



## The Camp2Congregation Project Executive Summary

*Jacob Sorenson, project director*

### Introduction

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Traveling day camp is a program derived from overnight summer camps in which trained summer staff members go on the road and bring the interactive, faith-centered, and highly relational camp experience to congregations or other Christian community centers. They are day camp programs, meaning campers come for programs during the day and go home each night.

*“It’s an awesome way for the kids to hear the good news, to learn about Jesus and faith things in a fun, engaging way. They just have a good time, and there is great outreach, high energy, and good messages.” – SpringHill site congregational leader*

*“It’s just a great opportunity to give camp to the people who can’t get there, and we try to do as close of a program to a camp program as we can. Camp is expensive, and not everyone can get there. I think it’s just a good opportunity to give camp to everyone. – Lutheran camp staff member*

The Camp2Congregation Project was a multi-dimensional, mixed-methods analysis seeking to answer the question: *What are the impacts of Christian traveling day camp programs on congregations, families, and young leaders in the church?* The research uncovered **three crucial elements** of traveling day camp that together led to **three common outcomes**.

The crucial elements of traveling day camp are that it is (1) a partnership ministry between the camp and congregation in which (2) trained summer camp staff are deployed to lead (3) interactive programs in the congregational setting. These programs have three common outcomes: (1) cultivating faith formation, (2) providing direct care and instruction, and (3) opening a doorway for deeper engagement in the congregation and camp. In the months following day camp, 85% of parents indicated that the day camp experience had a significant, positive impact on their children, and 84% of congregational leaders agreed that day camp had a significant, positive impact on their congregation.

Traveling day camp is a hybrid of traditional onsite camp experiences and Vacation Bible School (VBS) programs of congregations. The programs focus on elementary-age children. The key drivers of these ministries are the summer camp staff, who bring the professionalism of camp programming, novel activities, and abundant energy. There are two major streams of this ministry that emerged independently of one another, though they share common characteristics.

The first model emerged in the late 1970s as an outreach ministry of Lutheran summer camps in Oregon. Deployed teams of 4-5 staff members took camp programs, activities, and songs on the road to area congregations, seeking to replicate camp as much as possible in the congregational setting. The programs were recognized as innovative and effective at building goodwill with congregations, attracting new people to faith communities, and generating excitement for overnight camp experiences. They were replicated across the Lutheran Outdoor Ministry (LOM) network through the 1980s and 1990s, eventually spreading to ecumenical

partners in the Presbyterian Church Camp and Conference Association (PCCCA) and United Methodist Camp and Retreat Ministries (UMCRM), especially following the recession of 2008-2009. By 2018, nearly three-quarters of LOM camps operated traveling day camp programs, though many were beginning to feel stale and some directors began to question their value. Some LOM camps canceled their programs altogether or drastically cut their operations. Meanwhile, the programs in PCCCA and UMCRM camps were seen as fresh, innovative, and growing.

The second model began in 2006 as an outreach of SpringHill, a camp with overnight sites in Indiana and Michigan. The program resembled the Lutheran model in many ways, though it was more elaborate. SpringHill sent much larger teams of staff members (20 or more) and elaborate apparatus like inflatable water slides and mobile rock walls, in attempts replicate their onsite offerings. The ministry at SpringHill grew rapidly to more than 100 sites across the Midwest, and other Evangelical camps began replicating the program in the 2010s. Evangelical camps charged more than three times of what mainline camps charged, on average.

In each model, day camp was an offshoot ministry designed to approximate the on-camp experience in other contexts, with camp staff serving as the main drivers of the program.

## COMPARING DAY CAMP MODELS

What difference do we find in design of traveling day camp experiences?

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### HOW MANY CAMPS OFFER TRAVELING DAY CAMP?

	Lutheran Outdoor Ministries	Other Mainline Camps	Evangelical Camps
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>20%</b>	<b>5%</b>

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### STAFFING

	Lutheran Outdoor Ministries	Other Mainline Camps	Evangelical Camps
<b># staff per site</b>	<b>3-4</b>	<b>4-5</b>	<b>20+</b>
<b>staff roles + training</b>	STAFF ROTATE BETWEEN OVERNIGHT SITES AND DAY CAMP	STAFF ROTATE BETWEEN OVERNIGHT SITES AND DAY CAMP	SPECIALIZED STAFF TRAINED SPECIFICALLY FOR DAY CAMP

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### COSTS

	Lutheran Outdoor Ministries	Other Mainline Camps	Evangelical Camps
<b>fee structure</b>	CONGREGATIONAL FEE OR PER STAFF FEE	VARIES FROM FREE TO PER-CAMPER FEE	CHARGE PER-CAMPER FEE
<b>average fee per camper</b>	<b>\$63</b>	<b>\$70</b>	<b>\$227</b>

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### BY THE NUMBERS

	Lutheran Outdoor Ministries	Other Mainline Camps	Evangelical Camps
<b># of campers at a site</b>	<b>15-90</b>	<b>20-70</b>	<b>50-300+</b>
<b>Average campers per site</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>121</b>

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### TYPICAL SCHEDULE

	Lutheran Outdoor Ministries	Other Mainline Camps	Evangelical Camps
<b>days &amp; hours</b>	<b>M-TH/F</b> 9:00 AM - 3:00 PM OR PARTIAL DAY	<b>M-F</b> DAILY SCHEDULE VARIES	<b>M-F</b> 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM OR LONGER

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## A BRIEF HISTORY OF TRAVELING DAY CAMP

Traveling day camp began as an outreach ministry of overnight Christian summer camps and can be seen as an offshoot of overnight camp's success.

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**1980**

Olstad became the National Outdoor Ministries Director of the ALC in 1980, and his success with the traveling day camp program in Oregon soon spread to his colleagues. The day camp model became a prime focus of camps across the country within a few years of its inception in Oregon.

**MID 1970s**

The earliest examples of traveling day camp arose in camping ministries of the American Lutheran Church (ALC). The first recorded traveling day camp ministry began in the Lutheran Outdoor Ministries in Oregon, where Jerry Olstad served as Executive Director.

**1987**

The formation of the ELCA encouraged spread of the day camp model to additional Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM) camps.

**1997**

ELCA joins full communion partnership with Presbyterian Church (USA). The first Presbyterian Church Camp and Conference Association (PCCCA) traveling day camps begin within a few years.

**2006**

SpringHill begins to experiment with sending staff to communities for traveling day camp, the first Evangelical camp to do so

**MID 1990s - 2000s**

Traveling day camp becomes popular at most LOM camps and many PCCCA camps across the country, deepening connections between camps and congregations.

**2010s**

United Methodist Camp and Retreat Ministries begin adopting traveling day camps programs. SpringHill rapidly expands their programs and spreads the day camp model to other Evangelical camps.

**2009**

LOM and PCCCA have their first joint national conference, furthering the ecumenical connection and cooperation, which soon extended to additional Mainline Christian camping groups.

**2018**

SpringHill runs more than 100 day camps across 8 states. Some LOM directors have begun questioning the value of day camp and canceling their programs.

**2019**

Camp2Congregation Research Project gathers data and stories about traveling day camp.

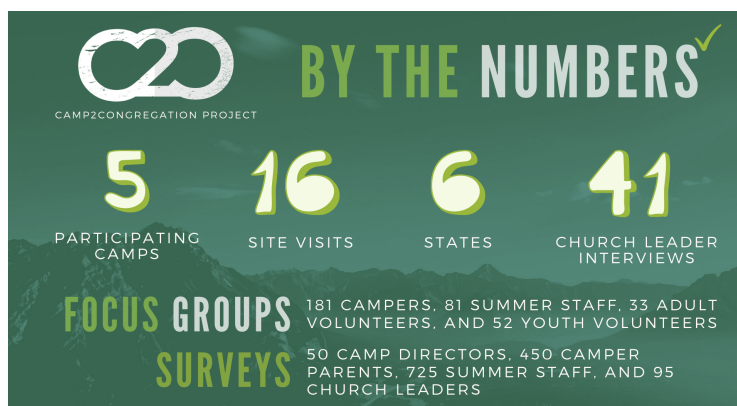
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## Project Overview

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The project centered on SpringHill, a large Christian camp and retreat ministry with sites in Michigan and Indiana. The project was generously funded by Lilly Endowment, Inc in a grant to SpringHill, which partnered with Sacred Playgrounds to direct the research and analysis. A cohort of Lutheran Outdoor Ministries (LOM) camps was recruited from within the geographical reach of SpringHill in order to compare program models and best practices. These camps included Living Water Ministries (MI), Lutheran Outdoor Ministries of Indiana and Kentucky, Crossways Camping Ministries (WI), and Ewalu Bible Camp (IA). The camps partnered with Sacred Playgrounds to recruit research subjects and advise the research team.

Data were gathered throughout 2019 in six distinct project dimensions, each providing a particular perspective of traveling day camp ministry. A total of 388 people participated in interviews and focus groups, and 1,320 completed surveys.



1. **Dimension 1** involved a review of literature and previous research, interviews of camp leaders with particular knowledge of the history of traveling day camp, and a survey of camp leaders whose ministries included traveling day camp.
2. **Dimension 2** involved qualitative interviews of twenty congregational leaders who had hosted day camp in 2018, selected using a stratified random sampling procedure. The findings from these first two dimensions informed the remainder of the study.
3. **Dimension 3**, the centerpiece of the project, consisted of sixteen site visits in summer 2019, including program observation and semi-structured focus groups with congregational leaders, camp staff, campers, and congregational volunteers, totaling more than 350 participants in 40 hours of recorded interviews.
4. **Dimension 4** was a survey of parents. All visited sites invited parents of potential day camp attendees to participate in May 2019. The sample of 450 parents included those whose children attended day camp in 2019 and a control group whose children did not attend. Parents were invited to complete a follow-up survey in September 2019 in order to conduct pre and post analysis. 117 parents completed both surveys.
5. **Dimension 5** surveyed camp staff members of the participating camps, using a test-retest methodology, with the first distributed during summer staff training and the second at the end of the summer. A total of 725 staff members participated in the survey, with 174 completing both questionnaires.
6. **Dimension 6** surveyed congregational leaders in October 2019 to assess perceptions and near-term outcomes. All day camp sites from the five participating camps were invited to participate, and 95 leaders completed the survey.

## Major Findings: The Three Crucial Elements of Traveling Day Camp

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### Element 1: Partnership between Camp and Congregation

*“They are the experts in their field on doing a week-long Christian camp experience for a kid, and so we feel like what it does for our congregation is it allows us to bring in kind of the experts for our kids, versus trying to put together a week of...VBS kind of camp that we wouldn’t do half as well as SpringHill.” – SpringHill site congregational leader*

Traveling day camp is a partnership ministry between the camp and congregation, and the ministry was enhanced when this partnership was prioritized. Interviews and surveys of congregational leaders identified three essential features of strong partnerships: effective communication before and during the day camp experience, care for the specific congregational context, and volunteers from the congregation feeling valued. Effective partners established mutual trust and respect prior to the camp program through clear definition of roles/expectations and regular communication about logistics (particularly housing and dietary needs for visiting summer staff). Effective partnership included attention to context, with both a willingness and ability among camp staff to adapt the program to the needs of the congregation without compromising the essential elements of the program. Together, the camp and congregation focused on how day camp fit in with the larger ministry ecology of the congregation and surrounding community.

Partnership included camp staff forming relationships with host families, adult volunteers, and youth volunteers (or CITS - counselors in training). Camp staff brought the program framework and expertise. In the most successful cases, they meaningfully included congregational leaders and volunteers (86% of congregational leaders agreed that church volunteers felt included and valued). The most effective partnerships included youth members of the congregation heavily involved in running the day camp programs, under the direct mentorship of camp staff. At their best, these partnerships empowered congregational leaders and promoted volunteerism that helped extend the impacts well beyond the week of day camp through ongoing relationships. In the months following day camp, 59% of congregational leaders indicated that youth volunteers had become more involved in congregational ministries.

When partnerships were strained, the ministry suffered. Congregational leaders and parents indicated lower levels of program satisfaction, and congregational leaders were less likely to want to continue the partnership in the future.

### Element 2: Trained Summer Staff

*“It’s like a breath of fresh air when you get some young, energetic college kids come in and talking about God.” – LOM site congregational leader*

*“Going to camp was the only time I ever saw peers, or even people in college age who had God at the center of their lives. That was really powerful for me. I think in a way that encouraged my faith. And so, I thought that if I could be that kind of role model, or be in that position for kids who were like me when I was younger, that would be really powerful.” – LOM site staff*

High-quality, well-trained summer staff set traveling day camp apart from traditional VBS programs and were the real currency of the experience. The highest quality programs had staff who clearly understood the ministry model of their camp, the importance of day camp in its own right, and had skills in early childhood education. Importantly, these staff had good

leadership on site. They displayed an effective working relationship with one another and felt supported by year-round camp leadership. The most effective staff were well cared for in terms of rest, time off, compensation, and spiritual support. Their skills and unique gifts were recognized as assets to the program and used accordingly. When these factors were in place, not only was the ministry to campers more effective, but the camp staff themselves also showed growth in leadership, self-confidence, and faith commitment. Campers spoke highly of the staff members and many could identify their favorites by name months after the experience. The best staff had a perceived investment in congregational ministry, the specific communities in which they served, and the specific children present at day camp.

Program flexibility was a factor in fostering camp staff effectiveness and creativity. At many sites, particularly SpringHill, the daily schedule was filled with activities that required staff to take on specific supervisory roles (e.g. belaying campers on high ropes elements, securing safety harnesses, and ensuring camper participation in a limited time frame). Highly specialized roles often precluded informal interaction between campers and staff, and the schedule left little room for the staff to shine creatively. In more flexible programs, staff were able to use their specific spiritual gifts, including such things as musical talents, improvisation, and putting creative spins on games or activities. At one Lutheran site, the campers displayed creativity during a time of free play, and they requested a talent show. The staff responded by adjusting the schedule to allow for a camper talent show later in the week, which many campers identified as the highlight of the day or even the entire week. Experiences where staff were asked to plan new activities or be creative in program adaptation also energized the camp staff. In the staff survey, the most significant factor related to staff growth (in measurements such as self-confidence, faith formation, and leadership) was agency. Staff members perceived growth much more frequently when they felt like they mattered, were valued, and contributed meaningfully.

When staff were poorly trained or not engaged, the ministry suffered. This was evident at multiple sites and attested to by parents, congregational leaders, and site visitors. Only 75% of staff members agreed that, after staff training, they felt prepared and empowered for their role during the summer. This was correlated with length of training, with shorter training leaving staff feeling generally less prepared. Camp staff that did not feel prepared or supported had a higher frequency of reported burnout or exhaustion at the end of the summer and had less of an understanding that their role fit in with the mission/vision of the camp. Site visitors could readily identify staff who were poorly trained or were not offered adequate direction/supervision, and congregational leaders also expressed disappointment or frustration about certain staff members. Conversely, the summer staff members were also the object of their most frequent praise. In every circumstance, campers expressed delight and appreciation of the camp staff members. “They’re very nice, even though they’re very crazy,” quipped one SpringHill camper.

### Element 3: Interactive Programs

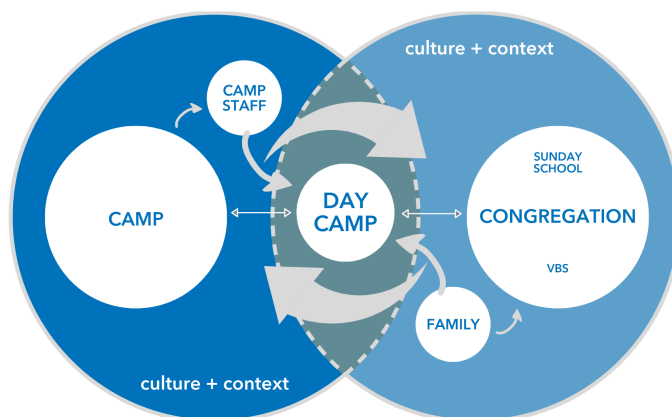
*“You can learn everything about God at the same time you’re having fun.” – SpringHill camper*

The pedagogy was highly participatory and experiential. One of the main features of day camp was that it was high-energy. Kids were active and engaged, consistently describing the experience as “fun.” Staff members were exuberant, attentive, and frequently moving. The experience was generally exhausting, with campers, staff, and volunteers physically tired at the end of each day. The activities were kid-centric and novel, intentionally different from what the young people were accustomed to experiencing at church. This created positive associations with

being at church and learning about God. The ministry was enhanced when the interactive experiences were meaningfully interpreted in the context of trusted relationships. Many campers saw the camp staff as celebrities, but they also felt relational connection with both staff and congregational volunteers through daily interaction and the personal regard adults showed for the campers. These trusted adults helped campers relate the program experiences to life and faith.

Programs were intentionally related to overnight camp experiences. In the case of SpringHill, this meant interaction with large apparatus like a climbing wall, rope ladder, and inflatable water slides. In the cases of LOM sites, this involved a heavier focus on camp-specific games and interactive songs common at each camp. A lack of apparatus and quality program equipment at LOM sites was apparent and frequently commented on by site visitors, camp staff, and congregational leaders. Activities in both models were multi-sensory, collaborative, and oftentimes connected to daily themes or learning objectives. Integrated, internally consistent curriculum proved a valuable tool for building the connection between experiences and learning objectives. This was most effective when each activity had a discernable purpose and staff took time to process the meaning of the experiences with small groups. SpringHill planned intentional processing time after each activity, during which campers shared what they liked most, what challenged them, and how they saw God in the activity. Frequently, campers had agency in their learning, being invited to participate in songs, actions, conversations, creative arts, and having opportunities to lead. This was especially true at Lutheran sites.

The SpringHill daily schedule focused on activities, with large blocks of time at each program station, such as the rock wall or archery. This standardized day and connected it directly to the mission and vision of their onsite camp programs (they termed the model “the SpringHill experience”). This approach did not always leave room for unique contextual concerns of individual congregations, causing occasional friction in the partnership. Lutheran sites tended toward the opposite end of the spectrum, with few consistent elements that identified or branded the experience as unique to their camp. In fact, many programs were labeled “Vacation Bible School” instead of day camp, one indication of a reluctance of the camps to take ownership. Lutheran programs varied considerably from site-to-site. While this allowed room for flexibility and creative adaptation, it also put a heavy emphasis on quality staff leadership in the absence of high-quality program equipment. The results were much less consistent than with SpringHill. Congregational leaders from SpringHill sites expressed higher levels of satisfaction with nearly every aspect of camp programming, most particularly the activities/games and small group education. In the parent survey, 90% of SpringHill parents strongly agreed that their child(ren) had a lot of fun, compared with 75% of LOM parents.





## Major Findings: The Three Major Outcomes of Traveling Day Camp

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### Outcome 1: Cultivating Faith Formation

*“It supplements what we’re teaching our kids here...It’s like a big dose of what we’re teaching on the weekend...We have kids that come back from that and we feel that’s a growth engine for their life.” – SpringHill congregational leader*

*“I will go to church more often. Because I’m getting more into it. I’m getting more into the Bible and stuff by reading it, so now I want to go to church more.” – SpringHill camper*

Direct faith instruction was not the focus or primary outcome of day camp, and there was little evidence for life-altering changes. Each program included direct instruction in the form of small group Bible study, and SpringHill offered encouragement and opportunities for participants to dedicate their lives to Christ. However, neither parents nor congregational leaders were generally looking for transformative change. The primary metaphor was cultivation, recognizing that day camp was part of a larger ecology of faith formation. The congregational leaders especially recognized this reality, as they were able to see day camp in the context of their year-round discipleship ministries. Several described the process as “planting seeds” of faith that might grow in the future or “watering” seeds of faith that had been planted previously. Camp staff also recognized that impacts were subtler at day camp than at overnight camp, which they observed was oftentimes transformative or life-changing. The curriculum was designed more to spark interest in delving deeper in the Bible and faith conversations than to teach specific content. Camp staff members and congregational leaders expressed hope that the example of faithful young adults (the camp staff) would inspire campers to consider faith more deeply or, at the most basic level, to give Christian faith “a cool factor,” as one leader put it. Higher regard for Christian faith might then lead to subsequent faith formation.

The vast majority of day camp participants had regular or semi-regular faith practices. Families that were more involved in congregational life and for whom faith was more important were significantly more likely to send their children to day camp. Of parent survey respondents whose children attended day camp, 92% reported attending church services monthly or more. A large majority also participated in regular faith practices in the home, such as praying together at bedtime and having conversations about God. The primary motivating factor for parents sending their children to day camp was, “I want my child(ren) to learn about God and grow in faith.” The experience was seldom an introduction to the Christian faith or congregational life but, rather, supplemental to ongoing religious instruction in the home and congregation.

There was strong evidence that the programs were successful in cultivating or supplementing faith formation. Multiple campers described feeling more interested and even excited about engaging with ongoing church programs and pursuing their personal faith. A quarter of parents indicated that day camp helped their children become more deeply involved in the congregation, and three-quarters indicated that day camp helped spark conversations about God and faith in the home. Almost two-thirds of congregational leaders (63%) observed in the months following day camp that children seemed more excited about and engaged in church than before day camp. It was clear that positive experiences in a faith context combined with direct interaction with highly-regarded young adult Christian mentors sparked curiosity about faith in the campers along with a desire to replicate what they observed and experienced.

## Outcome 2: Providing Direct Care and Instruction

*“I’ve had people encourage me, telling me it doesn’t matter what other people think, but I still was afraid to dance in front of people. But ever since I came to SpringHill, I have no idea why, but I just stopped being afraid.” – SpringHill camper*

*“Kids can come, they can be themselves, they can try, they can fail, they can come back and try again.” – LOM congregational leader*

Camp staff members repeatedly used the metaphor of “pouring into” the campers. They wanted to offer them direct care through an outpouring of spiritual and emotional support. The campers frequently described their perceptions that the staff members were nice and genuinely cared about them. They contrasted these feelings of acceptance and regard with other times in life when they felt that adults talked down to them or yelled at them. Being poured into meant feeling cared for and empowered. This had direct, immediate impacts on camper confidence and willingness to try new things, such as praying aloud, dancing, or climbing the rock wall.

One of the most concrete examples of this direct emotional care was SpringHill’s practice of affirmation at the end of each week. Staff members assigned each camper in their small group an inspirational word that they thought described the camper’s personality or spiritual gifts. Each word had a small certificate with a description and Bible passage, which the staff member awarded to each camper on the last day of camp, in the presence of the camper parents. Parents described how meaningful this was to their children, with some indicating that campers kept the certificates in prominent places in their bedrooms for years after day camp.

Another key aspect of pouring into the campers was providing basic needs. Day camp offered a safe, supportive space for the children. A quarter of parents indicated that the need for safe childcare was a very or extremely important motivating factor in sending their children to day camp. Several sites served children in impoverished communities, both rural and urban, focusing on providing basic needs like hot meals and healthy adult supervision. At one LOM site in rural Michigan, the congregation recruited campers at a local food pantry. The women’s group prepared and served hot breakfast and lunch each day to all of the campers, many of whom indicated in focus groups that the food was the highlight of their day. SpringHill had designated staff called “inclusion counselors” to work with children with special needs, either one-on-one or in small groups. This allowed children with special needs to participate in day camp and interact with the other children, something parents and leaders described as impactful to the children and their families.

Day camp also offered opportunities to learn new skills. At SpringHill sites, many children conquered their fears by participating in high ropes elements for the first time. Others learned a skill like archery. This direct instruction was another form of pouring into campers.

## Outcome 3: Opening a Doorway to Engagement in Congregation and Camp

*“I know of at least 3 new young families that have joined our church because of their day camp experience.” – LOM congregational leader*

*“They are providing the net, they’re catching people for us. Now it’s up to us to make the relationship with them afterwards.” – SpringHill congregational leader*



Outreach was a primary motivator for camps and congregations to participate in day camp. The program was envisioned as a tool for evangelism, though most leaders did not expect significant faith formation or religious conversion to take place during the camp experience itself. Rather, day camp was largely considered an entry point. This is because traveling day camp functioned as a hybrid and temporary space. Leaders regarded congregations and camps as the primary spaces of faith formation and discipleship. Though the Camp2Congregation Project uncovered the direct impacts described above (cultivating faith formation and providing direct care and instruction), the intention of camp and congregation leaders was to provide a doorway to what they considered primary ministries capable of more direct and lasting impacts. In short, they hoped to entice more young people to attend camp and to engage in the ongoing discipleship ministries of the congregation.

Parents, campers, and staff described day camp as a way for young people to try camp without the challenges of being away from home. After experiencing a taste of camp programming and interacting with camp staff, many were interested in attending overnight camp. A quarter of parent survey respondents indicated that their child(ren) attended or would be attending overnight camp, in part, because of positive day camp experiences. Multiple camp directors indicated that day camp was a significant source of new campers attending overnight camp. Camp staff described their personal experiences of day camp as influential in becoming more involved in camp programs and, for many of them, seeking to join summer camp staff.

Even campers that were not necessarily ready for overnight camp expressed interest in attending day camp again in the future. For congregational leaders, a key marker of program success was that young people wanted to come back. Because day camp most often took place inside a church building and on church grounds, the desire to return was often tied closely with an interest in engagement in congregational ministries.

Three-quarters of congregational leaders indicated that new families were introduced to the congregation through day camp, and over half (53%) indicated that these families continued their involvement in the months following day camp. Some congregations created special welcome bags for day camp attendees who were not regular participants in their discipleship ministries, and congregational volunteers were oftentimes incorporated into programming so that they could get to know children and families. The hope was to make everyone feel welcome and spark interest in congregational ministries. As mentioned above, most day camp attendees were already active in their faith and associated with the congregation. However, 6% of parent respondents indicated that day camp was their very first introduction to the congregation and a quarter indicated that day camp helped their children become more deeply involved.

It is apparent, therefore, that traveling day camp had both direct and indirect faith impacts. The programs nurtured and supplemented faith among young people and their families, and they also sparked ongoing involvement with the key discipleship ministries of camps and congregations. Close partnership between the camp and congregation enhanced these impacts.

## Conclusion

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Traveling day camp functions alongside of other programs and practices in a complex network of faith-based opportunities. It leverages the familiar VBS model of ministry, utilizing the special skills and training of summer camp staff to connect the experience explicitly to summer camp programs. When camp staff are well trained, interactive programs are well-executed, and there is a strong partnership between the camp and congregation, day camp programs have consistent positive outcomes.

For the most part, direct outcomes were subtle rather than life-changing. The most significant impacts associated with day camp appear to be dependent on participants' faith networks (specifically parents and congregational leaders) interpreting and responding to the experience. Families committed to faith formation and congregational engagement found an opportunity in the day camp experience that contributed to the overall positive feelings about faith, including sparking conversations in the home and invoking more positive feelings toward congregational engagement. Day camps also promoted volunteerism and involvement in participating congregations that lasted well beyond the experience, engaging and empowering the community in discipleship ministries. They also served valuable functions in communities: offering services such as affordable childcare and hot meals, bringing young people and their families together for fellowship in the congregational setting, and teaching life skills to young participants. For many campers, day camp served as a doorway to overnight camp experiences. Finally, the summer camp staff showed significant outcomes from their experiences, including improved leadership skills, increased faith commitment, and more self-confidence. Some of these outcomes were directly related to interaction with adults in the congregational setting, such as host families and congregational leaders. Summer staff serving at traveling day camps got more sleep, felt more supported, and were less burnt out at the end of the summer in comparison with their colleagues who served primarily at overnight camp.

Every group of stakeholders highly valued traveling day camp. This included congregational leaders, volunteers, host families, summer staff members, camper parents, and the campers themselves. The study uncovered some best practices and measurable outcomes, but the most basic finding is that the ministry is important to those who participate and in high demand among parents and congregational leaders. Along with the clearly identifiable positive outcomes, the overwhelmingly positive evaluations of the program model justify its replication among Christian camps across the country and beyond.