the methodological framework for the study and gives a critical rationale for using social science research, particularly the variables paradigm. Chapter 6 is a deep consideration of the rich quantitative data from three data streams. We will not seek causation, and we will not get mired in the positivist mindset. The data provide us with a first of its kind snapshot of Christian summer camp in the Mainline Protestant tradition. We will see the stark differences between Christian education in a traditional setting like confirmation training and Christian education at camp. We will also see the variability among camps in the same tradition, including a new typology that proposes four types of Mainline camps. Chapter 7 dwells deeply in specific cases and stories by examining the experiences at four camps and considering the major themes that emerge from these experiences. These qualitative data seek to explain

the statistical data from chapter 6 and lead us toward an integrative understanding of Christian summer camp that is grounded in the sort of personal encounter that we have discussed above.

Chapter 8 brings our experience to a close by proposing a theological understanding of Christian summer camp. We will consider camp as a theological playground that functions alongside other experiences and relationships to facilitate spiritual growth and transformation. We will close by being sent out to our home environments, where we will seek, like the camp participants, to integrate what we have learned into our lived contextual realities. Some pragmatic steps will be proposed to continue our process of learning and engagement.

You have not yet balked at the invitation, so I invite you to delve deeper with me. Our theological and theoretical parents may have never thought this possible or even desirable, but here we are in relational encounter. Do you want to play together?

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN SUMMER CAMP

Camps are virtually dripping with history. Christian camps claim a shared history connected to a biblical narrative of wilderness wanderings, and many are quick to evoke Jesus' model of ministry in the outdoors with his small group of disciples. Some camps draw connections to desert fathers like Saint Anthony and religious leaders like Saint Francis, tracing an arc of camping ministry from the Garden of Eden to the present day. Each camp also has a unique history connected to specific individuals whose pioneering efforts are legendary in that particular place. Each site has its holy places or artifacts that are evocative of those who have come before and passed on the faith. At Lutherdale in Wisconsin, visitors lean against the fireplace mantel that was carved from the log on which the camp founders sat in 1944 and received holy inspiration to begin a camp. At Stronghold in Illinois, campers gather in the historic castle around an enormous fireplace that contains the andirons from the legendary Camp Kosciusko, the first Presbyterian summer camp. At Crossroads Outdoor Ministries in New Jersey, a staff member solemnly adds *the log* to the campfire, a charred remnant of the last campfire of the previous camping session that connects the campers, in continuous succession, to decades of other faithful campers. Each camp has a unique history and a shared connection with the biblical narrative, but organized summer camping is also a unified movement with a shared history.



Our brief survey of the history of Christian summer camp will take us from the revival movements in nineteenth century America to the present day. Summer camp as an organized movement is an American phenomenon, and this chapter focuses almost exclusively on its history in the United States. This is not to deny the success of the movement in countries around the world but rather to identify its roots and original reasons for being. Camping professionals in Canada certainly have a strong argument that their sites share credit for the development of the early movement, so we can more properly say that summer camp is North American. Educators and Christian missionaries spread the camping paradigm to other countries after it was established in North America. We will begin by looking at the unique cultural forces in America that opened the space for the summer camp movement in the 1880s. We will then look closely at some of the first camps and see how they were emblematic of the emerging movement. The development and increasing sophistication of camping in the years before World War II show why the movement developed secular, Evangelical, and mainline branches. This gives us great insight into the key differences among the camping models and why they cannot be conflated. Our examination of the post-war years will show us how our present picture of organized camping emerged and why the camping model began falling out of favor with theologians and ministry professionals. We will end our brief history with a consideration of the past decade of camping that will illuminate our path through the literature in the next chapter and set the stage for our broad survey of mainline Protestant camping in chapter 6.

### **Setting the Stage: 19<sup>th</sup> Century Antecedents to the Summer Camp Movement**

Organized youth camping has its origins in late nineteenth century New England. The camping movement gathered momentum along with a myriad of cultural forces and not because of individual genius. It is a great metaphor for camp that, in effect, it has no founder because camp is essentially a communal enterprise. In one of the definitive histories of summer camp, Leslie Paris describes camp as a “hybrid” arena, where multiple forces interact in unique ways to produce something entirely new.<sup>1</sup> Among the cultural and counter-cultural forces that gave rise to the organized camp movement are urbanization, the back-to-nature and fresh air movements, the youth movements, the camp meetings, Chautauquas, and the rise of compulsory education.

The origins of organized camping must be seen in the context of the industrial revolution and the rapid urbanization of the nineteenth century. Henry David Thoreau exemplified the early back-to-nature movement in his influential *Walden* (1854). John Muir, John Burroughs, and other conservationists took up the cause of preserving the American wilderness. In the meantime, an idealized picture of the American West permeated the imaginations of city dwellers, exemplified in Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show that opened in New York in 1883, just as the nascent camping movement was beginning. There was an increasing fear, especially among upper class white New Englanders, that city living was not only detrimental to health, but also to humanity and the American spirit that longed for adventure and wilderness. Upper classes sought leisure in outdoor settings, and charity groups provided opportunities for lower class children to escape urban life for short stays in the countryside. These exoduses of poor

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<sup>1</sup> Leslie Paris, *Children’s Nature: The Rise of the American Summer Camp* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 9.

urban children, largely initiated by Protestant church leaders in the 1870s, came to be known as the *fresh air movement*.

The youth movement took shape at the same time and in response to the same perceived problems as the back-to-nature and fresh air movements. Concerned Christians, many of them ministers, saw children living in deplorable urban conditions. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Sunday school movement were both attempts to care for urban young people. They emerged in the midst of the industrial revolution in England and quickly spread to the United States. A concerted effort and evangelistic fervor among churches in Philadelphia in 1830 led to a surge in the number of Sunday schools in the frontier areas of the Ohio and Mississippi valleys.<sup>2</sup> The YMCA, along with its counterpart YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association), spread with similar fervor across the country in the 1850s and following. By the beginning of the Civil War, specialized youth work had spread throughout the country. The YMCA and YWCA focused their efforts on Christian care of young people in urban settings, while the Sunday school spread rapidly in both urban and rural areas.

The religious fervor that precipitated the early youth work movements was product of the most immediate antecedents of Christian summer camping: the camp meeting. Camp meetings originated in the outdoor revivals of the Second Great Awakening, with the movement gaining considerable momentum at the turn of the nineteenth century, exemplified most famously in the well-publicized 1801 revival in Cane Ridge, Kentucky. They held in common some of the basic components of Christian

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<sup>2</sup> Senter notes, "Over half of the eight to ten thousand new communities in the Mississippi Valley were provided with Sunday schools in a two-year period." Mark H. Senter, *When God Shows Up: A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 107.

camping: community, set-apart locations, and the outdoors. Camp meetings transcended denominational lines, though they are most closely associated with the Methodist and Baptist traditions. These set-apart locations used the natural beauty of the outdoors to convey a sense of holiness and liminality to provide safe space for social interactions and displays of the Holy Spirit that would be considered disgraceful or indecent in everyday life. Rieser notes, “The camp meeting, with its typical leafy enclosure, formed an interior space where guests could reflect on the divine presence in Nature, apprehend God’s immanence, monitor their internal states of grace, and focus without distraction on the journey to salvation.”<sup>3</sup> The faithful would return to the same grounds year after year, giving the camp meetings an important sense of permanence, which kept the movement going for decades. The grounds themselves became hallowed places where people had been converted or had recommitted their lives to Christ. Powerful religious experiences tied to a specific outdoor space remain key to the Christian summer camp movement, in which young people return in hopes of reliving a powerful experience or rekindling their faith. Many Christian camps trace their site history to nineteenth century camp meetings.

Philanthropist Lewis Miller and Methodist pastor John Heyl Vincent founded the Chautauqua Institution in 1874 on a former camp meeting site in *the burned-over district* of western New York. Chautauqua was designed to train Sunday school teachers. It exemplified the Protestant desire to retain a distinct identity and also shape the destiny of the nation, especially as a dramatic influx of immigrants in the 1870s and 1880s threatened the dominance of Mainline Protestants in New England and the Mid-Atlantic states. The movement successfully blended the set-apart outdoor spirituality of the camp

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew C. Rieser, *The Chautauqua Moment: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 32.

meeting with Christian education. The model was widely publicized, and similar programs quickly sprang up at sites across the country, so that by the 1880s and 1890s, seventy or more Chautauqua assemblies existed and were visited by more than a half million people annually.<sup>4</sup> These early Chautauquas were ecumenical, but they were decidedly Protestant. The movement was characterized by a strong anti-urbanism and an idealized notion of nature, though the pristine natural settings were largely manufactured and manicured. It was a chance to temporarily suspend real life and be welcomed into a set-apart, sacred realm. The adults that attended Chautauqua assemblies were Christian educators who would not only bring the learned Protestant ideals and ethics to Sunday school classes but would also expand the outdoor ministry and education model of Chautauqua to outdoor camping programs focused specifically on young people.

Chautauqua was part of a larger educational movement that was sweeping the nation in the decades following the Civil War. Compulsory education was increasingly common, and public-funded secondary education gradually followed. Chautauqua also exemplified the increasing public attention to leisure and recreation. Many primary schools had a summer term for much of the nineteenth century. An early camping experiment that is often credited as the first summer camp was actually a summer term class held in an outdoor setting. This was Frederick William Gunn's and Abigail Gunn's Gunnery School for Boys. The Gunns took the boys on a two-week camping excursion in Connecticut in 1861, and this continued periodically until 1879. It is a significant precursor to organized camping because it was well publicized and led to emulation of programs. The major distinction is that the Gunnery Camp was part of the school

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<sup>4</sup> Rieser, 51.

program, whereas summer camping emerged as the extended summer vacation gained popularity. Increased interest in leisure, recreation, and a retreat from city life were essential to school camps like the Gunnery Camp and the Chautauqua movement. Rieser notes, “The Chautauqua leisure model gave clerical sanction to the summer vacation and helped make it a defining ritual of middle-class life.”<sup>5</sup> The middle class demand for leisure resulted in an explosion of the vacation industry and a rapid elimination of the summer school term. Freeing up the months of July and August in the youth schedule, while the rising middle class was still expected to work during the summer months, opened the space for the summer camp experiment.

While compulsory education increased and secondary education became more common in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the youth movement gained considerable momentum and produced numerous organizations and opportunities for young people to engage in healthy community activities. The most influential of these was Christian Endeavor, founded by Francis Clark in 1881. Youth ministry historian Mark Senter marks this as a major transition in approaches to specialized youth ministry from “the period of associations” (such as the YMCA and Sunday school) to “the period of youth societies.”<sup>6</sup> The activities of Christian Endeavor were widely publicized and adopted in congregations across the country. Clark designed the regular gatherings to be youth-led. The stated objective of Christian Endeavor was, “To promote an earnest Christian life among its members, to increase their mutual acquaintance, and to make

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>6</sup> Senter, 147-149.

them more useful in the service of God.”<sup>7</sup> Clark’s description of Christian Endeavor societies as “a half-way house to the church” highlights their role in providing safe space for young people to interact with each other for the purpose of connecting them more fully to the church community.<sup>8</sup> Christian Endeavor was part of the *Christian nurture* movement popularized by Horrace Bushnell, who argued against the necessity of dramatic conversion experiences: “The child should grow up a Christian, and never know himself as being otherwise.”<sup>9</sup> This model of Christian education sharply critiqued the revivalist model popular in camp meetings, and this disagreement would cause early diversity in the camping movement that is still evident today in camps emphasizing the last night conversion experience compared with camps seeking intentional integration with homes and congregational ministries.

Congregations in all of the major Protestant denominations soon had vibrant Christian Endeavor societies. Denominational leaders who were concerned to keep the particularity of their denomination intact formed youth societies that adopted the model of Christian Endeavor but were specialized to denominational bodies. The Episcopal Church founded the Brotherhood of St. Andrew in 1883 and its counterpart Daughters of the King in 1885. Soon to follow were the United Presbyterian Youth Fellowship (1889), Epworth League (Methodist Church - 1889), Baptist Young People’s Union of America (1891), Walther League (Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod - 1893), and Luther League (1895). Senter notes, “Denominational control and loyalty seemed safer than the

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<sup>7</sup> F. E. Clark, *The Children and the Church, and the Young People’s Society of Christian Endeavor as a Means of Bringing Them Together* (Boston: Congregational Sunday School and Publishing Society, 1882), 40.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 52.

<sup>9</sup> Horace Bushnell, *Christian Nurture* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1994), 10.

nondenominational approach of Christian Endeavor.”<sup>10</sup> The rise of the summer camping movement occurred at the same time as the formation of these youth societies and should be seen as part of this broader movement toward specialized ministry with young people.

### **The First Camps: Conversion or Christian Nurture**

Urbanization, the rise of the middle class, the back-to-nature movement, the youth work movement, the ubiquity of compulsory education, and the leisure movement leading to the elimination of the summer term coincided perfectly in New England in the 1880s to give rise to the summer camp movement. The most influential of the early camps was Ernest Balch’s Camp Chocorua, founded in 1881, the same year as Christian Endeavor. Balch’s camp was widely publicized and emulated, making it an early prototype, but it is erroneous to credit him with founding the movement simply because he left a historical record. The Reverend George Hinckley of East Hartford, Connecticut, took a group of boys from his congregation for week-long camps in Rhode Island in 1880 and 1881. The record of these outings survive because of Hinckley’s fame in later founding the Good Will Farm for Boys in Maine, a camp that has been serving under-privileged children since 1889. The Detroit YMCA publicized successful multi-day camping ventures in the summers of 1882-1884, the success of which led directly to the founding of the first week-long YMCA summer camp in New York in 1885 by Sumner Dudley. Incarnation Center, the longest operating Christian summer camp, was founded in 1886 in Upstate New York by the Reverend Arthur Brooks. These early summer camps were founded independently in a very short span of time, demonstrating that the summer camp movement can best be described in terms of emergence. These camps are

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<sup>10</sup> Senter, 181.



part of the written history because their records survive, and they give hints of an early movement that may have included many pastors who experimented with organized summer camping like Hinckley and Brooks.

The early camps are remarkable not only in that they were founded independently of one another but also because they exemplify the major branches of the organized camping movement that we see today: private, agency, and religiously affiliated. These different branches held in common, at the outset, a focus on faith formation and Christian education of young people, though this would shift in the inter-war years. They differed in their programmatic strategies, and these differences would determine the history of the organized camping movement. One of the most important differences, which still divides Christian camping today, concerns the approach to Christian education as a conversion experience or as Christian nurture.

Balch's Camp Chocorua served as the prototype for subsequent *private* camps in terms of wealthy Protestant clientele, programs spanning the entire summer, and the need for effective publicity. Balch was the son of an Episcopal minister and dropped out of Dartmouth to found Camp Chocorua. He first arrived at Squam Lake in New Hampshire with a romanticized view of it as untouched wilderness, though it was a popular vacation destination. He began setting up plans for his camp on a small island as if he had discovered it, but he soon found out that someone else already owned the island, so he promptly purchased it. Camp Chocorua operated for nine summers, allowing Balch the opportunity to hone his camping model. Christian life and teaching were essential to all aspects of the camp program, with daily Bible study, worship, and regular group prayer.

Balch was very intentional in focusing on community living, outdoor skills, recreation, and democratic decision-making.

The Chocorua experiment was publicized among the New England Protestant elite, and through these channels it spawned similar private camp ventures, among them Camp Asquam (1885) and Camp Algonquin (1886), both founded on the same lake as Chocorua. The centrality of Christian education and faith formation to the program of these early private camps can be attributed in large part to the target clientele. Christian education and faith practices were essential pieces of the dominant culture in New England, so they featured prominently at camp. City living was seen as dangerous physically and spiritually, so camp was a safe place for upper class males to be unashamedly white and unashamedly Protestant. Paris notes, “Educated, native-born, and often quite young, the men who founded the first camps were idealists committed to countering the seeming enfeeblement, depletion, and degeneration of middle- and upper-class American boys.”<sup>11</sup> Early camp history is often characterized in terms of upper class white male idealism because of the influence of these early private camps on the literature and on New England’s elite. It is important to recognize that this represents one branch of organized camping, the smallest branch in terms of camper numbers, and it has a disproportionate effect on camp history because it served the elite. The private camp movement was so small that as late as 1896 when Hanford Henderson founded Camp Marienfeld on the upper Delaware River, he thought that he had started the movement.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Paris, 37.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 39.

Dudley's YMCA camp (named Camp Dudley after his death) is the prototypical *agency* camp that was quickly replicated by other YMCAs and later by the YWCA, the Camp Fire Girls, and other agencies focused on youth work. These agency camps featured one or two-week camping sessions that served the burgeoning middle class and even the working class. Whereas Balch charged 175 dollars for the full ten-week summer at Camp Chocorua, the early agency camps charged only four or five dollars per week.<sup>13</sup> Early agency camps resembled private camps in their gender exclusivity and centrality of Christian teaching. Private camps tended to incorporate Christian instruction as part of a well-rounded experience and path to responsible citizenry, while YMCA camps focused on proclamation and conversion. One-to-two hours per day were devoted to Bible study, and worship was central to the program. Dudley himself noted in the YMCA publication *The Watchman*, "Pleasure seeking does not necessitate any relaxation of Christian study and work."<sup>14</sup> A writer in another YMCA publication, *Association Men*, wrote in 1905, "The major aim of a boys' camp...should be to lead boys to Jesus Christ."<sup>15</sup> Agency camps had no particular connection to denominational bodies, so Christian teachings were not directly reinforced by congregational leaders. Camp served as an isolated Christian experience for groups of young boys that they were left to incorporate into their own faith stories upon returning home. Agency camps are seldom places of crisis conversion today. We will see that they moved away from this emphasis in the inter-war

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 37-40.

<sup>14</sup> C. Howard Hopkins, *History of the Y. M. C. A. in North America* (New York: Association Press, 1951), 205.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Hopkins, 469.

years, though the American Evangelical camping movement quickly picked up the conversion torch.

The third branch of early camping was markedly different in its approach to Christian education, and it is also most difficult to trace because the early pioneers of *religiously affiliated* camps did not found lasting camping organizations or network with other camping leaders to the same extent as private and agency camp leaders. Their goals were not to found camping businesses or promote an ideal as much as they were to connect relationally with groups of young people in their care. Pastor Hinckley took groups of boys for a week of camp in 1880 and 1881 because he wanted to get to know his Sunday school students better and to share his love of the outdoors with them. Programmatically, his camping ventures looked remarkably similar to Camp Dudley and Camp Chocorua in terms of Bible study, outdoor recreation (with an emphasis on aquatics), singing, and worship. The key difference was that he returned home with his campers and interacted with them continually through his congregational ministry. Pastor Brooks, likewise, reached out to young people in his own community when he began what was to become Incarnation Center in 1886. Brooks had a passion and a calling to serve the urban poor, particularly recent immigrants. His early camping ventures can be seen as part of the fresh air movement, as well as an outreach designed to serve poor communities and to engage them in the ongoing life of his congregation.

Another key difference that sets the early religiously affiliated camps apart is the inclusion of diverse camper groups. Early private camps and agency camps were gender segregated with predominantly native-born white campers. Hinckley's first camp venture was all boys, but three of them were Chinese. Brooks led a mixed group of white

Protestant campers from his congregation and recent immigrants from the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Equally significant, Brooks' first group of twenty-five campers in 1886 was coeducational. This is intriguing, considering that the vast majority of agency and private camps founded before 1900 were exclusively male.<sup>16</sup> Luther Halsey Gulick, who later founded the Campfire Girls, is credited with founding the first camping experience for girls in 1890, even though Pastor Brooks was already taking young girls to camp for several years.<sup>17</sup> It makes sense that an Episcopal congregation like Pastor Brooks' would be among the first to offer coeducational camping experiences, since the Christian Endeavor offshoot *Daughters of the King* was already established by the time he led his first camping outing. Congregations were offering increased opportunities for young people to gather in age-specific ministry ventures, and summer camping ministry was a natural extension that allowed ministry leaders to deepen relationships with their young congregants in set-apart locations for extended periods of time as part of their Christian nurture. We will see that denominations eventually caught on to the ministry potential of Christian camping and created their own networks, but it should also be noted that congregational ministers in the mold of Hinckley and Brooks have continued leading their young members on camping experiences. We will even examine a modern example of this model in chapter 7 when we travel to Lake Tahoe.

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<sup>16</sup> Paris, 46-47

<sup>17</sup> Joel F. Meier and Karla A. Henderson, *Camp Counseling: Leadership and Programming for the Organized Camp* (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2012), 14.

### Early Expansion and Muscular Christianity

The first two decades of organized camping from 1880 to 1900 showed modest expansion as early successes were replicated. The more visible arms of the movement attached themselves to the ideals of *muscular Christianity*, which portrayed the idyllic Christian man as tough and virtuous, having moral authority to lead the household and the other civilizations of the world. Early private camps, such as Chocorua and Asquam, can rightly be characterized as attempts to get white males out of the squalor of city living and domestic feminization to pursue the more manly pursuits of wilderness, self-reliance, and (male) Christian values. This connection to muscular Christianity dominated the literature because of the wealth of private camps and YMCA camps, but the idea was absent or even rejected in many of the congregational camping ventures and the charity camps, which can be better associated with the fresh air movement and the social gospel.

Private camps were largely confined to New England, with approximately twenty-five camps operating by 1900 and serving approximately one thousand campers each summer.<sup>18</sup> Agency camps expanded more quickly because of the communication and idea sharing of the YMCA. Paris notes, “By the turn of the twentieth century, hundreds of organizational camps served many thousands of boys, far more than the number who attended private camps.”<sup>19</sup> Of these, 167 were YMCA camps, serving an estimated five thousand boys per summer by 1901.<sup>20</sup> There is evidence that religiously affiliated camps continued to expand in popularity during this period. The first Catholic camp was

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<sup>18</sup> Paris, 39.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 40.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 42. Hopkins, 469.

founded in 1892, and the first Jewish camp followed in 1902.<sup>21</sup> The Reverend George Gray of Chicago began taking young people from his congregation to the shores of a lake in Saugatuck, Michigan in 1899, and this site would later become Presbyterian Camps. Camp meeting grounds and Chautauquas also continued operations during this period, with some used as camping grounds for families and others for congregational youth outings of the nascent Christian Endeavor groups. Epworth League outings began in 1888 on the Dimock Grove camp meeting site in northeastern Pennsylvania and are credited with saving the grounds from closure.<sup>22</sup> Dooly Campground in Georgia, Crystal Springs Camp in Michigan, and Kavanagh Life Enrichment Center in Kentucky are three Methodist sites founded between 1860 and 1875, as the popularity of the camp meeting was in its twilight. They existed at the crossroads of traditional revivalist camp meetings, Chautauquas, and summer youth conferences.

The conference setting focused on ministry with youth in the outdoor setting, but it differed from the summer camp model in its focus on large-group presentations, to the detriment of small groups and relational connection. The Winona Lake Bible Conference in Indiana is an important example. It was founded in 1895 as a large group camping and conference center aimed primarily at adults, so it was known as a Chautauqua. It held its first outdoor youth conference in 1908, giving birth to Camp Kosciusko, which is recognized as the first Presbyterian camp.<sup>23</sup> Another example is Lake Geneva in Wisconsin, where a conference of the International Sunday School Association in 1912

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<sup>21</sup> Paris, 58. Amy L. Sales and Leonard Saxe, *How Goodly Are Thy Tents: Summer Camps as Jewish Socializing Experiences* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 24.

<sup>22</sup> Leroy E. Bugbee, *He Holds the Stars in His Hands: The Centennial History of the Wyoming Annual Conference of the Methodist Church* (Scranton, PA: Wyoming Annual Conference, 1952), 76.

<sup>23</sup> Dale L. Brubaker, *History of Camp Kosciusko* (unpublished manuscript, 1993), 19.

expanded in subsequent years to include camp conferences and other events for youth.<sup>24</sup> The Lake Geneva conference, which Burkhardt identifies as “the first American camping program to receive the broad based support of institutional churches,” was an important precursor to youth camps operated with the support of denominational bodies.<sup>25</sup>

The first two decades of the twentieth century saw some important organizational changes in the camping movement. Edgar M. Robinson, an early YMCA camp director, became international secretary of the YMCA in 1901, and he immediately began advocating for increased work with boys younger than eighteen. This included a dramatic expansion of YMCA camps, the number of which nearly doubled by 1905.<sup>26</sup> Robinson also gave tremendous support to the fledgling Boy Scouts of America, founded in 1910, and encouraged an expansion of their programs into camping. Paris notes, “By 1920, almost 45 percent of all Boy Scouts, or over 160,000 boys, spent at least a week at camp in the summertime.”<sup>27</sup> The founding of the Campfire Girls in 1910 prompted an expansion of girls’ camps. This tremendous growth in camping was facilitated, in part, by G. Stanley Hall’s influential *Adolescence*, first published in 1904. Hall’s *recapitulation theory* gave credence to sending young people to camp so that they could enact their more primitive phase of life, which Hall tied to human evolution. Hall’s theory fit particularly well with the ideals of white male superiority and inevitable dominance over races deemed more primitive, so YMCA camps, Boy Scout camps, and private camps

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<sup>24</sup> Mark D. Burkhardt, *A History of Lutheran Church Camping in the United States, 1919-1949* (M.S. thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1982), 13-15.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>26</sup> Paris, 42.

<sup>27</sup> Paris, 45.



doubled down on their version of muscular Christianity. Athletic competition and reward systems became popular at camp during this period.

Religiously affiliated camps tended to focus on relationships, outreach, and inclusion, while private camps focused on the set-apart, exclusive nature of camping where young minds and hearts could be molded to the white American ideal. Exclusivity at private camps meant gender segregation and racial segregation. Many of the early camps, like the Chautauquas of the same period, were enclaves of whiteness, and the notions of muscular Christianity validated this separation as beneficial for society. Camps co-opted American Indian traditions and perpetuated notions of the inferiority of African-Americans. Seton's Woodcraft Indians, founded in 1901, sought to promote the ideals of Native American culture, but Van Slyck points out that these and similar efforts also led to perpetuation of stereotypes and "naturalizing the white conquest of North America."<sup>28</sup> Some camps continued to have campers live in teepees or wear headdresses into the twenty-first century. Also problematic in early camps was the tradition of *blackface* dramas, which caricatured African-Americans. Paris notes that desegregation of camping was slow and that blackface dramas continued at some camps into the 1950s.<sup>29</sup> Early religiously affiliated camps, largely overlooked in the accounts of Paris and Van Slyck, offered important exceptions to the norms of segregation. Hinckley and Brooks both operated inter-cultural and inter-racial camping experiences, and one of the earliest Lutheran camps at Lake Pepin, WI in 1920 was multi-racial.<sup>30</sup> The history of organized

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<sup>28</sup> Abigail A. Van Slyck, *A Manufactured Wilderness: Summer Camps and the Shaping of American Youth, 1890-1960* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 170.

<sup>29</sup> Paris, 269.

<sup>30</sup> Burkhardt, 26-27.

camping in America, however, is dominated by white children and camp leaders.

Influential members of the American Camp Association delayed adoption of an official statement recommending racial integration until 1966, at which point “a large number of private independent camps in North Carolina and Texas did not renew their membership or accreditation the following year.”<sup>31</sup> Summer camp became an integral part of the history of white America, but the early exclusion of black Americans caused a tremendous racial divide in camping that is still evident in the twenty-first century.

The increase in popularity in the early twentieth century meant a degree of permanence to the camping movement that led to the first camp directors associations, first for boys’ camps in 1910 and then for girls’ camps in 1916. These associations soon merged in 1924 into what was to become the American Camp Association (ACA). The sites also took on greater degrees of permanence. Most were transient in the early days of camping. Camp Dudley, for example, moved twice before finally settling at Lake Champlain, New York in 1891, though the camp rented the property until it was purchased in 1908. Van Slyck notes that the early camps usually had very few, if any, permanent structures. Campers usually stayed in tents, often mimicking military encampments (another feature of the muscular Christian movement) until the more established camps began constructing cabins in the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>32</sup>

The experiments of Hinckley, Brooks, Gray, and other ministers demonstrate that camping was part of some congregational ministries in the early years of the movement, but these experiences were isolated, focusing on intentional, ongoing relationships with

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<sup>31</sup> Armand Ball, “How the American Camp Association Has Evolved Through Certain Crisis,” *Camping Magazine* (September/October 2010), 37.

<sup>32</sup> Van Slyck, 14-15.

congregation members. Ferguson and Burch note, “Church-related and denominational camps grew at a much slower rate due to the fact that many private and agency camps were led by Christians and had a religious and moral nature.”<sup>33</sup> Congregations had Christian Endeavor or analogous youth associations that focused on ministry with young people, and they largely left the camping movement to the youth professionals in agencies like the YMCA or Girl Scouts, whose ministries could strongly support the ministries of the congregation. The two exceptions were individual ministers who recognized the value of attending camp with their congregants and large youth conferences at camp meeting grounds. As the dominant camping movement shifted away from Christian education and faith formation, individual congregations and entire denominational bodies began investing more heavily in camp.

### **The Inter-War Years: Camping Comes of Age as Progressive Education**

The growth in camp participation was dramatic in the inter-war years. Camp attendance reached one million campers per summer in the 1920s and doubled to two million per summer in the 1930s.<sup>34</sup> This growth can be attributed in part to the successful marketing of the camp experience among professional educators and the publicity in popular magazines, but several cultural factors are equally significant. The surge in the national economy following the First World War fueled a rising middle class that had the funds to attend summer camp, and it also allowed camping entrepreneurs to purchase property in order to begin new camping ventures. The inter-war years saw tremendous

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<sup>33</sup> Nancy Ferguson and Jennifer Burch, “Religious Camps: Common Roots and New Sprouts,” *Camping Magazine* (November/December 2011), 50.

<sup>34</sup> Paris, 62-63.

increase in high school attendance, which is closely related to an increase in summer camp participation. Hine notes, “In 1920 students made up 28 percent of youth fourteen to twenty; by 1930 the figure was 47 percent.”<sup>35</sup> On the eve of World War II, two-thirds of American teenagers were enrolled in high school.<sup>36</sup>

The sign that the camping movement had come of age was a speech in 1922 by former Harvard president Charles Eliot, in which he proclaimed, “The organized summer camp is the most important step in education that America has given the world.”<sup>37</sup>

Educators in prestigious institutions across the country extolled the benefits of summer camp, which was tied to the *progressive education* movement of John Dewey and others. Proponents of progressive education critiqued pedagogies that focused on rote learning, emphasizing experiential learning and critical thinking combined with social interaction. Lloyd Burgess Sharp was a student of Dewey’s, and he distinguished himself as the first person to earn a Ph.D. with an emphasis on camping education in 1929.<sup>38</sup> He was a strong proponent of the educational value of the small group camp experience, and Ferguson and Burch suggest that he heavily influenced Protestant camping to embrace the small group model over the conference model.<sup>39</sup> The period saw the first major publications about the educational benefits of summer camp, among them the influential *Organized Camping and Progressive Education* (1935), in which Carlos Ward explains,

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<sup>35</sup> Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* (New York: Avon Books, 1999), 198.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, 215.

<sup>37</sup> Paris, 238.

<sup>38</sup> Meier and Henderson, 17.

<sup>39</sup> Ferguson and Burch, 51.

“The Camping Movement has been making a transition from recreational and physical educational types of program to the more comprehensive objectives of personality enrichment.”<sup>40</sup> The expansion of camping as a legitimate educational outlet was concentrated in agencies that Senter describes, “emphasized wholesome activities designed to build character in boys and girls, such as Boy and Girl Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, 4-H Clubs, and Boys Clubs of America.”<sup>41</sup> Senter argues that the expansion of these agencies led to the decline of youth societies like Christian Endeavor. He signals this as a major transition in Protestant youth ministry, and this transition led directly to an increase in denominational camp ventures.

The trend in organized camping away from Christian evangelism and Christian education is most evident in the industry-leading YMCA camps. Hopkins notes that explicit Christian teachings at YMCA camps were increasingly called into question in the late 1920s and into the 1930s, with group work and “creative freedom” dominating the literature and changing the nature of the movement.<sup>42</sup> As Paris describes it, “Although camp leaders continued to praise the goal of ‘character’ development...most did so in far less explicitly religious terms than had their late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century predecessors, deemphasizing the link between muscles and morals.”<sup>43</sup> Most camps of the 1920s and 1930s cannot be described as anti-religious. Rather, specific religious teachings were deemphasized. YMCA camps and scouting camps did not stop having

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<sup>40</sup> Carlos Edgar Ward, *Organized Camping and Progressive Education* (Galax, VA: C. E. Ward, 1935), 146.

<sup>41</sup> Senter, 183.

<sup>42</sup> Hopkins, 552.

<sup>43</sup> Paris, 235.

worship services, but campers were increasingly given a choice of whether or not to participate.

Agency and private camps could no longer be counted on to provide experiences of Christian nurture that supplemented the ministries of the congregation, so religious groups moved beyond the isolated congregational approaches exemplified by Hinckley, Brooks, and Gray to establish larger summer camp organizations “for inculcating their specific religious values and traditions in young people.”<sup>44</sup> The first Lutheran camping organizations were founded during this time. Burkhardt notes that many of the first Lutheran summer camps were outreaches to the urban poor by chapters of the Lutheran Inner Mission Society: Camp Wa-ba-ne-ki in Pennsylvania (1919), Lake Pepin in Wisconsin (1920), and Camp Wilbur Herrlich in New York (1922).<sup>45</sup> These camps offered small group programs focused on religious education, worship, and recreation to diverse groups of campers that were often coeducational and inter-racial. Other Lutheran camps were founded at the synodical level or by Luther League associations. It was often the passion and determination of individual pastors, of the mold of Hinckley and Brooks before them, that made early camps successful. Methodist Pastor Mark Freeman not only drove some of the first youth groups to Camp Twinlow (ID) in the 1930s and led the programs, but he also single-handedly dug over a hundred feet of the first well and devoted his time to saving the camp from financial ruin.<sup>46</sup> Pastor Frank Richter is credited with the early success of Camp Wa-ba-ne-ki through his tireless work as “nurse,

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<sup>44</sup> Furgeson and Burch, 50.

<sup>45</sup> Burkhardt, 21-29.

<sup>46</sup> John Freeman, “A Short History of Mark Freeman and Twinlow as Told by His Son John,” Camp Twinlow, <http://twinlow.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Freeman-Story.pdf> (accessed April 15, 2015).

father, pastor, athletic director, chef, and chief entertainer.”<sup>47</sup> Many camps grant these early pioneers near legendary status, though they are virtually unknown outside the circle of that particular camp.

Aside from the dedication and small-group focus of pastors like Richter and Freeman, the primary mode of denominationally sponsored Christian camping remained the Bible conference. This was particularly true in the Methodist tradition, with its roots deeply embedded in the camp meetings and Chautauquas. No fewer than twenty new Methodist camps and conference centers were established in the inter-war years.<sup>48</sup> These camps have diverse histories. Epworth Forest in Indiana (1923) started as a conference center for Epworth League youth, Aldersgate in California (1928) as an extension of congregational Sunday school programs, and Twinlow in Idaho (1928) as a multi-purpose outdoor ministry center of local churches. The Presbyterians expanded their youth conferences during this period at places like Camp Kosciusko and Montreat Conference Center in North Carolina, where the large auditorium was completed in 1922. Early Luther League camps at Long Lake in Illinois (1920) and Fortune Lake in Michigan (1930) followed a hybrid version of the conference model that included small group time. The conference model emphasized large-group gatherings and dynamic speakers that harkened back to the conversion events of the camp meetings. The model also included intentional connections to congregational ministries that followed a Christian nurture model. Christian Endeavor, Epworth League, or Luther League groups often attended conferences together and shared in the experience with pastors from their home

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<sup>47</sup> Burkhardt, 24.

<sup>48</sup> Information provided to the writer in 2015 by the Camp and Retreat Ministries division of the United Methodist Church.

congregations. Burkhardt notes, “Augustana Luther League camps demonstrated that summer camping programs could be linked successfully to a year-round ministry to youth at the congregational level.”<sup>49</sup> Many youth conferences were relatively small events, with a few dozen youth in attendance, though the numbers grew steadily as they increased in popularity through the 1920s and 1930s. This expansion undermined the ability of congregational leaders to connect with their youth at the events, and it led church leaders to move away from the conference approach toward a model of camping centered on small groups.

Senter characterizes the period of youth ministry beginning in the early 1930s as “the Period of the Relational Outreach,” which was dominated by congregational youth fellowships and para-church organizations designed to engage young people outside of the congregation.<sup>50</sup> The camp model became one of the primary ways in which the relational focus of this period was lived out. The youth conference model, the direct successor of camp meetings and Chautauqua assemblies, transitioned to the familiar small group model focused on relationships that was pioneered in the 1880s. Ferguson and Burch date the official transition to a 1938 meeting of the International Council of Religious Education when educators “became concerned about the inappropriateness of the Bible conference model for children under twelve.”<sup>51</sup> The council, no doubt influenced by the increasing numbers of denominational camp ventures, advocated a small-group model of camping that featured Bible study, outdoor recreation, and crafts.

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<sup>49</sup> Burkhardt, 43.

<sup>50</sup> Senter, 189-191.

<sup>51</sup> Ferguson and Burch, 51.



By this time, each of the major Protestant denominations already had multiple well-established summer camps operating across the country, with the Episcopalian camp founded by Pastor Brooks already celebrating its fiftieth anniversary of coeducational, congregation-based camping ministry.

### **Post-World War II and the Explosion of Summer Camping**

The years following World War II saw a dramatic expansion of Christian summer camping in America. Denominational leaders in the major Protestant traditions were convinced of the potential of the summer camp experience for Christian education, and they designated tremendous resources to summer camp programs. Evangelical groups, most notably Young Life, identified the summer camp model as fertile ground for conversion and religious experience. Church membership and attendance increased during this period, which enabled numerous building projects of churches, camps, and conference centers. High school, including the extended summer break, had become a nearly ubiquitous experience across the nation, and the population surge of the Baby Boom generation produced a tremendous increase in the number of potential summer campers. These forces, combined with the established success of the summer camp movement in the inter-war years, led to a virtual explosion of Christian summer camping.

There was a noticeable distinction between mainstream camps and explicitly religious camps by the close of World War II due to the secularization tendencies of the inter-war years. ACA was a well-established leader in the camping movement by this time, and the organization sought to represent the camping movement as a whole, but many camping organizations resisted membership. Leadership of wealthy private camps and well-established agency camps dominated ACA in the inter-war years, leading Ward

to characterize it as “a sort of aristocracy of camping.”<sup>52</sup> The elitist attitude of private camping is exemplified in their dismissal of the fresh air camps “as *fun and games* as opposed to *camping as education*.”<sup>53</sup> Eells notes that ACA struggled with internal rifts over particular models of camping (e.g. centralized v. decentralized), the governance of the organization, and what constituted camping programs that were educationally sound. She describes “a rather tenuous relationship” between ACA leadership and religious camp leaders in the 1940s and 1950s, with ACA membership expressing “the lack of good standards and acceptable practices in many church camps.”<sup>54</sup> Christian camps often shied away from association with the broader movement in order to distinguish their emphasis on Christian education. Many Christian camps were also coeducational and interracial, while most private camps continued gender exclusivity and racial segregation. Christian camps began forming their own associations in 1949, and these associations eventually merged to become the Christian Camp and Conference Association (CCCA). The formation of a special Camp and Conference Committee during the first year of the National Council of Churches in 1950 signaled that the Christian camping movement had broad ecumenical support at the national level.

Some camps retained the camp conference model, but the majority of new camps adopted the small group model advocated by L. B. Sharp. A spike in post-secondary education, facilitated by the G.I. Bill of 1944, contributed to the expansion of the small group model. College students were available to fill the ranks of summer camp staff

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<sup>52</sup> Ward, 146.

<sup>53</sup> Eleanor Eells, *History of Organized Camping: The First 100 Years* (Martinsville, IN: American Camping Association, 1986), 43.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

members, relieving older adults from the responsibility of attending camp for an entire week. Using college students as camp staff members dates back to the first summers at Camp Chocorua and Camp Asquam, where the term “councilor” was first applied to the young members of the Asquam Camp Council in 1894.<sup>55</sup> Only the wealthier private camps could afford to employ students from the prestigious colleges in the early days of camping, which is why most of the early religiously affiliated camps were operated by the pioneering spirit and dedication of local pastors. The 1940s and 1950s witnessed an expansion of the model of camping in which college-age staff members guided and stayed overnight with small, single-gendered unit groups, which interacted with other unit groups in a larger camp environment. The week at camp continued to include instructional time with pastors or church leaders, but the primary responsibility of caring for the campers was passed to the camp counselors, who increasingly utilized a Christian education curriculum designed for the camp environment. This transition may have distanced the camp experience from congregational ministries in some cases, but it also opened the camp experience to many more young people, whose pastor or church leader no longer had to take them to camp.

Mainline camping flourished. No fewer than a hundred camping organizations were founded in the Methodist traditions alone from the end of World War II through the 1960s.<sup>56</sup> Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Lutherans witnessed similar growth. These camps were founded in every state and in diverse locations. Lake camps remained popular, and other camps were founded in remote wilderness areas to emphasize the set-

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<sup>55</sup> Paris, 36.

<sup>56</sup> Information provided to the writer in 2015 by the Camp and Retreat Ministries division of the United Methodist Church.

apart nature of camp (e.g. Wilderness Canoe Base in the Boundary Waters of Northern Minnesota, 1957) or near major metropolitan areas to provide easy getaways (e.g. Heartland Presbyterian Center just outside of Kansas City, 1956). Some of the first camps in the 1880s were clustered around resort lakes, such as Squam Lake, and the denominational camps followed suit in their rapid expansion. Lake Okoboji, in the so-called Great Lakes of Iowa, is a prime example. The first denominational camps on the lake were camp conference centers typical of the inter-war period begun by the Methodists (1915) and the American Lutheran Church (1924). As youth camping became the dominant model, these camps adapted their programming, and other youth camps sprang up for the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (1940), Presbyterians (1954), and the Lutheran Church in America (1960). The picturesque Flathead Lake in Montana was another center of denominational camp expansion, with the Presbyterians founding a youth conference center in 1930, followed by youth camps for the Lutherans (1943), Methodists (1947), and Episcopalians (1947). A significant portion of the denominational camp expansion happened at the expense of private and agency camps, for which the progressive educational mandate of the 1920s and 1930s had begun to wane. An early New Hampshire private camp was founded as Camp Ossipee in 1902, sold to another private owner in 1938 to become Camp Canaan, and after serious financial struggles, was purchased by the Augustana Synod of the Lutheran Church in 1960 to become Camp Calumet.<sup>57</sup> The American Lutheran Church's Camp Vermilion was similarly founded on

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<sup>57</sup> Rick Dacey, "The History of Calumet," Calumet Lutheran Ministries, <http://www.calumet.org/about/history> (accessed April 15, 2015).

the site of a struggling private camp in Minnesota in 1959.<sup>58</sup> The Camp Okoboji founded by the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod in 1940 took over the site of a former YWCA camp.<sup>59</sup> The cases of Flathead Lake and Lake Okoboji demonstrate a degree of denominational rivalry in establishing camps, but there were also significant cases of ecumenical cooperation. Camp of the Cross, North Dakota was founded in 1954 as a cooperative effort of four different Lutheran bodies: Augustana Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church, American Lutheran Church, and Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod.<sup>60</sup> Cooperative camp ventures were significant points of inter-denominational connection that were part of the movement toward unity that led to the formation of the Lutheran Church in America in 1962 and eventually the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America in 1988.

The success of new Evangelical summer camps paralleled the expansion of Mainline camping during this period. The Christian education goals of the Mainline camps focused on Christian nurture and looked very different from early agency camps that focused on using the emotionally charged camp environment as a vehicle for conversion. With the agency camps shifting away from conversion toward character building, a new generation of Evangelical camps was mobilized. The Christian agency most known for its camps in this period was Young Life, with Jim Rayburn founding the first near Colorado Springs in 1945. Camp was recognized as an “effective delivery

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<sup>58</sup> Ralph Yernberg, *The Camping Movement of the American Lutheran Church: The Collected Histories of Camps Related to the American Lutheran Church* (R. Yernberg, 2003), 24.

<sup>59</sup> “About Camp Okoboji,” Camp Okoboji, <http://www.campokoboji.org/about.php> (accessed April 15, 2015).

<sup>60</sup> Yernberg, 80.

system” of the gospel message.<sup>61</sup> Successful conversion stories were widely publicized, and the Evangelical camping movement spread rapidly. Senter writes concerning Young Life’s influence, “Camp began playing a key role in the evangelization of nonchurched young people.”<sup>62</sup> Young Life camps served nearly 17,000 young people each summer by the 1970s.<sup>63</sup> Evangelical groups and Baptist church fellowships founded numerous other camps during this period. The Young Life camp model focused on small groups and relationship building, while other mid-century Evangelical camps featured large group rallies, emotional altar calls, and dynamic preachers. Some featured the notable Evangelical voices of the day, such as Billy Graham, in the same way that the camp meetings featured Charles Finney and the early YMCA camps featured Billy Sunday. While Mainline camps formed associations within their denominations, the disparate Evangelical camping ventures were instrumental in the formation of the CCCA.

Christian educators, following the lead of the progressive education proponents in the preceding decades, embraced the camping model in the 1950s and 1960s, giving the movement greater momentum. Courses on Christian camping became common at undergraduate and graduate levels in places like Fuller Theological Seminary and Winona Lake School of Theology.<sup>64</sup> The difference of educational approach between Mainline camps and Evangelical camps is clear in the literature. Writing on behalf of the CCCA and other Evangelical groups (such as the Baptist General Conference), Todd and

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<sup>61</sup> Senter, 220.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid, 84.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, 285.

<sup>64</sup> Floyd Todd and Pauline Todd, *Camping for Christian Youth: A Guide to Methods and Principles for Evangelical Camps* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), ix, 30.

Todd wrote in 1963, “Evangelical camps are frankly evangelistic in nature. Their supreme and conscious aim is to see each camper won to Christ in a definite, personal, religious experience whether it be in a public service, in a private counseling session, or alone in a quiet woods.”<sup>65</sup> Another camping manual that was written on behalf of the Committee on Camps and Conferences of the National Council of Churches argued, “The purpose of church camping is the same as that of the church: that all persons may respond to God in Jesus Christ, grow in daily fellowship with him, and meet all of life’s relationships as children of God.”<sup>66</sup> These different views of Christian education at camp can be seen as the continuation of the longstanding disagreement about emphasizing camp’s potential for emotional conversion or emphasizing Christian nurture.

### **Camping from the 1970s to the Present**

The Baby Boomers were rapidly aging out of camp by the close of the 1960s, and camps of all types began to feel the strain. An economic recession in the early 1970s compounded the pressure, and camps across the country began to close. Paris notes, “As many as twenty-five hundred camps nationwide, or about one in five, went out of business from the 1970s through the 1990s.”<sup>67</sup> The expensive New England private camps took the biggest hit, with Maine losing a third of its camps in the 1970s alone, while the YMCA closed nearly half of its camps nationwide.<sup>68</sup> The rapid expansion of

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>66</sup> Robert Pickens Davis, *Church Camping* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1969), 12.

<sup>67</sup> Paris, 273.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

denominational camps came to an abrupt halt during this period, but many of their existing camps survived or even thrived.

The financial success of Christian camping in the 1950s and 1960s, together with official recognition by church bodies and Christian educators, buttressed many camps for the difficult years of the 1970s and 1980s. Many camps had transitioned from volunteer staff members to employing full-time directors, and these dedicated individuals fought for the viability of their sites. In addition, denominational sanction of camping ministry was well-established, so full-time advocates at the denominational level pressed the case for their ministries. One key example was Jerry Manlove, who helped professionalize camping ministry in the American Lutheran Church (ALC) during his tenure as National Outdoor Ministries Director from 1969-1979. Manlove advocated for professional education of camp executive directors in marketing, theology, and other key areas. He also led a campaign to expand camping ministries beyond the summer youth camp to include year-round retreat ministries, family camps, and other programs that directly supported the ministries of congregations. Manlove had a tremendous network of supporting colleagues that helped make Lutheran camping a particularly successful case. Yernberg notes that during the 1970s, economically lean years for the camping industry as a whole, “it was estimated that over 32 million was raised by camp directors for ALC camp facilities.”<sup>69</sup> Camps in other denominations survived through a similar stream of ongoing support, though their programs followed different paths of development, and some camps struggled. One camp advocate described the struggles in his 1972 dissertation, “Churches are running out of money. Declining resources have necessitated

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<sup>69</sup> Ralph Yernberg, *The Camping Movement of the American Lutheran Church, Volume 1: A History of the National Camping Movement in the American Lutheran Church* (R. Yernberg, 2003), 35.



a variety of cut-backs in programming, with one of the most frequently eliminated items being camping.”<sup>70</sup> The period as a whole can be seen as a time of consolidation, as denominational camps developed professional groups of camp directors, who maintained their successful summer camp ministries and began expanding to year-round operations in response to financial pressures.

Christian educators had embraced the camping model in the 1950s and 1960s, contributing curricula, training manuals, and articles, but the support waned in the 1970s. This change is most dramatic in the literature. The substantial bibliography of 1950s and 1960s materials nearly dries up in the ensuing decades. It is difficult to account for this change, but there appears to be an increased skepticism among professional educators about the educational value of a week-long summer camp experience. Importantly, this change coincided with the professionalization of the Christian camp director, which may have put some distance between camps and theologians, since many directors were not seminary-educated ministers. It is plausible that Mainline pastors and theologians in the neo-Orthodox stream of thought grew wary of a tendency in camping ministry toward natural theology or a general notion of spirituality.

The progressive education love affair with camp had largely ended by 1950, and Christian educators followed suit as support for camp waned in the major academic institutions. Ozier notes, “Despite tremendous momentum during the first half of this century by leaders in education and camping, little reference to camping’s educational

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<sup>70</sup> Lee Mathers Miller, “Lutheran Camping: A Theological Perspective” (Ed.D dissertation, Columbia University, 1972), 2.

importance appeared after 1950.”<sup>71</sup> Miller, writing in 1972, indicates that the “pendulum has swung” too far in the direction of process rather than content, necessitating camps to reclaim a Christ-centered approach.<sup>72</sup> His insights indicate that educators increasingly viewed camp as a method (or, perhaps, a gimmick) that was theologically shallow and lacking in the ongoing relationships required of Christian nurture. Evangelical camping groups continued to emphasize the value of camp for the emotional conversion experience, and this emphasis became associated with Christian camping as a whole, making Mainline educators who were suspicious of religious experience increasingly wary of the camp model. The professionalization of camp directors, while instrumental in the expansion of camping ministries, contributed to the notion that camp was separate from the life of the congregation. Pastors increasingly sent the young people to camp rather than accompanying them. Camps that were established as extensions of congregational ministries became associated with the “para-church” organizations.<sup>73</sup> This divide placed the burden of justifying the value of camping ministry on the camp professionals, a change that had tremendous consequences for Christian camping in the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Expansion of the national economy in the 1990s fueled a boom in organized camping. Specialty camps that focused on things like sports, music, and religion flourished. The established denominational camps saw dramatic increases in camper

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<sup>71</sup> Lance Ozier, “Camp as Educator: Lessons Learned from History,” *Camping Magazine* (September/October, 2010), 26.

<sup>72</sup> Miller, 49-52.

<sup>73</sup> Richard Leyda, “The Ministry of Christian Camping,” in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. by Michael J. Anthony (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 262.

numbers, with many peaking in the early years of the twenty-first century at double the numbers they were serving in the 1980s. The financial success enabled enormous building projects, many in excess of a million dollars, as camps upgraded year-round retreat facilities to host adult groups that were not keen on rustic accommodations. These projects sparked spirited philosophy debates about rustic camping versus resort-like facilities, though it is instructive to note that crusades to return camp to some rustic ideal are almost as old as the movement itself.<sup>74</sup> Evangelical camps also saw considerable growth. Young Life camps, after a stagnation of growth in the 1980s, more than doubled their enrollment to over 40,000 campers by the turn of the century.<sup>75</sup> The Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), most known for its presence on high school campuses, also ran camps offering the dual specialty of sports and Christian evangelism. Their modest camper numbers of just under 7,000 in 1988 more than doubled to over 16,000 campers in 1998 and then more than doubled again to 42,000 at 240 camps by 2007.<sup>76</sup>

The recession of 2008-2009 hit Christian camps particularly hard. The American Camp Association's annual survey showed a decline in camper numbers across the board during the recession, but the subsequent rebound in 2010 and following was markedly slower among religiously affiliated camps.<sup>77</sup> This can be attributed, in part, to changing religious views in the American public, as people increasingly profess no religious affiliation. Connection to denominations sustained camps through the difficult years of

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<sup>74</sup> "The purists among the early founders felt that 'real camping' was fast disappearing, for by 1910 camping had become institutionalized." Eells, 57.

<sup>75</sup> Senter, 286.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 287.

<sup>77</sup> Troy Bennett, "Camper Enrollment Continued Upward Trend in 2014," *Camping Magazine* (March/April 2014), 34.

the 1970s and 1980s, but this connection increasingly became a hindrance to growth in the early twenty-first century. Camps that relied on Sunday schools and confirmation groups to provide the bulk of their summer campers saw enrollment decline as church membership declined. Other camps followed the lead of Evangelical camp leaders in focusing on bringing unchurched young people to camp. Youth ministry was an increasing focus among Christian educators, but summer camp remained largely absent from the literature. The generation of professional camp directors that enjoyed the consistent support of denominational bodies and connection to Christian educators in the 1960s was gradually replaced by a new wave of directors that did not have the same relational ties to denominational leaders or theological traditions. Many camps drifted away from their denominational connections toward a broad ecumenism or deemphasized specific Christian teachings in favor of a general notion of spirituality.

The ACA, meanwhile, was reestablishing itself as the nationwide leader in camping by reimagining its vision and turning toward scholarship designed to benefit the entire industry. These moves are reminiscent of the successful alignment of the camping movement with progressive education in the 1920s, and the dramatic increase of camping literature since the turn of the century is analogous to that period. The current educational movement with which camping finds traction is known as *positive youth development* (PYD). The movement focuses on outcomes of education that extend beyond academics to such things as self-esteem, leadership, and spirituality. Meier and Henderson note, “In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the value of camps relative to positive youth development as well as human development has become a prominent focus. An emphasis

on purposeful or intentional programming to attain desired outcomes in campers is widely accepted.”<sup>78</sup>

Many denominational camps have closed since the economic recession. Some financial struggles are due to tremendous debt loads incurred during the building boom of the 1990s. Others are operational debts resulting from a decrease in summer camp numbers. Camps with longstanding histories of adult retreats and conferences are faring comparably better than those focused primarily on youth camping. These are historical strengths of the Presbyterian and Methodist traditions, dating back to the Chautauquas and conference centers. Camps that are incorporated as separate organizations face challenging decisions of how closely to align with denominational bodies that may or may not be supportive, and some have distanced themselves in order to broaden their client base. Other camps are owned and operated by specific congregations or judicatory bodies, and the relegation of camps to para-church organizations in the 1970s and beyond has affected them the most. Camp advocacy has dried up in some judicatory bodies, so camping organizations struggling financially after the recession have found their ministries on the chopping block. In 2012, the Blackhawk Presbytery in Chicago, struggling financially after a sexual abuse lawsuit, chose to sell the historic Presbyterian Camps in Saugatuck, Michigan, the site where Pastor Gray had pioneered an early congregational camping venture in 1899. The Missouri Conference of the United

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<sup>78</sup> Meier and Henderson, 16.

Methodist Church announced in 2014 plans to close all four of its summer camps due to financial concerns and “a decision to go in a new direction with camping.”<sup>79</sup>

The professionalization of the camp director and the paucity of literature on camping from Christian educators since the 1970s has placed the burden of camp advocacy on camp directors. They have proven enormously successful in marketing their own camp programs over the years, but they have struggled to demonstrate the value of Christian camping among Christian educators and scholars. Consequently, clergy members and educators who have had positive camp experiences are camp advocates, while those who have had negative experiences or have not been to camp are skeptical of camp’s value. Clergy members and educators who were trained in the 1950s and 1960s, when denominational camping was booming and Christian educators publicly endorsed the camp model, have been replaced in recent years. The new generation may have only heard of camp’s benefits from a camp director’s impassioned speech that sounds like a marketing ploy. Those that believe in the value of Christian camping may entrust their congregants to the camping professionals. Other pastors and youth ministers choose to follow the oldest model of church camping, dating back at least to Hinckley, Brooks, and Gray, by taking the young people or families of their congregation on an extended outdoor experience in hopes of building deeper relationships with each other, God, and creation. All of these are part of the ongoing history of Christian camping ministry.

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<sup>79</sup> Roger McKinney, “Methodist Camp Face Uncertain Future,” Columbia Tribune, [http://www.columbiatribune.com/news/local/methodist-camps-face-uncertain-future/article\\_2aeaa37c-bb28-5b72-8f75-a403b28998bd.html](http://www.columbiatribune.com/news/local/methodist-camps-face-uncertain-future/article_2aeaa37c-bb28-5b72-8f75-a403b28998bd.html) (accessed April 15, 2015).

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Camp is a place of stories. These stories are powerful marketing tools, and camp directors have, for decades, been using their most potent stories to convince people of the value of camp. The reality is that throughout its history, organized camping has seldom enjoyed an institutional mandate like those that have existed for classroom learning and Christian education (e.g. Sunday school and confirmation training). Young people are required to attend school and, in many cases, receive formal religious instruction at churches, but camp is optional. Consequently, camp directors have been compelled to justify camp's existence to potential clients and supporters. Compelling stories of life-changing experiences provide that justification and help directors make *the case for camp*. The result is that the bulk of camp literature is based on anecdotal evidence for the value of camp, and this evidence is based on the exceptional cases of life-changing experiences. Ribbe notes, "For too long, camp leaders have run their ministries with wonderful hearts, compelling vision, and undying effort, but with little qualitative and quantitative understanding of how camp experiences actually change lives."<sup>1</sup> There is very little scholarly literature related to Christian camping ministry. Consequences for a reliance on anecdotal evidence are clear: camp itself is devalued and considered

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<sup>1</sup> Rob Ribbe, "Redefining Camp Ministry as Experiential Laboratory for Spiritual Formation and Leadership Development," *Christian Education Journal* 9 (2010), 159

dispensable, as in the cases of Presbyterian Camps in Michigan and the four Methodist camps in Missouri (see previous chapter).

Significant periods in camping literature were documented in the previous chapter. The first was the period of connection to *progressive education* in the 1920s and 1930s. This period saw the first doctoral dissertations about the educational benefits of camp, most notably from Columbia University students who studied with the major proponents of progressive education. Dimock's and Hendry's 1929 study of Camp Amhek may be the first scholarly study of camp. The study begins with the hopeful words, "The summer camp as an educational agency has unusual possibilities...The camp is a new venture and willing, at least at the best, to make a fresh attack upon the problem of education."<sup>2</sup> L.B. Sharp, Carlos Ward, and others added to the literature that latched onto camp as a new educational enterprise with exciting possibilities to counter traditional, top-down educational models focused on rote learning. Scholarly attention on organized camping dried up in the 1940s, and it would not see a resurgence to equal the progressive education period until the turn of the century. In the interim, Christian educators began publishing about camping ministry as Christian camps thrived in the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>3</sup> These Christian camping writers relied heavily on the work of Dimock, Sharp, and Ward, essentially extending their progressive education arguments to include Christian education, faith formation, and conversion. Camp was recognized as an essential piece of Christian education. Ensign and Ensign asserted in the 1950s, "Church

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<sup>2</sup> William H. Kilpatrick, "Foreword" in Hedley S. Dimock and Charles E. Hendry, *Camping and Character: A Camp Experiment in Character Education* (New York: Ferris Printing, 1929), vii.

<sup>3</sup> Notable examples include: Clarice M. Bowman, *Spiritual Values in Camping* (New York: American Book-Stratford Press, 1954); Floyd Todd and Pauline Todd, *Camping for Christian Youth: A Guide to Methods and Principles for Evangelical Camps* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963); Robert Pickens Davis, *Church Camping* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1969).



camping is an integral part of the total program of Christian education in our churches, and camping contributes unique learning opportunities that cannot be duplicated in the church or church school.”<sup>4</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, camping lost its privileged place in Christian education literature through the 1970s and 1980s.

### **Youth Ministry Literature**

Christian camping ministry has fallen from favor in academia with the rise of youth ministry as a professional field. The 1980s brought the beginning of what Senter describes as the “professionalization of youth ministry.”<sup>5</sup> Conventions and academic conferences on youth ministry began across the country, and academic institutions began graduating doctoral students with emphases in youth ministry. The 1990s and following witnessed a corresponding explosion of youth ministry literature. Senter notes, “Youth ministry had become both an academic and a theological discipline.”<sup>6</sup> The curious thing is that camp is almost entirely absent from the youth ministry literature. Barnett concludes, “The lack of research and academic writing about camp programs can be traced in part to a lack of respect for camp as a true educational experience.”<sup>7</sup> Youth ministry is a rising academic field trying to assert its relevance amidst the long-established fields of biblical studies, systematic theology, and church history. Dean notes,

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<sup>4</sup> John Ensign and Ruth Ensign, *Camping Together as Christians* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1958), 62.

<sup>5</sup> Mark H. Senter, *When God Shows Up: A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 292.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 293.

<sup>7</sup> Scott Barnett, “Aspects of Camp Ministry that Facilitate Spiritual Growth: A Study of Two Single Gender Wilderness Camps,” Ph. D Dissertation (Deerfield, IL: Trinity International University, 2010), 2.

“The early twenty-first-century church has seen youth ministry’s first conscious attempts at self-reflection, with all the intellectual gangliness that accompanies the maturation of a field of study.”<sup>8</sup> Part of asserting the relevance of their theological discipline has meant that youth ministry writers must contend with the constant stream of manuals on silly skits, songs, and games that flood the market of youth ministry. Senter elaborates, “Perhaps the most frequently repeated criticism of Protestant youth ministries at the beginning of the twenty-first century was the accusation that they were merely fun and games.”<sup>9</sup> Root describes “the youth worker” being seen as “a hyperactive person in their early twenties who prefers unserious kid stuff to the responsible practice of shared suffering and proclamation of the Word in pastoral ministry.”<sup>10</sup> Camp has proven to be an easy target for caricature, so it is often used as the antithesis of what youth ministry strives to be.

Youth ministry scholars use camp anecdotes to illustrate particular points, but camp is seldom examined as a ministry in its own right. Chap Clark shares the story of “Darrin,” a youth group member “who became an overnight leader” after a significant camp experience but who quickly “left the faith behind” in college.<sup>11</sup> Clark’s anecdote illustrates the type of faith that seems so vibrant but does not *stick* long-term. Mark Yaconelli shares a camp story in which he and his son buck the trend of the activity-saturated camp environment by walking slowly while the other kids “bolted toward the

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<sup>8</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, *OMG: A Youth Ministry Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), xii.

<sup>9</sup> Senter, 307.

<sup>10</sup> Andrew Root and Kenda Creasy Dean, *The Theological Turn in Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2011), 37.

<sup>11</sup> Kara Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 31-32.

dining hall.”<sup>12</sup> Yaconelli shares positive anecdotes from several spirituality retreats that he personally led in camp settings, but his brief summer camp stories serve primarily as contrasts to his vision of *contemplative youth ministry*. Besides anecdotes, youth ministry writers describe camp as another youth group event comparable to ski outings and lock-ins. It is oftentimes used as an example of an activity that overtaxes harried youth workers.<sup>13</sup>

Camp is most often used as a negative example of ministry that is emotionally charged but not lasting. The use of the emotionally charged camp experience as a vehicle for conversion dates to the earliest days of camping in the 1880s, but as the previous chapter notes, there is another stream of camping that deemphasizes conversion in favor of Christian nurture. Duffy Robbins highlights the problems of youth ministries that focus too much on “warm fuzzies” by sharing an anecdote about a camp leader who leads an activity in order to get the kids to cry.<sup>14</sup> David Kinnaman includes camps as part of the “mass production of disciples” approach to ministry that is impersonal, shallow, and focused on “more-is-better.”<sup>15</sup> Kinnaman adds a brief anecdote about a young person who grew in her faith as a result of a camp experience, using this as evidence that “God can, of course, meet with anyone anywhere,” implying that faith formation at camp is the

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<sup>12</sup> Mark Yaconelli, *Contemplative Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 198-199.

<sup>13</sup> Yaconelli, 52, Mark Devries, *Sustainable Youth Ministry: Why Most Youth Ministry Doesn't Last and What Your Church can do About it* (Downer's Grove, IN: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 185.

<sup>14</sup> Duffy Robbins, *Building a Youth Ministry That Builds Disciples: A Small Book About a Big Idea* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 24.

<sup>15</sup> David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians are Leaving Church...And Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids, Baker Books, 2011), 120-121.

exception to the rule.<sup>16</sup> Robbins reduces camp to a creative gimmick: “If we’re building students whose faith is dependent primarily on a weekly skit, a creative Bible study, or a summer camp that is ‘the best week of your life,’ then we’re building Christians whose faith simply won’t sustain them beyond the high school years.”<sup>17</sup> Setran and Kiesling warn that the intense religious experiences of “Christian camps, youth group retreats, conferences, mission trips, and service projects” might spark growth in faith but “reliance on such experiences can be a barrier to emerging adult spiritual formation.”<sup>18</sup> The argument is that the intensity of the summer camp experience sets an unrealistic standard for faith formation that is unsustainable in the home environment, making everyday Christianity and weekly church services seem blasé. These youth ministry writers are not examining camp as a ministry but rather as an idea that they apply to every form of camping ministry. They neglect the camp model, dominant among Mainline Protestant camps, that focuses on intentional partnerships with families and congregations.

One of the most revealing references to camp in youth ministry literature is Mark Devries’ characterization of the *camp counselor youth worker*. He does not define what he means by the term, as though he assumes everybody will understand the reference. He contrasts the “camp counselor youth worker” with the “sustainable leader,” presumably referring to the relatively short duration of the camp experience in comparison to years of ministry in a youth group.<sup>19</sup> “Regular communication takes time,” he says, “the kind of

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 126-127.

<sup>17</sup> Robbins, 85.

<sup>18</sup> David P. Setran and Chris A. Kiesling, *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: A Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 43.

<sup>19</sup> Devries, 140.

time a camp-counselor youth worker will not spend.”<sup>20</sup> His major point seems to be that camp counselors are focused on individual relationships with young people, so the *camp counselor youth worker* builds a ministry centered around the person of the youth worker rather than building a team of leaders. He contends, “The result of growing a youth ministry through a camp counselor is the implosion of the youth ministry (and often the youth minister).”<sup>21</sup> Devries’ language is telling in its dismissiveness of the role of camp counselor and the use of camp as a contrast to professional (or *sustainable*) youth ministry.

Root uses camp in a similar way. Following Bonhoeffer, Root argues against the practice of idealizing the Christian community because it alienates people from the realities and messiness of actual community, where Christ is found in ministry to the other. He argues, “Youth ministry, then, has no task of locking young people down into some idea of faith. Rather, youth ministry seeks only to open free spaces where young people are affirmed and loved as persons, and through person-to-person encounter are asked to listen for the *call* of the living Christ.”<sup>22</sup> Root then goes on to use camp as an example that is often held up as an ideal community that does not deal with the messiness of life but rather serves as a retreat from it. In arguing against reducing the church to an idea, Root reduces camp to an idea: a “self-enclosed” space that “exists for its short time by forgetting the messy realities of our day-to-day lives.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Root, *Bonhoeffer as Youth Worker: A Theological Vision for Discipleship and Life Together* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 181.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 197.

Karen-Marie Yust offers one of the only peer-reviewed articles on Christian camping ministry to appear since youth ministry's emergence as an academic discipline. She summarizes the findings of the Indiana Camp Ministries Enhancement Program, a study of 23 diverse Christian camps in Indiana. Yust calls into question what she describes as the "conventional wisdom among camp directors that the experience of attending church camp is, for many people, one of the most significant factors in their overall spiritual formation as Christians."<sup>24</sup> She offers sharp critiques to the programs and methods of the camps she studies, dismissing them as largely "indistinguishable from similar camps in non-Christian settings."<sup>25</sup> She critiques the poor quality of the religious instruction and notes that what little religious programming she observed "is more tolerated than embraced."<sup>26</sup> She dismisses the findings of camp surveys that indicate significant gains in camper spirituality, asserting that they are based on unreliable end-of-week surveys that come too closely after the final night's climactic religious experience, which she also critiques as manipulative. The fun and games of camp, Yust argues, take precedence over religious instruction and faith formation. Her scathing critique ultimately concludes that camp is not much more than "an extension of their youth culture into another arena, where activities are comfortably similar to what one might do at school or home, but with a spiritual gloss."<sup>27</sup> Yust's article offers formal articulation of the reasons why camp is overlooked or dismissed in the majority of youth ministry literature.

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<sup>24</sup> Karen-Marie Yust, "Creating an Idyllic World for Children's Spiritual Formation," *International Journal of Children's Spirituality* 11 (April 2006), 178.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, 180.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 183.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 187.

Kenda Creasy Dean has offered one of the only scholarly voices that has been overtly supportive of camping ministry. Her turn to intentional theological reflection in the field of youth ministry includes summer camp, which she connects with eschatology. She presents camp as a “liminal” space, arguing that in the traditionally climactic ending of the camp week “the heavenly life-as-it-should-be briefly merges with the life of a teenager, and young people glimpse, momentarily but significantly, the inbreaking of God.”<sup>28</sup> It is significant to note that she is compelled to acknowledge traditional concerns about the camp experience, insisting multiple times that it is not necessarily manipulative. It is also significant that, like other youth ministry writers, she refers to a specific model of camping ministry (with the climactic ending) as representative of the whole. Elsewhere, Dean argues, “Religious camps have impressive records of helping young people become more intentional about devotion, more secure in their faith identities, and therefore more confident and explicit in telling the God-story of their tradition.”<sup>29</sup> She describes camp as a “faith immersion” experience that functions to improve fluency in the language and practices of a faith tradition.<sup>30</sup>

Amanda Drury echoes Dean’s notion of camp as an immersion in faith language and practices. She contends, “A teenager might pick up on more religious language and imagery in a week away at church camp as opposed to one hour’s worth of exposure once a week for the entire year at church.”<sup>31</sup> Drury is one of many practical theologians calling

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<sup>28</sup> Root and Dean, 172.

<sup>29</sup> Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: University Press, 2010), 154.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 154-155.

<sup>31</sup> Amanda Drury, *Saying is Believing: The Necessity of Testimony in Adolescent Spiritual Development* (Downer’s Grove, IN: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 50.

for a serious examination of experience in faith formation, and her project focuses on the need for testimony. She notes the gradual excising of testimony from Christian worship and practice, locating “the testimony’s final resting spot around the campfire on the last night of camp.”<sup>32</sup> Some youth ministry scholars would cite this informal setting of testimony as one of the theological dangers of the camp experience, but Drury and Dean are among those calling for a reconsideration of camp as a locus of practical theology.

### Youth Ministry Research

Research firms like Barna Group and Search Institute, along with academic institutions, have led the dramatic increase in youth ministry research since the 1990s. These studies focus on family life, congregations, and even short-term mission trips, but camp is excluded from nearly every study. Roehlkepartain makes no mention of camping ministry in his extensive description of the faith lives and commitments of Lutheran youth that is based on a review of multiple Search Institute studies.<sup>33</sup> The Exemplary Youth Ministry study includes seven denominations with strong camping traditions but does not directly address the role of camping ministries partnering with and strengthening the exemplary congregations that are identified. The study highlights the significance of “youth retreats,” “mission trips,” and other “common youth ministry practices” without including camping ministry.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 82.

<sup>33</sup> Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, “Loose Bonds, Emerging Commitments: The Lives and Faith of Lutheran Youth,” *Journal of Youth Ministry* 5 (Fall 2006), 93-114.

<sup>34</sup> Roland Martinson, Wes Black, and John Roberto, *The Spirit and Culture of Youth Ministry: Leading Congregations Toward Exemplary Youth Ministry* (St. Paul, MN: EYM Publishing, 2010), 133.



There are tantalizing references to camping ministry in a handful of small youth ministry studies, but the data are quickly passed over or largely peripheral to the larger study. One study of youth attending Seventh-day Adventist schools examines the effects of youth ministry involvement on faith maturity. The study focuses on youth group and mission trips without mentioning camp a single time until the conclusion, when the writers ironically state that “Christian camping ministry featured as an important element” and that it “should not be overlooked as an important part of youth ministry.”<sup>35</sup> In another study, “camp counselor” registered as an influential mentor relationship in spiritual formation among Christian adolescents, though the particulars of the camper-counselor relationship were not examined.<sup>36</sup> Another small study of Christian youth in New England found that “summer camp” was one of several key experiences that respondents indicate have “a lot of influence on their faith.”<sup>37</sup> The 2013 *Hemorrhaging Faith* study identifies the Christian summer camp experience as one of many factors in young people’s long-term engagement in faith communities, and a significant number of Canadian young people who stayed engaged in church said that their faith “came alive” at camp.<sup>38</sup> These studies show a peripheral but important inclusion of camp in youth ministry scholarship.

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<sup>35</sup> Barry Gane and Jimmy Kijai, “The Relationship Between Faith Maturity, Intrinsic and Extrinsic Orientations to Religion and Youth Ministry Involvement,” *Journal of Youth Ministry* 4 (Spring 2006), 62.

<sup>36</sup> Jason Lanker and Klaus Issler, “The Relationship Between Natural Mentoring and Spirituality in Christian Adolescents,” *Journal of Youth Ministry* 9 (Fall 2010), 99.

<sup>37</sup> Laura F. Fleming and Mark W. Cannister, “Assessing the Spiritual Formation Factors Most Effectual in the Renovation and Sanctification Process of Adolescents in New England,” *Journal of Youth Ministry* 9 (Fall 2010), 76.

<sup>38</sup> James Penner, Rachael Harder, Erika Anderson, Bruno Desorcy, and Rick Hiemstra, “Hemorrhaging Faith: Why and When Canadian Young Adults are Leaving, Staying, and Returning to Church” (EFC Youth and Young Adult Ministry Roundtable, 2013), 99.

It is notable that these studies are mainly focused on Evangelical Christian communities and that camp is often included for its role in providing intense religious experiences, the very *mountaintop experiences* that Yust, Robbins, and others critique. Camp has a role in Evangelical youth ministry studies because it is useful for conversion experiences. Fleming and Cannister emphasize camp's role in facilitating "the life-changing event of first accepting Christ," noting that 17.9% of their respondents "made a personal commitment to follow Christ at summer camp" along with "16.3% at a retreat."<sup>39</sup> A recent study sought to analyze the effects of spiritual transformation on adolescent virtue development. The researchers selected participants at a Young Life camp as the research subjects, postulating that the conversion event common on the last day of camp would function as a spiritual transformation. They were able to draw connections between spiritual transformation and virtue development, but they were confused by mixed results from examining the youth who experienced a conversion or recommitment to Christ. "Somewhat unexpectedly, change in spirituality and spiritual strivings was unrelated to reports of commitment or recommitment to God at camp in our sample."<sup>40</sup> The researchers stumbled across evidence that the conversion events so common at Evangelical summer camps, and critiqued by many scholars, frequently offer a sort of camp high that quickly fades. Theological skepticism about the significance of such conversion experiences in the camp setting, which are so dramatically caricatured in the 2006 documentary *Jesus Camp*, cause some youth ministry scholars and Christian

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<sup>39</sup> Fleming and Cannister, 80-81.

<sup>40</sup> Sarah A. Schnitker, Thomas J. Felke, Justin L. Barrett, and Robert A. Emmons, "Virtue Development Following Spiritual Transformation in Adolescents Attending Evangelistic Summer Camp," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 33 (2014), 33.

educators to discount the relevance of the camp experience or to reduce all of camping ministry to short-term, emotionally charged experiences that contrast with *sustainable* or *professional* youth ministry.

### National Study of Youth and Religion

The National Study of Youth and Religion (NSYR) is arguably the most significant youth ministry study to date, leading to many scholarly publications in multiple fields. The first wave of the study (2003) gathered a nationally representative sample of American teenagers and, among scores of questions, asked “how many times the teen had been a camper at a summer camp run by a religious organization with religious teachings or songs in its program.”<sup>41</sup> The results show that fully 39% of American teenagers have attended a religious summer camp at least once, including more than half of Mainline Protestant and conservative Protestant teenagers.<sup>42</sup> These numbers, which are higher than the numbers of teenagers participating in mission/service trips and comparable to the numbers attending retreats, demonstrate that it is a glaring omission to exclude camp from youth ministry studies. Smith does not explore the camp variable in depth but rather concludes, “The effects of such involvements remain to be explored.”<sup>43</sup> The five-year follow-up study of the NSYR (2008) does not address the camp variable at

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<sup>41</sup> Jacob Sorenson, “The Summer Camp Experience and Faith Formation of Emerging Adults,” *Journal of Youth Ministry* 13 (Fall 2014), 24.

<sup>42</sup> Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 53.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 54.

all, though camp is mentioned in the anecdotal accounts without further assessment.<sup>44</sup>

However, like many other youth ministry studies, it assesses the effects of mission trips on faith formation, finding them “not independently important.”<sup>45</sup>

A recent article uses secondary analysis of the NSYR data to measure the long-term effects of the religious summer camp experience. The study finds that camp does not have a statistically significant independent effect on measures of individual spirituality like personal prayer and perceived importance of faith in wave 3 participants of the NSYR. “However, on measures of communal spirituality (frequency of religious service attendance, college campus ministry participation, and participation in religious small groups), a significant positive effect is clearly evident in the five year follow-up, even when controlling for seventeen different variables.”<sup>46</sup> This article, along with Yust’s, is one of the only peer-reviewed articles specifically addressing the impact of Christian summer camping, and it makes a strong argument for camp’s lasting impact on faith formation. It is part of a turn to research in the broader field of summer camping, begun with ACA’s *Directions* study in 2005, and it begins to bridge the gap between youth ministry scholarship and camp scholarship.

### **Denominational Camping**

Mainline Protestant camping ministry is largely siloed. Resources, insights, and research are seldom shared across denominational lines, and they are often not even

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<sup>44</sup> “Amanda” reflects on experiences as a camp counselor at a religious camp. Christian Smith, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 26-32.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 218.

<sup>46</sup> Sorenson, 28.

shared among camps in the same denomination. The end-of-week camper surveys that Yust critiques in her article could provide valuable data on the state and effectiveness of camping ministry if they were standardized and shared, but camps use these almost exclusively for self-assessment and marketing. None of the denominational camping organizations involved in the Confirmation Project were able to provide data on the state of their camping ministries, not even summer camper numbers. The organizations are resource-based, offering consulting, training, and mutual support to camps within their network but providing almost no substantial literature to the field. The one exception is Bible study curriculum, but even this is largely siloed. Chalice Press offers an ecumenical curriculum used by camps in multiple Mainline denominations, but the Lutherans create their own curriculum. Jerry Manlove's *A Common Book of Camping* is considered a classic in Lutheran camping circles and was, for many years, required reading for their leadership training courses, but the book was self-published and not shared with other camping ministry groups.

Presbyterian Panel reports are published annually, and they assess camp and retreat ministries every ten years. The reports focus on the Presbyterian Church and are circulated internally. The 2012 report notes a decline from 2002 in the number of pastors and members who report a “particular learning or spiritual growth experience” that occurred in the context of a “camp/retreat/conference.”<sup>47</sup> The study shows that a significant minority of pastors (48%), specialized ministers (45%), elders (34%), and members (33%) report that “camps have been very important or important to their faith

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<sup>47</sup> Presbyterian Panel, “Spiritual Growth Experiences and Church Retreats” (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Church, 2012), 4.

understanding.”<sup>48</sup> These numbers provide important information about camping ministry in the Presbyterian Church, but the findings are discussed almost exclusively within the denomination. The survey is predominantly a self-assessment tool, though similar studies shared across denominational lines could provide valuable data to improve camping ministries. It is interesting that, even in the Presbyterian tradition, camps and retreats are examined primarily as settings for “singular spiritual growth experiences.”<sup>49</sup> The idea that the usefulness of camp is in its potential to provide *mountaintop experiences* appears to be deeply engrained in the consciousness of Christian leadership.

The insular nature of denominational camping organizations has stifled idea sharing and scholarship. The result is that many denominational camps remain inwardly focused and do not contribute to the larger fields of Christian camping ministry or summer camp as a whole. Collaborative groups like ACA and CCCA dominate the conversation because they produce literature. Mainline Protestant camps are then associated alternately with secular camping and Evangelical camping. This is a critical gap in the literature.

### **Camp Research**

The American Camp Association (ACA) sought to reestablish itself as the leader of youth camping beginning in the late 1990s, casting a renewed vision aiming to reach 20 million campers per summer by 2020. Among the priorities identified to attain this goal was a turn to outcomes-based research and scholarship. The *Directions* study, published in 2005, set a new standard for research in the field. It involved more than

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 2.

5,000 campers and their parents from 80 camps in a mixed-methods assessment of camp's impact on ten developmental outcomes. The centerpiece of the study was a quantitative assessment that measured the developmental outcomes before camp, immediately after camp, and six months later. Campers showed statistically significant growth on all ten outcomes, and much of the growth persisted through the six-month follow-up.<sup>50</sup> The study spawned numerous scholarly articles, multiple camp assessment tools, and many subsequent studies. One of the measured outcomes was "spirituality," so the study lent itself to secondary analysis of the religiously affiliated camps that participated in the study (about a quarter of the total, with the rest private and agency camps). Henderson, Oakleaf, and Bialeschki note that campers at camps that are intentional about religious/spiritual programming show much higher spiritual development post-camp and also retain some of this growth in the six-month follow-up, whereas campers at other camps do not.<sup>51</sup> Camp research, following the lead of the *Directions* study, has demonstrated the importance of intentional goals and programming in order to attain desired outcomes. One study concludes, "Positive outcomes do not just occur because children attend camp; these desired outcomes must be planned, measured, and then incorporated into future program planning efforts."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Christopher A. Thurber, Marge M. Scanlin, Leslie Scheuler, and Karla A. Henderson, "Youth Development Outcomes of the Camp Experience: Evidence for Multidimensional Growth," *Journal of Youth Adolescence* 36 (2007), 241-254.

<sup>51</sup> Karla A. Henderson, Linda Oakleaf, and M. Deborah Bialeschki, "Questions Raised in Exploring Spiritual Growth and Camp Experiences," *Leisure/Loisir* 33 (2009), 179-195.

<sup>52</sup> Barry A. Garst, Laurie P. Browne, and M. Deborah Bialeschki, "Youth Development and the Camp Experience," *New Directions for Youth Development* 130 (Summer 2011), 83.

## Spirituality and Religion in Camp Literature

One of the difficulties of the ACA studies is that *spirituality* is a difficult term to define. The *Directions* study used only four survey items to assess this developmental outcome, and the questions were designed to be applicable to all types of camps (e.g. “Nature helps me feel closer to God”).<sup>53</sup> Henderson and Bialeschki note, “Camp experiences offer the potential for spiritual development, but often in an implicit and tangential way,” though they argue for greater intentionality in this dimension, which they say is often overlooked at non-religious camps.<sup>54</sup> Spirituality as a generic affective construct is markedly different from *faith formation* and *Christian education*. Ferguson argues that “the interconnection between religion and spirituality must be untangled” in order to properly understand camp’s role in nurturing spirituality, which she says “is understood as the intrinsic capacity of the human for self-transcendence and recognizes that each human is rooted in something larger than just the self – perhaps even the holy.”<sup>55</sup> Sweatman and Heintzman offer a qualitative study of eleven YMCA camp participants in Canada in which they let the participants themselves define spirituality. Their results suggest that camp nurtures a general sense of spirituality in four ways: “the camp’s natural and non-urban setting,” “experiencing time alone,” “social experiences,” and “positive feelings experienced at camp.”<sup>56</sup> They also note that one religiously

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<sup>53</sup> Karla A. Henderson, Christopher A. Thurber, Leslie Schueler Whitaker, M. Deborah Bialeschki, and Margery M. Scanlin, “Development and Application of a Camper Growth Index for Youth,” *Journal of Experiential Education* 29 (2006), 15.

<sup>54</sup> Karla A. Henderson and M. Deborah Bialeschki, “Spiritual Development and Camp Experiences,” *New Directions for Youth Development* 118 (Summer 2008), 108.

<sup>55</sup> Nancy Ferguson, “Camps and Spirituality,” *Camping Magazine* 80 (March/April 2007), 50.

<sup>56</sup> Mary M. Sweatman and Paul Heintzman, “The Perceived Impact of Outdoor Residential Camp Experience on the Spirituality of Youth,” *World Leisure* 1 (2004), 25-28.



committed participant did not perceive growth in spirituality because “he related his spirituality with his religion, which was not cultivated at camp.”<sup>57</sup> Heintzman surveys a broad spectrum of literature connecting nature-based recreation and spirituality, and he concludes that the relationship “is multifaceted and much more complex than that portrayed in existing models.”<sup>58</sup> These studies demonstrate the difficulties of disentangling religious beliefs from spirituality, particularly in quantitative measurements. Spiritual growth, however defined, is not an automatic outcome of a camp experience, regardless of the connection to nature or the presence of nurturing relationships.

#### The “Essential Trinity”

Most of the camp literature does not focus explicitly on the spiritual or religious outcomes of the camp experience but rather on other experiential aspects tied to the so-called “essential trinity of camping”: community living, away from home, in an outdoor recreational setting.<sup>59</sup> The most documented strength of the camp experience is its power to forge strong relationships and the influence of those relationships on the individual participants. ACA’s 2006 *Inspirations* study sampled more than 7,000 campers at 80 camps to determine the qualities of camps that were most effective for fostering positive youth development outcomes. A key finding was, “The greatest strength of camp was Supportive Relationships – specifically, the quality of relationships between youth and

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>58</sup> Paul Heintzman, “Nature-Based Recreation and Spirituality: A Complex Relationship,” *Leisure Sciences* 32 (2010), 84.

<sup>59</sup> Thurber, et al., 242.

adult staff.”<sup>60</sup> Nearly every camp study examined attends to the relational aspect of camp as a key component in the experience, and the ACA studies tie it concretely to developmental outcomes. Christian camping literature also emphasizes this aspect of camp. Venable and Joy argue, “The glue that holds religious camping together, that explains why it changes lives and promotes meaningful discipleship, is the power of community.”<sup>61</sup>

Another key aspect of camp highlighted in numerous studies is that it is away from home. Researchers connecting camp with positive youth development note, “Camp involvement provides youth with the opportunity to escape their home environments and experience the novel camp setting.”<sup>62</sup> Camp staff members in one study describe their experience living inside “the camp bubble,” where they are protected from outside influences and free to grow in new ways because of this perceived isolation from their normal lives.<sup>63</sup> Another study of camp staff members finds, “The camp community contrasts most staff members’ home communities, particularly the camp environment as an emotionally safe place,” with many saying “they are better able to show their identity – ‘their true self’ – at camp.”<sup>64</sup> Michael Thompson connects this to the field of child

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<sup>60</sup> American Camp Association, “Inspirations: Developmental Supports and Opportunities of Youths’ Experiences at Camp” (2006) <http://www.acacamps.org/sites/default/files/images/research/Inspirations.pdf> (accessed May 2015), 1.

<sup>61</sup> Stephen F. Venable and Donald M. Joy, *How to Use Camping Experiences in Religious Education* (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1998), 13.

<sup>62</sup> Garst, Browne, and Bialeschki, 76.

<sup>63</sup> Sara K. Johnson, Jane A. Goldman, Anita I. Garey, Preston A. Britner, and Shannon E. Weaver, “Emerging Adults’ Identity Exploration: Illustrations from Inside the ‘Camp Bubble’” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 26 (2011), 258.

<sup>64</sup> Barry A. Garst, Nancy K. Franz, Sarah Baughman, Chris Smith, and Brian Peters, “Growing Without Limitations: Transformation Among Youth Adult Camp Staff,” *Journal of Youth Development* 4 (Spring 2009) [http://data.memberclicks.com/site/nae4a/JYD\\_090401final.pdf](http://data.memberclicks.com/site/nae4a/JYD_090401final.pdf) (retrieved April 2015).

psychology, arguing that the common camp ailment of “homesickness” (which he notes affects nearly all campers to some extent) can actually be a positive thing, since the campers are engaging in the important task of differentiating from their parents, a task he argues is increasingly stifled in the interest of keeping children “safe.”<sup>65</sup> This differentiation is found to be important for identity formation: “Research with adolescents suggests that young people reinvent themselves through the camp experience by escaping the negative impressions of others and revising their self-identity at camp.”<sup>66</sup>

Camp researchers highlight the experiential nature of the camp environment as the aspect that most clearly sets it apart from traditional education models. The early camp writers in the progressive education era emphasized experiential education, and the same is true for proponents of positive youth development. Camp is an effective learning tool because it is experiential. “The experiential nature of camp activities, combined with the elements of choice, personal interest, skill development, and risk taking, allows structured camp activities to promote positive youth development.”<sup>67</sup> These experiences take place in outdoor environments. When some writers (notably, Louv) critiqued summer camps for not being focused enough on the outdoors, ACA countered with research indicating that the vast majority of summer camps operate programs “primarily staged in the outdoors.”<sup>68</sup> The outdoor, recreational nature of the camp experience aligns it closely with the field of experiential education.

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<sup>65</sup> Michael Thompson, *Homesick and Happy: How Time Away from Parents Can Help a Child Grow* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2012), 28-30, 71.

<sup>66</sup> Garst, Browne, and Bialeschki, 78.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>68</sup> Penny A. James and Karla A. Henderson, “Camps and Nature Report” (June 2007) [http://camps.qc.ca/files/2914/2671/0036/camps\\_nature\\_report.pdf](http://camps.qc.ca/files/2914/2671/0036/camps_nature_report.pdf) (accessed March 2016), 3.

## Jewish Camping

Jewish camping is the most well researched branch of religious camping. Summer camp is well integrated into the religious education of Jewish young people, and scholarly literature has helped to improve the quality of Jewish camping and to provide a rationale for the importance of summer camp. Sales and Saxe, in their exemplary study of Jewish camps throughout the country, found that one of camp's primary roles is that of a Jewish socializing experience. As members of a minority religion, Jewish young people are pressured to assimilate their religion with societal norms, but camps provide them with experiences of immersion in Jewish community that serve to help them live more fully into their Jewish identities. They poetically note, "When Judaism is in the air, as it is at many camps, children take it in as effortlessly as breathing."<sup>69</sup> They note the power of relationships in the camp experience and the tremendous influence of the summer staff members, many of whom they found to be lacking in their knowledge of Judaism. They also refer to the "compartmentalization" of religious studies and fun activities that Yust notes is so common at the Christian camps she studied in Indiana, and they extoll the educational benefits in those camps that practice an integration in which Jewish learning is "infused into many different activities."<sup>70</sup> The experience of Jewish camp participants living and breathing their religious identity is a key element of camping ministry that is applicable to Christian camping.

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<sup>69</sup> Amy L. Sales and Leonard Saxe, *How Goodly Are Thy Tents: Summer Camps as Jewish Socializing Experiences* (Lebanon, NH: Brandeis University Press, 2004), 77.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 58-60.

## Experiential Education

Some of the literature most closely related to camping ministry comes from the field of experiential education. Griffin concludes his study on adventure-based learning, “It was discovered that Christian spiritual beliefs could be strengthened through a combination of explicit spiritual teaching and the ‘real world’ settings of group and personal challenges in the out-of-doors.”<sup>71</sup> Daniel found that participants in an Outward Bound-type wilderness expedition with explicit Christian components overwhelmingly regard it as a significant life experience up to twenty-five years later.<sup>72</sup> A study of incoming college students who participated in a wilderness orientation program with explicit Christian components found that participants exhibited growth in multiple constructs, one of the most prevalent being “personal spiritual development,” which included such specifics as “increased trust in God” and “increased awareness of one’s personal faith.”<sup>73</sup> These studies link Christian outdoor recreational experiences with faith formation, and they demonstrate the effectiveness of camp-like programs in intentional Christian formation. Though none of the studies are confined to camp experiences, they hold in common the major components of community living, away from home, and outdoor recreational environments.

Barnett and Ribbe connect the Christian camping experience directly to the experiential education literature. Barnett uses Dewey’s theory of primary and secondary

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<sup>71</sup> Jimmy Griffin, “The Effects of an Adventure Based Program with an Explicit Spiritual Component on the Spiritual Growth of Adolescents,” *Journal of Experiential Education* 25 (2003), 351.

<sup>72</sup> Brad Daniel, “The Life Significance of a Spiritually Oriented, Outward Bound-Type Wilderness Expedition,” *Journal of Experiential Education* 29 (2007), 386-387.

<sup>73</sup> Andrew J. Bobilya, Lynn D. Akey, and Donald Mitchell, “Outcomes of a Spiritually Focused Wilderness Orientation Program,” *Journal of Experiential Education* 33 (2011), 314.

experiences to explain that camp experiences, when intentionally processed in the moment, lead to “the cognitive and the affective mutually reinforcing each other to produce higher order learning.”<sup>74</sup> Barnett also relies heavily on David Kolb and the adventure education theory of Kurt Hahn, the founder of Outward Bound. He highlights the importance of disequilibrium created by immersion in a new setting and presentation of new challenges. He argues that this atmosphere of disequilibrium, when combined with caring community and intentional learning, provides space for transformational experiences in adventure education and challenge education, which he uses as subcategories of experiential learning. Ribbe likens camp to an “experiential laboratory” that facilitates spiritual formation and leadership development through intentional reflection on experience in the outdoor setting.<sup>75</sup> He critiques camps that revert to didactic “pulpit-centered ministry” as trading in the experiential nature of camp for a “cognitive-centered philosophy of learning,” and he notes that intentional reflection on experiences “is often done poorly or is disregarded altogether.”<sup>76</sup>

Barnett’s dissertation project connecting camping ministry to experiential education is a long way from mainstream scholarship, and Ribbe’s article did not appear in a peer-reviewed journal, but their work is part of a renewed interest in experiential education among religious scholars. Peter Jarvis is one of many scholars advocating a turn to experiential learning in religious education. He describes the importance of attending to “primary religious experience,” something that educators cannot provide but

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<sup>74</sup> Barnett, 21-22.

<sup>75</sup> Ribbe, 159.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 151-152.

rather help to interpret through “secondary learning experiences.”<sup>77</sup> Practical theologians, long suspicious of the trustworthiness of religious experience, have begun to attend more closely to the role of primary experience in shaping theology. Camp remains anecdotal in the bulk of the literature, but increased focus on experiential learning opens the space for a renewed consideration of the camp experience.

### **The Confirmation Project**

The Christian Youth: Learning and Living the Faith (CY: LLF) project, commonly known as the *Confirmation Project*, launched in 2014 as the first major youth ministry study to intentionally consider camping ministry’s contribution to Christian education and faith formation. This inclusion is part of the broader move in practical theology to consider religious experience, and it is also the result of the increased scholarly attention garnered by the ACA studies. These movements have aligned with the release of findings from a study on confirmation work in Europe, on which the Confirmation Project is based. Practical theologians are open to taking a fresh look at camping ministry.

### **Confirmation Work in Europe**

The centerpiece of the European study was a two-wave quantitative study of the effectiveness of confirmation work in seven countries: Germany, Austria, Denmark, Switzerland, Norway, Sweden, and Finland. The study found that, on average, there was very little change in religious commitment or education over the course of confirmation instruction. The study examined each country’s religious education program in depth and

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<sup>77</sup> Peter Jarvis, “Religious Experience and Experiential Learning,” *Religious Education* 103 (2008), 564.

offered valuable data for assessing and improving confirmation instruction. Two countries – Finland and Sweden – showed significantly higher growth than the other five in several of the religious commitment and program satisfaction variables. The scholars note that one key difference that sets the Finnish and Swedish confirmation programs apart from the others is that the majority of their confirmation training takes place at camp. They note, “Confirmands from groups that have been to camp three nights and more, score higher on almost all indexes on confirmand experience.”<sup>78</sup> The finding that “camp creates an atmosphere of community amongst confirmands that is highly favourable for their religious learning” strongly influenced the research team in the United States to include camp as a major part of the Confirmation Project.<sup>79</sup>

#### Confirmation Work in Finland

An important consideration in the findings from the European study is that the t2 survey was distributed to confirmation students on the last day of the camp experience, a method of evaluation that Yust sharply critiques. Questions about the validity of the findings are partly addressed in a separate study of Finnish confirmands that includes longitudinal data over five years. Niemelä discovered that the *camp high* so evident in post-camp surveys fades gradually over time but is maintained to some degree long-term.

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<sup>78</sup> Friedrich Schweitzer, Wolfgang Ilg, and Henrik Simojoki, *Confirmation Work in Europe: Empirical Results, Experiences and Challenges. A Comparative Study in Seven Countries*. (Munich: Gutersloher Verlagshaus, 2010), 233.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.



She notes, “Over the course of five years attitudes sank from what they were at the end of confirmation training, but were still more positive than at the beginning of training.”<sup>80</sup>

A subsequent qualitative study adds depth to the findings of confirmation training in Finland, where as many as 90% of young people attend confirmation camp. The study found a tremendous amount of congruence between camp programs in Finland and those at denominational camps in the United States. The major finding of the study is that young people in Finland regard the church as a sort of “spiritual storehouse” that provides access for contents that “are valuable, but they are for occasional use only.”<sup>81</sup> The study also notes that the camp experience shows great potential for transformation in the lives of young people and the volunteers that serve at camp. The study concludes, “The camp model may, in effect, be offering two keys. One is the key to access the spiritual storehouse. The other is the key to change the church.”<sup>82</sup> This view of camp’s role in offering something substantive and transformative to the life and ministry of the church is vastly different from the literature that reduces camp to *fun and games*, emotional manipulation, or, at best, a brief spiritual high. Camping ministry is moving past the status of anecdote to consideration as a valuable field of inquiry in its own right.

### **Camp as Locus of Practical Theology**

In his *Brief Outline*, Schleiermacher described practical theology as the crown of his theological tree, but he envisioned the field as an application of the theology

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<sup>80</sup> Kati Niemelä, *Does Confirmation Training Really Matter? A Longitudinal Study of the Quality and Effectiveness of Confirmation Training in Finland* (Tampere: Church Research Institute, 2008), 94.

<sup>81</sup> Jacob Sorenson, “Transforming the Spiritual Storehouse: A Portrait of Confirmation Camp in Finland,” *Journal of Youth and Theology* 14 (2015), 179-180.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 188.

generated in the other fields of philosophical and historical theology.<sup>83</sup> Theologians over the past century have sought to redefine Schleiermacher's notion of practical theology. Don Browning followed the work of Hiltner and others in reordering theory and praxis, redefining the entire field of theology in his influential *A Fundamental Practical Theology*. Browning argues that theory cannot be separated from practice and that theology itself develops from "theory-laden practices."<sup>84</sup> Practical theologians differ in their interdisciplinary approaches, but there is widespread agreement that practice informs theology. The practices and experiences once regarded as application of theory actually influence and redefine a person's understanding of God.

Camp has been described as "an experiential laboratory" and a "theological playground."<sup>85</sup> It is a place with the potential to shape and sharpen theological perspectives. Scholarship is beginning to attend to ways in which the Christian camping experience affects participants' faith and understandings of God. This perspective is based on the notion that Christian practice and experience shape theology, leading to what Browning calls "more critically held theory-laden practices."<sup>86</sup> Studies that operate from a *theory to practice* model are more concerned with efficacy of instruction based on pre-conceived (or divinely revealed) theories, while studies on faith formation assume that practice shapes meaning itself, including theological understanding.

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<sup>83</sup> Freidrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study, 3rd Edition*, trans. Terrence N. Tice (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2011).

<sup>84</sup> Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 7.

<sup>85</sup> Ribbe, 144, Sorenson (2014), 35.

<sup>86</sup> Browning, 7.

Christian summer camp is a locus of practical theology. The *fun and games* of camp turn out to be generative theological praxes that take seriously the activity of Christ in the world through the power of the Holy Spirit. As practical theologians, and youth ministry scholars in particular, continue to make the case that their field is not mere application but rather the very foundation of theological understanding, they would do well to recognize Christian camping ministry as a place where the activity of practical theology is already underway. Practical theologians can learn a great deal from observing the theological playground of camp, and they can offer valuable insights to improve camp practices and thereby impact faith formation in the church.

CHAPTER 4  
CONVERSATION PARTNERS

**Introduction**

Camps thrive as set-apart locations. They exist on the periphery of civilization, on the edge of church. This dates back to the earliest camp meeting grounds and is exemplified in Balch purchasing a literal island for his isolated enclave at Camp Chocorua. The fallacy is in thinking that set-apartness means isolation. The vibrancy of the camp model is based on connection, not isolation. This connection must not be limited to the self-enclosed camp community. The lack of generative dialogue between the Christian camping world and practical theologians is product of mutual suspicion, if not disdain. The previous chapter spent a great deal of time critiquing the short-sightedness of youth ministry scholars in overlooking the significance of camp, but a stream of anti-intellectualism among Christian camp professionals only exacerbates the divide. Camp professionals tend to look to each other for insights rather than engage in scholarly dialogue with other fields. There is, perhaps, a neo-Tertullian sentiment of *what has the academy to do with camp?* Suspicion of academia can isolate Christian camping from valuable conversation partners. It is a sad irony that some camping professionals so value their own ministry's unique ability to forge connections that they reject intentional dialogue with potential ministry partners.

Academia in the Western world is clearly heir to Enlightenment thinking characterized by the positivist and post-positivist perspectives, but academia cannot be

reduced to one school of thought anymore than camp can be. Chapter 2 makes clear that the secluded island of camp has to deal with its history of white male supremacy at least as much as the ivory tower of academia. The two are intertwined much more than either has been willing to readily admit. The common ground lies, appropriately enough, in the realm of relationality. A survey of the history of Christian camping and the scant literature currently available in scholarly circles make clear that camp is, first and foremost, about nurturing relationships. Reliance on human reason and individualism remain strong in Western scholarship, though there is an emerging understanding that being is neither confirmed nor constituted by reason but rather by relationship and interaction. The strong influence of minority voices, particularly from liberationist and feminist perspectives, has helped push this much-needed shift. Hopkins delves deeply into perspectives of minority voices, giving them a place to be heard. He offers a powerful statement as we seek to build community in this project, “All humanities thrive when all see their own humanities embodied in others.”<sup>1</sup> Relationships with others profoundly shape a person’s identity, and this understanding has led to the recognition that a person’s thinking is not only enriched by the other but that it is *contingent* on the other. Practical theologians characterize this as *the philosophical turn to relationality*.<sup>2</sup>

The camping community need not reject the perspectives of the scholarly community, and vice versa. This project seeks to live deeply in the scholarly world, with the understanding that practical theology values conversation and that, following Loder,

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<sup>1</sup> Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 88.

<sup>2</sup> Notably, Shults reviews the history of this philosophical turn and its implications for theological anthropology. F. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 11-36.

knowledge from the human sciences point toward the person of Jesus Christ. The goal is not to get more people to the isolated islands of camping ministries or to provide one more theological tome for academic critique. The goal is relationship itself, to seek greater connection and dialogue – to build bridges, in a sense. The conversation must include both theoretical and theological voices, for this is the interdisciplinary nature of the field of practical theology and consistent with camping ministry’s commitment to building community. This chapter seeks to bring some critical dialogue partners into the conversation before the project turns to the empirical and descriptive. We begin with three dialogue partners from secular fields and bring them alongside three voices from theological fields.

### **Theoretical Dialogue Partners**

Theoretical perspectives offer important interdisciplinary dialogue partners. Osmer describes the interpretive task of practical theology as “drawing on theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why ... patterns and dynamics are occurring.”<sup>3</sup> Hopkins and other scholars remind us that theology is not an isolated field of study but is rather embedded in the experience of being human and the quest for meaning-making. Practical theology, as an inherently interdisciplinary field, attends deeply to the insights of diverse theoretical voices. Numerous secular theorists offer important insights into the concepts that form the essentials of the camp movement: community living, away from home, and an outdoor recreational environment. The many conversation partners that offer insights into the camp experience include Pierre

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<sup>3</sup> Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 4.

Bourdieu's understanding of *habitus*, John Bowlby's attachment theory, and the fascinating new field of interpersonal neurobiology pioneered by Daniel Siegel.

#### Pierre Bourdieu: Habitus

Pierre Bourdieu is a common dialogue partner in the field of practical theology.<sup>4</sup> His major contribution to the present project is the understanding that knowledge itself, including knowledge of God, is socially and culturally constructed and that people act from this knowledge without conscious intentionality. He writes, "The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures."<sup>5</sup> Habitus involves a person's way of being and communicating in the world. Bourdieu describes this as a bodily wisdom that includes pre-cognitive processes and shapes individuals' dispositions. A habitus is not innate instinct but rather is learned over time through experience and tradition, and it seldom includes cognitive reflection. Rather, the body itself recognizes patterns in certain cultural situations that trigger responses based on previous experiences. These responses are often communicative, such as facial expressions, posture, or fidgeting, but they are also associated with learned skills. Habitus affects how a person responds in a given situation, and each new experience adds to the bodily wisdom of the habitus. Mary McClintock Fulkerson helpfully summarizes Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* as "a bodily knowledge,

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<sup>4</sup> Root characterizes the Bourdieuan perspective as one of five dominant models of practical theology. Andrew Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), 53-83.

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1980), 53.

not caused by principles but done in a way that responds appropriately to a situation; it draws from the past but in an improvisatory way.”<sup>6</sup>

Essential to an understanding of habitus is what Bourdieu calls “regulated improvisation.”<sup>7</sup> The bodily wisdom is adaptable. A new situation can therefore call for an improvised habitus that the body will remember in future situations. Novel experiences and new circumstances offer tremendous opportunity for the reevaluation and enhancement of bodily wisdom. Because of the nature of habitus, a person cannot enter a situation as a blank slate but rather brings wisdom of which they may or may not be cognitively aware. This bodily wisdom in turn affects their entire disposition in a given circumstance. A key example in the camp environment is worship. Participants come to camp with a certain bodily understanding of a worship service. In Mainline Protestant worship, this often includes sitting still in a temperature-controlled indoor space, which has lighting that is either artificial or filtered through stain glass. Their bodily understanding may need reevaluation when a camp worship involves movement or dancing in an outdoor worship area that is lit by direct sunlight or a flickering campfire.

One of the primary characteristics of the camp experience is that it is set apart or *away from home*, an aspect that affects the way participants make meaning of the experience. Each participant brings a certain habitus based on personal experience in a home environment or congregation. In very real ways, participants bring *home* with them. There is a cultural way of being in each camp environment, and the novelty offers

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<sup>6</sup> Mary McClintock Fulkerson, *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 151.

<sup>7</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson, trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 37-65.



opportunities to improvise and even learn new forms of habitus. If we accept Bourdieu's understanding that the new learning is incorporated into the habitus, then participants bring the new understanding (both cognitive and pre-cognitive) with them to home and church. Participants bring home to camp and then camp to home. Bourdieu's notion of habitus also informs the experiential, recreational nature of camp. Empirical research focusing on an outdoor recreational setting like camp must take into account more than the cognitive understanding or verbal recollections of the experience, whether they are gathered through surveys or interviews. People learn through action. The present assessment of the camp experience, therefore, will include direct observation, attention to the surrounding environment, and intentional questions focusing on bodily experience.

Fulkerson's exemplary study of Good Samaritan UMC in *Places of Redemption* demonstrates how a critical appropriation of Bourdieu can help us move past a Euro-centric view of humanity. We do this by intentionally seeking *encounter* with the other. She helps us understand that encounter is much deeper than passing acknowledgement. She argues that the dominant models of academic study have validated *obliviousness* to the social and cultural realities at work in the world, particularly those of the marginalized and oppressed. She writes, "What is needed to counter the diminishment and harm associated with obliviousness is a *place to appear*, a place to be seen, to be recognized and to recognize the other."<sup>8</sup> Our deep exploration of specific camps will consider how these set apart spaces serve as places to appear for young people who often have their voices silenced. We will see that the relational encounters at camp include more than different social circles, though these are often quite divisive in youth culture.

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<sup>8</sup> Fulkerson, 21.

Camps are places of encounter and appearance for people of different denominational or religious backgrounds, physical and mental abilities, socio-economic situations, sexual orientation, and race.

Root points out that an overemphasis on Bourdieu can lead to an understanding of God as a social construction, to the exclusion of divine revelation. In his words, “While our bodies may clearly be receivers of experiences of the divine, the divine itself cannot be captured by or equated to the embodied cultural realm.”<sup>9</sup> His critique highlights the need for interdisciplinary dialogue and specifically the Christomorphic perspective that Loder provides. Habitus does not mediate divine revelation itself but rather the interpretation of divine action. It has epistemological significance, but not soteriological. The boy Samuel’s lack of understanding in 1 Samuel 3 did not prevent God from calling to him. However, his cultural understanding (living at a time when visions were uncommon) prevented him from recognizing the voice of God. He made the only logical conclusion based on his previous understanding: his mentor Eli must be calling him. Eli was able to suggest a new possibility to Samuel based on the cultural tradition that was passed on to him, though he only recognized this as a possibility after God called three times. The embodied cultural realm did not make the vision itself possible but rather the understanding of the vision. It is instructive that this event of divine revelation became the watershed of a prophetic career and the eventual transformation of the culture itself (from tribal confederation to monarchy). Samuel left the temple with a new understanding of how God is at work in the world. Eli’s response to the divine judgment

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<sup>9</sup> Root, 63.

proclaimed through Samuel makes clear that divine action transcends human understanding: “It is the LORD; let him do what seems good to him” (1 Sam. 3:18).

### John Bowlby: Attachment Theory

Attachment theory provides a psychological vantage point to consider the importance of relationality. John Bowlby defines attachment behavior as “any form of behavior that results in a person attaining or maintaining proximity to some other clearly identified individual who is conceived as better able to cope with the world.”<sup>10</sup>

Attachment patterns develop in infancy and are carried forward and modified throughout the lifespan. These attachment patterns affect all subsequent relationships and the ability to live a healthy life. Bowlby describes attachment as a “goal-corrected behavior.”<sup>11</sup> By this, he means that proximity to the attachment figure is itself the set-goal. Attachment theory attends closely to evolutionary biology, so survival is interpreted as the ultimate outcome of attachment behavior, but the set-goal developed to achieve that is relationship with others. The implication is that humans are inherently relational and dependent on one another. The earliest predisposition toward attachment behavior is ingrained in the human genome itself. As the psalmist proclaims, “You knit me together in my mother’s womb, and I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made” (Psalm 139:13-14). The infant is born with a predisposition to connect and respond to human faces, especially to the face of the primary caregiver.

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<sup>10</sup> John Bowlby, *A Secure Base: Parent-Child Attachment and Healthy Human Development* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 27.

<sup>11</sup> John Bowlby, *Attachment* (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 70-71.

Attachment behaviors demonstrate that the human need to be in relationship is embedded in the very fabric of creation. Understood Christomorphically, this has tremendous theological consequences. The longing for a relationship that is reliable, a face that does not go away, orients the human being to the source of being. Psychoanalyst Ann Belford Ulanov reflects, humans “are driven to find the transcendent.”<sup>12</sup> Loder puts it in distinctly theological terms, the *analogia spiritus*, in which the human spirit longs to be reconnected to the Holy Spirit, the source of its being. He contends that humans experience a sort of “cosmic loneliness,” longing for a Face analogous to the face of the primary caregiver but different in substance. In Loder’s words, “A Face that will transfigure human existence, inspire worship, and not go away, even in and through the ultimate separation of death.”<sup>13</sup> Patterns of attachment, which are first established in infancy, become the primary means through which humans interpret their relationships with God. As with habitus, these patterns of attachment are interpretive, not determinative, of divine action.

Bowlby’s pathways model adds psychological depth to the Bourdieuan perspective, which focuses primarily on cultural embeddedness. Behaviors among individual humans diverge in infancy based on experience, which give them internal working models that form expectations later in life. Cultural drivers remain important, but attachment theory focuses more closely on individual person-to-person relationships. As Bowlby describes it, the “pathway” that each individual follows over the course of a

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<sup>12</sup> Ann Belford Ulanov, *The Unshuttered Heart: Opening Aliveness/Deadness in the Self* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 78.

<sup>13</sup> James E. Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 119.

lifetime is “determined at every moment by the interaction of the individual as he now is with the environment in which he happens then to be.”<sup>14</sup> This theory essentially means that there is nearly an infinite combination of pathways that a person might take during the course of a lifetime. It also means that a person is never static but always in the process of becoming. Experiences and relationships help to shape who a person understands herself to be. Caring relationships are important because they help a person live a healthy life, whereas insecure or disorganized attachment patterns can be detrimental to psychological health.

In order for any empirical research project to properly assess the camp experience, each individual must be taken seriously as they now are. Their interactions in the particular environment of camp, according to attachment theory, affect their identity and relationships. If attachment theory is correct in saying that humans are inherently relational beings that carry attachment patterns into future relationships, camp is a very fruitful place for studying human interaction and individual meaning-making. Each individual in the camp environment is affected in different ways based on many factors, so broad characterizations may be unhelpful. Attachment theory poses important questions about the nature and significance of human interaction in the camp community, along with how diverse individuals with varying attachment patterns make meaning in the complex environment.

#### Daniel Siegel: Interpersonal Neurobiology

Interpersonal neurobiology (IPNB) is an emerging field that places neuroscience in conversation with attachment theory. Daniel Siegel, the foremost expert in IPNB,

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<sup>14</sup> Bowlby, *A Secure Base*, 136.

argues persuasively that knowing is always embodied and situational, and it is dependent on relationship with other embodied minds. The self, Siegel contends, is emergent from the embodied brain and relationships with others. He writes, “We are not just an isolated, separate self, but an ever-emerging process of ‘selfing’ linked with other evolving selves over time.”<sup>15</sup> The physical structures of the brain are affected in and through relationships, and the process of brain growth and differentiation is “experience-dependent.”<sup>16</sup> Siegel’s work is fascinating and insightful, and it has tremendous significance for the camp environment.

Neuroscience itself is a rapidly expanding field that is uncovering more of the secrets of the human brain and providing insights into how knowledge and memory function. One key finding that Siegel highlights is that the brain is necessarily embodied. There is no cognitive activity without accompanying somatic responses. Bourdieu’s concept of bodily wisdom is thus given neurological support. Bodily disposition and emotional states are intertwined with learning, cognitive recall, and the development of the brain’s physical structures. Even more importantly, embodied brains cannot function or grow without connection to other embodied brains. The experiential, highly relational environment of camp is clearly onto something.

Siegel focuses on the specific characteristics of adolescent brain development in his book *Brainstorm*, noting that there are fundamental changes in the brain’s structure and wiring taking place during this critical life stage. He writes, “Brain changes during the early teen years set up four qualities of our minds during adolescence: novelty

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<sup>15</sup> Daniel J. Siegel, *The Developing Mind: How Relationships and the Brain Interact to Shape who we Are*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (New York: Guilford Press, 2012), 209-210.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

seeking, social engagement, increased emotional intensity, and creative exploration.”<sup>17</sup> These four characteristics are a veritable description of the summer camp environment. Siegel’s insights shed light on why the summer camp environment is a particularly fruitful learning environment for young people. Camp not only promotes the healthy brain development common to all humans by providing a rich experiential and caring relational environment. It also provides an environment that is specifically nurturing to the developing minds of its primary constituents.

The perspectives of Bourdieu, Bowlby, and Siegel together give a multi-dimensional view of the philosophical turn to relationality. They demonstrate that relationality is formed and embodied in the cultural, interpersonal, and psychosomatic. They all hold in common the conviction that knowledge is not confined to the intellect but rather is embodied and experiential. There is a tendency in Western intellectual projects to harbor deep suspicion of religious experience. Along with practical theologian Bonnie Miller-McLemore, we must move beyond the disembodied knowing of Western intellectualism, which “is ultimately insufficient for understanding the subject matter of faith and its practice.” She presses for practical theology’s “participatory, performative, and proactive kind of knowing that stays close to the ground, attends to human agony and ecstasy, and attempts to relieve suffering.”<sup>18</sup>

The three theoreticians above also hold in common belief in the potential for change or even transformation. This potential is evident in Bourdieu’s concept of

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel J. Siegel, *Brainstorm: The Power and Purpose of the Teenage Brain* (New York: Penguin, 2013), 7.

<sup>18</sup> Bonnie Miller-McLemore, *Christian Theology in Practice: Discovering a Discipline* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 138.

regulated improvisation, Bowlby's pathways model, and what Siegel refers to as "neuroplasticity" (the brain's ability to adapt and change over time).<sup>19</sup> These are not closed or determinative theories but rather theories of hope, and this characteristic alone makes them fruitful conversation partners with those who proclaim that God is present and active in the world in and through relationship. As a Christomorphic way of imagining how these theories directly impact an understanding of how God works in the world, consider the example of Acts 10.

The apostle Peter and the centurion Cornelius are in different places, physically and culturally, when they both have experiences of God's inbreaking. Their very different responses to the divine visions are product of their embodied cultural wisdom, or *habitus*. The centurion Cornelius immediately responds as a commander receiving orders from a higher authority: he sends his underlings to do what the angel commanded (verse 7). Peter is another story. He does not understand what God is trying to tell him. The vision is profoundly confusing to him. His embodied cultural wisdom is that of a devout Jew who obeys strict dietary laws, so the divine command to eat forbidden animals is unthinkable. However, the vision has all of the characteristics of a genuine divine revelation, so he is stuck between diametrically opposed cultural understandings. His initial response is introspection (verse 17), but the Spirit of God does not allow a retreat to the cognitive but rather pushes Peter to the relational (verse 19-20). The servants of Cornelius arrive, and the remainder of the story is intensely relational. Peter offers hospitality to the strangers and accompanies them to the house of Cornelius, where his own cultural laws forbid him to go. The two men share their experiences of God with one

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<sup>19</sup> Siegel, *Developing Mind*, 253-254.



another. Notice that neither yet understands what God is up to. The visions are not self-explanatory or even revelatory in and of themselves. Rather, the visions enable the relationship and relationship enables understanding. Only after the person-to-person encounter with Cornelius does Peter exclaim that he finally gets it. The progression of Peter's cognitive process is illuminating. The vision causes *διαπορευω* (verse 17), or complete confusion, a state in which Peter has no idea what to do or think. His response in verse 19 (*διενθυμειμαι*) means to think inwardly about it, to ponder it in his head. The relational encounter is what causes the aha moment (verse 34), with the word *καταλαμβάνω* implying that he has grasped onto or caught up to something elusive. This is in sharp contrast to the inward thinking of verse 19 and has somatic implications. Peter's new understanding, formed through relationship and experience, leads to the intentional ministry of verses 36-48. The word of God and gathered community of believers is then the occasion for the inbreaking of the Spirit. Peter knows, both cognitively and bodily, what is happening because of his own experience at Pentecost in Acts 2. He does what was culturally unthinkable only a day before: he baptizes the gentiles. The story reaches its climax with a new cultural understanding (*habitus*) born out of the inbreaking of God, relational encounter, and shared experience. The fact that it takes the apostles the rest of the book of Acts to wrestle with this new understanding does not change the reality that God is already at work in and through the gentiles. God's activity through Peter, Cornelius, and others in the early church will change the cultural understanding of the Christian Church itself. The movement of God's transforming activity is from the cultural to the inter-personal to the personal and back to the cultural.

Theologians must attend to diverse voices because that is what God calls them to do. The presence and insight of theological voices does not provide the condition for God acting. God is already present and at work, as in the case of Cornelius. The role of the practical theologian, then, is twofold, like that of Peter. The first is the role of interpretation through a deep understanding of scripture and relationship with the Incarnate One. The second is to bear witness and testify to how God is at work in the world, as Peter bore witness to the work of the Spirit at Cornelius' house and testified to the believers in Acts 11. God encountered Peter and Cornelius in the midst of their cultural embeddedness and drew them into a relationship with one another. This relationship, their cognitive processes, and cultural embeddedness did not create the divine revelation but rather facilitated their shared understanding. This is how interdisciplinary dialogue functions Christomorphically in practical theology.

### **Biblical and Theological Dialogue Partners**

There is no assumption in this project that the theological disciplines are de facto better than the disciplines of philosophy, sociology, or psychology. The conviction is, in fact, that certain secular voices are much more helpful in understanding the activity of God in the world than certain theological and biblical voices or categories. This is where we may part ways with Loder. It is not the theological framework itself that has primacy but rather our relationship with the God who is alive and active in the world. The project began with a statement of faith as a theological starting place, and it continues as a project seeking clarity on how the relational God is at work in the world. Not all theological viewpoints are helpful in this endeavor, but there are many potential dialogue partners that can help facilitate a rich discussion.

Osmer describes the normative task of practical theology as “using theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations, or contexts.”<sup>20</sup> Biblical and theological concepts reshape and reinterpret the summer camp experience for the Christian context of outdoor ministry. Likewise, any thorough study of this field must approach the research with great sensitivity to theological concepts. Christian camps, even those within the various Protestant denominations, have different biblical and theological priorities, and this project remains open to how these differing priorities may shape the Christian outdoor ministry experience. Three dialogue partners that this project intentionally incorporates are Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Don Juel, and Jürgen Moltmann. Specifically, these voices help us understand that Christ is present and active in human community, that the Bible is the living word of God active in each particular context, and that the Holy Spirit is active in the world in ways that can help us reimagine natural theology in the camp environment.

#### Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Christ in Community

The concept that Christ is present and active in Christian community has solid biblical foundations and is a theological starting point for various theologians, notably Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer understands human sociology from a theological perspective, with personal identity itself arising from relationship with God and other human beings. This perspective of the locus of personal identity has tremendous resonance with attachment theory and IPNB. The difference is that Bonhoeffer has a theological starting point in his understanding of relationality. God wills to be in relationship with human beings, so human relationships are analogous to and possible

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<sup>20</sup> Osmer, 4.

because of the individual's relationship with God. Revelation comes first, giving ontological priority to God. Bonhoeffer views the cross of Christ as the decisive revelatory act of God's solidarity with humanity through which "humanity has been brought once and for all ... into community with God."<sup>21</sup> Community with God necessarily includes community with other human beings, through whom God is active in the *you* of the other. In Bonhoeffer's words, "What is holy is the You of God, the absolute will, who here becomes visible in the concrete You of social life."<sup>22</sup> Root describes Bonhoeffer's concept, "As the disciple encounters unique persons in the world, standing with and for their humanity, he or she can be confident that within the relational encounter Christ is concretely present."<sup>23</sup>

Bonhoeffer understands Christian community as fulfillment of God's will, so it is essential to his understanding of the *Sanctorum Communio* that "community is an end in itself."<sup>24</sup> As Root and others have pointed out, this has tremendous theological implications for ministry. Christian community becomes the goal of ministry rather than a strategy of influence or a ministry program. "Relational ministry, then, should not be about a third thing but only about meeting Jesus Christ in the reality of his person, who is found within relational bonds with the adolescents with whom we minister."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, trans. Joachim Von Soosten, Reinhard Kraus, and Nancy Lukens (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 146.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 55.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Root, *Revisiting Relational Youth Ministry: From a Strategy of Influence to a Theology of Incarnation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 111.

<sup>24</sup> Bonhoeffer, 173-176.

<sup>25</sup> Root, 116.

If the gathering of the *sanctorum communio* is an end in itself, then Christian outdoor ministry programs are better assessed based on how faithfully they embody Christian community than on their programmatic or developmental outcomes. Studies such as ACA's 2005 *Directions* study focus only on the outcomes of the camp experience rather than assessing the nature of the experience itself. Both aspects may be important, but using Bonhoeffer's understanding of the *sanctorum communio* as a theological lens focuses particular attention on the camp community itself. Christ is at work in some special, concrete way in the midst of Christian community, and it is important to keep this in mind as the research examines how participants perceive and make meaning of this reality.

The Christian understanding of God's continuing activity in the world has a normative source in the Bible. Bonhoeffer is careful to distinguish between the Bible and the word of God, asserting that the Bible is the word only when it is proclaimed in Christian community. He writes, "The word inspired by the Spirit exists only where human beings hear it, so that the church-community makes the word the word, as the word constitutes the church community."<sup>26</sup> He understands the word as the linkage between the earthly and heavenly church. This is important because it means that the *sanctorum communio* is more than just human beings gathered together in relationship. This is why we can say that there is a qualitative difference between *Christian* summer camp and secular camp experiences. Both are intentional about building relationships and learning through experience, but only one intentionally connects the relational longing with the Source of Being through the word of God. A general notion of spirituality is

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<sup>26</sup> Bonhoeffer, 232.

common in some of the camp analyses detailed in the previous chapter, but this is inadequate. Bonhoeffer writes, “The word constitutes the unity between essential and empirical church, between Holy Spirit and objective spirit.”<sup>27</sup> Bonhoeffer is here describing Christian assembly around the scriptures, through which the crucified Christ is proclaimed. Person-to-person encounter is indeed the way in which Christians experience the concrete presence of the living Christ, but Bonhoeffer does not conceive of this encounter apart from the reading and proclamation of scripture and the sharing in sacred practices. Biblical hermeneutics, therefore, become important in the consideration of the Christian summer camp community.

#### Don Juel: The Bible as Living Word

If we accept the Bourdieuan concept of *habitus*, we must acknowledge that the sacred texts of scripture are interpreted by specific communities of encultured beings in specific times and places. Bonhoeffer does not dispute this but rather extolls the diversity of the earthly church.<sup>28</sup> This means not only that Christian summer camp experiences are different from secular camp experiences but also that they differ among themselves in significant ways. This is, of course, the case in each individual camping community, but there are also norms passed down through the cultural wisdom of the American Evangelical tradition that are different from the Mainline Protestant tradition. We have already seen this in chapter 2 with the emphasis on camping as a tool for the conversion experience in comparison with the understanding of camp as a place of Christian nurture in relationship with other ministries. Along with Bonhoeffer and Root, we have asserted

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 279.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 229.

that Christian community is not a tool for a conversion experience but rather the locus of Christ's concrete presence. The Christian camp experience, therefore, centers on hearing the word of God and exploring its meaning together with the community of believers. It is helpful to turn to the biblical hermeneutics of Don Juel for an understanding of how the word of God is at work in the camp environment.

Juel describes the Bible's worth in terms of what it does, the effect it has on real people in their contexts. He asserts that interpretation of the Bible is not a process of discovering a static truth but rather a process of deriving *meaning* that makes a difference in the world. This is consistent with Bonhoeffer's distinction between the Bible and the word of God, though Juel expands the concept in helpful ways. Juel describes it metaphorically, "Living with the Scriptures is more like sailing than like building cathedrals."<sup>29</sup> The truth certainly exists, but interpretation is a never-ending journey of discovery that may lead closer to or farther away from the truth. Arriving at the truth is only an eschatological reality. Interpretation, then, "is conceived as conversation with another person who has something important to say."<sup>30</sup> The text itself may be the conversation partner, but this often takes place with someone else who offers a new interpretation of the text. For Juel, this is the most exciting thing about biblical interpretation and what makes his hermeneutic most complimentary to the camp environment. Biblical interpretation is situated in the cultural and in the inter-personal. Juel is not concerned with someone blaspheming the sacred text. On the contrary, the

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<sup>29</sup> Don Juel, "Your Word is Truth," in *Shaping the Scriptural Imagination: Truth, Meaning, and the Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Shane Berg and Matthew L. Skinner (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 30.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 21.

Scriptures are meant to be played with. Biblical interpretation “leads not to unity but to extraordinary diversity.”<sup>31</sup> Like Bonhoeffer, he does not understand this diversity in terms of disunity but rather as adding an essential richness to the Christian community and the meaning derived from the biblical text. The conversation partner within a different context can offer a different interpretation that can deepen and enhance a person’s own interpretation.

The Christian summer camp experience offers fertile ground for intersections of meaning. Participants are in a new context that may open new opportunities for interpretation of the biblical text, since meaning-making is contextual. The summer camp experience also has the potential of bringing together people of different backgrounds who bring diverse interpretations of the biblical texts into conversation. This intersection of meaning offers the opportunity for new meaning-making in the ways that Juel describes.

#### Jürgen Moltmann: The Holy Spirit in Creation

A common critique of many Protestant denominations is that they have a deficient pneumatology. The Reformation focus on the Word of God centered the Christian worship experience on the proclamation of the gospel, primarily through the office of preaching. Enlightenment thinking further emphasized a systematic and rational interpretation of Christian doctrines. The work of the Holy Spirit was deemphasized in favor of a heightened Christology, and creation itself was viewed as a reality from which humanity must be liberated. This view served to justify an ethic of exploitation of the natural world. With a Christological focus emphasizing God’s justification and ongoing

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, 17.



relationship with humanity, the justified humans are free from sinful creation in order to act on behalf of other humans, largely to the exclusion of the natural world.

Jürgen Moltmann is a valuable conversation partner when discussing the Christian camping context, especially the focus of Christian camping on outdoor experiences. Moltmann is viewed as complimentary to Bonhoeffer, on whom his theological views are dependent in many ways. They share a theological emphasis on the cross of Christ as the definitive revelation of God, and they both emphasize the continuing work of God in the temporal world. The Christian church is penultimate, but it is also tied to the eschatological church that is breaking into the present reality, so both see great value in the present church existing for the sake of the world. Moltmann breaks with Bonhoeffer in his theology of the Social Trinity and his pneumatology, particularly the understanding of the Spirit's action in new and surprising ways.

His theology of the Social Trinity serves to correct the abuses of certain theological perspectives that reflect the immutable, impassible, omnipotent God of theism. Moltmann understands the Trinity as essentially open to the world, which means openness to relationship with human beings and all of creation. The perichoretic relationship is not only the paradigmatic relationship that enables human relationship through the person of Jesus Christ. There is a mystical connection through the Spirit in a move similar to Loder's *anologia spiritus*. Moltmann redefines *natural theology* through the lens of the cross rather than as revealing something about God separate from special revelation. "It is not that a general truth became concrete in Jesus, but the concrete, unique, historic event of the crucifying and raising of Jesus by Yahweh, the God of promise who creates being out of nothing, becomes general through the universal

eschatological horizon it anticipates.”<sup>32</sup> God is present in the very fabric of creation itself, though only recognizable through the specific revelation of Christ.

Moltmann sees the world itself in process of being created, guided by divine action and oriented to an eschatological reality. “The world is not yet finished,” he says. “It is therefore the world of possibilities, the world in which we can serve the future, promised truth and righteousness and peace.”<sup>33</sup> The very possibility of something different gives hope to a world that is not yet what it was created to be. Moltmann’s theology of hope does not rest on heavenly glorification in the next life but rather on the promise that history is even now moving toward an eschatological reality, and God’s revelation in time allows people to see what something might become. The divine promises of an eschatological reality are revealed in history, and in freedom human beings, along with creation, are participators in the process of creation history. God “constantly calls this world in question - not because to the eye of hope it is as nothing, but because to the eye of hope it is not yet what it has the prospect of being.”<sup>34</sup> This theological understanding of becoming has great resonance with the regulated improvisation of Bourdieu’s habitus and Siegel’s concept of *selfing* as a process not yet complete.

The primary knowledge of God’s activity through the Spirit is experiential, not theoretical. This experience is open to all of creation, through which the Spirit of God moves and gives life. Moltmann’s pneumatology identifies the Spirit as the breath of life

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<sup>32</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, trans. James W. Leitch (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 142.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 338.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 164.

in all created things, so creation itself is part of God's eschatological plan of liberation and redemption. This move makes some theologians uncomfortable because of their allergic reaction to natural theology, but the concept is right at home in the camp environment. Moltmann makes it theologically palatable with his understanding that God's work in creation is only apparent through knowledge of the Crucified God. Consequences of this theological priority include intentional creation stewardship and a theological anthropology that recognizes humanity's place within a larger creation. In his view of the Triune God's openness to the world, Moltmann's pneumatology is expansive: "The experience of God's Spirit is as specific as the living beings who experience him, and as varied as the living beings who experience him are varied."<sup>35</sup> This is a clear move beyond Bonhoeffer, but it does not deny the special revelation of God in Christ or the concrete experience of Christ in Christian community. It is through this very experience of the concrete presence of the Crucified One that the believer can identify God's work in creation through the Spirit.

Moltmann's eschatological theology of the Triune God open to creation has tremendous implications for the present study. Through their developing relationships with other human beings and creation in the relational, outdoor environment of camp, participants are participating in the work of God in the world and the actual revelation of God. Part of the meaning-making of the camp experience is the degree to which participants are aware of their activities as caught up in divine activity. Here is where Hopkins is again helpful for our understanding because he sees God's ongoing activity in the world as liberating. True encounter with the other can help break down stereotypes

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<sup>35</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 180.

and dismantle systems of oppression through mutual struggle. It is not only that we encounter the living God in our communities and relationships; God works through us in an outpouring of the divine love towards the world. In Hopkins' words, "The divinity works with us, persuades us, and loves us into carrying out this good news. In other words, the *imago dei* unfolds outward into the *missio dei*."<sup>36</sup>

Moltmann's theology points to the importance of relationship with other human beings, and it also insists on attention to each person's situatedness in the world. A deeper understanding of and relationship with creation is life-giving in the sense of opening a person to a heightened awareness of the Holy Spirit's activity. The habitus of the American cultural milieu is increasingly sedentary and reliant on technology as a mediator of relationships and experience. The Christian camp experience provides a unique atmosphere emphasizing face-to-face relationships, kinesthetic learning, and the outdoors in the context of intentional Christian practices. This combination has the potential to facilitate deep encounter with God through the concrete other, creative exploration of God's word, and openness to the Spirit's activity.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

This chapter has spent some time in rich conversation with deep thinkers who compel us to transition to the concrete. The thinkers that were welcomed to the conversation together give a multi-dimensional perspective of theological anthropology. We have considered Bourdieu's understanding of habitus, with attention to his concept of regulated improvisation. We have considered the wisdom of attachment theory, especially as Bowlby understands it through his pathways model. We have gained

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<sup>36</sup> Hopkins, 185.

valuable insights from Siegel about how person-to-person interaction and the functions of the brain combine to give rise to an ever-evolving understanding of self. These are all interpreted theologically as we consider, through Bonhoeffer, how God in Christ is concretely present in human community. Juel adds a biblical hermeneutic that is dependent on relationship and cultural embeddedness. Moltmann adds an understanding of the Social Trinity open to the world, into which God is even now breaking and through which God is continually revealed. These perspectives together suggest that a theological anthropology modeled in the Christian camp experience affirms a transcendent God who is present and active in interpersonal relationships as they bear witness to the relationality of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Knowledge of any kind, including knowledge of God, is contingent on interaction with the other. This reality is embedded in the very fabric of the created order, as demonstrated by psychology and neuroscience, and as revealed by the God who is Trinity. A serious look at Christian summer camp as a locus of human relationality and theological creativity can lead to a more robust understanding of God's continued work in the world.

These insights are of great value, and they lead us to a consideration of where to go next. Like Peter in Acts 10, we are tempted to remain in deep contemplation (*διενθυμειομαι*), but God is calling us to action that will bring us into relationship with others. The relationships into which God calls us can bring new meaning to our ingrained understandings and help us to grasp (*καταλαμβανω*) new possibilities of how the Spirit is at work in the world. It is no longer sufficient to observe the camp experience from afar or comment upon its potential from a theoretical viewpoint. We seek embeddedness, as Fulkerson and Hopkins have modeled for us. It is time to get our hands dirty.

Our conversation partners do not only compel us to move into the concrete, lived experience of camping. They also provide important guidelines for our interactions. We must consider broad cultural forces that influence the praxis of camping ministry and the habitus of the participants. We will consider many of these forces in chapter 6. However, the broad view is insufficient, and we refuse to fall into the trap of reducing reality to variables and causes. We must attend to individuals and their specific relationships. We must consider how they are making meaning from the experience, especially as they interact with others. Chapter 7 will provide some of this depth, and our use of *portraiture* as a methodology will take seriously the feminist and liberationist voices that have critiqued the positivist paradigm. It will help us attend to the bodily and tactile realities of the lived experiences. Through it all, we must remain open and aware of how God is at work. We must enter with the knowledge that God is present and the expectation that God will show up in unique and unexpected ways. It is time for a closer look at the Christian summer camp experience.

CHAPTER 5  
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

**Introduction**

Camp has a history of promoting a set of outcomes that is considered desirable by donors and constituents. These desired outcomes have changed over the course of camp's history in accordance with cultural and religious shifts. The desire to prove camp's effectiveness has led to the development of quantitative instruments, such as ACA's Directions study, that assume a set of variables and direction of influence based on the desired outcomes of constituents and society. The conversion-centered model of camping ministry measures success by the number of participants that dedicate or rededicate their lives to Christ. Our working definition of camping ministry does not assume causal influence or a single telos of the experience. Rather, *camp is a set apart space that facilitates relational encounter between the self, the other, and God.*

This does not mean that we must reject the methods of the human sciences but rather that we engage in interdisciplinary dialogue with a Christomorphic perspective. Osmer gets us started by describing the descriptive-empirical task of practical theology as “gathering information that helps us discern patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situations, or contexts.”<sup>1</sup> Theories about camping ministry must be grounded in actual experiences that go beyond anecdotal evidence. The lack of empirical data about camp

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<sup>1</sup> Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 4.

and a history of reliance on anecdotes necessitate a robust empirical approach, and the resources of social science can serve us well. We borrow the term “variables social science” from Christian Smith, who notes the problematic assumptions of this dominant stream of social science research.<sup>2</sup> We have already, along with Smith, rejected the positivist paradigm through our intentional dialogue with Bourdieu and his understanding of the importance of practice in the construction of social reality. Variables in this study are not used to provide a deterministic picture of the camp experience, to turn people into numbers, or to reduce reality to causes and effects. The camp experience is much more complex than any numerical model can predict because it involves encounters between real people and the inbreaking of an unpredictable God. Along with Smith, we will find that variables social science remains valuable in helping to develop “a growing understanding of the underlying causal powers and mechanisms that tend to produce various observed patterns of facts and events in human social life.”<sup>3</sup> It is not as simple as cause and effect, but we can certainly acknowledge that there are common forces at work in the various expressions of the camping model that result in observable outcomes or patterns. Isolating some of these causal mechanisms will help us understand the camp model. Attending to the perspectives of participants is essential in addressing questions of faith formation and Christian education, so quantifiable data will be grounded in descriptions of particular contexts and accounts of particular individuals.

Charmaz helps us move past the positivist paradigm. She notes, “The constructivist view assumes an obdurate, yet ever-changing world but recognizes diverse

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<sup>2</sup> Christian Smith, *What is a Person?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 277-284.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 296.



local worlds and multiple realities, and addresses how people's actions affect their local and larger worlds."<sup>4</sup> Participants themselves are making meaning from the camp experience in their own specific contexts. A study of Christian camping must take contextual differences into account rather than viewing camp as a unified whole. Cataloguing the programmatic differences and theological priorities of the various camps will provide a broad picture of camping ministry that must then be followed up by in-depth portraits of camping experiences that attend to individual perspectives and circumstances. This project adopts a mixed-methods, sequential explanatory methodology to ensure a sufficiently broad and deep picture of faith formation and Christian education in the Christian camping environment.

### **Research Question**

The purpose of the empirical portion of this project is to examine Christian summer camp as a place of ministry with young people. The primary research question is: *In what ways and to what extent does the residential Christian summer camp experience contribute to the faith formation and Christian education of adolescents in the Mainline Protestant tradition?* The research aims to deepen the understanding of Christian outdoor ministries by focusing on their primary constituency, namely, adolescents who are connected to other Christian ministries. The research question acknowledges that camps do not offer isolated experiences but rather are part of a much larger ecology of Christian instruction and formation that includes families, congregations, and educational institutions. The research, therefore, seeks to isolate the contributions of Christian residential camp experiences (independent variable) to faith

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<sup>4</sup> Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2005), 132.

formation and Christian education (the dependent variables). The challenge is to isolate the contributions that the Christian camp experience makes in connection with other experiences and the extent to which these contributions provide resonance and dissonance with other ministries.

The *residential Christian summer camp experience* is distinguished from single-day experiences and retreats in that the primary participants live together for at least three consecutive nights. It is “Christian” because it intentionally incorporates Christian beliefs and practices into the daily life of participants. The degree of this incorporation varies greatly among camps, even camps in the same denominational tradition, and this variability comprises many of the intervening variables in the study. *Faith formation* is seen as a life-long process of relating to the Holy that includes immediate experience and long-term meaning making. The complexity of this variable precludes a positivistic approach to the study. The research must attend to participants’ impressions and experiences in the moment as well as how these impressions and experiences are incorporated into their lives after the camp experience is over. *Christian education* differs from faith formation in its attention to knowledge of Christian beliefs and practices, along with how these beliefs and practices are passed on. Christian education lends itself to measurement more readily than faith formation, since growth indices can be quantified in a meaningful way. Using both faith formation and Christian education as dependent variables demands a multi-dimensional look at Christian camping ministry that attends to theoretical perspectives, theological convictions, and multiple forms of empirical data.

### **Participant Selection**

Previous chapters detailed the complexity of Christian camping ministry. The confusion evident in the literature is largely the result of conflating very different models of Christian camping ministry, and this study seeks to minimize these errors. In order to assess faith formation at camp in a manner that is sufficiently broad and deep, this study focuses on a particular cross-section of Christianity, namely Mainline Protestantism. Camping ministry in the Mainline Protestant tradition has historically maintained strong connections to congregational ministries. Mainline camps have also tended to focus on Christian nurture more than expectations for conversion experiences. These factors make camping ministry in the Mainline Protestant tradition an ideal candidate for exploration of the impact of Christian summer camp within a larger ecology of faith formation.

It is important to get the perspectives of multiple denominations, but it is also necessary to choose specific camps to include in the study, which inevitably limits the number of denominations sampled. The specific denominations coincide with those being studied by the Congregational Youth: Learning and Living the Faith (CY: LLF) project. Some of the conclusions and directions for future research that emerge from this study will undoubtedly relate to a more diverse Christian perspective of outdoor ministries. Enduring questions will remain as to the theology and meaning making of participants in other Christian outdoor ministry settings, particularly those from conservative and evangelical traditions. It is expected that faith formation and Christian education is different at Christian camps representing denominations that do not practice infant baptism and those that emphasize the believer making a decision for Christ, but future research will need to address these questions.

The CY: LLF project examines confirmation and equivalent practices in five Protestant traditions: the United Methodist Church (UMC), Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), Presbyterian Church in the USA (PC (USA)), and African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). Embedding a camp study within the larger framework of the CY: LLF project provides access to a large data pool and offers opportunities for direct comparison between educational ministries in the camp environment and those in congregations. Confirmation training remains a strong tradition in these denominations, and many congregations conduct some or all of their confirmation programs at camp.

Four of the five denominations participating in the CY: LLF project have robust camping ministry programs, including national associations of affiliated outdoor ministry sites. The AME Church is a clear outlier with regards to outdoor ministries. The denomination does not have a network of outdoor ministry programs, and camping ministry is not emphasized to the extent of the other four denominations. This disparity is an outcome of the problematic history of racial segregation in the United States and summer camping, in particular. The summer camp movement emerged largely as a white, middle-class phenomenon, while the AME tradition emerged as a black American denomination intentionally separated from white Protestantism. The CY: LLF project examines educational ministries in the AME that may be analogous to camping ministry, but future research is needed to address the distinctiveness of outdoor ministries in this tradition, as well as the attempts of reintegrating Christian summer camps across the country. This project focuses on the participating denominations that have comparable emphases on camping ministry: UMC, ELCA, PC (USA), and Episcopal Church.

Camping ministry has spread throughout the world, and some of the denominations represented are multi-national, but the study is limited to camping programs in the United States of America. The outdoor ministry networks of the four participating denominations comprise more than five hundred outdoor ministry sites and programs, not including an undetermined number of congregational camping programs unaffiliated with the networks. This project's *sequential explanatory* approach calls for a survey of all the outdoor ministry programs affiliated with the denominational networks followed by selection of four sites for qualitative visits based on the survey results.

Selection criteria for the four site visits were:

1. One site per denomination;
2. One site per major census region of the country;
3. Camping programs should exhibit connection to congregational ministries;
4. Camping programs should place high priority on faith formation and Christian education;
5. Camping programs should not represent statistical outliers in either the denomination or region in which they are located.

#### Site Selection Process

Selection of the four sites for qualitative visits began with analysis of the camp director survey data, which represented 332 individual camps. Each denomination was matched with a region of the country by applying criteria numbers three and five above. Statistical outliers were considered based on categorical data from the camp director survey. If a category accounted for at least 80% of responses, the others were considered outliers. Conversely, if a category accounted for less than 10% of responses and each

other category represented at least twice this value, it was considered an outlier. The statistical outliers were removed from the dataset as follows: **Northeast Region:** camps not certified by the American Camp Association were removed. **Midwest Region:** Episcopal camps were removed. **South Region:** ELCA camps were removed. **West Region:** camps with more than 250 acres of property were removed. **Episcopal Church:** camps with low or declining enrollment were removed. **ELCA:** camps that do not have campfire weekly or more often were removed; camps that have 250 campers or fewer each summer were removed; camps that have a person other than the cabin counselor leading Bible study were removed. **PC (USA):** camps having more than 750 campers each summer were removed. **UMC:** these camps showed no clear statistical outliers, so they all remained in the dataset. Camps were further selected based on the Congregational Connection variable, which was used to determine the degree of connection the camps had to congregational ministries.<sup>5</sup> Only those with a moderately high or very high level of connection were considered. These criteria were applied and resulted in the following number of camps from each denomination located in each region:

**Table 5-1: Number of Qualifying Camps, by Region**

	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Episcopal Church	2	0	11	2
ELCA	6	27	0	5
PC (USA)	2	9	12	4
UMC	5	19	22	8

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix E for discussion of this variable.

It was determined that at least five qualified camps should be available in order to compare programs and determine which was best suitable for a site visit. This additional stipulation meant that the Episcopal camp had to be in the South region and the Presbyterian camp had to be in the Midwest region. The ELCA was matched with the Northeast and the UMC with the West because each had more qualified camps in that region. Matching denomination with region thus narrowed the possibilities to thirty-six camps. This pool was narrowed further by considering the priority each camp places on faith formation and Christian education (criterion four).

None of the Episcopal camps offer confirmation camp programs, but four of the eleven rated the survey item “Christian education or confirmation” as “very important” or “extremely important,” and these were all considered through their website publications. The one rating the survey item as “extremely important” (All Saints Camp and Retreat Center in Pottsboro, TX) was contacted first, and the director was excited about participating in the study. Confirmation camp is not a common practice in the PC (USA), but three of the Midwest camps prioritized educational ministries, including confirmation programs and retreats. Stronghold Camp and Retreat Center (Oregon, IL) was contacted first because its relative proximity to the researcher allowed for car travel to the site. The director indicated a strong interest in participation. Confirmation camp is a widespread practice in the ELCA, so only the four Northeast camps offering these programs were considered. Camp Lutherlyn (Prospect, PA) offered multiple sessions, so it was contacted first in order to allow options for site visit dates. The director indicated strong interest in participation. The selected UMC camp directly contacted CY: LLF representatives and indicated an interest in participating in the study. Subsequent conversations determined

that the site was qualified for a visit and offered a valuable opportunity for study. The camp program was not an established camp affiliated with United Methodist Camp and Retreat Ministries but was rather a partnership between two UMC congregations that joined for a confirmation camp program every two years. The program was held at Lake Tahoe in California, so it is referred to as UMC Lake Tahoe camp.

### **Quantitative Measurements**

The research project included three streams of quantitative data. The two-wave quantitative portion of the CY: LLF study served as the first stream. It surveyed confirmation youth, parents, workers, and pastors in congregations of the five participating denominations (including the AME). The study used a population sample and surveyed participants in fall 2014 (T1) and spring 2015 (T2). Ministry leaders across the country were contacted electronically using denominational lists, and these leaders were asked to distribute questionnaires to others involved in confirmation ministries in their congregations. Several questions directly addressed Christian summer camp, and secondary analysis of these items was used to inform the present project. Since the time interval between surveys did not include the summer months, t-tests are of limited use for direct analysis of summer camp. Instead, these data provide evidence of how the camp experience functions as part of a larger ecology of faith formation and Christian education in congregations and homes.

The second stream of quantitative data came from the survey of camp leadership personnel in camps affiliated with the four denominations involved in the project (excluding the AME). The questionnaire was developed and field-tested with a group of camp program staff in spring 2014. Questionnaires were distributed to camp leaders in



fall 2014 using contact lists of the camping organizations affiliated with the participating denominations. The program Survey Monkey was used to facilitate survey completion and data entry. These organizations included Lutheran Outdoor Ministries, Presbyterian Church Camp and Conference Association, Episcopal Camps and Conference Centers, and United Methodist Camp and Retreat Ministries. Data from the survey reveal the landscape of Christian camping ministry in relation to programmatic differences, theological priorities, and size variation. They were used to characterize and categorize Christian camping ministry in the different traditions, facilitating the process of site selection for qualitative visits.

The third stream of quantitative data came from camp participants themselves. This stream was nested in the qualitative portion of the study. Participants at each of the four visited sites completed questionnaires on the first day of camp (t1) and the last day of camp (t2). They were also asked to provide an e-mail address for distribution of a third questionnaire (t3). Those providing e-mail addresses were sent the t3 questionnaire electronically, with an embedded link to the Survey Monkey instrument, six-to-eight weeks after the camp experience. The questionnaires were field-tested in spring 2015 with a group of confirmation students who had recently attended camp. This third stream of quantitative data, unlike the other two streams, is not generalizable to all camping ministries in the denominations studied. The data provide important information about the particular sites that were visited and the religious lives of the participants away from camp. The survey also offers data on the ongoing effects of the camp experience. These three streams of quantitative data, from congregations, camping leaders, and camp

participants, combine to provide a rich perspective of Christian camping ministry in the Mainline Protestant traditions studied. Results are detailed in chapter 6.

### **Qualitative Methodology**

John Creswell argues that the intent of the sequential explanatory methodology “is to have the qualitative data help to provide more depth, more insight into the quantitative results.”<sup>6</sup> The quantitative results in this study that the qualitative data build on are the first two streams of data listed above, particularly the survey of camp directors. The four sites selected for visits represent a particular cross-section of camping ministry in the Mainline Protestant tradition: camps that nurture strong connections to congregational ministries and prioritize Christian education and faith formation in their programs. The survey of camp directors indicates that just over half of the camps in the four denominations studied satisfy these criteria. The site visits add depth and insight into the particularities that contribute to faith formation and Christian education in these environments.

### **Portraiture**

We have noted the need to break with the positivist paradigm and move beyond the assumptions of a white male worldview. Hopkins and Fulkerson have helped us recognize the need to attend to diverse perspectives, and we turn to the innovative work of Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot to help us respond intentionally. She pioneered the research methodology of *portraiture* as a way of attending deeply to contextual realities, including

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<sup>6</sup> John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014), 225.

aesthetics.<sup>7</sup> The methodology was subsequently refined and documented in partnership with Jessica Hoffmann Davis, whose work *Safe Havens* demonstrates that portraiture is a robust form of social-science research that can be used in multiple settings.<sup>8</sup> In Lawrence-Lightfoot's words, "Portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life."<sup>9</sup>

Portraiture shares some traits with *grounded theory* in its approach to data collection and analysis. Data are analyzed at each stage of the research project, and further data are collected based on directions provided by the analysis. It is also similar to grounded theory in its *constructivist* approach. Portraiture seeks to explore and understand more than it seeks to test or prove. As Lawrence-Lightfoot puts it, a portraitist "hopes to generate theory, not prove prior theoretical propositions."<sup>10</sup> Two distinguishing characteristics of portraiture are its prioritizing of authenticity and its honest attention to the perspective of the researcher. The portrait must look and feel authentic to the subjects of the research, so their perspectives are attended to closely at each stage of data collection and analysis. Lawrence-Lightfoot's description highlights why this particular methodology is so compatible with our theological understanding of relationality and quest for genuine encounter with the other: "I wanted the subjects to feel *seen* as I had

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<sup>7</sup> Lawrence-Lightfoot's pioneering project is found in Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot, *The Good High School: Portraits of Character and Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

<sup>8</sup> Jessica Hoffmann Davis, *Safe Havens: Portraits of Educational Effectiveness in Community Art Centers that Focus on Education in Economically Disadvantaged Communities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Project Zero, Harvard University, 1993).

<sup>9</sup> Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot and Jessica Hoffmann Davis, *The Art and Science of Portraiture* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), xv.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 186.

felt seen – fully attended to, recognized, appreciated, respected, scrutinized.”<sup>11</sup> Similar to ethnography, portraiture embeds the researcher into the context being studied, so the researcher’s role of guest and participant become part of the data collection. Portraiture is particularly suitable to the camp environment, where the best way to gain an understanding is through participation rather than mere observation and where unique sounds, smells, and sights are essential to the experience. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis systematize their approach by attending to five aspects of portraiture: context, voice, relationship, emergent themes, and aesthetic whole.<sup>12</sup>

### **Biblical and Theological Foundations for Portraiture**

The story of God’s relationship with humankind is one of giving voice to the voiceless. Throughout the biblical narrative, God is concerned with those who lack power and privilege, particularly the enslaved, the orphans, the resident aliens, and the widows. God’s solidarity on behalf of the underprivileged culminates in the incarnation of Jesus Christ, through whom God experiences the joys and sufferings of human existence in order to redeem a fallen humanity. A theology of the cross proclaims a God who does not remain aloof in heaven but rather becomes incarnate in places that were once considered godforsaken. The biblical narrative also attests to a God who listens to the prayers of sinful humanity, even to the point of changing God’s mind, as in such cases as Abraham (Genesis 18:22-33) and Moses (Exodus 32:7-14). Jesus himself changes his method of interacting with the Syrophenician woman when he attends to her story (Matthew 15:21-28).

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 5.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 39-281.

Portraiture seeks to conduct research on human subjects in a way that honors their humanity and their uniqueness. It does this by deeply listening to each subject at every stage of data collection and intentionally seeking to portray the subjects in generous, authentic ways. Data collected from human subjects that do not fit into existing assumptions have the power to transform the theories themselves. The deficiency is not in the human subject as a deviation from the norm but rather in the theory. The marginalized and the statistical *outliers* have significant voices in portraiture. The methodology also approaches humanity in a holistic way that takes account of the human affinity for art, music, and culture. The portraitist walks alongside the subject of research to appreciate and provide an account of the experience in a way that is authentic to the subject.

#### Data Collection and Analysis

The four site visits took place in June and July of 2015. Considerable data were gathered prior to each camp visit, in accordance with the methods of portraiture. The primary source of pre-visit data was a structured interview with camp leadership personnel. These interviews provided information about organizational priorities, program specifics, and commitments of the camps. The interview data were considered alongside camp promotional documents and websites to help tailor the specifics for the site visits. The primary concerns were the specific dates for the visits and the programs to be considered. In order to maintain consistency of data collection for purposes of comparison, it was determined that each site visit would include a minimum of three consecutive days and two overnights for participant observation, which would be recorded as field notes. Each visit would also include a minimum of three focus groups: one focus group with camp staff members directly responsible for the care and

supervision of youth participants and two focus groups with the youth participants themselves. Scheduling these three focus groups was a priority of each camp visit and helped determine the dates for attendance. During the site visits, data were considered at the end of each day to form emerging theories that were then tested in subsequent days. Lawrence-Lightfoot states, “With each stage of data collection, at the close of each day, the portraitist gathers, scrutinizes, and organizes the data, and tries to make sense of what she has witnessed.”<sup>13</sup> These notes, documented in what she calls “an ‘Impressionistic Record,’” served an important role in directing the research project, and they were also valuable data for analysis and inclusion in the consideration of the emerging portraits.<sup>14</sup> They are similar to what Charmaz describes as “memo writing.”<sup>15</sup>

The three focus groups, one camp director interview, and site visit field notes served as the main streams of data for each of the four sites. The protocols for the focus groups and interviews were developed and field-tested in spring 2015, prior to the site visits. All interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions and field notes were imported into the software program NVivo 10 for coding and analysis.<sup>16</sup> Data analysis proceeded according to coding methods outlined by Charmaz, who, like the pioneers of portraiture, emphasizes the need to analyze data as they are collected.<sup>17</sup> Interview and focus group transcriptions were coded in a multi-stage process involving Charmaz’s definitions of initial coding, focused coding, axial coding,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 187.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 188.

<sup>15</sup> Charmaz, 72-95.

<sup>16</sup> QSR International, “NVivo 10,” <http://www.qsrinternational.com> (accessed March 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 13-41.

and theoretical coding.<sup>18</sup> Initial coding for each transcript followed a line-by-line method, allowing otherwise unseen codes to emerge from particular lines of transcription data. *In vivo* coding, which makes use of exact quotes or idioms from transcription data, was used as much as possible to stay close to the data during the initial coding. At each stage of the analysis, the researcher used focused coding to bring together the various codes from the initial coding. These focused codes were then arranged in relationship with one another and across transcripts through the process of axial coding. The final layer of coding is theoretical coding, which brings together the emerging focused and axial codes into cohesive theories that can be modified throughout the study based on new data.

All quantitative data were imported into the software program IBM SPSS 22 and subjected to statistical analyses.<sup>19</sup> The CY: LLF national survey data were input and cleaned by a professional research organization, and the dataset was acquired by this project for secondary analysis. The camp director survey was completed online, so data entry was not required. Some camps provided duplicate questionnaires. In these cases, the most complete questionnaire was kept and the others removed from the dataset. In the cases in which multiple questionnaires were completed for a single camp, the one completed by the senior staff member was kept and the others removed from the dataset. These measures ensured that each of the 332 camps was represented only once in the dataset. Designated camp staff members administered the camp participant questionnaires, since the researcher was not on site for the first and last days of camp. The questionnaires were collected and mailed to the researcher, who input the data into

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid, 45-71.

<sup>19</sup> IBM, "IBM SPSS Statistics 22," <http://www-01.ibm.com/software/analytics/spss/> (accessed March 2015).

SPSS. A second person verified the data entry using a random selection of respondents from each camp. The campers invited to complete the questionnaires were those participating in the specific programs that the site visits targeted. In addition, camps were invited to administer the questionnaires to a second group of campers during another week of the summer. This was done to increase the size of the dataset and allow for comparison of multiple programs within the same camp. Two camps (Stronghold and All Saints) decided to survey a second group. In both cases, these additional groups were in the same age group programs (middle school) as the programs involved in the site visits. Each camp participant entered a unique code on the questionnaires, which allowed t1 and t2 questionnaires to be matched without identifying camper names. This method allowed for 83% of questionnaires to be paired. Camp participants were invited to provide an e-mail address to receive the t3 survey, and 62% of participants provided e-mail addresses. Links to the t3 survey were sent to these addresses beginning six weeks after the camp experience. Reminders were sent in each of the subsequent two weeks. The response rate was low, so additional reminders were sent in October and November 2015, making the response window for the t3 survey between six and twenty-four weeks after the camp experience. The reminders were able to garner the desired responses (more than thirty) to effectively conduct statistical analyses of the data.

An essential piece of the portraiture methodology is incorporating constructive feedback from the participants as part of the writing process. This ensures that the resulting portrait looks and feels authentic to the primary stakeholders. Each site visit therefore resulted in its own *portrait*, a document of around ten thousand words that incorporated data from the camp's promotional materials, site visit, interviews, focus



groups, and participant surveys into a rich narrative that was then sent back to the camp directors for feedback about its accuracy and feeling of authenticity. This feedback resulted in a dialogical process that involved the subjects in the final editing of the portraits. The composition of these four portraits served as an additional layer of data analysis for this project. The particular contextual realities of each site were deeply analyzed during the portrait writing before any meta-analysis began. After composition and authentication of the portraits, the researcher returned to the data to consider themes that were emergent from the project as a whole. The results of these analyses are detailed in chapter 7.

### **Ethical Concerns**

The researcher attended carefully to ethical concerns throughout the research process. The researcher received formal training in qualitative research methodology with a team of researchers from the CY: LLF project at Princeton Theological Seminary. The researcher has also completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) certification in the protection of human research participants. Research methods and design are in compliance with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements of Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota.

The primary ethical concern in this research pertains to the human subjects. Every survey participant gave implied consent. Every interviewee and focus group participant gave informed consent before participating in the research process (see Appendix C). They were informed of the purpose for the research and how their data would be used. Pseudonyms are used, when appropriate, to protect identity of participants, though camp directors consented to have their names identified.

This research draws data from human subjects in vulnerable populations, namely persons under the age of eighteen. Parents or legal guardians gave written permission for all minors who participated in this research (see Appendix C). In addition, the minors involved in focus groups were informed of the nature and purpose for the research, and they gave verbal consent to participate (see Appendix C). These verbal agreements were recorded along with the entirety of the focus group interviews. In addition to the researcher, at least one other adult was present during all focus groups with minors. The researcher did not participate in individual interviews with minors.

All interview and focus group data were audio-recorded digitally in order to ensure accuracy and minimize researcher bias. These recordings were transcribed in digital format. All audio files, transcriptions, and survey data were stored electronically on a password protected hard drive. Data provided through online questionnaires are protected by passwords and the security of Survey Monkey. Paper questionnaires were stored in a locked file drawer. After completion of the research project, raw data will be kept on the password protected hard drive and in the locked file drawer in order to remain available to address questions about the research, including ethical concerns. The data will be kept for three years after completion of the research project, after which time the hard drive will be erased and the paper questionnaires will be destroyed.

This research is being conducted parallel to and using data from the CY: LLF project. The researcher has maintained consistent communication with the co-directors of the CY: LLF project in order to ensure ethical use of the project's data. Funding for the CY: LLF project is provided by a grant from Lilly Endowment, Inc. of Indianapolis, Indiana. Since the two research projects overlap, funds from the grant directly benefit the

present study. The researcher has maintained consistent communication with the grant administrator to ensure ethical use of the grant funds and necessary communications with Lilly Endowment, Inc.

### **Conclusion**

This project approaches the descriptive-empirical task of practical theology by presenting groundbreaking research on Christian camping ministry. The reliance on anecdotal evidence in much of the literature has done damage to the scholarly understanding of camping ministry. This project departs decisively from this anecdotal and often dismissive approach by attending deeply to specific contexts and searching for patterns of how the camp experience contributes to faith formation and Christian education.

This project adopted a sequential explanatory methodology. Four site visits added depth and clarity to the generalizable results of two streams of quantitative data coming from congregational leaders and camp leaders. A third stream of quantitative data (from the camp participants themselves) was nested in the qualitative methodology. The method of portraiture is especially suited to the experiential, tactile environment of summer camp. The composition of an individual portrait for each site added an important layer to the data analysis that allowed the research subjects to participate in the process and ensured that each site was considered fully as its own unique ministry context.

## CHAPTER 6

### QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

#### **Introduction**

The quantitative data for this project come from three streams: the national survey of confirmation leaders, the national survey of camp leaders, and the three-phase survey of camp participants from the sites visited. The original design called for using data from two national surveys conducted as part of the Congregational Youth: Learning and Living the Faith (CY: LLF) project. The national survey of confirmation leaders comes from the CY: LLF data set, and it is included in this project. The other was a national survey of confirmation participants. The CY: LLF project conducted this survey electronically in 2014-2015 and received insufficient responses to claim generalizable results. Moreover, an unauthorized user accessed the online survey and provided fraudulent data for a large number of cases, so the confirmation participant survey is excluded entirely from the present study. Each of the three remaining streams of quantitative data is reported separately below.

#### **CY: LLF Leader Survey**

The CY: LLF Leader Survey was conducted via e-mail in October 2014 to clergy in the United Methodist Church (UMC), Presbyterian Church (PC-USA), Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), and African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME). Walker Research administered the survey process and

collected responses on behalf of the CY: LLF research team. The data set was made available for the present study after it was cleaned and coded. This study focuses on data from the Episcopal Church, ELCA, PC (USA), and UMC. All other denominations represented, including the few AME cases that were gathered, are referred to as “other.” There were 1450 survey respondents that answered affirmatively to, “Are you the main person in your congregation who is in charge of youth discipleship programming?” This affirmative answer allowed them to answer a set of questions about the leadership of congregational education programs. The result was that, while multiple ministry leaders from a single congregation could respond to parts of the survey, only one leader from each congregation responded to the leader section.

The respondents have a good distribution across categories of sex, age, denomination, and region of the country. Respondents are 52% male and 48% female. Age distribution is: 20% ages 18-35, 23% 36-49, 30% 50-59, 19% 60-65, and 8% over 65. Broken down by denomination, 29% represent ELCA ministries, 18% Episcopal Church, 12% PC (USA), 38% UMC, and 4% AME or other. In terms of region, 17% are located in the Northeast, 42% in the Midwest, 30% in the South, and 11% in the West. All 50 states are represented, along with the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico.

Table 6-1 compares the geographic distribution of the cases represented in the sample with the distribution of all congregations in each denomination.<sup>1</sup> This table is evidence for the strength of the sample in providing generalizable data. Congregational

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<sup>1</sup> Data representing all congregations located in the United States come from the *U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations and Membership Study, 2010 (State File)*. The data were downloaded from the Association of Religion Data Archives, [www.TheARDA.com](http://www.TheARDA.com), and were collected by Clifford Grammich, Kirk Hadaway, Richard Houseal, Dale E. Jones, Alexei Krindatch, Richie Stanley, and Richard H. Taylor.

distribution is remarkably similar between the sample and all cases in both the Episcopal Church and PC (USA). ELCA congregations in the Midwest are overrepresented in the sample. UMC congregations in the Midwest are also overrepresented, while those in the South are underrepresented.

**Table 6-1: Percentage of Congregations by Denomination in Each Census Region - Sample Compared with All Congregations**

	Episcopal		ELCA		PC (USA)		UMC	
	Sample	All	Sample	All	Sample	All	Sample	All
Northeast	24%	27%	15%	20%	22%	20%	16%	15%
Midwest	21%	18%	62%	49%	28%	27%	37%	27%
South	39%	38%	12%	17%	36%	39%	40%	53%
West	17%	16%	11%	13%	14%	13%	7%	6%

There are some important consistencies in confirmation training across all four denominations. The median starting age of ELCA, PC (USA), and UMC confirmation students is twelve, and it is thirteen for Episcopal confirmands. Across all four denominations, 81% of students begin confirmation between the ages of eleven and thirteen, making middle school the primary age group for confirmation training. Classroom instruction is the dominant form of confirmation training in all four denominations. Fully 94% of programs require class attendance, and 93% have class sessions lasting between a half hour and two hours. The data indicate that teaching methods during these classroom sessions vary widely, but, as we will see in Table 6-4, a large majority of programs use a combination of didactic and participatory teaching methods. Fully 73% of programs use lecture, PowerPoint, or both as teaching methods,

and 65% require homework. However, 64% indicate using “hands-on learning (such as volunteering with the poor to learn about poverty),” 46% using “experiencing Christian practices,” and 59% using “games” as teaching methods in their confirmation programs. Taken together, 81% of programs use at least one of these methods. The most common and consistent teaching method is “group discussions”; 95% of programs use this method of instruction.

**Table 6-2: Level of Importance Given to Goals and Priorities of Confirmation**

	N	Likert Score Average	% Not important at all or Not very important	% Somewhat important	% Very or Extremely important
Experience community	1439	4.44	1.1%	7.2%	91.7%
Experience the presence of God	1422	4.56	0.8	6.8	92.4
Become more familiar with the Bible	1441	4.38	1.2	11.0	87.8
Develop personal point of view of own faith	1439	4.53	0.8	7.7	91.5
Develop a sense of belonging to the congregation	1436	4.44	0.9	7.2	91.9
Learn central Christian texts by heart	1436	3.00	32.8	36.7	30.7
Contribute own ideas to worship services	1432	3.87	5.7	25.6	68.6
Participate in leading worship services	1436	4.19	3.2	14.2	82.9
Learn to live everyday life in relationship to God	1423	4.59	0.4	4.4	95.2
Be allowed to decide topics with peers	1431	3.18	23.7	40.0	36.4
Have a lot of fun	1437	3.47	11.2	43.4	45.4
Get to raise questions concerning faith	1431	4.71	0.2	2.8	97.0

It is important to note that direct instruction is dominant, even though participatory methods are used. Table 6-2 helps tell this story. Only 36.4% of leaders indicated it is “very important” or “extremely important” that students should be allowed to decide topics with their peers, and only 45.4% rated the item “students should have a lot of fun” as “very important” or “extremely important.” Raising questions about the faith is strongly encouraged, but contributing ideas to the curriculum itself or to worship services is encouraged far less often. Confirmation instruction looks like a classroom for the vast majority of young people. It is not meant to be fun, and students are seldom given ownership of their own learning. The emphasis is on learning content.

In addition to utilizing a classroom model, the educational topics that leaders rank as most important are also remarkably consistent across the denominations. The top five topics overall are Bible, baptism, communion, God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), and experiences of or encounters with God. They diverge from there in accordance with denominational priorities (e.g. Lutherans place more emphasis on elements of the catechism like the Apostle’s Creed), but the consistency at the top is noteworthy, especially since three of these top five priorities (excluding the two sacraments) are the topics that camp participants from the site visits identify learning most (as we will see below).



**Table 6-3: Duration of Confirmation Programs by Denomination**

	<b>Episcopal</b>	<b>ELCA</b>	<b>PC (USA)</b>	<b>UMC</b>
<i>Value of N</i>	246	408	166	532
0-3 months	39.8%	0.2%	31.3%	42.1%
4-6 months	27.2	2.0	28.3	29.3
7-12 months	24.4	8.6	35.5	22.0
13-24 months	6.5	51.2	4.2	5.6
> 2 years	2.0	38.0	0.6	0.9
<b>Median duration</b>	5 months	24 months	6 months	4 months

**Table 6-4: Methods of Instruction Used**

	<b>Episcopal</b>	<b>ELCA</b>	<b>PC (USA)</b>	<b>UMC</b>	<b>Total</b>
Quizzes or tests***	14%	38%	21%	29%	28%
Lecture	58	67	65	68	66
PowerPoint***	21	45	21	37	35
Catechisms***	41	76	37	6	37
Memorization***	17	36	33	28	29
Group discussions	94	95	98	95	95
Hands-on learning***	55	69	57	67	64
Christian practices*	50	40	48	49	46
Games***	39	67	61	62	59
Videos***	50	75	55	58	61
Inter-religious dialogue*	18	15	15	22	18
Guest speakers	39	34	35	37	36
Mentors**	51	52	63	62	57
Workbooks***	26	35	49	60	45
Online resources*	30	37	26	31	32
Field trips***	38	38	36	51	43
Group Bible study***	59	81	84	75	75
Inquiry-led discussion	60	67	66	62	64
Faith practices at home with parents***	25	51	28	46	41
Faith practices at home alone***	38	33	54	48	42
<b>Avg. number of methods used</b>	8.23	10.49	9.48	9.93	9.73

Asterisks indicate that the chi-square is significant for this variable when the four denominations are compared. \*p<.05, \*\*p<.01, \*\*\*p<.001

**Table 6-5: Confirmation Program Activities Required and Optional**

		<b>Episcopal</b>	<b>ELCA</b>	<b>PC (USA)</b>	<b>UMC</b>
<b>Writing a faith statement</b> $X^2_{(6)} = 116.241$ , $p < .001$ , $N = 1328$	Required	39%	65%	83%	50%
	Optional	24%	12%	13%	27%
	Not offered	36%	24%	4%	24%
<b>Presenting a statement of faith</b> $X^2_{(6)} = 283.527$ , $p < .001$ , $N = 1294$	Required	8%	32%	82%	23%
	Optional	17%	13%	10%	21%
	Not offered	75%	55%	8%	56%
<b>Sunday worship service attendance</b> $X^2_{(6)} = 17.975$ , $p < .01$ , $N = 1346$	Required	73%	83%	71%	78%
	Optional	27%	17%	28%	20%
	Not offered	-	-	-	2%
<b>Classes for parents of confirmands</b> <i>Chi-square not significant</i> , $N = 1322$	Required	15%	17%	19%	15%
	Optional	31%	26%	18%	30%
	Not offered	54%	57%	63%	55%
<b>Confirmation camp</b> $X^2_{(6)} = 226.365$ , $p < .001$ , $N = 1311$	Required	2%	18%	-	4%
	Optional	9%	34%	7%	14%
	Not offered	89%	48%	93%	82%
<b>Confirmation retreat</b> $X^2_{(6)} = 42.675$ , $p < .001$ , $N = 1323$	Required	28%	32%	39%	35%
	Optional	17%	32%	14%	22%
	Not offered	56%	36%	47%	43%
<b>Mission/Service Projects or Trips</b> $X^2_{(6)} = 49.871$ , $p < .001$ , $N = 1334$	Required	34%	37%	42%	45%
	Optional	31%	47%	34%	36%
	Not offered	36%	16%	23%	19%
<b>Class attendance</b> <i>Chi-square not significant</i> , $N = 1347$	Required	93%	95%	97%	94%
	Optional	6%	5%	3%	4%
	Not offered	-	-	-	1%
<b>Homework</b> $X^2_{(6)} = 92.854$ , $p < .001$ , $N = 1319$	Required	63%	49%	73%	76%
	Optional	24%	32%	24%	18%
	Not offered	13%	19%	3%	6%

Tables 6-3, 6-4, and 6-5 show that the four denominations diverge sharply in several areas. Sixteen of the twenty methods of instruction (see Table 6-4) and seven of the nine program activities (see Table 6-5) that were measured in the survey have significant differences among the four denominations. There are certain differences particular to denominations, such as the Lutheran tendency to teach from the catechism and the Presbyterian tendency to require the presentation of faith statements. Differences that are of primary importance to the present study are program duration (see Table 6-3) and program activities required (see Table 6-5). Program duration explains many of the other variations among the denominations. Confirmation training in the ELCA is considerably longer than programs in the other three denominations. The majority of programs in each of the other three denominations are no more than six months in duration, while 89% of ELCA programs are longer than a year. The considerably longer duration of programs allows opportunity to use more teaching methods, and ELCA programs indicated using the most methods on average. More important for the present study, the ELCA is the only denomination in which confirmation camp is likely to be an option, since it is the only denomination in which confirmation programs are likely to last through the summer months. This is instructive when considering the camp variable in Table 6-5. More than half of ELCA confirmation programs either require attendance at camp or offer it as an option, but confirmation camp is comparatively rare in the other three denominations, particularly in the PC (USA). Confirmation retreats are much more common across all four denominations. The survey did not specify whether or not the retreat was held at a camp but only that it included one or two overnights. The specifics remain unclear as to how camps and retreats are connected.

### Implications of the CY: LLF Leader Survey

The results of the leader survey have important implications for Christian camping ministry. The data demonstrate that confirmation training programs rely on a classroom model as the primary means of instruction. Programs in all four denominations are incorporating multiple methods that take into account various learning styles, but it is clear that most of these are being incorporated into the classroom setting. Classes are patterned after the school classroom and meet regularly over a set period of time, with an emphasis on learning content. This model of education is so deeply ingrained into the American educational system that it is difficult for some to consider non-classroom settings like the camp environment as Christian education.

Confirmation camp is clearly a widespread practice in the ELCA, but it is rare in the other three denominations. This is an indication that camp itself functions differently across denominational lines. Confirmation training is an important educational ministry of all four denominations. This ministry is given such high value and is so ubiquitous that the methods used in confirmation ministries are indicative of the methods used in other educational ministries. The widespread inclusion of camp as part of confirmation training in the ELCA normalizes camp as a potential locus of Christian education, and this affects the overall perception of camping ministry at the denominational level. This normalization is not present in the other denominations to the same degree, resulting in a greater disconnect between the educational ministries of congregations and those of camps. This disconnect is quantifiable in the camp leader survey, which will be considered next.

## **Camp Leader Survey**

The Camp Leader Survey was conducted in fall 2014 among camps affiliated with the camping organizations of the four participating denominations: Lutheran Outdoor Ministries, Presbyterian Church Camp and Conference Association, Episcopal Camps and Conference Centers, and United Methodist Camp and Retreat Ministries. The survey collected data from 332 unique camps, representing a 61.9% response rate. Responding camps represent all fifty states. They reported serving a total of 179,126 youth summer campers in 2014, employing 9,269 summer staff members, and serving 7,515 families in Family Camp programs. Of the responding camps, 15.9% are affiliated with the Episcopal Church, 25.9% with the ELCA, 22.3% with the PC (USA), 33.7% with the UMC, and 4.2% not directly affiliated with these denominations but associated with the camping organizations. Several camps are affiliated with multiple denominations.

### Demographic Data and General Camp Statistics

#### **Geographic Location:**

- 15.9% located in Northeast census region
- 34.1% in Midwest census region
- 31.1% in South census region
- 18.9% in West census region

ELCA camps are heavily concentrated in the Midwest (61.2%, compared with 24.7% of non-ELCA camps). Episcopal camps are heavily concentrated in the South (49.1% compared with 27.6% of non-Episcopal camps).

#### **Size (Acreage):**

- 30.6% had less than 100 acres of property (or no property)

- 32.2% had 101-250 acres
- 20.4% had 251-500 acres
- 16.8% had more than 500 acres

**Budget:**

- 22.4% had an annual budget of less than \$250k
- 29.5% \$251-500k
- 27.6% \$501k-\$1 million
- 20.4% more than \$1 million

**Full-time Employment:**

- 8.0% had no full-time staff members
- 16.9% employed 1 full-time staff member
- 32.5% employed 2-3
- 16.6% employed 4-5
- 16.9% employed 6-10
- 9.2% employed 11 or more

**Summer Camp Numbers:**

- 28.1% had 250 or fewer residential summer campers in 2014
- 29.8% had 251-500
- 26.9% had 501-1000
- 15.3% had more than 1000 campers

ELCA camps tended to have more summer campers than camps in the other denominations. Fully 44% of ELCA camps had more than 750 campers in 2014, compared with 20.7% of non-ELCA camps. Only 10.7% of ELCA camps had 250 or

fewer campers, compared with 33.9% of non-ELCA camps. This variable is significant:  $X^2_{(7)} = 27.596$ ,  $p < .001$ . PC (USA) camps tend to have the fewest summer campers: 77.5% of PC (USA) camps had 500 or fewer campers, compared with 51.9% of other camps.

**Diversity:**

- 31.9% reported that less than 5% of campers are racial minorities
- 34.5% reported 5-10%
- 19.4% reported 11-25%
- 11.2% reported more than 25%
- 2.9% responded, “Unsure”

**Financial Assistance:**

- 16.0% reported less than 10% of summer campers received financial assistance
- 41.7% reported 10-25%
- 18.6% reported 26-50%
- 16.9% reported more than 50%
- 6.8% responded, “Unsure”

**Camp Directors/Executive Directors:**

- 74.0% were male
- 51.6% had been in current position for six or more years
- 92.5% had a four-year degree or higher level of education
- 29.6% had a masters degree or higher in a religious field (20.7% had a Master of Divinity degree)
- 26.8% had no formal theological education

**Other statistics:**

- 99.0% of camps were co-educational
- 50.5% were accredited by the American Camp Association (ACA)
- Average cost of one week of summer camp in 2014: \$383
- Average weekly summer staff salary in 2014: \$223

**Observations:**

Responding camps are diverse in terms of geographic location, physical size, the size of the camp operation, and denominational affiliation. The distribution of data, along with the high response rate, suggests a very strong data set. Denominational camps tend to be small organizations with low annual budgets and few full-time staff members, though a few camps are considerably larger than the rest. Summer campers are overwhelmingly white at the majority of camps, reflecting the demographic realities of Mainline Protestantism. The gender disparity among camp directors is pronounced, and it is noteworthy that more than a quarter of directors have no theological training. These data serve as an important marker of the differences between camp leadership and congregational leadership. The CY: LLF Leader Survey shows that just over half of confirmation program leaders are male, and 68.8 percent are ordained clergy members. Camp leaders are much more likely to be male and much less likely to have formal theological training than their congregational counterparts.

### Camp Programs and Philosophy

The Camp Leader Survey was designed to determine the program philosophy of camping programs. The survey focused predominantly on summer camp, though several variables also give indications of how summer camp fits into the other operations of the camp, particularly retreat programs. Much of the program philosophy is determined by a



series of five-point Likert-type questions. One section asked the degree to which the camp philosophy agreed with a given statement (from 1 – “strongly disagree” to 5 – “strongly agree”). The other section asked the level of importance the camp places on certain concepts or programs (from 1 – “not important at all” to 5 – “extremely important”). The items that overtly reference the faith teachings of the camp are examined in the next section.

**Table 6-6: Degree of Agreement with Program Statements**

	N	Likert Score Mean	% Strongly or Moderately Disagree	% Neither agree nor Disagree	% Moderately or Strongly Agree
The most important part of our camp day is the large group games/activities.	297	2.58	48.1%	35.7%	16.2%
The most important part of our camp day is the small group experience.	300	4.10	4.0	17.3	78.7
Camp is a place to unplug from technology.	301	4.59	3.0	4.0	93.0
Our camp has a strong focus on nature/creation learning and stewardship.	299	3.74	14.0	19.1	66.9
Our camp emphasizes summer staff formation as much as camper formation.	293	4.31	3.8	10.6	85.7
Summer camp is the most important aspect of our ministries.	295	4.09	8.1	15.9	75.9
Our camp is a place where people encounter diversity.	301	3.96	8.6	18.6	72.8

**Table 6-7: Importance Placed on Programmatic Concerns**

	N	Likert Score Mean	% Not important at all or Not very important	% Somewhat important	% Very or Extremely important
Fun for all participants	305	4.36	0.3%	7.5%	92.1%
Fellowship/community building	305	4.79	0.0	1.0	99.0
Self-esteem/character building	305	4.53	0.7	4.3	95.1
Peace and justice awareness	305	3.65	8.9	34.8	56.4
Strengthen/support families	304	4.00	3.9	22.4	73.7
Knowledge of and fellowship with creation	305	3.98	5.2	22.3	72.5
Participant safety	305	4.89	0.0	1.0	99.0
Taking a stand on moral/ethical issues	303	3.29	20.1	38.0	41.9

The data demonstrate that summer camp remains the primary ministry of outdoor ministry organizations affiliated with these four denominations. Retreats and conferences have risen in popularity over the past thirty years, but they have yet to supplant summer camp as the primary ministry focus in a large majority of outdoor ministry sites. Fully 75.9% of the camps moderately agree or strongly agree with the statement, “Summer camp is the most important aspect of our ministries” (see Table 6-6). In contrast, only 8.1% moderately or strongly *disagree* with this statement, and these likely represent the organizations that offer retreats and conferences but few or no summer camp programs. Data from retreat questions in the survey indicate that only 7.0% of camps do not offer retreats or rental facilities for guest groups to use, so we can surmise that these sites remain summer camp only. The picture that emerges, therefore, is that about 85% of organizations offer a combination of summer camp programs and retreats or conferences. Summer camp remains the focus of ministry in these organizations, even many in which retreat programs bring in a larger share of revenue than summer camp.

**Table 6-8: Frequency of Summer Camp Activities**

	N	“Rarely/never” or “less than weekly”	“Weekly” or “a few times per week”	“Daily” or “many times per day”
Large group games	301	2.7%	26.9%	70.4%
Group building/ challenge course	294	6.5	68.7	24.8
Group Bible study	299	5.0	5.0	90.0
Worship	301	1.4	12.6	86.0
Group singing	300	0.7	3.0	96.3
Campfire	298	3.0	46.3	50.7
Group prayer	298	0.7	1.6	97.7
Personal prayer/ meditation	296	7.4	29.4	63.2
Outdoor Cooking	287	34.5	57.8	7.7
Free choice time	295	14.6	27.5	58.0
Hear inspirational speakers (not staff)	288	49.3	23.3	27.4
Use/see multi-media/technology	295	40.3	30.5	29.2
Environmental education	297	14.8	56.6	28.6
Outdoor Adventure activities	292	8.6	51.7	39.7
Chance to publicly profess faith	287	23.0	48.8	28.2

Tables 6-6, 6-7, and 6-8 help to paint the picture of summer camp across the four denominations. Table 6-8 shows the percentage of camps that offer certain programs and activities in various frequencies. This table shows the incredible diversity of programming across the camp spectrum. As noted at the beginning of this project, it is not the apparatus of camp that makes the playground. Camps may look and feel very different from each other, and they defy easy categorization. They all tend to emphasize small group ministry, though some have more of a large-group, *centralized* program than others. They all use the outdoors in their programs, but the degree to which they use the outdoors varies greatly. Some camps have participants cook meals over an open fire and participate in outdoor adventure activities on a daily basis, while other camps take place largely indoors and incorporate a great deal of technology in their programming. People may define *camp* very differently because their experiences are so different. Bug bites, tents, and marshmallows cannot be assumed. Neither can air conditioned cabins, projector screens, and inspirational rallies.

Some of the differences are clear across denominational lines. Since several camps are affiliated with more than one denomination, independent t-tests comparing a single denomination to the aggregate of all the others are used instead of ANOVA analysis. Episcopal camps offer group Bible study significantly less often on average than camps in the other denominations,  $t_{(49)} = -3.760$ ,  $p < .001$ . Only 66% of Episcopal camps offer Bible study daily or more often, compared with 94% of non-Episcopal camps. This programmatic difference is the first of many markers related to the tendency of Episcopal camps to place less emphasis on faith formation and Christian education. Other markers will be examined in the next section. Closely related to this finding about Bible study frequency are denominational differences regarding who leads Bible studies at camp. Visiting clergy are most likely to lead Bible study at Episcopal camps (43% of camps), followed by the cabin counselor (18%), and other staff members specializing in Bible study leadership (18%). ELCA camps are most likely to have cabin counselors leading Bible study (80%), while visiting clergy (9%) and other staff members (8%) are used much less frequently. PC (USA) and UMC camps are more evenly split among the three groups of leaders, though both use cabin counselors at the highest rate (42% and 53%, respectively) and visiting clergy members at about one in four of their camps (25% and 28%, respectively). Bible study leadership is an important programmatic concern because it speaks to the compartmentalization of religious education from other camp activities. Camps that entrust Bible study leadership to the cabin counselors facilitate continuity with all aspects of camp programming because the person in charge of religious instruction is also leading games, group building, and late-night discussions. Using specialists or visiting clergy, on the other hand, professionalizes the religious education

of camp and increases the likelihood of faith being compartmentalized rather than permeating the entire camp experience. This observation is confirmed below in the analysis of camp types, which shows that Episcopal camps are the most likely and ELCA camps the least likely to show evidence for compartmentalization of faith. This finding is also explored in the qualitative analysis of chapter 7.

**Table 6-9: Percentage of Camps Offering Specialty Summer Programs, by Denomination**

	Episcopal	ELCA	PC (USA)	UMC	Total
<i>Value of N</i>	49	80	73	105	310
Travelling Day Camp	12.2%**	73.4%***	21.9%	8.7%***	28.7%
Special ability/Special needs Camp	26.5	39.7	23.3*	41.3	34.0
Leadership Training/Counselor in Training	81.6	73.1	68.5	63.8	70.0
Service/Mission Camps	28.6**	62.8***	45.2	41.9	45.3
Adventure Programs	49.0	58.8	59.7	45.6	52.8
Confirmation Camp	8.2***	69.2***	19.4*	23.8*	31.5
Family Camp	55.1	78.2**	51.4*	64.8	63.4

Chi-square values were calculated by comparing the value for a denomination with camps representing all other denominations. Asterisks indicate that the chi-square value is significant. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Table 6-9 shows that camps also differ across denominational lines in the types of specialty programs they offer. These are referred to as specialty programs because they are usually offered for only a fraction of the available camp sessions and host a small portion of the total summer campers. There are certain camps that operate primarily as specialty program camps (e.g. Outlaw Ranch is an ELCA camp in South Dakota that operates primarily as a family camp site), but the majority of camps offer a variety of programs. Confirmation camp is an example of a specialty program. The Camp Leader Survey confirms the finding of the CY: LLF Leader Survey that confirmation camp is a strong tradition in the ELCA but not in the other three denominations. It is interesting that

ELCA camps are significantly more likely than the other three denominational camps to offer several other specialty programs, including travelling day camp, service/mission camps, and family camps. This is likely a reflection of the continued emphasis placed on summer camping in the ELCA, while the other three denominations have shifted much of their efforts to establishing conference and retreat centers. This difference is evident in the summer camp number statistics above. The typical ELCA camp has more summer campers than camps of the other denominations, providing opportunities for a wider variety of specialty programs. Travelling day camp is an interesting specialty program that was defined on the survey as “programs in which teams of summer staff members travel offsite to lead camp programs with congregations for several days at a time.” These programs are, like confirmation camp, intentional links to congregational ministries, and the prevalence of these programs in the ELCA is another indication of the value this denomination assigns to Christian camping as a partnership ministry with congregations.

Despite the diversity, there are many things that are common across nearly every camp in these Mainline Protestant traditions. The vast majority of these camps offer co-educational residential summer camp programs in sessions lasting between five and twelve days. A guest who enters one of these camps for a few hours during the summer season is almost guaranteed to see young people praying as a large group, singing together, worshipping together, and playing group games. There are two things that camp leaders overwhelmingly agree about what camp is: first, camp is a place to unplug, a place set-apart from technology and normal routines; second, faith should be incorporated into all aspects of camp life, including the songs, games, and activities. These places are recognizably *camp*, as defined previously in the *essential trinity of organized camping*:

community living, away from home, in an outdoor, recreational environment. They are also recognizably *Christian*, incorporating distinct faith practices into the entirety of the programming.

**Table 6-10: Top Six Priorities of Camp Directors Ranked by Mean Score**

<b>Rank</b>	<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>
1	Participant safety	4.89
2	Fellowship/community building	4.79
3	Self esteem/character building	4.53
4	Facilitating participants' experiences of or encounters with God	4.51
5	Individual faith formation	4.41
6	Fun for all participants	4.36

One of the clearest ways to examine the philosophy of Christian camping in these Protestant traditions is to look at the average importance given to the Likert-type questions, which are shown in Tables 6-7 above and 6-12 below. Using the mean scores of these items (on a five-point scale) allows a simple ranking based on philosophical importance (see Table 6-10). It is not surprising that the item “Fun for all participants” scores highly (with over 92% ranking it very or extremely important), but it is intriguing that the mean score of this item is actually ranked *sixth* in importance. It has been noted that camp is sometimes dismissed as mere fun and games, but these data reveal higher priorities. The number one priority according to the Camp Leader Survey is “Participant safety.” It may be obvious that camp directors want the summer camp experience to be both fun and safe, so it is noteworthy to consider numbers two through five. The items “Fellowship/community building” and “Self esteem/character building” are essential elements of the camp experience and common goals across the spectrum of organized camping, as shown in such studies as the ACA Directions Study and others mentioned in chapter 3. The distinctness of Christian camping in the Protestant traditions is highlighted in the level of importance assigned to the items “Facilitating participants’ experiences of

or encounters with God” and “Individual faith formation,” both of which are assigned higher importance, on average, than fun. As noted above, camp directors overwhelmingly agree that faith should be incorporated into all aspects of camp life, so it is plausible that the items of community and self-esteem are viewed through a theological lens, a concept that is explored in the qualitative analysis detailed in the next chapter.

### Faith Formation and Congregational Connection

The program philosophy and activities of the various camping organizations demonstrate that faith formation is a high priority of camping ministry in these Protestant traditions. These findings directly contradict the dismissal of camp as mere fun and games along with the claim that faith teachings are peripheral or compartmentalized concerns in Christian camping. The Camp Leader Survey data allow a more detailed picture of how faith formation and Christian education fit into the programs and philosophies of Christian camps. Just as camps are diverse in their styles of programming, so too are they diverse in how faith practices and teachings are incorporated into their programs. This diversity is evident in two interrelated categories. First is the emphasis that the camp places, both philosophically and programmatically, on individual faith formation and Christian education. Second is the degree to which the camp prioritizes connection to partner ministries, especially congregations and denominational bodies. One surprising finding of the Camp Leader Survey is that these two aspects do not always coincide.



**Table 6-11: Degree of Agreement with Faith Statements**

	N	Likert Score Mean	% Strongly or Moderately Disagree	% Neither agree nor Disagree	% Moderately or Strongly Agree
All campers should have the chance to lead worship and prayers	296	4.10	7.4%	19.3%	73.3%
At camp, specific theology is not as important as general spirituality/belief	300	3.70	22.3	13.0	64.7
Faith formation/practices should be incorporated into all aspects of camp life	303	4.54	2.6	5.0	92.4
Camp worship/programs are designed to get campers more excited about and engaged in their home congregation	299	4.03	5.7	16.7	77.6
It is important for our staff and campers to understand the theology and practices of our faith tradition/denomination.	300	3.71	13.7	22.0	64.3
Our camp exists to lead young people to Christ.	301	4.14	7.3	16.9	75.7

**Table 6-12: Importance Placed on Faith Concerns**

	N	Likert Score Mean	% Not important at all or Not very important	% Somewhat important	% Very or Extremely important
Developing Christian leaders	304	4.30	-	12.5%	86.5%
Strengthen/support congregations	304	3.72	7.2%	34.5%	58.2%
Theological instruction	305	3.29	18.4%	48.3%	38.4%
Familiarity with the Bible	304	3.59	11.8%	33.2%	54.9%
Participating in Christian practices	305	4.12	3.0%	16.4%	80.7%
Individual faith formation	303	4.41	1.7%	8.6%	89.8%
Christian education or confirmation	301	3.62	13.6%	30.2%	56.1%
Learning faith language and practices	300	3.52	13.0%	37.3%	49.7%
Facilitating participants' experiences of or encounters with God	304	4.51	2.0%	7.9%	90.1%

The scores on the measurements of faith formation shown in Tables 6-11 and 6-12 are so high across all of the camps that it is difficult to divide the camps into meaningful categories. The data show that there are some clear outliers having significantly less emphasis on faith formation than the others. To find these outliers, six of the above variables were computed into a single variable and the aggregate scores categorized. These six variables were:

- 1) Faith formation/practices should be incorporated into all aspects of camp life
- 2) Our camp exists to lead young people to Christ
- 3) Individual faith formation
- 4) Facilitating participants' experiences of or encounters with God
- 5) Familiarity with the Bible
- 6) Participating in Christian practices

Survey respondents rated each of these variables on a Likert-type scale from one to five. These values were added, resulting in a maximum score of thirty and a minimum score of six. Those scoring twenty or less were the clear outliers in the data set, and they were coded as *low faith emphasis*. These comprise only 7.2% of the data set. The remaining cases all had mean responses of 3.5 or higher, meaning they responded to the majority of the above items with “moderately agree,” “strongly agree,” “very important,” or “extremely important.” All of these camps (92.8% of the data set) show evidence for a high degree of faith emphasis. Those with the highest scores (twenty-six or higher) were coded as *very high faith emphasis* (56.7%), while those scoring between twenty-one and twenty-five were coded as *moderately high faith emphasis* (36.1%).

Camps with a *low faith emphasis* may still be recognizable as Christian camps because they incorporate faith practices like worship, prayer, and Bible study. However, these practices are generally deemphasized and, on average, happen less frequently than at other denominational camps. Group Bible study, for example, remains a daily practice at fully half of the camps categorized as having a *low faith emphasis*. This is compared with 84% of camps with a *moderately high faith emphasis* and 97% of camps with a *very high faith emphasis* that have group Bible study at least daily.

The major differences among denominational camps in terms of faith formation are related to the degree of connection the camps have with congregational ministries and theological traditions of their denominations. Determining the degree of connection camps have with congregational ministries is complicated because there are so many potential points of connection. This study is able to take into account direct clergy involvement in the ministries of the camp, philosophy of the camp in relating to congregations, importance the camp places on specific denominational teachings, and special programs the camp has in relating directly to congregations. These factors together are combined into the congregational connection variable (see Appendix D), which is divided into quartiles indicating the level of connection: weak connection, moderately weak connection, moderately strong connection, and strong connection. The variable functions as ordinal data, similar to the Likert-type scales of many of the survey questions. Because of this, it can be tested for validity using several variables not included in the calculation. The congregational connection variable is positively correlated at the level  $p < .001$  with the degree of importance placed on “theological instruction” ( $r = .424$ ), “Christian education or confirmation” ( $r = .466$ ), and “learning faith

language and practices” ( $r=.466$ ). As the degree of connection increases, so does the level of importance placed on each of these items. The correlation is much weaker, though still statistically significant, with faith formation items such as “facilitating participants’ experiences of or encounters with God” ( $r=.247$ ,  $p<.001$ ) and “our camp exists to lead young people to Christ” ( $r=.147$ ,  $p<.05$ ). In other words, the congregational connection variable is strongly correlated with items related to specific theological teachings and traditions but not general faith importance. This suggests that many responding camps emphasize faith formation but have a weak connection to partner congregations.

#### Four Camp Types

Crossing the congregational connection variable with the faith emphasis variable reveals four distinct types of Christian camps in the Protestant tradition. The data show that no camps in these traditions that have a *low faith emphasis* have a moderately strong or strong connection to congregational ministries. The data are, therefore, categorized as shown in Figure A.

	Weak Connection	Moderately Weak	Moderately Strong	Strong Connection
Low faith emphasis	Type 1	Type 1	N/A	N/A
Moderately high	Type 3	Type 2	Type 2	Type 4
High faith emphasis	Type 3	Type 3	Type 4	Type 4

**Figure A**

Type 1 camps have a weak or moderately weak connection to congregations/denominations and a low faith emphasis. They look very different from all the other camps surveyed and probably most resemble the camps that Yust critiqued in her Indiana study as being largely indistinguishable from secular camps, except for some

religious trappings.<sup>2</sup> They still may have worship, prayers, and Bible study, but Christian identity appears to be secondary to other priorities and goals at these camps. These camps show the strongest evidence for compartmentalization of faith practices from other camp activities. Only 7.2% of camps surveyed fall into this category.

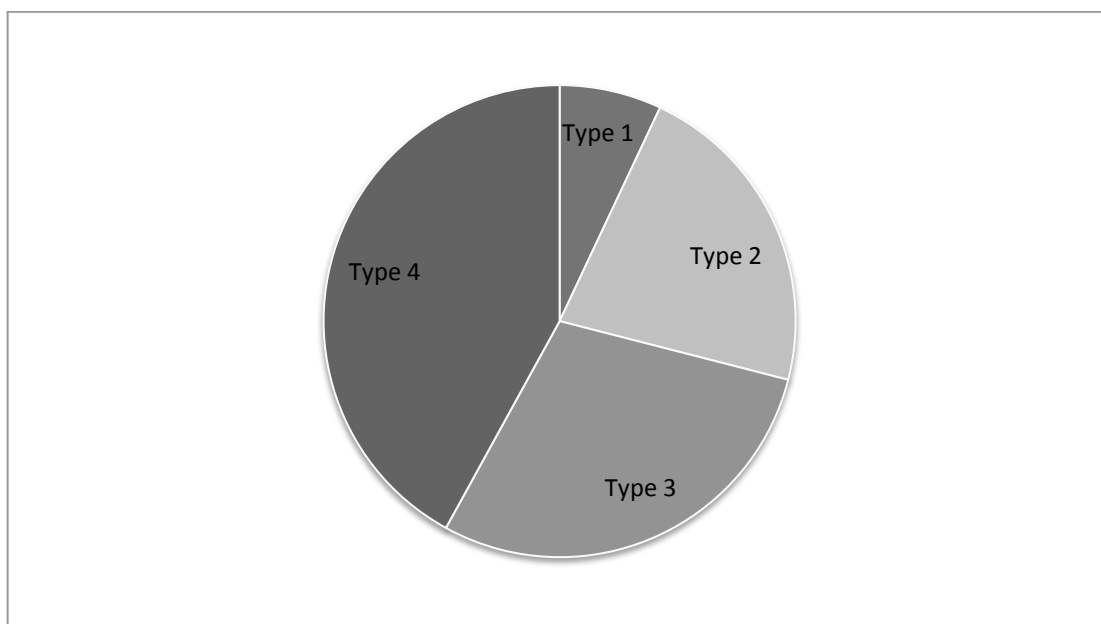
Type 2 camps have a moderate connection to congregations/denominations and a moderate faith emphasis. These camps are not categorized as Type 3 or Type 4 camps because they do not show particularly strong connection to other ministries or particularly strong faith emphasis. Faith teachings and Christian practices are part of the camp program, but they are not given noticeably more emphasis than other aspects. Religion or a more general spirituality may be seen as an important piece of camp life, but it does not necessarily permeate all aspects of the program. Just under a quarter (22.3%) of camps surveyed fall into this category.

Type 3 camps have a weak connection to congregations/denominations and a high faith emphasis. These camps are committed to faith formation, and Christianity permeates all aspects of camp programs. However, they deemphasize theological teachings specific to their denomination, and they have generally weak connections to congregational ministries. Clergy involvement is likely very low (only 17% indicate that “Many congregational leaders/clergy are heavily involved in the ministries of the camp,” compared with 53% of Type 4 camps). They are unlikely to see “strengthen/support congregations” as part of their role (only 33% see this as very or extremely important, compared with 88% of Type 4 camps). A surprisingly high percentage (28.9%) of camps surveyed fall into this category.

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<sup>2</sup> Karen-Marie Yust, “Creating an Idyllic World for Children’s Spiritual Formation,” *International Journal of Children’s Spirituality* 11 (April 2006), 180.

Type 4 camps have a strong connection to congregations/denominations and a strong faith emphasis. These camps exhibit high clergy involvement and strong connection to congregations in terms of philosophy and program. They appear to be strong partners in ministry with congregations and denominational leaders. They tend to emphasize Christian education and specific theological teachings or practices more so than the other camps. This is the largest single group, but well under half (41.6%) of camps surveyed fall into this category.



**Figure B: Camp Types**

One of the key predictors of camp type is the level of theological education that the director has achieved. Looking at the responses of camp executive directors, 42.9% of Type 3 camps have executive directors with no formal theological training, compared with only 16.5% of Type 4 camps. Only 17.9% of Type 3 camps have executive directors with an advanced theological degree (masters level or higher), compared with 38.5% of Type 4 camps. These data demonstrate the influence of the camp director in shaping the theological trajectory of the camp. They also suggest that formal theological education

can help connect camping ministries to the ministries of congregations. The shift in Protestant camping ministries from pastoral leadership to a professional class of camp directors was detailed in chapter 2, where it was noted that this shift had the unintended consequence of distancing some camps from their constituent congregations and theological traditions. The data from the Camp Leader Survey confirm this assessment.

**Table 6-13: Camp Types by Denomination**

	<b>Episcopal</b>	<b>ELCA</b>	<b>PC (USA)</b>	<b>UMC</b>	<b>Total</b>
<i>Value of N</i>	48	76	73	103	305
Type 1	18.8%	2.6%	8.2%	4.9%	7.2%
Type 2	27.1	22.4	27.4	16.5	22.3
Type 3	22.9	17.1	34.2	35.0	28.9
Type 4	31.3	57.9	30.1	43.7	41.6

Dividing the four denominations into camp types reveals the diverse picture of camping ministry in the Protestant traditions. Nearly one in five of the Episcopal camps surveyed are classified as Type 1, a surprisingly high number that undoubtedly affects the perception of camp's role in the entire denomination. The majority of Episcopalians do not have the option of attending a distinctly Episcopal camp that offers intentional faith formation and Christian education. It is possible that this leads to the camp leaders themselves emphasizing other aspects of the camp experience, resulting in nearly half of Episcopal camps being Type 1 or 2. The overall de-emphasis on Christian education in Episcopal camping plays out in the CY: LLF Leader Survey results shown in Table 6-5. Fully 89% of Episcopal confirmation programs do not offer camp experiences, and 56% do not offer retreat experiences (the highest of all four denominations).

The ELCA is unique among the four denominations in having the majority of its camps classified as Type 4. The notion that camps are partnership ministries with congregations permeates the organization of Lutheran Outdoor Ministries and the denomination of the ELCA as a whole. Chapter 2 details some of the historical reasons for this connection, including the influence of individuals like Jerry Manlove. Faith formation and Christian education are normalized aspects of camping ministry on the denominational level, a reality that is closely related to the inclusion of camp as part of educational programs such as confirmation training.

The PC (USA) and UMC have the highest percentages of Type 3 camps. In the case of the PC (USA), there are more Type 3 camps than Type 4 camps. It is unclear whether or not there is an intentional distancing of camping ministry from the ministries of the denominational bodies and congregations, but the disconnect has important consequences. Denominational bodies (presbyteries, synods, or conferences) have maintained ownership of most of the camping organizations in both denominations. A large percentage of Type 3 camps can easily lead to the judicatory bodies questioning the value of these organizations, especially when they are considered financial burdens. The examples of the Blackhawk Presbytery and the Missouri Annual Conference in closing their camps (see Chapter 2) provide evidence for the consequences of a shift to Type 3 camping.

### Implications of the Camp Leader Survey

The Camp Leader Survey provides the most comprehensive picture to date on Mainline Protestant camping in the United States. The data confirm that camping ministry is incredibly complex and diverse, though there are important constants across



the spectrum of camps. They all exhibit the essential elements of organized camping (community living, away from home, in an outdoor, recreational setting), making them a subset of the camping industry. All but a small fraction of camps (the 7.2% designated as Type 1) operate within an intentional Christian framework that permeates camp programs and philosophy, setting them apart from the industry as a whole.

Denominational bodies and camping organizations have a great deal of influence on their affiliated camps, but there remains a great deal of diversity within each of the denominations. The four camp types revealed in the leader survey are, in many ways, more meaningful categories than simple denominational affiliation for two main reasons. First, many camps (8%) are directly affiliated with multiple denominations, so they defy simple categorization. Second, camps resemble each other within camp type more than within denomination. For example, a Type 4 Episcopal camp has more programmatic and philosophical similarities to a Type 4 UMC camp than it does to a Type 1 Episcopal camp. This does not mean that denominational differences are unimportant, but including the four camp types allows for a more faithful picture of the complexity of the Christian camping landscape.

A major conviction of the present project is that camping ministry is necessarily a partnership ministry. It does not function on its own. The research question itself focuses on the *contribution* that camp makes to Christian education and faith formation, acknowledging that it does so only in partnership with other ministries. The prevalence of Type 3 camping in the Mainline Protestant traditions is troubling because it reveals a disconnect between ministries that have historically operated in close partnership. Type 4 remains the largest category in Mainline camping as a whole, along with three of the four

individual denominations, with the exception of the PC (USA). Type 4 camps offer the greatest opportunity for examining the contribution of camping ministry in partnership with the ministries of congregations, so the four site visits were chosen from among these camps. Further research is needed to examine the genesis and ministerial consequences of Type 3 camps. A particular concern is whether this group is growing in terms of percentage or remaining constant. All four of the participating denominations have experienced serious turmoil in recent years through debates over same-sex marriage and ordination of homosexual clergy. It is possible that the large percentage of Type 3 camps evident in the survey is a response to controversy within the denominations that amounts to a temporary spike that will diminish over time. Long-term research is needed to answer these questions.

### **Camp Participant Surveys**

The camp participant surveys were conducted among participants attending the four camps chosen for site visits in summer 2015. Much of these data, therefore, are supplementary to the qualitative data detailed in the next chapter, and they will be considered there in context. However, a look at the data set as a whole offers intriguing insights into the nature of camping ministry at Type 4 camps. These data should not be considered generalizable to all Type 4 camps, but they address issues raised in the CY: LLF Leader Survey and the Camp Leader Survey, particularly about camp's role as an educational ministry.

Questionnaires were administered to camp participants who were near the age of confirmation training or in the midst of confirmation training. These participants completed questionnaires on the first and last days of camp, and a third questionnaire was

sent electronically six weeks after the camp session to participants who provided an e-mail address. The surveys yielded 154 T1 responses and 158 T2 responses, with 142 paired cases. The T3 response rate was very low, due no doubt to the challenges of e-mail communication. The online questionnaire was, therefore, kept open until December to increase the response number. T3 responses were collected between six and twenty-four weeks after the camp experience. A total of 101 camp participants provided e-mail addresses, and 34 responded to the T3 questionnaire (33.7% response rate). A total of 30 cases include data from all three questionnaires in complete form.

### Participant Demographics

The four camps had programs of varying sizes, so participant numbers are different among the camps: 42% attended Camp Lutherlyn (ELCA), 37% Camp All Saints (Episcopal), 15% Camp Stronghold (PC-USA), and 6% the UMC Camp at Lake Tahoe. Gender breakdown was 48% male, and 52% female. In terms of race, 85% self-identified as white, 2% black, 6% Hispanic, and 6% mixed-race or other. Denominationally, 26% of participants self-identified as Episcopalian, 45% as Lutheran, 9% as Presbyterian, 6% as Methodist, and 13% as other. These simple demographics provide some interesting information about the participants of these camps. The lack of minority participants is no surprise at camps affiliated with predominantly white denominations. The Camp Leader Survey demonstrates that these numbers are consistent with camps in the denominations, where only 11% of all camps serve more than 25% minority campers and fully two-thirds serve 10% or less minority campers. More interesting is the denominational breakdown of the camp participants. Both the ELCA and UMC site participants were confirmation students, so almost all of them attended

churches affiliated with the same denomination as the camp. The PC (USA) and Episcopal sites, however, do not offer confirmation camp as a specialty program, and a large number of their participants come from other denominations (more than half, in the case of Camp Stronghold). This complexifies the picture of camping ministry even more, since not even Type 4 camps can be assumed to serve participants from affiliated congregations. Further research is needed to determine if the reality of participants from a diversity of denominational traditions contributes to camps intentionally shifting their identities from Type 4 to either Type 3 or Type 2.

A second group of data demonstrates that participants at these Type 4 camps are predominantly active church attendees. Fully 81% indicated that they had attended summer camp previously, with 30% saying they had attended at least four times.<sup>3</sup> In addition to previous camp attendance, 54% of participants had attended overnight church retreats, and 27% had attended mission or service trips lasting at least two days. In terms of confirmation training itself, 38% were in the midst of confirmation training, 18% were already confirmed, 32% had not yet started but planned to do so, and only 11% were not planning to be confirmed. Table 6-14 shows that prayer and Bible study in the home were inconsistent, but most participants were regular church attendees (90% attended church at least once a month) and participated in other Christian practices at least occasionally. It is clear that these were not stand-alone camp experiences for a large majority of participants but rather functioned within a larger ecology of Christian education and faith formation.

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<sup>3</sup> These numbers are slightly higher but comparable to the numbers reported in the National Study of Youth and Religion, which shows that two-thirds of Mainline Protestant youth who reported attending camp had attended multiple times and nearly a quarter had attended five or more times. Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 53.

**Table 6-14: Frequency of Christian Practices, T1 Survey**

<b>How often do you:</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Seldom/ never</b>	<b>Once/ year</b>	<b>Once/ month</b>	<b>Once/ week</b>	<b>Every day</b>
Pray by yourself	149	20.8%	11.4%	19.5%	26.8%	21.5%
Pray with family	149	22.1	24.2	14.1	14.1	25.5
Read Bible by self	148	37.8	20.9	21.6	16.2	3.4
Read Bible/w family	147	55.8	22.4	11.6	8.2	2.0
Attend church	148	1.4	8.8	21.6	56.1	12.2
Attend youth group	148	12.2	15.5	24.3	37.8	10.1

### Evidence for Growth

There are two methods to measure growth in faith formation and Christian education using the camp participant survey. The first is to take participants at their word when they responded to items asking if there was growth during the experience. The second is to measure differences in the seventeen identical survey questions using t-tests. Using both of these methods provides a degree of reliability to the measurements of growth during the camp experience. The first method simply involves observing the participant responses in Table 6-15. The responses are overwhelmingly in agreement with the statements, including more than 96% agreeing with, “I learned more about God” and 88% agreeing with, “I was strengthened in my faith.” The responses show variability across the different camps (something that will be examined alongside the qualitative data in the next chapter), but they all show positive growth.

**Table 6-15: Perceptions of the Camp Experience, T2 Survey**

	N	Likert Score Mean	Strongly or somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly or somewhat Agree
I learned more about God.	154	4.66	1.3%	2.6%	96.1%
I came to my own decision about my faith.	151	4.17	5.3	17.9	76.8
I thought about what is good or bad for me and my life.	151	4.36	2.7	11.3	86.1
I made an important step in growing up.	147	4.38	2.7	10.9	86.4
I was strengthened in my faith.	154	4.48	3.9	8.4	87.6
I had a lot of fun.	154	4.81	2.6	0.0	97.4
My questions concerning faith were taken seriously.	149	4.51	2.0	10.7	87.2

**Table 6-16: Topics of Education at Camp, T2 Survey**

<b>How much did you learn about the following topics?</b>	N	Likert Score Mean	Nothing or Not very much	Some	Quite a bit or A lot
The sacraments: Baptism and Communion	154	3.36	27.3%	20.1%	52.6%
Worship services	156	3.96	10.9	19.9	69.2
The Bible	157	4.24	2.5	15.9	81.5
Creed, Lord's Prayer, & 10 Commandments	154	3.76	20.7	16.9	62.4
God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit	155	4.18	9.0	14.2	76.8
Other Christian denominations	153	3.46	25.5	23.5	51.0
Other religions (for example, Judaism)	150	2.85	47.4	22.0	30.7
Justice and responsibility for others	155	4.05	8.4	20.6	71.0
Experiences of or encounters with God	156	4.12	5.8	23.1	71.2
Love and sexuality	149	2.96	42.3	14.8	43.0
Care of the environment/ecology	154	3.73	18.2	21.4	60.4
The history of the Christian church	156	3.71	20.5	19.2	60.3

**Table 6-17: Mean Score of Responses Before and After the Camp Experience**

	N	T1 Mean	T2 Mean	Paired Difference
God created the world.	137	4.50	4.51	+ .01
It is important for me to belong to my church/congregation.	137	4.31	4.53	+ .22***
Jesus is risen from the dead.	134	4.57	4.62	+ .05
I am unsure about what I should believe.	133	2.45	2.51	+ .06
I believe in God.	136	4.70	4.70	0.0
Faith in God helps me in difficult situations.	136	4.14	4.29	+ .15
I have important things to offer the church and the world.	129	4.01	4.27	+ .26**
God loves all humans and cares about each one of us.	136	4.77	4.74	- .03
Worship services are usually boring.	135	2.73	2.90	+ .17
If I have personal problems, there is someone in my congregation I could turn to.	132	3.90	3.98	+ .08
I know what it means to be a Christian.	134	4.15	4.25	+ .10
Jesus' death on the cross offers salvation.	132	4.41	4.55	+ .14*
I want to participate in the leadership of worship services.	134	3.69	3.84	+ .15
Scripture is the Word of God.	127	4.29	4.42	+ .13
I have Christian friends that I can turn to in times of need.	133	4.10	4.20	+ .10
When I grow up, I plan to participate in the life of a church/congregation.	131	3.94	4.09	+ .15
I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself.	134	4.49	4.57	+ .08

Table 6-16 adds depth to the camp participants' general claim that they learned more about God. It reveals that participants report learning about a variety of Christian education topics during the camp experience. The Bible, God as Trinity, and experiences of God top the list of the most commonly studied topics at these camps, while other religions and sexuality are covered infrequently. It is intriguing that topics like church history and creeds are covered with such frequency at these camps because these are topics typically associated with classroom learning. Even more important, the top three are among the five most prioritized topics identified in the CY: LLF Leader Survey. These data show that at least some camps are offering a breadth of Christian education

that goes far beyond perfunctory learning and is comparable to the topics covered in typical confirmation programs.

Table 6-17 provides data for the second method of measuring participant growth in faith formation and Christian education. Participants responded to these seventeen items in both surveys (first and last day of camp), using a five-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”). The first thing to note is that T1 scores are very high, leaving almost no room for positive growth. These high scores confirm the earlier observation that the majority of participants are active church members who come into camp with significant faith backgrounds. The high T1 scores and low number of paired cases combine to make statistically significant positive growth improbable. There is very little room for the scores to move any direction but down. The fact that nearly every score shows positive growth from the first to the last day of camp is notable, but even more noteworthy is that three of the variables show statistically significant growth.

1. “It is important for me to belong to my church/congregation.”  $t_{(136)} = 3.923$ ,  $p < .001$ , Cohen’s  $d = .224$
2. “I have important things to offer the church and world.”  $t_{(128)} = 2.893$ ,  $p < .01$ ; Cohen’s  $d = .263$
3. “Jesus’ death on the cross offers salvation.”  $t_{(131)} = 2.227$ ,  $p < .05$ , Cohen’s  $d = .146$

The growth in these scores adds substantial evidence to two different claims. First, this growth confirms the participants’ self-assessment that they grew in their faith during the camp experience. Second, it corroborates a key finding from the secondary analysis of the National Study of Youth and Religion data set that is described in chapter



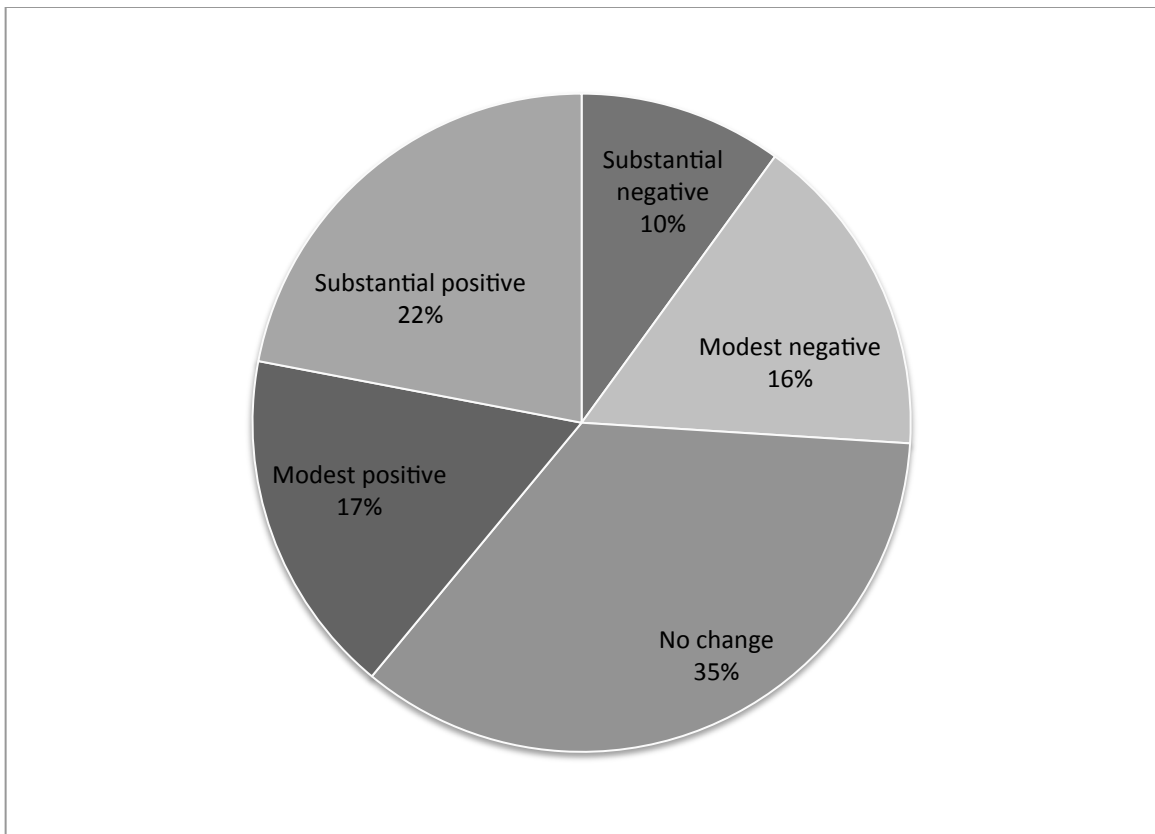
3. This finding was that those who attended religious summer camp as teenagers were significantly more likely than non-attenders to participate in communal religious practices, including church attendance, in their emerging adult years.<sup>4</sup> Two of the three above variables that show significant growth are related to engagement with the church. When considering this, it is worthwhile to note that growth in an additional survey item related to congregational engagement (“When I grow up, I plan to participate in the life of a church/congregation”) is nearly statistically significant:  $t_{130} = 1.703$ ,  $p = .091$ . These young people left camp with an increased motivation to participate in the life of a congregation and knowledge of their role in such a community. The evidence is building that one of the most significant general outcomes of the Christian camp experience is to foster engagement with Christian community.

T-tests are useful for assessing general growth in specific survey items, but the individuals get lost in the averages. Another way to assess overall growth is to consider an individual's scores across all seventeen variables before and after the camp experience. To accomplish this, the Likert scores of all seventeen variables were added together for each individual. The two items “I am unsure about what I should believe” and “Worship services are usually boring” were reverse-scored. Each individual respondent therefore had a cumulative score on each survey ranging from seventeen to eighty-five. The difference of these two values is called the GrowthScore variable. The values of the GrowthScore were categorized as follows: substantial negative growth (values of -6 and lower), modest negative growth (values between -5 and -3), no growth (values between -2 and 2), modest positive growth (values between 3 and 5), and

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<sup>4</sup> Jacob Sorenson, “The Summer Camp Experience and Faith Formation of Emerging Adults,” *Journal of Youth Ministry* 13 (Fall 2014), 24.

substantial positive growth (values of 6 and greater). The distribution of these categories is shown in Figure C. This distribution offers some complexity to the notion that the camp experience results in positive faith growth. A full quarter of camp participants show negative growth in this assessment.



**Figure C: Growth Categories T1-T2**

**Table 6-18: Correlation Coefficients of Faith Formation Variables**

	<b>GrowthScore</b>	<b>StrengthFaith</b>
<b>I decided to attend camp because: (T1)</b>	<b>N=136</b>	<b>N=132</b>
My friends coming as well.	-.030	-.012
My family wanted me to come.	.091	.077
I want to have fun.	.003	.042
My confirmation leader or pastor wanted me to come.	.023	.041
I want to meet people and make new friends.	-.080	.104
I want to learn more about God and faith.	-.136	.342***
<b>Before camp, how often did you: (T1)</b>	<b>N=138</b>	<b>N=134</b>
Pray by yourself?	-.254**	.375***
Pray with your family?	-.152	.185*
Read the Bible by yourself?	-.192*	.231**
Read the Bible with your family?	-.207*	.108
Attend church services?	-.061	.296**
Attend church youth activities?	-.115	.293**
<b>During camp, I liked or enjoyed: (T2)</b>	<b>N=141</b>	<b>N=137</b>
The content/topics of lessons.	.305***	.532***
My cabin counselor/group leader.	.302***	.247**
The other campers in my group.	.387***	.278**
The worship services.	.457***	.638***
The music, songs, and singing.	.480***	.457***
Spending time outdoors.	.370***	.408***
The large group games/activities.	.302***	.289**
The whole camp experience.	.314***	.229**
<b>How much did you learn during camp about...? (T2)</b>	<b>N=141</b>	<b>N=137</b>
The sacraments: Baptism and Communion	.076	.127
Worship services	.170*	.293**
The Bible	.241**	.322***
Creed, Lord's Prayer, & 10 Commandments	.102	.220*
God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit	.070	.308***
Other Christian denominations	.044	.285**
Other religions (for example, Judaism)	.161	.227**
Justice and responsibility for others	.179*	.337***
Experiences of or encounters with God	.263**	.492***
Love and sexuality	.225**	.172*
Care of the environment/ecology	.054	.235**
The history of the Christian church	.178*	.295***
<b>How much do you agree with the following? (T2)</b>	<b>N=139</b>	<b>N=137</b>
I learned more about God.	.425***	.581***
I came to my own decision about my faith.	.286**	.373***
I thought about what is good or bad for me and my life.	.334***	.554***
I made an important step in growing up.	.338***	.573***
I had a lot of fun.	.295***	.225**
My questions concerning faith were taken seriously.	.465***	.611***

Faith formation clearly cannot be taken for granted, even in Type 4 camps that are strongly connected to congregational ministries and serving regular church attendees. These data are confusing because the majority of those categorized as showing negative growth also indicated that they grew in their faith. Fully 40.5% strongly agreed with the statement, “I was strengthened in my faith” and another 35.1% somewhat agreed. It is useful, therefore, to use both of these variables to isolate some of the factors that contribute to faith growth in the camp environment. Table 6-18 shows the correlation coefficients of the GrowthScore variable and the Likert score from the item “I was strengthened in my faith” (StrengthFaith) with all of the other Likert-type variables from the two surveys that are not factored into either of the two test variables. The value of Pearson’s  $r$  is reported. Asterisks indicate that the value is significant at the level of  $p < .05$  (\*),  $p < .01$  (\*\*), or  $p < .001$  (\*\*\*)).

The correlation coefficients in Table 6-18 are revealing in many ways. First, they show the importance of using both measurements in assessing faith growth. Two of the faith practices measured at the beginning of camp (praying alone and reading the Bible alone) are positively correlated with “I was strengthened in my faith” but negatively correlated with the GrowthScore variable. A similar trend is evident in the item “I want to learn more about God and faith.” Participants who came to camp with a higher commitment to faith practices and increased desire to learn about faith reported at the end that they grew in their faith, but their overall responses to the seventeen faith growth items actually decreased. It is true that their initial responses on the first day survey were very high on average, so they had little room to increase their scores, but this does not explain an overall decline. One possible explanation is that participants were thinking

more deeply about their faith after their camp experience, so they were less likely to simply agree with every statement than they were on the first day of camp. Their internal working models have been complexified (Bowlby); they have developed more critically held theory-laden practices (Browning). This hypothesis will be tested in the qualitative analysis of chapter 7 and interpreted with Loder's transformational logic of the Spirit in chapter 8.

A second finding from the data in Table 6-18 lends support to this hypothesis that participants are thinking more deeply about their faith at the end of the camp experience. It is no surprise that the majority of the T2 survey items are positively correlated with both test variables, since participants tended to give higher values across the board on the last day survey. Finding the items that contributed most to faith formation is a matter of identifying the items with the highest correlation coefficients with both test variables. The item "My questions concerning faith were taken seriously" has remarkably high correlation coefficients, higher than almost all other variables. Participants who agreed more with this statement were much more likely to report growing in their faith and show evidence for growth in the seventeen faith growth items. This suggests that participants were actively questioning their faith and thinking more deeply about faith issues than they were at the beginning of camp.

A third finding from the data in Table 6-18 is that overall enjoyment of the experience is strongly correlated with growth in faith. This is especially true for enjoyment of the worship services and the music at camp. It is interesting that the correlation coefficients for "I had a lot of fun" are much lower than other items in that section. Fun and enjoyment are correlated with growth in faith, but they are not the most

important factors. The simple fact is that nearly every one of the camp participants had a lot of fun at camp, but not all of them grew in their faith. As was evident in the Camp Leader Survey, fun is an essential element of the camp experience, but it always works in combination with many other factors. It is a major finding of this study that will be explored in the next chapter: the theological playground of camp is *more* than fun and games.

A fourth finding of the data in Table 6-18 is that individual educational topics are also correlated with growth in faith. This is no surprise, since the item “I learned more about God” is very strongly correlated. The interesting finding is that the topic most strongly correlated is “Experiences of or encounters with God.” This finding highlights the importance of experiential learning in the camp environment. Those who grew in their faith at these camps were able to process the idea of experiencing God at work in their lives, and it is possible that they left with a bodily understanding (*habitus*) that they encountered God in the camp environment. Together with the other three findings from the data in Table 6-18, this provides a remarkably detailed picture of how faith formation often happens in the camp environment. Participants are likely to grow in their faith and understanding of God when they are allowed to question their faith, actively consider God’s work in human experience, and have fun while doing these things. The result at the end of the experience is not only a stronger and more thoughtful faith but, perhaps more importantly, an increased desire to engage with communities of faith.

#### Post-Camp Surveys

Yust has argued persuasively that last-day camper surveys are inadequate to assess the effectiveness of the camp experience when it comes to faith formation. Both

the ACA Directions Study and the secondary analysis of the National Study of Youth and Religion data set provide evidence that the effects of the camp experience are lasting, but these do not address some of the questions about faith formation and Christian education that are specific to the present study. The post-camp survey (T3) seeks to address Yust's critique and build on the longitudinal data of the other studies mentioned. The low response rate means that these data must be used cautiously, but the data are sufficient to offer some fascinating insights into the long-term effects of the camp experience.

The post-camp survey data are not representative of the larger sample. They are skewed female, slightly white, and younger in comparison to the original sample. Interestingly, the data are also skewed negative in terms of the faith formation that was evident in the first two surveys: 38% of T3 respondents had a negative growth score ("significant negative" or "modest negative"), compared with only 26% of the overall sample (see Figure C). This oversample of those showing negative growth provides an opportunity to test this group longitudinally.

Table 6-19 compares the means of the identical items on both the last day survey (T2) and post-camp survey (T3). T-tests were run, and none of the values are significant. This indicates that participants' assessment of their camp experiences did not change significantly after being away from camp for at least six weeks. This evidence contradicts the notion that participants experience an emotional high that quickly fades after returning home from camp. It is interesting to note that all of the enjoyment variables, while not statistically significant, increased from T2 to T3. A future study with more respondents is needed to confirm this, but this suggests that participants remember the camp experience even more fondly after returning home than on the last day of camp.

**Table 6-19: Comparison of Means of Post-camp Survey and Last Day Survey**

	<b>T2 Mean</b>	<b>T3 Mean</b>	<b>T3- T2</b>	<b>N</b>
<b>During camp, I liked or enjoyed:</b>				
The content/topics of lessons.	4.33	4.55	.212	33
My cabin counselor/group leader.	4.94	4.94	.000	33
The other campers in my group.	4.36	4.45	.091	33
The worship services.	4.41	4.63	.219	32
The music, songs, and singing.	4.67	4.79	.121	33
Spending time outdoors.	4.45	4.70	.242	33
The large group games/activities.	4.45	4.58	.121	33
The whole camp experience.	4.79	4.82	.030	33
<b>To what extent do you agree with the following statements?</b>				
I learned more about God.	4.74	4.52	-.226	31
I came to my own decision about my faith.	4.17	4.40	.233	30
I thought about what is good or bad for me and my life.	4.38	4.19	-.188	32
I made an important step in growing up.	4.40	4.50	.100	30
I was strengthened in my faith.	4.59	4.63	.031	32
I had a lot of fun.	4.90	4.87	-.032	31
My questions concerning faith were taken seriously.	4.48	4.66	.172	29

The seventeen faith growth items measured on the first day and last day surveys were also included on the post-camp survey. Thirty individuals completed all three surveys in their entirety. Missing values were replaced to maintain consistency across all three surveys. Responses that participants marked as “don’t know” were recoded to a 3 on the Likert scale (“neither agree nor disagree”). Data that were missing entirely were replaced with the mean score of that variable. Twenty-one total values were replaced using these methods, which amounts to only 1.4% of all values. The results of the t-tests



are recorded in Table 6-20. Asterisks indicate that t-values are significant at the level  $p < .05$  (\*) or  $p < .01$  (\*\*).

**Table 6-20: Paired Sample t-test Results Among All Three Surveys (N=30)**

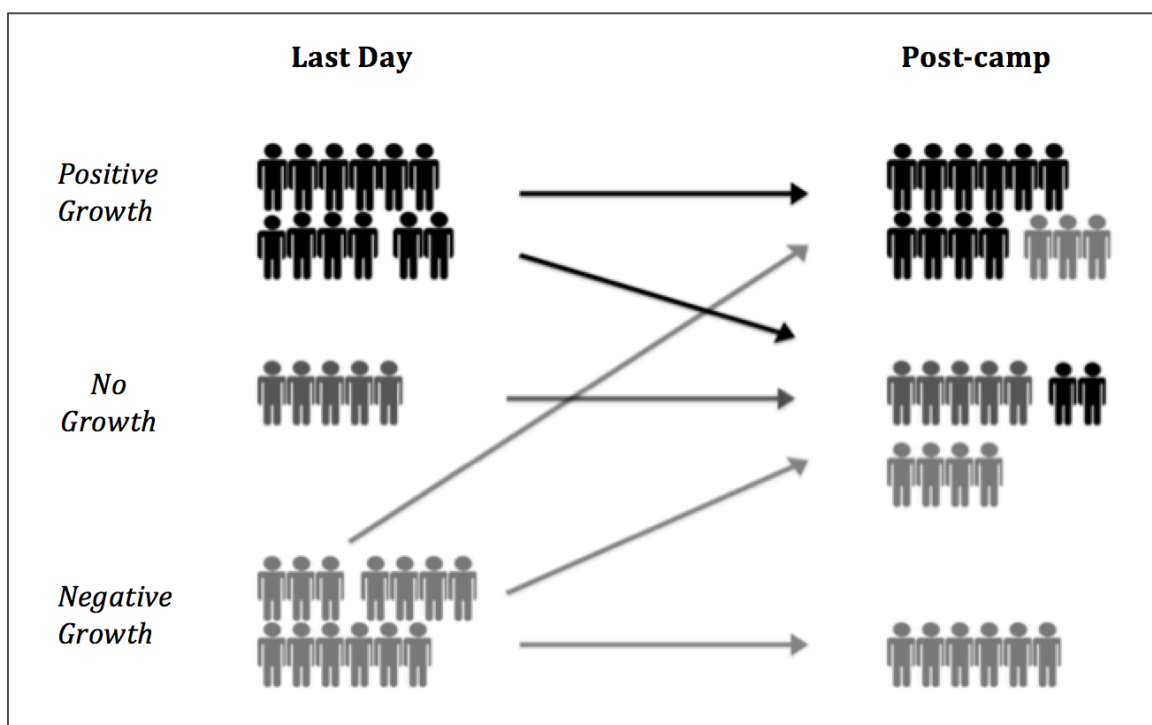
	T1 Mean	T2 Mean	T3 Mean	T2-T1 DM	T3-T1 DM	T3-T2 DM
God created the world.	4.60	4.50	4.67	-.100	.067	.167
It is important for me to belong to my church/congregation.	4.53	4.73	4.66	.200	.122	-.078
Jesus is risen from the dead.	4.63	4.70	4.77	.067	.133	.067
I am unsure about what I should believe.	2.40	2.50	2.50	.100	.100	.000
I believe in God.	4.87	4.87	4.87	.000	.000	.000
Faith in God helps me in difficult situations.	4.17	4.47	4.43	.300	.267	-.033
I have important things to offer the church and the world.	4.07	4.33	4.50	.267	.433*	.167
God loves all humans and cares about each one of us.	4.87	4.87	4.80	.000	-.067	-.067
Worship services are usually boring.	2.63	2.63	2.57	.000	-.067	-.067
If I have personal problems, there is someone in my congregation I could turn to.	3.67	3.77	4.30	.100	.633**	.533**
I know what it means to be a Christian.	4.23	4.33	4.60	.100	.367*	.267*
Jesus' death on the cross offers salvation.	4.37	4.63	4.77	.267	.400**	.133
I want to participate in the leadership of worship services.	3.80	3.70	3.87	-.100	.067	.167
Scripture is the Word of God.	4.47	4.60	4.63	.133	.167	.033
I have Christian friends that I can turn to in times of need.	4.34	4.17	4.47	-.178	.122	.300*
When I grow up, I plan to participate in the life of a church/congregation.	4.17	4.00	4.40	-.167	.233	.400*
I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself.	4.47	4.53	4.77	.067	.300*	.233*

As noted above, the T3 survey respondents are skewed negatively on the growth of items from T1 to T2. This explains why none of the t-values is significant when comparing those two surveys. What these data reveal, however, is the significant growth *after* the camp experience is over. Five items have significant t-values when comparing the T2 and T3 survey responses. Two of these represent what might be considered rebounds after the camp experience, meaning that the differences observed during the camp experience are *negative*, but the subsequent positive gains after the camp experience make the net change from T1 to T3 not significant (though it is interesting that the values have a net positive change). These two items are: “I have Christian friends that I can turn to in times of need” and “When I grow up, I plan to participate in the life of a church/congregation.” The other three items showing significant differences between T2 and T3 have a net positive overall effect, shown in the significant t-values when comparing the T3 and T1 means. One of these items has a t-value noticeably higher than the other variables: “If I have personal problems, there is someone in my congregation I could turn to.” The difference of means from T2 to T3 is very significant:  $t_{(29)} = 3.764$ ,  $p < .01$ . This variable is singled out in the analysis in part because its very high t-value indicates a strong effect but also because it corroborates the finding that participants leave camp with an increased desire to participate in Christian community. The open question after analyzing the T2 survey results was whether or not the increased desire to engage in Christian community has any effect on participants after they return home. The T3 survey results offer compelling evidence that a significant number of camp participants have increased confidence in members of their home congregations within two-to-three months after the camp experience. This confidence was not present at the

beginning or end of the camp experience, so it is reasonable to conclude that it is the result of engagement in congregational life after returning home from camp. Two final items from Table 6-20 deserve comment. They are “Jesus’ death on the cross offers salvation” and “I have important things to offer the church and the world.” These are two of the three items that showed significant growth from T1 to T2 in the analysis of the larger data set (see Table 6-17). While the differences from T1 to T2 in the smaller sample are not significant, there is evidence that the growth shown in the larger data set continues after the camp experience. This results in both items showing significant differences from T1 to T3.

The data in Tables 6-19 and 6-20 demonstrate that the impact of the camp experience continues after participants return home, where the experience is processed within a complex matrix of variables. One final level of analysis of the post-camp survey data further reveals this complexity. The faith growth score was recalculated to reflect the differences from T1 to T3. Differences of all seventeen variables were again added to determine the cumulative change across all items in the survey. Because of the low number of cases, the categories are simplified into *negative growth* (scores of -3 and lower), *no growth* (scores between -2 and 2), and *positive growth* (scores of 3 and higher). As noted, the T3 surveys have an overrepresentation of participants displaying negative growth during the camp experience: 43% of the total, or thirteen individuals. This distribution did not carry over into the T3 survey. Only six of the original thirteen remain in the *negative growth* category when T3 scores are compared with T1. Of the other seven, four move to the *no growth* category, and the other three move to the *positive growth* category. This volatility shown in the *negative growth* category from T2

to T3 is not present in the other two categories. Of the five categorized as *no growth* after T2, all five remained in the same category after T3. Of the twelve categorized as *positive growth*, only two moved to the *no growth* category and the other ten remained in *positive growth*. The result is that only 20% show *negative growth* from T1 to T3, while 37% show *no growth* and 43% show *positive growth*. The reasons for these shifts are complex and cannot be adequately explained using these survey data. It is notable that four of the six participants who remained in the *negative growth* category from T2 to T3 attended the same camp: Camp Stronghold. The qualitative data detailed in the next chapter help to explain the factors that contributed to this result.



**Figure D: Movement Among Growth Categories from T2 to T3**

These data provide no evidence for a camp high that quickly fades, though they justify Yust's concerns about reliance on end-of-week camper surveys. These data indicate that the impact of the camp experience is incomplete on the last day of camp. This is not surprising, since one of the essential elements of the residential camp

experience is that it is *away from home*. The experience is not complete until participants return home and have the opportunity to reintegrate into their home life in light of their new experiences. The small number of cases in the sample necessitates further research, but it is compelling that positive growth was almost totally maintained, while more than half of those showing negative growth at the end of camp reverted to pre-camp levels or changed to positive growth. This does not suggest a camp high that quickly fades but rather a camp low that quickly rebounds. However, there is no other evidence for a camp low, whether temporary or lasting. Participants report overwhelmingly that they grew in their faith and enjoyed the experience. Even the six remaining in the *negative growth* category agreed with the survey item, “I was strengthened in my faith.” An explanation more faithful to the participant responses is that some camp participants are questioning their faith and considering their relationships to God in ways that they are unaccustomed to doing. This deeper theological reflection causes variance in their responses to items related to faith, even while they maintain the understanding that they are growing in their faith. The ways in which they process their experiences of God and theological questions that surface in the camp environment are dependent largely on their supportive faith networks at home and in their congregations.

#### Implications of the Camp Participant Survey

The Camp Participant Survey offers a rich perspective of how faith formation and Christian education function in Type 4 camps. The majority of participants at these camps are regular church attendees who are invested in their Christian faith and express an interest in learning more about God. The camp experience functions for these participants as part of a larger ecology of faith formation and Christian education.

The trajectory of faith formation at these camps is one of overall growth, particularly in promoting a desire to engage in Christian communities outside of camp. Participants show an increased understanding of the value of participation in Christian community at the end of the camp experience, and they show evidence of engaging with adults in their congregations in the weeks following camp. The primary drivers for growth in faith during the camp experience include the ability to ask questions about faith, experiential learning that includes an understanding of encounters with God, and enjoyable experiences of faith practices like worship and singing.

On an individual level, faith growth at camp is much more complex and requires longitudinal study. Participants may leave camp with an understanding that they grew in their faith even while they show an overall decrease in measurements of faith commitment. The camp experience does not stand alone. It must be considered in the context of a complex matrix of variables that includes the home environment and congregation, among other things. The experience itself is not complete until participants return to their home environments and begin to process the experience from those contexts. The survey data indicate that those who grow in faith during the camp experience largely maintain this growth in the weeks after returning home, while those who appear to regress in their faith during the camp experience may be entering a time of deep reflection that results in subsequent growth or a deepening of self-understanding in relation to faith. More research is needed to assess the complexities of how the camp experience is processed after participants return home, especially in relationship to faith formation.

## Summary and Conclusions

This chapter has detailed the results of three streams of quantitative data related to Christian education and faith formation in the camp environment. The data come from a nationally representative sample of confirmation leaders in four Mainline Protestant denominations, a nationally representative sample of camp leaders in the same denominations, and a selected sample of camp participants at camps affiliated with the four denominations. These data together provide a multi-dimensional image of Christian camping ministry in the Mainline Protestant tradition.

Of primary concern is the degree of connection that camping ministry has with congregational ministries. Participants come to camp with an understanding of God and faith that has been formed in their homes and congregations, and they return to these environments while processing the camp experience. Many camps have maintained strong connections with congregational ministries and the teachings of their constituent denominational bodies, but others have become isolated or have relegated faith teachings to secondary concerns. The data reveal four types of denominational camps. Though the largest percentage retains historical connections with affiliated ministries (Type 4), a surprisingly large portion of camps emphasize Christian education and faith formation without maintaining strong connections to congregational ministries (Type 3).

The data clearly show that camps should be taken seriously as places of Christian education, even as they provide evidence for why some ministry leaders dismiss the educational value of camp. The question is not whether Christian camps serve as loci of Christian education and faith formation but rather the methods they use and the degree of effectiveness they have in partnership with other educational ministries. A comparison

with confirmation training programs is instructive. The majority of confirmation programs in the PC (USA), Episcopal Church, and UMC operate for no more than six months, meeting weekly or bi-weekly for class sessions lasting ninety minutes or less. This means that the total number of educational contact hours is usually less than thirty, a number easily outstripped in a six-day camp experience, even if the number of waking hours counted as educational is outweighed two-to-one. Even the content of instruction is remarkably similar between many camps and the educational ministries of confirmation. Recall the educational priorities of confirmation leaders detailed in Table 6-2. The top five of these ranked by importance are: providing opportunities to ask questions about the faith, experiencing God, developing personal faith, experiencing community, and developing a sense of belonging to the congregation. All five of these are identified through the camp surveys as the top priorities and outcomes of the camp experience. In almost every measurement of desired outcomes, camps and confirmation programs are after the same things. The difference lies in educational methodology.

Confirmation training exemplifies educational ministries in the congregational setting, and the data show that confirmation programs overwhelmingly rely on the classroom setting with an emphasis on direct methods of instruction. Camp, on the other hand, relies almost exclusively on participatory and experiential learning methods. These methods are the keys to camp's success as a place of Christian education, but they allow those with preferences for the classroom setting and direct instruction to dismiss the camp experience as fun and games. Fun is a comparatively low priority among confirmation instructors. Only 45% prioritize the item "Confirmands should have a lot of fun" as "very important" or "extremely important," compared with 92% of camp



directors that say the same about prioritizing “Fun for all participants” at camp. The experience cannot, however, be reduced to fun and games. The data reveal that community building, individual growth in both faith and self-esteem, and facilitating experiences of God all outweigh the importance of fun in the camp environment. Data from the camp participants themselves reveal that enjoyment of the experience works in combination with factors such as learning about encounters with God and the ability to ask questions about faith to provide a rich environment for faith formation and Christian education. Camp is certainly designed to be fun, but it is much more than that. The significance of enjoyment and experiential learning to the educational environment of camp will be among the most important topics for analysis in the next chapter.

The data reveal the stark differences among denominations in their acceptance of camp as an educational ministry. The ELCA has retained the strongest connections between congregational ministries and camping ministries, connections that are maintained, in part, through the ongoing partnerships with camps for confirmation ministries. Type 4 camping is the primary mode of camping ministry in the ELCA, resulting in widespread acceptance of camp’s significance among denominational networks. The Episcopal Church, in contrast, does not show evidence for widespread acceptance of camp as an educational ministry. When educational ministry happens in the camp setting, Episcopal clergy members are likely to lead sessions themselves rather than rely on the camp staff. The picture is more complicated in the PC (USA) and the UMC, where the prevalence of Type 3 camping indicates a rift between camping ministry and the ministries of congregations and denominational bodies. These findings will also be explored in the next chapter when we take a closer look at the case of Camp Stronghold.

These data confirm the importance of partnerships between camps and other ministry organizations. The growth evident in the camp environment takes place in the context of a much larger ecology of faith formation. Camp participants return home with a greater desire to engage in Christian community, and there is evidence that this desire fosters relationships with adults in the congregational setting. While the overall picture of the camp experience is one of growth in faith and engagement with Christian community, each individual participant experiences the camp environment very differently, and some even show evidence for regression in faith, at least in the short term. Quantitative measurements offer a broad view of the complexities of camping ministry, but the qualitative analyses of the next chapter will provide details of specific individuals in specific places that help expand upon the survey findings.

## CHAPTER 7

### QUALITATIVE RESULTS

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter provided a broad view of Christian camping ministry as a cultural phenomenon embedded in specific denominational paradigms. The wide-angle lens enabled us to survey the landscape and get a sense of how the cultural way of being (*habitus*) implicit in the camping model differs from that of the congregation or the assumptions of Christian education professionals in other settings (especially confirmation training). Quantitative methodology, however, is inherently impersonal, so a project with an explicitly relational starting point cannot settle for quantitative data. The Spirit calls us into community with one another, where Christ is at work through the messiness of person-to-person encounter. We have a sense of the landscape and the mechanisms at work in the Christian camping context, but it remains to be seen how these mechanisms operate in the lives of real, concrete persons. The survey data indicate that the camp experience is having an impact on individuals and their cultural contexts. It is time to exchange the wide-angle for a zoom lens and take a closer look at the sounds, smells, sights, and relational encounter of the summer camp experience.

Methodologically speaking, we are seeking to explain the results of the quantitative findings. Theologically speaking, we are curious fellow participants looking for ways in which God shows up in specific camp experiences.

We will see in the data that follow how the cultural wisdom of individual camping contexts shape the Christian camp experience that was outlined in the previous chapter. Every camp is different, and this study includes deep consideration of four unique camping contexts that were visited in 2015. The uniqueness of each camp was honored in the composition of four separate portraits, to which the camp directors themselves gave feedback and authenticated as accurate representations of their contexts.<sup>1</sup> The individual portraits were then considered in conversation with one another, along with a return to the transcripts of participant focus groups, interviews, and field notes. Even in the differences among camps, common themes have emerged from the data that give insight into how the Christian summer camp experience contributes to faith formation and Christian education in unique individuals. The chapter begins with a brief overview of each of the four sites followed by seven key themes that emerged from the data.

### **The Four Sites**

#### **Camp Lutherlyn, PA**

Camp Lutherlyn is an ELCA camp in the Northeast region. It lies at the intersection of Northeast and Midwest, in the forested hills of Western Pennsylvania. The camp is a short one-hour drive north of Pittsburg and two hours south of Erie, but each of the metropolitan centers gives way quickly to small towns and farmland as the meandering roads approach the camp property. Trees press in warmly as the camp entrance road crosses a narrow creek, giving the impression that visitors are crossing a boundary into a set-apart world. The Northwest and Southwest Pennsylvania synods of

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<sup>1</sup> These four portraits served as part of the analysis process, and they are published in their entirety at <http://theconfirmationproject.com/gallery>.

the ELCA own the 660-acre camp property, and many of their 256 congregations have been heavily involved since the camp opened in 1948 at the beginning of the post-war camp boom. Lutherlyn has a long history of close ties to its constituent congregations, and the leadership remains committed to Christian education and faith formation.

The brief nine-week summer camp season accounts for nearly half of Lutherlyn's operational income. The camp employs more than sixty college-age summer staff members and serves around a thousand residential campers. The camp also remains busy throughout the year with visiting school groups, adult retreats, youth retreats, and environmental education programs. These programs center on the educational goals of the camp, and they also help to fill budget shortfalls caused by shrinking summer camp numbers, which are down more than 40% since the year 2000. The drop in camper numbers can be attributed to the shrinking population of Western Pennsylvania and the decline in membership of ELCA congregations in the constituent synods. The strain shows in the deferred maintenance of some of the camp's many buildings and a certain degree of anxiety among the camp leadership, but the summer camp program remains a vibrant ministry.

The site visit at Camp Lutherlyn focused on Confirmation Camp, which is one of a myriad of summer programs. Other programs include such things as Rocketry Camp, Horse Camp, Life in the Wild, Leadership Camp, and Classic Camp. All of these programs last for a week and involve groups of six-to-ten campers in the same grade level staying in gendered housing with a college-age summer staff member serving as the counselor. The program is largely decentralized, with a focus on the small cabin group learning and growing together in the midst of a larger community. The major difference

of Confirmation Camp is that congregational leaders are required to attend with the young people and lead several hours of programming each day. This takes the place of the Bible study, which is typically led by the cabin counselor, and various other camp activities. The time with congregational leaders mostly takes the form of catechetical instruction, though most of the leaders incorporate experiential learning into the instruction time. The pastors involved in Confirmation Camp have been partnering in this venture for years, and they have created curricular cycles designed to cover the entire scope of confirmation training in three years of camp attendance. Many of the campers attend all three years. There were sixty-four confirmation campers the week of the site visit, along with roughly a dozen visiting pastors. The camper number is down considerably, and the pastors have joined with the camp leadership in efforts to engage more congregations and students in the program.

#### Camp All Saints, TX

Camp All Saints is an Episcopal Church camp in the South region. It is located an hour's drive north of the Dallas-Fort Worth Metro on the shores of Lake Texoma. The camp sits on a largely secluded 650 acres of property leased from the United States Army Corps of Engineers and has an incredible five miles of snaking shoreline. The lake is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Texas, but the three large coves encompassed by camp property give the impression of pristine wilderness. The Diocese of Dallas purchased the lease option from a struggling Lutheran body in 2004, during the time when many denominational bodies were divesting themselves of camp properties. The diocese also chose to invest heavily in youth camping by pumping more than six million dollars into summer camp accommodations at a time when most Episcopal camping

organizations were focused on conference centers and adult retreat facilities. These commitments reflect the priorities of the diocese and demonstrate the strong relationship envisioned between the camp and congregations in terms of youth discipleship.

The current director is the fifth in the camp's short history, and his three summers at the camp are more than any of his predecessors. The instability at the director level is symptomatic of the camp's early financial struggles and steady departure from its mission of serving the young people of the diocese. The current director sees his role as a change agent dedicated to refocusing the operations of the camp on Christian faith formation. He has a strong commitment to camp as an educational ministry and has sought to align the camp with Episcopal faith traditions, most notably through consistent use of *The Book of Common Prayer* for camp programs and statements about the camp's philosophy. The mission statement of the camp is taken directly from the Prayer Book's description of the church's mission: "To restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ."<sup>2</sup>

The site visit took place during the second of four weeks of summer camp. All Saints serves only three hundred summer campers each year, compared with thousands of retreat participants and environmental education students, but the director is effectively working to shift summer camp to the top priority. This includes investment in the recruitment and training of quality summer staff members and multiple media projects produced by the campers themselves designed to focus attention across the diocese on summer camp. All Saints follows the pattern typical in the Episcopal camping system of inviting clergy members to camp to lead worship services and Christian education time (known as *dean's time*). It is noteworthy that, while cabin counselors do not lead a set

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<sup>2</sup> Camp All Saints, <http://www.campallsaints.com/aboutus.html> (accessed October 2015). Book of Common Prayer, 855.

Bible study time, they are trained to incorporate Christian teachings into the daily camp activities. The program is largely centralized, with the large group together for meals and multiple activities each day. Camp participants separate into smaller groups for aquatics, high ropes, and other activities, but these are often done apart from the cabin group.

### Stronghold Camp and Retreat Center, IL

Stronghold is a PC (USA) camp in the Midwest region. The more than three hundred acre property is situated along the Rock River, about an hour West of Suburban Chicago. The camp is known for having a bona fide castle, which was constructed as a retreat home for the wealthy Strong family during the Great Depression. The castle comes complete with battlements, towers, and secret passageways. It is now used for both summer camp and retreat ministries, and it can accommodate more than fifty guests. The Presbyterian Church acquired the property in 1963, during the height of the post-war camp boom, when the influence of L. B. Sharp promoted the value of decentralized camping. There is a designated summer camp area at Stronghold set off in the woods far from the main buildings that reflects the priorities of the primitive, small-group camping experience. Stronghold followed the lead of the larger Presbyterian camping movement by shifting resources from youth summer camping to adult retreats and conferences in the 1980s and 1990s. The result is a hodge-podge of buildings that includes the imposing castle, a beautiful adult retreat center with hotel-style rooms, a large dining hall and office building, and summer cabins that have neither electricity nor running water.

Stronghold is closely tied to the Blackhawk Presbytery, which houses its offices on camp property. The general presbyter assumed overall control of camp operations in 2005 in a move meant to rescue the camp financially and yoke it more closely to the



Presbytery. This resulted in a shift of focus back to summer camp ministries. Summer camp brings in only a quarter of the revenue of retreats and serves around three hundred campers, compared with thousands of retreat participants. However, the bulk of the retreats serve secular adult groups and school groups, so emphasizing summer camp is a way of lifting up the educational value of Stronghold to the seventy-seven congregations in the presbytery. Support of camping ministries is inconsistent across the presbytery, with many clergy openly questioning the camp's value and seeing the organization as a financial black hole.

There were two site visits to Stronghold. The first was during the spring confirmation retreat, when clergy members and adult mentors brought confirmation students from across the presbytery to stay in the castle for three days. The second was during summer camp, focusing on a ten-day junior high camp group. Both the retreat group and the summer camp group were small and highly intimate. It is notable that the retreat had almost as many adult participants as youth.

#### UMC Lake Tahoe

The fourth site visit, which was in the West region, followed two United Methodist Church confirmation groups on a summer camp trip to King's Beach, CA on Lake Tahoe. It differs from the other three site visits in that it does not involve an established camping organization. Rather, it is a summer camp initiative of two UMC clergy members who, like George Hinckley and Arthur Brooks before them, recognized great value in taking their young people on extended camping outings. The two pastors organizing and directing the camp have extensive experience in UMC camping programs,

and they used their knowledge of camping ministry to create an innovative confirmation training program using the camp form.

The participating congregations are located in the largely secular Sacramento Metro, and the ministers found themselves frustrated in their efforts of engaging young people in confirmation training programs with any regularity. The longtime friends and ministry colleagues chose to partner for a confirmation camp that would remove the young people from their home environments for eight days and provide space to explore the confirmation materials in the highly relational atmosphere of camp. Their first confirmation camp program in 2013 met with initial resistance from parents but was subsequently embraced enthusiastically because of the marked difference in the young participants' ongoing church engagement. The second bi-annual confirmation camp was planned for 2015, and it enjoyed broad support among congregation members and parents. In addition, recently confirmed youth from the 2013 camp experience requested inclusion in the program leadership, so they served as small group leaders and activity facilitators during the Lake Tahoe experience.

The camp was housed at a King's Beach UMC congregation that was a short walk from the shores of Lake Tahoe. The experience included regular confirmation lessons interspersed with aquatics activities, games, small group time, worship, and other community building activities common to summer camp. The group consisted of the two pastors, eight confirmation students, four of the recently confirmed high school volunteers, and three adults from the congregations.

### **Theme 1: Camp is More than Fun and Games**

The large outdoor amphitheater at Camp Lutherlyn is a great place to contemplate the meaning of camp. It is set into a hillside with benches for over two hundred and a rough-cut wooden cross flanking a stone altar at the front. A stream babbles merrily behind the altar area, and the wind rustles the leaves of the imposing hardwoods that surround the sanctuary. The place can often seem like a meditative enclave separated from the bustle of a busy day at summer camp. The observer that sits there for an extended period of time, however, is bound to hear a shout from behind the trees to the right: "All clear?" A responding shout then rings out from far to the left: "All clear!" What happens next is as much surprising as it is illuminative of the camp experience itself. A loud "Woo-hoo!" accompanies a progressively louder "zzz-zzz-ZZZ-ZZZ!" The zip line passes directly behind the rough-cut wooden cross, and a person cannot help but smile to see the mix of frightened pleasure on the face of the child zooming past.

Camp is often critiqued as mere fun and games, and the site visits confirmed that participants are virtually unanimous in their agreement that camp is supposed to be fun. It is abundantly clear, however, that there is deep theological and pedagogical value in what participants describe as *fun*. The zip line is instructive because it is much more than the joyride that it appears to be. Three of the four sites, with the exception of Lake Tahoe, had high ropes courses, and the patterns were similar at all three sites. The uniqueness of Lutherlyn is that the zip line passes through the sanctuary. The fun of the experience is therefore tied to the experiential nature of the zip line itself, the location of the experience inside a place that is set apart as holy, and the community that supports the individual through the experience. Participants engage in the high ropes activities with a group of

peers that have already developed a strong sense of community and trust. A participant climbing the pole to the zip line platform has the encouragement and support of a trusted community, as well as the tangible physical safety of the belay system. What appears to be an individual experience is actually a coordinated community effort on behalf of the individual. Fun is an essential piece of the experience, but the value of the zip line cannot be reduced to fun. It can be instructive to think of the camp experience itself as *a zip line through a sanctuary*. The zip line, the sanctuary, and being on belay with a trusted community combine to provide a powerful learning environment that may be described as fun, though it goes far beyond fun and games.

Focus group participants repeatedly described camp as “fun,” “awesome,” or “great,” with occasional combinations like “awesomely great.” Their responses add depth to the quantitative findings, in which 97% of the participants agreed with the statement, “I had a lot of fun.” One UMC Lake Tahoe camper summed up camp as “marvelous.” When asked what made it marvelous, she said, “Because you’re getting new experiences and meeting new people. And you’re learning a lot, and it’s really fun.”<sup>3</sup> Focus group participants tied the concept of fun at camp to the themes of new experiences, increased autonomy, and feeling like part of the community. Faith was often intertwined with these themes, with many participants indicating that growth in faith contributed to their perception of camp as fun.

When asked what made camp so much fun, the most common response was to describe an activity or experience. Campers not only played new styles of games (e.g. human foosball) but also had novel experiences like high ropes, horseback riding, and a

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<sup>3</sup> UMC Lake Tahoe A, focus group led by Jacob Sorenson, July 2, 2015.

variety of aquatics activities. They spoke animatedly about singing new songs, making new friends, and learning new things. Campers at Lutherlyn lay in the wet grass gazing up at a brilliant canopy of stars as they discussed the names of constellations, their place in the universe, and the majesty of God. Campers at All Saints canoed through the flooded waters of Lake Texoma, which was an unprecedented thirty feet above normal levels, and they laughed raucously as they got stuck among the upper branches of forty-foot tall oak trees. Stronghold campers passed silently through the moving bookcase in the castle library to arrive in the secret chapel for morning worship. The UMC campers raced their kayaks through the calm waters of Lake Tahoe as the full moon rose over the mountains, and they marveled at a rare convergence of Venus and Jupiter, wondering if this was the Christmas star the magi followed two thousand years before. These and many other new experiences combined to make camp an exciting place of discovery and accomplishment for participants. One of the girls at All Saints explained her experience on the high ropes course, “When you’re about to quit, they tell you, ‘Just a little bit more.’ And then you get to the top and you just feel exhilarated, like you’ve done something that you felt you were never able to do.”<sup>4</sup>

The new experiences at camp were directly related to an increased sense of autonomy. The campers appreciated having a say in their experience, and this was part of what made camp fun for them. The challenge activities at all four camps were described as “challenge by choice.” Campers were not compelled to climb the high ropes towers or jump off the forty-two foot tall platform of Lutherlyn’s zip line. Many chose not to do so, and these choices were affirmed. Campers also had opportunities to determine their

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<sup>4</sup> All Saints Girls, focus group led by Jacob Sorenson, June 23, 2015.

schedule by selecting among multiple activities on an individual level (in the case of Camp All Saints) or determining alongside their peers what activity they would do as a group. Stronghold had a scheduled period of time known simply as UFT (unstructured free time), when campers could choose what they wanted to do. Each camp intentionally included the young people in decision-making, and the campers expressed a great deal of appreciation for this autonomy. It was important to the campers that this sense of autonomy also extended to their faith. They felt free to ask questions about their faith and actively wonder about God. One girl at Lutherlyn said that she was most excited about an activity called *the snake pit*, a time when the camp participants asked any question they wanted to a panel of pastors. One of her friends chimed in that she felt her faith had grown stronger at camp because she was able to ask questions.<sup>5</sup> These and other experiences contributed to the feeling that the campers could be themselves, something many of them felt unable to do in school or at home. “Here, you don’t have to be someone else,” a boy at Lutherlyn said.<sup>6</sup>

The feeling of being in community contributed tremendously to the idea that camp is fun. Aside from describing the various activities, the most common responses to what makes camp fun were related to friendship and community. The community support provided the container in which participants felt safe being themselves and were willing to try new things. Perhaps most importantly, camp participants felt loved and cared for. A staff member at Lutherlyn described her camp experience, “I was that one camper. I was the loner, and I didn’t know how to make friends because I was usually getting made fun

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<sup>5</sup> Lutherlyn Girls, focus group led by Jacob Sorenson, June 16, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Lutherlyn Boys, focus group led by Jacob Sorenson, June 17, 2015.

of. Camp showed me the love that I didn't get at home."<sup>7</sup> The three themes of new experiences, a sense of autonomy, and caring community combined to make camp fun for the participants, and this fun contributed to their desire and ability to learn. It is important to note that these themes of what makes camp fun are closely related to the five items that camp directors ranked ahead of "fun for all participants" on the director survey: safety, community building, self esteem, individual faith formation, and experiences of or encounters with God (see chapter 6). The data also shed light on the concept of *safety* in the camp environment. Safety at camp is much more than physical safety. It also includes mental and emotional safety. Part of the fun of camp was related to the notion that it is a safe place.

These data reveal the great complexity of what makes camp fun. It is not the goofiness and banality, though these are sometimes present in things like the pirate themed wor-*arrgh*-ship at Lutherlyn or the morning energizers at Stronghold. These are some of the trappings of camp, but they are not what participants describe when they are asked to characterize the experience. Camp is fun because it is experiential, communal, and empowering to young people. These experiences that are perceived as "fun" or "awesome" open the participants to new understandings of God and to the possibility that faith matters in their lives. Focus groups frequently contrasted these themes with their experiences in church, which they described as boring and focused on adults. There is a cultural disconnect for many of the campers between their faith experience in the church environment and their faith experience at camp. Returning to the zip line analogy, it is important that camp participants are not left dangling on the end of the zip line. After the

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<sup>7</sup> Lutherlyn Summer Staff, focus group led by Jacob Sorenson, June 17, 2015.

ride over the sanctuary at Lutherlyn, the zip line gradually slows until the participants simply hang there by the harness. Someone then brings a ladder, helps the participants down, and often accompanies them on the long return walk. Reducing the experience to mere fun and games can lead pastors, parents, and other faith mentors to treat summer campers as if they have just been to an amusement park rather than an intensely experiential immersion in intentional faith practices and caring Christian community. One priest at All Saints sadly remarked that the camp experience does not translate to the congregational environment, and another commented that they needed to bridge the gap between camp and congregation. The previous chapter noted that the survey results reveal this general disconnect between the pedagogical methods of camps and congregations, but they also indicate that the camp experience leads to greater engagement in congregational ministries. The qualitative data shed light on this finding.

### **Theme 2: Camp is Church**

I gathered with the retreat participants around the immense wooden table of the Strong family. The table was almost a foot thick and at least fifteen feet long. It had been brought into the dining room through an open wall while the castle was still under construction, since it could not fit through a doorway. Fifteen youth and twelve adults now gathered in tight quarters around the table for a special meal. It was the last night of the confirmation retreat at Camp Stronghold. The participants were tired but in good spirits after a day that the youth participants remembered for fun activities like sardines, games of gaga ball, and, most importantly, making new friends. The pastor led the group in prayer, scripture, and a brief message that recounted his childhood camping experiences before reciting the words of institution. Then we shared in the body and



blood of Christ, each participant passing the bread and wine around the table to the next member of the community. The participants smiled at one another and laughed, like a family gathered together for a special meal.

Despite sporadic comments about a camp-church divide, experiences at all four camps looked and felt remarkably like church. “My church and this place are the same,” one Lutherlyn boy reasoned, “because everybody at my church obviously believes in God and is nice. And that’s basically how it is here, too.”<sup>8</sup> The communion service at Stronghold was one of four worship services during the brief weekend confirmation retreat. The others were around an outdoor campfire, in the secret chapel behind the moving bookcase, and the closing Sunday service in the great hall of the castle that was planned and led by the youth participants. The other camps had worship in the outdoor sanctuaries of Lutherlyn, inside an actual church building at All Saints, and standing in the shallows of Lake Tahoe. All four site visits included multiple worship services in a variety of settings, and all four included participation in a sacrament. Comments that hinted at a camp-church divide are overshadowed by the more dominant theme that camp is, in fact, a faithful expression of church.

Participants repeatedly noted the increased frequency of faith-related activities at camp. “I usually only go to church on Sundays,” one Lutherlyn camper explained, “but now I’m going to church almost every morning, or doing church stuff every morning.”<sup>9</sup> Other campers expressed a similar sentiment that they were immersed in Christian faith practices, with daily worship, prayer, and Bible study. These regular faith practices

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<sup>8</sup> Lutherlyn Boys.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

structured the entire experience so that campers began interpreting games and activities through the lens of faith. “You're getting a connection to him the whole time,” a girl at All Saints explained about God’s presence at camp. “Whether you're just playing a silly game, he’s there. Or when you're in worship, he's there. When you're just talking with your friends, he's there.”<sup>10</sup> A Stronghold boy described how faith permeates all of camp life, “Like, you don't realize. You think it's just a game at first, but then when they explain it, you realize that it actually related really well.”<sup>11</sup>

Participants that contrasted the camp experience with church did so in order to explain how faith was becoming meaningful to them. Some of them seemed surprised at the discovery that faith actually matters in their lives because their perception of church was that it is boring and inconsequential to daily life. One boy at Stronghold said of his home church, “Some of the people are just there because they have to be. You know, they don't really care. But here, everyone's committed and dedicated to it. I can tell.”<sup>12</sup> “You guys are all wonderful people,” a boy at Lake Tahoe said as he looked around the circle, “You guys made me feel a lot better about church. You know, it's not all a boring service.”<sup>13</sup> These comments highlight the two major differences that camp participants identify between camp and congregation. First, they perceive people at camp being more committed to their faith than people in their congregations. Second, they perceive faith at camp as engaging and worthwhile, in contrast to faith in the congregation as boring and

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<sup>10</sup> All Saints Girls.

<sup>11</sup> Stronghold Boys, focus group led by Jacob Sorenson, June 27, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> UMC Lake Tahoe A.

inconsequential. These two differences are closely related to the themes of community and experience that will be explored below.

The survey data detailed in the previous chapter indicate an increased level of engagement in congregational life after the camp experience, a finding that is explained by the participants seeing continuity between camp and congregation. The faith experience at camp sheds light on the congregational experience. Participants get new perspectives on worship services and living out the faith that they take home with them. They are incorporated into their habitus (Bourdieu) or their internal working models (Siegel) of a life of faith. The concept of faith life as boring and irrelevant is rejected as camp helps participants reimagine Christian discipleship. “Jesus is no longer confined to church,” said a lifelong Episcopalian staff member at All Saints. “I know that’s a problem with a lot of Christian families that I’ve seen, is that you have Jesus on Sunday, and so I think that it’s really good that every aspect of everything that we do we try and point toward him.”<sup>14</sup> One Lutherlyn boy was struggling with his Christian faith and considering disengagement from church before coming to camp. “I got my faith back,” he said, explaining a moving experience at the campfire on the opening night: “It just hit me, and now I love God. It’s really awesome.”<sup>15</sup> While most of the campers recounted less dramatic faith experiences at camp, it was clear that they saw a great deal of continuity between camp and church. A Lutherlyn girl summed up the camp experience in one word: “Holy.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> All Saints Summer Staff, focus group led by Jacob Sorenson, June 24, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Lutherlyn Boys.

<sup>16</sup> Lutherlyn Girls.

### **Theme 3: Camp takes Christian Community Seriously**

The six boys in Stronghold's ten-day junior high camp were an unlikely grouping. Three were school friends that came to camp together, so they naturally gravitated together. The other three arrived without knowing anyone in the cabin group. Joshua admitted to his cabin mates that he had a tough time trusting people and making friends because people at school often picked on him. Another boy, Peter, had cerebral palsy, which made it very difficult for him to walk. A staff member usually drove him around camp on a golf cart, though he walked as much as he could because he desperately wanted to be part of the group. He did not want the others to feel sorry for him or treat him differently. His favorite part of the camp day was swimming because the buoyancy allowed him to keep up with the other boys more than most activities. During UFT on the seventh day of camp, his cabin mates wanted to play gaga ball. Peter decided to join them rather than swim with campers from another group. He played determinedly and even inspiringly before he took a nasty fall against the side of the gaga ball pit. His cabin mates rushed to help, but he waved them off and sat out for the rest of the session, clearly in some pain. When it was time to walk to the next activity, he waved off the golf cart. The group set off together, walking almost imperceptibly slower. One of the three boys who came to camp together fell in on one side of Peter, and Joshua, the self-described loner, walked closely on the other side. They did not take hold of him; they simply walked beside him. Then Peter reached out a hand to either side, and his companions took hold and helped him to the next destination.

The camp experience at all four camps can be described in terms that several participants used: *intentional Christian community*. It is *intentional* because community

building is a stated goal and programmatic priority of all four camps. It is *Christian* because it is framed by Christian faith practices. It is *community* because that is how the participants themselves described it. “We’ve only known each other for a couple days, but I feel like we’re family,” one Lutherlyn boy said, as his cabin mates nodded in agreement.<sup>17</sup> “I just feel comfortable with everyone,” said a Lutherlyn girl of her cabin group. “We’re getting closer to the sister stage!”<sup>18</sup> Participants at all four camps used familial language to describe the community they formed, with several saying that camp feels like a second home. Those in the focus groups who did not have stable familial situations described the experience as a discovery of what a family might be like. Trevor was a boy at Lake Tahoe who spoke honestly and seriously about his family life and the importance he found in his church group, especially the group he was bonding with at camp. He quietly summed up the camp experience as “almost having siblings,” adding, “I know that everyone says, ‘Oh yeah, it’s like a second family,’ but to me it’s something more because I never had that.”<sup>19</sup>

Community is the center of camp life and is connected to all of the other major themes, including the fun of camp, the sense of safety, and the increased desire to engage in Christian community after camp. The experience of the boys at Stronghold demonstrates a community forged out of shared experiences and deep care for one another. Peter’s cabin mates chose to walk beside him rather than grab hold of him because they understood his needs in that time and place. None of the many cabin groups

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<sup>17</sup> Lutherlyn Boys.

<sup>18</sup> Lutherlyn Girls.

<sup>19</sup> UMC Lake Tahoe A.

observed in the site visits settled for surface interaction or maintained some idyllic form of community. They were messy, complete with all of the difficulties, frustrations, and joys that accompany making space for the other. The Stronghold boys were no exception. “At camp, you have to *deal* with people,” Joshua lamented as his cabin mates joked, “We’re sitting right here, you know.”<sup>20</sup> Groups worked through adversity like the constant rain at Lutherlyn that forced activity cancellations and the bear at Lake Tahoe that ravaged the garbage area and frightened the participants. Even more importantly, they worked through disagreements and conflict through forgiveness and reconciliation. “You can’t just go home,” the director at All Saints pointed out. “You can’t just take your ball and leave. When there’s a real issue, there’s a real good chance you’re going to have to work through it.”<sup>21</sup>

One of the most important aspects of the camp community is the interaction of young people with adult mentors. The cabin counselors are especially influential in the cabin group, though it is also clear that they see themselves as part of the cabin community and co-learners with the campers. The summer staff members at each of the camps (the young confirmed volunteers in the case of UMC Lake Tahoe) forged a strong communal bond with one another during their weeks of intensive staff training. They described this staff community as deeply impactful on their own lives. The college-age summer staff members were not the only adults in the camp community. Several clergy members were present at both Lutherlyn and All Saints to lead various programs and participate in the community. The groups at UMC Lake Tahoe and the Stronghold

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<sup>20</sup> Stronghold Boys.

<sup>21</sup> All Saints Director, interview conducted by Jacob Sorenson, May 2015.

confirmation retreat were almost one-to-one youth to adults. These intergenerational environments facilitated a great deal of adult-youth interaction. Robert, one of the many pastors at Lutherlyn, led a content-oriented confirmation lesson focused on the creation stories of Genesis. The campers appeared largely disengaged and disinterested, adopting a posture reminiscent of the bodily wisdom (*habitus*) of the school classroom (slumped in their chairs, eyes wandering). After the lesson, two of the boys approached Robert and surprised him with their question. They did not ask about the lesson or anything to do with the Bible but rather how he became a Christian. So Robert told them his faith story, later describing how meaningful the experience was to him personally. The camp environment facilitated this sort of person-to-person encounter that is less about learning content than it is about getting to know people and their stories.

#### **Theme 4: Camp is a Place to Unplug**

“Which one is that?” a boy asked. Three adults and seven confirmation campers were lying flat on their backs in the wet grass of Lutherlyn’s playing field. They had been on their way back to the cabin for *Candle Power*, which is the name for the evening devotional time at Lutherlyn, but they had frozen in place when they stepped out from the trees, awestruck. There had been three days of almost ceaseless rain, and now the clouds had finally rolled back to reveal a stunningly clear night sky. They went no further in the direction of the cabin, deciding to change the name of evening devotions to *Star Power*. “That’s Arcturus,” answered one of the adults, indicating the bright star just beyond the arc of the Big Dipper’s handle. They lay there in the grass for perhaps an hour. They shared their highs and lows of the day and read an appropriately selected Psalm 19. They made other attempts at identifying stars and constellations. But they also enjoyed long

periods of silence, content to lie there in the company of friends and the beauty of creation.

The concept of *unplugging* has several meanings at camp. The most obvious is the absence of technology, but even more prominent than this is the idea of disconnecting from everyday life. Camp participants had a strong sense that they were *away*, and this opened them to new experiences and consideration of new possibilities. The feeling was visceral for many of the campers, some of who experienced a high degree of homesickness and even shed tears as they talked about missing members of their families. Others expressed relief of being in a relaxing environment away from stressful or conflict-ridden home lives. Several All Saints campers spoke of having relief from violent neighborhoods in Dallas, and other campers expressed how nice it was to be away from the *drama* of school. “It’s a lot more peaceful here,” a Lutherlyn boy said. “Everyone’s always happy and good, when at home, well, it’s not as peaceful as here.”<sup>22</sup> Many campers described the feeling in terms of being safe. They spoke of feeling safe to be themselves and safe to express their beliefs freely, something that many thought was not safe at school or at home, where they thought they might be *judged*. “It feels like another world,” a Lutherlyn girl summed it up.<sup>23</sup>

There was no question in the focus group protocols related to technology, yet the topic came up in every focus group. Absence from technological devices was one of the key differences that participants noted between camp and home. It is interesting that all four camps included technology in their programming, so it is not that they are touting

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<sup>22</sup> Lutherlyn Boys.

<sup>23</sup> Lutherlyn Girls.



primitive living or the inherent evils of technology. All four camps showed videos, and the one with the most primitive living accommodations – Stronghold – aired a feature-length film one evening. All Saints used technology most extensively, with videos during dean’s time, projected lyrics in chapel services, and the extensive media program that included time in the recording studio and production of video projects. The major difference is not with technology in general but rather with connectivity. Cell phones were disallowed at these camps, and participants did not have access to the internet. This had the effect of making them feel unplugged from their social networks and virtual spaces. “We can’t just escape out of the real world and go into the technology world and talk with our other friends,” a Lake Tahoe camper explained.<sup>24</sup> The surprising finding was that the youth campers were predominantly positive about this disconnection. The few that expressed a longing for their technological devices did so in relation to their descriptions of homesickness. They felt disoriented. These feelings of disorientation and being unplugged opened up space for new connections and experiences. Campers at all four camps spoke of *being free* from technology. A Lutherlyn camper elaborated on this feeling of freedom, “You connect a lot more instead of being on your phone or trying to talk to a friend when he’s on his phone. That way, we can just all socialize without any distractions.”<sup>25</sup> Several other campers and staff members spoke positively of the ability to interact with peers face-to-face without the mediation or distraction of technological devices. They also noted that being unplugged opened space for new experiences. “It lets

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<sup>24</sup> UMC Lake Tahoe B, focus group led by Jacob Sorenson, July 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Lutherlyn Boys.

you do different things,” a girl at All Saints explained, “because when you’re stuck on your phone, you don’t do anything new.”<sup>26</sup>

One of the most fundamental characteristics of the camp experience is that it is set apart and different. Participants felt free – from the need to be online, from the expectations of parents and peer groups, from the shackles of sameness. The outdoor environment of the camps did not create this feeling of being away, but it clearly added to it. Gazing at the clear night sky, lying in the wet grass, or hiking through the woods were novel and relaxing experiences for the participants. They were able to use the feelings of freedom and disorientation to gain new perspective on their lives away from camp. This included the opportunity to reimagine their understanding of God. Participants expressed awareness that they would soon plug back in, whether to their technological devices, unhealthy home environments, or simply their normal routines of home. The freedom of the camp environment was simply a much-needed respite for some participants. For others, it was a chance to reimagine their identity and beliefs in ways that they understood as *life changing*.

### **Theme 5: Camp takes Young People Seriously**

The clouds were thick and dark over Lake Tahoe, but the rain had dissipated and it had been several minutes since the last lightning bolt flashed over the distant mountains. It was now or never. The group broke cover and waded into the choppy waters, forming an uneven circle around the three shivering young people whose request had brought them there. It was, perhaps, unsurprising that three out of the eight UMC confirmation students were not baptized. Sacramento was known as a largely secular

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<sup>26</sup> All Saints Girls.

area, after all. But their request took the pastors off guard. Previous confirmation students that were not baptized had simply received the sacrament in church immediately before being confirmed. These young people had bonded with their fellow camp participants and discovered that belonging to the community of faith mattered to them. The place was important to them, and the community was important to them, so why not here? Two of them even had parents present as adult volunteers. The campers had, in effect, asked a question akin to that of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8: *Here is Lake Tahoe! What is preventing me from being baptized?* It would have been easy for the pastors to simply ask them to wait, but instead they made a flurry of phone calls to family members and adjustments to the camp schedule. A local multicultural youth group met the camp participants at the waters edge and joined them in the shallows. So it was that under a threatening sky in the choppy waters of Lake Tahoe and surrounded by a diverse representation of the Christian Church, three young believers were immersed three times in the name of the Triune God as the gathered assembly proclaimed each of them, in turn, “Child of God!”

One of the things most noticeable to the camp participants was that their opinions and ideas mattered. A Lutherlyn girl shared, “In school when we ask a question, sometimes people laugh or whatever because it’s a stupid question. Here, there’s never a stupid question.”<sup>27</sup> The camps strive to create learning environments that are participatory and empowering. The director at Lutherlyn explained that they teach their staff members Thomas Groome’s *shared Christian praxis* model of education as a way of giving campers ownership of their learning. This method in the context of Lutherlyn means

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<sup>27</sup> Lutherlyn Girls.

critical reflection on activities or experiences that involve attending deeply to the campers' own stories and perspectives alongside consideration of the biblical narrative. Key to the present point is that the campers themselves actively shape the learning process. All Saints has adopted a discipline model that involves helping young people take ownership of their actions and come up with potential solutions to behavioral problems. The counselors do not fix a problem but rather facilitate conversations in which the campers themselves work towards resolution and reconciliation. "Simply put, it's a method of working through issues that respects the autonomy and dignity of the children themselves," one staff member summed it up.<sup>28</sup> All four camps also include the young campers in worship preparation and leadership. Stronghold nurtures a strong tradition of storytelling around the campfire, and these times feature the campers themselves improvising and playing off of one another in shaping stories that are serious and silly, faith-related and not. Testimony featured prominently in the evening campfires at Lutherlyn, and it was clear that everyone's faith story was valued, from the visiting pastors to the summer staff members to the campers themselves. One Lutherlyn cabin group made it a goal for every one of the members to pray aloud at least once during a community worship service. "It kind of makes you come out of your comfort zone and actually admit to yourself that you believe in God. And saying it out loud helps."<sup>29</sup> These are but a few examples of how the young participants take ownership of a wide variety of camp activities and faith practices.

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<sup>28</sup> All Saints Summer Staff.

<sup>29</sup> Lutherlyn Girls.

Campers also expressed that camp is a place where it is acceptable to be a kid. This theme was especially important when participants contrasted camp with the congregation. Many had the impression that church is for adults. They appreciated that faith concepts at camp were presented in ways that they could understand and relate to. “The teachings are easier to understand than at my church,” an All Saints boy said. “They make it easier to understand, and they make it fun to learn about God.”<sup>30</sup> A Lutherlyn girl agreed: “Sermons are geared towards adults. You want to be able to come and hear devotionals that are geared towards our age so we can understand them.”<sup>31</sup> One aspect that contributed to the participants’ understanding of the learning sessions and worship services being geared towards their age group was that they were experiential. Not only were the young people invited to participate in discussions and ask questions; they also engaged in their learning bodily.

### **Theme 6: Camp takes Experience Seriously**

Sixty-four summer campers were arranged like a choir at the front of the All Saints chapel. A condenser microphone stood in front of them, alongside two staff members desperately trying to keep them under control and on beat. They were recording the song *It is Well*, and their voices would be blended with campers from the other three weeks of summer camp, thus the need for order and precision. The resulting video would be a gift to their congregations, the diocese, and the Episcopal Church, but this grand connection of believers was currently lost on the campers.<sup>32</sup> They were on take four, and

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<sup>30</sup> All Saints Boys, focus group led by Jacob Sorenson, June 24, 2015.

<sup>31</sup> Lutherlyn Girls.

<sup>32</sup> The completed video project can be found online at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6OiCU50o7Rc> (accessed March 2016).

they were getting antsy. Silence fell briefly as the staff member wearing the headphones smiled and nodded: “We’ve got it!” Then the campers broke into a new song, almost spontaneously. They began dancing around the altar, beating the rhythm out on the church pews, and breakdancing in the aisles as they sang their hearts out to their camp favorites. This was an Episcopal Church building in the socially conservative Diocese of Dallas, where projector screens in the sanctuary are generally deemed unacceptable, much less dancing and acts of exuberance. The priests and staff members could only smile and join in or frantically try to document this outpouring of the Spirit with pictures and videos. But they will never do it justice. A person had to be there, to experience it, to see and hear the campers joyfully singing, “You are alive in us, nothing can take your place. You are all we need, your love has set us free!” They looked free. They looked caught up in the Spirit. They were not just young people dancing. They were young Episcopalians dancing, and they found a holy space where it was safe and even encouraged to express their faith in this way.

The site visits made clear that camp is highly experiential. It is a bodily, multi-sensory experience. It is difficult to grasp the impact of the camp experience without understanding the sounds, smells, sights, and feelings of being there: laying hands on the newly baptized in the cool waters of Lake Tahoe, startling at the zip liner flying past the canopied sanctuary at Lutherlyn, smelling the fireplace and the closeness of the air in Stronghold’s crowded castle dining room, or dancing exuberantly alongside the sweaty campers in the All Saints chapel. The natural world cannot be overlooked for the role it played as the setting for many of the camp experiences participants found most

memorable or impactful. Each camp program used its own unique outdoor setting to provide a rich environment for multi-sensory experiences.

The group challenge course is a key example of how camp participants learn by doing. Campers animatedly recounted their experiences on challenge elements like *the swinging log*, *the raging river*, and *the nitro crossing*. The girls at Lutherlyn laughed as they recalled their difficulties getting over the ten-foot wall, which they described as “scary,” “challenging,” and “fun” at the same time. “It really, like, built your trust in people,” one said.<sup>33</sup> Camp participants do not simply talk about forming a community. They work at it, and the community is formed through shared experiences. In some senses, the entire camp experience becomes a group challenge course as participants encounter adversity or participate in Christian practices and then process the experiences together. Every situation and experience presented learning opportunities, or *teachable moments*, as staff members at multiple sites described them.

Many campers and summer staff members described the impact that the experiential nature of camp had on their faith. They were accustomed to being passive recipients of faith content, but at camp they discovered a faith that was active. Many arrived with a bodily understanding (*habitus*) that faith is *boring*. They connected this to their experiences in worship services. One Lutherlyn camper said, “In church services, you just have to sit and listen. Here, it’s more interactive.”<sup>34</sup> All Saints campers discovered that they could express their faith bodily inside an Episcopal church building. UMC Lake Tahoe campers had a similar discovery about bodily expression in worship.

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<sup>33</sup> Lutherlyn Girls.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

One camper noticed that she was singing the same songs as at church, but she said, “It’s very energetic and it’s a lot more dancing and stuff. Whereas in church, you just kind of sit there and sing the words on the screen.”<sup>35</sup> Movement and dance in worship helped the young camp participants gain a bodily understanding that worship is not boring but rather meaningful. They also connected experience to Christian education. As one Stronghold camper said, “Some of the stuff I just don’t understand, and the hands-on stuff really helps. But at church you don’t really do that. You just kind of talk about it.”<sup>36</sup> The experiential nature of camp facilitated learning about God and also conveyed to campers that faith is active.

The camps also design their programs in ways that encourage campers to continue their active faith expression when they return home. All Saints not only includes campers in worship leadership but also trains those that are interested in leading music through vocals, guitar, and percussion. Each camper returns home with a camp songbook that has lyrics and chords designed to facilitate incorporation of camp music into congregational worship. The music program is only one of many All Saints programs designed to equip campers with skills they can take to their home congregations. The UMC Lake Tahoe campers spent several sessions exploring their spiritual gifts and social topics that they were passionate about. They left with concrete ideas on how they could put their faith into action using their unique gifts. One Lake Tahoe camper said of her faith away from

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<sup>35</sup> UMC Lake Tahoe B.

<sup>36</sup> Stronghold Girls, focus group led by Jacob Sorenson, June 26, 2015.



camp, “I’m going to try to help out. More than just saying I’m going to do that, I’m going to actually try to put my words into action.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Theme 7: Dissonance and Inconsistency**

The confirmation retreat at Stronghold took place on the first warm weekend in March, but as the snow slowly melted outside, the campers sat inside the dimly lit castle listening to PowerPoint presentations on Presbyterian polity and Calvinist theology. A projector screen covered the enormous stone fireplace of the great hall, and the campers slumped low in the mercilessly uncomfortable couches as a pastor stood and taught in presentation format. The campers later admitted being “checked out” during the presentations, and one camper conspicuously fell asleep.<sup>38</sup> Then a bat suddenly flew through the room, buzzing the heads of the excited youth, who were momentarily transported from a boring classroom to an adventure. The pastor cut through the raucous with his deep voice, telling the children not to pay any attention to the bat but rather to keep their eyes on him. The bat made frequent incursions and became the unofficial mascot of the retreat. The campers affectionately referred to it as *Bruce*.

This pastor showed tremendous dedication to the camp form by his presence at the retreat, and it is noteworthy that he volunteered to fill in for someone else on very short notice. He recounted later that he saw great value in the camp experience as a way of developing deeper relationships with the young people of his congregation (theme 3), and he recognized the value of being away from home (theme 4). What was less clear to the young people was whether or not he took them seriously (theme 5) or took experience

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<sup>37</sup> UMC Lake Tahoe A.

<sup>38</sup> Stronghold Retreat Participants, focus group led by Jacob Sorenson, March 15, 2015.

seriously (theme 6). He adopted a typical form of education that the previous chapter demonstrates is the mode of confirmation instruction in the Protestant tradition. In the camp environment, it is a foreign pedagogy, and the young people recognized this. Similar incidents at the other camps make it clear that many instructors have difficulty either understanding or accepting the camp model, which includes a vibrant interplay of all of the above themes working in concert.

The pastor at the Stronghold confirmation retreat was one of a minority of pastors in the presbytery who demonstrate a strong commitment to the ministries of the camp. The camp leadership described a pattern of disengagement and dismissiveness among clergy that has eroded the camp's role as a partnership ministry of the church. Other camp leadership, most notably at Lutherlyn, described similar difficulties in engaging clergy members in the life and ministry of the camp. These situations are emblematic of a growing disconnect in Protestant denominations between camps and congregations, as revealed in the four camp types detailed in the previous chapter. The site visits demonstrate that even type 4 camps have a notion that they are being devalued, if not under siege, by the congregations they seek to support.

It was a major theme in the site visits that camp functions as a church community for the participants, and this had the overall affect of connecting participants to congregational communities, as shown in the quantitative data. There was some evidence, however, that this connection does not always take place. This was most evident in the staff communities, which contained some individuals with ten or more years of significant experiences at the same camp. For a minority of them, their faith itself was tied to the place of camp. The individuals with this perspective recounted strongly

negative experiences of rejection or alienation from congregational communities. Camp was an enclave and refuge for them that they came to interpret as the only faithful expression of church. One Lutherlyn staff member baldly acknowledged that she has no faith away from camp and that she was frightened for when she had to leave. “Camp is like my God,” one said.<sup>39</sup> This unhealthy relationship with camp was clearly a minority perspective, but it highlights the need for deep connections between camp and congregation. On a more personal level, this perspective highlights some of the significant burdens and deep wounds that these individuals bring with them to the camp experience. The caring Christian community at camp provides a place of safety and validation. Camp does not function as an isolated experience but rather within an intricate web of faith formation and supporting networks.

### Explaining the Stronghold Data

We can gain a deeper perspective of the dissonance and inconsistencies of the camping model with a closer inspection of the cultural realities at Stronghold during the specific time and circumstances of the site visit. The data from Stronghold reveal that a breakdown of the camp model has consequences for the experience’s contribution to Christian education and faith formation. Struggles within the Stronghold leadership team affected the entire camp community. There were communication breakdowns at the top levels of camp leadership during the summer site visit, and this dynamic led to inconsistent communication between the leadership team and summer staff members, which affected the camper experience. During one memorable afternoon, participants were engaged in a geocache competition, using a handheld GPS unit to locate various

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<sup>39</sup> Lutherlyn Summer Staff.

caches around the camp property. The activity was designed to be fun, experiential, and build community, three key themes of the camp model. One counselor sprinted across an open field, GPS in hand, while his group of campers lagged far behind in a scattered procession. A camper in this group pointedly expressed that she was not having fun. The staff member in charge of leading the activity approached the counselor and encouraged him to keep the group together and let the campers use the GPS. He brazenly ignored her in front of the campers and continued on his quest for victory. The breakdown of the camp model is apparent in this example. The young people were not being taken seriously or being given any agency, not even allowed to hold the GPS unit. The needs of the community were not being taken seriously, including both the summer staff community and the camper group. Consequently, the participants were not having any fun. Several other geocache groups were, of course, following the intended model of the activity, but this incident is symptomatic of how the camp model at Stronghold looked and felt differently than the other sites. Lake Tahoe, for example, had a similar incident in which one of the young confirmed volunteers was acting rudely to a camper, but he immediately apologized and corrected his behavior when one of the pastors brought this to his attention. The community was actually strengthened as a result of this reconciliation. Stronghold was a different case.

The leadership of Stronghold passionately expressed the value of the camp model in ways that were remarkably similar to the other three sites, but it looked very different in practice during the specific week of the site visit. The counselors were less intentional than at other camps in working through trust activities and facilitating community building, and the campers noticed this. Some expressed that they did not feel as close to

their cabin community as they had in previous years. Significantly, they expressed these feelings in the presence of their cabin mates. Others expressed that they did not always feel able to ask questions, particularly about faith. The boys' focus group session actually turned into a discussion about science and religion that the campers did not feel comfortable having until that setting. The breakdown of the experience had to do with the two themes of community building and taking the young people seriously.

**Table 7-21: Average Level of Agreement, by Camp**

	All Saints N=64	Lutherlyn N=60	Stronghold N=23	UMC Tahoe N=8
I learned more about God.**	4.75	4.68	4.26	4.86
I came to my own decision about my faith.**	4.25	4.38	3.50	3.88
I thought about what is good or bad for me and my life.**	4.44	4.50	3.95	3.75
I made an important step in growing up.***	4.59	4.52	3.55	4.00
I was strengthened in my faith.**	4.67	4.52	3.95	4.13
I had a lot of fun.	4.97	4.68	4.65	4.88
My questions concerning faith were taken seriously.**	4.57	4.63	3.95	4.50

Asterisks indicate the value of F is significant. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$

The results are clear in the survey data. Stronghold campers show significantly less growth in measurements of faith formation during the camp experience than campers at the other three camps. Considering the growth categories of the previous chapter is instructive. Fully 50% of Stronghold campers showed *negative* growth in the cumulative scores of faith measurements, compared with only 17.6% at the other three camps combined. Table 7-1 shows the Likert score averages for several items on the T2 camper survey reported by camp. ANOVA analysis indicates that all of the variables are significant, with the exception of "I had a lot of fun." Post-hoc tests indicate that Stronghold is significantly different than both All Saints and Lutherlyn for all six of the

significant variables. The UMC Tahoe data set is so small that significant differences are not evident, though it is notable that the values are consistent with both All Saints and Lutherlyn. Stronghold campers are the clear outliers, showing much less agreement that they learned about God, grew in their faith, or had their questions taken seriously.

**Table 7-22: Growth in 17 Variables, Stronghold and All Other Camps**

	Stronghold T1 Mean	Stronghold DM N=22	All others T1 Mean	All others DM N=119
God created the world.	4.05	-.050	4.57	+.03
It is important for me to belong to my church/congregation.	3.90	+.143	4.38	+.24***
Jesus is risen from the dead.	4.16	+.053	4.63	+.06
I am unsure about what I should believe.	2.55	.000	2.43	+.07
I believe in God.	4.33	-.048	4.77	0.0
Faith in God helps me in difficult situations.	3.95	-.286	4.17	+.24*
I have important things to offer the church and the world.	4.05	-.350	4.00	+.38***
God loves all humans and cares about each one of us.	4.80	-.300	4.77	+.01
Worship services are usually boring.	2.57	+.333	2.76	+.14
If I have personal problems, there is someone in my congregation I could turn to.	3.90	-.476	3.90	+.18
I know what it means to be a Christian.	4.19	-.476	4.14	+.21*
Jesus' death on the cross offers salvation.	3.95	-.100	4.49	+.19**
I want to participate in the leadership of worship services.	3.43	-.524	3.73	+.29*
Scripture is the Word of God.	4.06	-.056	4.33	+.16*
I have Christian friends that I can turn to in times of need.	4.19	-.429	4.08	+.20
When I grow up, I plan to participate in the life of a church/congregation.	3.62	-.333	4.00	+.25**
I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself.	4.57	-.381*	4.47	+.18*

Asterisks indicate that the t-value is significant. \* p<.05, \*\* p<.01, \*\*\* p<.001

Table 7-2 shows the seventeen items of faith formation that were measured on the first and last day of camp, with the Stronghold data alongside the data from the other three camps combined. The difference is stark. Stronghold shows negative growth in the difference of means (DM) in almost all measurements, compared with positive growth at the other three camps. Recall that when all of the data were considered together in the previous chapter, only three of the variables were significant (see Table 6-17). We get a clear sense of how much the experiences at one camp skewed the entire data set, since there are nine significant variables with the Stronghold cases removed. The three most significant gains evident in Table 7-2 above strengthen our understanding that the clearest impact of the camp experience on faith formation is in terms of engagement with faith communities. These three items are: “It is important for me to belong to my church/community,” “I have important things to offer the church and the world,” and “When I grow up, I plan to participate in the life of a church/congregation.” The troubling thing that the above data indicate is that when the camp model is inconsistent or poorly administered, the experience can actually have a negative impact on participants’ faith and commitment to the church.

These data indicate the breakdown of the camp model in a particular time and place, and they should not be considered indicative of Stronghold as a whole. On the contrary, several staff members and campers recounted personal experiences of encounter with God and growth in faith in previous trips to Stronghold. It is noteworthy that even the campers in this particular sample reported having fun and learning more about God. It is not the case that they had an overall negative experience. They simply had a qualitatively different experience than participants at the other three camps, and the

differences allow for isolation of the factors that are particularly important in camp's contribution to faith formation and Christian education.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

The four qualitative site visits indicate how the camp model functions in very different places with diverse groups of people. The sites chosen represent four different regions of the country, four different denominational traditions, and diverse programs. Their programs and priorities, however, are similar in ways that allow for characterization of the camp model itself, in whatever context it is placed. Their classification as type 4 camps, those demonstrating the combination of high faith emphasis and strong connection to denominational teachings and congregational ministries, allows for an assessment of how the camp experience contributes to faith formation and Christian education.

The data reveal seven themes that help to explain camp's role in faith formation and Christian education in these contexts. First, camp is designed to be fun, and all of the participants expect it to be fun, but they also recognize that there is much more to the experience. The factors of new experiences, increased autonomy, and caring community combine to make the experience fun for participants, and the fun itself contributes positively to their perception of faith and internalization of teachings. Second, camp is perceived as a faithful expression of church, and there is great continuity evident between camp and congregation. Third, camp takes Christian community seriously. Fourth, camp is a place to unplug, both from electronics and from normal routines or ways of being. Fifth, camp takes young people seriously. Sixth, camp takes experience seriously.



Seventh, there is evidence that camp experiences differ when the above six themes do not function in concert with one another.

The example of the junior high ten-day experience at Stronghold was offered as a specific example of how the camp model can break down, even in a context that has effectively housed the model in the past. It was suggested that the counselors and leadership staff in that time and place were not effective in facilitating community building or conveying that the young people were taken seriously. These breakdowns, it was determined, explain the significantly different survey results of the Stronghold campers. The findings highlight that the camp model must be practiced effectively and intentionally in order for there to be a recognizable contribution to Christian education and faith formation.

CHAPTER 8  
CAMP IN THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Introduction**

“Will you take a selfie with me in the morning?” Trevor’s voice came in a loud whisper from the other side of the dark room – that is to say, four feet away. Three grown men and five adolescent boys were laying in their bunks in a room the size of a walk-in closet. It was well after lights out on the final night of the site visit at UMC Lake Tahoe. Trevor could lose his pool time the next day for talking after lights out, so the urgency of his request was clear. I was leaving early in the morning, so this was his last chance to make his request. A *selfie* is a picture that a person takes of him or herself, and it is a way for a young person like Trevor to tell his own story on his own terms. I felt like he was inviting me into his story. There is great meaning to a selfie that is not alone, particularly to an only child living with a single parent. Trevor had described in the focus group session that he was conscious of not having a father figure in his life, and he characterized the camp experience in terms of familial relations: “almost having siblings.” He and I had shared a two-person kayak on the twilight excursion on Lake Tahoe under the full moon and Bethlehem star, and we had spent a great deal of time in meaningful conversation. I was reminded that night in the cramped space of the boys sleeping quarters that encounter and revelation cannot be adequately described or objectively characterized, no matter how careful the study. There is no substitute for experience and encounter. It is clear that the various summer camp experiences had

profound impacts on the participants, but I also must acknowledge that the encounters with the young people through the research process had impacts on me, the researcher.

This chapter will consider the camp experience in theological perspective. The characterization that follows is not detached and impersonal because the real, concrete people involved in the research have impacted the writer. This project has used multiple metaphors for viewing camp – a telescope, a wide-angle camera lens, a zoom lens, and painting a portrait – but the most appropriate for the experience itself may be a selfie. The young camp participants have, in a sense, been asked to pose in so many other arenas of life, but the pattern is upended at camp because they themselves are given the camera. They choose the background and, most importantly, who they want in the selfie with them. Their perspectives cannot be lost. What follows, therefore, is a sort of stitching together of the various images we have collected to see what sense we can make from the Christian summer camp experience in the Mainline Protestant tradition.

It is clear that there is real and lasting change happening through the Christian summer camp experience. Much of this change is attributable to the way of being (*habitus*) at camp. The camp model, however, should not be seen as a magic formula that produces change. Rather, as we have said, *camp is a set apart space that facilitates relational encounter between the self, the other, and God*. Christ at work in and through these relational encounters effects the change, not the space itself. Many camp participants show evidence of what can be considered spiritual transformation because the camps have been intentional about creating a space that facilitates relational encounter. Loder helps us make the connection: “Given clarity about the object of faith, Jesus Christ, and the transformational work of his spirit, the struggle to work out *who* one

is only in relation to *why* one exists at all forges an identity of theological proportions.”<sup>1</sup>

These camps are not disciple factories but rather theological playgrounds to which young people come as they are and leave with more complex understandings of who they are and whose they are.

### **Camp as a Theological Playground**

It is oftentimes difficult to speak about the inbreaking of God in the Western academic world, where reason is generally privileged over experience. Even in Christian churches throughout the West (with notable exceptions, such as Charismatic and Pentecostal churches), the work of the Spirit is often reduced to a sermon point, as if the mechanics of the divine-human connection can be explained didactically. There is a tendency to leave theological thinking to the professionals as a way to guard against heresy and prevent abuses. The notion is that theology is *safe* when it is in the hands of professionals. They set the background and frame the picture. Everyone else holds the pose.

Summer camp is a profoundly *unsafe* environment for theological doctrine because the professionals are not in control. Pastoral care and theology are placed into the hands of young, unqualified people who are engaging in a dynamic theological exchange that is best characterized in terms of play. The Christian summer camp becomes a sort of *theological playground* in which rigid doctrine suddenly becomes malleable. The untouchable truth claims that are safely protected behind the display case of the church building and curated by the professional minister are suddenly accessible to young

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<sup>1</sup> James E. Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 248.

people, who have little training in their care or proper use. In carefree, youthful exuberance, they smell them, shake them, rub their faces in them, and do all manner of unspeakable things to them. The professional ministers with the stomach to endure this defilement stoop to pick up the detritus only to realize that the truth claim has not been destroyed but rather made alive again. The truth of Jesus Christ does not need protection, and those who seek to guard it may inadvertently prevent its proclamation.

Bonhoeffer, Moltmann, and Juel have provided us with a theological framework that recognizes the ongoing activity of God in the world. Bonhoeffer proclaims the concrete presence of Christ revealed in Christian community. Moltmann stresses the inbreaking of God into the temporal reality and ongoing work of the Spirit. He even describes God's loving interaction with creation and humanity's response to being set free in terms of play. Juel reminds us that the word of God is not fixed and unchanging but rather dynamic and constantly speaking into our new lived realities, especially as we share in the interpretation with others. These theological claims demand person-to-person encounter and openness to what God is doing in the world right in front of us. They lead us less to theological study than to theological play.

Characterizing camp as a theological playground plays into the critique of camp as theologically shallow or banal. We cannot make the argument that camp is an expression of the *sanctorum communio* that Bonhoeffer describes if the relationships are simply surface-level encounters or involve forgetting the messy realities of life. The on-the-ground realities of the site visits and the perspectives (or *selfies*) of the participants themselves reveal the theological depth of the experience and the importance of the relational bonds. Campers shared some of their deepest longings and greatest fears with

one another. The camp experience did not cause them to forget the messiness of their day-to-day lives but rather put these realities in sharp perspective as viewed from the distance of camp. Trevor shared his appreciation for the familial bonds of the camp group even as he expressed to the trusted community his deep longing for this connection at home. The All Saints boys felt a profound safety in the Christian community at camp, which put their lives in inner city Dallas in sharp relief. Peter and Joshua, two boys with very different life experiences, shared a deep and personal encounter at Stronghold, where they were present in ministry for one another in both deep conversation and the simplicity of an outstretched hand. These are not isolated stories but rather examples of common themes that were pervasive at all of the site visits. Young people felt like they were taken seriously and their life experiences were taken seriously. They were present for one another in deeply personal ways. Mutual trust and respect for one another can actually be considered prerequisites for their ability to play in the camp environment. Peter would not have hobbled into that gaga ball pit in the first place if he did not have a significant level of trust in his cabin mates that they would neither take advantage of his disability nor simply let him win out of pity. The holiness of this and other experiences at the site visits should not be considered banal but rather *sacramental*.

Sacramental theology offers a rich claim that God shows up in the mundane substances of everyday life. Each of the four denominations studied has a rich sacramental theology, and all four site visits included participation in the sacraments. There was daily communion in the chapel at All Saints, communion under an enormous oak tree adjacent to the playing fields at Lutherlyn, the intimate communion service around the immense wooden table at Stronghold, and the memorable service of Holy

Baptism in the waters of Lake Tahoe. Camp theology itself can be considered sacramental in that there is a recognition that God is present and active in some mysterious way in the normal everyday things of the world: around the campfire, under the starlit sky, or in a helping hand lent to a friend in need. While these are not to be confused with the sacraments commanded by Christ, they are *sacramental*. In intentional Christian community and through active engagement with the word of God and the practices of faith, campers are awakened to the possibility, or even the probability, that they will see God in some unique, unexpected way. There are few times and places where Christians actively affirm that God is present and at work in all aspects of human life. The church needs places where people can live into their identities as children of God connected in relational bonds, as God is relationally connected in Trinity. It is difficult to find a place in Western society where this happens more concretely than at the Christian summer camp.

Life at camp is normed in a way that takes seriously the ongoing work of Christ's ministry, as camp guides and campers learn together to identify God's action in the world through the mundane and the extraordinary. We have observed in the site visits that the camp day follows a rhythm of daily Christian living in which the community eats, sleeps, prays, plays, and worships together. The structure of the intentional Christian living is reminiscent of what Bonhoeffer describes in his classic *Life Together*.<sup>2</sup> Bonhoeffer writes, "The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and

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<sup>2</sup> Bonhoeffer describes the living out of Christian community to include daily prayer, public reading of scripture, time alone, daily work, service, confession, and communion. His description of community living is patterned after his lived experience in the underground seminary at *Finkenwalde* in the early days of Nazi oppression of the German Confessing Church.

strength to the believer.”<sup>3</sup> Bonhoeffer wrote this short book while living under the oppression of the Nazi regime, and he was painfully aware that experiences of intentional Christian community were temporary, since Christians are called into the world. He urged his readers not to take for granted the blessing of living in Christian community. Many young people are accustomed to compartmentalizing their experience of God at church as separate from their everyday lives. The camp experience offers a radical re-centering of their lives as caught up with and dependent upon the activity of God. It is not as if God is present at camp but not present away from camp. The difference is in awareness and openness. There is a sort of *hyperawareness* at camp as participants notice the inbreaking of God in concrete, unexpected ways and participate in God’s ongoing work in the world. This participation is lived out as ministry to one another.

#### Communities of Christopraxis

Ray Anderson, in his book *The Shape of Practical Theology*, defines Christopraxis as “the continuing ministry of Christ through the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>4</sup> Anderson centers knowledge of God on the praxis of ministry. He distinguishes between practice and praxis, arguing that *practice* refers predominantly to applied theory or the carrying out of a plan. *Praxis*, on the other hand, involves discovering meaning in the tasks themselves. His understanding is valuable for the present project because it leads us past the simple assertion that we learn best through experience. We have observed that camp takes experience seriously and have seen the

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<sup>3</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 29.

<sup>4</sup> Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 29.



positive effects on education, but there is more going on at camp than experience-based learning. The campers and staff members are ministering to one another. Anderson's contention is that in the very act of ministering to one another is where we encounter the living Christ and develop theological understanding.

Pastor Robert's experience at Lutherlyn is illuminating. He desperately wanted the young people to know Christ, and that is why he devoted an entire week to sleeping on bunk beds at camp. His initial strategy was to present sound teachings to the young confirmation students. He presented theological doctrine, and they slumped in their chairs, only half-listening. The inbreaking of God was experienced not in the presentations but in the relational encounter when the campers later approached him and asked him to tell his faith story. Robert himself experienced the presence of Christ through the praxis of ministry, and he described this as a reaffirmation of why he devotes time to the camp model. He could teach his presentation-style confirmation lesson anywhere. But the camp environment opened the space for the relational encounter with those young campers that led to the experience of Christ's presence through ministry. Christ is not taught. Christ is encountered in the praxis of ministry.

One more story illustrates how camp as a theological playground can be interpreted as a community of Christopraxis. On the last morning of the Lutherlyn site visit, a counselor was sitting with his head in his hands. Asked what was wrong, he grumbled that he stayed up late. His campers had begun discussing what Hell was like and how come God punishes children for the sins of their parents to the third and fourth generations. They were up past midnight talking about the love of Christ and the differences between the Old and New Testaments. The discussion with the counselor

made it clear that there were some heresies floated around that would make a Lutheran pastor cringe, but it was also clear that the campers felt safe asking their questions and wrestling with their beliefs. The great possibility is that the conversation did not stop with lights out or even the last goodbye of camp. They may continue that conversation with each other over social media, with their pastor, who shared in the camp experience with them, and, God willing, with many other Christians for a lifetime to come. This brief example shows the lived reality of Juel's biblical hermeneutic, and similar exchanges played out at all four sites. The participants were exploring the word of God and playing with new ideas. It is remarkable how much time they were willing to devote to this task and how much interest they had in sharing their thoughts about God's word.

Ministry professionals and Christian educators tend to focus on right belief (*orthodoxy*) in a way that does not account for bodily wisdom (*habitus*) and the centrality of praxis. Their initial response in an environment like the Christian camp community is to correct problematic theology or, like Pastor Robert, to present sound doctrine. As Anderson and other practical theologians note, theology is constructed through the presence of the Holy Spirit in lived, bodily reality. What matters is not that the nineteen year-old camp counselor misinterpreted the biblical passage but rather that the Bible is open and accessible for reflection on real life circumstances and the individual camper's understanding of the biblical passage is valued. Juel is helpful in assuring us that the actual content of the misinterpretation will not stick as much as the bodily wisdom of participating in the interpretation. When theological reflection, particularly in the trusted small group setting of camp, is combined with action, the campers are engaging in practical theology through communities of Christopraxis. They are ministering to one

another. The conviction that Christ is active and up to something in the lives of these young people is itself right belief (*orthodoxy*).

### **Camp as Locus of Transformation**

Shults and Sandage make use of Loder's transformational logic of the Spirit to propose a helpful model for understanding the process of spiritual transformation. They define spiritual transformation as "developing qualitatively more complex ways of holding and being held in relation to others and the Other."<sup>5</sup> Their definition is helpful because it intentionally reaches beyond knowledge *about* God or learning new spiritual practices. The definition focuses deeply on relationships, and it assumes that a relationship with God is intertwined with person-to-person relationships. Their definition also takes into account diverse starting places. They do not speak of a transformed person as a final product but rather transformation as an ongoing process with the only goal recognizable eschatologically. Their intentional conversation with attachment theory and Loder provides great resonance with the present project.

They use Wuthnow's categories of spiritual seeking and spiritual dwelling, which he initially described in a broad cultural sense.<sup>6</sup> Shults' and Sandage's appropriation of the categories exemplify how the cultural influences the individual. They argue that healthy spiritual development includes alternating periods of spiritual dwelling and seeking. They understand this process cyclically. They describe spiritual dwelling as

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<sup>5</sup> F. LeRon Shults and Steven J. Sandage, *Transforming Spirituality: Integrating Theology and Psychology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 18.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

“relating to the sacred in ways that feel familiar, comfortable, and safe.”<sup>7</sup> This is a form of spirituality that includes regular patterns and often a sacred place. For camp participants, spiritual dwelling corresponds to the home and church environments, where they have developed patterns of prayer, worship attendance (or non-attendance), and religious practice that feel normal. The camp experience places participants in a physically set apart environment, so it corresponds well to spiritual seeking, which Shults and Sandage note includes “intensified anxiety and arousal.”<sup>8</sup> Distance from the place of dwelling heightens awareness and brings a certain amount of discomfort or unsettledness that opens participants to new possibilities. They note that traumatic life events or deep spiritual longings often facilitate the natural transition from spiritual dwelling to seeking. They recognize spiritual seeking as an integral part of religious life because spiritual dwelling can lead to complacency, boredom, and detachment. “A key transformational dynamic...is the pattern of intensified anxiety and arousal that is eventually soothed by new, growth-generating insights and commitments rather than by a return to safe but stagnant familiarity.”<sup>9</sup> Seeking leads to new forms of dwelling, and this return completes the cycle. They envision the cycles of spiritual dwelling and seeking as two concentric circles with various connecting points and dub their model *the crucible of spiritual transformation*.

The summer camp experience follows a pattern of spiritual seeking and dwelling, but it differs from the understanding proposed by Shults and Sandage because the period

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<sup>7</sup> Shults and Sandage, 32.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 33.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 34.

of seeking is planned and intentional. There is a set beginning and ending of the camp experience that has the effect of reducing the amount of anxiety for many participants. They know when the experience will end, which opens the possibility for a return to normalcy. This also eliminates the expectation that a person will leave transformed in the way that Shults and Sandage describe. That is why the playground metaphor is preferable to the crucible. Camp becomes a place and opportunity for the process to occur rather than a crucible that melts every participant into something new. The model that Shults and Sandage describe is useful because it helps us understand how and why spiritual transformation is so common through summer camp.

Returning to the chapel at Camp All Saints can help us better understand the process of dwelling and seeking at camp. Campers came to camp from congregations affiliated with the socially conservative Diocese of Dallas. Their habitus of spiritual dwelling involved sitting still in the worship service and trying to be quiet. They had no projector screens or guitars in their home congregations. Focus group participants described a habit of non-participation in worship services, with an understanding that church was boring and was not meant for them. These characteristics the campers described match nearly verbatim the description of spiritual complacency in Shults and Sandage. The six-day experience at All Saints provided the participants with time and space devoted to spiritual seeking that included reimagining a worship service. The All Saints chapel was an actual church building relocated to the camp. The daily worship service was nearly identical in form to that which they were used to back home, complete with liturgy from the Book of Common Prayer, a twelve-minute sermon, and the little tinkling bells at communion. The major difference was the music, which was intensely

participatory and included guitars, drums, and projected lyrics. Young people were frequently up in front playing instruments or leading actions to the songs. Those in the congregation were moving and clapping to the music. They described in the focus groups an understanding that this worship was for them. It was this new environment and freedom within a trusted community that made space for the exuberant dancing and singing that took place after the recording session. As they danced near the altar and breakdanced in the aisle, they were experimenting with new ways of being in an Episcopal worship space. It is important to remember that the camp staff members did not compel the campers to have a dance party in the chapel. It happened spontaneously. Camp staff members, deacons, and priests chose not to stop the campers but rather to join them, which further affirmed the experience. The participants were not given freedom to act however they wanted. Rather, they acted within the boundaries (both figuratively and literally) of their church tradition. Episcopal traditions and practices shaped and normed the experience. The participants left camp with a new bodily understanding (both cognitive and pre-cognitive) of how they might act in a worship space. The cycle was completed when participants returned home and incorporated their new bodily wisdom into their home environment. They returned to a familiar place of spiritual dwelling, but they were changed.

The reintegration into the cycle of spiritual dwelling following the camp week is an essential element of the experience. The empirical data make clear that camp does not end with the closing worship service or the final goodbye. Participants leave camp thinking more deeply about their faith, even calling some assumptions into question. The days and weeks immediately following the camp week are critical to the long-term

interpretation of the experience as a whole. The experience of the All Saints campers diverged sharply when they left the camp property. Some presumably attended a worship service at their home congregation on the day after returning from camp. Others did not enter a worship space for several weeks after camp.<sup>10</sup> This difference alone affected how the experience of participatory worship at All Saints was incorporated into their bodily understanding of worship long-term, and it is only one of a complex matrix of variables that interact in their cycles of spiritual dwelling.

Some congregations and families get nervous about the prospect of young people exploring their own theological voices or navigating the process of spiritual transformation. One of the great tragedies of the Christian camp experience is when an empowered young person returns to a home community hoping to have a voice and is instead stifled. The young person may be forced back into a cycle of spiritual dwelling that is no longer comfortable. Instead of acknowledging spiritual growth in the young person and their own potential for transformation in an encounter with that young person, adults demand that the young person reintegrate. These adults, who may be well-meaning church leaders, are operating under a theological anthropology that does not take into account an expectation for spiritual transformation and denies the research and theology that reveal human beings as always becoming. These families and faith communities are missing tremendous opportunities for spiritual growth, and they are inauthenticating genuine spiritual transformation in favor of the rigidity of the status quo. Camp participants need help making sense of the experience as they return to a home and a church that seem like different places in light of what they have learned about themselves

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<sup>10</sup> The post-camp survey data indicate that 10 of the 14 responding All Saints campers attended church services weekly after the camp experience, while 3 attended monthly, and 1 did not attend at all.

and God. They return excited about a faith that matters and feeling empowered to do something about it. They do not need a dose of *real* theology. They need opportunities to put their faith into action and through theological praxis to have an impact on other people's understandings of God and faith. They need accompaniment. They need ministry and ongoing opportunities to minister to others.

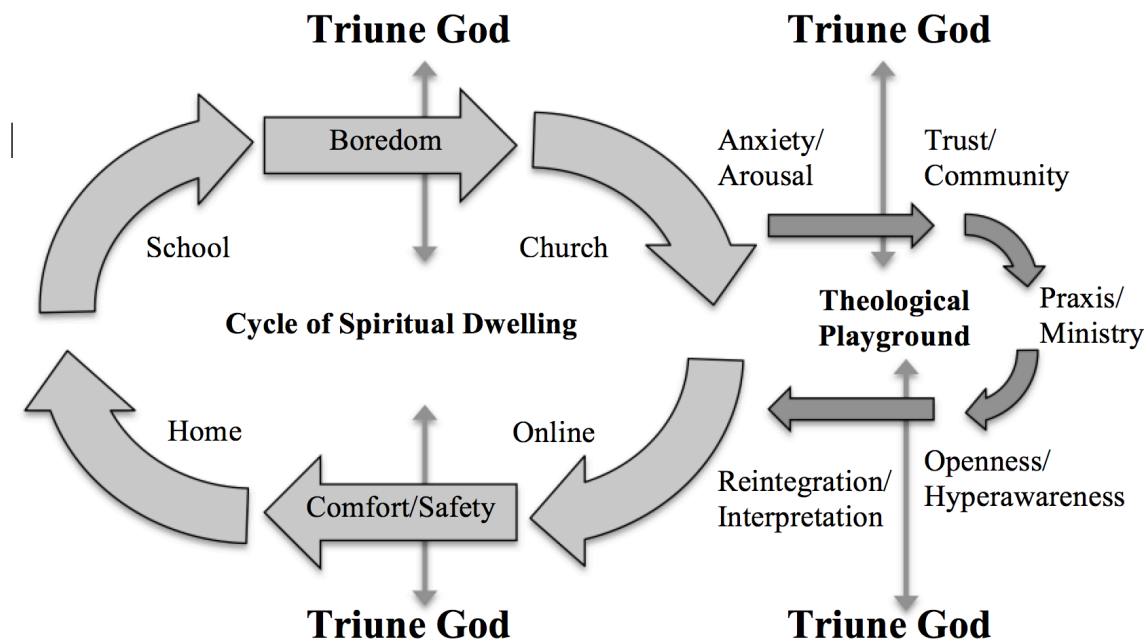
### **A Conceptual Model of Camp as Theological Playground**

Figure E offers a conceptual model for understanding the Christian camp experience in light of the research and theological priorities. The cycle of spiritual dwelling is represented at left. The young people work to make sense of their relation to the Holy as they navigate relationships at home, school, church, online, and other arenas of life. The cycle of dwelling provides a degree of stability and normalcy, which are connected to feelings of comfort and safety. As Shults and Sandage point out, this cycle also leads to feelings of boredom, disappointment, and even spiritual complacency. The cycle does not assume that a person is stuck in a rut or cut off from God's presence. On the contrary, God is constantly at work in and through relationships with others. The arrows indicate that the transcendent God is breaking into temporal reality and calling the human into relationship with the Holy.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> This conceptual model of God's inbreaking is adapted from Anderson's understanding of God's activity in Christopraxis. Anderson, 29.





**Figure E: Conceptual Model of Camp as Theological Playground**

The summer camp experience is conceptualized as the theological playground at right. Notice that the arc of the experience does not seek to create its own separate cycle (as in the concentric circles suggested by Shults and Sandage) but rather to lead away from and towards the ongoing cycle of spiritual dwelling. Camp does not exist on its own but rather always in relationship to other embodied cultural realities. There are feelings of heightened anxiety and emotional arousal at the separation from the normalcy of the cycle of dwelling. These feelings of uncertainty and dislocation are held and, in many cases, soothed as the participants build trust in an intentional Christian community. This community is the context for shared Christian praxis and ministry to one another. The emotional arousal combined with the embeddedness in a community of Christopraxis creates openness to recognition of Christ's concrete presence and shared understandings of the Holy. Camp does not conjure God or provide a place where God is working in some new way but rather facilitates a hyperawareness through which young people not

only identify but also participate in the activity of God. The young people feel safe to express themselves in ways that feel authentic, creating a sense of freedom to explore their beliefs. The trajectory of the experience leads back to the cycle of spiritual dwelling, and there is a critical period of reintegration when the participants interpret the experience in connection with their relationships away from camp. This reintegration is the locus of spiritual transformation or more critical understanding of themselves in relation to others and the Holy.

### **Conclusion: Bringing us Home**

This project began with an invitation to enter deeply into the world of Christian camping ministry. You, the reader, have brought who you are and your own understandings, both cognitive and pre-cognitive, along for the journey. Some of you no doubt dove deeply into this project and even experienced some moments of laughter or tears as you reflected on the stories in these pages in light of your own lived experiences. Others have breezed through the project or even skipped here to the end to consider how much time to devote to the reading. There is no expectation that a book will facilitate any sort of transformation. We can say the same for the camp experience. It has profound, even life-changing effects on some, and others reenter their home environments with comparatively little change. We have accounted for these differences in the preceding pages. Acknowledging the variability of the long-term effects of the camp experience does not lead us to apathy. We remain open to the possibility of encounter and transformation because we have come to expect change to happen at any moment. There is a similar openness to impending transformation as we come to the end of this project.

As we reintegrate into a cycle of spiritual dwelling, how do we interpret what we have learned and experienced? What difference do our observations make?

### Taking Camp Seriously

The major outcome of this project is a more deeply held conviction that the Christian camp experience deserves serious consideration in the church and the academy. The project has, in many ways, lived into this conviction through a deep scholarly look at camp as a locus of faith formation and Christian education. We have seen in the history of Christian camping ministry and in scholarship that camp has been repeatedly excluded from theological discussions. This project has demonstrated the enormity of this oversight and made a strong case that camp deserves closer scholarly attention. Camp can no longer be dismissed as mere fun and games or a theologically shallow experience. Like youth ministry before, it is time to get camping ministry out of the proverbial church basement and nurture a scholarly approach to this vibrant field of ministry.

This project has the potential to be a watershed for camping ministry scholarship. We have, in many ways, only begun scratching the surface in terms of research. The qualitative approach shows great promise in revealing the dynamics and individual impact of the summer camp experience. The quantitative approach has great value, as well. There is a clear opportunity to test some of the hypotheses that have emerged during the course of this project. The need for longitudinal study is clear when looking at the summer camp experience, since the model we have constructed suggests that the locus of spiritual transformation or growth is actually after returning home from camp. An expanded data set, whether qualitative or quantitative, can help confirm the findings of this study with more attention on the weeks following the camp experience.

This project focused on the summer camp experience of Christian young people at denominational camps, with an emphasis on type 4 camps. A closer look at the dynamics of type 3 camps could help confirm some of this study's findings about the importance of congregational connection. The picture of Christian camping ministry could also be broadened with a closer look at camps in the Evangelical tradition, including those that serve predominantly unchurched young people. There are also numerous other summer camp ministries that could be examined, including such things as family camps, day camps, and camping programs focused specifically on leadership training.

The inclusion of the Stronghold confirmation retreat in this study provides evidence for the continuity between retreat ministries and summer camp, but it also begs further investigation. Duration of the experience seems to matter. The shortened period of time at the retreat did not allow for the same arc of experience leading through anxiety, trust, praxis, hyperawareness, and reintegration. It seems likely that there is simply not enough time in a weekend retreat to open the space for the type of theological play observed in the summer camp environment. The experience certainly mimics summer camp in important ways, and more research is needed to assess the effects of the shorter duration. Retreat ministries are important to many outdoor ministry organizations, and close scrutiny of the youth retreat experience alongside the summer camp experience could prove valuable.

The summer camp staff experience is one of the most intriguing areas for future study. This project included staff perspectives in the site visit data, and there is clearly a rich data set to explore. Stronghold, All Saints, and Lutherlyn are among the hundreds of denominational camps that employ a sizeable group of college-age summer staff

members for five-to-twelve weeks during the summer. The data from this study indicate that the staff experience serves as an extended camp experience, a continuation of previous camp experiences, and also an opportunity for intense vocational exploration. There is a clear need for exploration of the nature of these summer camp communities and how engagement in these communities affects participants long-term.

### Improving Camping Ministries

This project not only instructs us to take camping ministries seriously but also that we can improve camping ministries. Camp is not one thing but representative of a whole field of outdoor ministries that look very different in practice. We have seen that the dismissal of camping ministries in academic and ecclesial circles is the result of real experiences and genuine concerns. Demonstrating that these critics cannot paint all of camping ministries with the same brush is an inadequate response. Camping ministry professionals can learn through conversations and research the most faithful ways of practicing the camp model. They can better address concerns and correct abuses.

The frequent promise of a mountaintop experience or life-changing adventure needs to be addressed, nuanced, and perhaps eliminated. The problem with this promise is that it demands dramatic and recognizable change within specific confines. It turns life change and conversion into law rather than gracious gifts from a loving God. There is no time limit on the inbreaking of God, and the dance of the Spirit does not conform to our choreography. Conversion and the coming Kingdom of God are eschatological realities breaking into the present world. The camp experience facilitates a hyperawareness of this inbreaking, but it must not claim to have any control over the Spirit. It is clear that the camp experience provides the setting for encounters between the self, the other, and the

Holy that some of the participants describe as life-changing. Dramatic conversion experiences happen at camp, and this should not be surprising, but these should also not be expected of every participant. We want camps that facilitate rather than manipulate. We want playgrounds, not factories. We prefer ministry over mountaintops.

The clearest finding of the research is that relationships between camps and congregations need to be nurtured. The intentional connections between these ministries have suffered in recent decades. Improving our camping ministries means strengthening these connections. Type 3 camps seem to think that they can bypass congregational ministries and connect directly with families or individuals. This may work from a marketing standpoint, but ministry often suffers. Reaching out to the unchurched is an important task, and future research is needed to examine camping ministry's effectiveness in this endeavor. This outreach, however, must seek to connect camp participants to communities of faith. Failing to make the connections sets camp apart as a stand-alone ministry. We do not need islands of faith. We need bridges and interconnected webs of faithful interaction among ministries. This project has demonstrated a clear bias for type 4 camps because of the intentional points of connection between the cycles of spiritual dwelling and the theological playground of the camp experience.

There are five practical steps that camps can take to nurture stronger connection to congregational ministries. First, they can seek theological training for their staff members, particularly camp directors. These people are professional ministers and Christian educators, yet many of them do not have formal theological education, and the data in chapter 6 show that a lack of theological education is a key predictor of a camp

having a weak connection to congregational ministries and denominational teachings. Second, camps must be intentional about hiring people of faith, especially their summer staff members. The staff members have tremendous influence on the lives of the camp participants, and they form the core of the *sanctorum communio* into which all other participants are welcomed. Third, camps should intentionally use the resources of their churches and theological traditions. This provides tremendous continuity between the camp and congregation, emphasizing the connection even in the context of difference (think of the chapel experience at All Saints). This is not to claim the superiority of a specific theological tradition but rather to acknowledge that theological traditions, liturgy, prayers, and music are faithful expressions of worship and theological interplay. Fourth, camps cannot settle for compartmentalizing faith practices from fun and games but rather must intentionally incorporate faith practices into all aspects of camp life. Fifth, camps should not settle for a rigid plan or an archetypal experience (like a mountaintop or a dramatic conversion on the last night) but rather should expect God to show up. They should operate in a playful openness that does not program God but rather recognizes, responds to, and participates in God's action. This might happen in unexpected ways, and camps should operate with an anticipation that God will show up.

We end this pragmatic section with a plea for camping professionals and advocates to take seriously the racial and gender disparities in our camps. We have seen that the present realities are product of a problematic history, but this does not excuse us. Camps are spaces of encounter, and we need diverse voices and diverse bodies so that we might come to a more complete understanding of the *imago dei*. The statistics we gathered on camp directors are deeply troubling. We need more women and people of

color in camp leadership. It is not acceptable to shrug our shoulders in dismissive acquiescence, and we can no longer claim obliviousness. Camp professionals must work together and listen to a diversity of voices to better understand how they can be places of welcome for participants of diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds.

### The Tower

The last morning of the confirmation retreat at Camp Stronghold found a group of participants clambering for *an adventure*. In spite of the beautiful spring weather, most of the retreat had taken place inside the great hall of the castle. This probably sounds more exciting than it was, since a large portion of the time was devoted to confirmation lessons presented in PowerPoint format while the young participants slumped in mercilessly uncomfortable couches. They wanted to get outside to enjoy the unseasonably warm March weather and explore the camp property. A block of free time before lunch on Sunday finally provided the opportunity. Lydia and Paul agreed to be the guides for the adventure. They were a young married couple volunteering to help with the retreat that weekend. They met at camp some years before when they both served on summer staff, and they collectively had eight summers working at Stronghold. They were largely responsible for making the retreat experience feel more like camp and less like class. They led the group in community building activities, an evening campfire, and numerous camp songs. They decided to lead us to *David's Tower*, a place that sounded worthy of an adventure.

The path followed a long, muddy trail through the woods, down a steep hill, across a creek, around a bend, and up another hill, where the tower stood. It came into view as we crested the final hill, breathing heavily from the climb and sporting mud



streaks on our backsides. It was not much to look at, especially considering we were at a camp that boasted a bona fide castle. David's "Tower" looked more like a two-story outhouse. It was constructed of simple concrete blocks and stood maybe twelve feet tall. The disappointment was clear on the faces of the adventurers: *We came all this way for this?*

Paul told us the story of David, a teenage member of the wealthy Strong family, who began constructing a lookout tower at the outbreak of World War II. The tower was incomplete when he went to war, where he was killed in action. Paul pointed to the spot part way up the tower, where the concrete blocks changed from one shade of grey to another. David's work was interrupted at that point, but his family had later completed his tower before selling the property to the Presbyterian Church. Lydia added that this was the place where Paul had proposed to her. Of all the places at Camp Stronghold, including gorgeous retreat centers, castle towers, and a secret chapel, he had chosen David's Tower. It was a holy place, a place dripping with meaning, and they had shared it with us. The young adventurers climbed almost reverently up the rickety wooden ladder to the lookout platform.

This experience comes to mind as we complete our journey together. Those young people had heard hours of presentations on church doctrine, history, and Presbyterian polity, but they probably remember our *adventure* more than the Chalcedonian formula and David Strong more than Jonathan Edwards. I later spoke with Lydia about her own camp experiences and how she might characterize camp. "We don't want this to be a place for the *mountaintop experience*," she said. "This is a place that wherever they are, wherever they're walking – they may not even be walking *to* the

mountaintop right now – but we're there walking alongside of them."<sup>12</sup> The camp experience is not an ending or a beginning but rather a continuation of a journey already in progress. It is a continuation of a project already under construction and a passing on of this important work to a generation yet unborn. The young people need travel companions more than they need correct answers. They need a chance to hold the camera and snap a faith selfie. Trusted travel companions, who they themselves invite into the picture, can help them discover the meaning along the way. Together, we learn to value the journey of faith over the destination of confirmation or the conversion event. We discover that the process of learning is as important as the content.

Two disciples walk the road to Emmaus in Luke 24. A fellow traveller comes alongside them, and they share with him their concerns and sorrows about the death of their Lord. The traveller does not redirect their journey but rather walks with them as he addresses their questions and listens to their doubts. The disciples later realize, in the breaking of the bread, that they have been in the presence of Jesus himself. It is in looking back on the experience and the encounter that they realize, "Were not our hearts burning within us?" (Luke 24:32). May our eyes be opened to the encounter with the living Christ as he comes beside us in our journey of faith. May we be opened to the new and surprising things that God is doing in the ordinary places of our lives. May we find safe places to explore and play with our theological understandings.

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<sup>12</sup> Stronghold Retreat Volunteers, interview conducted by Jacob Sorenson, March 15, 2015.

## APPENDIX A

### Camp Leader Questionnaire

You are invited to participate in a study of Christian camps! Your responses will be used to provide a first of its kind snapshot of organizational structure, theological priorities, and ministry philosophy of Christian camping across several denominations. Yours is one of nearly 500 camps being invited to participate because of its affiliation with one of the denominations. If you decide to participate, please complete the questionnaire. Your completion of this questionnaire is implied consent. No benefits accrue to you for answering the questionnaire, and no penalties or prejudice will result from a decision not to complete the questionnaire. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will not be disclosed, and names of camps will be replaced with pseudonyms. The questionnaire is designed to be filled out in 10-15 minutes by a director level staff person with the aid of an annual report. **Please fill out one questionnaire per camp.** If the camp is part of a multi-site consortium of camps with differing programs, clientele, and directors, please fill out one questionnaire for each camp rather than simply one for the whole organization. Please answer the summer camp questions with information from the **2014 summer season**. If you have any questions, please ask. You may contact Jacob Sorenson, lead researcher, at [camp@theconfirmationproject.com](mailto:camp@theconfirmationproject.com) or 608-865-0406.

#### Part I: General camp information

1. What is the name of your camp? \_\_\_\_\_
2. If your camp is one site among others governed by a common board or under a single organizational name, what is the name of the camp organization?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. My camp is not a site among other camps under a single organizational structure and name.
3. With what denomination is your camp affiliated? (check all that apply)
  - a. African Methodist Episcopal Church
  - b. Episcopal Church
  - c. Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
  - d. Presbyterian Church (USA)
  - e. United Methodist Church
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. In what state is your camp located? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Which of the following best characterizes the bulk of your summer camping season?
  - a. Boys only youth camping
  - b. Girls only youth camping
  - c. Co-ed youth camping
  - d. Primarily family camping with little-to-no exclusive youth camping
  - e. Primarily retreat ministries with little-to-no exclusive youth camping
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_

**Part II: Please answer these questions about you (person completing this survey):**

6. What is your current position at the camp?
  - a. Director/Executive Director
  - b. Site Director
  - c. Associate/Assistant Director
  - d. Program Director
  - e. Administrative Assistant
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. Are you
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. No answer
  
8. How old are you?
 

a. less than 25	e. 51-60
b. 25-30	f. 61-70
c. 31-40	g. over 70
d. 41-50	
  
9. What is the highest education level that you have achieved?
  - a. High school or equivalent
  - b. Some college or trade school
  - c. 2-year or Associates degree
  - d. 4-year or Bachelors degree
  - e. Masters degree
  - f. Doctorate
  - g. Other \_\_\_\_\_
  
10. How long have you been in your current position at the camp?
  - a. less than a year
  - b. 1-2 years
  - c. 3-5 years
  - d. 6-10 years
  - e. 11-15 years
  - f. 16+ years
  
11. How much formal theological education have you received after high school? (*check all that apply*)
  - a. Some college-level classes in religion, theology, or ministry
  - b. College degree in religion, theology, or ministry
  - c. Some seminary/formal theological education after college
  - d. Master of Arts (or similar degree) in religion, theology, or ministry
  - e. Master of Divinity degree
  - f. Professional certification in religion, theology, or ministry
  - g. other theological training, education \_\_\_\_\_
  - h. no formal theological education

**Part III: Please answer the following questions about your camp:**

12. Approximately how many acres of property does your camp own?
- we do not own property
  - less than 50 acres
  - 50-100 acres
  - 101-150 acres
  - 151-250 acres
  - 251-500 acres
  - 501-1000 acres
  - more than 1000 acres
13. What is your camp's approximate annual operating budget?
- |                                |                                |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a. less than \$250k            | f. > \$1.5 million-\$2 million |
| b. \$251k-\$500k               | g. > \$2 million-\$3 million   |
| c. \$501k-\$750k               | h. > \$3 million-\$4 million   |
| d. \$751k-\$1 million          | i. > \$4 million-\$5 million   |
| e. > \$1 million-\$1.5 million | j. more than \$5 million       |
14. Is your camp accredited through the American Camp Association?
- Yes
  - No accreditation body
  - No. Other camp accreditation body: \_\_\_\_\_
15. How many full-time, year-round staff people does your camp employ? \_\_\_\_\_
16. How many part-time, year-round staff people does your camp employ? \_\_\_\_\_
17. How many SEASONAL staff did your camp employ during the summer months? \_\_\_\_\_
18. How many SEASONAL staff did your camp employ during September-May? \_\_\_\_\_
19. How many youth summer campers attended your overnight camp programs last summer? \_\_\_\_\_
20. Compared to the previous summer, camper enrollment was generally:
- lower than the previous summer
  - higher than the previous summer
  - about the same
21. Overall summer camp enrollment was approximately:
- 100% capacity
  - 90-99% capacity
  - 75-89% capacity
  - less than 75% capacity
  - not sure

22. What was the basic weekly fee for your most common week-long summer program(s)? \_\_\_\_\_
23. Approximately what percentage of your summer campers received financial assistance (or “camperships”) to cover the camp fees, not including promotional deals/discounts?
- less than 10%
  - 10%-25%
  - 26%-50%
  - 51%-75%
  - more than 75%
  - unsure
24. What was your base WEEKLY summer staff salary for 1st year, non-specialist staff? \_\_\_\_\_
25. Approximately what percentage of your summer staff members were returning staff?
- less than 25%
  - 25-35%
  - 36-50%
  - 51-75%
  - greater than 75%
  - unsure
26. Approximately what percentage of your campers were African-American, Hispanic, Asian-American, Native American, or other racial minority?
- less than 5%
  - 5%-10%
  - 11%-25%
  - 26%-50%
  - 51%-75%
  - more than 75%
  - don't know
27. What do you use for your summer Bible study curriculum?
- Inside Out curriculum
  - Lutheran Outdoor Ministry (LOM) curriculum
  - We write our own curriculum
  - Outside personnel or visiting pastors bring in and lead Bible study/spiritual time
  - We do not have a set Bible study curriculum
  - Other curriculum: \_\_\_\_\_
28. For the majority of your camp programs, who leads/facilitates the Bible study time?
- the cabin counselor (or unit group leader) that stays with the campers overnight
  - other staff members (besides counselors) who specialize in leading Bible studies
  - visiting pastors or spiritual leaders not employed by the camp
  - the campers themselves lead most/all of the Bible studies
  - Other \_\_\_\_\_

29. Many camps offer traveling day camp programs, in which teams of summer staff members travel offsite to lead camp programs with congregations for several days at a time. How many day camp teams did your camp send last summer?
- Number \_\_\_\_\_
  - We offered these programs, but we do not have accurate numbers.
  - We did not send any day camp teams.
30. Many camps offer special ability camps during the summer in which children or adults who are differently abled physically, mentally, or developmentally are offered specialized programming. Approximately how many differently abled campers did your camp serve last summer?
- Number \_\_\_\_\_
  - We offered these programs, but we do not have accurate numbers.
  - We did not offer these programs.
31. Many camps offer leadership training, counselor-in-training, or staff-in-training programs for high school age campers. These campers are not on staff. How many of these campers did your camp serve last summer?
- Number \_\_\_\_\_
  - We offered these programs, but we do not have accurate numbers.
  - We did not offer these programs.
32. Many camps offer service/mission experiences for their campers in a variety of settings. How many campers participated in these programs last summer?
- Number \_\_\_\_\_
  - We offered these programs, but we do not have accurate numbers.
  - We did not offer these programs.
33. Many camps offer confirmation programs in which confirmation students from area congregations come for intentional programming related to confirmation instruction, often with partnership from congregational pastors. How many campers participated in these programs last summer?
- Number \_\_\_\_\_
  - We offered these programs, but we do not have accurate numbers.
  - We did not offer these programs.
34. During confirmation camp programs, what is the level of involvement of clergy members or other leaders from the campers' home congregations?
- Congregational leaders/clergy are required to attend and lead all or the majority of programs
  - Congregational leaders/clergy lead or participate in a set portion of the programming
  - Congregational leaders/clergy are invited to attend/participate but are not required to lead
  - Congregational leaders/clergy are largely uninvolved in confirmation camp
  - Our camp does not offer confirmation camp programs

35. Many camps offer adventure trips in which campers leave the main site for excursions in the wilderness including such things as backpacking, canoeing, biking, and rafting. How many campers participated in these programs last summer?
- Number \_\_\_\_\_
  - We offered these programs, but we do not have accurate numbers.
  - We did not offer these programs.
36. Many camps offer family camp programs during the summer in which families of various types spend several nights together at the camp with special programming designed for families. Approximately how many families did your camp serve through these programs last summer?
- Number of families \_\_\_\_\_
  - We offered these programs, but we do not have accurate numbers.
  - We did not offer these programs.
37. What is the level of involvement of clergy, youth ministry leaders, and other congregational leaders in your camp's summer camp programs? (*circle all that apply*)
- Congregational leaders/clergy participate in or lead summer staff training sessions
  - Congregational leaders/clergy minister to and are available to summer staff members
  - Congregational leaders/clergy regularly lead camp worship services with campers
  - Congregational leaders/clergy regularly lead Bible studies or other small groups
  - Congregational leaders/clergy are invited to stay at camp while their congregants attend
  - Congregational leaders/clergy are seldom involved in regular camp life or activities
  - Many congregational leaders/clergy are heavily involved in the ministries of the camp
  - Very few congregational leaders/clergy are regularly involved in the ministries of the camp
38. In terms of retreat ministries, which of the following does your camp provide in support of congregations? (*circle all that apply*)
- Clergy retreats
  - Church council/presbytery/governing body retreats
  - Ministry training events or conferences held at the camp
  - Confirmation retreats run by the camp and designed to support confirmation ministries
  - Retreat facilities congregations utilize for their own confirmation retreats
  - Overnight youth retreats run by the camp
  - Retreat facilities that congregations utilize for their own youth retreats
  - Overnight adult or family retreats run by the camp
  - Retreat facilities that congregations utilize for their own adult or family retreats
  - The camp is used by congregations for congregational worship services
  - Camp staff members travel to congregations to lead overnight retreats
  - Camp staff members travel to congregations to lead congregational worship services



39. Which of the following do you use to evaluate your camp programs? (*circle all that apply*)
- a. We survey each camper at the end of their visit
  - b. We send surveys to campers after they return home from their camp visit
  - c. We survey parents asking them to evaluate the experience of their children
  - d. We survey clergy or other congregational leaders asking them to evaluate the programs
  - e. We direct people who wish to evaluate our programs to an online survey
  - f. Leadership personnel evaluate programs through direct observation and conversation
  - g. We regularly hold listening sessions with groups of campers, parents, and other clientele
  - h. We evaluate our programs through informal means and do not use written evaluations

**Part IV: Please indicate how often you expect all or the majority of your summer campers will engage in the following practices by circling the appropriate number.**

	Rarely or never	Less than Weekly	About weekly	A few times per week	Daily	Many times per day	N/A
Large group games/"all-camp":	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
Group building/ challenge course	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
Group Bible study	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
Worship	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
Group singing	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
Campfire	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
Group prayer	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
Personal meditation or prayer time	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
Outdoor cooking	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
Free choice time	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
Hear inspirational large-group speakers	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
Use or see multi- media/technology	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
Environmental education/stewardship	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
Outdoor adventure activities	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
Have chance to publicly profess faith	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A

**Part V: Please circle the number that best describes your camp's overall philosophy with respect to the following statements with 5 = "strongly agree" and 1 = "strongly disagree."**

	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
All campers should have the chance to lead worship and prayers	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
The most important part of our camp day is large group games/activities	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
The most important part of our camp day is the small group experience	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Camp is a place to unplug from technology (no cell phones, computers)	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
At camp, specific theology is not as important as general spirituality/belief	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Our camp has a strong focus on nature/creation learning and stewardship	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Faith formation/practices should be incorporated into all aspects of camp life	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Camp worship/programs are designed to get campers more excited about and engaged in their home congregation	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Our camp emphasizes summer staff formation as much as camper formation	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Summer camp is the most important aspect of our camp's ministries	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
It is important for our staff and campers to understand the theology and practices of our faith tradition (or denomination)	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Our camp is a place where people encounter diversity	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Our camp exists to lead young people to Christ	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

**Part VI: Please indicate the importance that your camp places on the following:**

	Not important at all	Not very important	Somewhat important	Very important	Extremely important	N/A
Fun for all participants	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Fellowship/community building	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Self esteem/character building	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Developing Christian leaders	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Peace and justice awareness	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Strengthen/support congregations	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Strengthen/support families	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Theological instruction	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Familiarity with the Bible	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Participating in Christian practices	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Knowledge of/fellowship with creation	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Individual faith formation	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Participant safety	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Christian education or confirmation	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Learning faith language and practices	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Taking a stand on moral/ethical issues	1	2	3	4	5	N/A
Facilitating participants' experiences of or encounters with God	1	2	3	4	5	N/A

**Please add any additional comments about the ministries of your camp that were not covered adequately in this questionnaire:**

## Camper Questionnaire 1

**Welcome to camp!** This questionnaire is designed to gather your opinions about the camp experience. It will help us make camp better for future campers, and it is also part of a research project studying the impact of camp on faith formation. Thank you for consenting to participate in this project by completing this questionnaire! You will be asked to fill out another one on the last day of camp. We will not be using your name, but we would like to be able to match your questionnaires, so we have a *secret code*:

### Your secret code:

Please use CAPITAL LETTERS

#### Question 1:

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- A. Using your first name, identify the 3rd letter and put it in the 1<sup>ST</sup> box.  
 B. Using your mother's first name, identify the 3rd letter and put it in the 2<sup>ND</sup> box.  
 C. In the 3<sup>RD</sup> and 4<sup>TH</sup> boxes, put the month of your birthday. For example, September would be 09.  
*Example: John's mother is Sarah. John's birthday is the 12th of May (05). "H" is the 3rd letter in John's first name, and "R" is the 3rd letter in his mother's name. His code is:*

H	R	0	5
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### Why did you decide to come to camp?

*Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.  
 DK/NA means that you don't know, or that the statement does not apply to you.*

	I decided to attend camp because...	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	DK /NA
2	my friends were coming as well.	1	2	3	4	5	9
3	my family wanted me to come.	1	2	3	4	5	9
4	I want to have fun.	1	2	3	4	5	9
5	my confirmation leader or pastor wanted me to come.	1	2	3	4	5	9
6	I want to meet people and make new friends.	1	2	3	4	5	9
7	I want to learn more about God and faith.	1	2	3	4	5	9

### Before you came to camp:

	How many times had you...	Never	Once	2-3 times	4 or more times	DK /NA
8	been to summer camp before (3 or more nights)?	1	2	3	4	9
9	been on overnight church retreats (1-2 nights)?	1	2	3	4	9
10	been on mission or service trips (2 or more days)?	1	2	3	4	9

#### 11. Choose ONE of the following about Confirmation training (circle the letter):

- A. I have begun confirmation training at my church, but I am not yet confirmed.  
 B. I am already confirmed.  
 C. I have not yet started confirmation training, but I plan to.  
 D. I attend church regularly, but I am not planning to be confirmed.  
 E. I do not attend church regularly, and I am not planning to be confirmed.

<b>What do you believe and think?</b>							
<b>How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?</b>		<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>DK /NA</b>
12	God created the world.	1	2	3	4	5	9
13	It is important for me to belong to my church/congregation.	1	2	3	4	5	9
14	Jesus is risen from the dead.	1	2	3	4	5	9
15	I am unsure about what I should believe.	1	2	3	4	5	9
16	I believe in God.	1	2	3	4	5	9
17	Faith in God helps me in difficult situations.	1	2	3	4	5	9
18	I have important things to offer the church and the world.	1	2	3	4	5	9
19	God loves all humans and cares about each one of us.	1	2	3	4	5	9
20	Worship services are usually boring.	1	2	3	4	5	9
21	If I have personal problems, there is someone in my congregation I could turn to.	1	2	3	4	5	9
22	I know what it means to be a Christian.	1	2	3	4	5	9
23	Jesus' death on the cross offers salvation.	1	2	3	4	5	9
24	I want to participate in the leadership of worship services.	1	2	3	4	5	9
25	Scripture is the Word of God.	1	2	3	4	5	9
26	I have Christian friends that I can turn to in times of need.	1	2	3	4	5	9
27	When I grow up, I plan to participate in the life of a church/congregation.	1	2	3	4	5	9
28	I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself.	1	2	3	4	5	9

<b>Your faith life before camp:</b>							
<b>Before camp, how often did you...</b>		<b>Seldom/ Never</b>	<b>At least once/ year</b>	<b>At least once a month</b>	<b>At least once a week</b>	<b>Every day</b>	<b>DK /NA</b>
29	pray by yourself?	1	2	3	4	5	9
30	pray with your family?	1	2	3	4	5	9
31	read the Bible by yourself?	1	2	3	4	5	9
32	...Bible with your family?	1	2	3	4	5	9
33	attend church services?	1	2	3	4	5	9
34	...church youth activities?	1	2	3	4	5	9

- A little about you (circle one or more for each):**
35. **Are you:** Male Female
36. **Are you:** White Black Hispanic Asian Mixed race Other
37. **Are you:** Presbyterian Lutheran Methodist Episcopal Other Christian Not Christian
38. **How old are you?** \_\_\_\_\_
39. **E-MAIL (for follow-up questionnaire):** \_\_\_\_\_

## Camper Questionnaire 2

**Hope you had a great week!** This questionnaire is designed to gather your opinions about the camp experience. It will help us make camp better for future campers, and it is also part of a research project studying the impact of camp on faith formation. Thank you for consenting to participate in this project by completing this questionnaire! We will send one more by e-mail after camp. We would like to match this questionnaire with the one you filled out on the first day of camp, so remember to enter your *secret code*:

**Your secret code:**

**Question 1:**

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- A. Using your first name, identify the 3rd letter and put it in the 1<sup>ST</sup> box.  
 B. Using your mother's first name, identify the 3rd letter and put it in the 2<sup>ND</sup> box.  
 C. In the 3<sup>RD</sup> and 4<sup>TH</sup> boxes, put the month of your birthday. For example, September would be 09.  
*Example: John's mother is Sarah. John's birthday is the 12th of May (05). "H" is the 3rd letter in John's first name, and "R" is the 3rd letter in his mother's name. His code is as follows:*

H	R	0	5
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**Looking back, how was your camp experience?**

*Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.  
 DK/NA means that you don't know, or that the statement does not apply to you.*

	During camp I liked or enjoyed...	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	DK /NA
2	the content/topics of lessons.	1	2	3	4	5	9
3	my cabin counselor/group leader	1	2	3	4	5	9
4	the other campers in my group.	1	2	3	4	5	9
5	the worship services.	1	2	3	4	5	9
6	the music, songs, and singing.	1	2	3	4	5	9
7	spending time outdoors.	1	2	3	4	5	9
8	the large group games/activities.	1	2	3	4	5	9
9	the whole camp experience.	1	2	3	4	5	9

**What did you learn?**

	How much did you learn about these topics during camp?	Nothing	Not very much	Some	Quite a bit	A lot	DK /NA
10	Sacraments: Baptism and Communion	1	2	3	4	5	9
11	Worship services	1	2	3	4	5	9
12	The Bible	1	2	3	4	5	9
13	Creed, Lord's Prayer, 10 Commands	1	2	3	4	5	9
14	God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit	1	2	3	4	5	9
15	Other Christian denominations	1	2	3	4	5	9
16	Other religions (for example, Judaism)	1	2	3	4	5	9
17	Justice and responsibility for others	1	2	3	4	5	9
18	Experiences of/encounters with God	1	2	3	4	5	9
19	Love and sexuality	1	2	3	4	5	9
20	Care of the environment/ecology	1	2	3	4	5	9
21	The history of the Christian church	1	2	3	4	5	9

<b>What do you believe and think?</b>							
<b>How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>		<b>DK /NA</b>
22	God created the world.	1	2	3	4	5	9
23	It is important for me to belong to my church/congregation.	1	2	3	4	5	9
24	Jesus is risen from the dead.	1	2	3	4	5	9
25	Unsure about what I believe.	1	2	3	4	5	9
26	I believe in God.	1	2	3	4	5	9
27	Faith in God helps me in difficult situations.	1	2	3	4	5	9
28	I have important things to offer the church and the world.	1	2	3	4	5	9
29	God loves all humans and cares about each one of us.	1	2	3	4	5	9
30	Worship services are boring.	1	2	3	4	5	9
31	If I have personal problems, there is someone in my congregation I could turn to.	1	2	3	4	5	9
32	I know what it means to be a Christian.	1	2	3	4	5	9
33	Jesus' death on the cross offers salvation.	1	2	3	4	5	9
34	I want to participate in the leadership of worship services.	1	2	3	4	5	9
35	Scripture is the Word of God.	1	2	3	4	5	9
36	I have Christian friends that I can turn to in times of need.	1	2	3	4	5	9
37	When I grow up, I plan to participate in the life of a church/congregation.	1	2	3	4	5	9
38	I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself.	1	2	3	4	5	9

<b>What were your experiences during camp?</b>							
<b>To what extent do you agree with the following statements?</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>		<b>DK /NA</b>
39	I learned more about God.	1	2	3	4	5	9
40	I came to my own decision about my faith.	1	2	3	4	5	9
41	I thought about what is good or bad for me and my life.	1	2	3	4	5	9
42	I made an important step in growing up.	1	2	3	4	5	9
43	I was strengthened in my faith.	1	2	3	4	5	9
44	I had a lot of fun.	1	2	3	4	5	9
45	My questions concerning faith were taken seriously.	1	2	3	4	5	9

46. **Are you:** Male Female

47. **Are you:** Presbyterian Lutheran Methodist Episcopalian Other Christian Not Christian

48. **E-MAIL (for follow-up questionnaire):** \_\_\_\_\_



## Camper Questionnaire 3

**Hope you had a great week at camp!** This questionnaire is designed to gather your opinions about the camp experience. It will help us make camp better for future campers, and it is also part of a research project studying the impact of camp on faith formation. Thank you for consenting to participate in this project by completing this questionnaire! We would like to match this questionnaire with the two you filled out at camp, so remember to enter your *secret code*:

### Your secret code:

Please use CAPITAL LETTERS

#### Question 1:

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- A. Using your first name, identify the 3rd letter and put it in the 1<sup>ST</sup> box.  
 B. Using your mother's first name, identify the 3rd letter and put it in the 2<sup>ND</sup> box.  
 C. In the 3<sup>RD</sup> and 4<sup>TH</sup> boxes, put the month of your birthday. For example, September would be 09.

*Example: John's mother is Sarah. John's birthday is the 12th of May (05). "H" is the 3rd letter in John's first name, and "R" is the 3rd letter in his mother's name. His code is as follows:*

H	R	0	5
---	---	---	---

### Looking back, how was your camp experience?

*Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each statement.  
 DK/NA means that you don't know, or that the statement does not apply to you.*

	During camp I liked or enjoyed...	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	DK /NA
2	the content/topics of lessons.	1	2	3	4	5	9
3	my cabin counselor/group leader	1	2	3	4	5	9
4	the other campers in my group.	1	2	3	4	5	9
5	the worship services.	1	2	3	4	5	9
6	the music, songs, and singing.	1	2	3	4	5	9
7	spending time outdoors.	1	2	3	4	5	9
8	the large group games/activities.	1	2	3	4	5	9
9	the whole camp experience.	1	2	3	4	5	9

### What were your experiences during camp?

	To what extent do you agree with the following statements?	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree	DK /NA
10	I learned more about God.	1	2	3	4	5	9
11	I came to my own decision about my faith.	1	2	3	4	5	9
12	I thought about what is good or bad for me and my life.	1	2	3	4	5	9
13	I made an important step in growing up.	1	2	3	4	5	9
14	I was strengthened in my faith.	1	2	3	4	5	9
15	I had a lot of fun.	1	2	3	4	5	9
16	My questions concerning faith were taken seriously.	1	2	3	4	5	9

<b>What do you believe and think?</b>							
<b>How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Disagree</b>	<b>Neither agree nor Disagree</b>	<b>Somewhat Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>		<b>DK /NA</b>
17	God created the world.	1	2	3	4	5	9
18	It is important for me to belong to my church/congregation.	1	2	3	4	5	9
19	Jesus is risen from the dead.	1	2	3	4	5	9
20	I am unsure about what I should believe.	1	2	3	4	5	9
21	I believe in God.	1	2	3	4	5	9
22	Faith in God helps me in difficult situations.	1	2	3	4	5	9
23	I have important things to offer the church and the world.	1	2	3	4	5	9
24	God loves all humans and cares about each one of us.	1	2	3	4	5	9
25	Worship services are usually boring.	1	2	3	4	5	9
26	If I have personal problems, there is someone in my congregation I could turn to.	1	2	3	4	5	9
27	I know what it means to be a Christian.	1	2	3	4	5	9
28	Jesus' death on the cross offers salvation.	1	2	3	4	5	9
29	I want to participate in the leadership of worship services.	1	2	3	4	5	9
30	Scripture is the Word of God.	1	2	3	4	5	9
31	I have Christian friends that I can turn to in times of need.	1	2	3	4	5	9
32	When I grow up, I anticipate participating in the life of a church/congregation.	1	2	3	4	5	9
33	I am concerned about those less fortunate than myself.	1	2	3	4	5	9

<b>Your faith life since returning from camp:</b>							
<b>Since camp ended, how often have you...</b>	<b>Seldom/ Never</b>	<b>Less than monthly</b>	<b>At least once a month</b>	<b>At least once a week</b>	<b>Every day</b>		<b>DK /NA</b>
34	prayed by yourself?	1	2	3	4	5	9
35	prayed with your family?	1	2	3	4	5	9
36	read Bible by yourself?	1	2	3	4	5	9
37	read Bible with family?	1	2	3	4	5	9
38	attended church services?	1	2	3	4	5	9
39	...church youth activities?	1	2	3	4	5	9

40. **Are you:** Male Female

41. **Are you:** White Black Hispanic Asian Mixed race Other

42. **Are you:** Presbyterian Lutheran Methodist Episcopalian Other Christian Not Christian

43. **How old are you?** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX B

### Summer Staff Member Focus Group Protocol

1. Let's start with a few questions about your staff and who we have here.
  - A. Who is a returning staff member?
    - i. Okay, and how many years have you worked here?
  - B. For whom is this your first year on staff?
    - i. Okay, did any of you work at another camp before coming here?
  - C. Who was a camper before coming to work at camp?
    - i. Was anybody a camper at another camp?
2. So why spend your summer working at a Christian camp? What brought you here?
3. For those of you who are in your first summer of working here, how does the experience compare to your expectations?
  - i. That's interesting. Say more about that.
4. Okay, how about the returning staff members. How does this summer compare with previous summers?
5. As staff members, you are people that know this camp better than pretty much anybody. Tell me what makes this camp special.
  - i. I'm an outsider and have no idea what camp is. Explain what it's like to be here.
  - A. When campers come to this camp, what is the most important thing for them to take away?
  - B. Okay, let's go around the group, and you each get one word to describe what camp is.
    - i. I love that word you used. Can you say more about that?
6. This is a Christian camp, and a lot of the campers are coming from churches and Christian homes. How do you think camp fits in with their Christian education and faith formation?
7. What about you and your experience here? How would you say that camp fits into your faith story?
8. This week you are having confirmation camp programs at camp. In what ways are these similar and different to other programs you have here at camp?
  - A. What is special or different about this particular week?
9. What did we miss? What else do I NEED to know about this camp and your experience here?
10. Anybody coming back next year?

## Camper Focus Group Protocol

1. How is the week going so far?
  - a. What kinds of things have you done?
    - i. I'm not familiar with that. What's that?
  - b. What has been the best part?
    - i. Why?
    - ii. What did you like about that?
    - iii. What's that?
  - c. What are you most looking forward to?
    - i. Why?
    - ii. What's that?
2. Has anyone been to camp before?
  - a. *YES*: How many times have you been a camper?
    - i. Why did you decide to come back?
    - ii. How does this year compare to previous years so far? Too early to tell?
  - b. *NO*: What's it like being new here?
    - i. Had you been away from home before?
3. Tell me about what it feels like to be at camp.
  - a. I'm an outsider and have no idea what camp is. Explain what it's like to be here.
  - b. What's been the hardest or most challenging thing so far?
    - i. How did you deal with that?
    - ii. Did you learn anything from it?
  - c. Let's go around the group, and you each get one word to describe what camp is.
    - i. I love that word you used. Can you say more about that?
4. What makes this place different from your home or church environment?
  - i. Say more about that.
  - ii. Does anybody else feel that way?
  - b. Is there anything that is the same?
5. This is a Christian camp. Tell me a little about your feelings about the Christian teachings and faith practices that you do here.
  - a. How big of a deal do you feel like these Christian things are compared with the other activities you do at the camp?
  - b. When you think of your own personal faith, how has this experience affected you?
  - c. What is the main thing that you will take home from this experience?
  - d. When you are looking back six months or a year from now, what will be the thing that sticks with you?
    - i. Say more about that.
6. What else do I NEED to know about your experience this week?
7. Anybody coming back next year?

## **Camp Director Interview Protocol**

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. How did you get into camping ministry? How did you come to be at this camp?
  - A. How long have you been serving here?
  - B. What other ministry roles have you had, either here or elsewhere?
  - C. Why camping ministry? What is it that excites you about this ministry?
2. How does summer camp fit in with the other ministries of this camping organization?
  - A. Tell me a bit about your retreat programs and other programs.
3. If I was not a camp person and you had to justify the purpose of camp's existence for me, what would you say? What are camps for, and why have them at all?
  - A. What do you see as the main impacts of this camp on participants?
4. What do you see as the main priorities of the summer camp ministries? Why do summer camp?
  - A. How does faith formation and Christian education fit into this?
5. Tell me a little about the summer staff. How do you recruit them? What do you see as the camp's role in ministering to the summer staff people?
6. Camps have different types of membership and organization. This camp is affiliated with the church. Characterize for me the partnership that you see between the camp and the congregations.
  - A. How are clergy members and church leaders involved in this ministry?
7. When I come for a site visit, I want to make sure that I am telling the particular story of this camp. What sets this camp apart from other ministries? From other camps?
  - A. Is there anything happening the week of my visit that will be different from other weeks? How might this affect the picture that I get of your ministry?
8. Confirmation camp is a special program offering at your camp? How does this ministry fit in with the other ministries of the camp? What sets it apart?
9. What did we miss? What else do I NEED to know about this camp and your experience here?
10. What questions do you have for me?

## APPENDIX C

### Parental Permission

Dear camp director,

Thank you for your agreement to participate in the Confirmation Camp Project in the summer of 2015! In order to comply with the highest ethical standards and ensure the safety of the young people in your care this summer, we require parent/guardian permission for the young people's participation in these research projects. Please include the following statement in your registration materials:

This summer, our camp has been selected to participate in the Confirmation Camp Project. As part of this study, a trained researcher will be on site during three days of summer camp to observe our programs and speak with our campers and staff. Campers may be asked in small groups to reflect on their camp experience and what it means to them. At no time will they be alone with the researcher, and the camp day/activities will not be disrupted. Campers will also be asked to complete a short questionnaire on the first and last days of camp. A third questionnaire will be sent to campers after they return home from camp. No names or other identifying information of campers will be used in any research documents or publications. The study is designed to learn the contributions of the Christian camp experience to Christian education and faith formation. It is exciting that our camp has a chance to shine in this project. By signing this form, you consent to allow your child to participate in this research project. Your child will also be given the opportunity to consent or opt out of the project.

Parental signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

You may also choose to print the above statement on permission forms separate from the registration form.

Blessings in Christ,

Jacob Sorenson

### **Verbal Consent Statement**

“Before we get started, I want to make sure that everyone here knows who I am and why I have asked to speak with you today. My name is Jacob Sorenson, and I am a researcher representing the Confirmation Camp project, which is part of a nationwide study on confirmation and part of my Ph.D degree at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN. This project seeks to learn the extent to which confirmation and equivalent practices in five Christian denominations in North America are effective for strengthening discipleship in youth, and my specific interest is in how the Christian camping ministry experience contributes to faith formation and Christian education. I am going to ask you some questions about your experiences at camp and in church and about how these experiences fit in to your life. You are under no obligation to answer any of these questions, and you will not be punished or rewarded for the way you answer. I want this to be a safe place for you to answer honestly or for you to choose not to participate.

“I am recording our conversation today, and this recording will be a very important part of my research. I may use some of the ideas you come up with and even some direct quotes in the things that I write. However, none of your names will be used, so people who read my reports will not know who said what. I received written permission from your parents, but it is important for me to receive your permission, as well. Do you have questions about this research or how it will be used?

“If there are no more questions, I am going to ask each of you to respond with either, ‘Yes, I agree to be interviewed’ or ‘No, I do not want to be interviewed.’

“Did everyone get the chance to respond? Okay, let’s begin.”

## Informed Consent Form

You are invited to be part of the Confirmation Camp Project, which seeks to determine in what ways and to what extent the Christian outdoor ministry experience contributes to faith formation and Christian education of adolescents in the Protestant tradition. This study is being conducted as part of Jacob Sorenson's doctor of philosophy (Ph.D) thesis at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota and is part of a nationwide study of confirmation and equivalent practices known as the Confirmation Project. Your camp has been selected from among the hundreds of camps in the United States that completed an initial camp survey (in fall 2014) as one of four camps to be visited in summer 2015.

The site visit will include a researcher coming to your outdoor ministry site and staying for a minimum of three days and two nights. While present, the researcher will observe and participate (to the extent agreed upon) in the activities and programs alongside the camp participants, taking notes throughout. The researcher will also conduct semi-formal focus group interviews with two groups of camp participants and one group of summer staff members. These focus groups will be audio recorded, though no names or identifying information will be collected. The focus group questions/protocols that will be asked of camp participants are attached. At no time will the researcher be alone with a camp participant, and a camp staff member is asked to be present during focus group interviews. In addition, camp participants will be given a questionnaire within three hours of their arrival at camp and again on the last day of camp. Those who provide e-mail or mailing addresses will be sent a third questionnaire 6-8 weeks after the camp session. This contact information will not be shared with anyone outside the research team or used for any purpose other than sending the final questionnaire.

If you consent, you will be asked to participate in several aspects of this study. **First**, you consent to an individual interview lasting 45-60 minutes in which you will be asked to give details about your outdoor ministry organization and what you see as its role in faith formation and Christian education. This interview will be audio recorded. As a leader of the organization, your anonymity cannot be assured. On the contrary, consider it an opportunity to tell others about your ministry so that they can learn. **Second**, you consent to providing the researcher with promotional and historical documents that will, together with your interview, give a picture of your outdoor ministry site prior to the site visit. **Third**, you consent to ensure the gathering of parental consent for this research project. A sample consent statement is attached. Any camp participant that does not have written parental consent will not participate in the project, and the researcher will work with you to ensure this. **Fourth**, you consent to host the researcher at your outdoor ministry site for three days and two nights during the site visit. **Fifth**, you consent to aid in the distribution and collection of the camp participant questionnaires on the first and last day of the camp session.

You will receive no compensation for your participation in this study.

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In published reports, your name and the camp name may be included, but no identifying information of camp staff members



or camp participants will be included. The safety of the young people under your care is of primary concern. When referring to individuals or quotes, pseudonyms will be used. This research uses the methodology of *Portraiture*, which seeks authenticity and tries to portray research subjects in the best possible light. In accordance with this method, reports and write-ups will be sent to you for feedback before they are distributed or published. Together, we can avoid inaccuracies and misrepresentations and ensure that an authentic portrait of your outdoor ministry site shines through.

All data will be kept in a password-protected file, and hard copies of questionnaires will be stored in a locked file cabinet. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. In compliance with federal guidelines, the data will be kept for a period of three years after completion of the study, at which time it will be destroyed.

The researcher conducting this study is Jacob Sorenson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 608-865-0406.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked. I consent to participate in this study. I consent to be audio recorded.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of investigator \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D

### **Congregation Connection Variable Computation**

Sixteen items total were combined to determine the “ConConnect” variable, which I define as “Degree of connection the camp has with congregations and denominational traditions.” The goal of this variable, in essence, is to ascertain the degree to which camps intentionally partner with ministries in their tradition. UMC camps are part of the United Methodist Church, and their ministries do not stand on their own without the support of congregations, conferences, and United Methodist families. A strong connection would indicate an intentional partnership between the ministries of the camp, the ministries of the congregations, and the ministries of the homes.

Of the sixteen items used to compute this variable, eight of them concern clergy involvement in the life of the camp. The theory is that a high degree of connection to congregations and denominational traditions is indicated, in part, by a heavy buy-in on the part of clergy. These eight items (from question # 37 on the survey) were combined into one variable indicating the level of involvement of clergy in the life and ministry of the camp on a scale of 1-4. Five of the eight items (a-e on the survey) refer to specific ways the clergy might be involved. These were combined with answers in items f, g, and h as follows:

1. Camps were categorized as having “low-to-no clergy involvement” (score of 1) if they indicated that clergy participated in 0 of the 5 activities and

checked item “h” OR if they indicated 1-2 activities and checked items “f” and “h.” (21.1% of total camps)

2. Camps were categorized as having “moderate clergy involvement” (score of 2) if they indicated 1-2 activities and checked “h” but did not check “f” OR indicated 0 activities but checked “g” OR indicated 3-5 activities but checked both “f” and “h” (24.9% of total)
3. Camps were categorized as having “high clergy involvement” (score of 3) if they indicated 3-5 activities but checked “h” OR 1-2 activities but checked “g” (without checking “f”) OR 3-5 activities and checked both “g” and “h.” (27.8% of total)
4. Camps were categorized as having “very high clergy involvement” (score of 4) if they indicated 3-5 activities and checked “g” (without checking “f”). (26.2% of total)

Four of the Likert-type questions were used in the variable, all of them getting a score of 1-5, based on the number checked on the survey. Three of these items were from Part V, which asked participants, “Please circle the number that best describes your camp’s overall philosophy with respect to the following statements with 5 = “strongly agree” and 1 = “strongly disagree.” The three items were:

1. At camp, specific theology is not as important as general spirituality/belief (this one was reverse-scored, so “strongly disagree” was coded as 5).
2. Camp worship/programs are designed to get campers more excited about and engaged in their home congregation.

3. It is important for our staff and campers to understand the theology and practices of our faith tradition (or denomination).

The final item was from part VI, which asked participants, “Please indicate the importance that your camp places on the following:” That item was:

1. Strengthen/support congregations

Finally, four items from question #38 were included, and camps were given 1 point for each item checked. No points were assigned if they did not check the items. These were items b, j, k, and l. These four items were generally uncommon among all camps (item b was the only one with more than half, and the number was 50.5%), so these individual items show special programmatic connection to congregations that should be taken into account.

All of the above mentioned items were added together to give a raw score to each camp, with a possible of 28 points (note that 5 is the lowest possible score). Only one camp scored 28, and two camps each got 26 and 27. Observing the data trends determined that 21-28 constituted the highest level of connection, 18-20 were categorized “moderately high,” 15-17 “low,” and under 15 “very low.” To avoid camps on the edge of low and high from being unfairly categorized as “low,” they were tested against the clergy involvement variable and the importance of “strengthen/support congregations.” If camps had a high level of clergy involvement and indicated that the item “strengthen/support congregations” is “very or extremely important” (4-5 on Likert scale), they were recategorized as “moderately high.”

In actual numbers, the above scale means that if the camps give up an average of one point on each of the Likert scales and clergy involvement scale, they need to offer at

least two of the special retreat opportunities from question #38 to be categorized in the highest category.

If they give up an average of two points on the Likert scales and clergy involvement scale, they cannot be categorized in the “moderately high” category unless they offer all four special retreat opportunities from question #38 (extremely unlikely) OR they fulfill the exception requirements indicated above.

On the lower end of the scale, even if the camp offers none of the special retreat opportunities from question #38, the camp needs to give up two points on at least three of the Likert scales and clergy involvement scale in order to fall into the “low” category. In order to score under 15 (“very low”), a camp mathematically must give up an average of two points or more on all Likert scales and the clergy involvement scale.

The scale was tested against several variables not included in the calculation to confirm the reliability of the scale. The connection scale is positively correlated at the level  $p < .01$  with the degree of importance placed on “theological instruction,” “Christian education or confirmation,” and “learning faith language and practices.” As the degree of connection increases, so does the level of importance placed on each of these. There is no significant correlation with faith items such as “facilitating participants’ experiences of or encounters with God” and “individual faith formation.” In other words, it is significantly correlated with items related to specific theological teachings and traditions but not general faith importance. This allows for categorization of camps into the four camp types detailed in chapter 6.

## APPENDIX E

### Axial Coding Worksheet

This worksheet shows the coding breakdown of the fourteen major axial coding groups that emerged from the qualitative research. The numbers indicate the total number of references coded to the specific axial node in NVivo. These are broken down by site, as each camp was considered individually in the composition of the portraits before the data set was considered together. “AS” stands for Camp All Saints. “ST” stands for Stronghold Camp and Retreat Ministries. “LT” stands for UMC Lake Tahoe. “LU” stands for Camp Lutherlyn. Under each of the axial codes are listed the various focus codes that were categorized there.

<b>Activities and Programs</b>	AS: 152	ST: 107	LT: 71	LU: 155
Aquatics Arts and Crafts Camper Choice Activities Campfire Challenge Course Games High Ropes	Large-group Activities Media Center/Tech Activities Music, Song, Dance Schedule of Programs Skits/dramas Small Group Activities Sports			
<b>Administration and Staff</b>	AS: 61	ST: 107	LT: 71	LU: 55
Capital Campaigns, Improvements Committees, Meetings Director skills, attributes Director Influence Finances, Budget	Fundraising Partner Organizations Staff Hiring, Salaries Staffing Structure Training, pre-planning			

<b>Away from Home</b>	AS: 24	ST: 40	LT: 62	LU: 52
Change of pace Comfort zone, outside Differences from church Differences from home Homesickness Magic, mystique of camp	New experiences On own Parents, siblings absence Place apart Safe place Sleep difficulties			
<b>Camp and Congregation</b>	AS: 39	ST: 89	LT: 67	LU: 53
Camp-Church Connection Camp-Church Disconnect Camp impacts Church Camp pipeline, cycle Church polity	Confirmation camp Congregational support Congregational indifference Partnership with synod/presbytery Pastors/Clergy and camp			
<b>Camp Characteristics, specifics</b>	AS: 65	ST: 89	LT: 37	LU: 37
Age groups, offerings Camp History Changes at Camp Facilities Food Service	Program Offerings Retreat Ministries Sights and Smells Uniqueness of this camp			
<b>Community and Relationships</b>	AS: 112	ST: 78	LT: 106	LU: 130
Accompaniment Adult-child relationships Cabin groups Camp as family Communication Community feeling, bonding Competition - Cooperation Conflict Resolution Counselor-camper relationship Covenant writing, building Differences respected Emotional connection, empathy Face-to-face interaction	Fellowship Friends, new friends Intergenerational Judging, not judging Living together Relationships Role Models Shared Experiences Small groups Summer Staff Community Team analogies Trust building Volunteers			
<b>Conflict and Negative Challenges</b>	AS: 38	ST: 0	LT: 45	LU: 22
Bullying, pranks Camp struggles Community break-down Counselors – BAD examples Difficult home life Disagreements	Injuries Lack of engagement Overprotective parents Personal adversity Rules violations Shame, shaming			

<b>Environment at Camp</b>	AS: 161	ST: 87	LT: 29	LU: 124
Acceptance Adventurous Camp is for kids Diversity Emotional intensity Emotional health, safety Freedom Home, feeling at home Hospitality, feeling welcome Intensity of camp	Joking, banter Joy, happiness at camp Loved, felling loved Magic of camp Planned, organized Positive descriptors (fun, awesome) Questions, ability to ask Relaxing Respectful nature of camp Safety, feeling safe			
<b>Faith and Christian Formation</b>	AS: 259	ST: 158	LT: 69	LU: 116
Bible study Christian embeddedness Christian identity Christianity, feelings toward Confirmation ministry Discipleship, way of Jesus Faith discussions, testimony Faith practices (prayer, worship) Fellowship with believers God-centered Growth in faith	Holy Spirit, work of Jesus Christ, references to Ministry to summer staff Ownership of faith Personal call, vocation Personal faith stories Relationship with God Religious experience Sacraments, sacramental Science and religion Theology at camp			
<b>Learning and Education</b>	AS: 89	ST: 37	LT: 69	LU: 83
Adventure-based learning Age groups, differences Camp as education Campers as co-educators Classes, lessons Different from school, class Discussion, questions	Education models, philosophy Experiential learning Learn about God Learning styles Teaching methods, pedagogy Thinking theologically Understand, ability to understand			
<b>Outdoors and Tech Unplug</b>	AS: 51	ST: 70	LT: 22	LU: 46
Bugs and animal encounters Busyness and pace, relaxation from Outdoors Technology, absence from	Technology, use at camp Unplug, ability to Weather			



<b>Personal Growth/Impact of Camp</b>	AS: 159	ST: 52	LT: 79	LU: 166
Camp as change agent Camp high, camp boost Camp memories Desire to return Fears, conquering fears Individuality, growing up	Life-changing experience Long-term impact Personal growth, betterment Planting a seed Self-esteem Take away from camp			
<b>Philosophy of Camp</b>	AS: 58	ST: 29	LT: 15	LU: 2
Goals, core values Intentionality Ministry strategy, rationale Program philosophy	Purpose of Camp Time at camp Uniqueness of camp model			
<b>World Outside of Camp</b>	AS: 106	ST: 44	LT: 92	LU: 64
Adversity in world Camping world, other camps Church polity Family, home life Other denominations, religions	School Secularity, problems with Stories of life away from camp World in contrast to camp			

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