

Camp2Congregation Project

Dimension 2 Summary of Emerging Themes

THEME 1: Traveling Day Camp thrives as a partnership between the ministry of the camp and the ministry of congregations in their distinct communities

- The partnership is, in part, *transactional*: it is based on clear and specific roles for camp and congregation, outlined in a contract and exchange of money
 - The camp provides program and trained camp staff members
 - The congregation provides a monetary fee (or camper financing), physical space, volunteers, food/housing for staff members, and access to constituents
 - Other partnership details vary from site to site (or camp to camp)
 - Effective communication matters between camps and congregations throughout the year and in preparation of camp staff arrivals
 - The cost of hosting day camp varies widely from camp to camp. The cost is sometimes absorbed entirely by the congregation and sometimes is passed on (all or part) to the camp participants.
 - The more the transactional element of the relationship is emphasized (particularly the monetary aspect), the less the relationship tends to feel like a partnership to both ministries
- Attention to context matters; when partnerships work most effectively, the camp adapts program strategy based on the specific contextual needs of the congregation/community, and the congregation engages the day camp with the community context
- Day Camp programming is not designed as a stand-alone ministry (day camp is not the goal; it is a means to a different end). It functions for individuals as:
 - An introduction/doorway to the faith/congregational ministry OR
 - A supplement to the ministry of the congregation
 - For some churches, day camp is more integrated into the life and ministry of the church than others
 - Large churches tend to have less integration and congregational awareness/engagement than small churches
- Day Camp is oftentimes one aspect of a larger partnership between the camp and congregation, though other times it is the primary expression of the partnership
- The partnership mutually affects perceptions and ministry philosophy
 - Camp staff members are exposed to the specific challenges and benefits of congregational ministry and contextual realities
 - Congregational ministers learn camp strategies and program specifics that they utilize in their year-round ministry

THEME 2: Traveling Day Camp is an outreach ministry

- Outreach of camp to congregation(s)

- Outreach of congregation(s) to community
- Primary focus on spreading the gospel
 - This generally takes place through conveying the basics of faith (introduction to Christianity) and by introducing people to a faith community, where they will continue hearing the gospel
- Secondary focus on expanding constituency/membership
 - Camp hopes to get participants to sign up for other camp programs
 - Congregation hopes that community members who attend day camp will return for church services and other year-round ministries (e.g. Sunday school)
- One of the primary goals is to get people to come back; day camp is viewed as a secondary space and a potential **doorway** to *primary* church (especially regular church services) and *primary* camp (programs that take place on the camp property)

THEME 3: Traveling Day Camp is a hybrid of summer camp and Vacation Bible School

- Provides both *alternative church* and *alternative camp*
 - *Alternative Church*: Children worship in the church sanctuary, but the worship is high-energy and participatory; programs take place in the church building and grounds, but they are very different from what typically takes place in those spaces
 - *Alternative Camp*: The camp program takes place away from camp, in a space convenient for families; this provides an opportunity to participate for people who may not otherwise get to go to camp because of financial barriers, scheduling conflicts, or they are not ready to be away from home for a week
- The ministry is camp-like in its incorporation of camp music, camp activities, camp staff members, and use of outdoor spaces
- The ministry is like Vacation Bible School in its incorporation of church volunteers, schedule, and its presence in the church building/grounds
- Many of the activities are designed to take place outdoors, often times directly interacting with the natural environment, similar or identical to overnight camp programs. However, the spaces are generally more manicured than overnight camp properties. The camp uses the outdoor spaces available at the host site.
- Some congregations continue to call the program Vacation Bible School, though the consensus is that day camp is different from VBS in important ways (mostly related to the presence of the camp staff members, though also related to camp-specific activities)
- When camp staff are present and doing what they do best, congregational leaders often have the opportunity to take a break for leadership roles and can focus on other areas.

THEME 4: Day Camp is an educational ministry with the primary pedagogical strategy being fun, high-energy, participatory activities

- Day camp programs maintain a high level of emotional intensity throughout the day; they thrive on excitement and moving from one activity to the next
- These high-energy activities are designed to be exciting and flashy (or *splashy* in the case of aquatics) in order to build excitement in the community and draw more participants; many are novel activities or new experiences for many of the campers
- **Music** is an integral element of programming; music is participatory, high-energy, and repetitive
 - Some songs are thematic or strongly connected to faith teachings, allowing music to serve a key pedagogical role
 - Some songs are used as fun elements of the program to help build excitement and a sense of belonging
- Activities are highly tactile and participatory; campers are rarely taking in knowledge passively; even large group skits/presentations are interactive, and songs generally include hand motions
- These high-energy, participatory activities have two pedagogical functions:
 - *Direct/explicit*: activities are intentionally connected to specific teaching, often times related to faith; campers are made aware of how the activity is related to the teaching
 - *Indirect (null curriculum)*: campers learn through bodily wisdom (*habitus*) that church is a fun place (not boring) where they are welcome, that being a Christian is fun and relevant to their lives, and that fellow Christians (particularly people in this particular church) are trustworthy and enjoyable; children learn *without knowing that they are being taught*
- Content of Bible studies and lessons is rudimentary and introductory
- The high-energy programming is exhausting for camp staff, church volunteers, and campers
 - For other church staff members, day camp is sometimes seen as a break, easy, or a chance for staff to interact with young people without the burden of being “in charge”

THEME 5: Camp staff members are at the center of Traveling Day Camp’s (strategy) and success (deliver the program, are the agents, *vehicle*)

- Interaction with and observation of faithful emerging adults is deeply meaningful and impactful to campers, volunteers, and host families; the more people who interact directly with the camp staff and the deeper (relationally) the interaction, the greater the positive impact
- Staff members are models and mentors that exemplify a deep and personal faith
 - Campers experience camp staff as facilitators; campers look up to the staff members and witness them modeling lives of faith; the personal connections and individual affirmations become meaningful to campers because of the perceived status of the staff members (similar to that of celebrity)

- Leadership development and faith formation for youth volunteers (CITs)
- The faith modeling exemplified by the emerging adult summer staff members is at least as important as the content of the curriculum
- The success of the day camp program is contingent upon the quality of the summer staff members and their perceived investment in the specific day camp community
- They set the tone: the energy and enthusiasm of the camp staff members directly feeds the campers and program
- The presence of camp staff members is the primary factor that sets day camp apart from VBS; they are seen as the primary benefit of hosting a day camp
- They are highly valued by congregational leaders for their gifts, talents and partnership, even when staff members change from year to year

THEME 6: Traveling Day Camp provides valuable services for the congregation and community

- Provides high-quality summer ministry program for congregations that may not be able to do it on their own (EASY for the church)
- Provides food: to camp staff and to campers
- Provides childcare opportunity for families
- Offers a safe space for children
- Provides important opportunities for volunteerism, hospitality, and evangelism
- Engages young people with special needs
 - Behavioral issues that may preclude attendance of overnight camp
 - Differently abled children (particularly those on the Autism spectrum)

THEME 7: Traveling day camp provides a space of encounter for often segregated groups, leading to greater mutual understanding, relationship, and bridge-building

- *Young adult to elementary age encounter:* the primary encounter is between emerging adult camp staff members and the young participants
- *Cross-generational:* day camp often brings together older generations with the youngest generation, primarily by way of church volunteers connecting with young people in special programs (e.g. quilting); older generations also have the opportunity to interact with the emerging adult camp staff
 - Older generations often provide funding for their grandchildren or other campers
- *Ecumenical:* day camp often provides a space for people from different churches and different religious backgrounds to interact
- *Racial diversity:* as an outreach ministry that often reaches beyond the church walls, day camp tends to be more racially diverse than the congregation on a Sunday morning

- *Socio-economic diversity*: day camp is oftentimes made available to low-income communities, providing a space where lower income children can interact with those from more affluent backgrounds and vice versa
- *Differently abled campers*: Many day camps are intentionally welcoming to children with disabilities or impairments, incorporating them into the programming alongside neurotypical and non-disabled children